

afropopXV

THE ULTIMATE CULTURAL EXCHANGE



Discussion Guide



Leslie Fields-Cruz
BPM Executive Director
AfroPoP Executive Producer



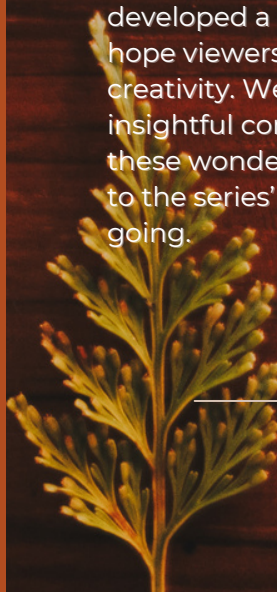
Chris Hastings
Executive Producer & Editorial Manager
WORLD Channel
AfroPoP Executive Producer

afroXV

THE ULTIMATE
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When my colleagues and I first imagined a series introducing public television viewers to the breadth of media stories emerging from the contemporary African diaspora, we dared not dream it could last this long. Yet, here we are, celebrating *AfroPoP XV*. Over the years, the series has transported viewers to 36 different countries, showcased the work of 90 different filmmakers, and developed a loyal fan base of millions, coast to coast. We hope viewers enjoy this season's focus on Black creativity. We also hope this discussion guide provokes insightful conversation about the issues addressed by these wonderful films. Thanks to all who've contributed to the series' success and to the viewers who keep it going.

— *Leslie Fields-Cruz*



World Channel is proud to co-produce this extraordinary series. *AfroPoP: the Ultimate Cultural Exchange* was the first of its kind in U.S. public media. Its success has inspired similar series, making public media an invaluable resource for enriching stories by and about people of color from across the globe. The people who create these films welcome the opportunity to have their work showcased on *AfroPoP*. Those of us working in public media appreciate the opportunity to share these stories with our audiences. I invite users of this discussion guide to introduce their friends and family to *AfroPoP*. The conversations these films evoke are discussions Americans need to have as we navigate through our increasingly connected and complex world.

— *Chris Hastings*

WELCOME TO OUR CELEBRATION OF BLACK CREATIVITY

This year, we are celebrating our 15th season of *Afropop: The Ultimate Cultural Exchange*. I couldn't be more proud than to be a part of a legacy started by BPM's founding executive director, Mable Haddock, continuing with Jacquie Jones and now Leslie Fields-Cruz to provide space in public media for our filmmakers to tell their stories and for our audiences to see themselves in the global Black experience. This year, we are celebrating with a look at the genius across the arts: in dance, in music and in the visual arts. I hope you enjoy our dynamic season. Happy Birthday *AfroPoP*!

— Denise Greene

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide provides:

- A synopsis of each *AfroPoP* Season 15 film
- Filmmaker biographies
- A series of discussion prompts and some background and context for the films' key issues.

We invite audiences to review the synopsis and filmmaker biographies before screening each film. The discussion prompts are designed to support group conversations about each film's content, aesthetics and the filmmaker's approach to storytelling.

Film discussions can take place in person or online. We hope educators, students, artists, documentary film clubs, social groups, and others will find these resources useful toward enhancing their knowledge about the artwork and issues addressed in these films as well as the filmmakers who made them. Most of all, we invite you to share these films with your network and join us in celebrating the amazing creativity showcased in these films.

WHERE TO WATCH

Online

- blackPublicMedia.org
- worldchannel.org
- YouTube
- pbsonline.org

On Public TV

- PBS stations across the U.S. Consult local listings for air times.



Denise Greene
BPM Director of Programs
AfroPoP Series Producer



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Can You Bring It

Bill T. Jones and D-Man in the Waters

All stills from Can You Bring It

About the Film

This special presentation documentary, by Rosalynde LeBlanc and Tom Hurwitz traces the history and legacy of choreographer-dancer-director Bill T. Jones' tour de force ballet, "D-Man in the Waters." One of the most important works of art to come out of the age of AIDS, the 1989 ballet gave physical manifestation to the fear, anger, grief, and hope for salvation that the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company experienced as they were beset by the AIDS pandemic, which took the life of their co-founder Zane, among other company members. In the film, LeBlanc — a former company member — guides her present-day college dance students to reconstruct the ballet while simultaneously teaching them the epidemic's oft-forgotten history. The experience deepens the dancers' understanding of the power art can have in a time of crisis.

Meet the Filmmakers

Rosalynde LeBlanc danced with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company (1993 – 1999), and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project (1999 – 2002). She has worked on screen with film directors Burt Barr and John Turturro among others, and is a leading figure in the legacy and pedagogy of Bill T. Jones. She re-stages his work around the country and runs the Jones/Zane Educational Partnership at Loyola Marymount University, where she is an associate professor.

Tom Hurwitz, ASC, a member of the American Society of Cinematographers, is one of America's most honored documentary cinematographers. His work has won two Emmy Awards, Sundance and Jerusalem Film Festival Awards, and four Academy Awards. Over the past 25 years, his features and television programs have won dozens of Emmy, Dupont, Peabody, Directors Guild, and film festival awards.

Discussion Prompts

- Reflecting on the epidemic of AIDS and COVID-19, what differences and similarities do both share about the spread of information in our communities?

- The dual expression of a performance offers both freedom and intentionality in movement. How do you contend with that tension, especially in reflection of the "performances" of our everyday life. Whether it be in the expression of our gender, race, at home, in the workplace--how does that tension define who you are?

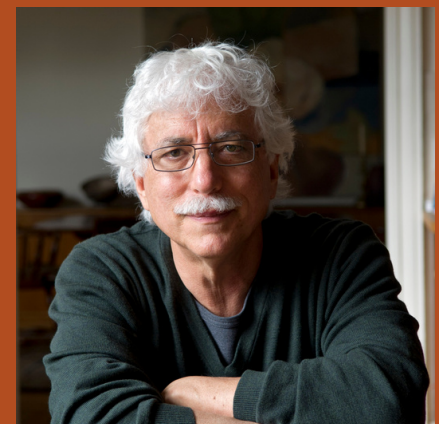
- The film raises the conversation of support and safe spaces, especially the expansion of new digital spaces. Describe communities and spaces that you find safe. Are they mainly in-person? Are they virtual? How do you feel those spaces support you? How do you support others?

- Bill T. Jones in conversation with the dance students mentions societal "callous on the heart and conscience" and the cathartic power of art to process tragedy. How does that idea relate to your life experiences?

- "D-Man in the Waters" responds to the elevation of self to a community, the transcendence of an individual to a collective body. What do you find transcending about the piece? How does that concept of community relate to your personal experiences?



Rozalynde LeBlanc
Producer & Co-Director



Tom Hurwitz
Co-Director & Director of Photography



Queen Kidjo

All stills from Queen Kidjo

About the Film

This Claire Duguet documentary provides viewers a guided tour into the career, life and indomitable spirit of five-time Grammy Award-winning international music icon Angélique Kidjo — ranked among the 100 most influential women in the world by Forbes Afrique and the BBC, and among the TIME Most Influential People of 2021.

The film features footage of the globally recognized activist appearing with 20th century musical superstars Miriam Makeba, Celia Cruz, Youssou N'dour, Ziggy Marley, Philip Glass, and Peter Gabriel; as well as cameo appearances by contemporary music stars including Alicia Keys and Yemi Alade.

Meet the Filmmaker

After completing a master's degree in theoretical physics and a bachelor's degree in art history, Claire Duguet joined the Louis Lumière School, image department (1999 – 2002). In 2001, she met Agnès Varda for whom she filmed regularly until *Visages, Villages* (Faces, Villages) (2017). Since 2003, Duguet has been shooting portraits of women all over the world with Titouan Lamazou. Author-director of documentary films since 2006, she has further developed her practice of playwriting by participating in the fiction scriptwriting workshop of La Fémis (2014). Among her productions are portraits of Michel Rocard and Carole Bouquet (*Empreintes* collection, France 3), *Duel: Truffaut – Godard* (2015) and *La Turbulence Rodin* (The Rodin Turbulence) (2017). She also directed *An American Named Kazan* for Folamour (Arte, 2019).

Discussion Prompts

- Angelique Kidjo was reassured in her dream to become a singer when she saw Miriam Makeba on an album cover. Thinking about the importance of representation as a step toward confirmation and then self-actualization, what historical or contemporary figures have been important in affirming your ambition?

- What do you think Ibrahim Maalouf meant when he said that Angelique showed that "France is also a little bit African"?

- As detailed in the film, music is a universal language that connects the human experience regardless of language and geographical barriers. Can you list artists that you enjoy that are from a different part of the world than you? What connected you to that artist(s)? Why does their music impact you?

- This film is also a story of resilience in times of resistance. In her activism, Angelique has looked up to freedom fighters like Nelson Mandela, Winnie Mandela, and Harry Belafonte. Discuss agents of resistance that you admire and the why their work has impacted your life.

- Angelique Kidjo's work was inspired by great artists before her and now works to support artists of a new generation. In building stepping stones for those after us, what wisdom would you share to the next generation about your life experiences?



Claire Duguet
Director/Producer

A photograph of Bill Traylor, an elderly man with a white beard, sitting at a wooden table outdoors. He is wearing a blue shirt and a grey cardigan, and is focused on drawing on a piece of paper. On the table are various art supplies, including a yellow jar and several sheets of paper. Behind him are several easels displaying his artwork, which includes depictions of animals and human figures in a stylized, expressive manner. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

Bill Traylor: Chasing Ghosts

Photo Credit: Horace Perry

About the Film

Bill Traylor was a unique American artist with an unlikely biography. This film, by Jeffrey Wolf and Daphne McWilliams, explores his remarkable life. Born into slavery in 1853, on a rural Alabama cotton plantation, Traylor spent most of his life working the land — toiling as a sharecropper after the Civil War until the late 1920s. He began drawing and painting in his later years, often with found materials, making more than 1,000 works of art between 1939 to 1942. Today, his work is acclaimed for its vibrant depictions of plantation life and African Americans' radical transition from agrarian to urban life. The film is a compelling human narrative that gives voice to a man who endured a long life of extreme hardships during an era of legalized racial indignities, to become one of America's most prominent artists, exhibited in museums and collections worldwide.

Meet the Filmmaker

Jeffrey Wolf made the acclaimed documentary, *James Castle: Portrait of an Artist*, an award-winning film that delves into the life and creative process of the artist James Castle, as told by family members, artists and members of the deaf community. *Bill Traylor: Chasing Ghosts* is Wolf's second feature-length documentary. He has also made short films about the artists James "Son Ford" Thomas, Martin Ramirez, Elijah Pierce and Gregory Van Maanen. Wolf's articles and art reviews have appeared in many magazines and catalogs. His photographs have been included in numerous publications. As a feature film editor, Wolf is recognized for his film work with prominent directors such as Arthur Penn, Sidney Lumet, Leslye Headland, John Waters and Ted Demme. His films include *The Ref*, *Beautiful Girls*, *Holes*, and *Life*, among others.

Discussion Prompts

- Bill Traylor is sometimes described as the "greatest American artist you've never heard of." What role can documentaries like this one play in helping art lovers learn more about lesser known Black artists from our segregated past?

- Bill Traylor was self taught and only began creating art in old age. We can only wonder how much more he would have produced had he been able to start earlier. How are today's systems of talent identification and development different than they were in Traylor's time? How might they be altered to give those who lack formal arts instruction, high social status and financial independence a better chance at pursuing careers in the arts?

- Today, many wish to censor and/or ban creative and scholarly content that addresses controversial social issues. Indeed the work of artists like Traylor could some day be banned. How can we work to ensure Americans get to discover and learn from all of our artists?

- The New South arts collective was founded by young, White artists determined to chart a new path for 20th century southern artists. Though Black people were sometimes the subjects, and/or inspiration for their work, none of New South's members were Black. The struggle to diversify the leadership ranks of American arts institutions continues. How can today's arts patrons partner with arts institutions to encourage more equity-focused innovation and institutional development?

- Even today, many artists, live a life of financial instability. How might the story in this film inform decisions we make today about how artists are compensated in the global economy?

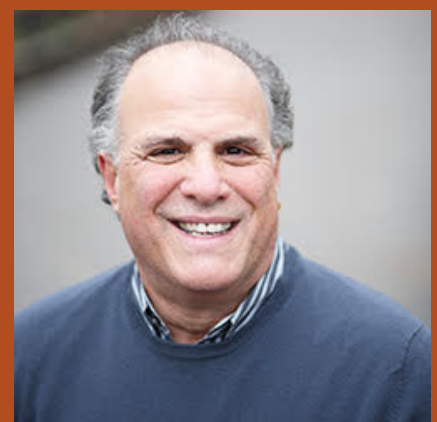
- What do you think the filmmaker intended by subtitling this film, "Chasing Ghosts"?



Photo credit: Albert Kraus
Adjacent background drawing, "Construction with Yawping Woman," by Bill Traylor



"Chase Scene," by Bill Traylor



Jeffrey Wolf
Director/Producer



Photos by Bruno Mano

About the Film

Mapiko is a traditional masked dance performed exclusively by male members of the Makonde community of Northern Mozambique. Filmmaker Sara de Gouveia's documentary follows Atanásio Nyusi, a compelling storyteller and legendary Mapiko dancer, taking us on a visually dramatic journey through Mozambique's past (including Mapiko's role as a tool to challenge colonization during the Mozambican War of Independence) and its vibrant present.



Meet the Filmmaker

Sara CF de Gouveia is an award-winning filmmaker who has worked as a writer, director and cinematographer in feature and short documentaries, commercials, online campaigns and music videos. *The Sound of Masks* is her first feature length documentary. The film had its world premiere at the 2018 International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam and was officially selected for the 2018 Marrakech International Film Festival, 2019 Hot Docs, New York African Film Festival, and the Durban International Film Festival. It received the award for Best Feature Documentary at the 2019 Plateau International Film Festival and the 14th SAFTA Golden Horn Award for Best Cinematography. In 2021, the film received the Best International Feature and Best Direction awards at the 7th Brasil Festival of International Cinema.

Discussion Prompts

- Beyond dancer Atanásio Nyusi's devotion to the Makonde culture and commitment to his artform, what other themes and messages emerge in this film?

- Throughout history, dance and other art forms have played a pivotal role in bringing people together to achieve communal objectives. In this film, Mapiko is depicted as having helped Mozambicans expel the Portuguese colonists. It is a testament to the community's strength and self determination that Mapiko didn't die out during the colonial period. What is it about the arts that makes this possible?

- Masked dancing is not unique to the Makonde people of Mozambique. Across the globe, masked performers often serve as proxies for deities, animals, natural elements, or types of human beings. What might the dances and masks seen in this film symbolize?

- Gender-specific dance traditions are found in cultures around the globe. What other culturally based dance traditions do you know of that are gender specific? Should these traditions be required to open up to participation by people whose gender might not align with the tradition?

- Based upon what you've seen in this film, how confident are you that the art of Mapiko will survive and thrive into the future? What do you think would help to ensure that survival?

- The title of this film suggests Mapiko is about much more than just intricate steps, costumes and masks. Having watched the film, what does the title say to you about what the filmmaker wants viewers to think about?



Sara de Gouveia
Director



Rewind & Play

All stills from Rewind & Play

About the Film

Improvisational pianist and composer Thelonious Monk is considered one of the brightest luminaries of 20th century jazz. This film by Alain Gomis, features raw footage that was preserved from a 1969 interview the musician gave to French state television. The recordings reveal Monk in the grip of the violent factory of stereotypes from which he tries to escape. Rewind & Play offers an unfiltered glimpse at the indignities some artistic geniuses are asked to endure.



Meet the Filmmaker

The Franco-Senegalese filmmaker Alain Gomis studied art history at the Sorbonne (France). He made his directorial debut in 2002 with *L'Afrance*, a film about the struggles of migrants in France, which won a Silver Leopard Award at the Locarno Film Festival. His film *Andalucia* was shown at the Venice Film Festival in 2012. *Aujourd'hui* (Tey), shown in competition at the Berlinale, won a Golden Stallion at FESPACO (Pan-African Film and TV Festival of Ouagadougou). He returned to the Berlinale in 2017 with *Félicité*. The film won him the competition's Grand Jury Prize, a second Gold Stallion at FESPACO, and represented Senegal at the Oscars where it was shortlisted for Best Foreign Language Film.

Discussion Prompts

- How did this film make you feel? What, if anything, does it tell you about Thelonious Monk? And what story do you think the TV show producers who shot the original footage intended to tell about him?

- Suitably, Monk's compositions create an aural tableau for the film. Tunes played during the tense interview include "Monk's Mood," "Thelonious," Crepuscule with Nellie, and "I Should Care." How does the film's soundtrack serve as the composer's unspoken reply to the treatment he is receiving?

- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to repeat the bar scene?

- How did the indifference of the TV production crew exacerbate the objectification and indignities accorded to Monk? How might they have behaved differently to create a less hostile atmosphere for their esteemed guest? And what power and responsibility do today's production crews have to diffuse racially and culturally insensitive situations such as the one shown in this film?

- Casual racism remains commonplace across the globe. Yet many people still appear unable to recognize it or even admit it exists. This film offers a painful example of how this type of disrespect plays out, even against people like Monk, who have achieved global luminary stature. How might films like this facilitate greater awareness about the problem?

- What message do you take away from the filmmakers' choice of a title for this film?



Alain Gomis
Director

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is presented by



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