



**2012 New York Film Critics Circle Winner: Special Award for "Project Shirley"**  
**2012 National Society of Film Critics' Film Heritage Award for "Project Shirley"**

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## Portrait of Jason

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1967. Running time: 105 minutes. Black & White. Filmed in 16mm and released in 35mm. Aspect ratio: 1.33:1. Mono Sound. ©1967 Shirley Clarke.

### Cast:

Onscreen..... Jason Holliday (né Aaron Payne)  
Offscreen ..... Shirley Clarke and Carl Lee

### Crew:

Director..... Shirley Clarke  
Producer ..... Shirley Clarke  
Production assistant..... Bob Fiore  
Photography ..... Jeri Sopanen  
Sound ..... Francis Daniel  
Assistant Sound engineer..... Jim Hubbard  
Editor ..... Shirley Clarke  
Assistant editor ..... Gloria Hawkins  
Negative cutters..... Lawrence Mischel, Sue Mischel  
Laboratory ..... Duart Film Labs, New York

First sneak preview screening: July 9, 1967 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
US premiere: September 29, 1967 at the Fifth New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center.  
Theatrical premiere: October 2, 1967 at the New Cinema Playhouse, 120 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and  
the Cinema 50, 236 West 50<sup>th</sup> Street, New York.  
Originally released by Filmmakers' Distribution Center.

Restoration by the Academy Film Archive, Milestone Films and Modern Videofilm. 35mm prints  
by FotoKem. Restoration supervised by Joe Lindner and Michael Pogorzelski. 16mm Fine Grain  
courtesy of Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. 35mm archival print courtesy of  
Svensk Filminstitutet.

*Jason reaches brilliant moments in a total run-down of his soul history,  
an all-night monologue breaking the barrier between private humor and public discourse,  
covering inside history of gay negro boyhood,  
urban hip scenes as houseboy scoring for human kicks,  
high camp spade queens on streetcorners,  
lower echelon night-club comic universe,  
underground love confessions —  
all done in a language so down American  
Jason emerges familiar archetype in the hip hotel rooms of decades.*

— Allen Ginsberg

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*"The most extraordinary film I've seen in my life is certainly Portrait of Jason...  
It is absolutely fascinating."*

— Ingmar Bergman

## Where's Shirley? The Re-discovery of *Portrait of Jason*

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Milestone launched "Project Shirley" in 2008 with the simple idea of distributing the films of the American Independent director, Shirley Clarke. Although there are hundreds of manuscripts and books on her contemporaries John Cassavetes, D.A. Pennebaker, Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage, Clarke had been nearly forgotten by academics, audiences and the press. *The Connection* was acquired from the estate of Lewis Allen and *Ornette: Made in America* from producer Kathelin Hoffman Gray. UCLA had restored *The Connection* already and Gray had all the elements for *Ornette*. *Portrait of Jason* and all the short films were licensed from Clarke's daughter Wendy and the materials were to come from the Museum of Modern Art.

MoMA had restored *Portrait of Jason* in 2000 and their version was released on DVD in 2005 by England's Second Run to generally excellent reviews. But the restoration proved to be problematic since it had been restored from a well-used 35mm print in the museum's collection. Frames and sound were missing. The DVD was missing four to five minutes. At that time, it seemed to be the only 35mm materials in existence and nothing was left of the original 16mm camera negative or the 35mm blow-up negative done in 1967. MoMA's restoration was a fifth generation away from that camera negative. Access to this restoration dupe negative would require creating a fine-grain print and a dupe negative after that to produce prints — so the photochemical 35mm prints for distribution would be even *further* away from the original. With each step in the photochemical process losing some definition and contrast, Milestone decided to search for the original materials once more. It was something that had been tried on at least three other occasions without success.

Thankfully, the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research in Madison had Clarke's vast paper collection along with some of the film material from her career. There were inspection reports for six reels of original 16mm outtakes from *Portrait of Jason* along with five reels of sound outtakes. Unfortunately on inspection, the film reels were once again confirmed to be outtakes.

The paper trail led to DuArt Films in New York, the original lab for the film in 1967. The company was in the process of closing its film lab and creating an inventory of the holdings. Unfortunately, no materials for the film existed there. Dozens of other labs and film storage facilities around the Tri-State area were contacted with several months of phone calls, faxes and emails. After much pleading, there were still no discoveries.

Then followed even more months of contacting places such as New Yorker Films (the last distributor of the film), the Jerusalem Film Festival (a holder of a very battered 35mm print donated to them by New Yorker's founder Dan Talbot) and literally hundreds of foreign labs, distributors and archives. There were only 16mm prints in various archives and collections but they too were battered, due to the great popularity of the film in the 1960s and early 1970s.

By now, over a year has passed and frustration grew with each and every failed attempt. One night, however, Milestone's Dennis Doros woke up with a mathematical equation in his head. In the morning, it proved to be the footage count found on the inspection report of the original outtakes at Wisconsin. Totalling up, it turned out that the running time for these reels was 109 minutes — only four more than the original release length. This was too much of a coincidence for the Milestone team.

Dennis Doros asked the Wisconsin archivists to send on the reels of film outtakes to UCLA Film & Television Archives for inspection. However, after examining these, the folks at UCLA agreed that these were indeed outtakes. They had all the earmarks of discarded footage: black leader throughout the reels, a total lack of credits and lots of splices. But Doros thought about that and went back to review the Second Run DVD. The

film *did* lack credits and was *supposed* to look unedited. UCLA's Ross Lipman took one more look at the footage, as a favor. It was then discovered the great irony in the search. Because Shirley Clarke had created a film that was *meant* to look unedited — filled with out-of-focus shots and black leader — that Shirley's 16mm fine-grain was hidden all these years as outtakes! It was lost by its very nature.

Because UCLA and Ross Lipman were tied up with the LA Rebellion restorations, Milestone spent months researching the source of the 16mm fine grain reviewing Shirley Clarke's papers and taking notes from the fine-grain itself. The film and lab bills showed that this fine-grain was created in May 1967 for a screening on June 7<sup>th</sup> for her family and friends. After that, she edited for three more months before the film's premiere at the New York Film Festival. New problems, therefore, popped up immediately.

Since this was Clarke's original cut, that meant that there was a lot of editing done afterwards that was not reflected in the fine-grain. Though interestingly enough, some of those editing notes were found on masking tape at various points on the fine-grain itself. Additionally, the sound track outtakes were just that — outtakes. They could not be used for the film.

So that meant another search for a 35mm print in good condition. After days of researching the Wisconsin papers, Doros stumbled upon a late 1960s telex from the Swedish Film Institute asking for permission to lend its print to the Belgium Film Archive. Doros dashed off an email to archivist Jon Wengström at the Swedish Film Institute. Wengström replied not only with a quick affirmation but a day later, a DVD (scanned that very night) arrived of their 35mm print as well! It turned out to be in almost mint condition.

Although it would have taken months of traditional film editing to conform the Wisconsin fine-grain to the final version (as seen in the Swedish print), modern technology proved an incredible ally in this endeavor. Modern VideoFilm scanned the Wisconsin 16mm to 2K digital files and also created a quick scan of the 35mm print. Using the Quantel IQ system, the computer was able to do scene recognition and match up the two versions in less than 18 hours. Only one short dissolve was missing from the 16mm fine-grain and that was borrowed from the 35mm print.

Milestone then spent a week comparing the digital files of the restoration with the 1980 VHS release by Mystic Fire Video and the 2005 DVD release by Second Run. Although the restoration's running time matched exactly the original running time, it was important to make sure that nothing was missing in Milestone's version. Interestingly enough, many of the "black leader" scenes were missing from the two previous releases — as if previous projectionists had cut this intentional leader — or when it mastered to video, the engineers had removed them. Other small bits and pieces as well as sound were missing at various points in the previous versions. However, nothing at all was missing from the new restoration. One final check was made, using the 1967 Swedish print as a guideline. This showed that the Quantel IQ system and the engineer at Modern VideoFilm had done a perfect job. Not only that, but the detail, the contrast and the sharpness of the 16mm fine grain was far, far superior to the previous versions.

While viewings all these versions, Doros also compared the damages to each. To promote *Portrait of Jason*, Clarke had appeared in the documentary *Rome is Burning* to talk about her career. She complained that her first feature film *The Connection*, also intended as a "found" film, was far too beautiful. She wanted it to look rough while her cinematographer Arthur Ornitz insisted that it retain a professionally photographed appearance. She deeply regretted losing the argument. Although the 16mm fine-grain of *Portrait of Jason* had plenty of dirt and scratches — especially in the optical effects — far more dirt existed in the Swedish and MoMA prints. Milestone and the Academy could have spent hundreds of hours and a lot of money to clean the digital version, but since it already looked better than it did on its opening in 1967, it was decided to honor Clarke's wishes and to retain the look.

To see Milestone's extended explanation of the search for *Portrait of Jason*, please see the YouTube video at <http://youtu.be/ewD5ySM5reE>

## Restoration

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*Portrait of Jason* was preserved by the Academy Film Archive with funding by the Academy Film Archive, Milestone Films, the Toronto International Film Festival and a Kickstarter campaign. It was restored from the original 16mm fine grain interpositive and a 35mm print.

At Modern VideoFilm, colorist Kathy Thomson and the Academy's Joe Lindner scanned the 16mm interpositive at 2K. Modern Videofilm's Vincent Pirozzi supervised and assisted on the work including the proofing of the 2K transfer, the 35mm negative and the 35mm prints. Modern VideoFilm created a one-light scan and a digital audio track of the 35mm print from the Svenska Filminstitutet (Swedish Film Institute), which were used in conforming and creating the final restoration. Because Shirley Clarke and Gloria Hawkins had done additional editing after the fine grain was created, Modern VideoFilm's editor Roger Berger used the Quantel IQ platform to piece together the film using the Sweden's print as a guide. He discovered that with the exception of one optical effect (footage of Jason smoking was used and then repeated in reverse), the 16mm material was complete. The team at Modern recreated all the optical and transition effects in the print and removed flaws in the 16mm, including pen markings and tape which were placed as optical and printing cues. They then created a B&W LUT (Lookup Table) for output to 35mm, matching the exact composition and sizing of the 35mm print; a DCP (digital cinema package); and a HDSR (high definition) video master. Over 6 terrabytes of information have been recorded to hard drive and tape formats to preserve the various digital formations.

The 35mm Internegative was produced at FotoKem in Burbank, California as were the 35mm prints.

The original 16mm materials were provided by the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and a 35mm print was loaned by the Svenska Filminstitutet.

The preservationists were Josef Lindner and Michael Pogorzelski at the Academy Film Archive. 35mm prints were made at FotoKem. Special thanks to: Randy Haberkamp, Mike Pogorzelski, Joe Lindner and May Haduong, Academy Film Archive; Maxine Fleckner Ducey, Heather Heckman, Emil Hoelter and Mary K. Huelsbeck of the Wisconsin Center for Film & Theater Research, University of Wisconsin Madison; Steve Wilson of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin; Ross Lipman at the UCLA Film & Television Archive; Kate McGuire of the Trenton Historical Society; Jackie Raynal; Jon Wengström of the Svenska Filminstitutet; Christoph Terhechte of the Berlinale International Forum of New Cinema and Charlie Tabesh, Turner Classic Movies.

Restoration by the Academy Film Archive and Milestone Film & Video  
Film Archivist: Josef Lindner and Michael Pogorzelski  
2K Conversion, DCP and 35mm internegative by Modern Videofilm.  
Colorist: Kathy Thomson.  
Supervision by Vincent Pirozzi  
Editing by Roger Berger  
35mm Film Lab: Fotokem

## Production

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Like Jason's history, the recorded accounts of the production of *Portrait of Jason* includes stories that are mostly true and some that are less so. Here are some facts.

Shirley Clarke, having not made a movie since 1964's *The Cool World*, decided that Jason would be an excellent subject for a film. Andy Warhol's *Poor Little Rich Girl*, the one-camera portrait of the beautiful Edie Sedgwick and his other Screen Tests might have been an influence. In a 1969 interview at the George Eastman House, Clarke said, off-the-record, that a month before shooting her film, Warhol coincidentally met Jason Holliday at a bar through Paul Morrissey. He then tried to shoot a film with Jason and Edie Sedgwick, which Clarke said, was in the wastebasket as far as she knew. "They simply couldn't do it."

Clarke used the money for *Portrait of Jason* that she had earned working on the Expo '67 film *Man in the Polar Regions* produced by Graeme Ferguson Productions. She also used Ferguson's facilities in early 1967 to edit the first cut of the film.

The camera, lighting and sound equipment were rented on December 2, 1966. The shooting was on the evening of Saturday, December 3, and continued through the morning of the next day. It started around 9:00 pm and lasted for 12 hours. The assistant to the director, Bob Fiore (*Winter Soldier*, *Pumping Iron*), was paid three hours of overtime. The cameraman was Jeri Sopenen, using an Eclair NPR 16mm camera, a fairly mobile camera. Jeri's friend Jim Hubbard was assisting on sound and he recalls that at 2:00 in the morning, the Éclair broke down, so he had to call and wake his friend to rent his Auricon 16mm camera. The camera magazines held 400 feet of film, so takes were 10 or 11 minutes long. The sound engineer Francis Daniel used a Nagra reel-to-reel recorder. Clarke owned the last one that inventor Stefan Kudelski actually made himself (she had used it on *The Cool World*) and had kept it for many years so it was likely that one. Clarke said that along with them, were two friends of Jason's — Carl Lee was one and another named Richard is mentioned in the film.

The film intended to only feature Jason Holliday in front of the camera, but Shirley did make a bow to cinema vérité: "*When I saw the rushes I knew the real story of what happened that night in my living room had to include all of us, and so our question-reaction probes, our irritations and angers, as well as our laughter remain part of the film, essential to the reality of one winter's night in 1967.*"

The film was shot in Shirley Clarke's living room, in her apartment at the Hotel Chelsea, 222 W. 23rd Street. Clarke's apartment was the site for many of the parties put on by her friends at the Chelsea since it was one of the few to have two rooms. She had one of the two penthouses (composer Virgil Thompson for a time had the other), each a two-story structure on top of the hotel. To reach the apartment, Clarke would take the elevator to the top floor, and then a stairway to the roof, where the tower-like structures had a separate entrance. Clarke's living room was on the lower level of the penthouse.

The film set was her apartment as it was, with only slight furniture adjustments by Clarke's daughter, Wendy. Though its not apparent in the film, by blowing up the frame and adjusting the exposure for the label, the bottle Jason is drinking from is Deerstalker Single Malt Scotch — though it looks too clear to be the original contents. Wendy Clarke helped before and after the film, but she was not present for the shooting.

Clarke explained to Holliday that he had the floor, a chair, a couch and a mantle piece and that he needed to stay in that area. They also had hand signals, though she never said what they were. She also offered that he could move anything around in the apartment and put it in the space they were using





for the film, but he declined. Clarke mentioned later “all he cared about was what he was wearing.” In that same 1969 GEH interview, Shirley said she gave Jason a newspaper at the beginning of the film so he would have something to do with his hands.

According to a June 1968 letter, the total cost of the film was \$21,500.

In the 1983 Afterimage interview with Lauren Rabinovitz, she talked about how her perception of Jason changed during the making of the film:

*Jason is a performer, and everything except the last 20 minutes in the film I had seen a hundred times before. I'd heard every story that he told and every variation. I knew that if I asked him X, I would get Y. I knew him that well. An interesting and important fact is that I started that evening with hatred, and there was a part of me that was out to do him in, get back at him, kill him. But as the evening progressed, I went through a change of not wanting to kill him but wanting him to be wonderful. Show him off. I went through getting to love him as I spent months sitting at my editing table trying to decide which half of what I filmed I was going to drop. I developed more and more of a total ability to understand where he was coming from—leaping cultural gaps, his homosexuality, his opportunism, his hype. I changed a lot of judgmental ideas by really getting to know Jason. By the way, sometimes I still go back to my original thoughts about Jason. But in the process of working on the film, I grew to love him... Jason is not your average human being. I knew that when I chose him I was choosing somebody dramatic, photogenic, crazy, interesting... Somehow, he ends up the victor. I was perfectly willing for him to win.*

In a recent interview with Wendy Clarke, she discussed her mother's editing choices and process:

*This is the film my mother made just before she started to explore video. I think she would have made it in video if she had made it a little later. I remember that she wanted it to feel like it was all shot in sequence and in real time and that was why she had the sound recording while the film magazines were being changed. Her other films were edited in a much more complex style, as were the camera angles as well. This film does not feel so much choreographed as her others. All her films are dealing with many levels of what is happening and always exploring the medium, historical context, and breaking new ground.*

— interview by Ariel Schudson, quoted in her essay “Out of the Shadows and Onto the Screen: Project Shirley and Milestone's Restoration of the *Portrait of Jason*”

## Post-production and Release

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After creating a work-in-progress print, Shirley Clarke screened *Portrait of Jason* for perhaps the most impressive and illustrious focus group ever assembled — especially for an independent film. Larry Kardish, a recent graduate from Columbia University who had just been hired by the Film-Makers Distribution Center, sent out the invitations. The RSVP list for the private 3:00 PM showing at the Museum of Modern Art is a who's who of the New York cultural elite in the 1960s. Among the attendees at the screening and the party that followed were:

Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee (actors and activists)	Esther Bodie (actress)
Adolfas Mekas (filmmaker)	Fred McDarragh (photographer)
Elia Kazan (Hollywood director)	Mike and George Kuchar (filmmakers)
Terry Southern (novelist and screenwriter)	Arthur Miller (playwright)
Roscoe [Lee] Browne (actor)	Henry Geldzahler (art historian and critic)
Virgil Thompson (composer)	Ken Jacobs (filmmaker)
Willard Van Dyke (filmmaker and photographer)	Paul Heller (film producer)
Bill Greaves (filmmaker)	Lionel Rogosin (filmmaker)
Norman Mailer (novelist and mayoral candidate)	Barney Rosset (publisher)
David Amram (composer)	Richard Leacock (filmmaker)
Kit Carson (actor)	D.A. Pennebaker (filmmaker)
Bill Jersey (director and producer)	Storm de Hirsch (filmmaker)
Rip Torn and Geraldine Page (actors)	Louis Brigante (filmmaker)
Jack Gelber (playwright)	Robert Frank (photographer and filmmaker)
Emil Cadoo (photographer)	Carl Lee (actor)
Douglas Auchincloss (journalist and writer)	Jason Holliday (film's star)
George Plimpton (writer)	Andy Warhol (artist and filmmaker)
Sheldon and Diane Rochlin (filmmakers)	Robert Lowell (poet)
Eddie Jaffee (press agent)	Paul Morrissey (filmmaker)
Amos Vogel (film critic)	Elaine Dundy and Betty Lorwin (Clarke's sisters)
Tom Prideaux (editor, <i>Life</i> magazine)	Michael Snow (painter)
Dan Talbot (film exhibitor and distributor)	Tennessee Williams (playwright)
Stanley Kaufman (critic)	Peter Kubelka (filmmaker)
Hayden Walling (architect)	Bob Blackburn (artist)
Allen Ginsberg (poet and Buddhist)	Lionel Ziprin (poet)
Ed Sanders (member of the Fugs)	Gordon Ball (photographer)
Richard Foreman (theater director)	Harry Smith (filmmaker and musicologist)
Larry Kardish (future MoMA curator)	George Kleinsinger (composer)
Thomas Hoving (director of the Metropolitan Museum)	Wendy Clarke (Shirley's daughter)
Cheryl Crawford (theater producer)	

## Film-Makers' Distribution Center

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*The forming of the Filmmakers Distribution Center and my subsequent involvement more directly with the "Underground" (especially Jonas Mekas and Louis Brigante) are responsible for the fact that I stopped my two-year ass-sitting waiting for my agent to sell one of my scripts or inform me that Hollywood was calling (Since The Cool World, I hadn't been able to convince any major or minor company to produce several scripts I'd written, and I was beginning to think I'd never make another film.) When Jonas persuaded me to try 8mm and keep a film notebook, I got such a kick out of handling a camera again that I knew I'd have to find a way to make another film. The success of [Mekas's] The Brig, [Kenneth Anger's] Scorpio Rising and [Paul Morrissey and Andy Warhol's] Chelsea Girls convinced me I could produce myself if I kept cost way down, and I guess that's just what I did.*

— Shirley Clarke "About the Making of *Portrait of Jason*" press release, 1967



*Portrait of Jason* was distributed by the new indie company, Film-makers' Distribution Center (FMDC), founded by Clarke, Mekas and Brigante. Much of the story of that distribution here comes from James Kruel's brilliant *New York, New Cinema*. The company was patterned after their friends' Filmmakers Coop, but unlike them, it focused on more narrative films and designed to get these films out of the college circuit and into the more commercial arthouse cinemas around the country.



The Wurlitzer Building and Wurlitzer Hall on West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street at the height of its fame.

The film was a perfect choice to open their new theater New Cinema Playhouse (designed to spotlight the American cinema movement), as it already was a hit at the New York Film Festival just a couple weeks before. FMDC had already scored a successful release with Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*. The distributor and theater decided that *Portrait of Jason* could do well with a marketing and publicity push. Clarke was already more of a "commercial" entity than the distributor's other filmmakers having had *The Connection* and *The Cool World* open theatrically. Also, Clarke was willing to go through the interviews and appearances necessary to make the film a hit.

The New Cinema Playhouse was actually one of three planned theaters the FMDC were trying to run in the city. (Cinematheque 1 opened in early 1968, while Cinematheque 2 on Greene Street never opened.) The New Cinema Playhouse was located at the Wurlitzer Building at 116 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in the Times Square area where many art films would have their premiere before the neighborhood would deteriorate in the 1970s.

The FMDC spent a reported \$12,000 to convert the basement theater into a commercial movie house. It also carried an overhead of \$2000 a week, not including the advertising — a very large house "nut" for an art house back then. As the first film opening the Playhouse on October 2, 1967, *Portrait of Jason* had to succeed. FMDC spent \$400 to produce 3,000 "I saw Jason" buttons to be distributed at the New York Film Festival.



It was also behind the decision of Clarke's to spend the money at DuArt to blow the film up from 16mm to 35mm. Strangely; no poster was ever produced for the film's national release.

The film was extensively advertised and publicized in New York and the film did reasonably well — playing for 11 weeks with an average box office of \$1700 a week. But due to the theater's overhead and the advertising expenses, the film lost more than \$7,000 during its run. It severely damaged any hopes of having a successful national release. Ironically, in consideration of the extra expenses to make 35mm prints, there were more 16mm rentals than 35mm of the film. Sadly, it also marked the beginning of the end of the Film-Makers' Distribution Center and the just-refurbished Playhouse. When less commercial films followed at the theater and "popular" directors Andy Warhol and Robert Downey quit the FMDC, the utopian dream ended in 1970. One of their last filmmakers they distributed was John Waters with his film *Mondo Trasho*. His next film, *Pink Flamingos*, sparked the rapid rise of Robert Shaye's fledgling distribution company New Line Cinema into an important New York indie distributor. It would evolve into one of Hollywood's mini-majors based on films like *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

*Shirley Clarke has been trying in films to reveal what's happening.*

*What's really happening on the scene in the lives of young Americans.*

*What's doing now — using a style that is both beautiful, penetrating and with humor.*

— From the original press notes for *Portrait of Jason*

As for Clarke, she did fairly well, primarily because of the lecture circuit. Even if the film rental was only \$200 in nontheatrical venues, Clarke would appear at a college or theater for as much as \$1000 plus expenses. (For comparison, Jean-Luc Godard earned \$1500 an appearance for his US tour of LA CHINOISE in 1968.)

When the FMDC and the Playhouse closed in 1970, there was \$80,000 of debt. To save the assets from public auction, Jonas Mekas pledged to pay the debt. Shortly thereafter, he turned the plans for the Cinematheque 2 on Greene Street into the Anthology Film Archives and started the idea of the Essential Cinema featuring 300 films. Clarke was dismayed at Mekas' new plans without her knowledge and more so, because none of her films were named to the list. Mekas had been one of her major critical champions over the years, but it was only in 1981 when the Anthology had a retrospective of her films that she received recognition from the archive.

*"A film is like a battleground. There's love...hate...action...violence...death. In one word: emotions."*

— Sam Fuller

## Jason Holliday (June 8, 1924 – June 15, 1998)

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*"One of the most genuine, most outstanding narratives of the decade! About a very complex human being, as complex as many a Dostoyevsky character. A beautiful person and a tragic one."*

— Jonas Mekas, *Village Voice*



*"I'll never tell!"*

— Jason Holliday

Jason Holliday was born Aaron Payne in Montgomery, AL or Trenton, NJ in 1924 — although he claimed 1934 in his official biography for the film. His parents, Fannie and Eugene (Jason says in the film that his father's nickname was "Brother Tough") were both from the south but lived most of their lives in Trenton, where they owned and ran Payne's Restaurant. The earliest public record of Aaron is in a newly discovered photograph from the 1941 Trenton Central High School yearbook where he appears in of the Boys Choir. He can be found in the front row, to the right of the center.



According to a handwritten note by Shirley Clarke (on Hotel Chelsea letterhead), Aaron claimed that he dropped out of Rider Business College after one year and went on to study acting with Charles Laughton at the Actors Workshop in Hollywood. He then studied dance with Katherine Dunham, Eugene Loring and Martha Graham. In New York, he said he acted at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, which was affiliated with the New School for Social Research and where Carl Lee also studied.

The Trenton Historical Society recently discovered clippings from the *Trenton Times-Advertiser* that show that Aaron often performed locally throughout the 1950s. The newspaper announced that “well-known Aaron Payne, a former resident of Trenton... will do a song and dance act” at a Mardi Gras festival at the Carver Center YMCA in December 1949. The next year, he was part of the “entertainment” at a United Republican League banquet. And in 1951, he was described as “present star of the Salle de Champaign [sic] in New York City” when he was slated to appear at the Carver Center’s “A Nightclub in New Orleans” Mardi Gras celebration. This wasn’t as “small time” as it may seem. Back then, the Carver Center on Fowler Street was the focal point of the African American community and hosted such performers as Cab Calloway and Fats Waller.

Clarke got to know Jason through Carl Lee. Carl’s father, the actor Canada Lee, was friends with Jason. In her 1983 *Afterimage* interview with Lauren Rabinovitz, Clarke recalled:

*Jason used to come around and clean up my house when I didn’t want him to. I would also give him \$40.00 to help him get on with his career — get costumes or music for his nightclub act. There were times when he was very funny, and there times when he was very cruel and dangerous. We would be sitting around, and he’d suddenly take amyl nitrate and pop it under your nose. I thought I was having a heart attack. I could have killed him. Anyway, I’m walking down the street one day — isn’t it wonderful how fate is always there when you need it-and luck somehow took over. There, coming down the opposite side of the street, was Jason. I saw him, and I said, “Yes, that’s who I could make the film with.” I had not talked to him in several years. But I said, “Hi, Jason,” and he almost fell over with joy. I said, “You know, I’ve got an idea about something. I’d like to film you doing what you do, telling those stories you tell and talking about your life. It would just take one day.”*

And she said in a *New York Times* interview:

*I was fascinated by the idea of having Jason explain the story of his life before a camera. So, last January [ed. actually the evening of Saturday, December 3, 1966 to the morning of the 4th], I interviewed him in my apartment for 12 solid hours. The result, I’m convinced is a portrait of a guy who is both a genius and a bore. Although Jason says he really hasn’t had any fun as a ‘hustler’ conning people, he appears to have had the last laugh.*

In a ¼” audio-recording of a 1969 interview with experimental film director James Blue (recently catalogued by Nancy Kauffman at the George Eastman House and not heard since it was made), Shirley Clarke talks about truth, the filmed representation of truth and the spectator’s perception of that truth:

*I should say something here that I never told anyone else but I think I must... There’s this one sequence in the film that isn’t in the finished film and the reason it’s not in the finished film is because... it wasn’t true when it came back and I saw it. In other words, as the moment happened, it seemed quite believable ... and worked. But when I saw it, I didn’t believe it. It was a moment before Carl actually starts to attack Jason, when I remind Jason of something really horrendous that he once did to me. You know, one of the probably most evil things done to me in my life. And he started to cry. Now... two things are not believable. One — that he’s crying because I say it. And secondly, that you don’t believe that I was in an absolute fury... though I can assure you I was. I really was. I was flipped. I was sort of waiting all night to finally say this to him. And, oh, maybe seven in the morning, I said all right... I’m just going to. But strangely enough, when it came back... you didn’t believe it. You didn’t believe either one of us. And that means, that there is always the possibility that no matter whether you really feel that it’s happening and seem to be responding, that there is ... apparently some other world that exists between the two, which happens*

during that process of taking it on film, projecting it, and having it come back to you. Where you can look and say, "I'm sorry, it's not real."

Q: "What would it have done if you left it in?"

*Well, I'm not courageous enough... The reason I removed it finally that I thought it destroyed everything ... Because it didn't work, it would destroy everything else that did. I knew it wasn't [true] when I saw it. Not when it was happening... I know I was in a fury. I remember my emotions. I sounded like I was provoking him for no other reason than to stick pins in to see if he would jump.*

And then there was Jason's own truth... Jason told Jonas Mekas in a *Village Voice* (September 28, 1967) interview why he decided to be in the film:

*I know I am a great actor and I got a chance to prove it . . . I wondered if people would think I was a homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual. I wondered if I was great enough to convince them I was all three ... I was aware filmwise of what I was doing. I never got too far beyond my image. But what is my image? Other than a well-dressed, well-liked swinging cat? I also play many roles in life. I was also hip enough to do it on the screen – dig it?*

Audiences to this day want to know how Jason reacted to the film. Clarke said in an *Oakland Tribune* interview in 1968:

*"I knew before I made it that I would not release the film unless Jason agreed," Miss Clarke said. – 'And that I would not release it unless I felt it succeeded. One of the things we agreed upon — it was not a film we would show our mothers.*

*"When Jason saw a rough cut of the picture, his only remark was, 'How was I, Shirley?' When it was shown at Lincoln Center before about 3,000 people, there was an ovation for about 20 minutes. Jason was in the audience He said, 'I was pretty funny 'I didn't realize how much I liked or disliked Jason until the night I made the film. The nature of film is that it intensifies reality. And I felt much more for Jason after making it.*

*"This is the story of a very alienated human being who could not really get to himself." Whether Jason reveals his inner self fully before the camera isn't really important. "I don't think that's the problem," Miss Clarke said. "The problem is Jason getting to Jason."*

*Where is Jason now, after the Lincoln Center showing, and the ovation, and the scattered appearances of the film in commercial theaters and colleges?*

*"Exactly where he was before the film began. This is one of the most tragic things to me — he is right back where he was before. About a month before I came to San Francisco I saw Jason at Lord & Taylor and he said, 'Look Shirley, I've got a free tie!'"*

There is not much more known about Jason Holliday after the release of the film. Actor Antonio Vargas was friends with Holliday (Vargas' gay character in Paul Mazursky's *Next Stop, Greenwich Village* is patterned after him) recalled "You never knew where he'd be, who'd he be with, or who he's be with, but he was always around. Trying to make it." (From Irene Gustafson's article "Putting Things to the Test: Reconsidering *Portrait of Jason*," *Camera Obscura* 77.)

Later in 1967, Holliday was asked to record a comedy act for LP. The producer was a songwriter who worked in the Brill Building back in the day and also did some spoken word albums with Lenny Bruce and

Jonathan Winters. It was not released at the time, but an edited version with added music, laugh track and sound effects, came out in 2007. Before he died, the producer gave the original mag tapes to film professor and archivist Regina Longo. The tapes have since been loaned to Milestone and restored by sound archivist Art Shifrin for inclusion as a bonus feature on the video release.

For many years, no one knew what happened to Jason, until a UCLA professor hired a detective to find him. Sadly, the search turned up only his obituary, which appeared in the *Trentonian* on July 31, 1998 under his given name Aaron Payne. Holliday died in Flushing, NY and was survived by two sisters, six nieces and two nephews. He was cremated at Oxford Hills Crematory in Chester, NY.

In his final film *Black Is... Black Ain't* (released posthumously after his death from AIDS), black gay filmmaker Marlon Riggs saluted Jason, an even earlier pioneer. Following a title card reading "'True Niggers ain't faggots' — Ice Cube," Riggs cut to Holliday and the filmmaker's voiceover read: "Jason. Dear Jason. Dear Jason. When the people sang the freedom songs... when the people sang the freedom songs, do you think they also sang them for you? How long, Jason, how long have they sung about the freedom and the righteousness and the beauty of the black man and ignored you. How long?"

In 1967, for the release of *Portrait of Jason*, Jason dictated this brief memoir:

## Jason Holliday's Autobiography

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*Aaron Payne (alias) Jason Holliday. Born Trenton, New Jersey, June 8, 1934 — Began career at five years old as errand boy for prostitutes, pimps, bootleggers, schoolteachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. — and anyone else I could get a buck out of. Lonely old men and hot old maids.*

*At nine years old I was on radio show from North Philly — Nixon Grand Theatre, plus two soap operas.*

*At eleven years I sang and danced outside of bars and gin mills and made a good living for myself and my family.*

*After high school, I felt I had outgrown New Jersey, in which I know to be one of the worst states in America (hate, hate, hate).*

*I was a college dropout in both New Jersey and Washington, DC. I knew that New York was where I belonged. I didn't know how long it would take, but I had the balls to try.*

*In less than three weeks in New York, I became a Broadway gypsy. I was a chorus boy in all the Broadway and Harlem nightspots. Later I appeared in "Carmen Jones," "Finian's Rainbow" and a revival of "Green Pastures."*

*Time passes between shows on Broadway and you learn a lot of things. So between shows I turn a many tricks (call boy, bar b-boy, etc.) I didn't care what I did. I was living and eating (houseboy, etc.).*

*Soon I took the nightclubs by storm as a single — I felt I could make it alone. Many chorus kids can't do a single, but I knew I could. From Small's Paradise I took Greenwich Village like Mr. Grant took Miss Richmond. I stayed at the Salle de Champagne for five years. I made more money, turned more tricks, got so high and had more fun than I ever knew you could have in this world. Such a ball!*



*When that ended, I split from New York and gave DC a try. I upset the Howard Theatre (14<sup>th</sup> and T), the Old Rose Social Club and the Caverns. Much later for Miss DC with its jive spooks. At Howard U, I wrecked there too. You better believe it!*

*So to Chi I went. Oh! What a town. The late Killer Johnson who everyone loved gave me a break. That's where I met Lil Green, Joe Williams, Tiny Bradshaw and many others.*

*In Boston I was MC at the famous Hi-Hat. Worked with Lady Day [Billie Holliday], Carmen McRae, Sassy [Sarah] Vaughn, Miles Davis, Max Roach, Dizzy Gillespie, and you name them, they know and love Jason!*

*Last but not least, I worked with the MJQ [Modern Jazz Quartet] and my sunshine superman, Willie Bobo [William Correa]. Plus I was MC and comic at San Francisco's Blackhawk and Ann's 440 and the Renaissance in Los Angeles. Plus Jason is still going strong.*

— Jason Holliday, Esq.

Jason Holliday then listed the following people. These are assumed people he worked for or worked with in one capacity or another.

Dr. Stuart Leichter, New York City

Millard Thomas [pianist, most notably with Harry Belafonte]

Ellis Larkin [pianist, most notably with Ella Fitzgerald]

Miss Nancy Steele, owner of night club L'Intrigue on West 56<sup>th</sup> Street between 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Ave

Nancy Caen [ex-wife of columnist Herb Caen, San Francisco Chronicle]

## Obituary notice in the [NJ] *Trentonian*, July 31, 1998

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Aaron Payne, 74 of New York died June 15 in Flushing, NY. After cremation, he was buried in Oxford Hills Cemetery in Chester, NY.\*

Born in Montgomery, Ala., Mr. Payne resided in Trenton, where he attended public schools, and lived in Flushing and Jamaica, NY most of his adult life. As a young man, he was in the entertainment world and travelled abroad extensively, using the stage name "Jason Holliday."

Son of the late Fannie and Eugene Payne, he is survived by two sisters, Mattie Pearl Ferguson and Excell Waters, both of Trenton; six nieces and nephews. Arrangements were by Trumbo's Funeral Chapel, New York City.

*\*editor's note: This was wrong – he was cremated at Oxford Hills Crematory but his final resting place is actually unknown at this time.*

## Shirley Clarke (October 2, 1919 – September 23, 1997)

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*"Dancer, bride, runaway wife, radical filmmaker and pioneer — Shirley Clarke is one of the great untold stories of American independent cinema. A woman working in a predominantly male world, a white director who turned her camera on black subjects, she was a Park Avenue rich girl who willed herself to become a dancer and a filmmaker, ran away to bohemia, hung out with the Beats and held to her own vision in triumph and defeat. She helped inspire a new film movement and made urgently vibrant work that blurs fiction and nonfiction, only to be marginalized, written out of histories and dismissed as a dilettante. She died in 1997 at 77 and is long overdue for a reappraisal."*

— Manohla Dargis, *New York Times*, April 27, 2012



*A Poor Farmer went over to see his neighbor the Rich Farmer, to ask his advice. His farm was doing very badly. How could he save it from ruin, he wanted to know. The Rich Farmer gave him a sealed silver box. "Take this box," he said. "It is a magic box. Do not open it. But three times a day, for three months walk around your farm holding it, and at the end of the three months come to see me again."*

*At the end of the three months the Poor Farmer went back to Rich Farmer, who asked him how his farm was doing. "Better," said the Poor Farmer. "Much better. Now what shall I do?" "Take the magic box with you again," instructed the Rich Farmer, "and again walk around your farm with it three times a day for three months and at the end of that time come back to see me."*

*Again at the end of three months the Poor Farmer came back as he had pledged. "And how is your farm doing now?" asked the Rich Farmer. "It is doing wonderfully!" cried the Poor Farmer excitedly, shaking his head in amazement. "This magic box you gave me is truly remarkable. What is in it?" he asked eagerly.*

*"Nothing is in it," replied the Rich Farmer. And then he added, "Always remember, in farming or in business, or in anything you do in life, you must work but you must always carry your magic box."*

This is the story that Shirley Clarke's beloved maternal grandfather liked to tell his workers and his family, according to her sister Elaine. Little could he have known that his granddaughter would take the story of the magic box to heart and later carry one around to world acclaim.

Shirley Brimberg was born in 1919 New York to a very well-to-do family. The first child, she was soon followed by two sisters, Elaine and Betty. Her father Samuel Nathan Brimberg was a Polish-Jewish immigrant who made his fortune in clothing manufacturing. Her mother, Florence, came from wealth as well. Florence's father, an immigrant from Latvia with a genius for metal work, had made his own fortune as the industrial inventor of the Parker Kalon tap screw for metal. (Much of his story and the three sisters' early childhood can be discovered in Elaine Brimberg Dundy's excellent autobiography, *Life Itself!*)

Shirley was an indifferent student with learning disabilities — most likely dyslexia. She only learned to read in fifth grade and to write in seventh.

*"My parents spent a fortune on tutors in order to get me promoted from one grade to the next."*

After her father lost his fortune in the stock market crash of 1929, he quickly (according to Elaine, that very night) became angry and violent, taking out his frustrations on his three daughters. Elaine wrote: *"Shirley argued with Daddy, pitted herself against him, knowing full well the denunciations and derisive mockeries she was subjecting herself to. It made dinner a living hell. But she stood her ground. Nevertheless, I know his constant disapproval took its toll on her. She was wounded by him in a way that would last for the rest of her life... During her film career this same spirit of rebellion made her dig in..."* (From *Life Itself!*, page 40)

Three years later, Brimberg left the clothing business to head Universal Steel Equipment. He regained much of his fortune and the family moved to an apartment at 1185 Fifth Avenue. But the beatings and the family's deep unhappiness continued.



Early home movies show a young Shirley deeply tanned and prancing and somersaulting with her sisters on the front lawn of their summer home (see above). There is a joy in her movement. In high school at the prestigious Lincoln School, she discovered herself.

In a later interview, she related: *"To be popular in your class at Lincoln, you didn't have to be rich or good looking or have famous parents — though there were a lot of students who had all three — but you had to*

*do something you would be known for. We had a class poet, a class chess player, a class actor, a class chemical engineer, and so on. But there was one thing we didn't have."*

And that ... was a dancer.

Dance was to be Clarke's salvation through her difficult teenage years. She attended a number of colleges including Stephens College, Bennington College, the University of North Carolina and Johns Hopkins University. After she had taken all the dance courses a college had to offer, she would move on to another. Deciding that she was ready for professional instruction, she left college and returned to New York. There, she studied dance with Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey then later danced for Hanya Holm and Anna Sokolow. Clarke also took on several administrative roles in the dance community. The year 1942 was momentous as she staged her first choreography at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street YMHA and, to escape her family (she later said), she married lithographer Bert Clarke. He was described as a charming man, a gourmet cook and a talented book designer with his own printing press. He was 15 years her senior. Their daughter Wendy was born two years later.



A previously unpublished photo of a young Shirley Clarke dancing as a member of the Carolina Playmakers theater group at the University of North Carolina. (Photo courtesy of Wendy Clarke.)

However, by the early 1950s, with a young daughter and an aging body, Clarke decided to try filmmaking. The Brimberg family had always had a motion picture camera — there are home movies dating back to the early 1920s — and Shirley had received a 16mm camera as a wedding present.

*"I remember one thing with myself which was when I had gotten a camera and it came with a book of directions which I spent a week trying to decipher, because it was really like reading algebra or something and particularly, something I wasn't good at. I'm never good at math and I'm not particularly mechanically inclined. I had a hatred for it and I used to curl up inside as I would read*

*numbers like F 2/5, and you had to use a light meter and this, that, and the other. And I realized after about two years — one day I woke up to realize that I automatically knew them, that somehow I no longer was fighting this battle of technique, that I could actually look out of the window and tell you this is a 5/6 day with a certain kind of film stock, that I had become that familiar just by doing it, and that suddenly all these things that were really basically quite repulsive to my nature — and I don't like being careful that way, I'm not patient in that manner — didn't matter. That certain things I did have: I had enormous patience in terms of editing and I've always adored that part of making film, and in an odd way as I develop as a director I set up less and less situations to edit. The better I've become as a director, the less editing, the more I'm thinking in terms of the last twenty or thirty minutes that will have no editing at all, and yet, the one thing that I really adore doing in film is editing. I just love the playing around with pieces of film. I can sit for hours.” — A Conversation: Shirley Clarke and Storm de Hirsch, 1964*

*“Most of the dance films I'd seen were awful and I figured I could do better. Essentially, film's a choreographic medium.” — Los Angeles Times interview, 1976*

Shirley Clarke started out with what she knew best — dance and movement — and she quickly became an esteemed filmmaker at a time when only a handful of women worked in the field. (There were Mary Ellen Bute, Maya Deren, Ida Lupino and Helen Levitt to name a few.) She studied filmmaking with Hans Richter at the City College of New York, and made her first film, an adaptation of Daniel Nagrin's ballet *Dance in the Sun*, in 1953. The film featured fluid intercuts from interior and exterior locations and did *not* (as dance films traditionally had) cut between long shots and close-ups of the dancers, which Clarke believed broke up the original patterns of expression in the choreography. The film had a modest beginning:

*“A friend and a dancer named Daniel Nagrin was preparing to go to Hollywood for a role he had gotten in a Bing Crosby film. As he had never seen himself on film, he asked if I would film him to see how he looked. He was performing a new dance work at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y. I decided to take him out to the beach and film it there, because it was called Dance in the Sun. It was not until a year ago that Daniel told me that it was really about walking in a forest.” — Shirley Clarke in Whitney Museum of Modern Art, The New American Filmmakers Series, #39*

She believed that “dance as it existed on the stage had to be destroyed in order to have a good film and not just a rather poor document.” (From Gretchen Berg's “Interview with Shirley Clarke,” *Film Culture*, no. 44, Spring 1967: 52.)

Clarke's conversations with fellow dancer and filmmaker Maya Deren encouraged her to continue her progress. There was a love-hate relationship between the two women pioneer filmmakers (early on, Deren reportedly invited Clarke to come to her apartment to view Deren's films — and then charged her admission), but Deren inspired Clarke to see natural human movement as a form of dance as pure as the abstract movements she had previously been filming. Dance, in Deren's interpretation, was an extension of the human consciousness in planes not “anchored in conventional spatiotemporal logic.” Clarke's *In Paris Parks* (1954) manifested this concept, although its style differed greatly from Deren's because of its disregard for a rigid structure of motion and because of its upbeat jazz music, which reflected the idea of abstract movement itself. Clarke would later go on to further include jazz, which itself challenged traditional values in music, in almost all her soundtracks. She *definitely* aimed to challenge established values in cinema in her own work.

*In Paris Parks* is one of her finest early films and it all started by accident. Clarke had traveled to Paris to make a film about her mentor, the famed mime Étienne DeCroux. She arrived with her camera, her

equipment and her daughter Wendy in tow, only to find that he had gone off to Italy. She was in a fury, but with nothing to do, she found herself taking Wendy to the park. On the second day, she realized that the playing of the children was in itself a dance. So she made "a dance of life." (Clarke would later film DeCroux in 1955, but never completed the film.)

Clarke returned to New York to become a full-time filmmaker, enrolling in City College's film program. She joined the Independent Film Maker's Association and entered her dance films into competitions. Her third film, *Bullfight*, is the only filmed performance of the legendary choreographer Anna Sokolow. Its success, winning awards at the 1955 Edinburgh and Venice Film Festivals, along with awards for her other short films, solidified Clarke's career. By 1958, Clarke had become a leading figure in the world of American Independent film.

Her 1957 film, *A Moment in Love* was named one of the ten best nontheatrical films of the year by the *New York Times*. Clarke was also chosen, along with other filmmakers, to create short film loops depicting scenes of American life for the United States Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair.

Her next film, *Bridges-Go-Round*, consisted out of outtakes from the Brussels loops work. It was a work of brilliance — an avant-garde mix of visual and sound as she made the bridges of Manhattan literally dance for the camera. It is also film that has become legendary not only as a masterpiece of the postwar Indie scene, but as a film that had to be screened two times whenever it was shown. Legendary electronic music composer Bebe Barron told the story at Clarke's memorial in Los Angeles:

*One day she phoned us [she and her husband/partner Louis] with the news that the Brussels World's Fair had commissioned her to do a short film...on short notice. She needed music fast. Could we help her? There wasn't time to do original music but we offered to put together a score from music we did for Forbidden Planet. We couldn't give it to her but we clandestinely lent it to her for Brussels. To our surprise it worked well with Bridges-Go-Round. When Shirley returned from Brussels, she commissioned a permanent score from the jazz musician, Teo Macero. It gave a totally different feeling to the film. Shirley liked both and to this day they are usually shown together to demonstrate what scoring can do for a film.*

She became known as an advocate for the small independent film community in New York, and soon after began to turn towards social issues in her filmmaking. In 1958, she joined Irving Jacoby and Willard van Dyke on a short film about 666 Fifth Avenue (known as the Tishman Building), then a year under construction. Working in 35mm for the first time, she later called it "a musical comedy about the building of a skyscraper." They received an Academy Award nomination for *Skyscraper* (1960).

Van Dyke's widow Barbara told the story of her contribution to the film:

*Shirley trusted her senses as an artist: her physical sense as a dancer, her visual sense and her musical sense. Willard had the most enormous respect for her sense of structure and always gave her full credit for saving the "SKYSCRAPER" film - he got the commission, and he could shoot it, but when he hit the editing room nothing was coming together. He called Shirley in and she picked up the footage, turned it upside down and inside out and made a film! She knew how to do that, and there aren't many who do.*

As Clarke's fame grew, so did her ambition.

*"Skyscraper took prizes everywhere. It started off at the Venice Film Festival, and it got first prize for a short film. Thorold Dickinson, who was at the United Nations, was on the jury. In fact, that's how I*



*came to do A Scary Time (1960) for the U.N. When I did A Scary Time, I learned how to shoot dramatic scenes, like mommy and daddy watching TV and the kid kissing them good-night, so that it looked real and would cut in successfully with documentary footage. No big deal, but it was a start. After making A Scary Time I was getting clearer and clearer that I wanted to make dramatic films. Skyscraper proved that I could take what seemed to be a documentary subject and, by theatricalizing the shooting and editing style, make a musical that is really entertaining."*

— interview with Lauren Rabinovitz, *Afterimage*, December 1983.

Clarke was now a vital part of the burgeoning post-war American film movement. She was one of the first—and the only woman—signers of the New American Cinema manifesto in 1961. She, like many of her contemporaries, was influenced by the works of Lionel Rogosin (*On the Bowery*), James Agee (*The Quiet One*), Helen Leavitt (*In the Street*), Roberto Rossellini (especially *Open City*) and the cinéma vérité filmmakers.

Clarke's sister Elaine (married to critic Kenneth Tynan and a noted author in her own right) wrote in her autobiography that she suggested to Shirley that she consider adapting a play by a friend of hers, Jack Gelber, for her first feature. Controversial from the start, "The Connection" had opened to mostly negative reviews, but within a few months, had become the hit of New York theatre. Clarke had seen the play but wasn't as certain as her sister. Elaine convinced Shirley that the play had a ready-made audience and a cast that was perfect for the film. Shirley went back to see the play again and left thoroughly convinced and excited. Elaine set up a meeting between the playwright and the filmmaker. Gelber was very distrustful since Hollywood had been calling and he didn't want to "sell out."

*Into my life walked Shirley Clarke. Black bowler hat jauntily cocked on her head, dressed in black, stabbing the air with her signature little Schimmelpfennig cigar, laughing at her own secret jokes, her nervous energy level so high she hardly had time to spit out her words. Before I knew it I was in her house on 87<sup>th</sup> Street and she was showing me one of her short films, Bridges-Go-Round, on a cracked wall above a bookcase. I made up my mind instantly. Shirley was for me.*

Gelber later described Clarke as "a rushing river. Warm, quick, garrulous, laughing at the slightest provocation, she seemed ready to jump at any new experience out there."

Clarke and co-producer Lewis Allen had a novel idea to raise the money — they would fund the film the same way producers found backers for a Broadway play — by reaching out to hundreds of small subscribers. At the time, this kind of fundraising was unheard of for film. And like the play, it wasn't the only thing that was unconventional about the project.



Taking the raw, graphic depiction of drug addicts that he had written for the stage, Gelber and Clarke changed the character of the theater director Jim Dunn to a filmmaker and added a level of humor by poking fun at the world of cinéma vérité movement. And while constricted to a single set, Clarke combined the French New Wave's mobile camera with a whirling choreography of movement and jazz unseen in independent film before. The film was a hit at Cannes, but it was promptly banned by a New York censor board for indecent language. A struggle ensued to have it theatrically screened in the United States. After a two-year battle, the producers and director ultimately won in court. But as important as it was the victory was judicially, it was sadly a case of too little too late. The film lost its timeliness and failed at the box office. Among filmmakers, *The Connection* was highly influential but sadly the film went out of distribution in the late 1980s until the Milestone release in 2012.

*"For years I'd felt like an outsider, so I identified with the problems of minority groups. I thought it was more important to be some kind of goddamned junkie who felt alienated rather than to say I am an alienated woman who doesn't feel part of the world and who wants in."*

— Los Angeles Times interview, 1976



*"Right now, I'm revolting against the conventions of movies. Who says a film has to cost a million dollars and be safe and innocuous enough to satisfy every 12-year-old in America? We're creating a movie equivalent of Off Broadway, fresh and experimental and personal. The lovely thing is that I'm alive at just the time when I can do this."* — Shirley Clarke, 1962

Clarke's next film, *The Cool World*, was based on a Warren Miller novel. Significantly, it was another collaboration with actor Carl Lee. The son of actor Canada Lee, Carl had been one of the stars of *The Connection* (as Cowboy) and during the filming the pair fell in love. Clarke told her sister that he was the great love that she had been waiting for all her life. After the screening of *The Connection* at Cannes, Shirley took off with Carl for a year in Europe. Elaine later wrote that by that time the polite young man she had known was already heavily into drugs and dealing. Carl and Shirley's relationship was tumultuous but lasted more than twenty years until his death in 1986.

*The Cool World* was another melding of harsh reality (this time, set in Harlem), music and choreography. Produced by Fred Wiseman, it has rarely been seen since the 1960s. The film opened at the Venice Film Festival. Clarke attended the festival with Carl, her mother, her daughter, Wendy and her niece, Tracy Tynan. (Tynan went on to marry filmmaker Jim McBride whose film *David Holzman's Diary* is reminiscent of Clarke's work.) *The Cool World* is now only available from Wiseman's Zipporah Films.

In 1964, Clarke directed *Robert Frost: A Lover's Quarrel with the World*. The famed poet was 88 years old and it was filmed very shortly before his death. The film revealed Frost's warmth and impish charm as he appeared at speaking engagements at Amherst and Sarah Lawrence Colleges.

Clarke combined this footage with conversations about Frost's work, scenes of his life in rural Vermont and reminiscences about his career. The poet is also seen receiving an award from President Kennedy and touring an aircraft carrier. Shot for public television, Clarke reportedly struggled with her producer and was unhappy with the final film. But *Robert Frost: A Lover's Quarrel with the World* won the Academy Award for Best Documentary that year and, as her daughter Wendy writes, "Shirley did consider [it an honor] that she won an Academy Award for this film and even went to Los Angeles to the Academy Awards. She sat just behind Danny Kaye."

The stress of finishing and releasing *The Cool World* (she had many arguments with her producer Wiseman), difficulties with *Robert Frost* and the death of her father brought about a crisis in Clarke's life. In January 1965, she left Lee and entered a rehab facility in Connecticut. After that, with the help of her sister, Elaine, she moved into the Hotel Chelsea, a legendary haven for artists, authors, musicians and members of New York's arts community. Shirley lived in number 822 — one of the coveted "penthouses" that offered access from the roof and were slightly larger than the tiny rooms in the rest of the building. Clarke's apartment quickly became a focal point for the New York cultural scene. Elaine remembers that Shirley had two poodles in those days. Their dinner — hamburgers without the buns or fries — was delivered every day from the hotel's legendary restaurant, El Quijote.

Clarke's fourth feature, *Portrait of Jason*, proved to be a different kind of project from her other films. It is perhaps her masterpiece.

Stripping away all the contrivances of fiction, Clarke pursued the purest of cinéma vérité while still challenging its perception. *Portrait of Jason* would be one person, one interview and made to look unedited. Clarke and two assistants, however, carefully and brilliantly edited the film, over the course of several months. Clarke and Lee chose as their subject Jason Holliday (formerly Aaron Payne), a gay African-American cabaret performer with a knack for drama. They filmed him over the course of one evening in her Hotel Chelsea apartment. Holliday's stories — involving racism, homophobia, parental abuse, drugs, sex and prostitution — would have been shocking for the day if his candor and humor had not completely charmed both filmmaker and viewer. The film balances on a fine edge between truth and dramatic performance, tragedy and humor, trust and abuse. It remains a greatly respected and vital LGBT film. Although preserved by MoMA from a 35mm print, it too became unavailable commercially in the 1980s. In 2010, Milestone acquired the rights to *Portrait of Jason*, and undertook an ultimately successful two-year worldwide search for master materials.

Despite the success *Portrait of Jason*, Clarke found it increasingly difficult to find financing for her films. In 1969 she received a grant from the Museum of Modern Art to develop a system where video could be used to edit film. Although a remarkably prescient idea, foreshadowing the introduction of non-linear editing systems by five years, it was too far ahead of the technological curve and failed. This video experiment, however, intrigued Clarke and she started experimenting with the medium.

*"Video allows for an emotional response on the part of the person editing. What's going to change is that you're going to have the same kind of freedom that actors have on stage, yet you can record it. It allows the filmmaker to stay in the creative process longer."*

— Los Angeles Times interview, 1976

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Clarke experimented with live video performance, returning to her roots as a dancer. She formed the Teepee Video Space Troupe at her Hotel Chelsea penthouse. This group included video artists Andy Gurian, Bruce Ferguson, Stephanie Palewski, DeeDee Halleck, Vickie Polan, Shrider Bapat, Clarke's daughter Wendy Clarke and many others. Gurian would write: "*She was the closest person to a complete artist I had ever met and there was more to learn from her than anyone else in the business. She successfully combined personal vision, logical methodology, political awareness, self-reflection, and an impulse to communicate. Thirty years later, having met artists of all kinds by the score, I still maintain this opinion.*"

The troupe worked in and around the hotel. Other participants included many of her neighbors in the building, including Viva, Arthur C. Clarke and Agnes Varda. (Around this time, Clarke appeared as herself in Varda's feature film, *Lion's Love*.) Many of these videos are in need of preservation — film historian and archivist Beth Capper is currently leading a project to catalog and preserve the documents and videos of the group. Her invaluable site is at <http://teepeevideospacetroupe.org/> for more information.

*"If you're not a character when you're over sixty, you're nothing."* — Shirley Clarke

Although Clarke approached Hollywood — and Hollywood approached her — several times, the opportunities all turned out to be work-for-hire jobs. These were projects that she wisely refused each time they appeared. But in an interview with Marjorie Rosen, Clarke remarked, "To tell the truth, if I had the talent or the particular abilities to make Hollywood movies, I guess I'd be making them — actually, as a moviegoer I personally would take the likes of *Duck Soup* over *The Connection* any day." It was also widely known that she had a deep love for anything related to Felix the Cat. The opening shot of the Felix Bar in *Ornette: Made in America* is an homage to the cartoon feline, much like a Hitchcock cameo.

*"When I was still a young girl, I had about twenty Felix the Cat toys, from tiny wooden ones to large stuffed Felixes that my parents brought back from France. I had a Felix the Cat costume that my French governess made for me to attend a girlfriend's costume party. Also, I had a 16mm film by Otto Messmer called Felix Out of Luck. So I would sit watching my Felix film in my Felix the Cat costume surrounded by my entire collection of Felix the Cats."*

— quoted in *Whitney Museum of Modern Art, The New American Filmmakers Series, #39*

Wendy Clarke also points out that another common motif in her mother's films was images of human skulls— not as symbols, but simply because she liked them.

Clarke became a professor teaching film and video production at UCLA in 1975 and stayed there for the next ten years. She influenced dozens of future directors including Allison Anders (*Gas, Food Lodging* and *Strutters*), Valerie Faris and Jonathan Dayton (*Little Miss Sunshine*). Dayton spoke at Clarke's Los Angeles memorial:

*At first I was surprised by how relatively little she knew about the specific workings of certain cameras and video switchers. As I got to know her better I saw that she was teaching us something far more important and enduring. We were learning about how to live our lives as filmmakers. She taught us how to look into our worlds for the subject matter of our films, to see how some eccentric acquaintance could be the centerpiece of a documentary, to see how an interest in dance could lead to a series of experimental films, to see how new smaller 35mm movie cameras could allow one to shoot in places film makers never ventured into.*

*Shirley never stopped learning. She infused her students with the idea that there was a legitimate place for personal film making, that we didn't have to all pray at the altar of the commercial film*

*industry. Finally, one of her most valuable gifts was her sense of humor. Although she was capable of being fiercely angry with those who crossed her, most of life's dramas she found incredibly funny. She had experienced her share of disappointments and betrayals, but her resilience was inspiring. She loved to laugh and always seemed to find ways to enjoy the company around her. Shirley Clarke's legacy is not only represented by her films, but in the work of hundreds of filmmakers whose work she fostered and inspired.*

During her time at UCLA, Clarke also directed two video works based on the theater pieces by Sam Shepard and performed by Joe Chaikin. *Savage/Love* (1981) was a monologue by a murderer and *Tongues* (1983) has Chaikin speaking on life and death. In the 1980s, theater and film producer Kathelin Hoffman wanted to create a documentary about jazz innovator Ornette Coleman and discovered that Clarke had started one in the late 1960s. She hired Clarke and worked with her to create the fifth and final feature film of Clarke's career, *Ornette: Made in America*. The documentary was very well received and marked a cinematic comeback of sorts for Clarke. Once again, she was on the cutting edge of film style — merging documentary techniques, video art, music videos and architecture into a meaningful statement. The celebratory premieres and career retrospectives that came with the film were personally satisfying for Clarke. She told her colleague DeeDee Halleck: *"Things are changing. I recently had five retrospectives. There's a sense of respect when I walk into a room. I was always on my way up and now I realize I'm no longer on my way up."*

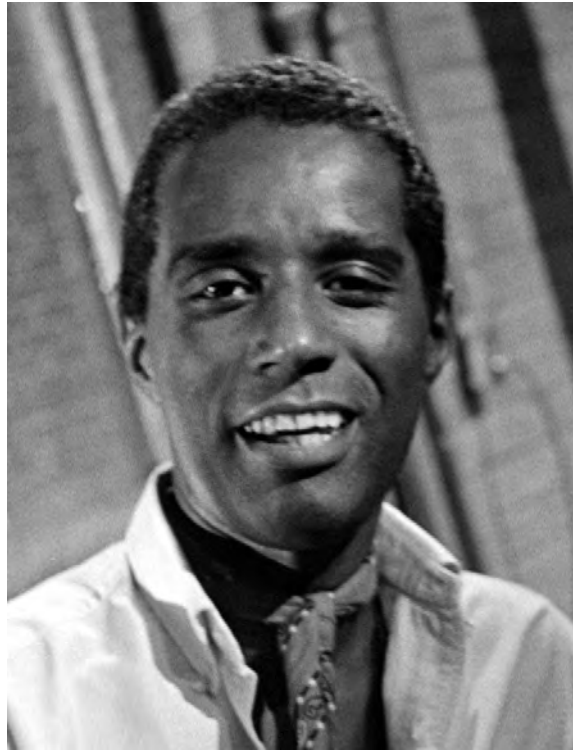
However, in thinking about their days working together, Hoffman (now Kathelin Hoffman Gray) noted that Clarke was beginning to show signs of the Alzheimer's disease that soon took over the last decade of her life. As she reached her 70th birthday, Clarke was enjoying taking a look at the past and anticipating the future — just as the illness started to take it all away from her.

When she became incapacitated, longtime friends David and Piper Cort took Shirley in to their home in Massachusetts. They had met late in the 1970s and soon she and David worked on many video projects together. Clarke spent her last years of her life with them, and the Corts made her as comfortable as they could. In 1997, Clarke had a stroke that left totally incapacitated. The Corts and her daughter Wendy filled Clarke's room at the Deaconess Palliative Hospice with photos and objects that she had cherished while friends and relatives visited. Fifteen days later, on September 23, Shirley Clarke died.

There were obituaries and tributes from around the world — many captured her talent, her generosity to her friends, her contribution to film and video and her ability to inspire. But for a filmmaker that specialized in subject matter that was intended to shock audiences, perhaps the most shocking aspect of Shirley Clarke's career is her lack of recognition in today's film history. Acknowledged by dozens of filmmakers as a major influence, there is still not one single book devoted to Shirley Clarke's life and work, nor had there been a significant release of her films. Milestone's "Project Shirley" is intended to present as many of her films in beautifully restored versions as possible and to bring her indomitable spirit back into this world.

Carl Lee  
(November 22, 1926 – April 17, 1986)

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*"In the sort of hip world of New York, Carl Lee was the hip-black-actor icon.  
He was for hip people what Sidney Poitier was for mainstream people."*

— James Toback, filmmaker

Carl Lee (born Carl Vincent Canegata) was the only son of Harlem royalty. His father, Canada Lee, was a musical prodigy, a jockey and a champion boxer who took up acting on a whim and soon shot to stardom on stage and in film. Carl's father and his mother Juanita separated when the boy was small so Carl spent much of his childhood with his maternal grandmother, Lydia Canegata. Carl also lived with his mother in several middle-class white neighborhoods, including the Williamsbridge section of the Bronx. And though he did not often see his famous father, Carl idolized Canada. At that time, Canada was still a professional boxer, and in later years Carl fondly recalled sitting ringside at one of his father's matches. According to Carl's stepmother, Frances Lee Pearson, "[Carl] saw his father knock someone out to the ring and he was scared stiff. I think he was always a little fearful of that side of his father."

Growing up in prosperous white neighborhoods, Carl attended excellent schools but often felt lonely and rejected. When his father achieved stardom on Broadway, he experienced what he called "double isolation." As he later told a reporter, *"In Hollywood, at least the children of stars had each other. Here in New York, there wasn't nobody."* In 1941, Carl ran off to become a jockey in Saratoga Springs, NY, as Canada had done when he was kid. Carl's cousin Bill Canetega speculated that *"He was a teenager, maybe he was in some trouble."* Carl was shortly returned home.

Lee also followed in his father's footsteps in the theater, appearing in a production of Jean-Paul Sartre's play "The Respectful Prostitute" at the Selwyn Theatre in 1949. He later worked one summer at a resort called the Chrystal Lodge where he performed scenes from Shakespeare and contemporary plays. Canada



Lee's biographer Mona Z. Smith describes Carl's letters to Canada in the mid-1950s as full of "a childlike vulnerability and a need for his father's approval and praise." In one, he wrote: "I really hope with all my heart that someday you and I could be together in Paris. I'll keep that as a wish for the future."

In 1951, father and son did spend together time in Paris, along with Canada's second wife, Frances. In a letter at the time, Canada wrote about his son, "He's a great guy. We've really gotten to know each other. I think this trip will do him an awful lot of good." When the couple traveled south to Italy, Carl stayed on to study French with the last of his GI Bill tuition money.

In 1952, Carl was back in New York and having no luck finding acting jobs. He wrote to his father in Italy that he had applied to be an elevator operator at *Bloomingdale's* "but they concluded that I wasn't the type. Probably figured me for a union organizer. Or something almost as deplorable." He might, he wrote, try to take the Civil Service Test so he could work in a post office, like his uncle.

Shirley Clarke's sister, actress and writer Elaine Dundy knew Lee when he was a young student at the Dramatic Workshop and remembered him as "a good-looking, polite, youngster, eager to lend a hand at any theatrical task." When Dundy reconnected with Lee backstage at the play "The Connection" in 1959, "he seemed to be the same young man as ever — but he wasn't." According to Dundy, in the intervening years, Lee had worked as an actor, served as a maître d' at the Café Bohemia where Miles Davis played and become a drug dealer and a pimp. He lived, Dundy wrote, "in two worlds: the bohemian world of white artists and black musicians in the East and West Village and the black underworld of Harlem. In the drug culture of the sixties you could say that he was bridge between the two."

It was Dundy who introduced her sister to "The Connection" and to Lee. When Clarke decided to make a film version of Jack Gelber's controversial play, she elected to keep the cast, which had been performing and touring as a unit. And it was during the filming of *The Connection* that Clarke and Lee fell in love. Clarke was seven years older and had been married to Bert Clarke for eighteen years. She was also the mother of an adored daughter, Wendy. But after *The Connection* was a sensation at the 1962 Cannes Film Festival, director and star took off for a year in Europe. Their tempestuous relationship would continue, on and off, until Lee's death.

Filmmaker James Toback was a teenager when he encountered Lee after seeing his performance in Clarke's second feature, *The Cool World*. "I went back to 72nd Street, where I lived, and down the block, there, two hours after seeing him play the lead on screen, was Carl Lee standing in front of his white Triumph TR6, smoking a cigarette in his navy-blue blazer and his white shirt, looking very debonair. I told him I'd just seen the movie and that he was great. He was effusively friendly, and by the end of the conversation I had lent him \$20 and bought some marijuana for him." The two became friends. In an interview with Michael Sragow, Toback recalled:

*Shirley Clarke's whole life revolved around Carl Lee; they had this on-and-off 30-year relationship and she totally supported him the whole time. His influence was a combination of language, style, personality and psychology. He was a great analyzer of human beings, particularly in their sexual and racial nature; he was a philosopher of sex and murder, talked about these subjects endlessly and always lived some kind of criminal life on the side. He had a magnificent baritone voice. He could sing, but he was an electric, hypnotic, evangelical speaker. He spoke in the rhythms of a great preacher, but his subject was casual sexual analysis, race, murder, crime, death and madness. He spoke beautifully and broadly and powerfully, with great emphasis, and looked you right in the eye. He would not have been capable of an ebonic moment.*

During the course of their long relationship, Lee introduced his partner to heroin. Or as Dundy reports, Clarke insisted that Lee turn her on to drugs so that she could "be on the same glorious wavelength." Dundy deeply regretted her role in bringing the couple together but came to understand that the relationship satisfied her sister's need to rebel and also brought her closer to the African American community. And it was Lee's presence and connections that enabled Clarke to make her second feature, *The Cool World* about Harlem gang life. Lee also joined Clarke behind the camera during the filming of *Portrait of Jason* and his questioning and goading of Holliday make for riveting and uncomfortable cinema.

Lee continued to work in films, appearing with Sammy Davis, Jr., Frank Sinatra and Louis Armstrong in *A Man Called Adam* (1966) and in Gordon Parks, Jr.'s Blaxploitation classic *Super Fly* with Ron O'Neal. He also appeared on television in episodes of *The Doctors and the Nurses*, *The Defenders*, and *Mannix*. After battling a drug problem most of his adult life, Lee died on April 17, 1986 having contracted AIDS.

## Jeri Sopenen, Cinematographer (August 14, 1929 – September 21, 2008)

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Emmy award-winning cinematographer Jeri Sopenen was born in Helsinki, Finland but pursued a successful career in film and television in the United States for almost fifty years. He worked on dozens of projects, including documentary features, National Geographic television specials and the independent film, *My Dinner with Andre*. After studying music composition at the Sibelius Academy in Finland, Sopenen won a Fulbright Scholarship to Lawrence University in Wisconsin.

Once in the US, he became interested in filmmaking and went on to study at UCLA. In 1957 he traveled to Cuba where he filmed Fidel Castro and his guerrilla army. In later years, he sailed around the world and filmed with Jacques Cousteau aboard the *Calypso*. Sopenen filmed a nine-part television series *Gardens of the World* with Audrey Hepburn and shot second-unit nature footage for Woody Allen's *A Midsummer's Night Sex Comedy*. Sopenen spoke seven languages and his film work took him around the world eight times. He lived on Manhattan's Upper West Side and was an avid and competitive crossword puzzler.

For *Portrait of Jason*, Sopenen rented an Éclair camera, a 12-120mm zoom lens, a high hat and various other equipment from General Camera Corporation on December 3, 1966. The cost of the rental was \$87.68. That camera broke around 2:00 in the morning and an Auricon 16mm (from Jim Hubbard's friend, Giffard Associates at 337 West 20th Street) was rented, also with a 12/120 zoom lens. The negative film stock used was Kodak B&W Plus X that she purchased from Maysles Film. DuArt did the lab work.

## Francis Daniels, Sound

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We know that Francis Daniels did the sound on *Portrait of Jason* because Shirley Clarke hung onto his bill (grand total of \$227.70 for a day and half plus three hours overtime, equipment rental and cab fare). Daniels later did sound for George Butler and Bob Fiore's *Pumping Iron* and a few other films in the 1970s.

## Robert Fiore, Assistant to the Director

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Bob Fiore studied at New York University Film School and soon started working for Shirley Clarke, Don Pennebaker and Rickie Leacock at Filmmakers Coop. He started filming documentaries (including theatrical releases *Dionysus in '69* and *Festival Express*) and Brian de Palma's early feature, *Greetings*, as well as doing camerawork on the Maysles' *Gimme Shelter*. He helped Robert Smithson put together his film, *Spiral Jetty*, prior to working as part of an extended collective on the antiwar documentary, *Winter Soldier*. Over the years, Fiore has continued to shoot documentaries, both on film and tape for television, as well as occasionally directing (*Pumping Iron*) and producing (*Matta: the eye of a surrealist*).

According to Clarke's records, Fiore started working on *Portrait of Jason* on October 31<sup>st</sup> and was on hand that evening in December 1966 when they filmed Jason. He then spent the next three months assisting Clarke on the film and the editing. Bob was paid \$3.00 an hour for his work, but as he remembered, he was sharing an apartment at 36 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street with three other men for \$45 a month.

*"I was present during the filming of Jason, working as Shirley's PA, and then I worked as her editorial assistant during the cutting of the film. Shirley was quite a mercurial character, but a very good editor. I learned how to edit from her, and especially how to organize and handle long-form talking straight to camera documentaries.*

*It was sometime after that we started Winter Soldier, and Shirley gave us a weird Italian editing table she had acquired somewhere and couldn't get to work, and we never were able to get it to work either, despite Fred Aronow's best efforts. But the gesture was appreciated.\**

*I worked as her editorial assistant also on a couple of quasi-commercial projects; the one I remember best was a multi-screen presentation produced by Graeme Ferguson for Expo '67 in Montreal."*

— Bob Fiore, from an email dated September 28, 2010

\*The Winter Film Collective repaid their debt 45 years later by donating to the restoration of PORTRAIT OF JASON

## On the Making of *Portrait of Jason* Jonas Mekas Interviews Shirley Clarke

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**Jonas:** How does your new film [*Portrait of Jason*] differ from your other work, say, *The Connection* or *The Cool World*?

**Shirley:** For me, the most unique, extraordinary part of making *Portrait of Jason* was the shooting experience itself. I've been making films for over ten years and this was the first time the shooting was both exciting and relaxing and for a very simple reason. Instead of deciding in advance each exact movement of the camera or the actor, I planned a very simple camera procedure: I had only one set-up, I had only one action to follow. For the first time, I was able to give up my intense control and allow Jason and the camera to react to each other...

I started to trust Jason and the camera and not insist on being the controller. The only horror was working on an Auricon that had to be reloaded every ten minutes. But we kept the tape running the whole twelve hours, 9:00 PM to 9:00 the next morning.

**Jonas:** How did you come to filming Jason?

**Shirley:** For me, as for thousand of others today, film is the medium of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet so little of the medium till recently has been explored. The underground has been exploring poetic cinema and the changing vision. Cinéma vérité has called to our attention that people are the most interesting subject. Yet we have rarely allowed anyone to really speak for himself for more than a few minutes at a time. Just imagine what might happen if someone was given his head and allowed to let go for many consecutive hours. I was curious, and WOW did I find out.

**Jonas:** Why did you use Jason instead of... yourself?

**Shirley:** I had that idea at first. I had the idea of using myself as the subject of the experiment. But soon I realized I was too hip — aware filmwise. I would have both over-censored or over-directed myself., and I knew that a valid film could only be made if you were free enough to reveal the truth. Now it was also important to “go” with someone I knew well enough to have some idea of what he could or would reveal, but at the same time not someone I was TOO close to, which I believe would make for dual self-consciousness. I had known Jason on and off for several years and I knew he'd dig the opportunity to do his “thing” for a public. I also suspected that for all his cleverness, his lack of know-how of filmmaking would prevent him from being able to control his own image of himself, unlike my experience filming Robert Frost — Frost was always playing a mirror image of himself.

**Jonas:** From what you say, it's clear that you started with a certain amount of known or “controlled” elements. Where does the unknown come in?

**Shirley:** One thing I never expected was the highly charged emotional evening that took place. I discovered antagonisms I'd been suppressing about Jason. I was indeed emotionally involved. Since the readers of the “conversation” haven't yet seen the film, I should say here that while Jason spoke to the camera, other people were in the room, during the shooting, beside myself, who reacted to what Jason said and did, got involved with him. We had a tiny crew, plus two old friends of Jason who knew all his bits and had suffered from his endless machinations as well as enjoyed his fun and games. How the people behind the camera reacted that night is a very important part of what the film is about. Little did I expect how much of ourselves we would reveal as the night progressed.

## A Small Dictionary to Help You Enjoy *Jason Better* Created by Shirley Clarke for the *Svenska Filminstitutet's Filmklubb*

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A cabaret license.....	need before you can perform in a nite-club cannot be gotten if you've ever been in jail
To Hustle (A Hustler).....	do anything to get money
Get in there and pitch .....	fight back
Bellevue.....	an Insane Asylum
Balling .....	fucking
Uptight .....	in a bad situation
Fags / Faggots.....	homosexuals
Stash .....	a hiding place
Rikers Island .....	a New York City jail
Cunt.....	female sexual organ
Stoned.....	drugged
Ranking .....	bothering
Busted (to be busted).....	to be arrested
Ivy League .....	The "fancy" American universities
Brooks Brothers.....	Best men's store in N.Y.C.
Come down front.....	to be honest
Score .....	to get (a drug world expression)
Poppers .....	a drug (Amthal [Amyl] nitrate that speeds up your heart & gives a fast high)
Heat.....	cops
Ofay .....	a white man
Chops .....	mouth
"Y" .....	Young Men's Christian Association
Charlie .....	a white man
Twat .....	female sexual organ
High Indian prestige.....	a West Indian negro
Wiffen-poof [Whiffenpoof] song .....	famous Yale University song
Kick off .....	to die
Johns .....	a man who pays a prostitute
Roach .....	Marijuana Cigarette butt
Welfare.....	economical pension give by gove-ment [government]
Wacy's [Macy's] .....	Biggest dept. store in N.Y.C.
Carmen.....	is famous jazz singer Carmen McRae
Dinah.....	is famous jazz singer Dinah Washington
Carl.....	an actor – old friend of Jason
Richard .....	an actor – a new friend of Jason

(Carl and Richard are talking to Jason behind the camera with me).

Additional terms not defined by Shirley Clarke in 1967

- Sparkle Plenty ..... Originally a beautiful baby character in the Dick Tracy comic books. Used later as slang for uppers, amphetamine or speed.
- Modesty Blaise ..... A British comic book character later made into novels and movies, most notably a film directed by Joseph Losey. The Slang Dictionary cites the novels as a source for the term "Daisy" to describe a Gay man.
- Klein's ..... A popular department store located at Union Square in New York City.

## Milestone Films

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Milestone was started in 1990 by Amy Heller and Dennis Doros out of their New York City one-room apartment and has since gained an international reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company's work in rediscovering and releasing important films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, Kent Mackenzie's *The Exiles*, Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery*, Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba*, Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity*, the Mariposa Film Group's *Word is Out*, Shirley Clarke's *The Connection* and *Ornette: Made in America*, Milestone has long occupied a position as one of the country's most influential independent distributors.

In 1995, Milestone received the first Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I Am Cuba*. Manohla Dargis, then at the *LA Weekly*, chose Milestone as the 1999 "Indie Distributor of the Year." In 2004, the National Society of Film Critics again awarded Milestone with a Film Heritage award. That same year the International Film Seminars presented the company its prestigious Leo Award and the New York Film Critics Circle voted a Special Award "in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films." In November 2007, Milestone was awarded the Fort Lee Film Commission's first Lewis Selznick Award for contributions to film history. Milestone/Milliarium won Best Rediscovery from the Il Cinema Ritrovato DVD Awards for its release of *Winter Soldier* in 2006 and again in 2010 for *The Exiles*.

In January 2008, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association chose to give its first Legacy of Cinema Award to Doros and Heller of Milestone Film & Video "for their tireless efforts on behalf of film restoration and preservation." And in March 2008, Milestone became an Anthology Film Archive's Film Preservation honoree. In 2009, Dennis Doros was elected as one of the Directors of the Board of the Association of the Moving Image Archivists and established the organization's press office in 2010. He is currently serving his third term. In 2011, Milestone was the first distributor ever chosen for two Film Heritage Awards in the same year by the National Society of Film Critics for the release of *On the Bowery* and *Word is Out*. The American Library Association also selected *Word is Out* for its Notable Videos for Adult, the first classic film ever so chosen.

In December 2012, Milestone became the first-ever two-time winner of the prestigious New York Film Critics' Circle's Special Award as well as another National Society of Film Critics Film Heritage Award, this time for its work in restoring, preserving and distributing the films of iconoclast director Shirley Clarke. Important contemporary artists who have co-presented Milestone restorations include Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Barbara Kopple, Woody Allen, Steven Soderbergh, Thelma Schoonmaker, Jonathan Demme, Dustin Hoffman, Charles Burnett and Sherman Alexie.

"*They care and they love movies.*" — Martin Scorsese

"*Milestone Film & Video is an art-film distributor that has released some of the most distinguished new movies (along with seldom-seen vintage movie classics) of the past decade.*"

— Stephen Holden, *New York Times*

## Milestone would like to thank...

### The people who made the restoration possible

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Wendy Clarke

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