



Shiro's Story – Jovian Wade and Percelle Ascott, photo: James John

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE ACQUIRES RAPMAN'S 3-PART YOUTUBE HIT 'SHIRO'S STORY'

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On the eve of the release of the hotly anticipated *Blue Story*, BFI are delighted to announce the acquisition of viral sensation *Shiro's Story* into the **BFI National Archive**. UK artist, filmmaker and Screen Star of Tomorrow 'Rapman', AKA **Andrew Onwubolu**, rose to prominence through his ground-breaking music and online short film trilogies. Set to Rapman's original music and lyrics, *Shiro's Story*, a captivating tale of love, loss and betrayal set amidst the streets of South London, stormed YouTube in 2018, to date amassing over **18 million online views** in total. Narrated by Rapman and starring Jovian Wade and Percelle Ascott, *Shiro's Story* features cameos from Ashley Walters as well as London rappers including Headie one, Not3s and the late artist Cadet.

The acquisition of *Shiro's Story* into the BFI National Archive demonstrates the BFI's continued commitment to building a dynamic and representative contemporary collection of fiction work that embraces a new generation of filmmaking innovators, as well as highlighting the importance of digital preservation to ensure that online films are fully preserved to inspire generations to come.

Work created digitally for online viewing is potentially some of the most vulnerable. The BFI National Archive's role is to ensure that it is still safe and can be made accessible, not just for the next decade or so, but 200 years in the future. By actively bringing digitally created contemporary work like *Shiro's Story* into the archive from different platforms, this significant acquisition also reflects the fast changing pace of new and emerging filmmaking in our multi-channel age and recognizes the incredible reach and audience impact achieved by the films.

The phenomenal viral success of Rapman's 3-part rap narrative led to the *Shiro's Story* creator being signed by **JAY-Z** to global entertainment management company and label **Roc Nation**, as well as bringing him to the attention of key players in the film industry.

Rapman's first feature, *Blue Story*, produced by DJ Films, Joi Productions and BBC Films is released by Paramount Pictures UK, in cinemas on 22 November. Last night BFI Southbank hosted a special preview of *Blue Story* with Rapman in association with specialist film events company We Are Parable who brought the best of Peckham and Deptford to Southbank's SE1.

We Are Parable will present *Shiro's Story* at the Midland Arts Centre on 5 December for 'The Art of the Black Visual Album', a new nationwide season, supported by the BFI Film Audience Network as part of BFI Musicals.

Rapman's hugely successful original narrative approach, inspired by the aesthetic intersection of music and film, signifies a new breed of filmmaking that directly challenges the medium to keep telling stories in fresh and engaging ways, reaping significant audience impact. Fresh talents, who historically may have had less access to industry opportunities and support, are directly demonstrating their skills and proving their appeal online before crossing over to access more traditional support structures of filmmaking.

On the significance of bringing *Shiro's Story* into the BFI National Archive, Rapman recently told *Sight & Sound* *"I hope that audiences of the future look at my work the way I look at films like West Side Story, exploring these big themes of loyalty, heartbreak and betrayal. I hope they also realise that Shiro's Story was a game changer, not just for me as a filmmaker but also for what can be done"*

BFI Curator of Contemporary Fiction Will Massa adds, *"The impact and success of Shiro's Story is probably as much as any new or emerging filmmaker could hope for. It's a brilliant example of how relationships are changing between filmmakers, their audiences and the wider industry. This surge of energy from the bottom up is really invigorating and is opening up a conversation with a whole range of creative people who may have felt historically that the film industry was something of a closed shop. Acquiring this trilogy is an opportunity for the BFI National Archive to celebrate these new voices and establish a relationship with the next generation of filmmakers at a crucial moment in their careers."*

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ABOUT THE BFI

The BFI is the UK's lead organisation for film, television and the moving image. It is a cultural charity that:

- Curates and presents the greatest international public programme of World Cinema for audiences; in cinemas, at festivals and online
- Cares for the BFI National Archive – the most significant film and television archive in the world
- Actively seeks out and supports the next generation of filmmakers
- Works with Government and industry to make the UK the most creatively exciting and prosperous place to make film internationally

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

ABOUT THE BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the one of the largest and most important collections of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. For over 80 years the BFI has been an international leader in film preservation and guardian of Britain's unparalleled film and TV heritage. The BFI is an innovator in presenting films to audiences in new and dynamic ways, from cinemas to film festivals, outdoor events to online video-on-demand services. At the heart of all its activities is the BFI's central aim to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to the widest possible range of film and their own film heritage.

That heritage includes all-time great British directors Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger; and the rich vein of documentary filmmaking, in which Britain led the world, including the lyrical work of Humphrey Jennings. The archive also boasts a significant collection of filmmakers' papers as well as extensive stills, posters and production and costume designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera.

Expert teams undertake the time-consuming and complex task of restoring films at the BFI John Paul Getty Jr Conservation Centre in Hertfordshire. The BFI's most precious film materials are kept in optimum conditions in the world-leading Master Film Store in Warwickshire.