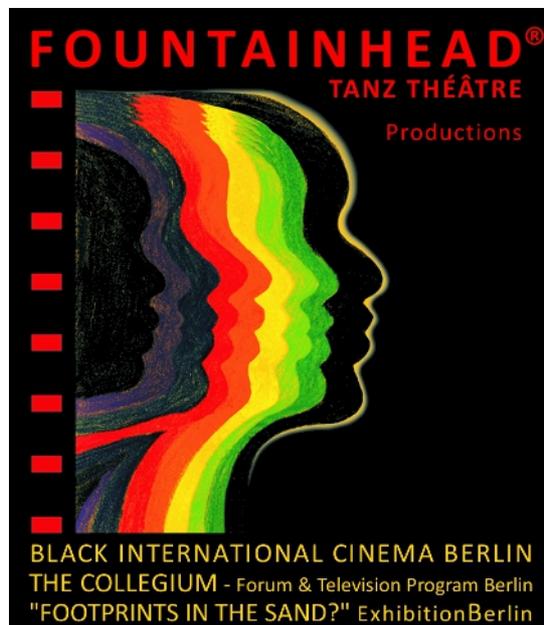


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**Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre**  
**Black International Cinema Berlin**  
**The Collegium - Forum & Television Program Berlin**  
**"Footprints in the Sand?" ExhibitionBerlin**  
in association with  
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...are an international, intercultural community of persons engaged in achieving increasing understanding and cooperation between individuals and groups in support of democratic procedures and the elimination of violence, religious, ethnic and gender persecution, youth exploitation, homophobia and racial hatred through the process of art, education, culture and dialogue.



## **Chicago Native Advances Black Artistry in Berlin**

**March 7, 2016 2:11 PM**

**By Linn Washington Jr.**

BERLIN, Germany—Professor Donald Muldrow Griffith contemplated a life-changing decision nearly four decades ago to relocate over 4,000-miles from his hometown of Chicago, the words of his mentor, legendary jazz singer Oscar Brown Jr., weighed heavily on his mind.



Donald Griffith. Photo by Linn Washington, Jr.

Griffith remembered a challenge Brown issued him.

Griffith said Brown had told him that if he “wished societal adjustments” he had to “assume responsibility for bringing those changes about.”

Griffith once served as Brown’s manager, whose artistic portfolio included playwright, poet and actor. Griffith had expanded his own portfolio from a university degree with an emphasis on psychology and education in acting, dance, singing and modeling.

An invitation to Griffith to come to Berlin, Germany in 1979 to perform in a Broadway-style musical ignited a life-enriching artistic odyssey that created a body of accomplishments that have produced accolades for Griffith and that have elevated the recognition of African American culture in Berlin.

When in Berlin for that initial acting opportunity, Griffith said he “met a group of American co-performers and a German colleague, who were interested in creating artistic works, which also addressed social issues.” He decided to stay in Berlin at the conclusion of that theater contact.

Griffith embraced the words of Oscar Brown Jr. and has made an artistic mark in Berlin, a city that does not enjoy recognition as a nourishing place for artistic expressions by African Americans on par with Paris, France.

“I was and am very fortunate to have wonderful friends and family, who supported our ambitions,” Griffith said.

Ambitions Griffith held to influence social change through cultural expressions grew into institutions, the first being Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre, an arts and cultural organization founded in 1980. Griffith said a mission of Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre is to confront violence and prejudice through various cultural activities.

Six years after the founding of Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre, Griffith produced and directed the first European Black Cultural Festival, a three-week long event that featured the contributions of blacks to world culture through film, theater, dance, music, workshops and seminars.

That Cultural Festival included inauguration of the Black International Cinema Berlin. That cinema event, now held annually, showcases films with subject matter about blacks but is not limited to

black issues only. The distinguished group EFFE – Europe For Festivals/Festivals For Europe – now ranks Griffith’s film festival as one of “Europe’s finest” annual festivals.

The 30th Anniversary of the Black International Cinema Berlin in 2015 produced a “heartfelt congratulations” from the Cultural Attaché for the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. A letter from the Attaché noted that one of the films selected for screening last year was an award-winning film about Griffith’s 1986 founding of the European Black Cultural Festival. The Attaché characterized Griffith’s Festival as “the beginnings of Black American culture in Germany.”

Griffith has taken Black International Cinema Berlin to other cities in Europe and America.

Griffith’s achievements in Berlin led to an invitation from the University of Indiana in South Bend (USA) from him and his wife, ballerina Gayle McKinney, to create a dance theater department. While at that university from 1992-1995, the pair travelled annually to Berlin to produce the film festival and other cultural activities.

From Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre have flowed initiatives in theater, dance, films/videos, film distribution, film festivals, musical productions, publications, seminars, exhibitions and workshops.

Another Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre endeavor is Griffith hosting THE COLLEGIUM, a television program with a magazine style format broadcast regularly in Berlin and other German cities.

Berlin is a city quickly associated in the minds of most Americans with Cold War intrigues and/or World War II Nazi-era excesses. However, Afro-American Griffith said race-based ugliness in Berlin and beyond has not proved a major problem in either his professional or personal experiences.

“I have been fortunate to avoid unpleasantness in Europe, although one senses a change in attitude in the atmosphere, with declining economies and newcomers from various countries seeking to become a part of Europe,” Griffith said.

Griffith credits his psychologist father and classical pianist mother for inspiration along with his mentor Oscar Brown Jr.

“I was and am influenced by the intelligence, education, diligence and sense of responsibility of my parents, especially by my father, John Willis Griffith.”

FOUNTAINHEAD® TANZ THÉÂTRE  
Founded 1980, Berlin/Germany

The events and organizations are produced and directed by Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre or are in association with Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre.

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