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IN CULTURE & ARTS:

Black International Cinema Berlin (May 4-8)

We have a dream!

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As a result of **professor Donald Muldrow Griffith's** ideas and motives this year people may witness a **25th Anniversary of Black International Cinema Berlin** which represents year based interdisciplinary and intercultural film/video festival. It is produced and directed by **Fountainhead Tanz Theatre.**

The festival is going to take place for the second time **at the Rathaus Schöneberg (City Hall) in Berlin.** This year's title **"Opportunity, please knock... We have a dream!"** already implies the originality of this festival, but also hides zephyr of a change and better tomorrow. **The event consists of video/movie projections, seminars and photo exhibition.** The part called "the Magical oasis cinema experience" is going to be held between 4th and 8th of May and the photo exhibition will be available from June 1st till 30th.

It all begun as part of the **Black Cultural Festival in Berlin in 1986,** which was an idea of prof. Donald Muldrow Griffith. Mr. Griffith graduated from the University of Loyola, Chicago, Illinois with a degree in Psychology and Pedagogy. After he spent quite a long time as a group therapist, teacher and probation officer, another interests emerged as spotlight in his life - acting, singing and dancing. **In Berlin he established the company Fountainhead Tanz Theatre along with four his colleagues Ricky Powell, Linda Curry, a German colleague Detlef Bäcker and the very famous ballerina Gayle McKinney,** who later became his partner.

Mr. Griffith, what was your initial motive for organizing this kind of event with its theme?

The origins of the festival began prior to 1986, as a result of a conversation with **Oscar Brown Jr.** His position on the matter of social change was that persons should assume responsibility for the changes they desire in society. His question to me was - "what is the plan?" This

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thought provoking question among other contributions from my father, my studies and readings led to the assumption of the responsibility to produce and direct the first Black Cultural Festival in Berlin and Europe through the auspices of the Fountainhead Tanz Theatre. **There were four persons who had been invited to Berlin from New York City to perform at Theater des Westens.**



Our situation was very comfortable economically and administratively, with no visa problems or other concerns. After living in the USA, Chicago and New York, **we were accustomed to a variety of persons from different cultures and nationalities, whereas in Berlin, we only saw a sea of persons from one group and rarely saw persons of other cultures.**

As time progressed, we gradually became acquainted with small numbers of persons from numerical minority groups and realized there were interesting stories to be documented and presented to the general public, nationally, internationally and we decided to assume responsibility for the dissemination of this information, lest it pass and die, **"like footprints in the sand"**.

Do films have something in common besides actor's and director's origin?

The relativity of film to the human experience is the ability to transcend, cultural, national boundaries with images/pictures that stimulate emotions, thoughts which have the capacity to inform and transcend humanity from various perspectives.

What made this festival keeping its tradition for so long?

The determined desire and need to establish a legacy of what is possible, even under difficult financial circumstances. **We came from privileged backgrounds in the USA.** Families intact, sufficient economic resources, university educations, travel, etc. All of these we took for granted. **When we were young, we thought everyone had the same lifestyle. As we matured, we became aware of how mistaken we were.** Eventually, we came to believe that those who are given much have a responsibility to return the investment from our families and society, to the individuals, groups and societies in which we reside and elsewhere. The work of Fountainhead Tanz Theatre is an example to other persons of what can be accomplished without the economic resources customarily associated with such undertakings. We view our efforts as role models and a source of national and international inspiration and hope.

It is said that "foundation believes that prejudice against disadvantaged groups can be challenged and stronger links within society can be forged by using art, theatre, dance, music and seminars". Why do you think that this approach is better or more efficient than any other? Are there any evident and solid proofs for that?

Booker T. Washington, the noted educator said: "Dip your bucket down where you are." Our approach to contributing to a more informed and peaceful society, follows the principle of utilizing the resources available to us as contributions to societies and hopefully as beacons of light, of whom there are many - sung and unsung. We are contributing what and where we have the ability and wish by example, to encourage others to approach life in a similar fashion.



Do you expect those seminars and films are going to change prejudices, even if they have been creating for a very long time? How do you think that is going to be a success?

Change is usually an incremental process and our attitude is to assume responsibility for supporting our beliefs with performance, activity and aspire for the best possible results. We have witnessed change as a result of our and other's efforts in Berlin and elsewhere - if our colleagues and friends nationally and internationally, had not been willing to support us in many ways, all these years, we might not have been able to fulfill the dream of change, through art and culture. We realize we are a small part of human evolution and our hopes are when our time has physically passed, we will be able to pass the baton of life, our legacy onto the next generation. Change will come, it is inevitable, although we must always be observant of the direction.

In your personal opinion, what makes people hate someone who is "different" in any way?

People learn to hate, because of a lack of education, manipulation by others and personal feelings of inferiority and insecurity, which are bred by individuals, family and societal conditions. The need to "be somebody" often leads to the discharge of low self-esteem or negative projections onto persons or groups unable to protect themselves or their image. This is brought about because of a lack of educational, financial and media resources, plus the lack of physical prowess, which would enable the party or parties to establish a balance of power between themselves and their adversary, thereby serving as a defense or protection against attacks and this resource may also engender respect as a result of the ability of the persecuted to protect themselves.

There are many negative feelings in the world, but many of them have not reached the intensity of hate! Therefore it is our duty to try to hold the "hounds of hell, at bay", as **Malcolm X** said: "By any means necessary". Hopefully, peaceful means.

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