

# South Bend Tribune

## Griffiths to help IUSB leap into dance program

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 1992



Indiana University at South Bend Photo

Husband and wife Donald M. Griffith and Gayle McKinney Griffith have joined the faculty of Indiana University at South Bend's Division of the Arts. They will begin teaching this fall in a new dance degree program.

By MARK STRYKER  
Tribune Staff Writer

SOUTH BEND — Dance has long been the neglected child within the arts at Indiana University at South Bend. While degree programs and professional level instruction exist in music, theater and the visual arts, they don't in dance.

At least they haven't until now.

Gayle McKinney Griffith, a former principal ballerina with the Dance Theatre of Harlem, and Donald M. Griffith, whose professional experience includes acting, dancing and singing on Broadway, have accepted faculty positions within the Division of the Arts at IUSB.

The husband and wife team will begin teaching this fall in a newly created dance

degree program. The Griffiths also will be involved in an off-campus IUSB-sponsored outreach program to help nurture minority participation within the arts in the South Bend community.

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Currently, the Griffiths live in Berlin, where they direct the Fountainhead Tanz Theater, an interdisciplinary arts center that they founded in the early 1980s.

The Griffiths' experience with coordinating dance, theater and music programs in Berlin will serve them well at IUSB, where they'll be expected not only to teach dance classes but also to apply their choreography skills to musical theater, drama and opera productions.

"Generally speaking, we're coming to South Bend to begin a dance department. But more than that, we want to bring to-

gether artistically all these institutions — dance, drama, theater, music," said McKinney Griffith. "Dance is our main focus. But to link all of these together — that's what we do well."

She spoke in an interview conducted in April, when she spent nearly a week in South Bend meeting members of the IUSB faculty and administration, as well as invited members of the minority community. (Her husband did not accompany her; he'll visit IUSB for the first time in June.)

McKinney Griffith said both of their experiences encompass all styles of dance, from classical to modern, but that their teaching philosophy stretches beyond the specifics of technique:

"Today, you need to know more than just ballet and modern. You need to be a dieti-

tian, you need to be a doctor, you need to know about the different floors. What to eat. What to do for the body. You need to read the paper and know what's going on around you ...

"You're learning many things. Discipline works throughout life. It's not just in the classroom. So then the students learn to appreciate that dance is more than just one, two, three, four, and 'Can I get my leg up?'"

Tom Miller, director of production with the Division of the Arts, said IUSB is thrilled with the addition of the Griffiths.

"One aspect of it is that we're getting two people where we began to look for only one. That's a huge plus from the IUSB point of view because our critical mass is twice as



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### DANCE

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much as we thought it would be," he said.

"But we're also bringing absolutely top-notch professional resumes into our program."

In addition to her tenure with Arthur Mitchell's Dance Theatre of Harlem from the late 1960s to 1980, McKinney Griffith has worked with George Balanchine, Louis Johnson, Ruth Page and Alvin Ailey.

She's appeared in the films "A Piece of the Action," "The Wiz" and "Gloria," and on television in the PBS series "Dance in America." She's also served as the assistant choreographer for the Fort Worth Ballet. She was trained at the Juilliard School of Music, Connecticut College and the U.S.A. School of Dance.

Donald Griffith has appeared on Broadway in productions of "Merchant of Venice" and "A Streetcar Named Desire." He also was nominated for "Most Promising New Off-Broadway Actor" by the New York Drama Critics for his role in the show "Contributions."

He's acted on television and in commercials and taught jazz and modern dance at the Joseph Homes School of Dance in Chicago, the Chicago Dance Theater and the Fred Benjamin Dance Center in New York.

With Fountainhead in Berlin, the Griffiths have won critical acclaim for choreographic interpretations of poet Ntozake Shange's works, for artistic exchanges with the Chicago Moving Company dance theater and for their work with students of all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The Griffiths also organized Europe's first Black Cul-

tural Festival in 1986, and established the annual Black International Cinema/Berlin, a festival now in its seventh year.

Details of the community outreach program the Griffiths will coordinate in South Bend remain undefined, although it is clear that its goal will be to interest inner-city children in dance — children who otherwise would never have the opportunity to be exposed to ballet or modern dance.

Gladys Muhammad, community organizer with the South Bend Heritage Foundation, said the program probably will be housed on South Bend's west side. Muhammad took McKinney Griffith on a tour of the west side in April and came away impressed with her uncompromising commitment to working with children in the inner city.

"I think she sees it as an opportunity," said Muhammad. "Because they'd been successful in Germany in developing their school, she felt like they could do it. There was no doubt; it was positive. I got the feeling that was their thing."

Increasing minority involvement in the arts has been part of IUSB's plans for its dance program ever since the first discussions began a couple of years ago. In formulating its program, IUSB has worked closely with the Dance Theater of Harlem, the country's first black classical-dance company.

Last September, Walter Raines, a former dancer and now director of the school affiliated with the Dance Theatre of Harlem, spent three days in South Bend at IUSB's invitation. The Griffiths were recommended to IUSB by both Raines and the founder of Dance Theater of Harlem, Arthur Mitchell.