

## Black Mountain College

### A Brevard College student resurrects a piece of our Western North Carolina educational heritage

by Will Byers  
Arts & Life Editor

I grew up here, and may be one of the few kids that's proud to be from Brevard. It took growing older and visiting some other places to fully appreciate what we've got going on in this part of the world. Not only do we reside in the oldest mountains on the planet, filled with diverse life, we also live in a region with remarkably significant cultural history that is still alive today.

My focus with the Clarion is "Arts & Entertainment," so specifically I'd like to

talk about a short-lived college you may have never heard of. Black Mountain College began in 1933 as an experimental liberal arts school that attempted to challenge the rigid educational models present in early 20th century America.

The creative realms of theatre, music, and other fine arts were integral in the curriculum of Black Mountain College students. The school closed due to financial issues after twenty-four years, in 1957, but is still regarded as a highly successful experiment of the progressive education movement.

Who participated in this school? The abstract painter Robert De Niro, Sr. attended BMC. He was the father of a prolific actor you might've heard of. The list goes on, and the talented alumni, like Robert Rauschenberg or Dorothea Rockburne, can only be surpassed by the list of faculty members throughout the school's existence.

Buckminster Fuller created his first geodesic dome at the college in 1949. Do you recall the large dome of the Epcot Center at Disney World? It's just one of his many brainchildren. You should look him up, he was quite an interesting guy.

Partners Merce Cunningham and John Cage worked at Black Mountain College, and through their avant-garde compositions and choreography they gave huge energy to the modern dance movement.

Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus School in Germany, brought his aesthetic to Black Mountain College and is considered to be a huge influence in modern architecture and design.

Willem de Kooning was also on board in the painting department with the brilliant Josef and Anni Albers, both important figures of the progressive education movement. Willem de Kooning

was an abstract expressionist whose contemporaries include Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock.

William Carlos Williams brought life to the study of poetry at Black Mountain College, and his method is regarded as an important influence to the Beat Generation. As well, he worked personally with Allen Ginsberg and helped him discover his poetic voice.

If at this point you are amazed that a small college outside of Asheville during the mid-twentieth century could have possessed so many worldly, talented faculty members, then I should say you aren't alone. Or, maybe you couldn't care less, but I, at least, find it remarkable that such innovators found this region conducive to expanding educational consciousness.

Arriving at my point, Lenoir-Rhyne University, located in Hickory, NC has announced it will be holding a summer session of its program "The Spirit of Black Mountain College." Its effort is to create a collaboration of student participants who will present performance art and other projects inspired by the legacy of Black Mountain College.

There are some preparatory items to take care of before one can participate, and those can be viewed on the website (<http://blackmountaincollege.com/summersession.htm>.) but if you are interested in anything from philosophy to film I would say this experience would be well worth the preliminary effort.

There are also registration fees, but in light of what you could gain from "The Spirit of Black Mountain College," I don't see the fees as something exorbitant. If none of this is of any interest to you, will you at least check out some of these artists? Dropping their name might make you look smart some day.

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