

# Winston-Salem native shows short film at RiverRun 2015

BY CHANEL DAVIS  
THE CHRONICLE

A filmmaker from the area is back in Winston-Salem to show his short film at the 2015 RiverRun International Film Festival.

Neil Creque Williams, a Winston-Salem native, was involved with the arts as a child in the city, participating in the Steven's Center Children's Choir and UNC School of the Arts Summer Filmmaking Sessions, attending the National Black Theater Festival and numerous community theater productions.

"I'm really excited. It's an honor to be able to play at RiverRun. I get to hang out at the old stomping ground. It's awesome to be back in Winston and to be part of the art resurgence that they've been doing," Williams said.

He attended Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School before earning his degree from Duke University in 2006. He recently received his Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts in Los Angeles. Williams's short film is titled "David's Reverie," which is his thesis film.

"David's Reverie" focuses on the story of a jazz musician who struggles to prevent his epilepsy diagnosis from stopping his career.

A 27-year-old David, played by Brandon Fobbs ("The Wire," "Bones," "Pride" and "This Christmas") is living out his lifelong dream of becoming a star trumpet player in a band. He is suddenly struck by epilepsy and unpredictable seizures, challenging his ability to play his trumpet.

With his dream on the line, he must find the courage to accept his illness, the confidence to be himself and a way to express the music inside of him.

Fobbs said that he was instantly interested in the role. "The minute I read the breakdown, I was like 'Hey I want to do this.' The musician aspect touched me first. I play saxophone, so I connected with the jazz, being a musician, and the levels of what he was dealing with," he said. "It's one thing as a black actor to lead in a film. To lead in a good film is amazing. Sometimes we get to lead in a film that might not be that good or we get to be in a good film but our role is real small. This was a really good



Williams

mix because I got to lead in a really good film that had some deeper levels."

Williams said that his time on the arts scene in the city was a huge influence on him.

"It's been a huge influence. Since I was little, I was able to participate in the Stevens Center's children's choir, as well as the Stevens Center always having different artists and musicians coming in. I remember seeing the Harlem Boy's Choir and I think that we actually sang an opening for them, which was awesome to be able to participate in that," Williams said. "We were surrounded by different artists and art, which really influenced and helped me see that being an artist is not only possible but something you can strive to do."

The writer said that viewers can expect some great music and an even greater story line.

"All the music is original, composed by Andrea Alexander, and we shot it in South Central [Los Angeles], so we had all the real jazz clubs. Ultimately, viewers can expect an emotionally grounded story of an individual dealing with illness while pursuing their artistic passion," he said. "If you're a fan of jazz, if you're a fan of stories with individuals battling health issues, then it's a story for you for sure. It's also uplifting because at the end of the day, we wanted to make a positive story about an experience of an individual dealing with epilepsy."

Williams was diagnosed with epilepsy as a teenager and wanted to make a film that showed the disorder from the perspective of an epileptic artist.

"For me, it was personal. I had epilepsy as a teenager. I was in the Kernersville community theatre and I was playing the child lead in 'The King and I' when I had my

we wanted to do," he said. "Hollywood exploited it too far and they didn't support all of the images."

Townsend said that the images that came out in the '70s fed African-Americans and showed them as superheroes against "the man," but if you were weak, you got sucked in to wanting to be what you saw on the screen.

"I think that it affected me to want to right that wrong," he told the audience. "Hollywood offers you the roles they want you to do and not the roles you always want to do."

He said that the reality shows of today could be considered the same thing.

"Whatever you watch on television, it gets into your DNA. It gets into your ear gates, your eye gates and your spirit. So if you see all these beautiful women of color acting out, throwing drinks, calling each other the B-, fighting and tussling, you're going to say 'oh that's acceptable behavior.' There was a time that you wanted television to be the baby-sitter, now you don't."

RiverRun runs through April 26. For more information about the festival, visit [www.riverrunfilm.com](http://www.riverrunfilm.com).

## RiverRun

from page A1

me because I loved what he has done. I've been really careful and tried to select movies that I believed in," he said.

Burnett is best known for his works "To Sleep with Anger," "Killer of Sheep" and "Glass Shield." "Killer of Sheep" later became one of the first 50 films to be selected for the Library of Congress's National Film Registry.

"I wanted to make a film that spoke to the community and could be used for social means and debate," Burnett said of "Killer of Sheep." "It was made to be shown in the community. It was never intended for theatrical release."

Despite that, the film is thought to be one of the best films of the decade ('80s), according to Pollock.

Pollock asked both filmmakers about their reaction to Blaxploitation then and now.

Burnett said that most people at the University of California-Los Angeles film school had a negative reaction to the time period.

"That's one of the reasons we made the films we did. We tried to focus on a more accurate picture of the black community. I think it just reassured what

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— Charles Burnett



Burnett



Townsend



## Want To Go?

**What:** "David's Reverie"

**When:** April 24 at 7:15 p.m.

**Where:** Hanesbrands Theatre, 209 Spruce St N., on April 24.

**How Long:** 20 minutes run time

**How Much:** \$10-12

very first seizure the night before one of my rehearsals," he said. "I was dealing with seizures when I was doing something artistic or just while trying to achieve in school. The whole story is about an individual coming to terms with how they can handle their illness and continue their dream. It is meant to remove the stigma. For me, every time I would watch a film with someone that has epilepsy or seizure's they usually were written off. I wanted to show that this is a person fighting and achieving what he wants to do, but he still has this illness he needs to respect."

Fobbs said that the film shows viewers that they should take a broader look at epilepsy and the bright future that comes along with it.

"We would definitely like for people to be more aware of the different kinds of epilepsy and the hope that there still is for people with epilepsy. One of the biggest examples of that is not just the film but the director himself," he said. "Go stand in the face of your giant and do what you hope to do."

The film premiered at the Los Angeles International Shortsfest in July 2014, was recently screened at the New Voices in Black Cinema Film Festival at BAMcinématek in New York City. It was

nominated for Best Narrative Short at the 2015 Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles and took home third place in the Best Narrative Short category at the North Carolina Black Film Festival.

Both Williams and Fobbs are excited about the film getting a chance on the big screen.

"In the future, we will see what happens when he has to fight," Fobbs said.

Those interested in more information can visit the film's Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/david-sreverie> or visit Twitter and Instagram at @DavidsReverie. You can also email at [info@david-sreverie.com](mailto:info@david-sreverie.com).



Photos by Erin Mizelle for The Chronicle

A packed room listens to filmmakers Robert Townsend, left, moderator Dale Pollock and Charles Burnett talk about the industry.



Dale Pollock, center, asks Charles Burnett a question about his experience in the industry. Robert Townsend looks on.

Photos by Erin Mizelle for The Chronicle