



### FESTIVAL INFO No. 8 (24.09.2014)

#### **Huge Crowds at Film and Reading with Theodor Wonja Michael, who survived the Nazi Era as a Black Man in Germany**

On Thursday evening, 23 October, the Theater im Bauturm could have been filled twice over considering the number of people interested in attending **Theodor Wonja Michael's** presentation "**Memories of an Afro-German**" which was published by dtv under the title DEUTSCH SEIN UND SCHWARZ DAZU – ERINNERUNGEN EINES AFRO-DEUTSCHEN (loosely: *Being German and black at that: memories of an Afro-German*). To kick off the event, FilmInitiativ presented the WDR documentary **PAGES IN THE FACTORY OF DREAMS: BLACK EXTRAS IN GERMAN FEATURE FILMS**. It depicts how black Germans, including Theodor Michael and his sister Juliane, suffered abuse as performers in the "human zoo" exhibitions and propaganda films for the recapture of German colonies in Africa during the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era.

During the reading and subsequent discussion with **Gerhardt Haag**, director of the Bauturm theatre, it became apparent that despite these bitter experiences, **Theodor Michael** has in no way lost his sense of humour. He regaled the audience with stories including how as a black man, he always is automatically asked in German airports to show his passport, but he always responds that he does not have it with him. If border control agents tell him that he must "be able to prove his identity", he pulls out his identity card and is amused at their astonishment that someone can be "black and German at the same time". In addition, he then insists that the passports of all the white people at the counter be checked, which sometimes leads to clear expressions of displeasure from those in the queue. When an audience member asked Michael what has changed in today's Germany in terms of racism, he answered that today there are "no racist laws" still in force as they were in the Nazi era, and that black Germans could defend themselves. Yet he said that his children and grandchildren are still confronted with racist hostility. "But they can fight back, and they do!" Audiences were delighted with Michael and the wisdom of age that he displayed, and dozens of visitors purchased his biography, requesting that he autograph their copies.

The successful event was a further example of the close cooperation between the African Film Festival, organised by FilmInitiativ, and the **africologneFESTIVAL**, initiated by Theater im Bauturm, whose next edition is slated to take place from 17 to 27 June 2015. Due to massive demand, the event with **Theodor Wonja Michael** will probably be repeated during the event.

In the meantime, another joint soirée by Cologne's African film and theatre festivals will take place – on **23 November 2014** (at 18:00 in the Theater im Bauturm). Entitled **BLACK BROTHERS UNDER ICE AND DEATH**, an homage to the forgotten African victims of the First World War is to be presented – with historical film footage and photos, literary texts and music. Cameroon-born journalist **Charles Onana** is invited to discuss the role of colonial soldiers. He manages the Parisian publishing house Éditions Duboiris and will publish the French version of **Theodor Wonja Michael's** biography.