

Urban Bush Women, Uncensored

January 26, 2010



Samantha Spies, Bennalldra Williams, and Keisha Turner in *Zollar: Uncensored*, photo by Yi-Chun Wu

Bold, erotic, empowering, and fierce – these are a few of the words that defined Urban Bush Women’s performance on Saturday night at [Dance Theater Workshop](#). The company, led by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, kicked off their 25th anniversary season with *Zollar: Uncensored*, an evening-length piece that featured shorter works spanning from 1985 to 2004. The performance centered on erotic integrity, a theme that was considered too controversial by many arts presenters back in the 1980s, and was thus abandoned by Zollar. For the first time since then, Zollar’s company presented a seamless collage of uncensored work that left the audience laughing, crying, howling, hooting, clapping, and shaking to the company’s sensual rhythms. A spoken excerpt from *Bones and Ash* (1995) guided the performance – “We came here for the dreams, and in the dreams we find ourselves” – and self-awareness and knowing took on different forms throughout the evening. Three dancers stared at their reflections in a mirror as they erupted into laughter, while in another excerpt the dancers and vocalists – four women who wove in and out of the performance – moaned individually and then collectively, expressing pleasure from cupcakes. They also celebrated their bodies as they shook and shimmied to “Shake What Your Mama Gave Ya”.



Paloma McGregor, photo by Yi-Chun Wu

While *Zollar: Uncensored* illustrated pride and pleasure, it also conveyed pain and torment. A woman broke free from inner torture and hurt by shedding her clothes and stilettos and cracking an egg over her heaving body while ominously revealing a knife. She was then joined by a group of women who dressed and comforted her. In a powerful excerpt from *River Woman*, Zollar walked hunched over across the stage with Samantha Speis, nude, mimicking her movement. With a strained voice and extending arms, Zollar told the story of a rape and physical abuse while Speis appeared as a victim and a crushed spirit, removed from her own tortured body.

A sense of community and sisterhood pulsed throughout the piece. When one woman fell, the others were there to help her rise up. Strength came from unity, and this was enhanced by costume choices (the dancers were usually dressed in uniform iridescent fabrics) and the interwoven performances of the dancers, vocalists, and on-stage percussionist Beverly Botsford. To further build community, the dancers invited audience members onstage at the conclusion of the performance for an improvisational dance session. It's hard to believe that Zollar's work was considered controversial only twenty-five years ago. Her messages and portrayals of eroticism and sensuality are direct, but in 2010, it's clear that Zollar's work should be celebrated, and free of censorship.

Posted by Evan

Filed in [Dance](#), [Dance Theater Workshop](#), [New York City](#), [Reviews](#), [modern dance](#) · Tags: [bones and ash](#), [Dance](#), [Dance Theater Workshop](#), [jawole willa jo zollar](#), [New York City](#), [urban bush women](#), [zollar uncensored](#)

<http://dancingperfectlyfree.com/2010/01/26/urban-bush-women-uncensored/>