

## Urban Bush Women: Celebrating 25 Years

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Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, the founder and principal choreographer of Urban Bush Women (UBW), says UBW's work is "creating art as a catalyst for social change." Brooklyn experienced this first hand when UBW, rooted in the African Diaspora and community connections, began hosting "hair parties or meetings with organizations and corporations and with teens, mothers and daughters and men to gather information about hair experiences growing up. Meetings were in small groups and although the participants were not dancers they were encouraged to describe their feelings about hair through movement. The shared information inspired choreographers to create a collection of movements that evolved into Hair Stories, which debuted in 2004 at Long Island University's Triangle Theatre.

The Summer Institute is an outgrowth of UBW's continued philosophy of using art for social change. This 10-day program teaches professional dancers and community organizers the use of artistic expressions in community activism. The Summer Institute began right here in Brooklyn after 9/11 and for the past several years Urban Bush Women held classes at Mark Morris and Brooklyn Academy of Music Dance Studios. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the need to rebuild New Orleans, Urban Bush Women held the Summer Institute in New Orleans in 2009 and will do so through 2011 before moving on to another city. The focus while in New Orleans is how to effect meaningful change in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Besides its touring schedule and Summer Institute, Urban Bush Women has recently introduced a Great Room Series at ART-NY, 138 So Oxford Street, home to UBW. Once a month the neighborhood residents and community organizations are invited to a themed dance lab, which may include Dance Culture or Dance Wellness. Two or three individuals perform in each of these themed series and the audience gets to participate and give their own interpretation of the themes with some guidance from the dancers. The series is a way of engaging the community and introducing UBW to more of its home community.

UBW has tried to create programming for teens, but when our local YWCA closed its facility to focus on housing for women, UBW lost one of its key partners for teen programming. In years past the Summer Institute has included one or two teens, but it quickly became evident that teens needed their own program. Urban Bush Women began collaborating with Transcendance, a teen dance company, that allowed UBW to recognize that teens needed a Teen Institute. UBW is in the planning stage now to design a Teen Institute which they expect to launch in 2011 for teens between the ages of 15-19. Poloma McGregor, director of Center of Creative Change says: "This is a critical moment in our civic history as we face a rapidly shifting global landscape that requires new ways of working and demands fresh ideas. Our future lies in the hands of our youth. This project aims to place tools in those hands to help build a more equitable tomorrow."

As they celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Urban Bush Women continues to bring innovative programming to communities whether for adults or teens. Take advantage of the opportunity to meet UBW dancers at ART-NY and share in learning techniques to use art for social change. For more information about all their upcoming performances located here in Fort Greene/Clinton Hill as well as around the world, visit: [www.urbanbushwomen.org](http://www.urbanbushwomen.org).