

Friday and Saturday, December 1–2, 2023, 8pm
Sunday, December 3, 2023, 3pm
Zellerbach Playhouse

Urban Bush Women

presents

Hair & Other Stories

There will be one 15-minute intermission.

Choreographed by

Chanon Judson and Mame Diarra Speis
in collaboration with the company

Stage Direction

Raelle Myrick-Hodges

Dramaturg

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Performers

Courtney J. Cook, Ross Daniel, Kentoria Earle, Roobi Gaskins,
Grace Galu Kalambay, Mame Diarra Speis, and Mikaila Ware

Lighting Designer

Xavier Pierce

Costume Designer

DeeDee Gomes

Projections Designer

Nicholas Hussong

Sound Design by

Everett Asis Saunders

Music Composed by

The Illustrious Blacks
(Manchildblack and Monstah Black)

Additional Music

“Own That Sh*t” by Tendayi Kuumba and Greg Purnell;
“Break It Down” by Tendayi Kuumba; “I Am Not Yours” by Du’Bois A’Keen

“Liberation Psychology” by Dr. Thema Bryant, excerpted from a
Society of Counseling Psychology webinar, September 2021. Used with permission.

“Move B*tch” by Michael L. Tyler, Craig Stephen Lawson, Jonathan H. Smith, Bobby Wardell
Sandimanie Jr., Jeffrey Ray Grigsby, Lola Chantrelle Mitchell, Paul D. Beauregard, Ricky Dunigan,
Sean Paul Joseph, Stephanie C. Martin, Jordan Michael Houston, and Jason Williams as sung by Ludacris
is used with permission from Universal Music, Reservoir Media and Ultra Music.

Original Concept for *HairStories* (2001) by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Elizabeth Herron



The company in *Hair & Other Stories*. Photo by Alec Himwich.

Crafted from personal narratives from our communities, kitchens, and living rooms, social media, and YouTube, *Hair & Other Stories* is a two-hour experience that blends dance-theater and conversations that challenge existing American values and celebrate our choices around “who we be” and “how we do!” Choreographed by Co-Artistic Directors Chanon Judson and Mame Diarra

Speis in collaboration with the company, *Hair & Other Stories* explores disquieting perceptions of beauty, identity, and race, and what constitutes the freedom to rise to our Extra-ordinary Selves in extraordinary times.

This is the urgent dialogue of the 21st century.

Don't come here for no show: we're goin' on a journey!

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

URBAN BUSH WOMEN

Celebrating its 40th Anniversary, Urban Bush Women (UBW) burst onto the dance scene in 1984, with bold, innovative, demanding, and exciting works that brought under-told stories to life through the art and vision of its award-winning founding Artistic Director and Visioning Partner, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. The company continues to weave contemporary dance, music, and text with the history, culture, and spiritual traditions of the African Diaspora under the organizational artistic direction of Zollar and Co-Artistic Directors Chanon Judson and Mame Diarra Speis.

UBW performs regularly in New York City and tours nationally and internationally. The Company has been commissioned by presenters nationwide, and includes among its honors a New York Dance and Performance Award (“Bessie”); the Capezio Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance; a Black Theater Alliance Award; and two Doris Duke Awards for New Work from the American Dance Festival. In recent years, Zollar has received the 2014 Southern Methodist University Meadows Prize, the 2015 *Dance Magazine* Award, and the 2016 Dance/USA Honors Award. In 2017, Zollar received a “Bessie” Award for Lifetime Achievement in Dance. Speis is the recipient of the 2017 “Bessie” Award for Outstanding Performer with the ensemble

skeleton architecture. Judson received the APAP Leadership Fellowship and the Director's Lab Chicago Fellowship in 2018.

Off the concert stage, UBW has developed an extensive community engagement program called BOLD (Builders, Organizers, and Leaders through Dance). UBW's largest community engagement project is its Summer Leadership Institute (SLI), established in 1997. This 10-day intensive training program serves as the foundation for all of the company's community engagement activities. Ultimately the SLI program connects dance professionals and community-based artists/activists in a learning experience to leverage the arts as a vehicle for civic engagement.

UBW launched the Urban Bush Women Choreographic Center Initiative (CCI) in January 2016, and the Choreographic Center Initiative Producing Program (CCI 2.0) in March 2022. The CCI supports the development of women choreographers and producers of color and other underheard voices.

Chanon Judson (*co-artistic director*) has been working with the acclaimed Urban Bush Women since 2001, as performer and now Co-Artistic Director. She is a director's fellow with New Perspective Theatre Women's Work Lab, Chicago Director's Lab, and APAP's Leadership Fellowship Program. Choreographic credits include *Times*

Up! (commissioned by Flea Theatre), *The Hang* (Taylor Mac, Here Arts), *Cannabis: A Viper Vaudeville* (Collaborator/Performer; Baba Israel/Grace Galu/ Talvin Wilks), *Orlando* (Barnard College), *Chronicle X* (Nia Witherspoon), *Prometheus Bound* (Tank Theatre), *The Invention of Tragedy* (Flea Theatre), and *Nurturing the Nurturer*, her original performance-ritual/gathering for mothers. Chanon has worked with Mickie Davidson, Talvin Wilks, Kwame Ross, Barak adé Soleil, Sita Frederick, Sandra Burton, and Allyne Gartrell. Performance credits include *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, *God's Trombone* (Craig Harris), *Cotton Club Parade*, *Michael Jackson 30th Anniversary Concert*, and the Tony Award-winning musical *Fela!*

Chanon is an avid arts educator and has served as a faculty member with AileyCamp (Site Director), Alvin Ailey Arts in Education, Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Earl Mosley's Institute of the Arts. She is the founder of Cumbe Center for Diasporic Arts' Dance Drum and Imagination Camp for Children and co-founder of Family Arts (FAM), where she and her husband offer spaces for families to learn, explore, and create. Chanon is a newly appointed visiting associate professor at the University at Buffalo where she is investigating jazz embodiment, education, and organizing aesthetics as well as leading a charge to redesign the jazz curriculum to better reflect the rich contributions of the African Diaspora.

Mame Diarra Speis (co-artistic director/performer; she/her), is a mother and movement improviser intrigued with play, risk, rigor, and experimentation. She is currently a performer and the Co-Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women. Speis has had the pleasure of working with Gesel Mason, the Dance Exchange, jumatatu poe, Deborah Hay (as part of *Some Sweet Day* curated by Ralph Lemon at the Museum of Modern Art), Baba Israel, Marjani Forte-Saunders,

and Liz Lerman. She recently performed as a guest artist with MBDance in the *Motherboard Suite* with artist Saul Williams, under the direction of Bill T. Jones. Speis was the recipient of the Alvin Ailey New Directions Choreography Lab and was awarded a "Bessie" for Outstanding Performer in 2017. Her work has been featured at the Kennedy Center, Long Island University, the Joyce SoHo, Hollins University, Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, Danspace Project, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Dixon Place, BRIC, Dance Place, and the Kelly Strayhorn Theater. She has developed a movement and teaching practice that explores pelvic mobility as the root of powerful locomotion and as a point of connection to the stories, experiences, and lineages that reside in each of us. Speis has been a guest artist and teacher throughout the United States, South America, Senegal, and Europe. She has also taught at Princeton University as a Lecturer in Dance. Speis has been fortunate to continue building a strong relationship with her *alma mater*, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), in various capacities, and was the commencement speaker for the VCUarts graduating class of 2020–21. Her recent projects include *Walking with Trane*, co-choreographed with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, and her collaboration with Chanon Judson-Johnson on *Hair & Other Stories* and *Haint Blu*.

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar (*founder*) earned her BA in dance from the University of Missouri at Kansas City and her MFA in dance from Florida State University. In 1984, Zollar founded Urban Bush Women (UBW) as a performance ensemble dedicated to exploring the use of cultural expression as a catalyst for social change. Zollar developed a unique approach to enable artists to strengthen effective involvement in cultural organizing and civic engagement, which evolved into UBW's acclaimed Summer Leadership Institute. She serves as director

of the institute, founding artistic director, and visioning partner of UBW, and currently holds the position of the Nancy Smith Fichter Professor of Dance and Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor at Florida State University.

Zollar's awards include: 2008 United States Artists Wynn fellowship, 2009 fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial, 2013 Arthur L. Johnson Memorial award by Sphinx Organization, 2013 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, 2014 Meadows Prize from Southern Methodist University, 2015 *Dance Magazine* Award, 2016 Dance/USA Honor Award, 2016 Black Theater Alliance Award, 2017 "Bessie" Award for Lifetime Achievement in Dance, 2018 American Conference on Diversity Performing Arts Humanitarian Award, 2021 fellowship from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, 2021 Dance Teacher Award of Distinction, and the 2021 Martha Hill Dance Fund Lifetime Achievement Award.

WHO'S WHO IN THE COMPANY

(listed alphabetically by first name)

Aminata Mariama Speis-Top (*performer*) is in her fourth season of performing with Urban Bush Women. She has also had the pleasure of collaborating in Nia Wither- spoon's *Chronicle X*. Aminata is excited to continue expanding her work outside of UBW as a seven year old.

Bianca Leticia Medina (*company member*) is a Boricua-Mexicana New York City-based dance artist. She began her career based in Los Angeles, working as a full-time dancer, choreographer, and teaching artist touring globally with CONTRA-TIEMPO Activist Dance Theater, Viver Brasil Dance Company, and choreographer and collaborator Marina Magalhães. A proud Chicago native, Medina holds a BFA in dance from the Uni-

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versity of Iowa, and has studied in-depth in Salvador, Bahia, and Brazil with internationally acclaimed choreographer Vera Passos. Currently, Medina holds the position of Rehearsal Director and Co-Choreographer in Magalhães's Creative Capital Award-winning project, *Body as a Crossroads*. She is honored to begin her journey as a company member with Urban Bush Women.

Courtney J. Cook (*associate artistic director/performer*) is a Virginia native now residing in Brooklyn, NY. Her current roles are as Associate Artistic Director, BOLD Facilitator, and performing company member with Urban Bush Women. She was a company member with MBDance (Maria Bauman), and a featured artist in collaboration with Marguerite Hemmings (*we free*). She is honored to be a recipient of the 2018 "Bessie" Award for Outstanding Performance for her work with all three of these organizations. As a creator, she has had the



The company in *Hair & Other Stories*. Photo by Alec Himwich.

privilege of performing her solo work, *PoolPITT*, as a featured artist in ModArts Dance Collective's Collective Thread '17; the Estrogenious Festival '17, curated by Maura Donohue; and BDAC's Creative Emancipation Collaboration, curated by Ebony Noelle Golden. Cook also has been able to create and perform in collaboration with interdisciplinary artists Tendayi Kuumba and Greg Purnell (FLUX), exploring movement, sound, theater, and visual art. In 2022, Cook was involved as performer/choreographic collaborator and vocalist in *Cannabis! A Viper Vaudeville*, created by Baba Isreal and Grace Galu Kalambay (Soul Inscribed).

DeeDee Gomes (*costume designer*) is a self-taught fashion and fiber artist based in New York. She has created stage attire and done fashion styling for musicians and bands, including Meshell Ndegeocello, Nation Beat, and individual singers from Enrique Iglesias' band. Gomes designed costumes for Brazilian band Filhos de Jorge that were featured in one of their music videos that had over six million views. She also designed costumes for dance ensemble the Pulse Project. Gomes did the styling and costumes for a girl band called Funky Diamonds, of which she was a member, which toured internationally. She is owner of Dee-Dee's Street Boutique in New York which features her remarkable one-of-a-kind repurposed, recycled clothing.

Everett Asis Saunders (*sound designer and engineer*) is the founder and creative director of Flux Innovations, a sound and audio services company whose recent clients include PBS, Sony Music, and Columbia Records. Saunders is a producer, composer, songwriter, and performer. He has specific knowledge and practice in arranging, editing, and mixing for theater, film, and music entertainment. His work spans across genres with original compositions for numer-

ous independent films and the dance communities of New York and Los Angeles, with his latest commissions including Marjani Forte & Works *Memoirs of a... Unicorn*. Film projects include PBS' *The March* (2013), *Print Shop* (2016), and Project Imagination winner *TRANSPORTER*, directed by Damon Colquhoun.

Grace Galu Kalambay (*performer*) is a vocalist, actor, guitarist, and composer. She combines the sounds of her Irish and Congolese heritage with her LES upbringing in a soulful and gritty twist. Kalambay was recently featured in *Buskerball 2022*, and recorded *Firelight* with Fearless Music. Her composition "Ordinary Sentiment" was featured in the Ed Burns film *Purple Violets*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Kalambay devised *The Mendelssohn Electric* with Trusty Sidekick, and was cast as the lead in their production of *The Gospel Electric*, commissioned by the Park Avenue Armory. She is a core member of the band Soul Inscribed, and has for the third time been selected as a cultural ambassador for the American Music Abroad program. Kalambay is also a recipient of the NEFA NTP grant. Soul Inscribed has recently been signed to the Tokyo Dawn music label and just released its EP, "Tune UP." Kalambay is an artist in residence at HERE Arts Center and the composer for *Cannabis! A Viper Vaudeville*. She voiced Wisdom in Nia Witherspoon's production *The Dark Girl Chronicles* (2021) at The Shed. She is currently touring *Haint Blu* with Urban Bush Women.

The Illustrious Blacks (*music composer*). Manchildblack & Monstah Black comprise this fabulous musical duo that has arrived on a mission to fuse futuristic funk, hypnotic house, and cosmic pop into pulsating positivity for the planet. Their entertaining weekly radio show on WBAI 99.5 FM in NYC, *On Air w/The Blacks*, invites audiences to listen in as they conduct inter-



views, feature live performers, and discuss the latest happenings in global pop culture.

Kentoria Earle (*company member/performer*) was raised in Winter Haven (FL) and is the proud daughter of Kent Earle and Victoria Wilson. She recently graduated from the Florida State University, where she obtained her MA in dance and studio-related studies. Since graduating, she has had the opportunity to work with choreographers/artists such as Renegade Performance Group, Abigail Levine, and Urban Bush Women as an apprentice. Earle has spent her first few years post-grad entering the field as a Brooklyn-based performing artist and collaborator. She is working to build an artistic process that looks at solo and improvisational practices as a way to tap into ancestry and lineage-based movement exploration. Kentoria believes these practices support and open up spaces where artists can be fully present for what often results in holistic and sustainable approaches to our healing, individually, and collectively.

Mikaila Ware (*company member/performer*) (BFA Florida State University) began her dance training at Fort Stewart (GA) at the age of five. Now a New York-based movement artist, Ware has worked in the mediums of dance and film with choreographers including Davalois Fearon, Kayla Farrish, André Zachery, and Johnnie Cruise Mercer. Ware's performances have been featured in articles in the *New York Times*, *Dance Magazine*, and *Dance Enthusiast*. Additionally, Ware completed the Accessibility Partnerships and Programs Fellowship at the Lincoln Center and is an alumna of the Diversity in Arts Leadership program with the Arts and Business Council of New York.

Nicholas Hussong (*production designer*) is a creator of video, projections and film for live (and now digital) performance and events. Creative Producer at Dwight Street

Book Club. Broadway: *Skeleton Crew*. Other regional credits include: *Until the Flood* (13 regional and international locations); *Haint Blu, Hair & Other Stories* (Urban Bush Women); *These Paper Bullets*, Drama Desk Nomination (Yale Rep, Atlantic Theater Company, Geffen Playhouse); *Woman's Party* (Clubbed Thumb); *Grounded* (Alley); Arden Theater, Playmakers Rep, Berkshires Theatre Group, Marc Jacobs, Nashville Symphony, Hartford Symphony, Tony Awards (CBS). He also designed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, China, Canada, and Austria. Co-creator of *FEAST*, an immersive dining experience with Listen&Breathe (Nantucket, Ireland). Adjunct Lecturer New School of Drama and USC. Yale MFA. UAW and USA829. www.nickhussong.com.

Raelle Myrick-Hodges (*stage director*) has directed plays nationally and worked as a stage director internationally in devised works. She is the founder of Philadelphia's Azuka Theatre—an award-winning company now in its 23rd year. Myrick-Hodges has presented works in dance, music, theater as and film as Curator of Performing Arts for the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans. She has worked with artists in different aesthetics and disciplines including Denis O'Hare, Miriam Hyman, Meryl Streep, Antonio Brown (choreographer), Jeffrey Wright, and Chinaka Hodge. Currently, Myrick-Hodges is working on two projects for her newly created theater ensemble Elephant Room. Her creative contribution on *Hair & Other Stories* is dedicated to the memory of Ebony McKinney, co-founder of Elephant Room. Current and upcoming works directed by Myrick-Hodges include *The Bluest Eye* written by Toni Morrison and adapted by Lydia Diamond at the Arden Theatre Company and a world premiere of the 1947 play, *In Splendid Error*, written by William Branch—a fictional retelling of the day before John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry.

Roobi Gaskins (*company member/performer*) is an NYC-based artist who specializes in dance, choreography, and garment construction. Although she has always had a passion for dance, she owes her movement genesis and training to 14 years of competitive figure skating, where she competed internationally as a member of the Puerto Rican national team. She began her formal dance training at Bard College, where she received a BA in dance. She was an apprentice with Urban Bush Women in 2019–20, and has also performed works with artists including Abby Z and the New Utility, Brownbody, 7NMS, and Trisha Brown.

Ross Daniel (*performer*) is a Georgia-born artist based in New York with an MFA in dance performance and choreography from Florida State University and a BA in theater from Georgia College & State University. Daniel is a 2019–20 New Directions Choreography Lab Fellow at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and a participant in the MANCC Forward Dialogues at the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography, where he developed a dance collective with choreographer Sarah Rose entitled Daniel-Rose Projects. Currently Ross is a BOLD facilitator with Urban Bush Women and a Pilates instructor, and he is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the legacy of Urban Bush Women.

Symara Johnson (*company member*), a Portland (OR) native currently residing in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, has immersed herself globally in interdisciplinary and choreographic studies. She is a recipient of the Dai Ailian Foundation Scholarship based in Trinidad and Tobago. Johnson is a graduate of the Beijing Dance Academy and SUNY Purchase's Conservatory of Dance program and she is a current CPR 2022 AIR. Johnson has presented work throughout New York City and Germany. Most notably, she has danced works by and for Kevin Wynn,

Ogemdi Ude, Rena Butler, Jasmine Hearn, Hannah Garner, Nattie Trogdon and Hollis Bartlett, Slowdanger, Marion Spencer, Joanna Kotze, Netta Yerushalmy, Christoph Winkler, and others.

Xavier Pierce (*lighting designer*). Pierce's credits include *Shakespeare in Love* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival Festival, dir. Christopher Moore), *Smart People* (Arena Stage, dir. Seema Sueko), *Harvey* (The Guthrie, dir. Libby Appel), *Fences* (Long Wharf/McCarter Theatre co-production, dir. Phylicia Rashad), *Fly* (Florida Studio Theatre/Handy Award for Best Lighting), *Two Trains Running* (Two River Theatre, dir. Ruben Santiago-Hudson), *A Raisin in the Sun* (Westport Country Playhouse, dir. Phylicia Rashad), *Common Enemy* (Triad Stage, dir. Preston Lane), *The Piano Lesson* (Olney Theatre Center, dir. Jamil Jude), *Two Trains Running* (The Arden, dir. Raelle Myrick Hodges), and *4,000 Miles, Peter and the Starcatcher*, and *The Mountaintop* (PlayMakers Rep). Upcoming: *Native Gardens* (The Guthrie and Arena Stage, dir. Blake Robison), *Blithe Spirit* (The Guthrie, dir. David Ivers), *Othello* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival, dir. Bill Rauch). Pierce is a graduate of New York University Tisch School of the Arts (MFA in design for stage and film).

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Hair & Other Stories is informed by our ongoing partnership and work with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond's Understanding and Undoing Racism workshop.

Urban Bush Women Staff

Chanon Judson and Mame Diarra Speis,

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Advance NYC, *Development Consultants*

Company

Bianca Medina

Chanon Judson

Courtney Cook

Kentoria Earle

Mame Diarra Speis

Mikaila Earle

Roobi Gaskins

Symara Johnson

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Hair & Other Stories was commissioned by the Virginia Arts Festival and had its proscenium stage premiere as part of the 2017 Festival at the Attucks Theatre, Norfolk, VA, on April 22, 2017.

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Hair & Other Stories was also further developed at BRIC (Brooklyn, NY) while Urban Bush Women was their 2018–19 Artist-in-Residence.

UBW, Inc., dba Urban Bush Women, is a not-for-profit organization.

Urban Bush Women
138 S. Oxford Street, Suite #4B
Brooklyn, NY 11217
(718) 398-4537

Booking Inquiries
Michelle Coe
mcoe@urbanbushwomen.org

Connect with UBW
www.urbanbushwomen.org
Facebook: @urbanbushwomen
Twitter: @ubwdance
Instagram: @ubwdance