



Witch in Woman

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Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

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**URBAN
BUSH
WOMEN**

LifeDance Trilogy is a heavy, but bloodless title to apply to the juicy and very specific performing of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Tiye Giraud, and Edwina Lee Tyler. Watch Giraud in a bright, down-home red dress breathe a sigh of relief as she unstraps her shoes. See her matter-of-factly swat a mosquito while her rich voice chants the field hollers of Southern black slaves. As she moves easily from a lazy hum to a quivering shriek, you can feel the heat on her body, the uneasy boil of rage and momentary contentment in her soul.

Watch Tyler, crooning to her traditional wooden xylophone in a deep, deep voice, while her hands and sticks move more and more rapidly over the keys. As the rhythms build in intricacy, she seems to fuse with the instrument. Who's playing whom here?

Watch Zollar. Shabby black dress, battered hat, crazed eyes, liquor bottle. She yells verses from the Bible. The King James version never had such a to-the-point translator.

Sure, the show at the Kitchen is about "life" and "dance" and the dance that's life. (What isn't?) But, more importantly, it's about the selves that lurk within, about growth, about peeling off layers to get to the essence, about the black female ancestors who run through the blood of black women today.

Zollar's subject is the spirituality of these women ancestors—churchy, crazed perhaps, but instinctively linked to the nature worship of their African forebears. In *LifeDance... the fool's journey*, crawling along the floor, stick and bundle over her shoulder, the infant traveler sees frightening things in the dark around

her. Panting in a strong rhythm, she unwraps the bundle, puts full white pants over her leotard, ties a sash around her waist, wraps a turban around her head, and dances with zeal, her bare feet slapping the ground. She rearranges the clothing, her voice a high, breathy moan, and becomes a bent crone, the stick that bore the bundle now a cane to hobble with.

In *LifeDance I... The Magician (the Return of She)*, she's an indolently sexy woman—high heels, blue dress, "St. Lou-

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is woman..." The other two women sing and play music they composed—Tyler beating on a big drum. The high heels come off; bare feet dig into the ground. The uncertain streetwise woman was only a disguise of the fertility goddess. In *LifeDance II... The Papess (mirror in the waters)*, Zollar's that nutty, Bible-banging alcoholic, but this guise too masks another persona. Black dress off, eyes rolling, wide apart legs stamping, brave and defiant, she shrieks over and over, "Me don't fear no buckra whip." And concocts a voodoo spell to shrivel her oppressors.

Zollar can lean perilously far out over cliché and melodrama without tumbling in. This is, I think, because of her knack for finding the telling rhythm, gesture, image. In her powerful portraits, you certainly see a woman dancing, but you never see dance steps. How refreshing.