

# THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

MUSIC

DANCE

PERFORMANCE FILM

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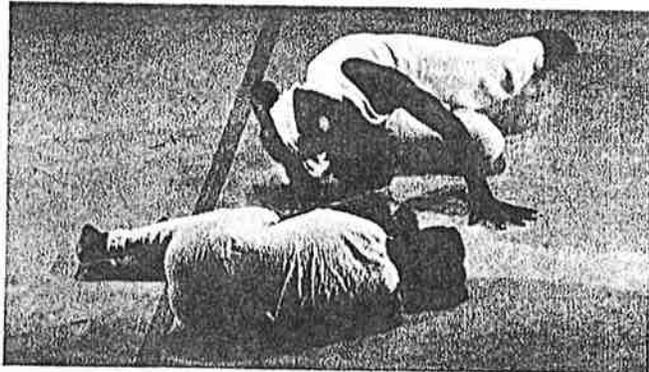
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RETURNING TO A TRADITION IN WHICH PERFORMERS HAVE MULTIPLE ROLES, WHERE MUSICIANS AND POETS DANCE, AND DANCERS SING AND BLOW HORNS, CRAIG HARRIS AND JAWOLE WILLA JO ZOLLAR RECENTLY PREMIERED "HEAT" AT THE KITCHEN IN NEW YORK CITY, PERFORMED BY THE URBAN BUSH WOMEN AND THE DIRTY TONES BAND.

HARRIS, AN IMPORTANT TROMBONIST IN THE NEW YORK SCENE, HAS WORKED WITH MUHAL RICHARD ABRAMS AND DAVID MURRAY, AS WELL AS LEADING THE TAILGATOR'S TALES AND OTHER BANDS. HE CONSIDERS SOUNDS AS AURAL IMAGES RELATING TO SPECIFIC MOTIONS. AS A COLLABORATOR, HE HAS ALSO WORKED WITH DIANE MACINTYRE'S DANCE TROUPE.

JAWOLE WILLA JO ZOLLAR IS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN BUSH WOMEN, A LEADING AFRO-AMERICAN DANCE ENSEMBLE. SHE FEELS THAT ALL MOVEMENT CONTAINS THEMATIC IMAGES THAT EXPRESS CERTAIN SOUNDS. THE TWO ARE ALSO INTERESTED IN VAUDEVILLE AND THE TRADITION OF THEATRICAL REVUE, AND IN EMPHASIZING EMOTIONAL CONTENT IN THEIR FORMAL WORK.

## HEAT IN THE KITCHEN: THE URBAN BUSH



## WOMEN MEET THE DIRTY TONES BAND

BY ROBERT  
HICKS  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY LORI I.  
DUNN

**Robert Hicks:** Who have you collaborated with in the past?

**Jawole Willa Jo Zollar:** Edwina Lee Tyler and Tiye Giraud are two composers and performers I've worked with. I worked with flutist and composer Carl Reilly. And I've worked with Craig before—at La Mama in 1985.

**Craig Harris:** I've worked with Diane Mac Intyre's dance ensemble. I used to write for an R-&-B band that had a revue with six dancers. I was in college at the time, and this was in a club. It was a theatrical-type thing.

How does this current project differ from what you've both done before, in terms of the dancing you're choreographing and the music you're composing?

**JZ:** For me it's a bigger project. It's the first time I've worked with a five-piece band, three actresses, a writer, a visual designer, and put so many elements together. It's different for me because I'm working with all these elements as equal parts—I think in the past it was more unequal.

Had there been more of an emphasis on the dance as opposed to the other media?

**JZ:** Yes, in the past it was more dance.

**CH:** I see it as a continuation of what I've always wanted to do with dancers. I always feel pretty good about working with dancers. The difference here for me is that we've had more time to work on things. Usually with this kind of thing, we would do it once and never see each other again.

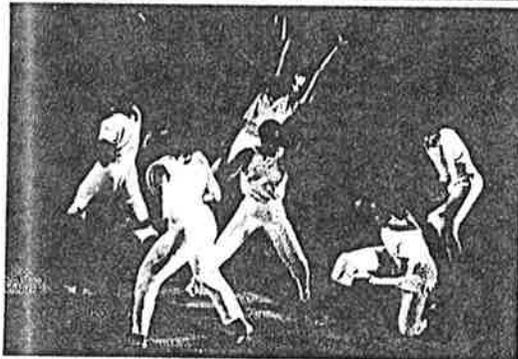
Could you explain your concept of "dance design" and how it fits in with the Urban Bushwomen?

**CH:** "Dance Design" is just a piece of music I've written for dancers. I know a lot of dancers who work very hard, and I check them out. So I wrote some music for them. One day it will hopefully be done in full collaboration with dancers.

I was thinking of the statement you made in the Real Art Ways Jazz Festival program this summer, about sound being a vibration and relating to movement—that



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sound presented some kind of aural image you associate with dance.

**CH:** All movement is sound—I mean from a physics standpoint. Movement creates vibrations and vibrations are movement and it's all sound. If you blur your vision, or focus your eyes, on dancers or on anything that moves, there are images you see. This is what I try to reconstruct in "Dance Visions."

What specific images are you interested in with this project, in terms of the dancers and the type of music you're composing for their movements?

**CH:** I look at the dancers. I don't write for a while. I just look and look and look. I transpose this to a musical language. I see that every dancer would be a note, a rhythm, and I just try to look and transpose the activity I see into music. In music you have certain ways of writing, certain compositional techniques, which you can work out through watching dance. I'd like to do a special project with that one day. Because when I see dance, I see a lot of different harmonies while the motions are going on. I'd like to transpose that to a piece of music paper. I might use five dancers, and you could think of it as five-part harmony and see how the lines are intertwining. For composers it's easy.

Jawole, in terms of your choreography, are you writing for music that's already been composed, or do you have specific images you want to project and have music written for that?

**JZ:** In the process of the piece, all of those things happen. In some pieces the music exists first; in others the movement exists first. In some pieces an image or an idea exists first. I don't use any particular process in that sense.

What are the requirements for these different processes?

**JZ:** That's hard for me. I tend not to intellectualize the process until after the piece is done.

What is the process you use to arrive at a unity of the various elements?

**JZ:** When I first began this piece I had a series of images in my head. I'd write down an image here, an image there—in the beginning I don't really worry about how they connect. I just assume they will, and in the connection I'll discover something else about it. After a while things just begin to connect. In the beginning there's a series of images: a knife, an apple, a mirror, sunglasses. I didn't know how much they connected.

Is it part of the process for the audience to act as interpreter?

**JZ:** Absolutely. I intentionally want it left open. It's not necessary for me to have the audience see what I see, only that they come in with an open mind. Even if Craig told you in detail what everything meant when he wrote it, you'd still hear it in terms of your own experiences. That's what I like—for the audience to see it in terms of who they are and what they do.

Craig, when you compose for the dancers, do you bring in your own subjective interpretations of that knife and apple? Or is it just motions, or a thematic element?

**CH:** Everything is an element, because there's also poetry in the piece. I think we're trying not to divide the disciplines at all. Theater is just as important; it's an element of the sound. It affects me—how I write, how I'm thinking. The beauty of working in this setting is that you're working with other people you can talk to. You can say, "What do you think about this?" As well as what you think. Because what you're doing in one discipline may not work for the whole project.

How does a collaboration differ from simply composing music for musicians, or choreographing movements for dancers?

JZ: I'm not sure it's very different. Even for the pieces I do in silence, I see images and feel music. Most of our pieces have live music. I always hear music. Anytime you have another person there it has an impact on you. There is a give and take. I always have that because I have a company.

What is it about each other's work that brought you together?

CH: I'd call it a likeness of mind. We're very close in age. The times in which we grew up in this country are very close. Our cultural background is very similar—we agree about a lot of things.

Do you think the New Orleans brass ensemble tradition is important to the music you're composing for Urban Bushwomen?

CH: No. I'm from Long Island, New York. People are always trying to put this New Orleans tag on our band. That really gets me aggravated. It shows a disrespect for New Orleans music—I think that's something one should study. That music does affect me and has a lot to do with my growth.

What Afro-American dance traditions most influenced your choreography?

JZ: It's not a question of most influenced. These influences come about throughout your career; at certain points one appears significant because you're at a pivotal point and that influence affects you strongly at that point. I had to realize that everything from being in the drum and bugle corps to being a majorette influences your work. It's a continuum that you're moving through. But I can't say any one aspect of Afro-American dance has been a main influence. That would be like saying this finger is my favorite finger.

What aspects of Afro-American dance have you been influenced by?

JZ: Everything, literally, from break-dancing to old-fashioned tap-dancing to the lindy hop to Katherine Dunham. I grew up in a black community and it was all there. I absorbed it; I didn't think about it.

How does storytelling figure into your choreography?

JZ: As a child, I danced in revues. I guess you'd call it a late vaudeville tradition. There always was a live band, a comic emcee, and dance. These elements were always together. Now I'm doing an '80s version of what I know. But it's also the same as African theater—not separating one thing from the whole.

Craig, how do all these elements figure into your choice of musicians?

CH: This project has been an education. There was a time in any culture when dance, theater, and music all went together. I don't know why they seem to be divided in these times more than others. Now people are specialists.

Take Duke Ellington and Jimmie Lunceford, for example. One of Ellington's trumpet players, Ray Nance, sang, tap-danced, and played violin. And the trombone section of the Lunceford band—people can't imagine the choreography! I've seen them on tape, and this band was flying. I've always seen music this way. Everything I saw growing up was this way—everything all together. Before, a musician couldn't just play his instrument. He had to dance, he had to sing—and it wasn't looked upon as buffoonery.

It was part of the culture.

CH: Everything was. There's this clip of the Ellington band where the trumpet player comes somersaulting out of the band. It's just beautiful! We've gotten away from all that. I look for musicians who are "in the tradition." They need to check it out, because now we're far from it. I'm just talking about this tradition I grew up on. It's been documented. It's all been there before.

How does your use of the Australian *didjeridu* figure in this collaboration?

CH: Jawole's *didjeridu* for now. (laughter) I'll be playing it here and there, and Jawole will say, "Play it here, in this section." I love to play *didjeridu*, and Jawole loves it. Yeah, you'll hear it—it's prominent in the piece.

I don't like the sounds we make from computers or synthesizers. For me the *didjeridu* is such a strong, natural sound. When I first heard it, I was compelled to write for it. I went to Australia for about a month. I saw this instrument and liked the sound, so I got one. I got the breathing technique from playing trombone. So it's another vehicle to express myself.

As far as technology goes, I'll use anything to express myself. I'm a prime believer that the human creative spirit always comes out ahead, because it's always changing. Now you can sample sounds and stack them—we just use what we can to get to the next point. We create something new. Computers won't be around long. We'll have something new, and they'll be out of business.

Jawole, how do you feel about using computers?

JZ: I'm not closed to what the possibilities are. If it deals with sound and movement, it's another possibility to work with. But I'm not technologically oriented. It would take me a long time to get there. I still have trouble working my answering machine.

You've said that you use computers in composing to help speed the process up.

CH: Yes, but I'm just a beginner. I use it to do the hard work, the copying, which can be very tedious. It can do all the work no one wants to do. I like to use my time creating.

Is this project the same thing you did in Atlanta?

JZ: That was a work-in-progress for this piece, "Heat." It takes me two or three years to complete a piece. I get the images and they go through different phases. What you saw in Atlanta was similar. It went through some changes, but the concept remains the same.

What changes have occurred?

JZ: You go through one layer and then you add another layer until you get deeper inside the idea. Then you realize there are some things you don't need anymore, so you get rid of them.

Are the pieces for solo or ensemble?

JZ: The solos are all in the context of the whole.

Could you describe the piece?

JZ: The first piece, "New Moon Fantasies," deals with a young woman and adolescence. The second piece, "Shelter," deals with displaced people, whether they're homeless or refugees. "Shelter" was inspired by Craig's album of the same name.



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What was "Shelter" composed for?

CH: I was doing concerts in New York City homeless shelters the past three winters. From my point of view as a composer and performer, the advantage of this piece is being able to work on it with live improvisors in other fields. That's the beauty of it for me. Not everything is set; there's room to improvise. There's movement. You need a lot of time to work with each other, to feel each other out.

Any future plans for collaborations?

JZ: I want to form a vocal ensemble. I'm interested in the human voice and the Linkletter technique. Everyone has a natural voice, and whether your voice is pitch-perfect or not, you can still get a lot out of it. I'm really interested in exploring what this mechanism can do. It's partly because I know I'll be able to sing a lot longer than dance.

CH: I want to look into the whole spectrum of music and dance. I want to write a revue, a show where musicians, dancers, poets—everybody—is involved. The dancers play instruments; the musicians dance. It will take a while. But it will be a very powerful interdisciplinary piece.