

THE KITCHEN

VIDEO

MUSIC

DANCE

PERFORMANCE FILM

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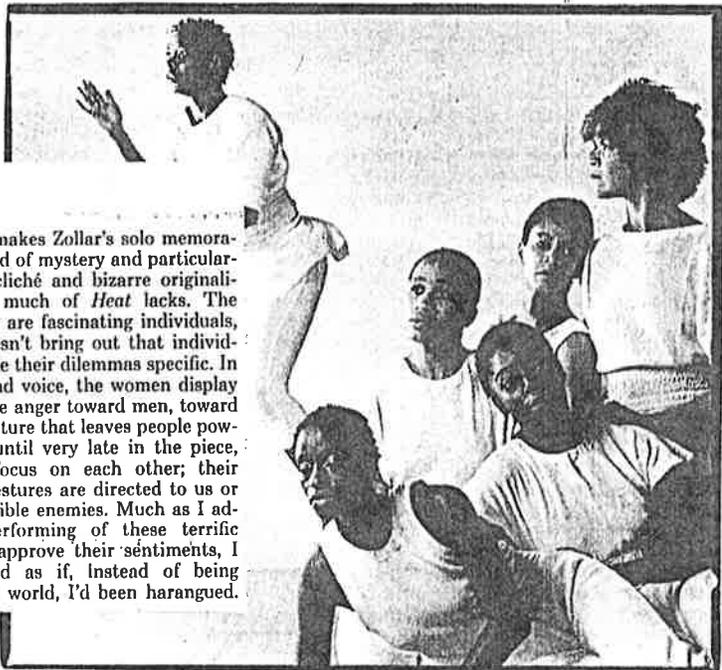
The new work that Jawole Willa Jo Zollar has made for her Urban Bush Women is called *Heat*. Craig Harris and his Dirty Tones Band (Carl Bourelly, Alonzo Gardner, Ralph Peterson Jr., Brandon Ross) lay out sizzles and slow burns at the back of the stage; Leni Schwendinger's lighting colors them gold and red or silhouettes them charred against the backcloth. The three women of Thought Music—Laurie Carlos, Jessica Hagedorn, and Robbie McCauley—prowl around spitting out rage in numbers like "Dog Eat Dog," lifting their legs on all men whose little pets they don't want to be. The six Bush Women—Theresa Cousar, Anita Gonzalez, Christina Jones, Viola Sheely, Robin Wilson, and Marlies Yearby stretch and roll like cats in heat, flirt, explode into bitter speech or violent gestures.

In the middle of the first half, their chief, Zollar, performs a riveting solo, first seen in 1986, while Jones lies immobilized on a tipped-over chair, Gonzalez crazily wraps her head in layer after layer of fabric, and the others stir restlessly in a clump. Whatever Zollar does is potent. She's got a drab blue dress on and high-heeled shoes and shades when she begins her dance. She's stiff at first, undulating, back to us. An old churchgoing lady? A witch? In her swaying dance, she gives birth to a more primal self—naked except for a G-string, a knife hanging between her legs. She mashes an egg against her chest, and as she kneels under a light, glistening, the egg seems not something she has applied, but something she is exuding.

Heat is always giving you something intense to watch and listen to: the Bush-women sensuously hymning the shades of lipstick they apply (Carlos's "Lipstick Song"); Carlos, with her earth mother presence, her baby gestures, her deep, gutty voice, and the quiet simplicity with which she can deliver a line like "I love you. I hate you. What's the difference?"; Harris putting aside his trombone and blowing a didgeridoo at the women (a phallic symbol par excellence); tall, skinny 10-year-old Pyeng Threadgill, dancing along with the women in *Shelter*, and singing in a sweet, clear voice; the ironic wit of a soliloquy (written by Hagedorn) in which a vulva is spoken of as if it were an angora sweater ("Are you warm? Take off your vulva").

Directing the Heat

BY DEBORAH JOWITT



But what makes Zollar's solo memorable—her blend of mystery and particularity, of near-cliché and bizarre originality—is what much of *Heat* lacks. The Bush Women are fascinating individuals, but *Heat* doesn't bring out that individuality or make their dilemmas specific. In movement and voice, the women display an all-purpose anger toward men, toward a power structure that leaves people powerless. Too, until very late in the piece, they don't focus on each other; their words and gestures are directed to us or to their invisible enemies. Much as I admire the performing of these terrific women and approve their sentiments, I felt afterward as if, instead of being drawn into a world, I'd been harangued.

Urban Bush Women warm up in *Heat*.

LOIS GREENFIELD