

C12

## Dance in Review

■ Kyra Nichols's Princess Aurora ■ Inspiration  
from tarot and Rastafarianism ■ Some timeless  
themes ■ Sacred dignity ■ 'Kick me,' they said.

### Urban Bush Women

#### The Kitchen

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar has a rare gift for evocative persuasion. Her theater-dance pieces usually draw the viewer into sometimes unfamiliar worlds, making potentially alienating themes like spirituality and multiculturalism seem reasonable and familiar.

In part, that persuasiveness develops from the homemade look and simplicity of much of Ms. Zollar's theatrically canny work. But the two new pieces she and her Urban Bush Women company presented on Thursday night looked comparatively cluttered.

Ms. Zollar's dancers are gifted musicians and actors. And the musical components of the pieces had the kind of emotional resonance one expects from her.

But "LifeDance III ... The Empress (Womb Wars)," a New York premiere, was an almost unvarnished polemical harangue. One of a series of pieces based on Ms. Zollar's odyssey through the tarot, "LifeDance III" dealt chiefly with issues having to do with women, reproduction and healing. Ms. Zollar perched on a small table strung with totemic miniature rag dolls and sat in a chair as she unconvincingly telephoned a friend to speak her piece in abrupt, isolated words and a gentle flow that built at one point to the hypnotic singsong of a revivalist preacher. A chorus sat and moved behind two painted, sun-drenched landscapes that served as scrimms. Voices raised in a cappella song and chant called and responded to Ms. Zollar. A nude woman rolled out, bucking and writhing in some primal pain.

The level of intensity was pretty much unvarying. And Ms. Zollar's text lacked the glancing poetic illumination one expects of her. It served as impassioned speechifying until a last "I said I wasn't going to tell nobody," repeated with an urgency wrenchingly at odds with the joyous gospel song of the same name.

The cast also included Terri Couzar, Maia Claire Garrison, Christine King, Treva Offutt, E. Gaynell Sherrod, Valerie Winborne and Junior (Gabu) Wedderburn. The set was designed by Helen Oji, the costumes by Stefani Mar and the lighting by Phil Sandstrom.

"Nyabinghi Dreamtime," a work in progress, had an unfinished workshop look. The piece aims, say the program notes, to explore the dynamics of spiritual states in relation to the Nyabinghi rural Rastafarian tradition in Jamaica. The vocal score is based on traditional songs from the Revival, Kumina and Rastafarian cultures. At this point, "Nyabinghi Dreamtime" is essentially a well-

staged ritualistic spectacle with a standout score. Composed by Mr. Wedderburn, the dancers and the Ancient Vibrations musical ensemble, the music is compelling in its lilting simplicity and the biblical tone of its plain-spokenness.

The strong performers were Ras Menelik, Teddy (Cilas) Davis and Ira Williams, all members of Ancient Vibrations, and the seven dancers of Urban Bush Women.

JENNIFER DUNNING