



THE KENNEDY CENTER

Performing Arts Series

ARTS-BASED PROGRAMMING VIA SATELLITE/WEB

presented in cooperation with PRINCE WILLIAM NETWORK

Urban Bush Women: Shadow's Child

Tuesday, February 25, 2003
Grades 4 – 8

When viewing *Urban Bush Women* and participating in this guide's suggested activities, the following National Standards for Dance will be addressed: 3, 5, 7.

Background Information

The Artists

Urban Bush Women is more than a dance company. It is a group of professional dancers who explore spiritual, political and cultural experiences as part of their artistic process. Movement, music, vocals, and storytelling are combined in performances that share the traditions and history of African Americans and African peoples from all over the world. Imagine choreography that combines generations of African dance, including traditional African Dance, Drill Team, Double Dutch jumping, Step Dancing, and hip-hop, with modern dance and ballet.

The Artistic Director

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, artistic director, choreographer, and founder of Urban Bush Women was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. Early on, she was keenly aware of her African

heritage. After studying dance at the University of Missouri and Florida State University, Zollar left for New York City to continue her dance studies. In 1984, Zollar founded Urban Bush Women to give social and political issues a voice in the arts and to create performances that inspire social awareness and change. Zollar's work explores personal stories, community histories, and the political issues of Africans and African-Americans. Ms. Zollar and her troupe often leave the dance studio to work directly in communities, helping people identify their cultures, histories, and memories and shape them into creative expressions.

The Creation of *Shadow's Child*

Shadow's Child was created by Urban Bush Women and the National Song and Dance Company of Mozambique. The two dance companies

collaborated for four years, sharing their community histories, languages, storytelling, music, art, and dance traditions, to create this performance piece that connects the two cultures. The parts of the story that take place in America feature African-American music and dance traditions; the music and dance of Southeast Africa take the stage through a series of flashbacks. During the program, two dancers and one musician from Mozambique perform with seven dancers and one musician from the United States.

The Story of *Shadow's Child*

Shadow's Child is about a young girl named Xiomara who moves from Mozambique to rural Florida. She is teased by both black and white American children for being different—she dresses differently, she jumps rope

What to Look and Listen For

- Large Puppets. Some are controlled by rods, some by strings, and some are actually worn by the dancers.
- Musical Instruments. You will hear drums and the *timbila*, a type of xylophone common in southern Africa.
- Dance Styles. You will see jump rope, hip-hop, African dance from Mozambique, along with other dance styles.
- Masks. Although huge masks were newly made for this production, they were created to look like traditional African masks.
- Different Languages. Songs are performed in English, several different African languages of Mozambique, and Portuguese (Mozambique was once a Portuguese colony).

The Story of *Shadow's Child Cont.*

differently, her mother and father are different from the other parents, and she is very dark-skinned. She feels alone and longs for a way to “fit in.”

Xiomara realizes that she can go out in the night without being seen because her coloring is so dark, and she begins to find comfort in the night. The creatures of the night and the spirits of her ancestors speak to her and help her to recognize her personal strengths. Through believing in herself and using her gifts, Xiomara becomes the town heroine.

About the Program

Shadow's Child brings together dance, storytelling, live music, and puppetry to tell a story of a young girl's search for identity. The performance addresses many social issues, including the cruelty of teasing, intolerance, finding strength in oneself, and celebrating difference. During the program you will see an abbreviated version of *Shadow's Child*, followed by a conversation with the company.



Instructional Activities: When Lions Tell History

There is an African proverb that explains: History told from the point of view of the lion is very different from that told by the hunter.

Write three different stories about a lion being hunted and killed. First, write the story from the point of view of the hunter. Second, write from the lion's perspective. Third, write the story from the point of view of a tree that silently observed.

The group Urban Bush Women is interested in exploring stories from many perspectives. After watching *Shadow's Child*, think about the different characters in the story and their individual perspectives. Think about teasing and feeling different from both Xiomara's point of view and that of the American children.

Dance Your Story

Urban Bush Women creates dances about people's experiences. Create a dance about an experience that was important in your life.

- Select an experience that was important in your life.
- List three feelings you had about this experience.
- Create three movements to express each of those feelings.
- Stand still, then dance each of your movements in order without stopping, and then stand still again.
- You have created a simple dance.

Resources

On the Web

kennedy-center.org/pwttv
urbanbushwomen.org
walkerart.org/pa/ubw/

Print

Locke, David. *Drum Gahu: An Introduction to African Rhythm*. Reno: White Cliffs Media, 1998.

Video

Free to Dance. PBS Series.