

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Zollar, Jawole Willa Jo
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar,
Dates:	August 2, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:50:16).
Abstract:	Artistic director and dancer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar (1950 -) was the founding artistic director of Urban Bush Women, a performance ensemble and dance company based in Brooklyn, New York. Zollar was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 2, 2006, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_098
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Choreographer and dancer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar was born in 1950 and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. One of six children, Zollar grew up in a family that was steeped in African American culture. She grew up listening to jazz music and imagining movement in her head. Her first dance teacher was Joseph Stevenson, a student of American dance pioneer Katherine Dunham. Having earned her B.A. degree in dance from the University of Missouri in Kansas City and an M.F.A. degree from Florida State University, Zollar moved to New York City in 1980 to study dance with Dianne McIntyre at Sounds in Motion. In 1984, she left McIntyre's studio to establish the internationally acclaimed dance company, Urban Bush Women in 1984.

Zollar's dance company, Urban Bush Women, uses live music, cappella vocalizations and movement to interpret the religious traditions and folklore of the African Diaspora. Her work with Urban Bush Women has earned five grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts. Zollar has also garnered accolades as a teacher and speaker. These include receiving a New York Dance and Performance BESSIE Award in 1992, the Alumni Achievement Award from the University of Missouri in 1993 and Worlds of Thought Resident Scholar at Mankato University in 1993.

Zollar has created works for Alvin Ailey, the American Dance Theater, Ballet Arizona, Philadanco, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and others. Zollar is Artist in Residence at Florida State University. Her other university commissions include Florida A & M University and the University of Maryland, College Park. She has lectured at such prestigious universities as MIT and UCLA. In 1999, she received the Martin Luther King Distinguished Service Award. Zollar's company was prominently featured in the PBS documentary, *Free to Dance*. In 2002, Zollar was awarded an honorary doctorate from Columbia University.

Urban Bush Women continue to tour extensively throughout the United States and Europe. Zollar resides in Tallahassee, Florida and Brooklyn, New York.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar was conducted by Shawn Wilson on August 2, 2006, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Artistic director and dancer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar (1950 -) was the founding artistic director of Urban Bush Women, a performance ensemble and dance company based in Brooklyn, New York.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Zollar, Jawole Willa Jo

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Zollar, Jawole Willa Jo --Interviews

African American Choreographers--Interviews.

African American dancers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Urban Bush Women (Dance company)

Occupations:

Dancer

Artistic Director

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, August 2, 2006. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Section A2006_098_001_001, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar was born in 1950 in Kansas City, Missouri to Dorothy Zollar Hoover and Alfred Zollar, Jr. Born in the late 1870s, her paternal grandfather, Alfred Zollar, Sr., was descended from Creek Native Americans and slaves, and was a skilled hunter and fisherman. He deeply distrusted whites. Zollar's maternal grandmother, Willa Mason, used makeup to pass as white while working at a department store in Kansas City. Zollar's mother was born in 1922 in Texas, and moved to Kansas City, where she was raised in a boarding house. Dorothy Zollar Hoover attended Lincoln High School, where she received good instruction in black history and graduated at age fifteen. Zollar's mother was unable to have a career in dance because her skin was too dark, so she became a jazz singer, and met Count Basie, Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday and Jay McShann. Before her parents married, Zollar's mother had been married twice before to a Creole man and a Mexican man. Zollar explains why she changed her name to Jawole.

Names, Yoruba.

African American families--Missouri.

Race awareness--United States.

African American mothers--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Section A2006_098_001_002, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's paternal great grandfather, Hampilton Zollar, was conceived when his mother, a slave, was raped by her white slaveholder. Zollar's great grandmother was a Creek Native American. Zollar's parents, Dorothy Zollar Hoover and Alfred Zollar, Jr., met growing up in a boarding house in Kansas City, Missouri. They bought a house in a middle class neighborhood, where they were one of the area's first black families, and Zollar's father opened Alan Bud's Tavern. Zollar was a lively child, and she recalls her propensity for cursing and the ineffectiveness of her mother's punishment of washing her mouth out with soap. She was a good student who excelled in reading, and took lessons at the Joseph Stevenson School of Dance. Zollar attended Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church with her family. She recalls having to dress and speak more formally when shopping downtown in segregated Kansas City, as well as her later experiences of blatant racial discrimination in graduate school at Florida State University.

African American families--Missouri.

African American girls--Childhood and youth.

Education, Elementary.

Segregation--Missouri.

Dance, Black.

Dunham, Katherine.

Joseph Stevenson School of Dance.

Video Oral History Interview with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Section A2006_098_001_003, TRT: 0:29:34 ?

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar attended Central High School in Kansas City, Missouri, where she learned about the Civil Rights Movement and Marxist thought. She enrolled at the University of Missouri - Kansas City, where she majored in

dance. In college, Zollar began wearing her hair in an afro after attending a speech by Haki Madhubuti about black culture, but decided not to join the Black Panther Party, because some of their customs favored men over women. She graduated in 1975, and continued on to graduate school at Tallahassee's Florida State University. Zollar studied under her mentor, Nancy Smith Fichter, and specialized in choreography, especially the jazz and avant garde movements. She created 'Crossings' in memory of her mother, and restaged Pearl Primus' 'Fanga.' Zollar received her M.F.A. degree in 1979. She moved to New York City, and worked for Dianne McIntyre's Sounds in Motion. In 1983, Zollar founded her company, Urban Bush Women, an all-female group focused on feminist themes.

Education, Secondary--United States--History--20th century.

Black power--United States.

Dance, Black.

Dance--Study and teaching (Secondary)--United States.

Experimental dance.

Ku Klux Klan (1915-).

Video Oral History Interview with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Section A2006_098_001_004, TRT: 0:20:59 ?

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar founded the modern dance company Urban Bush Women in 1984. Her first two pieces were 'River Songs,' based on the book 'At the Bottom of the River' by Jamaica Kincaid; and 'Xpujla,' a homage to her ancestors. Those pieces were followed by 'Working for Free,' which was inspired by the improvisational dance techniques of Zollar's mentor, Dianne McIntyre; and 'Anarchy, Wild Women and Dinah,' a collaborative piece based on the folk legends of Dinah and High John the Conqueror. She founded the Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute, a program for civic engagement and artistic development in the New York City community. Zollar describes her hopes for the future of Brooklyn, New York, and her opposition to the Barclays Center. She talks about African American inspirations in dance, including Blondell Cummings, Eleo Pomare and Bill T. Jones. Zollar reflects upon her life and how she would like to be remembered. She talks about choreographing a piece based on her experiences.

Urban Bush Women (Dance company)--History.

Choreography and dance.

Dance, Black.

Black Arts movement.