Review

Urban Bush Women

Cal Performances

Dec. 1, 2023 8 pm

Zellerbach Playhouse

 “ Hair & Ot her Stories”

 Performance as Protest/Participation

The Urban Bush Women are an outstanding group who can lecture, sing, act and dance. They are collaborators, with Mame Diaarra Speis and Chanon Judson (choreographers) in a series of staged events that bring us details of the life and emotions of the group.The event is elegantly performed: each section is narrated, sung and danced in a unique style that tells the audience of these womens experiences. It is an unusual and amazing performance.

The event also challenges the audience to accept the narrative, examine it feelings and also! to practice breathing and some exercise in place. For this reviewer, who greatly admires skill of many sorts, the wide variety of experiences in one event was too much. The audience however seemed to ‘get into the act’ with enthusiasm.

The “Hair” episodes detailed the women’s confrontation with the nature of “black’ hair and how several of them dealt with it; cutting, un’frizzing’, accepting, straightening, etc. These events were the background for the general presentation of black women’s experiences, how to describe them, how to talk about them, and how they are accepted. All narratives combined talk, song and dance. All beautifully performed.

This narratives and other statements are important, critical and contemporary…and ..but a bit too much even for a very receptive and supportive audience. Audiences receive performances and it has its right to respond with its own feelings and sensibilities.

Performers were: Courtney Jj. Cook, Ross Daniel, Kentoria Earle, Roobi Gasking, Grace Galu Kalamdbay, Mame Diarra Speis, and Mikaida Ware. Two children were with the group.

Joanna Harris

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