

# Urban Bush Women

## *Hair & Other Stories*

Saturday, September 21, 2019  
7:30 pm



Photo: ©James Morgan Owens



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# Urban Bush Women

PRESENTS

## *Hair & Other Stories*

Saturday, September 21, 2019, at 7:30 pm  
Hancher Auditorium, The University of Iowa

Crafted from personal narratives from our communities, kitchens and living rooms, social media and YouTube, *Hair & Other Stories* is an experience that blends dance-theater and conversations that challenge existing American values and celebrates our choices around “who we be” and “how we do!”

Choreographed by Co-Artistic Directors Chanon Judson and Samantha Speis in collaboration with The Company, *Hair & Other Stories* explores disquieting perceptions of beauty, identity, and race, and what constitutes the freedom to rise to our Extra-ordinary Selves in extraordinary times.

**This is the urgent dialogue of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**



***Don't come here for no show:  
we're goin' on a Journey!***

Photo: ©James Morgan Owens

*There will be one fifteen-minute intermission.*

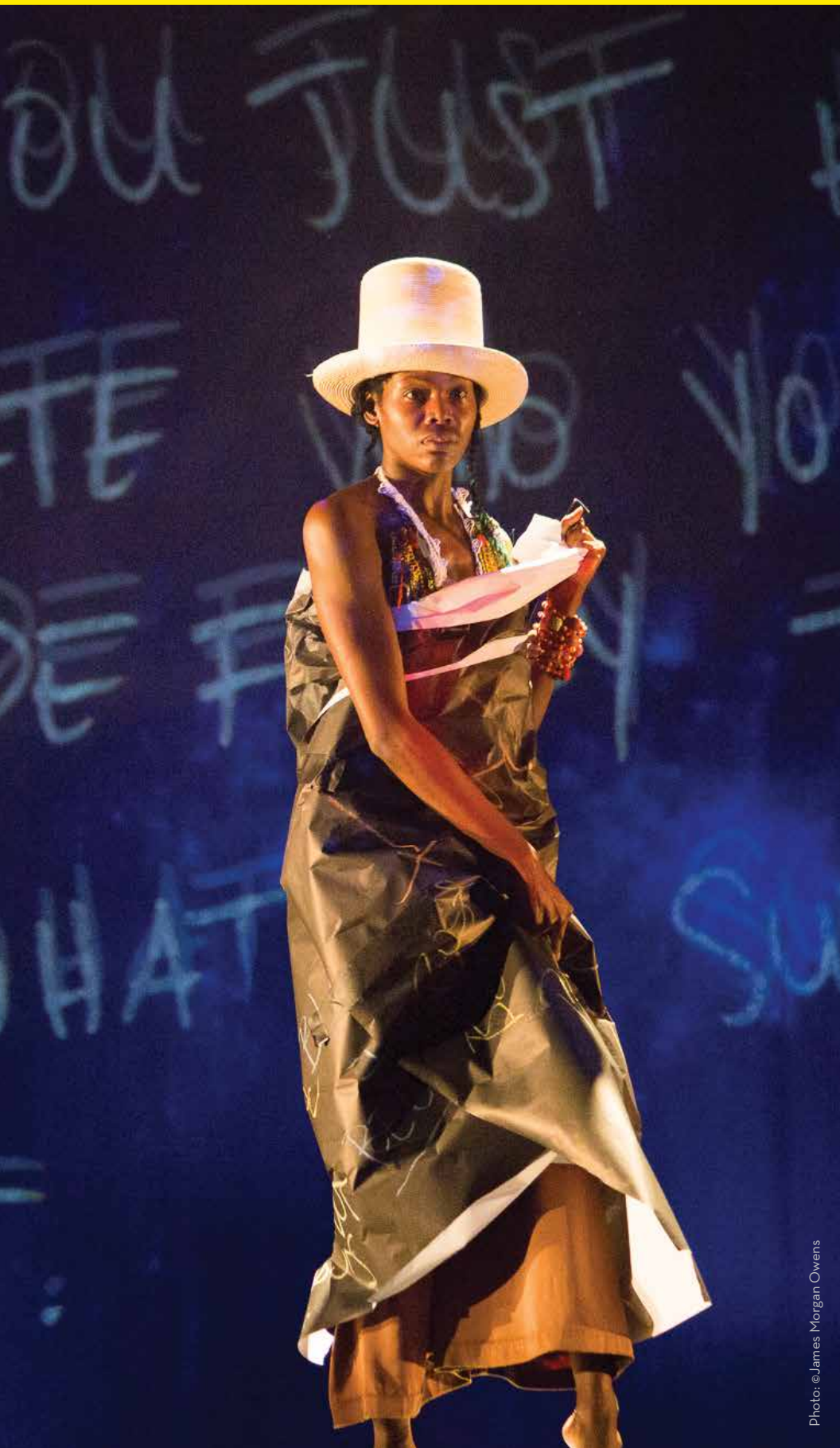
**Please join the cast for a talkback and discussion in the Stanley Café immediately following the conclusion of tonight's performance.**

*Program and casting subject to change.*

*The videotaping or taking of photographs during performances is strictly prohibited.*

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# *Hair & Other Stories*

Choreographed by  
Chanon Judson and Samantha Speis  
in collaboration with The Company

Stage Direction  
Raelle Myrick-Hodges

Dramaturg  
Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

The Company  
Chanon Judson, Courtney J. Cook, Du'Bois A'Keen,  
Samantha Speis, Stephanie Mas, Tendayi Kuumba (\*on leave)  
with Kesha McKey

Lighting Designer  
Xavier Pierce

Costume Designer  
DeeDee Gomes

Projections Designer  
Nicholas Hussong

Sound Design by  
Everett Asis Saunders

Music Composed by  
The Illustrious Blacks (Manchildblack and Monstah Black)

## Additional Music

"Own That Sh\*t" by Tendayi Kuumba and Greg Purnell

"Break It Down" by Tendayi Kuumba

"I Am Not Yours" by Du'Bois A'Keen

"The Issue of Colorism" by Dr. Cheryl Grills.  
Used with permission by Dr. Grills and D. Channsin Berry

"Move B\*tch" by Michael L. Tyler, Craig Stephen Lawson, Jonathan H. Smith, Bobby Wardell Sandimanie Jr., Jeffrey Ray Grigsby, Lola Chantrelle Mitchell, Paul D. Beauregard, Ricky Dunigan, Sean Paul Joseph, Stephanie C. Martin, Jordan Michael Houston, Jason Williams as sung by Ludacris is used with permission from Universal Music, Reservoir Media and Ultra Music.

Original Concept for *HairStories* (2001) by  
Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Elizabeth Herron

*Aminata*, short film and publicity videography by  
Ramy Mam

Photography by  
Hayim Heron

Additional sound recording by  
Jared Hassan Foles at World Eater Recordings

Special Prop design by  
Kofi

*Hair & Other Stories* is informed by our ongoing partnership  
and work with The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond's  
Understanding and Undoing Racism workshop.



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# About the Artists

**URBAN BUSH WOMEN (UBW)** burst onto the dance scene in 1984, with bold, innovative, demanding, and exciting works that brought under-told stories to life through the art and vision of its award-winning founder, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. The Company weaves contemporary dance, music, and text with the history, culture, and spiritual traditions of the African Diaspora.

Under Zollar's artistic direction, Urban Bush Women performs regularly in New York City and tours nationally and internationally. The Company has been commissioned by presenters nationwide, and includes among its honors a New York Dance and Performance Award ("Bessie"), the Capezio Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance, a Black Theater Alliance Award, and two Doris Duke Awards for New Work from the American Dance Festival. In recent years, Zollar has been awarded the 2014 Southern Methodist University Meadows Prize, the 2015 Dance Magazine Award, and the 2016 Dance/USA Honors Award. In 2017, Zollar received a Bessie Award for Lifetime Achievement in Dance.

Off the concert stage, Urban Bush Women has developed an extensive community engagement program called BOLD (Builders, Organizers, & Leaders through Dance). UBW's largest community engagement project is its Summer Leadership Institute (SLI), established in 1997. This ten-day intensive training program serves as the foundation for all of the Company's community engagement activities. Ultimately the SLI program connects dance professionals and community-based artists/activists in a learning experience to leverage the arts as a vehicle for civic engagement.

UBW launched the Urban Bush Women Choreographic Center Initiative (CCI) in January 2016. The CCI supports the development of women choreographers of color and other underheard voices.

**JAWOLE WILLA JO ZOLLAR** (Founder and Chief Visioning Partner) earned her BA in dance from the University of Missouri at Kansas City and received her MFA in dance from Florida State University. In 1984, Zollar founded Urban Bush Women (UBW) as a performance ensemble dedicated to exploring the use of cultural expression as a catalyst for social change. Zollar developed a unique approach to enable artists to strengthen effective involvement in cultural organizing and civic engagement, which evolved into UBW's acclaimed Summer Leadership Institute. She serves as director of the Institute, founding artistic director and visioning partner of UBW, and currently holds the position of the Nancy Smith Fichter Professor of Dance and Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor at Florida State University.

Awards: 2008 United States Artists Wynn fellowship, 2009 fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial, 2013 Arthur L. Johnson Memorial award by Sphinx Organization, 2013 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, 2014 Meadows Prize from Southern Methodist University, 2015 Dance Magazine Award, 2016 Dance/USA Honor Award, 2016 Black Theater Alliance Award, 2017 Bessie Award for Lifetime Achievement in Dance, 2018 American Conference on Diversity Performing Arts Humanitarian Award.

**AMINATA MARIAMA BALDE TOP** (Performer) is in her third season of performing with Urban Bush Women. She is excited to celebrate this landmark in her three years of being on the Earth.

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# About the Artists

**CHANON JUDSON** (Co-Artistic Director/Performer) began her relationship with UBW in 2001. She has had the privilege of serving the Company as rehearsal director, Director for UB2—Urban Bush Women’s performing apprentice ensemble, and now furthers her work with UBW as Artistic Director and Co-Director of BOLD (Builders Organizers and Leaders through Dance). Chanon was a participant in the APAP Leadership Fellows Program (Cohort III), and DirectorsLabChicago (2018). Additional credits include: Taylor Mac’s 24-Hour Spectacular, *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, Prophecy Dance Company (Kwame Ross), Cotton Club Parade (Warren Carlyle), and the Tony Award-winning musical *Fela!* (Bill T. Jones). Her commercial credits include Victoria’s Secret Live, L’Oreal Live, *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, Apple Watch, and the Michael Jackson 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert. Chanon is an avid arts educator, and she has served as faculty with Urban Assembly of Music and Arts High School; AileyCamp, Kansas City, MO (Site Director); Alvin Ailey Arts in Education; Brooklyn Academy of Music; and Earl Mosley’s Institute of the Arts. Additionally, Chanon is the proud founder of Cumbe Center for Diasporic Arts’ Dance Drum and Imagination Camp for Children and Family Arts Movement LLC, offering creative movement and art making for children. She gives thanks to her dad for his help on research for *Hair & Other Stories*.

**COURTNEY J. COOK** (Performer) is a Virginia native now residing in Brooklyn, NY. She began her formal movement training at family reunions and her home church. She later shifted to training in European-centered dance forms at Virginia Governor’s School for the Arts. Furthering her studies, she attended and graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University, receiving her BFA in dance and choreography. As an independent artist, she has had the privilege of performing her solo work titled *PoolPITT* as a featured artist in ModArts Dance Collective’s *Collective Thread* ‘17, a featured artist in the EstroGenius Festival ‘17, and as a part of Betty’s Daughter Arts Collaborative’s *Experiments in Creative Emancipation* project under the curation of Ebony Noelle Golden. She is also involved in creative projects and works by other innovative Black women choreographers such as Maria Bauman (MBDance) and Marguerite Hemmings (we free). In 2018, she received a New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award: Outstanding Performer, for sustained achievement with Urban Bush Women, MBDance, and Marguerite Hemmings. In addition to collaborating on a current project with artists Tendayi Kuumba and Greg Purnell (*FLUX*). She continues learning, living, and developing her own creative voice through various forms of collaboration, movement, sound, and visual arts. She is here, in the NOW, and she is beyond grateful.

**DEEDEE GOMES** (Costume Designer) is a self-taught fashion and fiber artist based in New York. She has created stage attire and done fashion styling for musicians and bands, including Meshell Ndegeocello, Nation Beat, and individual singers from Enrique Iglesias’s band. She designed costumes for Brazilian band Filhos de Jorge that were featured in one of their music videos that had over six-million views. She also designed costumes for dance ensemble The Pulse Project. She did the styling and costumes for a girl band called Funky Diamonds, of which she was a member, that toured internationally. DeeDee is owner of DeeDee’s Street Boutique in New York which features her remarkable one-of-a-kind repurposed, recycled clothing.



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AGEE**

**Chris  
EARL**

# About the Artists

**DU'BOIS A'KEEN** (Performer) is a true renaissance spirit. A Georgia native residing in New York City, A'Keen began his formal dance training at age 19. After receiving his BFA in dance from Florida State University, he was accepted as an MFA candidate. While studying in NYC, A'Keen joined UBW in December 2014. Aside from working with UBW, A'Keen has produced and premiered his own work as a choreographer and filmmaker at The Kennedy Center, and he has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Opera Wire*, and *Dance Magazine*. In 2018, A'Keen made his operatic debut as choreographer and guest artist of Charlie Parker's *YardBird* with the Arizona Opera. When he is not performing, A'Keen works as the CEO & Creative Director of A'KEEN BRAND, LLC, a creative agency and production company. He has had much success working across the industries of film, fashion, and dance. A'Keen is an IFP Screen Forward Lab Fellow for the 2017 cohort and 2018 NYTV Featured Artist. While he works across many genres and industries as a producer, director, and artist one of his main passions is dance. This is his fifth year with UBW as a touring company member and second year as branding & marketing strategist. A'Keen looks forward to continued growth and success nationally and internationally, alongside his beautiful wife and life partner, Camry Vonyae' A'Keen.

**EVERETT ASIS SAUNDERS** (Sound Designer) is the founder and creative director of Flux Innovations, a sound and audio services company. Their recent clients include PBS, Sony Music, and Columbia Records. Saunders is a producer, composer, songwriter, and performer. He has specific knowledge and practice in arranging, editing, and mixing for theater, film, and music entertainment. His work spans across genres with original compositions for numerous independent films and New York/LA dance community, with his latest commissions including Marjani Forté & Works *Memoirs of a...Unicorn*. Film works include PBS' *The March* (2013), *Print Shop* (2016), and Project Imagination winner *Transporter* directed by Damon Colquhoun.

**THE ILLUSTRIOUS BLACKS** (Music Composer). Manchildblack & Monstah Black comprise this fabulous musical duo who have arrived on a mission to fuse futuristic funk, hypnotic house, and cosmic pop into pulsating positivity for the planet. Their entertaining weekly radio show on WBAI 99.5 FM in NYC, *On Air w/The Blacks*, invites audiences to listen in as they conduct interviews, feature live performers, and discuss the latest happenings in global pop culture.

**KESHA MCKEY** (Performer) is a choreographer, educator, and performing artist in New Orleans. She received her BS from Xavier University and her MFA in dance performance from UW-Milwaukee. She is a part of Junebug Productions' Gomela cast and is a "Homecoming Project" artist. She is the Artistic Director of KM Dance Project with choreography credits including the UBW Summer Leadership Institute (SLI), Women in Dance, Roots Week, and Peridance APAP Showcases. Kesha is a 2018 CAC Resident Artist, 2016 Dancing While Black Fellow, and a 2016 Jacob's Pillow Improv Traditions and Innovation scholarship recipient. She is a dance educator at NOCCA and on the UBW SLI faculty.

**NICHOLAS HUSSONG** (Projections Designer). Off-Broadway credits include *Skeleton Crew* (Atlantic Theater Company) and *These Paper Bullets!*, Drama Desk Nomination (Atlantic Theater Company, Geffen Playhouse, Yale Rep). Regional credits include *Grounded* (Alley Theatre), *Two Trains Running* (Arden Theatre), *The Mountaintop* (Playmakers Rep), and *I Saw My Neighbor*



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# About the Artists

on the Train and *I Didn't Even Smile* (Berkshire Theatre Group), as well as productions with Esperanza Spalding, Abrons Art Center, Premieres NYC, Ars Nova, Heartbeat Opera, Cantata Profana, Nashville Symphony, Hartford Symphony, I Am A Boys Choir, SummerWorks Toronto, La MaMa Summer Share, and Joe's Pub. Nicholas was the Artistic Associate at Triad Stage in Greensboro, North Carolina, where he continues to design new works based on Appalachian life written by Preston Lane.

**RAELLE MYRICK-HODGES** (Stage Director) has directed plays nationally and worked as a stage director internationally in devised works. She is the founder of Azuka Theatre located in Philadelphia—an award-winning theater company now in its 23rd year. Raelle has presented works in dance, music, theater, and film as Curator of Performing Arts for the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans. Raelle has worked with artists in different aesthetics and disciplines including Denis O'Hare, Miriam A. Hyman, Meryl Streep, Antonio Brown (Choreographer), Jeffrey Wright, and Chinaka Hodge, among others. Currently, Raelle is working on works for her newly created theater ensemble, Elephant Room, which premiered works in January 2019. Raelle's creative contribution on *Hair & Other Stories* is dedicated to the memory of Ebony McKinney, co-founder of Elephant Room. Current and upcoming works directed by Raelle include *The Bluest Eye*, written by Toni Morrison and adapted by Lydia Diamond, at the Arden Theatre Company; and a world premiere of the 1947 play *In Splendid Error*, written by William Branch—the fictional telling of the day before John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry.

**SAMANTHA SPEIS** (Co-Artistic Director) is a movement improviser based in New York City and the mother of Aminata and Aicha. She has worked with Gesel Mason, The Dance Exchange, Jumatatu Poe, Deborah Hay (as part of *Some Sweet Day* curated by Ralph Lemon at the MoMA), Marjani Forté, and Liz Lerman. Speis was the 2012 recipient of the Alvin Ailey New Directions Choreography Lab and recently was awarded a Bessie for Outstanding Performer. Her work has been featured at the Kennedy Center (Millennium Stage), Long Island University, BAAD, Joyce SoHo, Hollins University, Danspace Project, Dixon Place, Dance Place, and the Kelly Strayhorn Theater. Speis's solo, *The Way it Was, and Now*, was commissioned by the Jerome Foundation to be performed at Danspace Project for the Parallels Platform Series, and was later invited to the Kaay Fecc Dance Festival in Dakar, Senegal. She has developed a movement and teaching practice that explores pelvic mobility as the root of powerful locomotion and as a point of connection to the stories, experiences, and lineages that reside in each of us. She has been a guest artist and taught workshops throughout the United States, South America, Senegal, and Europe. Recent projects include *Walking with 'Trane* co-choreographed with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and her collaboration with Chanon Judson-Johnson and Raelle Myrick-Hodges of *Hair & Other Stories*.

**STEPHANIE MAS** (Performer) is a Miami native and has been a performer with Urban Bush Women since her entry into the Company in June 2013. Throughout her time with Urban Bush Women, she has had the opportunity to tour worldwide, performing and co-facilitating workshops/master classes in the different communities they have been invited to visit. She also works as a freelance performing artist and has had the opportunity to collaborate and create with artists such as Paloma McGregor, Millicent Johnnie, Megan Bascom, Megan Kendzior, Kate Weare, BODYART, and Kirstin Kapustik. Mas received her 200hr Yoga Certification in 2013.

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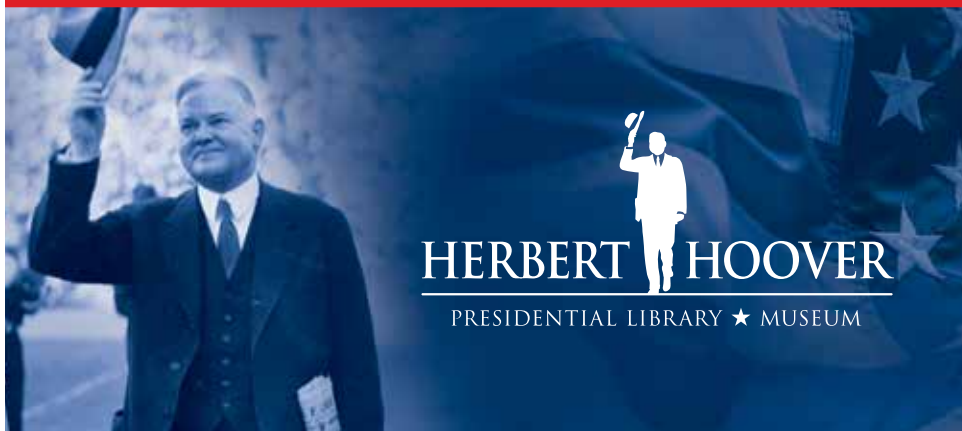
# About the Artists

**TENDAYI KUUMBA** (Performer \*on leave) is an international dancer, singer, songwriter, and touring company member of Urban Bush Women. Tendayi is a graduate of North Atlanta High School of Performing Arts and Spelman College. Past choreographic works include *Prague-New York Effects*, *First Effects*, *Heroin'e*, and *FLUX* with collaborators Courtney Cook, Greg Purnell, and Manchildblack. She has worked with Àşę Dance Theatre Collective, Marjani Forté-Saunders, Jim Findlay's Electric Lucifer workshop, and Philadelphia Opera's *We Shall Not be Moved*, directed by Bill T. Jones. She's received accolades for music releases of Jazz EP *Just A Matter of Time*, and single *Incog-negro*. Recently, she toured as one of two back-up singer-dancers on the *American Utopia* world tour for Grammy-nominated artist David Byrne. Presently, she is generating and co-creating an artistic space, The Golden Ratio, in Brooklyn, NY, alongside partner Greg Purnell. She gives thanks and blessings for life, love, breath, and the pursuit of happiness through creativity.

**XAVIER PIERCE** (Lighting Designer). Credits include *Shakespeare in Love* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival, dir. Christopher Moore), *Smart People* (Arena Stage, dir. Seema Sueko), *Harvey* (The Guthrie, dir. Libby Appel), *Fences* (Long Wharf / McCarter Theatre co-production, dir. Phylicia Rashad), *Fly* (Florida Studio Theatre / Handy Award for Best Lighting), *Two Trains Running* (Two River Theatre, dir. Ruben Santiago-Hudson), *A Raisin in the Sun* (Westport Country Playhouse, dir. Phylicia Rashad), *Common Enemy* (Triad Stage, dir. Preston Lane), *The Piano Lesson* (Olney Theatre Center, dir. Jamil Jude), *Two Trains Running* (The Arden, dir. Raelle Myrick-Hodges), *Native Gardens* (The Guthrie & Arena Stage, dir. Blake Robison), *Blithe Spirit* (The Guthrie, dir. David Ivers), *Othello* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival, dir. Bill Rauch), and *4,000 Miles*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, and *The Mountaintop* (PlayMakers Rep). Xavier is a graduate of New York University Tisch School of the Arts, MFA in design stage and film.

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# About the Artists

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The UBW Creative Catalyst Circle invites the partnership of individuals, teams of individuals, and institutions who believe in the vision and mission of UBW and who wish to bring this vision to the stage through their philanthropic gifts.

Alfred and Patricia Zollar

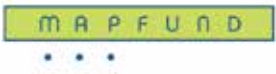
Anonymous

Tracey and Phillip Riese

**SPECIAL THANKS** to Talvin Wilks for early dramaturgical support for *Hair & Other Stories*; to Stephanie McKee and Laurie Uprichard for their continued support during the development of *Hair & Other Stories*; to Jonathan D. Secor, Lai-Lin Robinson, Susan Hamburger, and Tamar Fedestin for shepherding *Hair & Other Stories* during their tenure at Urban Bush Women.

# About the Artists

**MAJOR FUNDING FOR URBAN BUSH WOMEN IS PROVIDED BY** Acton Family Giving; Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; Doris Duke Charitable Foundation—Leadership Grants Program; Ford Foundation; Howard Gilman Foundation; Mertz Gilmore Foundation; Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation; Nathan Cummings Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; New Music USA; New York Community Trust; New York State Council on the Arts; The Surdna Foundation; and public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with The City Council.



# About the Artists

***Hair & Other Stories* was commissioned** by the Virginia Arts Festival and had its proscenium stage premiere as part of the 2017 Festival at the Attucks Theatre, Norfolk, VA, on April 22, 2017.

***Hair & Other Stories (audience-engaged version)*** is a National Performance Network (NPN) Creation Fund Project co-commissioned by Junebug Productions in partnership with Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans, Dance Place and NPN. For more information: [www.npnweb.org](http://www.npnweb.org).

***Hair & Other Stories* is made possible by** Engaging Dance Audiences, which is administered by Dance/USA and made possible with generous funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; the Lincoln Center Cultural Innovation Fund, which is generously supported by The Rockefeller Foundation and administered by Lincoln Center; the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; the MAP Fund, which is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; and Acton Family Giving and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. It is also supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

***Hair & Other Stories* was made possible by residencies** at Baruch College and City College Center for the Arts through the City University of New York (CUNY) Dance Initiative, which receives major support from The Mertz Gilmore Foundation, the Howard Gilman Foundation, and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Additional support was provided by the Jerome Robbins Foundation and the Harkness Foundation for Dance. CDI is spearheaded and administered by The Kupferberg Center for the Arts at Queens College.

***Hair & Other Stories* was also further developed** at BRIC (Brooklyn, NY) while Urban Bush Women was their 2018-2019 Artist-in-Residence.

UBW, Inc., dba Urban Bush Women, is a not-for-profit organization  
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## **Learn more about UBW and its programs**

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Donations: Renee Taylor Foles, [rtaylorfoles@urbanbushwomen.org](mailto:rtaylorfoles@urbanbushwomen.org)

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# César Pelli (1926–2019)

## Hancher architect and friend

César Pelli was a brilliant architect, and it was truly an honor to have him design the current Hancher Auditorium. We were even more honored to call him our friend.

That friendship began immediately after Pelli Clark Pelli Architects was selected to design a new Hancher Auditorium following the destruction of the original building by the flooding of 2008. César felt a personal connection to Hancher's work, and he made sure to connect with members of the staff and the University of Iowa community to ensure his ideas honored Hancher's past and elevate its future. At his firm's offices in New Haven, Connecticut, he devoted an entire room to the project, and he was always happy to share his thoughts about the building with visitors.

César was delighted by the beautiful setting—often commenting that it was the most gorgeous site for which he had designed a building—and he was committed to making the most of the space. He brought the indoors and the outdoors together in the lobby spaces and rehearsal room and designed an exceptional performance space.

His joy for the project was palpable from beginning to end. He came to Iowa City for the major milestones of the project, including our Site Ceremony connecting the original Hancher to the new, our Leave Your Mark beam signing (after which he joined hundreds of construction workers on the as-yet-unfinished stage for lunch), and our Gala Opening. On opening night, César took the stage with Hancher Executive Director Chuck Swanson to launch a new era for Hancher. We'll always remember his words that night: "Hancher was built with love."

We are saddened to lose our friend. We are blessed to have the opportunity to serve our campus and community in a building that will always stand as a tribute to César.

Above: César Pelli at the opening night of the Hancher Auditorium, 2016 (Photo: Bill Adams)  
Opposite page photos: scale model of Hancher Auditorium at Pelli Clark Pelli offices in New Haven, 2012; Hancher Executive Director Chuck Swanson (seated) looks at scale model while César Pelli (holding glass) looks on from behind, 2012; Pelli and the rest of the Pelli Clark Pelli team in front of Hancher during the Leave Your Mark event, 2014, (Photo: Miriam Alarcón Avila); Pelli and Swanson in 2016 (Photo: Bill Adams); Pelli and Swanson at opening night of the new Hancher Auditorium, 2016 (Photo: Bill Adams); exterior of Hancher Auditorium (Jeff Goldberg/Esto).

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# The Vision for Hancher Auditorium: A Lifetime Commitment

*This is the first in a series of essays about Virgil Hancher and his vision for the arts in general, and Hancher Auditorium in particular, at the University of Iowa. The essays will appear in playbills throughout this season and will be available on the Hancher website, as well.*

By Daniel Boscaljon

Virgil Hancher was born 04 Sept 1896 in Pocahontas County near Rolfe, Iowa, and attended the University of Iowa (called the State University of Iowa [SUI] through the vast majority of his lifetime). He toyed with transferring to Northwestern, but ultimately chose to complete his undergraduate studies and his J.D. at Iowa and received a B.A. from Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar (Hancher returned to Oxford to receive an M.A. when he completed law school). The combination of these experiences in his early years—small town Iowa, SUI, Evanston, and international education—remained important for the rest of Hancher's life. After serving on the board of the Alumni Association and as its president while an attorney in Evanston, Illinois, Hancher became the thirteenth president of the University, serving from 1940-1964. He died unexpectedly in New Delhi, India, on 30 January 1965, while working with the Ford Foundation and thus did not, as planned, return to Iowa as a part of the law school faculty.



Virgil Hancher in 1956

Hancher's recollection of his formative years as an undergraduate offers an initial indication of why he felt an urgency to create a space for community on campus. He wrote:

*There were no dormitories for men, there was no student union, there was no orientation, and there were few organized activities in which a freshman could participate...He might make friends through his classes or a church group but, by and large, he led a lonely life.*

Hancher's drive to create communities and connections is clear when considering his biography. Not only was he active in the alumni association, and a leader on multiple local, national, and international boards and organizations that ranged from education to religion, he was also relentless in forming and informing organizations that would bring humans together productively.

By 1940, when Hancher returned to Iowa, the campus had grown. Nonetheless, his vision for a space on campus where students could feel like part of a larger whole remained. Hancher sensed that SUI needed a space in which a community could come together that would stand apart from church and class as an essential part of human—and thus also student—life. He believed that the arts offer an essential contribution toward human vitality.

In the State University of Iowa Auditorium report of 1964, Earl Harper—who served as Director of the Iowa Memorial Union when that space had been the artistic heart of the campus—wrote the following as a way to summarize the “twenty years of dreaming, planning, and so many frustrations” about what became Hancher Auditorium:

*Today...will be a movement fraught with great good for our community, a visible symbol of the unifying interest of the entire university family, administrators, faculty and staff members, students of every degree of advancement and of every curricular interest, alumni and friends of the university generally in a frequent coming together for those many, varied, and important interests, inspirations, pleasures, and intellectual stimulæ which only can be adequately implemented through such an auditorium, such an opera-symphony hall, such a musical theatre, such a center of convocations, lectures and parliamentary gatherings as is now authorized.*

The thought that an auditorium could provide this particular sort of community seems almost quaint, given the current size and complex structure of the university system.

Yet what Harper envisions, and what Hancher Auditorium has continued to offer over the years, is a space for musing rather than amusement. While entertainment provides a way to passively pass the time, distracting audiences from their problems for a time of shared interaction, art's role is more serious. Art invites a level of engagement that harnesses mind and soul. It creates a space of wonder—not just to marvel at how humans can move or the sounds humans can make—but also a space to reflect on the meaning of our lives. Whether through speech, sound, or silence, the space of Hancher steadfastly inspires audiences to engage in meaningful experiences that provide a sense of depth—something remains memorable even if it cannot be put into words. Distractions rarely inspire more than a sense of waking up after it is done: the arts provide a sense of awakening during the performance.

This kind of community event—a coming alive around the space of creation rather than a waking up, individually, afterward—is what Hancher had in mind as a way to interrupt the tendency toward alienation and loneliness. Although Hancher felt that both religious communities and academic institutions provided important resources for a flourishing human life, he felt that the arts inspired a distinct sense of togetherness that was equally important. The Hancher Auditorium that exists today—rebuilt—is a continuation of this initial vision.

*Daniel Boscaljon is a longtime contributor to arts writing in the ICR, often providing interviews, reviews, and essays on aesthetics for Little Village and The Englert as well as for Hancher. An independent scholar, teacher, and arts critic, he is committed to inviting others to incorporate wisdom and joy as part of everyday life. In addition to teaching workshops and holding free public conversations in the area, Daniel also has three current ventures including the Center for Humanist Inquiries (professional consultations), Coffee with Dan (spiritual direction and philosophical life coaching), and The Thoughtful Life (a non-profit venture that includes his "Making Space for Yourself" podcast). You can find his writing and more information about his services at [danielboscaljon.com](http://danielboscaljon.com).*



Photo: Zak Neumann

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