



ANGELA JIMENEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Visible** with, from left: Marguerite Hemmings, Judith Jacobs, Souleymane Badolo, Kota Yamazaki, Catherine Dénécý and John O. Perpener III in an *Urban Bush Women* production at the Harlem Stage Gatehouse.

## Dissecting Freedom on a Grand Scale

There are many moments in “Visible” when what seems casual is likely to be painstakingly drawn, when multiple layers of sound, text and movement create a kind of symphony. The production still seems half-baked, yet when it coheres, it’s like good jazz: without being literal it finds its way back to

**GIA  
KOURLAS**

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REVIEW**

its theme.

The work, choreographed by Nora Chipaumire and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar — it was produced by Ms. Zollar’s *Urban Bush Women* and commissioned by Harlem Stage — explores being a foreigner in America, where ideas of liberty and the pursuit of happiness don’t tell the whole story.

In part “Visible,” seen on Thursday evening at the Harlem Stage Gatehouse, shows what falls between the cracks. Its narrative is dusted with images from the Great Migration, when blacks moved north at the turn of the 20th century, as well as with the appearance of a deity who carries a cane — the cast uses

canes for support and, at times, as nooses — and was, among other things, a protector of travelers.

There are six performers with varied backgrounds: Souleymane Badolo (Burkina Faso); Catherine Dénécý (Guadeloupe); Marguerite Hemmings (Jamaica); Judith Jacobs (the Neth-

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*The United States is seen through the eyes of newcomers.*

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erlands); John O. Perpener III (the United States) and Kota Yamazaki (Japan). But even though Ms. Zollar’s family moved north to Kansas City, Mo., during the Great Migration, “Visible” seems to be Ms. Chipaumire’s story. (She’s from Zimbabwe.)

Two percussionists, David Alston and Bashir Shakur, perform side by side and are wonderful, as are the costumes by Mr. Yamazaki, who has managed to

design danceable sportswear with a Japanese twist. His costumes make the show’s inhabitants — including himself — appear modern, even when their vehement movements bring something more essential, more ancient to the stage.

At times the performers are lost in individual worlds, even when performing in unison; Ms. Dénécý is a force, while Mr. Badolo takes his time, letting the music first seep into his skin before reacting to it. But there are some difficult, literal moments to swallow, as when Ms. Jacobs throws herself on the floor panting hard and screaming lines like “America, built on a colony, telling me to go back to my country!”

As a performer she’s just too presentational to pull it off. Oddly it’s Mr. Perpener, a dance historian, who anchors “Visible” with the gravity it deserves and the lightness it needs. That he understands dance is more than evident in his scholarship; the surprise here is how he knows how to own a stage.