On his birthday (9 March 2001) I interviewed ballet legend Fernando Bujones, illustrious principal dancer with the American Ballet Theater (ABT) from 1972, when he was 17, until 1985. A Cuban-American, Bujones’s performance style was the quintessence of the heroic, radiant approach associated with Alicia Alonso and her National Ballet of Cuba. He is currently artistic director of the Southern Ballet Theatre (Orlando, Florida).

The interview with postmodern innovator Jawole Willa Jo Zollar was conducted on 19 May 2001. Having danced since childhood in both Africanist and Europeanist styles, Zollar founded the Urban Bush Women (UBW) performance ensemble in 1984. The company has performed worldwide and organically links professional concert performance with community activism, showing that all people are dancers and that dance, by its nature, is political.

My excerpts are intended to give a feel for the general way things transpired in the course of two sample interviews as well as the specific turns of conversation dictated by the details of individual careers. As indicated by ellipses, I have done some editing to compress my commentary and minimize the back-and-forth of these hourlong-plus conversations.

Although Bujones’s opinions are his own, they are a gauge and mirror of the ballet perspective/aesthetic in which he was nurtured. Just as Bujones represents his milieu, so Zollar’s outlook is inflected by her standing as a driving female force in the postmodern, post-colonialist, multicultural dance arena.

**BUJONES**

_Dance in itself would not be so powerful, so enriched, if it wasn’t for black dance._

BDG: Please talk about the presence of African American dancers in the American Ballet Theater and whether you were aware of the “mandate” by its co-founder and longtime director, Lucia Chase, not to use black dancers.
FB: Yes. I knew about that. I felt that in the ’70s the company still had a . . . cautious way of using an Afro-American dancer. We had a dancer, Keith Lee, who was with us—tall, handsome, and pretty strong. And he was used in specific roles, like the Moor’s Pavane [a choreography by modern dancer José Limón based on Shakespeare’s Othello] . . . or to do the barrel turns in Harald Lander’s Études [the best-known ballet by this Danish-born international choreographer] because of his athletic prowess . . . because of his strength, because of his skin color too.

BDG: Any comments about Alvin Ailey’s works choreographed for ABT [The River, 1970, and Sea Change, 1972]?

FB: Ailey was very admired by ABT. The River was a huge success . . . and he did the next work for us. . . . [Somehow] the search for more Ailey works kind of dissolved. The artistic direction went into other choreographers and they went more into . . . bringing back . . . beginning roots again [meaning the “Americana” ballet styles of Eugene Loring, choreographer of Billy the Kid, and Jerome Robbins].