



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Davidson

Contact: Aviva

917-714-2221
avivabgd@gmail.com

MERIÁN SOTO'S BRANCH DANCES **FREE Public Performance at a Bronx Historical Landmark**

Bronx, NY (4/14/14) – On Sunday, May 18, 2014, at 1:30 pm, Dancing in the Streets and BAAD! (Bronx Academy of Arts & Dance), in partnership with Westchester Square BID, will present a FREE public performance of **Merián Soto's** magical **Branch Dances** on the grounds of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, a Gothic Revival Church building in Westchester Square, the Bronx.

In a one-hour performance, **Merián Soto, Arthur Aviles**, and 10 Bronx-based dancers—will move in response to the heft, form, and texture of large tree braches, which they will carry on their shoulders and interact with in myriad ways, evoking the sensual, mysterious, and kinetic force of nature and transporting the 21st century urban audience to prehistoric times when the Bronx was home to a primeval forest.

The May 18th performance will be the third public event of a six-session *Branch Dances* workshop for Bronx choreographers and dancers. In the course of three consecutive weekends, Merián Soto will train Aviles and his Bronx colleagues in her distinctive meditative practice that focuses on developing receptivity to the branches' physical properties and forging a somatic connection to the timelessness and powerful force of nature. Two preceding public events with Soto and workshop participants are:

- **Saturday, May 10, 1:30-3 pm:** a *Branch Dances* demonstration on the streets of Westchester Square and at Owen Dolen Park as part of the sixth annual *Fair @ The Square* festival organized by Westchester Square BID.
- **Saturday, May 17, 1:30-3 pm:** Merián Soto and the workshop participants will lead a 1 ½ hour *Branch Dances* workshop with senior citizens at Owen Dolen in a program coordinated by the Owen Dolen Park Recreation Center.

The workshop sessions for participating choreographers and dancers will take place at BAAD! on Saturdays and Sundays, May 3, 4 and 11 from 12-3 p.m.; and on May 10, 17, and 18, from 12-1 p.m. right before the public events.

THE ARTISTS:

- **Merián Soto** has been developing *Branch Dances* performances since 2005 for indoor and outdoor spaces, including Lincoln Center and Wave Hill. She is a Bessie-Award winning choreographer and performance artist who, for over 35 years, has created and performed group and collaborative pieces across the US and internationally. Puerto Rican born, Soto came of age in the Bronx, where she co-founded Pepatián with Patti Bradshaw and Pepón Osorio. Soto is Professor of Dance at Temple University.
- **Arthur Aviles** is a Bessie Award-winning dance pioneer who rose to international acclaim when he danced with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. Among his many awards, Aviles received the NYC Mayor's Arts Award for his artistic leadership of BAAD!

- The other Bronx-based dancers/choreographers participating in the workshop and performance range in age from 18 to 65 and include **Maleek Washington**, a member of Kyle Abraham's Abraham in Motion company; **Marsi Burns**, a seasoned improvisational dancer; and **Ni'Ja Whitson**, an interdisciplinary artist, writer, and full-time lecturer at Lehman College.

THE SITE: The Branch Dances performance will take place on the grounds of the historic St. Peter's Episcopal Church. This New York City Landmark, which is listed in the National Registry of Historic Places, stands on the footprints of the original Westchester Town Hall. St. Peter's Church was built in 1855. It was designed by Leopold Eidlitz, the Czech architect who designed other prominent New York City buildings, including the original Metropolitan Opera House and the New York County Courthouse, better known as the "Tweed Courthouse." In 1877, after a fire destroyed part of the original St. Peter's Church, it was rebuilt, somewhat altered, by Leopold's son, Cyrus.

THE PARTNERS:

- **Dancing in the Streets** presents FREE adventurous, community-based, public performances in unexpected places. Since moving to the South Bronx in 2011, Dancing in the Streets is applying its 30-year legacy towards developing public performances in the Bronx that expand the cultural conversation, build community, nurture artists, and reclaim, revitalize, and draw attention to the borough's unknown architectural, natural, and cultural treasures. As part of the South Bronx Culture Trail, a collaborative initiative with Casita Maria Center for Arts & Education, Dancing in the Streets commissioned Joanna Haigood to create two large-scale works celebrating the rich cultural tradition of the South Bronx: 1) the Bessie Award-winning *Paseo* (2012), a traveling, site-specific work that recaptured the Latin music and dance scene of the mid twentieth century, which Haigood created with Bobby Sanabria; and *The Bronx Revolution and the Birth of Hip Hop* (2013), which she created in collaboration with five hip hop pioneers who also performed in the work. www.dancinginthestreets.org
- **BAAD! The Bronx Academy of Arts & Dance** was named one of the seven pillars of culture in the Bronx by the Bronx Council on the Arts. In October 2013, BAAD! moved to the St. Peter's Chapel, where it is continuing its 15-year legacy of nurturing and presenting the work of established and emerging choreographers, dancers, playwrights, musicians, visual artists, poets, writers and directors; with a special focus on work by and about women, people of color and the LGBTQ community. BAAD! enriches the cultural life of the Bronx with five signature performance series; exhibitions; a dance library; and pot luck suppers, forums, and a newsletter for and with the Bronx dance community. <http://www.baadbronx.org>
- **Westchester Square BID:** The Westchester Square Business Improvement District is a non-profit corporation whose dues-paying members—property owners, merchants, and residents of the Westchester Square neighborhood of the Bronx—join forces to improve the quality of life of the neighborhood through physical improvements and community events, including free public performances. The BID's Executive Director Lisa Sorin is transforming the area, which is already a commercial and transportation hub of the Bronx, into a cultural destination capitalizing on BAAD!'s adventurous programming, on the rich ethnic diversity of the Bronx, and on the Square's historical significance as the first European settlement that was founded in 1654 by English settlers in what is now called the Bronx. <http://www.wsbid.org>