

For Immediate Release  
August 8, 2004

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**Black Woman's Story of Triumph Over Her Mental Illness is an  
Entertaining and Inspiring Treat for All**

Life always has seemed like one big **Balancing Act** for Wambui Bahati (A.K.A. John-Ann Washington). This native North Carolinian went from Broadway star to welfare and was told she'd spend the rest of her life in mental institutions. She's been homeless and she has also dined with a former President of the United States.

In 1969 she was an acting major at New York University School of the Arts. On her way to dance class one day, she ended up in Los Angeles. Wambui says, "I had never been to California before. I arrived with a credit card, some dance clothes, and less than 20 dollars. I wandered around LA for four months before I realized I was not where I was supposed to be."

"My family says that I flew home to North Carolina during that time and announced I was getting married, before flying back to LA. But I don't remember much about that California adventure. I think that is a good thing."

That trip was a flashing red light that she and her family ignored because of ignorance and embarrassment.

"We didn't understand why I would do something so irrational. So, we didn't talk about it and I tried to forget about it." It was years before she ever told anyone about that trip or similar incidents. Twenty-five years passed before she received a proper diagnosis and treatment for manic depression or bipolar mood disorder.

In 1996 Wambui was living in North Carolina and was tired of trying to hide her bipolar mood disorder. Despite challenges that would come because of the stigma associated with mental illness, she decided to talk about it. But she didn't just talk about it. She wrote about it. She got on the stage and performed a show about it. She put songs in the show and sang about it.

The music styles in the show include R&B, jazz, calypso, pop and gospel. Through her show you experience her journey. One minute you are holding your stomach and laughing hysterically and the next you are trying to dab your tears without anyone noticing. By the end we are all uplifted - feeling a little stronger - ready to take on the next challenge. She has reminded us of who we really are.

"I wanted to tell my story", she says, "Because I overheard others trying to tell it for me. When I would hear, 'Girl, I heard she was

in a mental institution,' I wanted to be able to say, 'I already told y'all that.' And when they'd say, 'Girl, she used to be an actress in New York; now she's living in public housing,' I wanted to be able to say, 'Didn't you see my show?' If you had seen my show you would have heard me when I sang, 'I'm lonely po' an' sad, my credit's really bad.'"

After seeing her show, many people called her in secret and e-mailed her in code. Some wrote letters with no return addresses that were signed with only initials. The letters said, "Thank you for telling my story," or "Thank you for telling my mother's story," or "my sister's" or "my father's" or "my child's." Others said, "You are so brave to talk about it."

Today, Wambui performs and speaks all over the country about how manic depression interrupted her life. "I tell about the hospitalizations, the medications, the doctors, the police, my children, the shame, my anger, and the guilt. And then I tell how I found inspiration and exhilaration out of desperation. I share the joy that I once thought I would never feel."

You can experience Wambui Bahati and the powerful one-woman musical entitled **Balancing Act** at Don't Tell Mama, 343 W. 46th Street (Restaurant Row) in New York City on Mondays at 9:30 P.M. August 9th, 16th and 30th. Song writer /singer Curvie McMurray is the musical director. Please visit: [www.BalancingActShow.com](http://www.BalancingActShow.com) and [www.wambui.com](http://www.wambui.com)

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**The engagement at Don't Tell Mama has just been extended by popular demand: September 12th-3:00pm, 13th-9:00pm, 19th-8:00pm, 20th-9:00pm. These are the last NYC dates before Wambui goes on tour in October.**

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