

STEP AFRiKA!



Monday, February 13, 2023
7:30 p.m.

About Gertrude Castellow Ford



With an ever-inquisitive mind, Gertrude Castellow Ford fully embraced the arts. As a patron, an observer and a practitioner, Mrs. Ford engaged in a lifelong exploration of all things of beauty and inspiration. Exceedingly well-read in poetry and classic literature, Mrs. Ford was often at the center of spirited discussions about the merits of all manner of literary works. Always at the very foundation of her spirit was a great and sincere love of the arts and letters.

In keeping with a generations-old family tradition of philanthropy, Mrs. Ford established the Gertrude C. Ford Foundation in Jackson, Mississippi, with a very generous gift in 1991 to support the arts in Mississippi. In addition to the donation for the construction of the Ford Center, the Foundation supports the USA International Ballet Competition, the Mississippi Opera, Mississippi Museum of Art, University of Southern Mississippi Orchestra and many others.

Mrs. Ford died in September of 1996. She and her husband, Aaron Lane Ford, who was an Ackerman attorney and U.S. congressman representing what was Mississippi’s 4th District, are buried in Cuthbert, a small town in southwest Georgia.

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PROGRAM

TRIBUTE

CHOREOGRAPHED BY JAKARI SHERMAN

Tribute pays homage to the African American step show. The work combines the distinct stepping styles from different fraternities and sororities and blends them to showcase the incredible variety of stepping. Tribute includes all the exciting elements of the step show--the use of props, ripples and floor work, creative formations, and audience participation.

NDLAMU

CHOREOGRAPHED BY JACKIE SEMELA

Ndlamu is a traditional dance of the Zulu people and for more than 25 years, Step Afrika! has studied the dance form through the Company's long-standing partnership with the Soweto Dance Theater. Step Afrika! makes this Ndlamu uniquely its own featuring solos created by each dancer as well as the addition of contemporary movement.

ISICATHULO

CHOREOGRAPHED BY JACKIE SEMELA

Isicathulo or "the gumboot dance" is a tradition created by South African workers who labored in the oppressive mining industry of then-apartheid South Africa. Isolated from their families for long periods, the miners transformed their rubber boots into percussive instruments to not only entertain but to share secret messages with each other. Isicathulo has become one of the most popular dance forms in South Africa and has striking similarities to the African-American tradition of stepping.

SOLO

Traditionally, stepping is performed by groups, big and small. In this Solo, Step Afrika! investigates the form at its most intimate level.

CHICAGO

CHOREOGRAPHED BY JAKARI SHERMAN

Chicago finds the rhythm in everyday situations. It is a percussive symphony using body percussion and up to 5 complex polyrhythms performed simultaneously in order to narrate a percussive dance "story." Inspired by a summer spent in the Windy City, this ground-breaking work transforms the 100-year old, folkloric tradition of stepping into contemporary performance art.

SPECIAL NOTE: Audience participation has been a part of the step tradition since its inception in the 1900s. Members of the audience are invited to clap, stomp, cheer and participate in call and response with the Artists.

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

C. Brian Williams, Founder & Executive Producer
Lamar Lovelace, Executive Director
Mfoniso Akpan, Artistic Director
Conrad R. Kelly II, Assistant Artistic Director
Artis Olds, Director of Arts Education and Community Programs
Margo Cunningham, Marketing Manager
Kristen L. Taylor, Company and Communications Manager
Misha Michel, Arts Education and Production Assistant
Niomi Collard, Production Manager

COMPANY

Ariel Dykes
Kamala Hargrove
Akievia Hickman
Jabari Jones
Conrad Kelly II
Isaiah O'Connor
Valencia Odeyka Emonni Springer
Ericka Still
Pelham Warner
Robert Warnsley



Learn more about Step Afrika!
Share your experience!
#StepAfrika
www.stepafrika.org

THE STORY OF STEP AFRIKA!

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping—a polyrhythmic, percussive dance form that uses the body as an instrument. Under Mr. Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's cultural exports, touring more than 50 countries across the globe. Step Afrika! is one of the top 10 African American dance companies in the world. Step Afrika! promotes stepping as a contemporary dance genre through critically acclaimed performances and arts education programs. Creatively engaging audiences in this nascent art form, the Company creates full-length productions that expand on stepping's unique American history.

Step Afrika! blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities; traditional West and Southern African dances; and an array of contemporary dance and art forms into a cohesive, compelling artistic experience. Performances are much more than dance shows; they integrate songs, storytelling, humor, and audience participation. The blend of technique, agility, and pure energy makes each

performance unique and leaves the audience with their hearts pounding.

The Company reaches tens of thousands of Americans each year through a 50-city tour of colleges and theatres and performs globally as Washington, DC's one and only Cultural Ambassador. Step Afrika! has earned Mayor's Arts Awards for Outstanding Contribution to Arts Education (2005); Innovation in the Arts (2008); and Excellence in an Artistic Discipline (2012); and performed at the White House for President Barack Obama and the First Lady.

Critically Acclaimed works, such as *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence and Drumfolk*, tour major U.S. cities. Step Afrika! is prominently featured at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History & Culture with an interactive exhibit on the art form of stepping. To learn more, visit www.stepafrika.org.

STEP AFRIKA! BIOS

CREATIVE TEAM



C. BRIAN WILLIAMS

Founder and Executive Produce
C. Brian Williams is a native of Houston, Texas, and a graduate

of Howard University. He recently earned the nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts—a 2022 National Heritage Fellow from the National Endowment for the Arts, for contributions to American heritage and culture. Brian first learned to step as a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. - Beta Chapter, in the Spring of 1989. While living in Southern Africa, he began to research the percussive dance tradition of stepping, exploring the many sides of this exciting, yet under-recognized American art form, and founded Step Afrika! in 1994. Williams has performed, lectured, and taught in Europe, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and

throughout the United States. He is the founder of the monumental Step Afrika! International Cultural Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa. Through Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's newest cultural exports and inspired the designation of Step Afrika! as Washington, DC's official "Cultural Ambassador." Williams has been cited as a "civic/community visionary" by NV Magazine, a "nation builder" by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and a "minority business leader" by the Washington Business Journal. He is the recipient of numerous Artist Fellowships; the Distinguished Arts Award from the Coalition for African Americans in the Performing Arts; the Pola Nirenska Award for Contemporary Achievement in Dance. He is also featured in *Soulstepping*, the first book to document the history of stepping. He also earned the 2008 Mayor's Art Award for Innovation in the Arts and has led the company to multiple Metro DC Dance Awards for "Outstanding New Work,"

“Excellence in Stage Design/Multimedia,” and “Outstanding Group Performance.” In 2018, Williams received the Mayor’s Arts Award for Visionary Leadership from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities



MFONISO AKPAN

Artistic Director
Mfoniso Akpan has trained extensively in tap, ballet, jazz, modern, African dance,

and step. While attending the State University of New York at Stony Brook, she majored in biochemistry and cultivated her stepping skills as a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Mfon began her training at the Bernice Johnson Cultural Arts Center and has performed at Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, the Apollo Theater, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Lincoln Center. Mfon toured with the off-Broadway show *Hoofin’ 2 Hittin’*, where she was a featured stepper and dancer.

NIOMI COLLARD

Lighting Designer / Production Manager

Niomi Collard is a Washington, D.C., and Tampa, FL-based lighting and projections designer. Niomi has designed lights and video on stage with Synetic Theater Company, The Source Festival, and GALA Hispanic Theater, and was nominated for a DC Regional Award for Outstanding Production in a Play for *KLYTMNESTRA* by Dane Figueroa Edidi at Theater Alliance

(2020). Niomi has been behind the camera as lighting director for PBS NewsHour and designed lighting throughout the Smithsonian’s many museums. She has assisted in designs at The Studio Theatre and Rorschach Theatre Company. Niomi helps lead TechOps for DragonCon in Atlanta, GA every Labor Day weekend, and is a graduate of the American University in Washington, D.C. Niomi joined Step Afrika! in 2017 and her favorite color is R318 Mayan Sun.

COMPANY



ARIEL DYKES

is a native of Gainesville, Florida. She received an Associate of Arts Degree in Musical Theatre

from Santa Fe College and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance from the University of Florida. She has trained in traditional and post-modern dance, jazz, voice, and acting, and has worked with such artists as Ailey Dancers’ Nathaniel Hunt and Samantha Barriento, Tony Award winner Scott Coulter, and Galen Hooks. She was introduced to stepping and strolling as a member of the Iota Lambda Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., where she choreographed step routines for the chapter and UF’s National Panhellenic Council. This is her first season with the Company.



KAMALA HARGROVE was born and raised in the Bronx, New York, and started dancing at the age of four. She trained professionally

in ballet, Horton, Graham, West African, jazz, and hip hop at the Alvin Ailey School and Dance Theater of Harlem until she was 18. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics, Theater, and Dance with a concentration in Dance and Choreography at Trinity College. Since graduating from Trinity College, Kamala has appeared in various music videos and live performances. She has performed with artists including Estelle, Mr. Vegas, Wizkid, and French Montana. She has also worked as a Teaching Artist in New York City, teaching elementary, middle, and high school students. This is Kamala's first season with the Company.



AKIEVIA HICKMAN is a native of Tallahassee, Florida, and holds an MBA from Florida A&M University. She is a

member of the Beta Alpha Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. In addition to being trained in hip-hop and jazz, Akievia has studied modern and contemporary dance under the direction of Shepiro Hardemon as a member of Mahogany Dance Theatre. Akievia was introduced to stepping in high school when she joined the Code Red Step team and

furthered her experience in college as a member of the Rampage Step Team.



JABARI JONES

is a Detroit, MI native who began dancing at the age of 8, inspired by recording artist Usher's "You Don't Have to Call" music

video. A self-taught dancer, his first ever taste of performing was dancing in the 79th Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Jabari has performed with Aloe Blacc, Missy Elliot, Lil Baby, City Girls, 2 Chainz, Rick Ross, and Lil Yachty and choreographed projects for the Thurgood Marshall College Fund. In addition to his extraordinary dance credits, Jabari is also an actor, appearing in productions of College Boyfriends, Nick Cannon's WildNOout, BET's American Soul, and Sophia Nahl Allison's Eyes on the Prize: Hallowed Ground. Jabari studied English at Morehouse College and he is a proud member of The Chi Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc where he served as Stroll Master.



CONRAD R.

KELLY II is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he attended Dillard High School of the Visual and Performing

Arts. While attending Florida A&M University, he became a member of the Marching 100 and the Strikers. After college, Conrad became a soloist for The Rolle Project in

Las Vegas as well as a dance instructor with Studio 305, where he regularly taught classes in hip-hop, contemporary, and jazz dance. He has won numerous awards as a choreographer and dancer. Conrad is a two-time recipient of the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities' prestigious Arts and Humanities Fellowship Program. He plans to use his extensive performing and teaching experiences to launch a mentoring program for young male dancers.



ISAIAH O'CONNOR

is a native of Miami, Florida. He received a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Florida Agricultural

and Mechanical University. In college, Isaiah joined the Strikers Dance Troupe under the direction of Shepiro Hardemon and studied hip-hop, modern, and urban soul. He aspires to use his talents to not only perform on stages across the world but to give back to those who helped him along the way. This is Isaiah's first season with Step Afrika!.



VALENCIA ODEYKA EMONNI SPRINGER

is a native of Brooklyn, New York. She holds a bachelor's degree in

Elementary Education and served as the first "Stand Queen" (captain) with the Ambassadors of Sound Marching band at Virginia Union University.

She studied ballet, jazz, African, hip-hop, and contemporary dance at Restoration Youth Arts Academy. Valencia has performed with Forces of Nature, Dance Africa (Brooklyn), and as part of a live installation entitled "A Primordial Place." She also worked as a social studies and science teacher, dance teacher/coach, guest choreographer for local New York/ Virginia majorette teams, and as a model for New York and Richmond, Virginia, fashion weeks. Valencia is a proud member of the Nu Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. and the Eta Psi Chapter of Tau Beta Sigma National Honorary band sorority.



ERICKA STILL

is a native of St. Petersburg, Florida. She began her training at SADA under the direction of Paulette W. Johnson, where

she studied tap, ballet, jazz, African, and contemporary dance. Ericka discovered the art form of stepping in middle school as a part of the AKAdemy Exquisite Gems program. Ericka received a Bachelor of Arts in Health Science: Pre-Occupational Therapy and she minored in Rehabilitation Management from Florida A&M University. Throughout college, she studied under the direction of Shepiro Hardemon as a member and Co-Assistant Artistic Director of Mahogany Dance Theatre. This is Ericka's first season with the Company.



PELHAM WARNER is a native of The Bronx, New York and has attended Dutchess Community

College. A self-taught dancer of Dancehall and student of Afro Street styles, his true passion can be found in the rhythm and beats of his percussive stepping style. As a teenager, Pelham was a member of The Players Club Steppers. He then found his home stepping with The Order of the Feather Fraternity, where he served as the team's Step Master and captain for five years. Pelham is an accomplished teaching artist, teaching step to students in the greater New York City area for several years. He recently performed

in the a capella musical The Movement by Kathy D. Harrison at The National Black Theater Festival. He is blessed to have the opportunity to continue his passion for stepping, performing, and teaching during his fourth season with Step Afrika!.



ROBERT WARNSLEY is a native of Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Illinois State University with a Bachelor of

Science in Information Technology. Robert learned to step and stroll as a member of the Eta Tau chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. In addition to stepping, he practices hip-hop and Chicago-style footworking.

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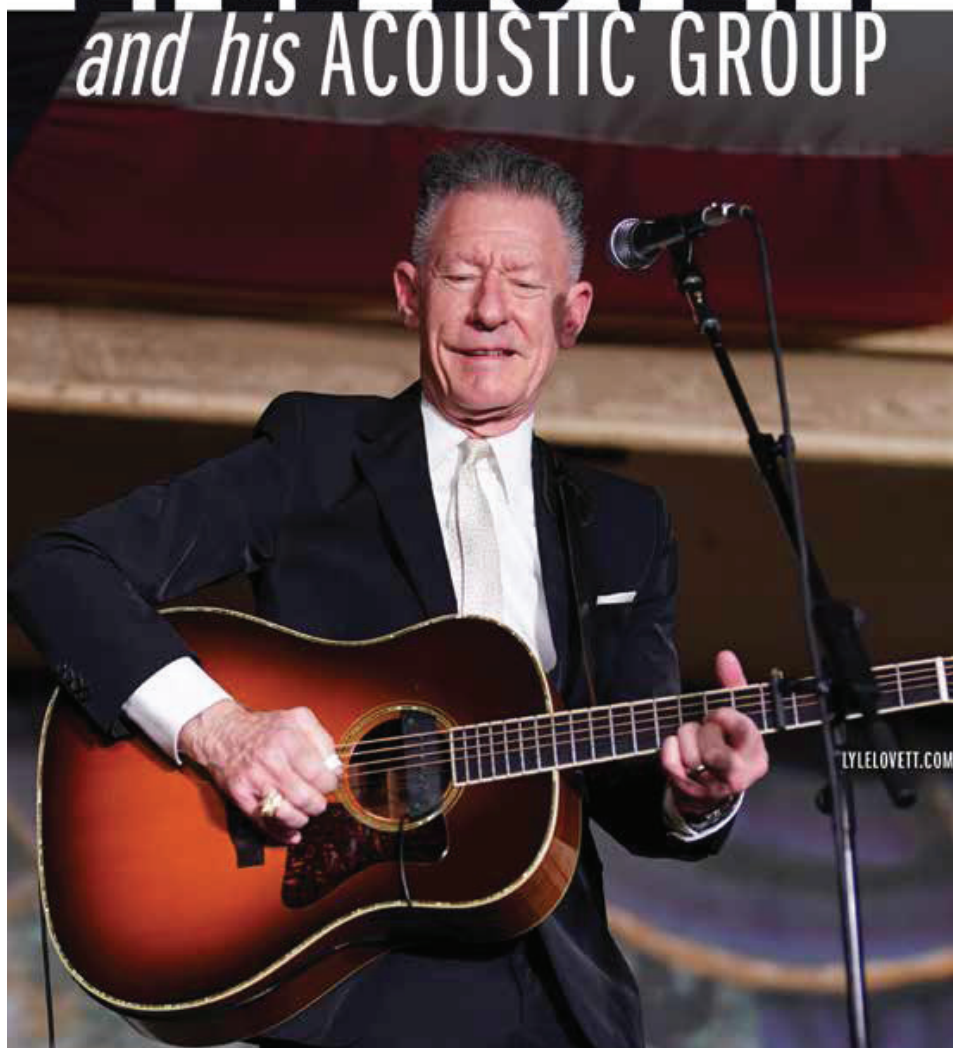
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