

MUSIC CENTER
STRATHMORE

Strathmore
and
C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! Founder & Executive Director
Present

STEP AFRIKA!
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Sunday, January 20, 2019, 5pm

FEATURING

Mfoniso Akpan Emmanuel Chacon Deatrice Clark Matthew Evans
Kiera Harley Conrad Kelly Vincent Montgomery
Ronnique Murray Olabode “Buddy” Oladeinde Anesia Sandifer
Jordan Spry Nicholas Stewart Jerel Williams
Ta’quez Whitted

WITH SPECIAL GUEST

Dem Raider Boyz Step Squad

DIRECTED BY

Mfoniso Akpan

COSTUME DESIGN

Kenaan Quander

SOUND DESIGN/ENGINEER

Kevin Alexander

**LIGHTING/
PROJECTION DESIGN**

Niomi Collard

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Simone Baskerville

PROGRAM

Opening Performance by Dem Raider Boyz Step Squad

Idemo!

Choreographed by Christopher Brient

Idemo means “let’s go” in the Croatian language. Inspired by Step Afrika!’s groundbreaking tour of southeastern Europe in 2015, *Idemo!* focuses on the power and precision of contemporary stepping combined with Step Afrika!’s classic use of audience participation.

Umngane

Choreographed by Makeda Abraham, Mfoniso Akpan, and Aseelah Shareef

Lead percussion by Kofi Agyei

Umngane, pronounced “oom-gah-ney” means friend in Zulu, and the work is a tribute to Step Afrika!’s cofounder, the late Mbuyiselwa “Jackie” Semela, and his notable choreographic work, *Still My Friend*. *Umngane* incorporates modern, West African, traditional Zulu, and “Semela” dance techniques to create an intriguing mélange of movement.

The Wade Suite

Deacon’s Dance (Movement One)

Original choreography by Bongkosi with Ronnique Murray

Lead vocals by Sherise Payne

Originally conceived as an Indlamu (traditional Zulu dance) solo, the movements were adapted to represent a deaconess as she prepares for church Sunday morning.

Wade (Movement Two)

Choreographed by Paul Woodruff, LeeAnet Noble, and Kirsten Ledford

Vocals by Matthew Evans, Vincent Montgomery, Sherise Payne, and Krislynn Perry

This movement celebrates the merging of the South African gumboot dance, collegiate stepping, and tap with the African American spiritual. Wade also honors the social and artistic role of the church in African American communities.

nxt/step:hip hop

Choreographed by Jakari Sherman

Original score by Johnathan Matis and Jakari Sherman

Projections by Miguel Asua

nxt/step:hip hop is a suite of three movements that incorporate the use of props and time signatures less commonly used in stepping. It blurs the lines between art forms as the artists assume the part of both dancers and musicians. This piece was first performed in 2006 with live rock musicians and cutting-edge video projections, demonstrating what *The Washington Post* called “the unlimited artistic possibilities of stepping.” The work has since been transformed several times to include an innovative jazz quartet, an 80-piece orchestra, and hip-hop music and movement.

Creation of *nxt/step:hip hop* was made possible by the National Performance Network, Dance Place and Dolly Hand Cultural Center. Additional support was provided by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities New Media and Audio Technologies Program and the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival.

Passing 25

Choreographed by Ryan Johnson with Christopher Brient, Brian McCollum, and Jason Nious

Passing 25 features Step Afrika!’s signature high energy, audience participatory, and rhythmic style. The work also showcases the diverse body percussive traditions found within Step Afrika!

Indlamu

Originally choreographed by Jackie Semela with contributions from countless artists over the years

Lead Percussionists: Matthew Evans and Vincent Montgomery

A cornerstone of South Africa’s Zulu culture, this legendary dance of warriors is performed with live drumming in full traditional attire. For more than 25 years, Step Afrika! has studied the dance traditions of the Zulu people, and now the Company makes it uniquely their own with solos created by each dancer and the addition of contemporary movement.

Special Note:

Community participation has been a part of the step tradition since its inception in the early 1900s—members of the audience are invited to clap, stomp, cheer, and participate in call and response with the Artists throughout the performance.

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. Under Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's cultural exports, touring more than 50 countries across the globe. Step Afrika! now ranks as one of the top 10 African American dance companies in the United States.

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.

Step Afrika! promotes stepping as an educational tool for young people, focusing on teamwork, academic achievement and cross-cultural understanding. The Company reaches tens of thousands of Americans each year through a 50-city tour of colleges and theaters 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 they performed at the White House for President Barack Obama and the First Lady.

Step Afrika! is featured prominently at the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African American History and Culture with the world's first stepping interactive. In 2017, Step Afrika! made its off-Broadway debut with the critically acclaimed production, *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*.

To learn more, visit www.stepafrika.org.

BIOGRAPHIES

C. BRIAN WILLIAMS

C. Brian Williams, Founder and Executive Director of Step Afrika!, is a graduate of Howard University and native of Houston, Texas. After living in southern Africa, Williams 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, South and Central America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Caribbean, and throughout the United States. He is a founder of the monumental Step Afrika! International Cultural Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Under Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's newest cultural exports. He has claimed the designation of Washington, DC's, official cultural ambassador. Williams has been cited as a "civic/community visionary" by *NV Magazine*, "nation builder" by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and "minority business leader" by the *Washington Business Journal*. His work is prominently showcased at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and he is featured in *Soulstepping*, the first book to document the history of stepping, and several documentaries discussing the art form. Williams is also a recipient of numerous awards including the Mayor's Arts Award for Innovation in the Arts and the Pola Nirenska Award for Contemporary Achievement in Dance. In 2018, Williams received the Mayor's Arts Award for Visionary Leadership from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

MFONISO AKPAN

Mfoniso Akpan, Artistic Director, 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. Akpan 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. Akpan toured with the off-Broadway show *Hoofin' 2 Hittin'*, where she was a featured stepper and dancer.

EMANUEL CHACON

Emanuel Chacon is a native of Wilmington, Delaware. He attended the University of Delaware where he studied marketing and interactive media. His rhythmic background began with the martial art of Capoeira at the age of 14. In college, he pledged Lambda Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Inc., leading his team to a number of championships throughout the Northeast. His dedication to performance has allowed him to work and dance for recording artists, Telemundo, *BET Music Matters*, *Vibe Magazine*, *Empire* (season 2), and to teach several workshops. His mission is to use his gift to spread positivity and mentor the younger generation.

DEATRICE CLARK

Deatrice Clark was born in Los Angeles, California. She is a graduate of Howard University with a bachelor of science in human development. Clark began stepping with the Quad Step Team in her freshman year at Howard. She organized the QuaDrew Step Team and lead them in many showcases. Clark is passionate about teaching and arts education. She has taught various step classes, camps and residencies around the DC metro area for Step Afrika!, Joy of Motion Dance Center, Motion Express, and SEJBodyMusic.

MATTHEW EVANS

Matthew Evans was born in Newark, New Jersey, but was raised in Clinton, North Carolina. He attended Elizabeth City State University where he pursued a degree in music with a concentration in vocal performance and a minor in mass communications. In college, Evans became a member of the Lambda Gamma chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. He took on the position of hop master for his chapter and lead them to a number of victories in step competitions throughout the East Coast. He also competed in major singing competitions including *BET's Sunday Best*, *Tank You're My Star*, *Mary Mary Singing Spotlight*, and Tasha Cobbs' *You're Dream Is Out There*.

KIERA HARLEY

Kiera Harley began training with Evangel Cathedral's Pure Expressions Dance Ministry at eight years old. She performed in Evangel's Broadway-style musical productions, where she shared the stage with gospel music legends. Throughout high school and college, she performed with Eudora Ballet, Dynamic Moves Dance Company, SOUL Dance Team, and Pasi3n Latin Dance Team. Harley attended Towson University, where she became a member of the Upsilon Mu chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and graduated with a bachelor of science in exercise science. Haley joined Step Afrika! in 2016.

CONRAD R. KELLY, II

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, Kelly became a soloist for The Rolle Project in Las

Vegas, Nevada, 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, with performance highlights that include *The Disney Christmas Parade*, *So You Think You Can Dance* (season 11), Steve Harvey's *Dreamers Academy*, *Super Bowl XLIV*, *Dance Africa Atlanta*, *Scream Tour*, Ruby Diamond's *Rock the Diamond*, and World Ballet, Inc's., *Rock the Ballet*. Kelly plans to use his performing and teaching experiences to open a mentoring program for young male dancers.

VINCENT MONTGOMERY, JR.

Vincent Montgomery, Jr. is an actor and entertainer hailing from Orlando, Florida, and is very excited to be in his inaugural season with Step Afrika! While attending Florida A&M University, he was an active member in the world-renowned Marching 100 Band, Attack Dance Crew, and Rampage Step Team. Montgomery's performance highlights include *Dreamgirls*, *Shuffle Along*, *Why Mosquitoes Buzz*, and *Once on This Island!* Montgomery has recurring roles on web-based projects such as *The Undergrad Chronicles* and *College Boyfriends*. He is a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and continues to advocate for holistic living as well as men's mental health awareness.

RONNIQUE MURRAY

Ronique Murray is a native of Washington, DC, and this is her first season with Step Afrika! Murray received a bachelor of fine arts degree in dance and choreography from Virginia Commonwealth University and began her professional teaching career as a dance educator at Fairmont High School (Fairmont, North Carolina) and Columbia Heights Education Center (Washington, DC). She has performed with Snoop Dogg, Daniel Gwirtzman, Scott Putman, Roger Lee Dance Company, Maverick Lemon Dance Project, Kyoko Ruch, and Judith Steel. In 2010, Murray was featured in a reconstruction of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's *Shelter* and in a featured PBS documentary about the Urban Bush Women. She is extremely proud to be a member of the Epsilon Zeta Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.

OLABODE "BUDDIE O" OLADEINDE

Olabode Oladeinde aka Buddie O is a native of Chicago, Illinois, who recently cocreated a clothing line to celebrate his love of fashion. Oladeinde received a bachelor of science degree in community health with a concentration in health planning and administration from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In addition to stepping, he continues to study and perform West African, hip-hop, and Chicago-style footworking. This is Oladeinde's second season with Step Afrika!, and he is a proud member of the Tau chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

ANESIA SANDIFER

Anesia Sandifer is a native of Augusta, Georgia. She attended the University of Georgia where she received a bachelor of business administration in finance with a minor in dance. She also became a member of the Zeta Psi chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., where she served as step master. Sandifer was a full scholarship recipient at the 2015 Debbie Allen Summer Intensive in Los Angeles, California. She has performed on ESPN for the Special Olympics 2015 World Games as a dancer for O.A.R. and Siedah Garrett.

JORDAN SPRY

Jordan Spry, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, joined Step Afrika! in 2012. He was first introduced to stepping in high school when he joined the Progressive African American Cultural

Society. Spry attended Howard University and graduated with a bachelor of business administration in marketing. While at Howard, he stepped with Drew Hall Step Team. Spry served as a head coach for Drew, where he choreographed many first place winning pieces for the *HU Homecoming Step Show*. Spry is also a freelance photographer capturing moments from Step Afrika!'s tours around the world and personal work at home in the DC metro area, and he is an aspiring model.

NICOLAS STEWART

Nicolas Stewart is a native of Buffalo, New York, who has been stepping competitively for 17 years. He is a graduate of Hobart and William Smith Colleges with a bachelor of arts in architecture, and he recently earned a master of fine arts in acting at the University of South Carolina. Stewart's step experience as a captain and coach led him to utilize the performing arts as a way of engaging and inspiring young artists around the world. He is extremely blessed to be a part of Step Afrika!

TA'QUEZ WHITTED

Ta'Quez Whitted is a proud alumnus of Elizabeth City State University where he captained the step team and graduated with a bachelor of science in criminal justice. Whitted started stepping in high school where he founded Mu Omega Psi Fraternity Step Team during his junior year in order to develop leadership as well as promote brotherhood and academic excellence.

JEREL L. WILLIAMS

Jerel L. Williams, from Jacksonville, Florida, has been stepping for more than 18 years. Dance and theater became a part of his life when he joined the Florida A&M University STRIKERS in 2007, where he trained to be a professional performer. Williams studied education at Tallahassee Community College. He served many years traveling to different communities as a student advocate, mentor, and a stepping and dance instructor who aims to lead young people through love, unity, and opportunity in order to reach their full potential. Williams joined Step Afrika! in September 2016.

GUEST ARTISTS

DEM' RAIDER BOYZ STEP SQUAD

Dem' Raider Boyz (DRB) Step Squad was founded in 2001 as the first successful all-male step team at Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, Maryland. For the past 18 years they have competed and performed at various high school and collegiate step shows and community events along the East Coast. DRB are the two-time-reigning High School Step Team National Champions and have remained the premier step team in the DC metro area, founded on the principles of brotherhood, scholarship, community service, and fun! With unparalleled precision, combined with energy and always full of creativity, the young men of DRB work extremely hard to learn and perfect the art of step.

KOFI AGYEI

Kofi Agyei, percussionist, began drumming at the age of six, starting out with Ghanaian traditional drums. At 13 years old, he was introduced to the *djembe*, and traditional styles of drumming from Guinea. His mentors include Nana Yao Opare Dinizulu I and Agyei has performed with the Dinizulu Drummers & Dancers, the Asase Yaa Dance Company, Devore Dance School, and many other ensembles. Agyei has also appeared at the North Charleston Arts Festival, Dance Africa DC, and off-Broadway with Step Afrika!'s critically acclaimed production of *The Migration*.