



THE EVOLUTION TOUR

Step Afrika! celebrates more than 30 years of critically acclaimed percussive performance with this groundbreaking program. As the world's leading authority on the art form of stepping, Step Afrika! is committed to pushing the boundaries of the tradition, exploring its nearly limitless artistic possibilities. This evening's production features exciting new dance works alongside a performance shaped and refined through the Company's long-standing collaboration with South Africa.

Welcome to The Evolution Tour!

Yebo CHOREOGRAPHED BY PELHAM WARNER JR.

Yebo (pronounced "yeah-boh") is an isiZulu word meaning "yes" or "I agree." This work combines the energy of Amapiano and Afro-Beat music with the latest dance movements and styles pouring out of the African continent.

Passing 30 CHOREOGRAPHED BY CHRISTOPHER BRIENT WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM VARIOUS ARTISTS

This dynamic "step" work honors three decades of Step Afrika!'s creativity. Passing 30 features intricate choreography by some of the company's most influential artists who have merged stepping with contemporary body percussion, spoken word, drumlines, and so much more. It's a tribute to Step Afrika!'s ever-evolving commitment to present the art form of stepping like no one else in the world.

Zulu ORIGINALLY CHOREOGRAPHED BY JACKIE SEMELA

Since 1994, Step Afrika! has studied Zulu traditional dance through its partnership with the legendary Soweto Dance Theatre in the Republic of South Africa. In August 2024, Step Afrika! returned to Johannesburg for a month of exchange, rehearsal, remembrance, and celebration. This performance of Zulu features new solos and choreography developed during that residency—an explosion of rhythm and movement.

SOLO

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

STRIKE CHOREOGRAPHED BY CONRAD R. KELLY II

The word percussion stems from the Latin percussio, meaning “to beat” or “to strike.” In this work, the artists of Step Afrika! strike their bodies and transform the stage into a percussive platform—while also playing one of the world’s oldest instruments. STRIKE is an exploration of rhythm, sound, and power, and it reminds us of the body’s outstanding capacity to speak, to command, and to resonate—without a single word.

STRIKE is commissioned in part by Strathmore and the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities. The work premiered in June 2025 at Strathmore.

THE STORY OF STEP AFRIKA!

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the world’s leading authority on the art form of stepping. Under Mr. Williams’ leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America’s cultural exports, touring more than 60 countries across the globe and ranking as one of the top 10 African American Dance Companies in the US.

Step Afrika! blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities; traditional 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, Innovation in the Arts, Excellence in an Artistic Discipline, and was inducted into the National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) Hall of Fame, the first Dance Company to earn this honor. Step Afrika! headlined President Barack Obama’s Black History Month Reception and performed at the first ever Juneteenth Celebration at the White House. The Company is featured prominently at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History & Culture with the world’s first stepping interactive exhibit and is the GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ title holder for the “largest STEPPING dance”.

Learn more about Step Afrika! at stepafrika.org.



C. BRIAN WILLIAMS



LAMAR LOVELACE



MFONISO AKPAN



CONRAD R. KELLY II



NYIA CHRISTIAN



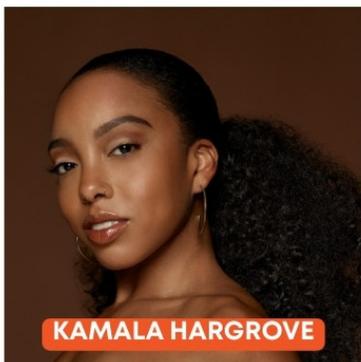
JEROD COLEMAN



ARIEL DYKES



KEOMI GIVENS JR.



KAMALA HARGROVE



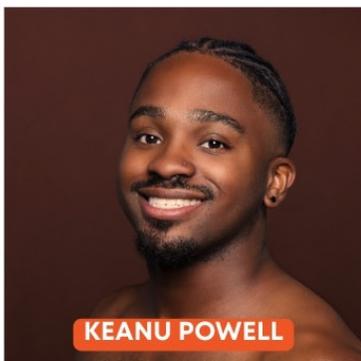
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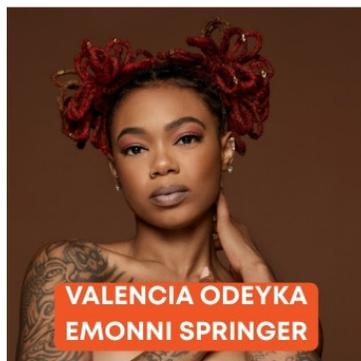
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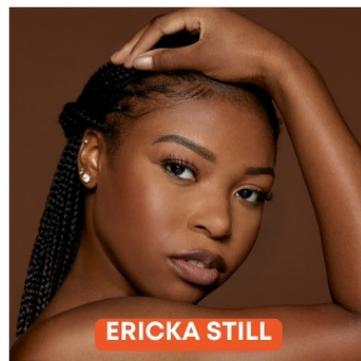
ISAIAH O'CONNOR



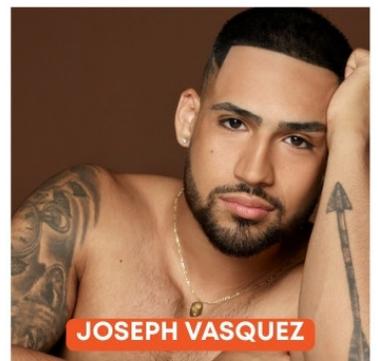
KEANU POWELL



VALENCIA ODEYKA
EMONNI SPRINGER



ERICKA STILL



JOSEPH VASQUEZ



PELHAM WARNER JR



ROBERT WARNSLEY



TRESHAWN WILLIAMS



JESSE SPARKS III

STEP AFRiKA! BIOS**CREATIVE TEAM****C. BRIAN WILLIAMS** (Founder and Executive Producer)

C. Brian Williams is a native of Houston, Texas, and a graduate of Howard University. 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 stencing, 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. 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."

In 2022, the National Endowment of the Arts designated Williams as a National Heritage Fellow, the nation's highest honor in folk and traditional arts. He is the recipient of numerous Artist Fellowships; the World Alive! Distinguished Artist Award by Arts Emerson; the Mayor's Arts Award for Visionary Leadership from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities; Distinguished Arts Award from the Coalition for African Americans in the Performing Arts; and 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 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." 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*. His work is featured prominently at the Smithsonian Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

LAMAR LOVELACE (Executive Director)

As Executive Director for Step Afrika!, Lamar Lovelace is responsible for the organization's strategy and operations, leading its staff, programs, and the execution of its mission. Working closely with Step Afrika!'s board of directors, he spearheads fundraising, marketing, operations, and long-range planning for the organization. He brings deep expertise from academia and has managed the organization's humanities-based partnerships.

In July 2017, Lamar joined Step Afrika! as Deputy Executive Director, where he oversaw the dance company's communications and marketing strategy, fundraising efforts, and financial operations. Previously, Lamar spent 8 years at Columbia University as Assistant Director in the Office of Community Outreach and Education and Director of Public Programs and Events. At the New York City-based campus, he managed community-based partnerships and special events and produced large-scale, humanities-based programming opportunities to engage students, faculty, and staff.

At Broward College in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Lamar was Director of Cultural Affairs and Student Engagement, where he created arts-based social justice programs and exhibitions. He holds Master's degrees in Arts Management and Oral History from Carnegie Mellon and Columbia, respectively, and a BA in Speech and Hearing Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Lovelace is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

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.

MARIANNE MEADOWS is a member of United Scenic Artists local 829. Nominated for the Helen Hayes award 4 times, she holds a BA from Sarah Lawrence College and an MFA from the University of Washington, with additional training at Lester Polakovs' Studio and Forum of Stage Design in NYC.

COMPANY BIOS

CONRAD R. KELLY II is a native of Fort Lauderdale, FL, who studied Criminal Justice at Florida A&M University. During his time at FAMU, he performed with the Marching 100 and The Strikers. Conrad later became a soloist for The Rolle Project in Las Vegas and a dance instructor at Studio 305, where he taught hip-hop, contemporary, and jazz. He has won numerous awards as a choreographer and dancer, including being a two-time recipient of the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities' prestigious Arts and Humanities Fellowship Program. A long-standing member of the Company, Conrad serves as Step Afrika!'s

Assistant Artistic Director and recently choreographed *The Movement*, an epic tribute to Black Lives Matter and the wave of activism in 2020. This is Conrad's ninth season with the Company.

NYA CHRISTIAN is a native of Cleveland, OH, and holds a BA in Political Science with minors in Sociology and Dance Arts from Howard University. A proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, she has served as Parliamentarian, Step Mistress, and Stroll Captain of the Alpha Chapter. Nya has choreographed for the White House Initiative on HBCUs and Howard University's 2022 Homecoming Step Show. She is formally trained in ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, modern, and West African. Nya was a member of ELEVATED Dance Crew's award-winning National 1st Place Championship team at the World of Dance competition, and she has performed on *Good Morning America* as part of the Black History Month segment "The Story of 9 Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities." This is Nya's third season with the Company.

JEROD COLEMAN is a native of Columbus, Georgia, and holds a BA in History from the University of South Alabama. While in college, he crossed into the Theta Delta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., where he served as Step and Stroll Master. Jerod has performed with the entertainment teams of the Atlanta Braves and Atlanta Falcons, and has competed in Red Bull Dance Your Style and DreamHack ATL. He also taught at Thomas H. Brewer Elementary School in Columbus, GA, where he founded and led an all-boys step team called the B.L.U.E. Steppers. This is Jerod's third season with the Company.

ARIEL DYKES is a native of Gainesville, FL, with an Associate of Arts in Musical Theatre from Santa Fe College and a BFA in Dance from the University of Florida. She is a member of the Iota Lambda Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., where she choreographed step routines for her chapter and UF's National Panhellenic Council. Ariel has trained in ballet, jazz, West African, and post-modern dance, as well as voice and acting. She has worked with notable artists such as Ailey Dancers Nathaniel Hunt and Samantha Barriento; Tony Award winner Scott Coulter; and Grammy Award-winning Gospel artist Smokey Norful. This is Ariel's fourth season with the Company.

KEOMI GIVENS JR. is a native of Miami, FL, where he trained with Ricardo Dume, Tyrell Rolle, Conrad R. Kelly II, Tanisha Cidel, Maribel Trujillo, and Robert Battle. He studied in the PAVAC Magnet program at Miami Northwestern Senior High School, as well as at New World School of the Arts and Mahogany Dance Theatre, where he served as Rehearsal Director and choreographer. Keomi has performed with Gravity Dance Troupe and Ricky Danco, and has choreographed for the Marching "100" of Florida A&M University, Ricky

Danco, and the Booker T. Washington Lady Twisters. This is Keomi's third season with the Company.

KAMALA HARGROVE is a native of the Bronx, NY, with a BA in Mathematics, Theater, and Dance from Trinity College, where she earned a BA in Mathematics, Theater, and Dance. Kamala studied at The Ailey School and Dance Theatre of Harlem and has appeared in various music videos and live performances. She has performed with artists including Estelle, Mr. Vegas, Wizkid, and French Montana. Kamala has also worked as a Teaching Artist in New York City, instructing elementary, middle, and high school students.

TERRENCE JOHNSON is a native of Broward County, FL, and holds a BA in General Studies from the University of Central Florida. He has over a decade of stepping experience, serving as a founding member of Hazard Step Team in Orlando, FL, and previously performing with the Adimu Men of Excellence, Inc. Step Team. In 2015, he was inducted into the UCF Chapter of Progressive Black Men, Inc. Terrence began his journey with Step Afrika! in 2023 as a guest artist and now enters his third season with the Company as a full-time artist.

JEMEEMA S. MONTROSE is a native of Brooklyn, NY. She attended ASA College, where she studied Health Information Technology. Jemeema is a proud member of Swing Phi Swing Social Fellowship, Incorporated, and has served as the Chair Facilitator of the National Step and Stroll Committee. She has led performances on numerous college campuses across the country, and Jemeema has also served as a step coach for middle and high school students. This is Jemeema's second season with the Company.

ISAIAH O'CONNOR is a native of Miami, FL, with a BS in Biology from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. A student of hip-hop, modern, and urban soul, Isaiah has previously stepped with the Strikers Dance Troupe under the direction of Shepиро Hardemon. This is Isaiah's fourth season with the Company.

KEANU POWELL is a native of Decatur, GA, with a BBA in Management from Howard University. While at Howard, Keanu became an active member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., serving as 2nd Vice President and Step Master. He is also a member of Kappa Kappa Psi National Honorary Band Fraternity, Inc., through the Eta Omega Chapter, and served as Drum Major for the 2021-2023 seasons. Keanu was prominently featured on *Good Morning America* representing Howard University. He has also performed nationally with Howard's band at major events, including Nike Headquarters and the inaugural NBA HBCU Classic. This is Keanu's second season with the Company.

VALENCIA ODEYKA EMONNI SPRINGER is a native of Brooklyn, NY, with a BA in Elementary Education from Virginia Union University. 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, where she served as the first “Stand Queen” (captain) with the Ambassadors of Sound Marching Band. An alum of 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 has also worked as a social studies and science teacher, dance teacher/coach, guest choreographer for local New York and Virginia majorette teams, and as a model for New York and Richmond, Virginia, fashion weeks. This is Valencia’s seventh season with the Company.

ERICKA STILL is a native of St. Petersburg, FL, and holds a BS in Health Science, Pre-Occupational Therapy, with a minor in Rehabilitation Management from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. She previously stepped with AKAdemy Exquisite Gems and trained under Paulette W. Johnson at SADA and Shepiro Hardemon as a member and Co-Assistant Artistic Director of Mahogany Dance Theatre. This is Ericka’s fourth season with the Company.

JOSEPH VASQUEZ hails from Guttenberg, NJ, and has a BA in Exercise Science from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. In college, Joseph danced with the Rutgers Bachata Performance Team, where he choreographed and led the team for four years. He is a member of Lambda Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Incorporated—the first Latin fraternity to step and stroll—and The Revels Stroll Team, where he was led by former team captains Francisco Pozo and Carlos Zapata. This is Joseph’s fourth season with the Company.

PELHAM WARNER JR. is a native of the Bronx, NY, and holds a BA from Dutchess Community College. Pelham is a member of The Order of the Feather Fraternity, where he served as the team’s Step Master and captain for five years, and he has previously danced with The Players Club Steppers. Pelham has worked as a dance instructor in the greater New York City area and recently performed in the a cappella musical *The Movement* by Kathy D. Harrison at The National Black Theater Festival. This is Pelham’s seventh year with the Company.

ROBERT WARNSLEY is a native of Chicago, IL, with a BS in Information Technology from Illinois State University. A member of the Eta Tau chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Robert served as the step and stroll master for four years and has organized, competed, and placed first in numerous step shows. He has partnered with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America to teach stepping, and he actively participates in community

service projects in Chicago. Robert also studies, practices, and teaches dancehall and various Afro styles in the Chicagoland, DMV, and NYC areas. This is Robert's seventh season with the Company.

TRESHAWN WILLIAMS is a native of Davenport, IA, and holds a BFA in Dance from the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in Los Angeles. He was introduced to competitive stepping as a child through Step with Soul (formerly Wayman AME Steppers), where he later became the first junior artistic director. TreShawn has trained extensively in ballet, jazz, and hip-hop, and has performed with Inspire Danz Company, the LA Sparks, and the Disney & Lego web series. He has choreographed for musicals, dance teams, and concerts, including Kanye West's Donda Choir. This is TreShawn's second season with the Company.

SPECIAL GUEST BIOS

JESSE SPARKS III, known professionally as DJ JSparkz, is a dynamic host, DJ, and stepper from Seat Pleasant, MD. A graduate of Bowie State University with a degree in Radio and Television Broadcasting, he is a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (Delta Mu Chapter, initiated 2022), where he served as Stroll Master, choreographing and leading performances that celebrated the fraternity's tradition and spirit. Jesse's artistry is rooted in dance, with training under Queen P the Brand and performances with the renowned Beat Ya Feet Kings. He has brought his talent and energy to major stages with the Washington Wizards, Mystics, Commanders, and D.C. United.

CAST LIST WILL VARY BY SHOW. PLEASE CONFIRM YOUR SHOW'S CAST LIST WITH OUR COMPANY MANAGER AT COMPANYMANAGER@STEPAFRIKA.ORG.

Headshots of the Company and Staff by Keith Major and Jati Lindsay.