



Saturday, February 25, 2023, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Step Afrika!

Mfoniso Akpan, artistic director

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

Jerel L. Williams

COVID-19: Masking is required inside the auditorium, and is strongly recommended, though not required, for indoor lobby/waiting areas as well as outdoor spaces. Up-to-date vaccination is strongly recommended, though not required for entry. The latest information on Cal Performances' COVID-19 safety policies is available at calperformances.org/safety.
Photographing and/or recording this performance is strictly prohibited.

PROGRAM

Tribute

Ndlamu

Isicathulo

Solo

Chicago

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.

PROGRAM NOTES

TRIBUTE

Tribute pays homage to the African American step show. The work combines the distinct stepping styles from different fraternities and sororities and blends them together 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. (Choreographed by Jakari Sherman.)

NDLAMU

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. (Choreographed by Jackie Semela.)

ISICATHULO

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. (Choreographed by Jackie Semela.)

SOLO

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

CHICAGO

Chicago finds the rhythm in everyday situations. It is a percussive symphony using body percussion and up to five 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. (Choreographed by Jakari Sherman.)

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 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 ten 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.

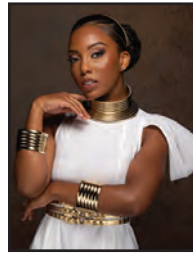
Step Afrika! blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities; traditional West and Southern African dances; and an array of contemporary dance and art forms into a cohesive, compelling artistic experience. Performances are much more than dance shows; 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 theaters and performs globally as Washington, DC's 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 to major US 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.

THE COMPANY

Ariel Dykes is from Gainesville, Florida. She received her AA degree in musical theater from Santa Fe College and a BA in dance from the University of Florida. Dykes has trained in traditional and post-modern dance, jazz, voice, and acting and worked with such artists as Ailey dancers Nathaniel Hunt and Samantha Barriento, Tony Award-winner Scott Coulter, and world-renowned choreographer and performer 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.



Kamala Hargrove is a native of the Bronx, New York. She began dancing at the age of four. She has trained in ballet, Horton, Graham, West African, jazz, and hip-hop at the Alvin

Ailey School and Dance Theater of Harlem. Hargrove received her BA in mathematics and theater and dance with a concentration in dance and choreography at Trinity College. She has performed with artists including Estelle, Mr. Vegas, Wizkid, and French Montana and served as a guest artist on tour with Step Afrika! Hargrove has also worked as a Teaching Artist in New York City, teaching elementary, middle, and high school students.

Akievia Hickman is a native of Tallahassee, Florida. She received an MBA from Florida A&M University. Hickman is a member of the Beta Alpha chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Trained in hip-hop and jazz, she also studied modern contemporary dance under the direction of Shepиро Hardemon as a member of Mahogany Dance



joined the Code Red Step team and furthered her experience in college as a member of the Rampage Step Team.

Theatre. Hickman created her own dance company, Killer Heels, which has helped build her into a great choreographer. She was introduced to stepping in high school when she



Jabari Jones is a native of Detroit, Michigan. He studied English at Morehouse College. Jones started dancing at the age of 8—inspired by the performances of recording artist Usher.

He has performed with artists including Aloe Blacc, Detroit 1-8-7, Elijah J, Jacob Latimore, Missy Elliot, Rick Ross, Quality Control (Lil Baby, Layton Greene), the City Girls, and the One Music Festival. Highlights from his performance credits include the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, acting in the productions of *College Boyfriends* and *Mooz-Lum*, principal stepper and pledgee on BET+ show *Bigger*, actor in *American Soul*, featured in Krogers HBCU homecoming commercial, and as a guest fraternity dancer/player on the television show *Wild N Out*. Jones joined Step Afrika! in 2017. He is a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

Conrad R. Kelly II, Assistant Artistic Director of Step Afrika!, 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



ing experiences to open a mentoring program for young male dancers.

Vegas as well as a dance instructor with Studio 305, where he regularly taught classes in hip-hop, contemporary, and jazz dance. Kelly plans to use his performing and teach-



Isaiah O'Connor is from Miami, Florida. He received a BS in biology from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. In college, O'Connor 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 learn about performing while also giving back to those who helped him.



Valencia Odeyka Emonni Springer is a native of Brooklyn, New York. She received her 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 and has performed with Forces of Nature and Dance Africa (Brooklyn). Springer 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.



Sekou Luke



Ericka Still is a native of St. Petersburg, Florida. She has been dancing since a young age at SADA under the direction of Paulette W. Johnson, where she trained in tap, ballet, jazz, Af-

rican, and contemporary dance. Still discovered the art form of stepping in middle school as a part of the AKAdemy Exquisite Gems program. She received a BA 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.

Pelham Warner, is from the Bronx, New York, and attended Dutchess Community College. As a teenager, he was a member of the Players Club Steppers. He then



found his home stepping with the Harlem, New York-based group, The Order of the Feather Fraternity, where he served as the team's Step Master and captain for five years. He

is blessed to have the opportunity to continue his passion for stepping, performing, and teaching with Step Afrika!



Robert Warnsley is a native of Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Illinois State University with a BS in information technology. he 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.

Jerel L. Williams, is a native of Jacksonville, Florida and he has been stepping for more than 20 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 stepping and dance instructor, leading young people through love, unity, and opportunity and to reach their full potential. Williams joined Step Afrika! in September 2016.

THE CREATIVE TEAM



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

C. Brian Williams, Founder and Executive Producer of Step Afrika!, is a native of Houston, Texas and graduate of Howard University. He is a National Heritage Fellow as designated by the National Endowment of the Arts, the nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. Williams 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 tra-

dition 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, including the 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. Williams 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.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Headshots of the company artists and
C. Brian Williams by Drew Xeron.

Headshot of Mfoniso Akpan by Jordan Spry.

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*

Marianne Meadows, *Assistant Production
Manager*

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Intiman Theatre, Meany
Center for the Performing
Arts, Seattle Children's
Theatre, Seattle Choruses,
Seattle Opera, Seattle
Rep, Seattle Shakespeare
Company, Seattle Theatre
Group, Taproot Theatre
Company, Village Theatre

