

STEP AFRIKA!
VIP GALA 2025



STAFF

C. BRIAN WILLIAMS
FOUNDER AND
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

LAMAR LOVELACE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MFONISO AKPAN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

CONRAD R. KELLY II
ASSISTANT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

PASCHA BARNWELL
COMPANY MANAGER

MARGO CUNNINGHAM
SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER

MILEN MATTHEWS
MANAGER, ARTS EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

CHRYSTAL VAUGHAN
MANAGER, EVENTS AND
SPECIAL PROJECTS

DANCERS

KENNETH L. ALEXANDER
NYA CHRISTIAN
JEROD COLEMAN
ARIEL DYKES
KEOMI GIVENS JR.
LEANDER GRAY
KAMALA HARGROVE
TERRENCE JOHNSON
JEMEEMA S. MONTROSE
CONRAD R. KELLY II
ISAIAH O'CONNOR
KEANU POWELL
VALENCIA SPRINGER
ERICKA STILL
BRIE TURNER
JOSEPH VASQUEZ
PELHAM WARNER JR.
ROBERT WARNSLEY
TRESHAWN WILLIAMS

VIP GALA 2025 SPONSORS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



Ann Belkov

Reg Brown & Tiffeny Sanchez



PRODUCER



**John W. Hill
& Family**



DIRECTOR

C. Brian Williams
English Hudson Consulting

Maia Hunt Estes
The Menkiti Group &
Keller Williams Properties

HEADLINER

Dyonicia "Dy" Brown
**Erica Green &
Jeffery Kennerly**
Christopher Montgomery
Troy Patterson

Kym Taylor
Melanie Trottman
**Mrs. Natasha Watkins &
Dr. Benjamin O. Watkins III**
Oracle

PERFORMER

David & Monique Canada
Tiane & Kyle Doman
Janel Merritt

Latrena M. Owens
Glenn Singleton
Conrad Woody

PATRON

Ashley Adams
BJ Berliner
Catherine Hogan

Maria Kane
Jeffery Tribble

Special thanks to our generous in-kind sponsor **Tito's**

OUR MISSION

Step Afrika!'s mission is to preserve, expand and promote an appreciation for stepping through professional performances and to educate, motivate and inspire young people in and out of school through arts education programs that emphasize teamwork, commitment, and discipline.

OUR VISION

As one of the most celebrated African American dance companies in the world, Step Afrika! fortifies our relationships in the communities we serve and highlights our mission to preserve and promote the tradition of stepping. It is our vision to expand programmatic efforts to reach larger audiences.

EMPOWER OUR YOUTH

Your sponsorship supports Step Afrika!'s arts education programs for youth in Washington, DC. Through in-school residencies, interactive performances, and Summer Steps with Step Afrika!, we introduce thousands of students to the tradition of stepping, helping them build pride, confidence, and connections through rhythm and movement.



ORDER OF PROGRAM

STEP AFRIKA! VIP GALA 2025

Monday, June 9, 2025

Emcee: Ariel Dykes, Full-Time Company Member

OPENING PERFORMANCE

Strike (excerpt)

WELCOME

Brandon Todd, Board Chair

SPONSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Mfoniso Akpan

PERFORMANCE

Passing 30

RAISE YOUR PADDLE

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

C. Brian Williams

PERFORMANCE

Umngane (excerpt)

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 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. 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. C. Brian Williams holds an honorary Doctorate from the University of the District of Columbia.



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.

COMPANY



CONRAD R. KELLY II is a native of Fort Lauderdale, FL who studied Criminal Justice at Florida A&M University. Following his time with A&M's Marching 100 and The Strikers, Conrad became a soloist for The Rolle Project in Las Vegas and a dance instructor with Studio 305, where he regularly taught classes in hip-hop, contemporary, and jazz. Conrad has won numerous awards as a choreographer and dancer, and is namely 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 most recently choreographed The Movement, an epic tribute to Black Lives Matter and the domino effect of activism experienced in 2020. This is Conrad's seventh season with the Company.



KENNETH L. ALEXANDER is a native of Savannah, GA, with a BFA in Interior Design from Valdosta State University. First introduced to stepping through the Sigma Beta Club, Kenneth became a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., and Delta Phi Delta Dance Fraternity, Inc., where he served as Step and Stroll Master for both organizations. He has trained in hip-hop under VYB Dance Company and performed at the Super Bowl LV Halftime Show in Tampa Bay. This is Kenneth's second season with the Company.



NYA CHRISTIAN is a native of Cleveland, OH, with a BA in Political Science, Sociology, and Dance Arts from Howard University. A proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, she has served as the Alpha Chapter Parliamentarian, Step Mistress, and Stroll Captain. Nya has choreographed performances for the White House Initiative on HBCUs and Howard University's 2022 Homecoming Step Show. She also 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 second season with the Company.



JEROD COLEMAN is a native of Columbus, GA, with a BA in History from the University of South Alabama. He is a member of 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, Atlanta Falcons, 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 second 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 third season with the Company.



KEOMI GIVENS JR. is a native of Miami, FL, where he trained with Ricardo Dume, Traci Young-Byron, Conrad Kelly II, Tanisha Cidel, Maribel Trujillo, and Robert Battle. He has studied at the New World School of the Arts and The Mahogany Dance Theatre, where he served as Rehearsal Director and choreographer. Keomi has danced with Gravity Dance Troupe and Young Contemporary Dance Theatre (YCDT). In addition to his work as a dancer, Keomi has choreographed for The Marching 100 of Florida A&M University, RickyDanco, and the Booker T. Washington Lady Twisters. This is Keomi's second season with the Company.



LEANDER GRAY is a native of Washington, D.C., and studied at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Leander has performed at the Black Leaves Project, CityDance Creating the Magic Concerts, Art All Night DC, the Elements Urban Arts Collective Annual Showcase, and the DC Youth Freestyle Battle. He has participated in the prestigious Monsters of Hip Hop Intensive and the Kennedy Center Dance Lab and was featured in a music video by Revolution Marz. This is Leander's first 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. This is Kamala's third season with the Company.



TERRENCE JOHNSON is a native of Broward County, FL, with a BA in General Studies from the University of Central Florida. Terrence has stepped with ADIMU: Men of Excellence Step Team and is a co-founder, former president, and performer of the Hazard Step Team. He was inducted into the UCF Chapter of Progressive Black Men, Inc. in 2015. This is Terrence'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 Shepiro Hardemon. This is Isaiah's third season with the Company.



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 first 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 first 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 sixth 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 first season with the Company.



ERICKA STILL is a native of St. Petersburg, FL, with a BS in Health Science, Pre-Occupational Therapy, and a Minor in Rehabilitation Management from Florida A&M University. Ericka previously stepped with AKAdemy Exquisite Gems and studied under the direction of Paulette W. Johnson and Shepiro Hardemon as a member and Co-Assistant Artistic Director of Mahogany Dance Theatre. This is Ericka's third season with the Company.



BRIE TURNER is a native of Lithonia, GA, with a BA in Strategic, Legal, and Management Communications from Howard University, where she graduated magna cum laude. She is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., serving as Chapter President, and she also pursued a minor in Theater Arts Administration. Brie served as both captain and co-captain of the Howard University Bisonettes Dance Ensemble and has dedicated over 10 years to technical dance training. This is Brie's third 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 third 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 sixth 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 sixth season with the Company.

Headshots by Keith Major and Jati Lindsay



STEP AFRIKA!

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

JUNE 27 - 28, 2025 at THE MUSIC CENTER
AT **STRATHMORE** in BETHESDA, MD

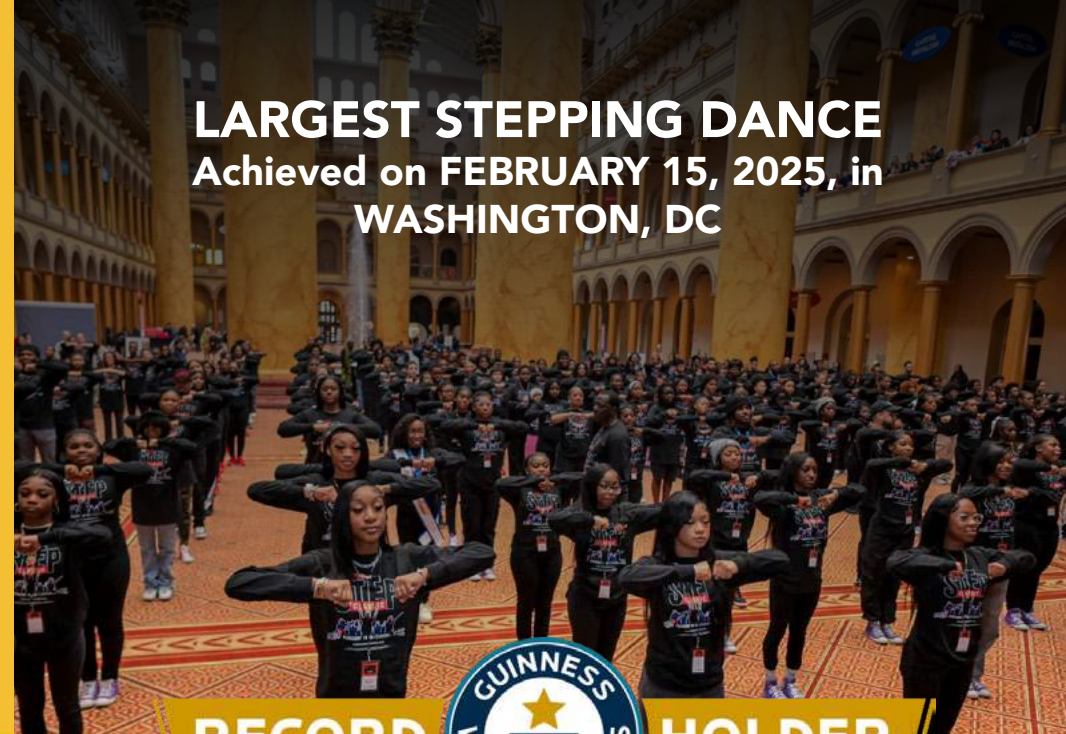
Celebrate 30 years of Step Afrika! at Strathmore with groundbreaking performances featuring two world premieres and special guest Sweet Honey in the Rock®



PURCHASE TICKETS TODAY



LARGEST STEPPING DANCE
Achieved on FEBRUARY 15, 2025, in
WASHINGTON, DC



RECORD



HOLDER



Scan to watch our historic moment!

66

DON'T JUST DANCE... MOVE THE WORLD

99

- Martha Graham

30 **STEP AFRIKA!**
1994 | CELEBRATING THIRTY YEARS | 2024

The Brown Sanchez Family
Congratulates Step Afrika! on
Moving the World for Over 30 Years





The **DC Housing Finance Agency** is a proud and continuous supporter of Step Afrika!



The District's resource for innovative solutions in affordable housing finance. Check out our upcoming homeownership event below.



2 0 2 5

DC HOUSING FINANCE AGENCY'S

HOMEOWNERSHIP FAIR

Saturday, June 21

10AM - 3PM | R.I.S.E Demonstration Center

Join us at **DCHFA's Homeownership Fair** to connect with local lenders and real estate agents. Discover valuable information about D.C. homebuying programs, credit repair options, and much more!

Registration is required.



Scan to Register!

HomeownershipDC.eventbrite.com

CoStar Group is a
proud supporter of
Step Afrika!

CoStarGroup.com



 CoStar Group™



Thank you for making a difference

Every day, devoted volunteers in our town give amazing gifts of resources and time to help our neighbors grow stronger.

We offer our support to Step Afrika! for their unlimited spirit and contribution to preserve, expand and promote an appreciation for stepping through professional performances. It's this heartfelt connection that can make a difference in our community and beyond.

Visit us at bankofamerica.com/about





AUGUST 4 - 9, 2025
at ARENA STAGE



Step Afrika!'s **week-long summer camp for rising 4th to 12th graders** will return this summer! For Summer Steps details and registration, please visit: stepafrika.org/summersteps

* SAVE THE DATES FOR *

STEP AFRIKA!'S MAGICAL MUSICAL HOLIDAY STEP SHOW

RETURNING TO ARENA STAGE **DECEMBER 5 - 21, 2025**



TICKETS GO ON SALE
AUGUST 1, 2025



Celebrating the
Life and Legacy of
**Jerry
Lewis**



Working hand-in-hand with local partners to build **strength in our community.**

At Amazon, we look to leverage our scale for good to help strengthen local communities. That means combining our strengths with those of community partners, working together to find creative solutions that have a lasting impact.

www.aboutamazon.com/impact

amazon

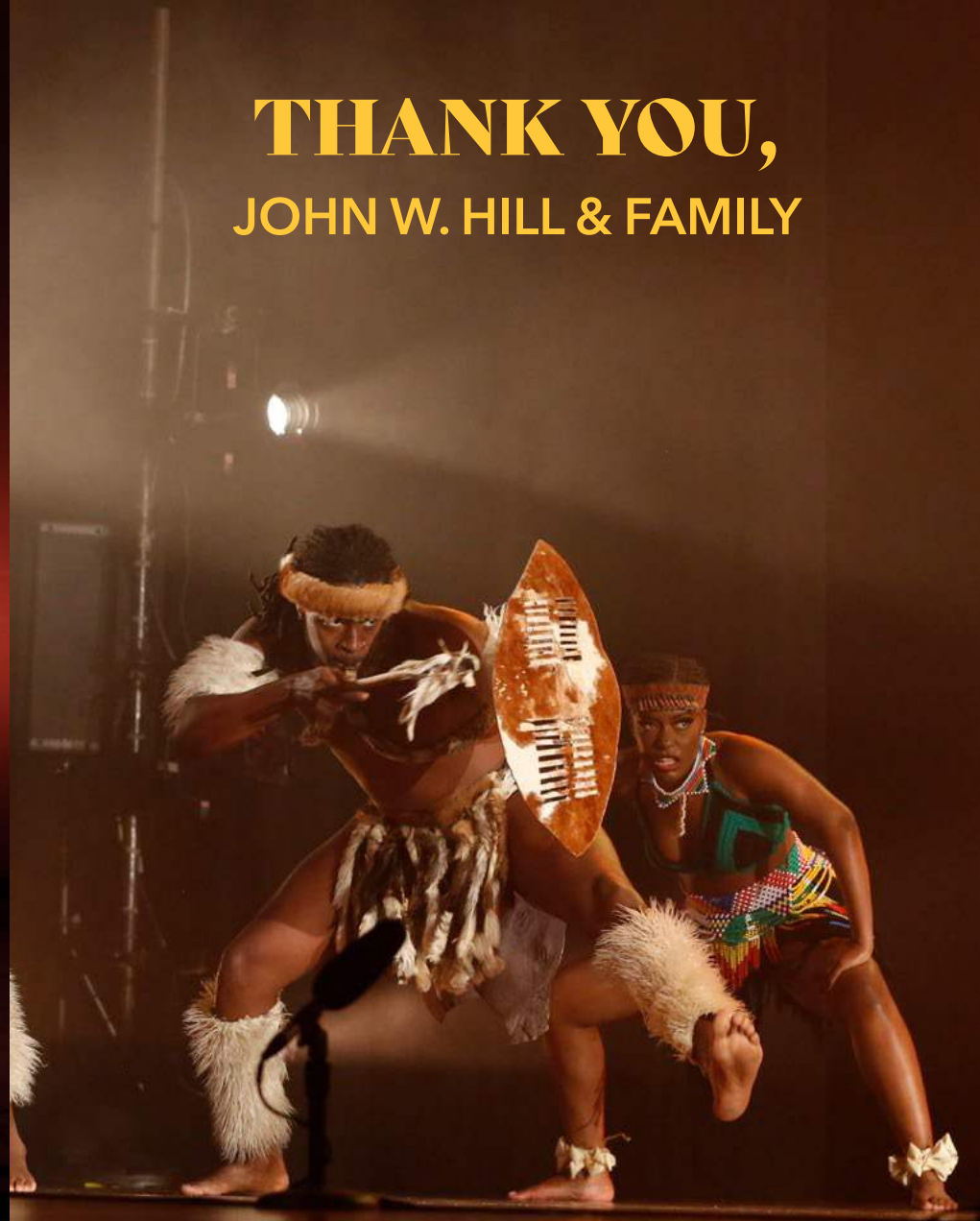


Washington
Gas

Washington Gas proudly supports
Step Afrika!'s VIP Gala 2025!

www.washingtongas.com

THANK YOU,
JOHN W. HILL & FAMILY



30 **STEP AFRIKA!**
1994 | CELEBRATING THIRTY YEARS | 2024



We Are Experts for Social Good.

With a track record to prove it,
English Hudson supports
justice-centered organizations
by advancing fundraising,
general strategy, digital strategy,
design, executive search, and more.

We are honored to support
Step Afrika and their
commitment to leading impactful
change in our communities!

english-hudson.com

THANK YOU, MAIA HUNT ESTES



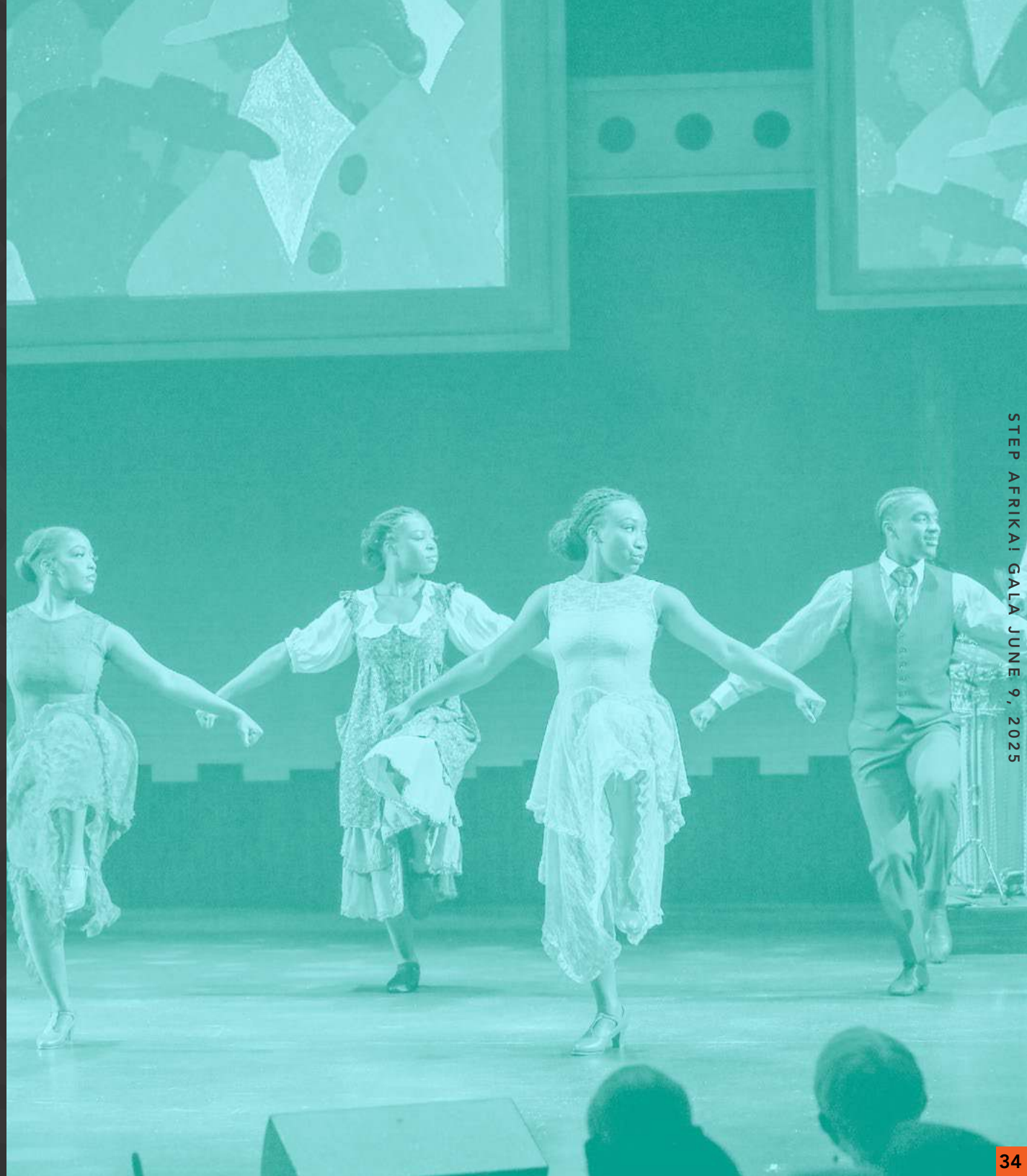
Step Afrika! performs "the Movement" in South Africa, 2024

GALA COMMITTEE

- Ann Belkov
- Brandon Todd
- C. Brian Williams
- Maia Hunt Estes
- Marliisa Hudson
- Mignon and Kebharu Smith
- Tiane Doman

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Brandon Todd - Chair
- Kym Taylor - Vice Chair
- Natasha Watkins - Secretary
- Jeffery D. Kennerly - Treasurer
- C. Brian Williams - Founder + Executive Producer
- Lamont Akins
- Ann Belkov
- Dyonicia "Dy" Brown
- David Canada
- Tiane Doman
- Maia Hunt Estes
- John W. Hill
- Marliisa Hudson
- Janel Merritt
- Christopher Montgomery
- Troy Patterson
- Kebharu Smith
- Glenn Eric Singleton
- Melanie Trottman
- Conrad Woody



STEP AFRIKA! GALA JUNE 9, 2025



f @StepAfrika1994

@StepAfrika

@StepAfrika

Step Afrika!
1333 H Street NE
Washington DC 20002
www.stepafrika.org