

STEP AFRIKA! 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

SOWETO THEATRE

SEPTEMBER 4 & 5, 2024 at 19h00



INTRODUCTION

Step Afrika! **began as an International Cultural Festival in Soweto, South Africa, on December 4, 1994**, founded by C. Brian Williams, Thembinkosi Hlathswayo, Moeketsi Koena, and Mbuyiselwa “Jackie” Semela. Rooted in artistic collaboration, cross-cultural workshops, and performances, it has since evolved into a global phenomenon. Today, Step Afrika! is recognized worldwide, performing on prestigious stages across the United States and captivating audiences in over 60 countries.

Step Afrika! celebrates 30 years tonight with this ground-breaking production at the Soweto Theatre. **South African and African American dancers will unite in a vibrant fusion of rhythm and culture**, demonstrating how two rich cultural heritages come together in perfect harmony. We thank you for sharing in this milestone with us.

STEP AFRIKA!'S FOUNDERS





1994



**THE FIRST STEP AFRIKA!
INTERNATIONAL
CULTURAL FESTIVAL**



STEP AFRIKA!'S EARLY YEARS



1995, 1996, AND 1997



EXPLORE STEP AFRIKA!'S TIMELINE

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RUN OF SHOW

Umbulelo

Choreographed by Thabiso Manare

*Instrumentals by Sipho "Spuku" Dlamini, Mojalefa Mosia,
and Sifiso Maseka*

*Vocals by Nosipho Mtotoba, Sibusiso Shozi,
and Simphiwe Sanele Sikhakhane*

Performed by the Maison De la Dance Academy

Welcome

C. Brian Williams and Moeketsi Koena

Rebirth (World Premiere)

Choreographed by Thuli Semela

*Instrumentals by Sipho "Spuku" Dlamini, Mojalefa Mosia,
and Sifiso Maseka*

*Vocals by Aphiwe Duneko, Nosipho Mtotoba, Sibusiso Shozi,
and Simphiwe Sanele Sikhakhane*

*Performed by Stephen Chauke, Aphiwe Dumeko, Busisiwe
Mahlangu, Danile Mashite, Sifiso Morobe, Motsau Motsau,
Karabo Motsikoe, and Tholakele Nkal,*

"Inside a person, there are many persons." We see an inward journey of a civilization held together by one thing: Breath. From Mthi/tree/motho/muntu/ntu/bathu, we witness oneness and the complexities of our paths from or to each other.

The piece begins with the image of a tree, accompanied by voices, groans, and chants that mirror the tree's subtle movements. The tree holds deep symbolic meanings, often representing life, birth, death, and the strength of women. The work also portrays a woman connecting with her children, guiding them on the right path, and being a source of constant support.

Celebration

Choreographed by Step Afrika!

Performed by Kenneth L. Alexander, Nya Christian, Jerod Coleman, Ariel Dykes, Keomi Givens Jr., Kamala Hargrove, Nepri James, Isaiah O'Connor, Na'imah Ray, Joseph Vasquez, Pelham Warner Jr., and Robert Warnsley

Celebration honors the vibrant tradition of stepping, spotlighting the diverse styles from African American fraternities and sororities while embracing the joy of our return to South Africa.

Solve 4X

Choreographed by Moeketsi Koena

Performed by Irvin Teme

SOLVE 4X is a cutting-edge innovation designed to project an unstructured yet grounded moment of selfless energy, creating an opening for each individual to solve their own inherent human challenges. This piece explores the dimensions of kinetic energy inspired by nature and the perceived limitations of freedom. It reflects on the insatiable desires and wants of humanity, which arise from not using our natural senses and potential energy to their fullest. The piece concludes with an invitation for the audience to renew their commitment to solving their own Xs.

Wade

Choreographed by Step Afrika!'s Kirsten Ledford, LeeAnet Noble, and Paul Woodruff

Vocals by Aphiwe Duneko, Ariel Dykes, Nosipho Mtotoba, Sibusiso Shoji, and Simphiwe Sanele Sikhakhane

Performed by Jerod Coleman, Kamala Hargrove, Terrence Johnson, Conrad Kelly II, Isaiah O'Connor, Na'imah Ray, Valencia Springer, Ericka Still, Brie Turner, and Robert Warnsley

Wade shows the continuity in African and African American percussive dance traditions by blending the South African Gumboot Dance, tap, and stepping with the African American spiritual.

- Intermission -

Izithukuthuku (World Premiere)

“the tattered soul of a worker”

Choreographed by Vusi Mdoyi

Dramaturgy by Phala Ookeditse Phala

Vocals by Sibusiso Shoji

Performed by Muzi Shili, Paballo Phiri, Thulisile Binda, Thembi Ngwenya, Oscar Buthelezi, Lungile Ngwenya, Micca Maganye, Elma Motloenya, and Vusi Mdoyi

Using *isiPantsula* as a rhythmic quilt of protest activism, Izithukuthuku draws on the percussive sound of violent capitalist oppression, symbolized by the instructive rhythm of a typewriter. This is counterpointed by the sound of a sewing machine amidst the lament of the working class struggling to survive with less. The sound of the train, represented by beer crates, reflects both the poison of liquor and the train as more than just a mode of transport—it's an unrelenting machine of industrialization that feeds on productive souls with no regard for their well-being.

The Movement

Choreographed by Conrad R. Kelly II

Performed by Kenneth L. Alexander, Nya Christian, Jerod Coleman, Ariel Dykes, Keomi Givens Jr., Kamala Hargrove, Nepri James, Isaiah O'Connor, Na'imah Ray, Valencia Springer, Ericka Still, Brie Turner, Joseph Vasquez, Pelham Warner Jr., and Robert Warnsley

The Movement is an epic tribute to Black Lives Matter and the domino effect of activism experienced in 2020. Embodying the passion and power of protest, the piece demonstrates how one can become many as we step toward social justice.



ARTISTS



Kenneth L. Alexander
Thulisile Binda
Oscar Buthelezi
Stephen Chauke
Nya Christian
Jerod Coleman
Sipho "Spuku" Dlamini
Aphiwe Dumeko
Ariel Dykes
Keomi Givens Jr.
Kamala Hargrove
Nepri James
Terrence Johnson
Conrad Kelly II
Micca Maganye
Busisiwe Mahlangu
Sifiso Maseka
Danile Mashite
Sfiso Morobe
Mojalefa Mosia
Elma Motloenya

Motsau Motsau
Karabo Motsikoe
Nosipho Mtotoba
Lungile Ngwenya
Thembi Ngwenya
Tholakele Nkal
Isaiah O'Connor
Paballo Phiri
Maison De la Dance Academy
Na'imah Ray
Muzi Shili
Sibusiso Shozi
Simphiwe Sanele Sikhakhane
Valencia Springer
Ericka Still
Irvin Teme
Brie Turner
Joseph Vasquez
Pelham Warner Jr.
Robert Warnsley

STEP AFRIKA! 30TH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE



C. Brian Williams, Moeketsi Koena, Vusi Mdoi, Matshidiso Ndinisa, Thabiso Manare, and Thuli Semela, with Vuyisile Mqoqi and Nobayeni Xaba

Founded in 1994 by **C. Brian Williams**, Step Afrika! is the world's leading authority on the artform 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 U.S.. 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.

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."

Moeketsi Koena is the co-founder, Chairman, and Managing Director of Itrotra Art X Connection, a newly established arts platform. With a rich background in dance, he also founded Inzalo Dance Theatre Company ...(IDTC) and serves as the Associate Artistic Director for Madagascar's International Dance Festival I'Trôtra. Koena is a professional dancer, teacher, and choreographer whose work uniquely blends South African Hip Hop (Kwaito), African Dance, and Western Contemporary Dance. He has collaborated with various institutions across South Africa and Europe, including Pretoria Technikon and the Artisjok Nutwintig Youth...

...Organisation in Amsterdam. Koena's education includes African Dance under the late Jackie Semela of Soweto Dance Theatre, along with further studies in the Netherlands and Belgium. He has worked with renowned choreographers and institutions worldwide, including the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center and the Bates College Dance Festival in the USA. His accolades include multiple nominations and an FNB Vita Award for Most Outstanding Performance by a Male Dancer. In addition to his artistic pursuits, Koena is also an Artistic Event Organizer and Producer, currently serving as the Executive Producer of the Hlakwa Pitseng Event.

Vusi Mdoyi is a dancer, teacher, choreographer, artistic director, and Pantsula creative activist. He is the founding director of VAP Dance Academy Theatre and Studios, the first dance academy in Katlehong Township, dedicated to training young people in the area. Mdoyi also co-founded the Impilo Mapantsula Global Movement, which unites, promotes, and documents Pantsula culture while contributing to the development of industry standards. Deeply influenced by his upbringing in the township, Mdoyi's work is rooted in ...the rich history, culture, politics, fashion, music, and language of Pantsula. His passion lies in introducing Isipantsula to traditional theatre, academic, and experimental art spaces, and contextualizing this artistic tradition on a global stage.

Matshidiso Ndinisa is a South African dancer, choreographer, and singer known for her contributions to both traditional and contemporary African performance arts. She has been involved in significant projects such as "Via Sophiatown," choreographed by Vusi Mdoyi, ...

...and "Africa Umoja," conceived by Todd Twala. Mokoka's career has spanned various roles in the performing arts, showcasing her versatility and commitment to celebrating and promoting African culture through dance and music. Her work has been recognized in multiple productions across Africa and beyond, making her a prominent figure in the South African arts scene.

Thabiso Manare began his dancing career with the Arco Dance Club in White City Jabavu, Soweto, where his talent was soon recognized by Mr. Nkosana Mzolo. This opportunity led him to join the Soweto Dance Theatre under the mentorship of Mr. Jackie Semela in Orlando East, where he received his foundational training in Afro-Fusion and Contemporary Dance, working with renowned choreographers. Thabiso furthered his education at the Tshwane University of Technology Arts Department and earned a full scholarship to Brunel University in London, where he obtained a Higher National Diploma in Art. Today, he is the founder and director of Maison Dela Dance Project (House of Dance), an NPO dedicated to training young and adult dancers in various styles, with a strong emphasis on Ballet and Contemporary Dance.

Thuli Semela is a dancer, teacher, choreographer, and the founder and Artistic Director of Semela Dance Company and Youth Development.

CHOREOGRAPHERS



Conrad R. Kelly II, Moeketsi Koena, Vusi Mdoi, Thabiso Manare, and Thuli Semela

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 Conrad's eighth season with the Company.

Moeketsi Koena – *see bio listed under the Step Afrika! 30th Anniversary Committee section*

Vusi Mdoyi – *see bio listed under the Step Afrika! 30th Anniversary Committee section*

Matshidiso Ndinisa – *see bio listed under the Step Afrika! 30th Anniversary Committee section*

Thabiso Manare – *see bio listed under the Step Afrika! 30th Anniversary Committee section*

Thuli Semela – *see bio listed under the Step Afrika! 30th Anniversary Committee section*

"Reflecting on these 30 years of relations, we recognize the humility and respect that have defined our connection. Our American family embodies the true spirit of Ubuntu, demonstrating a commitment to shared humanity and mutual understanding, fostering a lasting bond that honors the essence of unity and togetherness."

– Moeketsi Koena



ADMINISTRATIVE AND CREATIVE TEAMS

STEP AFRIKA! 30TH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE

Moeketsi Koena, Founder
C. Brian Williams, Founder
Thabiso Manare, Technical Coordinator
Matshidiso Ndinisa, Logistics
Vusi Mdoyi, Creative Coordinator
Thuli Semela, Creative Coordinator

STEP AFRIKA! STAFF (USA)

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 & Community Programs
Margo Cunningham, Marketing Manager
Pascha Barnwell, Company Manager

CONSULTANTS

Vuyisile Mqoqi, Financial Manager
Nobayeni Xaba, Public Relations Manager
Nomveliso Tshabalala, Graphic Designer
Noel Ndinsa, Workshop Facilitator

PRODUCTION

Kenneth Bogosi, Lighting Designer
David Hlatshwayo, Stage Manager
Zain Vally, Sound Designer
Thobeka Yakophu, Costumes
Mulle Mokegele, Costumes
Mtwabisang Malaka, Costumes
Phala Ookeditse Phala, Dramaturg
Katlego Sekhosana, Dramaturg

SOWETO THEATRE TEAM

Vincent Motau, General Manager
Lethabo Khumalo, Producer
Didimalang Sole, Customer Service Manager
Khosi Ndesi, Marketing Department
Thulani Ntshingila, Building Manager
Vumile Qupe, Youth Development
Mimi Fihla, Administrator/Youth Development
Lebugang Mnisi, Technical Manager
Tlhopiso Sera, Front of House Manager
Tiisetso Ntlhanngoe, Stage Manager
Rendani Gelebe, Lighting Technician
Mthobisi Cele, Senior Sound
Goodman Makhubele, Stage Technician
Katlego Khanye, Assistant Sound
Lerato, Assistant Sound

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Thembinkosi Hlathswayo, Founder
Khadilatou Doyneh, Step Afrika! UK
H Pattern, Step Afrika! UK
Dr. Mamphuthi Khasu-Nkatlo

OUR REHEARSAL SPACES

The Centre for the Less Good Idea	Dube Chapel Hall
Maison De'La Dance Studio	Bapedi Hall
VAP Studio	

GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS, ARTS, CULTURE, AND RECREATION

Louis Baloyi	Mashudu Magada,
China Mashinini, HOD	Head of Corridor
Shane Maja, Cheif Director of Arts, Culture, and Heritage	Keamogetswe Malefo, Director, Creative Arts

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING 30 YEARS OF STEP AFRIKA!

Step Afrika!'s 30th Anniversary Celebration has been made possible by:

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

VIP RECEPTION SPONSOR

Mr. Michael Sudarkasa

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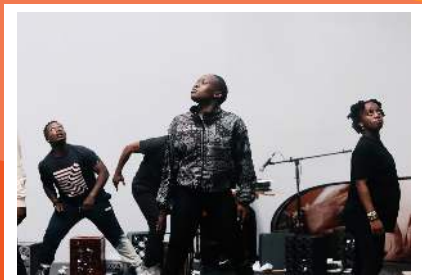
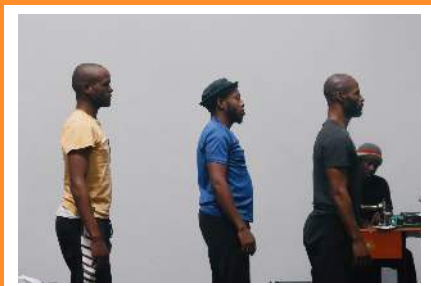
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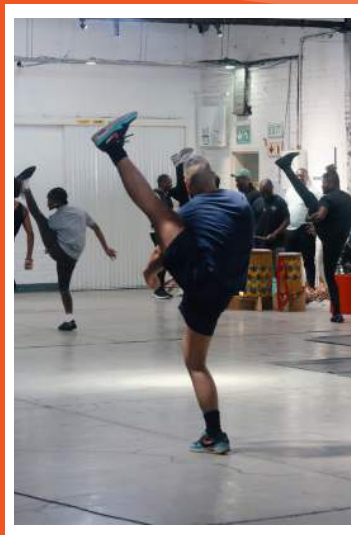
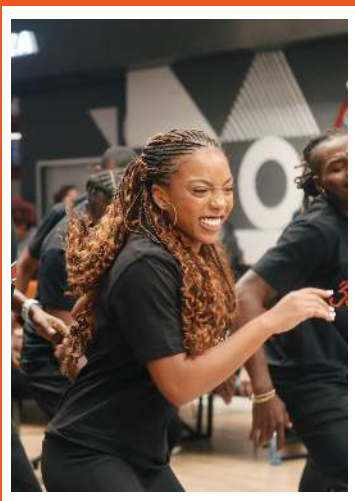
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PC: NEPRI JAMES, MARGO CUNNINGHAM





PC: NEPRI JAMES





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