



STEP AFRiKA!

VIP GALA 2026

**TUESDAY
JUNE 2, 2026
HISTORIC
HOWARD THEATRE**

WELCOME

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Step Afrika!'s VIP Gala 2026!

Tonight, we come together at the iconic Howard Theatre to celebrate the power of stepping, the talent of our artists, and the community that keeps this work alive. We are honored to share this evening with you, our donors, sponsors, partners, friends, and champions.

Your support allows Step Afrika! to keep creating bold new work, like our latest production, *The Fruits of Our Labor*. It also helps us bring arts education programs all year to students and communities throughout Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia.

Thanks to you, the rhythm goes on. Because of your support, young people discover the joy, discipline, history, and promise of stepping. You help Step Afrika! stay the world's leading authority on this art form and a home for culture, creativity, and community.

We are truly grateful for your generosity and for joining us on this unforgettable night of performance, celebration, and purpose.

With heartfelt appreciation,



C. Brian Williams
Founder & Executive Producer

Founder and Executive Producer



Lamar Lovelace
Executive Director

STEP AFRIKA!

VIP GALA 2026 SPONSORS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Ann Belkov

Reg Brown & Tiffeny Sanchez



PRODUCER

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C. Brian Williams

Maia Hunt Estes

HEADLINER

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The Spera Group at TTR Sotheby's

Coca-Cola Consolidated, Inc.

Tito's

Dyonicia "Dy" Brown

Dr and Mrs Benjamin Watkins III

Christopher Montgomery

PERFORMER

Lamont Akins

Kym Taylor

Tiane Doman

Melanie Trottmann

Rolanda & Clarke Fleming

Ashley Adams Winkfield

Jacqui Francis

Special thanks to our generous in-kind sponsors Edmond's Honor and 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 grounded in teamwork, commitment, and discipline.

OUR VISION

As the world's leading authority on the tradition of stepping, Step Afrika! strengthens connections within the communities we serve while advancing and preserving this uniquely American art form. Our vision is to deepen the impact of stepping through artistic excellence, cultural preservation, and educational engagement locally, nationally, and globally.

YOUR IMPACT

By sponsoring this year's Gala, you help bring *The Fruits of Our Labor* to life—a powerful new theatrical work marking an exciting new chapter for Step Afrika!—while sustaining the Company's year-round arts education and community engagement programs across the DMV.



YOUR SUPPORT

expands arts education programs across Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia, reaching

35,000 STUDENTS

students each year and deepening initiatives that connect stepping with math and

CORE ACADEMIC LEARNING





AN EVENING WITH STEP AFRIKA!

VIP GALA 2026

Celebrating the artistry, legacy, and future of Step Afrika!

HOSTED BY

Lesli Foster

Award-Winning Journalist & WUSA9 Evening Anchor

EVENING MUSIC & TRANSITIONS

DJ Ty Alexander

OPENING PERFORMANCE

Yebo

WELCOME FROM THE BOARD

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SPECIAL PERFORMANCE

The Fruits of Our Labor (Excerpt)

RAISE YOUR PADDLE

FOUNDER'S REMARKS

FINALE PERFORMANCE

Evolution



This summer, Step Afrika! takes center stage in New York City.

Musical Bodies at
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
June 7–September 27, 2026

Step Afrika! featured in The Met's landmark exhibition
exploring movement, music, and the body as instrument.

Learn more at www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions

The Migration: Reflections on
Jacob Lawrence at The Joyce
Co-presented by Step Afrika! and IMG Artists
June 10–21, 2026

A critically acclaimed fusion of stepping, dance, live
percussion, and visual art inspired by Jacob Lawrence's
iconic Migration Series.

Tickets available at www.joyce.org/performances



STEP AFRIKA!

**AT ARENA
STAGE**

FALL / WINTER
2026 SEASON

**THE FRUITS
OF OUR LABOR**

OPENING NIGHT:
SEPTEMBER 10, 2026



**STEP AFRIKA!'S MAGICAL
MUSICAL HOLIDAY
STEP SHOW**

OPENING NIGHT:
DECEMBER 4, 2026

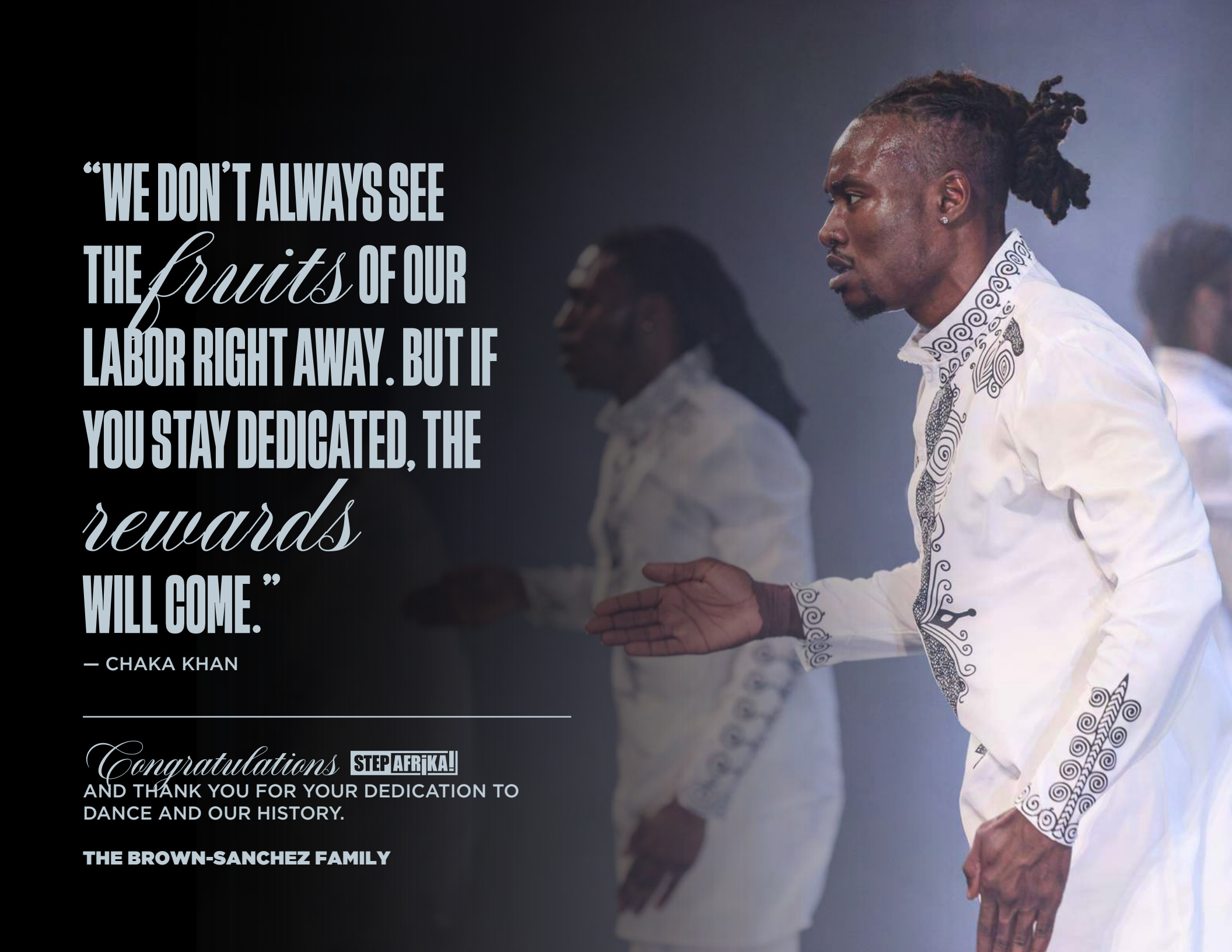
TICKETS ON SALE
JULY 2026

Learn more at
www.arenastage.org



**THANK
YOU**

ANN BELKOV



“WE DON’T ALWAYS SEE
THE *fruits* OF OUR
LABOR RIGHT AWAY. BUT IF
YOU STAY DEDICATED, THE
rewards
WILL COME.”

— CHAKA KHAN

Congratulations **STEPAFRIKA!**
AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION TO
DANCE AND OUR HISTORY.

THE BROWN-SANCHEZ FAMILY



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





Thank you for making a difference

Every day, devoted volunteers in our community give their time and resources to help strengthen our neighborhoods.

We offer our appreciation to nonprofit Step Afrika! for their commitment to drive meaningful change and celebrate their leadership to make a difference here, and beyond, for all of us.



Lawrence Di Rita
President, Bank of America Greater Washington D.C.
bankofamerica.com/washingtondc

CoStar Group is a proud supporter of Step Afrika!



CoStarGroup.com





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



DCHFA'S HOMEOWNERSHIP FAIR 10AM -3PM SATURDAY, JUNE 13

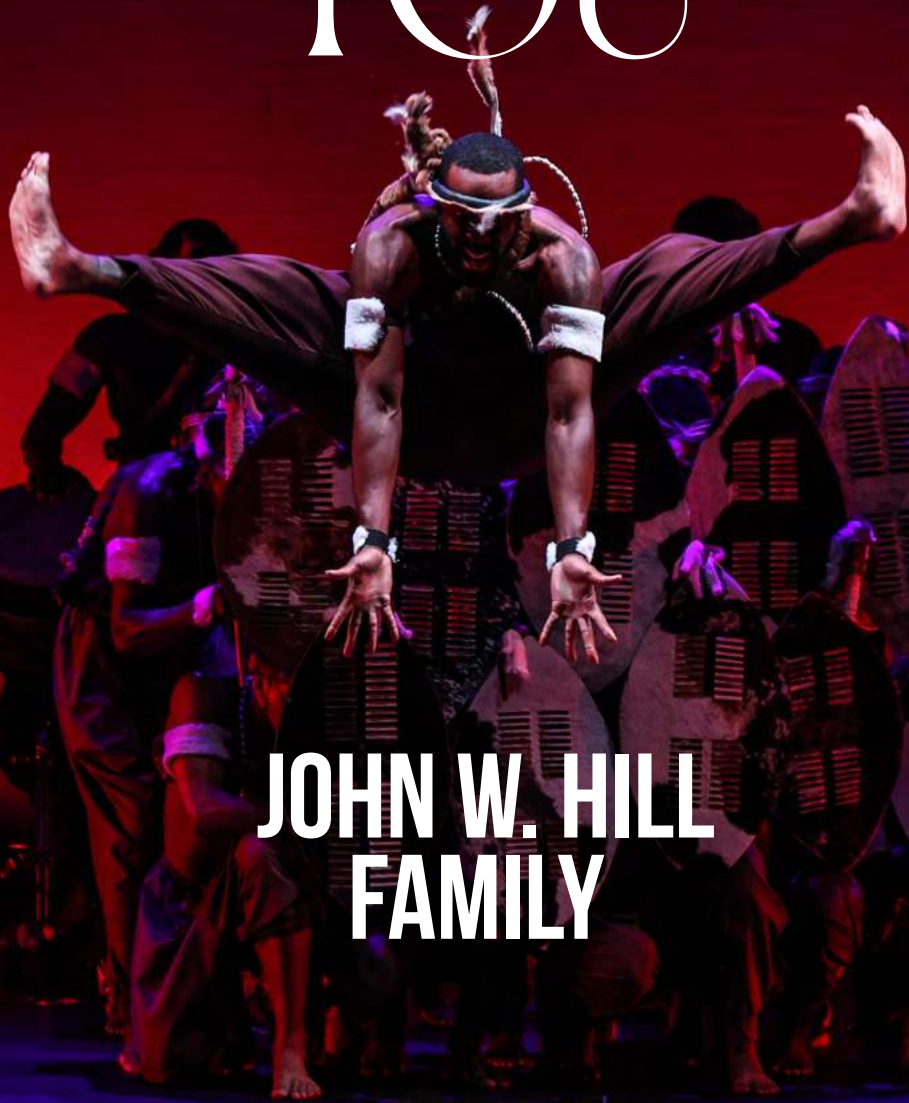
REGISTER NOW



The District's resource for innovative solutions in affordable housing finance. Register for our upcoming Homeownership Fair to learn about homebuying opportunities and programs.



THANK YOU



**JOHN W. HILL
FAMILY**

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACKS IN DANCE

BLK IS AMERICAN ART.

A MOVEMENT. A MESSAGE. A MANDATE

JOIN US

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Investing in Local Arts for All

Artists and performers fuel our imagination, inspiring us to dream bigger. We champion equitable access to the arts, partnering with organizations like Step Afrika! to ensure everyone can experience the vibrant local arts and culture that Washington, D.C. has to offer.



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Washington Gas proudly supports
Step Afrika!

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LEADERSHIP



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.



LAMAR LOVELACE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As Executive Director of Step Afrika!, Lamar Lovelace drives the organization's strategy and operations, leads its staff and programs, and advances its mission. Working closely with Step Afrika!'s board of directors, he directs fundraising, marketing, operations, and long-range planning for the organization.

Throughout ten seasons with Step Afrika!, Lamar has transformed the organization's reach and sustainability. Under his leadership, the company secured the largest gifts in its history, recorded consistent revenue growth, and dramatically expanded its national

and international profile. He managed multi-million-dollar budgets and launched initiatives that strengthened international partnerships in South Africa.

Before joining Step Afrika!, Lamar led teams at Columbia University and Broward College in arts management and community engagement.

Lamar earned master's degrees in Arts Management from Carnegie Mellon University and Oral History from Columbia University, as well as a Bachelor's degree in Speech and Hearing Science from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He is a proud 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.



CONRAD R. KELLY II ASSISTANT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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.

COMPANY



KWADJO BEDIAKO is a native of Queens, NY, and holds a BA in Psychology from Stony Brook University. A proud Ghanaian educator, he brings the high-energy Azonto dance style to schools and studios across the tri-state area. Kwadjo began his step training with Francis Lewis High School's nationally ranked Nu Gamma Psi Step Team and later performed with Stony Brook University's Cadence Step Team. He expanded his Afro training as a member of Stony Brook's L' Afrique Dance Team before joining the professional Afro dance company Afro-Afrique. He is also a member of P.L.A.Y.E.R.S. Club Steppers and has worked on projects with artists including Davido, Ms. Lauryn Hill, and Koffi

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.



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.

COMPANY

JAYDEN KING is a native of Miami, FL, and a graduate of Florida A&M University with a Bachelor of Science in Pre-Physical Therapy. She has trained extensively in ballet, jazz, contemporary, modern, and hip hop at Artistic Soul, ICTalent Dance Studio, Arthur and Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts, and New World School of the Arts. Jayden is a former member of Mahogany Dance Theatre under the direction of Shepiro Hardemon, where she served as Assistant Rehearsal Director, Rehearsal Director, and President. She has performed works by Conrad Kelly, Tyrelle Rolle, Christopher Huggins, Clarence Jones, Allyne Gartrell, and others, and has trained with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Dance Theatre of Harlem through summer intensives. This is Jayden's first 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 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 fourth season with the Company.



KEONDRE PASCAL is a native of Broward County, FL, and an alumnus of Dillard Center for the Arts. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Music Education from Florida A&M University, where he was a member of the world-renowned Marching 100 and Images Modeling Troupe, later serving as Trainer. A proud member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity of America, Inc., Keondre held multiple leadership roles and also served as Mr. Alpha Kappa Alpha and the university's beloved mascot, the FAMU Venom. His dance training includes mentorship from Shepiro Hardemon and Manny "Fresco" Acosta, with performance credits including World of Dance, Kenny Haiti, and EverythingArlon. An educator and mentor, he launched a business to train young dancers, and his work has been recognized in Shoutout Miami and Bold Journey. This is Keondre's first season with the Company.



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.

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.



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.



HEADSHOT PHOTO CREDITS:
KEITH MAJOR & JATI LINDSAY

SPECIAL GUESTS



LESLI FOSTER is an award-winning journalist and longtime weeknight anchor for WUSA9, where she also leads the station's "Impact" coverage focused on community issues. Since joining the station in 2001, she has covered many of the region's defining moments with warmth, authenticity, and a passion for storytelling that uplifts everyday people doing extraordinary things. Her work has earned multiple Emmy, Edward R. Murrow, and Associated Press Awards, including an Emmy for Best News Anchor in the Washington, DC market. A graduate of Howard University and member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Lesli is deeply engaged in community service and founded "Girlfriends Give Back," an initiative supporting local charities throughout the Washington region.

DJ TY ALEXANDER is a bestselling author, speaker, wellness advocate, podcaster, and DJ whose work empowers women to choose healing and gratitude over grief. In 2010, she launched the acclaimed lifestyle and wellness platform *Gorgeous In Grey*, establishing herself as a leading voice in beauty, self-care, and mental wellness. Ty is the author of *Things I Wish I Knew Before My Mom Died* and founder of *Self Care IRL*, a social wellness community designed to create transformative healing experiences for women of color. Her work has been featured by major outlets including *ESSENCE*, *O Magazine*, *CNN*, and *Well + Good*, and she has partnered with brands such as Dove, Cadillac, and ULTA Beauty. Through her writing, speaking, and podcasting, Ty continues to inspire women to pursue healing, self-love, and personal growth.



STEP AFRiKA!

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