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**STEP AFRIKA!**  
**THE MIGRATION: REFLECTIONS ON JACOB LAWRENCE**

Thursday-Friday, April 20-21, 2017, at 7:30pm  
Colwell Playhouse

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# PROGRAM

## STEP AFRIKA!

### **THE MIGRATION: REFLECTIONS ON JACOB LAWRENCE**

C. Brian Williams, founder and executive producer

Jakari Sherman, director

Drum Call

Go West: circa 1890

Drumfolk

Wade Suite

Movement One: The Deacon's Dance

Movement Two: Wade

*20-minute intermission*

Trane Suite

Movement One: Trane

Movement Two: Off The Train

Movement Three: My Man's Gone Now

Chicago

## **The Cast**

Mfoniso Akpan

Makeda Abraham

Christopher Brient

Dionne Eleby

Delaunce Jackson

Joe Murchison

Anesia Sandifer

Jakari Sherman

Brittney Smith

Jordan Spry

Andrew Vinson

Ta'quez Whitted

## **With Special Guests**

Jahi N'gozi Jelani

Lionel B. Lyles II

Charise Pinkston

## **Scenic Design**

Harlan Penn

## **Costume Design**

Kenaan Quander

## **Sound Design**

Patrick Calhoun

## **Lighting/Production Design & Production/ Company Manager**

John D. Alexander

## **Sound Engineer/ Assistant Production Manager**

Cory Rayner

*The Migration* is made possible through commissioning support from Washington Performing Arts; Hancher Auditorium at University of Iowa; the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Ordway Center for the Performing Arts; and Meany Hall for Performing Arts at University of Washington.

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Tom Gallant, President  
[www.generalartstouring.com](http://www.generalartstouring.com)

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# PROGRAM NOTES

*"Must we remain in the South or go elsewhere? Where can we go to feel that security which other people feel?" - A colored woman in Alabama, 1902*

## DRUM CALL

Choreographed/Composed by Jakari Sherman  
and W.E. Smith  
Original Recording of "African Villages" by  
W.E. Smith

The drum has always been essential to African culture everywhere and is critical to the rhythm of Migration. *Drum Call* depicts an African village, the arrival of foreign ships, and the ensuing turmoil.

## GO WEST: CIRCA 1890

Choreographed by Makeda Abraham,  
Mfoniso Akpan, and Delaunce Jackson  
Drumming by Jahi N'Gozi Jelani with  
Jakari Sherman and Andrew Vinson

When Africans arrived in America, their music and dance traditions were ingrained in the culture. *Go West* explores how West African dance and drum traditions spread and maintained their vitality in the New World.

## DRUMFOLK

Choreographed by David Pleasant  
Flute by Lionel B. Lyles II

*Drumfolk* is a celebration of the early development of African-American percussive traditions including patting juba, hambone, and ring shout – giving way to art forms like tap dance and stepping. While exploring this heritage, *Drumfolk* reflects on the harsh conditions in the South that coincided with the practice of these transcendent musical forms. The work shows how

the progression of such hardships preempted escape and migration, and how the fortitude of the enslaved led to the creation of new traditions like spirituals, field hollers, and shouts.

## WADE SUITE

Choreographed by Kirsten Ledford,  
LeeAnet Noble, and Paul Woodruff  
Lead Vocals by Brittny Smith

*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.

### Movement One: The Deacon's Dance

The African-American spiritual played a significant role in lifting the spirit in troubled times. In *The Deacon's Dance*, two deacons prepare for Sunday services.

### Movement Two: Wade

After the abolition of slavery, the church remained a center of refuge and community-building amidst the harsh conditions and served as a primary means of communication for industries recruiting labor during World War I. *Wade* highlights the importance of the church in helping African-Americans survive the South, and its critical role in helping vulnerable migrants resettle in the North.

*"I was leaving the South to fling myself into the unknown. I was taking a part of the South to transplant in alien soil, to see if it could grow differently, if it could drink of new and cool rains, bend in strange winds, respond to the warmth of other suns, and, perhaps, to bloom." - Richard Wright*

## **TRANE SUITE**

Original Recording of *Trane* by W. E. Smith  
Saxophone by Lionel B. Lyles II

Throughout the Great Migration, the train was an important means of transporting people to the North. The entire railroad industry recruited heavily in the South and thus, economically, became a primary means of African-American's "one-way ticket" to a new life. Named in reference to John Coltrane and paying homage to Duke Ellington's *Take the A Train*, *Trane* is a journey in three parts, following the story of the Great Migration.

### **Movement One: Trane**

Choreographed by Jakari Sherman  
Creation of *Trane* made possible by the  
DC Jazz Festival.

The opening movement, *Trane*, establishes the connection between past and present: the rhythm of the train north; Ellington's classic score; and the Alpha "train," a time-honored element of stepping practiced by brothers of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

### **Movement Two: Off The Train**

Choreographed by Jakari Sherman

Three men arrive in the North, luggage in hand . . . thrilled about the possibilities.

### **Movement Three: My Man's Gone Now**

Choreographed by Mfoniso Akpan,  
Aseelah Allen, Dionne Eleby, Kevin Marr,  
and Jakari Sherman

Recording of "My Man's Gone Now" by  
Nina Simone

During the migration, it was common for men to journey north without their wives or children because of the high cost of travel. This left many women at home in the South caring for children and struggling to find work. *My Man's Gone Now* is the story of three women, each in a different phase of their transition to the North and ready to be reunited with their loved one.

## **CHICAGO**

Choreographed by Jakari Sherman

Between the 1910s and 1920, more than 400,000 African-American migrants left the South for many Northern and Western cities, including Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Chicago. By the end of the 1920s, that number exceeded 1.2 million.

*Chicago* finds the migrant's new rhythm in everyday situations. It is a percussive symphony using body percussion and vocals to highlight the collective self-transformation of these brave men and women once they arrived "Up North."

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# PROFILES

**C. BRIAN WILLIAMS** (Founder & Executive Director) is a graduate of Howard University in Washington, DC, and a native of Houston, Texas. Williams learned to step as a member of his fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.—Beta Chapter in 1989. During a fellowship in Southern Africa, he began to research 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, South and Central America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Caribbean, and throughout the United States. He is a co-founder of the historic Step Afrika! International Cultural Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Under Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's newest cultural exports. In 2009 Step Afrika! was designated as Washington, DC's official Cultural Ambassador. During the past 22 years, Step Afrika! has expanded to become the largest African-American arts organization in Washington, DC. The company was honored to headline President Barack Obama's Black History Month Reception at the White House in February 2016 and to create the world's first stepping interactive exhibit for the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Williams has been cited as a "Civic/Community Visionary" by *NV Magazine* and "Nation Builder" by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. He is featured in *Soulstepping*, the first book to document the history of stepping, and several documentaries discussing the art form. Williams has received numerous awards including the Mayor's Art Award for Innovation in the Arts, the Pola Nirenska Award for Contemporary Achievement in Dance, and a 2017 Minority Business Leaders Award

from the Washington Business Journal. In 2016 Mayor Muriel E. Bowser appointed Williams to serve as a Commissioner for the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities.

**JAKARI SHERMAN** (Director, *The Migration*) is an intense performer, percussionist, and choreographer whose stepping experience extends over 20 years. Sherman served as the Artistic Director for eight years and brought new life to the folkloric tradition of stepping locally and across the globe. As a choreographer, he seeks to create a body of work that is experimental and challenging for both the dancer and the audience. Sherman studied management information systems at the University of Houston and is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

**MFONISO AKPAN** (Artistic Director, *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. Akpan toured with the off-Broadway show *Hoofin' 2 Hittin'*, where she was a featured stepper and dancer.

**CHRISTOPHER BRIENT** (Assistant Artistic Director) is a native of Houston, Texas who performed in his first step show in the ninth grade, and has been addicted to the stage ever since. His love of dance began while attending Texas A&M University, where he taught hip-hop classes, served as Step Master for the Potent Pi Omicron

Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and earned a bachelor's of science in agricultural journalism. He joined Step Afrika! in 2009.

**MAKEDA ABRAHAM** is an actress and dancer from Brooklyn, New York. She is a proud graduate of Howard University, where she received a BFA in theatre arts with a concentration in acting. For Step Afrikan's 15th Anniversary, Abraham choreographed *Umngane*, with Mfoniso Akpan and Aseelah Shareef, for which she earned a 2010 Metro DC Dance Awards nomination for Outstanding New Work. Abraham is currently based in New York, living life to the fullest as a professional artist and entrepreneur. She is a proud member of D.I.V.A. Inc. and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

**DIONNE ELEBY** is a graduate of Elon University where she majored in musical theater and minored in African-American studies and business administration. A native of Atlanta, Georgia, Eleby has performed with the African-American Dance Ensemble, ArtPark Regional Theatre, and Rotterdam's Lef in Holland. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

**DELAUNCE JACKSON** is a native of Cincinnati, Ohio. He studied dance and theater with local artist mentors Terri Brown and Jack Louiso. Jackson went on to train and perform with Kankouran West African Dance Company, Step Afrika!, and tour both nationally and internationally with the off-Broadway percussive production STOMP! From the Lincoln Center to Madagascar, he continues to discover the unbridled diversity and universal significance of percussive art in cultural communication and relations. Jackson is a graduate of Howard University. He thanks the Creator for ordering his steps and his family for their undying love and support.

**JOE MURCHISON** comes to Step Afrika! from Lawton, Oklahoma. He has trained at the Dallas Black Dance Theatre's Academy and also received a scholarship to dance at the Debbie Allen Hip Hop Intensive, led by hip-hop great, Dave Scott. Murchison began stepping in junior high school but it was at the University of Central Oklahoma, where he earned a BS in kinesiology, that he bloomed as a performing artist. As President and Step Master of the Zeta Sigma chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Murchison led his chapter to numerous step show competitions, earning both district and regional awards.

**ANESIA SANDIFER** is a native of Augusta, Georgia. She attended the University of Georgia where she received a BBA in finance and a minor in dance. She is also a member of the Zeta Psi chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., where she served as Step Master. Sandifer was a full-scholarship recipient for the 2015 Debbie Allen Summer Intensive in Los Angeles, California. She performed for ESPN's Special Olympics 2015 World Games as a dancer for O.A.R. and Siedah Garrett.

**BRITTON SMITH** is a native of Houston, Texas. She attended Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she was a "Dancing Doll" before graduating from Texas Southern University. Smith obtained a BA in radio, TV, and film; a MA in education; and also became a member of the Gamma Psi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Smith appeared in *Stomp The Yard 2* and has opened for musical acts including Miguel and The-Dream.

**JORDAN SPRY** is a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was first introduced to stepping in high school, when he joined the Progressive African American Cultural Society. Spry then attended Howard University and graduated with a BBA in marketing. While at Howard, he stepped

with the award-winning Drew Hall Step Team, serving as a head coach and choreographing many steps for the team. Spry is also a freelance photographer, capturing moments from Step Afrika!'s tours around the world, and an aspiring model. He joined Step Afrika! in 2012.

**ANDREW VINSON** attended Elizabeth City State University, where he earned a bachelor's of science degree in graphic design and computer science with a concentration in business administration. He is a proud member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.—Lambda Gamma chapter, where he served as Basileus and Hop Master. Vinson began playing drums at an early age and has since mastered styles ranging from marching band to jazz. Vinson is a native of Enfield, North Carolina. He joined Step Afrika! in 2009.

**TA'QUEZ WHITTED** is a proud alumnus of Elizabeth City State University where he captained the step team and graduated with a BS in criminal justice. Whitted started stepping in high school where he founded Mu Omega Psi Fraternity Step Team during his junior year to develop leadership and promote brotherhood and academic excellence.

**JOHN D. ALEXANDER** (Lighting/Projection Designer) recently designed *Yellowman* by Dael Orlandersmith, directed by Thembi Duncan; *Riches* by Lee Blessing, directed by Paul Douglas Michnewicz; *Darius and Twig* by Calette Jennings, directed by Eleanor Holdridge; the national tour of *Anne and Emmett* by Janet Langhart Cohen, directed by Tom Jones II; and *Other Reasons to Die* by Bob Bartlett, directed by Gregg Henry. He also designed for the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Festival, Source Theater Festival, George Mason University, Georgetown University, and Bowie State University. Alexander is a graduate of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

## **SPECIAL GUESTS**

**JAHÍ N'GOZI JELANI** is a native of Baltimore, Maryland, and started drumming at the age of two years old with Sankofa Dance Theater. Jelani has studied under master instructors in the cultural arts such as Baile McKnight and Mamady Keita. He specializes in djembe orchestra and is a life-long student of the Malinke tradition.

**LIONEL B. LYLES II** was born in Colorado. He majored in music education at Morgan State University. In 2006, The Lionel Lyles Quintet recorded its first studio project, *The Lionel Lyles Quintet: The September Sessions*. For the next four years the quintet would travel up and down the east coast and in 2008, Lyles attended North Carolina Central University, studying with national jazz icons such as Branford Marsalis and Joey Calderazzo. The Lionel Lyles Quintet released its second album, *The Lionel Lyles Quintet: At The Precipice* in 2014. Lyles won a 2015 "Jazzy" for Best Tenor Saxophonist in Washington, D.C.

**CHARISE PINKSTON** works as a freelance dancer, choreographer, model, and visual artist in Washington, DC. She obtained her BFA in dance arts from Howard University and has trained with dance companies such as Lula Washington Dance Theatre, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, and Debbie Allen Dance Academy. She has performed the works of many talented choreographers including Hope Boykin, Assane Konte, and Ronald K. Brown. Pinkston continues to choreograph, provide technical dance training, and produce commissioned works for public and private events.



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## ABOUT THE COMPANY

**STEP AFRIKA!** was founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams and is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. It now ranks as one of the top ten African-American dance companies in the United States.

The company blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African-American fraternities and sororities, African traditional dance, and influences from a variety of other dance and art forms. Performances are much more than dance shows; they integrate songs, storytelling, humor, and audience participation.

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 theatres 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 (2005), Innovation in the Arts (2008), and Excellence in an Artistic Discipline (2012), and most recently performed at the White House for President Barack Obama and the First Lady.

Step Afrika! is featured prominently at the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African-American History & Culture with the world's first stepping interactive.

To learn more, visit [www.stepafrika.org](http://www.stepafrika.org).

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# ABOUT THE MIGRATION SERIES

**THE MIGRATION SERIES**, by painter Jacob Lawrence, is jointly owned by The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. This epic, 60-panel tempera painting series depicts the migration of thousands of African Americans from the rural southern to the industrial cities of the north between 1910-1930. Prior to 1910, 90 percent of African Americans lived in the south. Between 1910-1920 the African-American population in the North increased 65 percent. It was a movement on an epic scale with an impact similar to the migration from Southern and Eastern Europe into northern United States cities decades earlier. Both migratory historical events are universal and shaped the cultural landscape of America.

Step Afrika!, the Washington, DC-based global ambassador for the tradition of stepping, blends body percussion, dance, spoken word, projected images of Lawrence's paintings, and live and recorded music to chart the story of African-American migrants moving from the South to the North. The use of stepping is a perfect pairing, as the U.S. tradition originated in the same time period captured in Lawrence's paintings.