



krannert center

YOUTH SERIES

2019-20

SCHOOL-DAY PERFORMANCES
FOR PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND HOME
SCHOOLS, GRADES PreK-12

STEP AFRIKA! DRUMFOLK



I ILLINOIS
College of Fine & Applied Arts



ABOUT STEP AFRIKA!

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 through arts education programs that emphasize stepping’s core values of teamwork, commitment, and discipline. Through the leadership of Founder and Executive Director C. Brian Williams, 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.”

Over the past 25 years, Step Afrika! has grown to become one of the top 10 African-American dance companies in the United States and the largest African-American arts organization in Washington, DC. Step Afrika! began as an exchange program with the Soweto Dance Theatre of Johannesburg, South Africa, and has expanded to become an internationally celebrated dance company presenting performance, residencies, and workshops worldwide.

Step Afrika! gets people moving—towards college, towards a greater appreciation for the arts, and towards a better understanding of each other.

DID YOU KNOW?

We have stepping groups right here in our community! Many sororities and fraternities in the University of Illinois’ Black Greek Council have their own stepping teams. Every October they gather for a Step Down show to celebrate these traditions in friendly competition.

ABOUT DRUMFOLK

On the heels of its critically acclaimed work, *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*, Step Afrika! introduces *Drumfolk*, a high-energy exploration of the drum as an instrument of community, resilience, and determination. *Drumfolk* is the second work by Step Afrika! that chronicles and celebrates the African-American experience in America. Grounded in extensive research and over two decades of percussive practice and investigation, *Drumfolk* reveals hidden histories and events that transformed American life and experience.

Drumfolk was inspired by the Stono Rebellion of 1739, an event that would forever transform African-American life and culture. When Africans lost the right to use their drums, the beats found their way into the body of the people, the “Drumfolk.” This program celebrates the early development of African-American percussive traditions including patting juba, hambone, and ring shout—leading to art forms such as tap dance and, of course, stepping. While exploring this important heritage, *Drumfolk* reflects on the harsh conditions of the American South that coincided with the practice of these transcendent musical forms and how the fortitude of people who were enslaved enabled the birth of new, inspiring traditions such as spirituals, field hollers, and shouts.

Connects to Illinois Learning Standards in Fine Arts, Social/Emotional Learning, and Social Sciences.

WHAT IS STEPPING?

Stepping is a percussive art form first developed through the song and dance rituals performed by African-American fraternities and sororities. In stepping, the body becomes an instrument, using footsteps, claps and spoken word to produce complex polyrhythms. Stepping has been described as “one of the most exciting dance forms created in the 21st century.”

In the early 1900s, African-Americans began to attend American colleges and universities in greater numbers, and the students recognized a need to develop Greek-letter organizations that would support them both academically and socially. Stepping became a way that members of these student groups (known today as *the Divine Nine*) expressed love and pride for their organizations.

Stepping is the latest in a fascinating line of percussive dance traditions found in African-American communities since the banning of the drum in 1740. The art form’s use of synchronized movement, words (often in call-and-response form), and polyrhythm (meaning several different rhythms used at the same time) communicate allegiance to a group and bears striking resemblance to movement practices found across the African continent. Stepping is an important part of America’s artistic and cultural life.



WORD UP

Each of the words listed below has a connection to the work of Step Afrika! After seeing the performance and reading this guide, write a few words of your own to explain the meaning of each term below and its connection to Step Afrika!

CHOREOGRAPHY

TEAMWORK

COMMITMENT

DISCIPLINE

FRATERNITY

SORORITY

COMMUNITY

RHYTHM

POLYRHYTHM

PERCUSSIVE

ON THE MAP

STEP AFRIKA! IS FROM . . .

WASHINGTON, DC

*The troupe also has strong ties to Johannesburg, South Africa.



United States Capitol Building



Washington Monument



Howard University

Step Afrika!: *Drumfolk*

Youth Series Performances

Th-Fr, Feb 6-7, 2020, at 10am
Colwell Playhouse
Performance length: 60 minutes
Recommended for grades 3+

Public Marquee Performances

Th-Fr, Feb 6-7, 2020, at 7:30pm

Step Afrika! appears courtesy of
General Arts Touring, Inc.

Corporate and Community Bronze Sponsor

WEFT 90.1 FM

Campaign for Young Audiences

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Youth Series Programming

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The Susan Sargeant McDonald Endowed Fund
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developer of the Krannert Center Youth Series)
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KRANNERT CENTER | 50

500 S. Goodwin Ave.
Urbana, IL 61801
KrannertCenter.com
217.333.6700 (main number)
217.244.3009 (Youth Series office)
youth@krannertcenter.com

 GREENING THE ARTS

LIBRARY CONNECTIONS

Krannert Center has also partnered with Champaign Public Library and The Urbana Free Library to help expand your students' Youth Series experience. Our local libraries have placed materials that relate to *Drumfolk* on display, and librarians are prepared to help your students immerse themselves in the wide-ranging subject areas that are covered by the production. These resources will be available approximately two weeks before through two weeks following the performance.

We hope that you are able to take advantage of these exciting partnerships with our local libraries!

www.champaign.org | www.urbanafreelibrary.org

OPEN HOUSE AT THE SPURLOCK MUSEUM OF WORLD CULTURES:

11am-12:30pm, February 6-7, 2020

Drop in for a self-guided, interactive visit on the day of your Youth Series performance. Museum guides will offer hands-on object studies and gallery-based challenges for students tied to the themes of *Drumfolk*. The Spurlock Museum also has a variety of resources for classroom use. Contact Kim Sheahan at ksheahan@illinois.edu or 217.244.3355 for information on available artifacts and lesson plans.

