

GENEVA CONCERTS



presents

STEP AFRiKA!

Friday 29 October 2021 • 7:30 p.m.
Smith Opera House

COMING NEXT

Sunday, February 20, 2022
3:00 PM

Symphor!a

THE ORCHESTRA OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

Lawrence Loh, conductor
Jon Nakamatsu, piano

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR: Ballade in A minor, Op. 33

RAVEL: Piano Concerto in G major for Piano and Orchestra
Jon Nakamatsu, piano

RACHMANINOFF: Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44



PROGRAM

TRIBUTE

(Choreographed by Jakari Sherman)

NDLAMU

(Choreographed by Jackie Semela)

ISICATHULO

(Choreographed by Jackie Semela)

SOLO

CHICAGO

(Choreographed by Jakari Sherman)

There will be no intermission.

Special Note:

Audience participation has been a part of the step tradition since its inception in the 1900s. Members of the audience are invited to clap, stomp, cheer and participate in call and response with the Artists.



This concert is made possible with generous financial support from the Williams Family Foundation and from FairGame, providing support to arts and cultural organizations for regional projects as determined by the NYS Gaming Commission.

PROGRAM NOTES

TRIBUTE

Tribute pays homage to the African-American step show. The work combines the distinct stepping styles from different fraternities and sororities and blends them together to showcase the incredible variety of stepping. *Tribute* includes all the exciting elements of the step show: the use of props, ripples and floor work, creative formations and audience participation. (Choreographed by Jakari Sherman)

NDLAMU

Ndlamu is a traditional dance of the Zulu people and for more than 25 years, Step Afrika! has studied the dance form through the Company's long-standing partnership with the Soweto Dance Theater. Step Afrika! makes this *Ndlamu* uniquely its own featuring solos created by each dancer as well as the addition of contemporary movement. (Choreographed by Jackie Semela)

ISICATHULO

Isicathulo or "the gumboot dance" is a tradition created by South African workers who labored in the oppressive mining industry of then-apartheid South Africa. Isolated from their families for long periods, the miners transformed their rubber boots into percussive instruments to not only entertain but to share secret messages with each other. *Isicathulo* has become one of the most popular dance forms in South Africa and has striking similarities to the African-American tradition of stepping. (Choreographed by Jackie Semela)

SOLO

Traditionally, stepping is performed by groups, big and small. In this *Solo*, Step Afrika! investigates the form at its most intimate level.

CHICAGO

Chicago finds the rhythm in everyday situations. It is a percussive symphony using body percussion and up to five complex polyrhythms performed simultaneously in order to narrate a percussive dance "story." Inspired by a summer spent in the Windy City, this ground-breaking

work transforms the 100-year old, folkloric tradition of stepping into contemporary performance art. (Choreographed by Jakari Sherman)

The Story of Step Afrika!

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. Under Mr. Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's cultural exports, touring more than 50 countries across the globe. Step Afrika! now ranks as one of the top ten African-American dance companies in the United States.

Step Afrika! blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African-American fraternities and sororities; traditional West and Southern African dances; and an array of contemporary dance and art forms into a cohesive, compelling artistic experience. Performances are much more than dance shows; they integrate songs, storytelling, humor and audience participation. The blend of technique, agility, and pure energy makes each performance unique and leaves the audience with their hearts pounding.

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 performed at the White House for President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.

Step Afrika! is featured prominently at the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African-American History & Culture with the world's first *stepping* interactive. In 2017, Step Afrika! made its off-Broadway debut with the critically-acclaimed production, *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*.

Meet The Company

Emanuel "Manny" Chacon is a dancer and choreographer from Wilmington, DE. His love for movement began at a young age with the Afro-Brazilian Martial Art of Capoeira, followed by his collegiate experience with Lambda Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Inc. and mentor J-Romeo. His styles include Capoeira, Hip Hop, Reggaeton, Afro & Caribbean movement, Stepping/Body Percussion, Gumboot, and Zulu. He has performed on Telemundo, MTV Tr3s, and Revolt TV.

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, Dionne 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.

Jabari Jones, is a native of Detroit, Michigan. He started dancing at the age of 8 – inspired by the performances of recording artist Usher. Prior to Step Afrika!, he was a featured performer for artists such as Aloe Blacc, Detroit 1-8-7, Elijah J, Jacob Latimore, K Jay Music, and The Music Factory. In addition to dancing in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, he has also been an actor in productions of *College Boyfriends* and *Mooz-Lum*. Jabari studied English at Morehouse College and immediately joined Step Afrika! upon graduating in 2017. He is a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

Conrad R. Kelly II, Assistant Artistic Director of Step Afrika!, is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he attended Dillard High School of the Visual and Performing Arts. While attending Florida A&M University, he became a member of the Marching 100 and the Strikers. After college, Conrad became a soloist for The Rolle Project in Las Vegas as well as a dance instructor with Studio 305, where he regularly taught classes in hip-hop, contemporary and jazz dance. Conrad plans

to use his performing and teaching experiences to open a mentoring program for young male dancers.

Misha Michel is a native of Miami, Florida. She holds a BFA in Dance from Florida State University and is a member of the Kappa Epsilon Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Misha trained under the direction of Maribel Fruitstone and Traci Young-Byron as a member of the Young Contemporary Dance Theatre (YCDT). As the YCDT SUPAStarz captain, Misha was featured on two Lifetime series, *Step It Up* and *Bring It!*. This is Misha's third season with Step Afrika!

Dustin Praylow is a South Carolina native. He began his dance training at Dancin' On Main Studios in Lake City under the instruction of Karl Singletary and direction of Paige Strickland. Dustin furthered his training in modern, contemporary, and ballet at the University of South Carolina, where he received his BS in Biology with a minor in Dance. Dustin began his professional dance career in 2016 with Norwegian Creative Studios, performing in the Broadway show *After Midnight* on the *Pride of America*, *RSSC Mariner*, and the Norwegian *Escape*. This is Dustin's third season with Step Afrika!

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 also became a member of the Zeta Psi chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc, where she served as Step Master. Anesia was a full scholarship recipient at the 2015 Debbie Allen Summer Intensive in Los Angeles, CA. She has performed on ESPN for the Special Olympics 2015 World Games as a dancer for O.A.R. and Siedah Garrett.

Valencia Odeyka Emonni Springer is a native of Brooklyn, New York. Valencia holds a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and served as the first Stand Queen (captain) with the Ambassadors of Sound Marching band at Virginia Union University. She studied ballet, jazz, African, hip-hop, and contemporary dance at Restoration Youth

Arts Academy and has performed with Forces of Nature and Dance Africa (Brooklyn). 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. This is her third season with Step Afrika!

Jordan Spry, Assistant Artistic Director of Step Afrika!, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, joined Step Afrika! in 2012. He was first introduced to stepping in high school, when he joined the Progressive African American Cultural Society. Jordan attended Howard University (HU) and graduated with a BBA in Marketing. While at Howard, he stepped with Drew Hall Step Team. Jordan served as a head coach for Drew, where he choreographed many first-place winning pieces for the HU Homecoming Step Show. Jordan is also a freelance photographer, capturing moments from Step Afrika!'s tours around the world and personal work at home in the D.C. area, as well as an aspiring model.

Pelham Warner, is from The Bronx, New York and attended Dutchess Community College. As a teenager, Pelham was a member of The Players Club Steppers. He then found his home stepping with the Harlem, New York-based group, The Order of the Feather Fraternity, where he served as the team's Step Master and captain for five years. He is blessed to have the opportunity to continue his passion for stepping, performing, and teaching during his third season with Step Afrika!

Robert Warnsley is a native of Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Illinois State University with a BS in Information Technology. Robert learned to step and stroll as a member of the Eta Tau chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. In addition to stepping, he practices hip-hop and Chicago-style footworking. This is Robert's third season with Step Afrika!

Meet The Creative Team

Mfoniso Akpan, Artistic Director of 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. 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.

C. Brian Williams, Founder and Executive Director of Step Afrika!, is a native of Houston, Texas and graduate of Howard University. He 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. He is the founder of the monumental Step Afrika! International Cultural Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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." 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*. He is



the recipient of numerous Artist Fellowships, the 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 2008 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. In 2018, Williams received the Mayor's Arts Award for Visionary Leadership from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

Step Afrika! Outreach

Stepping is a dance that uses the body as an instrument, combining footsteps, claps, and spoken words to produce complex rhythms.

Thursday morning started out at Geneva High School where Step Afrika! dancers engaged with students at two different assemblies. In each session members of the company invited students to respond to the call and to dance with them. Invited students demonstrated the stepping techniques and complex rhythmic patterns shared by the company and were encouraged to engage in discussions about the roots and creative evolution of percussive dance.

On Thursday evening Step Afrika! held a dance workshop for members of the Hobart and William Smith Colleges community. Claps, slaps and stomps filled the Gearan Center as members of the company demonstrated stepping techniques, taught dancers the language of step and engaged in conversations about the rich history of stepping as an archive of memory, reinvention and expression for the African-American community. The workshop also encouraged all those in attendance to attend the concert the following night, supplying them with both anticipation and a deeper connection to the choreographic expressions presented on stage.

Geneva Concerts is profoundly grateful to all of our donors who provided us with financial support from the beginning of this pandemic when we had to suspend our season.

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