

Bringin' It Home

WHAT DO SOUTH AFRICAN AND U.S. DANCE CREWS HAVE IN COMMON? THEY'VE EVOLVED INDEPENDENTLY, THEY'RE HUNGRY FOR YOUNG BODIES, AND NOW THEY'RE DANCING TOGETHER.

By Eisa Nefertari Ulen



If music is a universal language and dance its universal response, then something in our collective unconscious has allowed South Africans and Black Americans to speak it with the same accent. From NYC to Soweto, several nearly identical dance styles have evolved independently—despite the vast abyss called the Middle Passage. Every time we make the music with our mouths, bring in the noise, or soul clap to make sound, we celebrate the same beats. And each time we conjure up some new way to shake our bodies to the bass sound pumping, we reflect some long ago dance move created on the continent.

South Africa's Pansula dancers lock and unlock their bodies without a sound, as South African house provides the beat. Their tight robotic moves pay homage to our own breakdancers, but

Pansula keeps both feet on the ground, like popping. And from the dark pain of imported mineworkers, the signifyin' song and dance called Gum Boot developed. Named after the footwear used by mineworkers, Gum Boot dancers tell tales about their own virility and life among the mineworkers. Similarly, Black fraternities and sororities celebrate themselves via stepping. So, whether we are speaking of the whole body-shaking rhythms of DC sistahs dancing to Go-Go music or South African women grooving in any Zulu village, the message is the same.

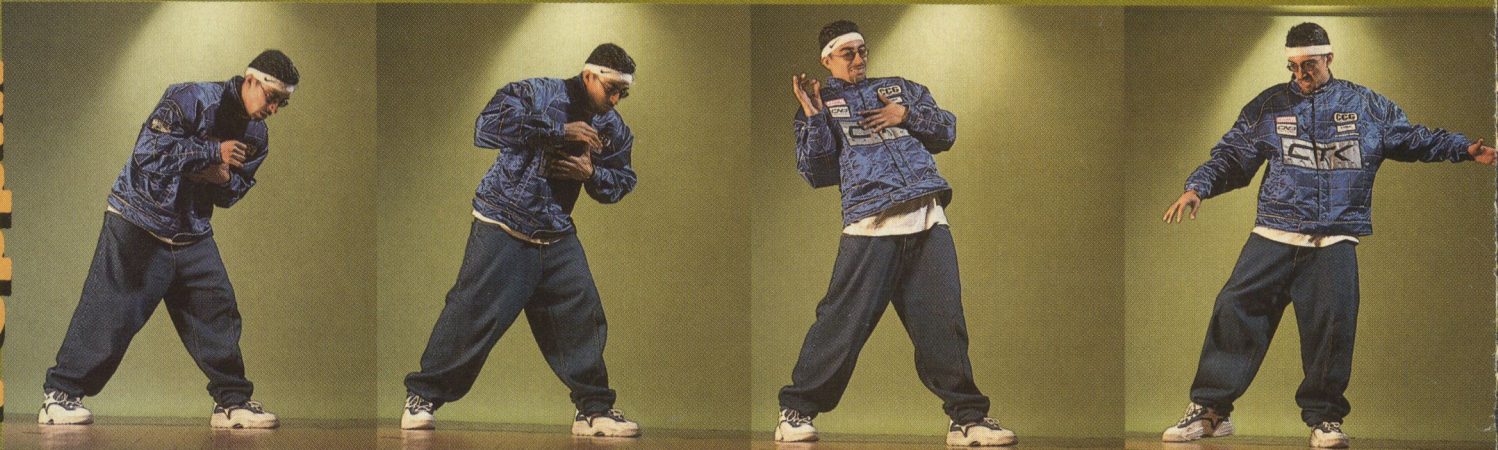
Since such magic exists on both sides of the Atlantic, a group of twenty-somethings brought it all together. For the past three years, members of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and the Soweto Dance Theatre have collaborated in an effort dubbed Step Afrika!, which is fast developing Pan-African

appeal. This past year, UK's Isigi Dance Company introduced Atlanta's own Bankhead Bounce, and Jamaican-born H. Patton dropped Dancehall sound and style. Every year, a free public performance in Soweto follows two weeks of workshops, where Black folk from all over learn regional variations on similar dance moves.

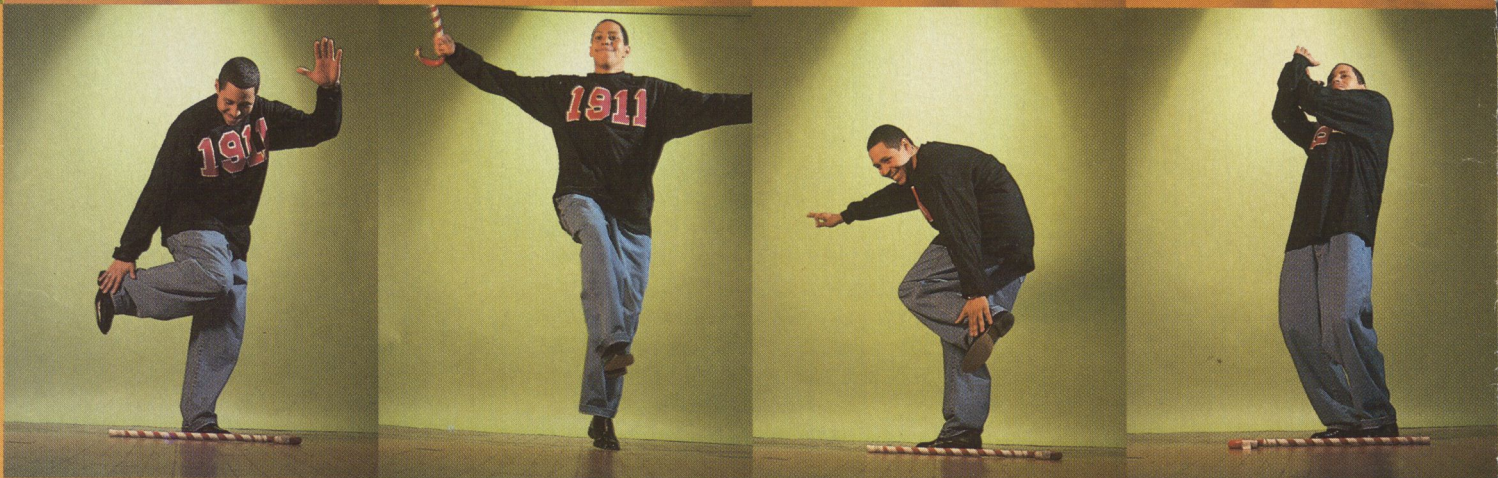
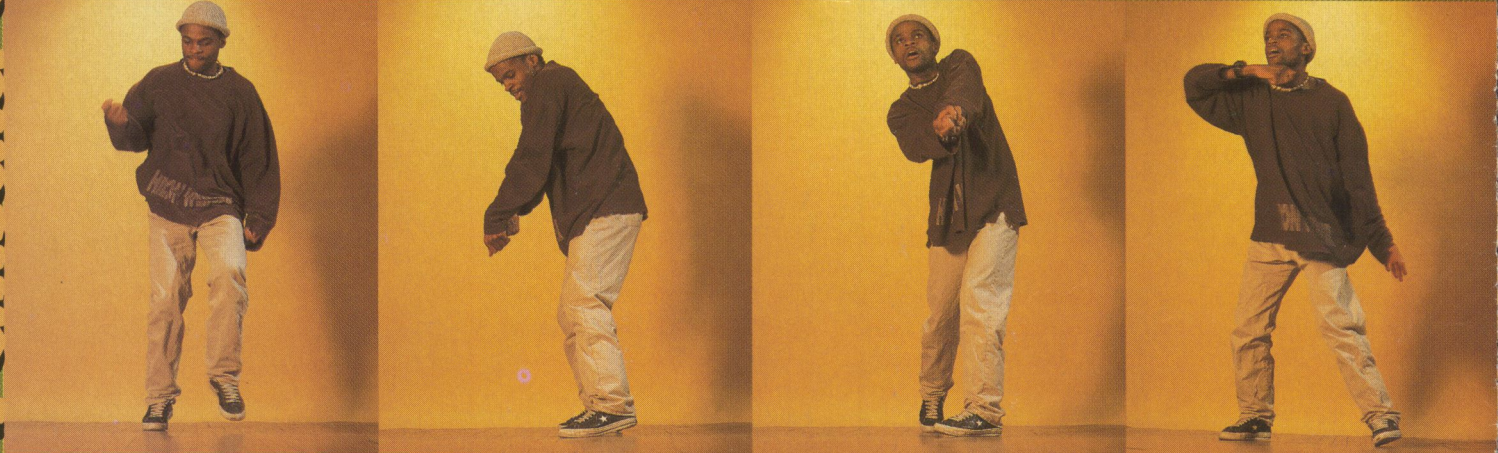
The ululation, the sistahs' high call of praise among many African nations, sounds through the township community center whenever this synergy reaches its height. Like the "aiight" from the same crowd, this is a call of celebration and a call to represent where you're from. And it is aiight. But it's definitely all good when a mother leader of a South African village can see us young and dancing together, and say, "Now I know what has happened to my sons and daughters taken so long ago. You are doing well, my children." **S**

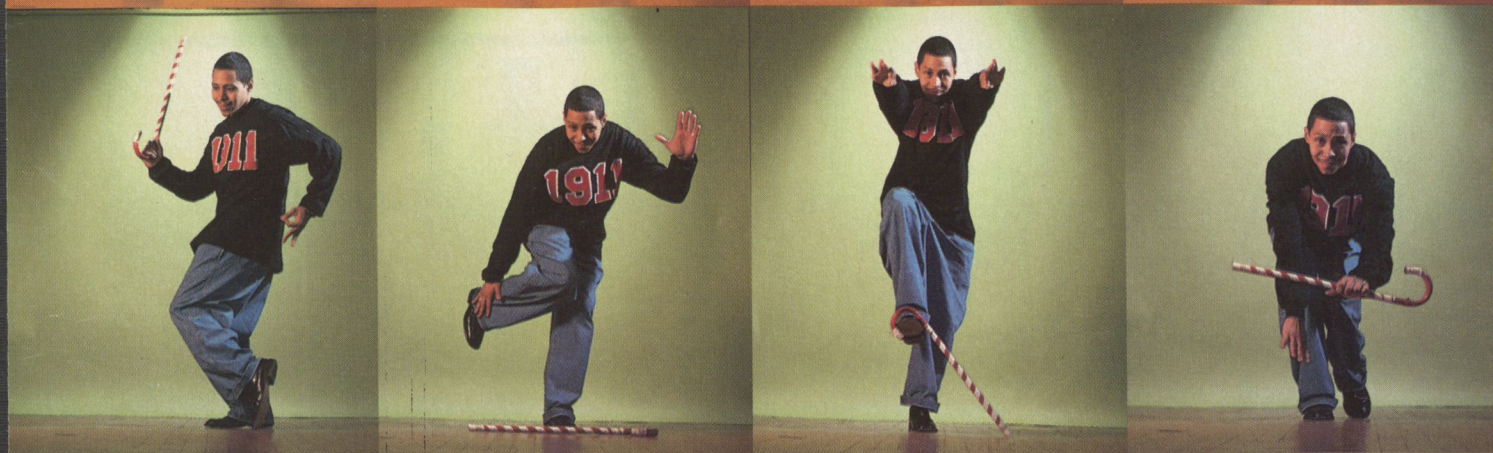
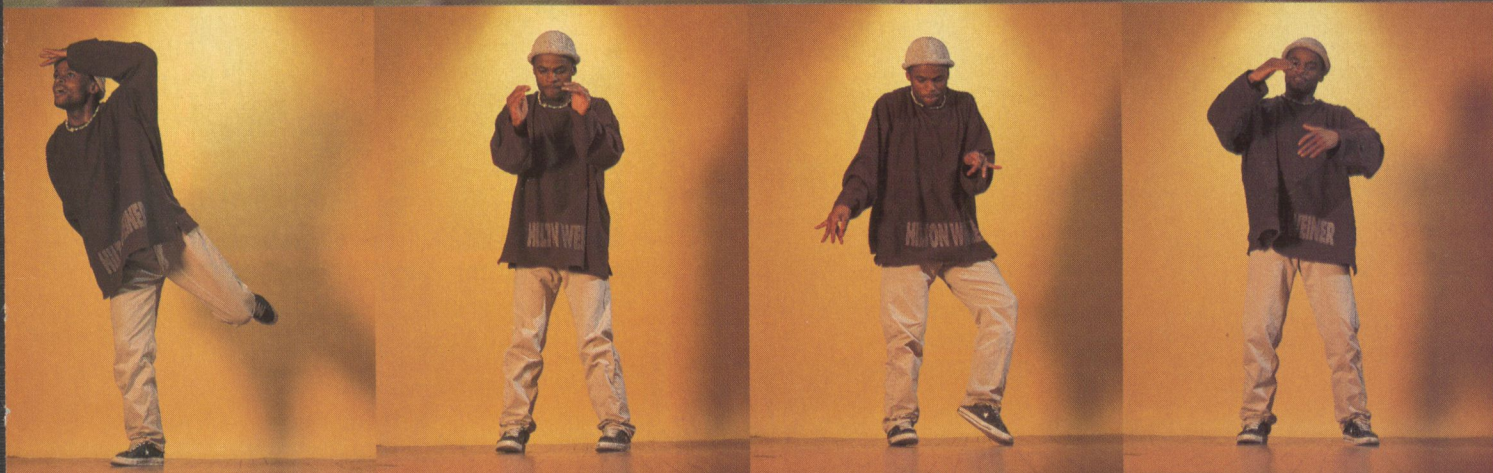
RICHARD MITCHELL

Pansula & Poppin'



BONE BREAKING: SOUTH AFRICA'S PANSULA (below), LIKE URBAN POPPING (above), TWISTS JOINTS AND BENDS BONES BEYOND THE LIMITS OF IMAGINATION.





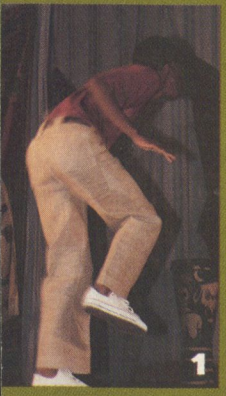
HAND TO FOOT: FRATERNITY STEPPING (above), LIKE GUM BOOT DANCE (below), USES FOOT STOMPING AND HAND CLAPPING TO TELL TALL TALES.



Steppin' & Gum Boot

RICHARD MITCHELL

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH STEP AFRIKA!



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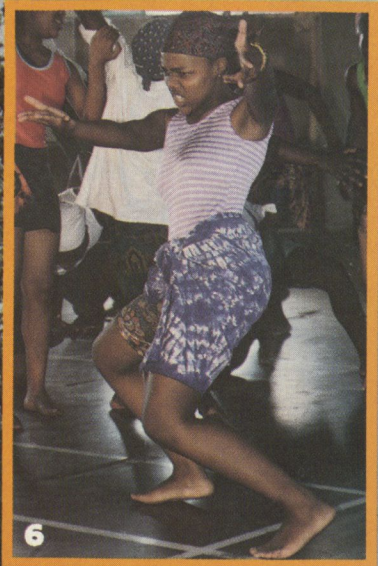
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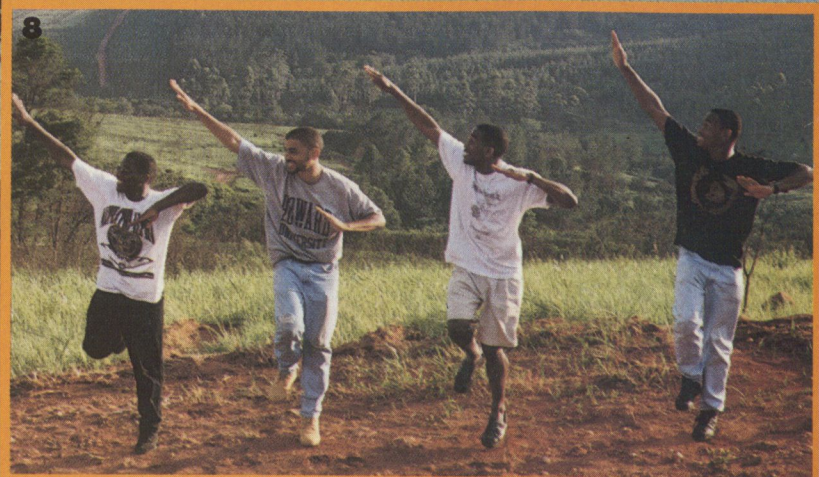


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- 1. Pansula
- 2. Swazi dance
- 3. Sibaqa dance
- 4. Gum boot
- 5. Zulu dance
- 6. Jungle dance
- 7. Gum boot
- 8. Stepping



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