

# MAKING IMPRESSIONS

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## STEP AFRIKA! RECALLS CULTURE

Step Afrika! will visit Dance Place, bringing the highly percussive rhythms of "stepping," as practiced by African American fraternities and sororities, South African gumboots, African American spiritual techniques, Southern African Zulu warrior dance, and American tap dance. Each evening will be a celebration as well as a performance, as Step Afrika! affirms the foundation of step with a program that highlights both Southern Africa as the birthplace of this movement and the African American fraternities and sororities where this technique has been reborn and made popular.

Step Afrika! is a powerful collaborative project between young artists from the United States, Europe, and the South Africa-based Soweto Dance Theater. A byproduct of annual sojourns to the Step Afrika! International cultural Festival in Soweto, South Africa, the project highlights the African-American fraternity and sorority art form of stepping and its links to dance traditions around the world.

Founded in December 1994, Step Afrika! USA is the American arm of the groundbreaking festival. The company reaches thousands of Americans each year and has performed on many stages in North America, Europe, and South Africa. Reviewers describe Step Afrika!'s performance as a "high energy brand of precision stepping"—a dance genre considered by some to be one of the most exciting created by Americans in the 21st century—and its performers "an enormously powerful ensemble of dancers." Step Afrika! recently completed a 50-city tour of American colleges and universities from Maine to Mississippi.

The company is also a leader in the field of Arts in Education and specializes in the use of stepping as a motivational and educational tool for young children. Step Afrika! has conducted step residencies and clinics for the Kennedy Center, the MOJA Festival, the Kentucky Center for the Arts, the Smithsonian Institution, and in schools and community-based organizations around the country. The company offers weekly classes on the traditions of step throughout the year.

During a Step Afrika! performance, one will see the connectedness of these members of the African Diaspora to Africans born in Africa. Each evening the audience will receive a repertoire of pieces that refer to the historical origins of step along with the future of this African-inspired art form here in the United States.

In the piece "For the Brothers," arranged by Jeff Johnson and Paul Woodruff, the male tradition of stepping preserved by the African American fraternal organization Alpha Phi Alpha will be performed. The "sistas" of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. will excite the crowd with high-energy movements in "High Steppin' Sorors," arranged by Kirsten Smith, Genia Morgan, and Stacey Montgomery.



STEP AFRIKA!

Photo: Lion Shaw

Choreographer Mbuyisela Semela will reconnect with the source in "Gumboot Dance," inspired by the South African mine workers' historic and current struggle for political and social equality. In another piece, "The Zulu Dance," he exposes the rich culture of the Zulu people of Southern Africa.

Pieces like "Wade in the Water" show the spiritually bonded connections between Africans of the Diaspora and those born in Africa; this piece fuses gumboots, step, tap, and African American spiritual dance. "Shhh!" and "Who I Am" are light-hearted pieces that add to the evening of dance with the rhythms of American tap dance and collegiate step.

Don't miss Step Afrika! F

10/19, 8 pm, all seats \$20; Sa 10/20 at 8 pm; Su 10/21, 7 pm, \$16 general, \$12 students, members, artists, senior (purchased in advance only by F 10/19 at 5 pm); \$6 17 and under. Dance Place, 3225 8th Street NE (Brookland/CUA Metro). 202/269-1600.

**IN ADDITION** to the Dance Place weekend performances, Step Afrika! will offer the following:

**M 10/15, 10:15-11:45 am:** Master Class at Dance Place. Call 202/269-1600 for details and registration.

**Sa 10/20, 9 am-3:30 pm:** Step Afrika! will be at the Armour J. Blackburn Center at Howard University as a prelude to the Youth Step Conference, which will be on 10/21. This conference is intended to educate, uplift, and enlighten youth ages 9 to 17 to the historical and cultural significance of step. Contact Brian William at 202/462-2592 for further details.

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