

# Step Afrika!

PHOTOS BY MARY T. MILLER



By Meredith Strohm Gunter and Mary T. Miller

According to an African proverb, "If you can talk, you can sing; and if you can walk, you can dance." One thousand area grade school students were dazzled last week by some serious singing and dancing by the internationally recognized Step Afrika! USA ensemble. Presented by PVCC and the Community Children's Theatre, Step Afrika! introduced area children to a vibrant, athletic, and rhythmic form of dance incorporating dance traditions from around the world, especially South African mine workers' Gumbboot dancing, tap dancing, and stepping – a more contemporary style popular among African American fraternities and sororities. To a standing room only house for both performances, and to an enthusiastic and dazzled crowd, Step

Afrika! performers offered the "high energy brand of precision stepping" for which they have been known and recognized. In cooperation with the Soweto Dance Theatre and the John F.

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Imagination Celebration, Step Afrika! developed this special children's production to inform and engage young people in

learning about dance, its history, and its potential as a communicative form. The Monticello Step Team joined "Step Afrika" at the end of the county school performance, and local children

education, when the ensemble cast was introduced at the conclusion of the program, each performer's status as a recent college or university graduate (or soon-to-be graduate) was also announced. To encourage

all audience members to carry the traditions home with them, the troupe introduced the concept of "Body Music": "Think of several ways you can make music with your body: clapping hands, stomping feet, patting belly. Try different sounds and choose three rhythms you really like. Try them in different orders until you like the sound and movement of your body. Get your friends and family to



try the dance with you!"

The Community Children's Theatre was organized in 1953 by the University of Virginia, Department of Speech and Drama, and the University League, which is now the Junior League, to give children an opportunity to participate in live theatre as actors and audience. It was the first community organization in Charlottesville that focused on bringing dramatic arts into the lives of all school age children. Beginning with in-school performances, CCT went on to present its first professional children's theatre production in 1969. During the past 50 years, CCT has co-sponsored professional companies with public schools, provided teacher and student workshops, directed youth productions, and has offered a continuous weekend or Family Series since 1971. CCT is an active member of the Piedmont Council of the Arts and was recently honored with the 2003 Piedmont Council of the Arts Organization Award.

CCT, with the generous help of a local anonymous foundation and PVCC offered this two day residency of Step Afrika as its final show of the season. A public performance, also sold out, was offered on Sunday. As a non-profit organization, Community Children's Theatre is dependent upon the generosity of area residents to be able to continue making theatre accessible and exciting to young students. Season tickets for this past season, including five performances, were \$30. For more information, or for season tickets for next year's season, contact CCT at '961-7862 or cct@avenue.org.

# THE MUSIC MUSE

## What Songs Are on Your Soundtrack?

By Les Sinclair

It occurred to me the other day as I was doing my weekend radio show just how many songs we have on our own personal soundtrack. If your life were a movie (and let's face it whose isn't?) what songs would be "MUST HAVES"?

Remember the last time you saw a movie? Do you recall the sad moment that drew you to tears or the silliness that made you laugh? The movie very likely had music that helped bring you to the conclusion of how you felt.

Movie scores are so good at accentuating the scene that the Motion Picture Companies actually sell the music. The soundtrack can literally make or break a scene in a film and some soundtracks are better than the movie itself... the movie "DUETS" is a perfect example. Thumbs down for the movie and thumbs up for the soundtrack.

So what's on your soundtrack?

How many songs that come on the radio can you sing along with? Many I'd suspect



And it's likely that they also have some sort of meaning to you.

Now, here's where radio comes in. Maybe you have a favorite station (I hope it's mine) maybe you have a few stations that you like (Still, I hope mine is your favorite, I write that with a wink!) I'd bet it's your favorite station because they play the music

that more closely resembles your idea of a soundtrack.

Think back over the course of your life and how the songs on your radio have marked that time. Maybe you remember your first dance, your first kiss, the song when your fiancé proposed, or when your first girl or boy friend broke up with you? Think of the sad songs that got you thru the rough spots in your life and the happy songs that multiplied your joy.

Now, this is why there are radio formats. The younger set doesn't have enough experiences to have a fully developed soundtrack, so the station, for the younger listeners, plays the same 40 songs over and over.

This is where the term Top 40 came from (They really play more than 40 songs, it just feels like 40—again with a wink!). The younger crowd is still searching for their soundtrack. They're still matching experiences and music. And when they find them they belt out something like "That's tight, yo!"

Once you move into adulthood your choices are still adaptable but you have a general feel for what you like and dislike. You've got a nice base for a soundtrack to your life, even though it's not fully complete yet. After you get a bit further along, you're soundtrack is in place, but you want

to feel hip so you sample other genre's of music and maybe add a few more titles to your "Life Juke Box". And you'll say something like "Cool song!"

As older (and I use that term loosely – don't send me hate-mail, OK?) listeners have so many experiences that they need more than just 40 songs, to set their life to music. And the older set will say something like "Swell", "Cool", "Word!" "Groovy" "Kickin'" or "Tight!" Depending on what word is in fashion for your generation.

For me, a song marks almost every memorable moment.

Now think about how you attach songs to people. I have songs that remind me of each of

my kids and significant others and even the guy down the hall at work.

Often we take these moments for granted, but inevitably a song will make you think of something or someone or an instant. Then all that's required is to match the moment and the music.

I'd welcome your thoughts on YOUR SOUNDTRACK. Send me an email les@z95.net. We can swap notes. And maybe come up with one Swell, Groovy, Cool, Word-up, Kickin', Tight soundtrack, Yo!

Les Sinclair is Program Director, Music Director and on-air talent for Z95.1.



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