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# 40

## Under Forty

Here are young Washingtonians to watch in politics, arts, sports, media, medicine, and business. You may be hearing a lot more about them in coming years.

\*Photographs by Ron Aira

### TEEN MULTIMEDIA PRODIGY

Casey Drogin's videos have a self-exposing quality that would mortify most teenage boys. The subjects of the videos—all of which Drogin stars in—range from a romance with a stuffed hippo to a struggle to play a video game without bursting into tears. "If I think it's funny," the 15-year-old multimedia prodigy says, "I'll do it."

Drogin has published cartoons in the newspaper *Young DC*, and last year his work sold at a National Press Club auction alongside that of professionals such as the *Washington Post's* Tom Toles. His rap video featuring his song about kosher bread, "Matzah!," won a Montgomery County Public Schools contest. Drogin has produced dozens of shorts, including one picked up by Xbox's Web site; many are on YouTube.

He got hooked on video by Takoma Park Middle School teacher Zack Wilson. "He has

skills that can't really be taught," Wilson says. "He has a great sense of timing and knows what shot to place where."

In a video-camp contest, Drogin was voted most likely to succeed in the electronic arts. This summer he's taking a New York Film Academy course, and he hopes to enroll in New York University's film school after graduating from Silver Spring's Albert Einstein High. Drogin gets inspiration from idols such as director Quentin Tarantino, but his talent?

"My mom. She's got a really twisted sense of humor."

—GRETCHEN COOK

### CHEF WITH A SWEET FUTURE

Naomi Gallego isn't your average chocoholic. This month, the 32-year-old pastry chef at PS7's in DC's Penn Quarter flies to Chicago to compete in the World Chocolate Masters US National Competition. →



**Brian Williams founded Step Afrika!, the only professional company devoted to the style of dance called stepping. It originated in black fraternities and sororities but has earlier roots in South African folk dances.**

the PS7's Chocolate Bar and an innovative Dark Chocolate Linzer Cake, but fruit desserts are equally impressive—such as a pineapple spring roll with cream-cheese sabayon, spiced-carrot reduction, and carrot mousse.

As for her future, she says: "I'd love to bring a sophisticated dessert restaurant to Washington—with tasting menus and wine pairings. And have my own line of chocolates." —SARA LEVINE

#### SHARING THE JOY OF STEPPING

Brian Williams knows the power of stepping. It's more than the energy pulsing from his dancers' stomping and clapping. By taking performances into schools, the founder of DC's Step Afrika! has seen youngsters come out of their shells and students get interested in college.

"Stepping is accessible," says Williams, 38. "All you need is your hands, your feet, a little space, and some friends."

What at first just looks like a flashy performance becomes a way of teaching values embodied in the art form: teamwork, discipline, commitment.

Williams leads the only professional company dedicated to the percussive dance style originating in historically black fraternities and sororities. He learned stepping at Howard University; during a fellowship in South Africa, he realized it had roots in folk dances there.

Since 1994, Williams has built a group focused on spreading this distinctly American art form and its message of cultural exchange. Embassies have invited Step Afrika! to perform and teach in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Brazil. In June

the group makes its first trip to Asia.

Williams's newest piece, *Nxt/Step*, mixes traditional stepping with video and electronic music. It premiered at Dance Place to good reviews; an updated version will be performed May 30 through June 3 at DC's Atlas Performing Arts Center.

—CHAD LORENZ

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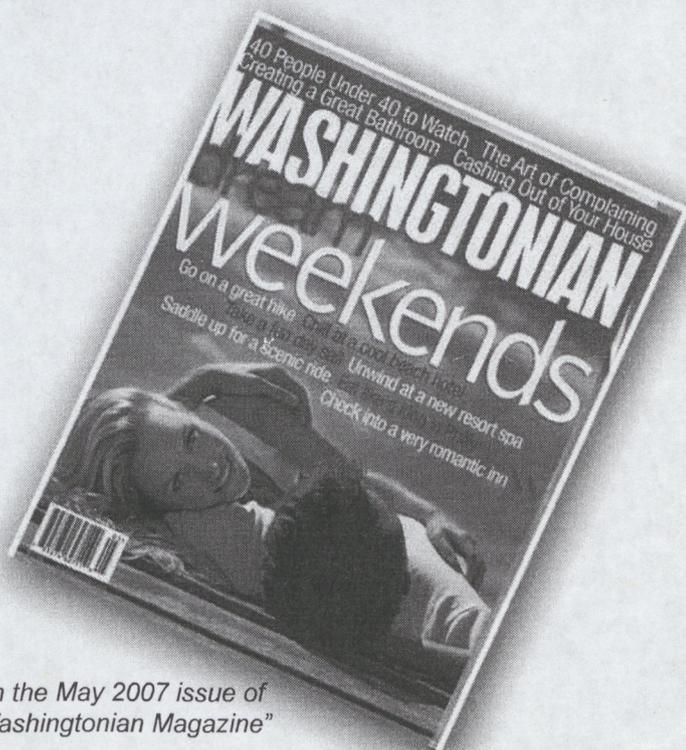
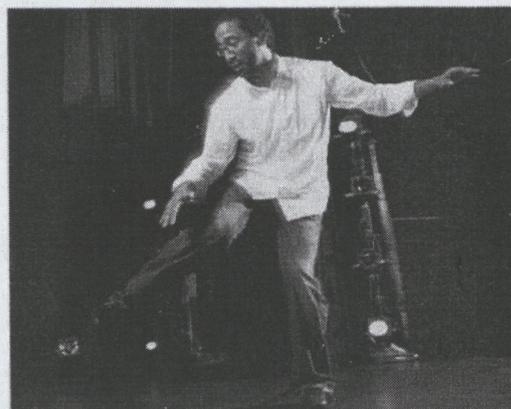
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