

Step Afrika! shares history of keeping the beat

By **AYESHA MORRIS**
Daily News Staff

Syncopated stomping, African chanting and choreographed hand-claps are part of the energy coming to the dance floor when Step Afrika! performs this weekend in the Virgin Islands.

The first show happens at 8 p.m. today at Island Center on St. Croix, followed at 8 p.m. Saturday at Reichhold Center.

Step Afrika! will hold their second residency at 10 a.m. today at Island Center.

Stepping is a style of dance rooted in African heritage, made popular by black fraternities and sororities in the early 1900s.

Using a series of geometric formations, dancers keep a cadence with their feet, accentuating beats with unified choreography reminiscent of the military.

Founder Brian Williams, a Howard graduate and Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity member, went to South Africa in 1991 for a fellowship and recognized a similar style of the dance.

"He saw a young boy doing some gumboot and thought it was a little odd because it had a lot of the same characteristics of stepping," Giani Clarkson, Step Afrika company manager, said. "There is a serious bridge between what African-Americans and Africans know as stepping."

Gumboot dancing developed in the mines of South Africa, where workers created dances with their boots and bodies to keep their spirits up in response to oppressive working conditions and apartheid.

Williams started a festival that brought both groups together to perform and later founded his own company in Washington, D.C.

In 1994, Step Afrika became the



Step Afrika! to perform on St. Croix and St. Thomas this weekend.

first professional dance company focused strictly on the art of stepping.

"We've gone from a local sensation to an international phenomenon. We travel all over the world to 150 events and travel to foreign countries reaching over 75,000 people," Clarkson said. "We're entertainers and educators."

The company is made up of eight college graduates — four men and four women.

Graduation from college or university is a requirement for membership, and the company makes it pick from auditions held throughout the nation.

"We just want people who have a love of stepping and want to be ambassadors of culture," Clarkson

“
Our show is basically a history lesson of how stepping arrived in the Americas ...

— Clarkson Giani

said. "We interact so well and we always want to make the audience feel a part of what we're doing."

The company has danced in places as far away as Brazil and Tanzania, and it will be going to Vietnam this summer.

"Our show is basically a history lesson of how stepping arrived in the Americas, from the pledge scene on college campuses, to the South African gumboot mines, to

an African Zulu celebration, and to here, where stepping has taken on a contemporary vibe," Clarkson said. "We're about preserving the culture of stepping and using stepping as a tool for children to get them into in college and higher education."

Saturday night, the company will showcase about seven dances.

The opening number, "KeNako," is inspired by the com-

pany's time in Johannesburg, South Africa. During the piece, dancers step along to the metronome in perfect timing.

"The Pledge Scene" showcases the different styles of stepping used by African-America fraternities and sororities.

In a dance called "Work," choreographed by Jackie Semela, the South African gumboot style is shown.

And "Shh" highlights the unique stepping styles in each of black fraternities and sororities.

"They all have a distinct stepping style, with different postures, the way the arms move, calls, beats, and changes," Clarkson said.

The performance is strictly percussive.

"If you've got a body you've got music. You roll from there," he said. "The only music is maybe a drum."

Sponsors for the show include the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts (for the residencies), Innovative, Tropical Shipping, FirstBank, First Insurance and Marriott Frenchman's Reef.

Tickets are on St. Croix are \$15 for covered seating and \$8 uncovered at Urban Threadz, Alliance Clothing and UVI Bookstore; and on St. Thomas are \$12 for lower uncovered seating and \$8 for upper uncovered seating; available at Modern Music, Urban Threadz, VI Bridal and Tuxedo, Parrot Fish, and Reichhold Center Box Office.

For information, call **693-1559**.

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MUSIC FEST

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She migrated to the U.S. in the late '80s and began writing her own compositions. In a career that has been stretched over almost 20 years, Prescott has performed in Chicago as the opening act for famed Jamaican artist Wayne Wonder and shared the stage with many top Caribbean entertainers in Grenada and Anguilla.

Denise "Saucy Wow" Belfon is a soca, R&B and gospel singer, songwriter and dancer. She is commonly known by Caribbean locals as the "soca-dancehall queen" because of her high energy, complex, exotic on stage performances in addition to her powerful, husky, and high stamina vocals. Her career, although very well established, exploded after the release of her 2003 smash single, "Saucy Baby," which is considered to be her signature song by many.

Saturday

Songstress Cherine Anderson will treat audiences to dancehall soul — a mixture of reggae, dancehall, soul and R&B, laced with the grittiness of her past. She is a singer, songwriter and acclaimed Jamaican actress who has starred in two of Jamaica's most successful films, *Dancehall Queen* (1997) and *One Love* (2003).

Popular songs include "Good Love" and "Kingston State of Mind."

Growing up in the church, she became a touring member of Ashe Performing Arts Ensemble, and in 2003, Anderson's voice lent two heartfelt songs to the soundtrack of *One Love*, which earned her the MTV2/Urbanworld Film Festival Award for best actress in a feature film.

She has a bachelor of arts in film and music and a minor in Japanese language and literature from Middlebury College and has held numerous internships at entertainment companies such as MTV



Daily News File Photo

Cool Sessions of St. John will perform in the BVI Music Festival.

Haiti to Brooklyn, NY. In 1987, he joined a rap group with his cousin Prakazrel Michel (aka Pras) and Michel's high-school classmate Lauren Hill. They initially called themselves the Tranzlator Crew, which evolved into the Fugees, a name taken from slang for Haitian refugees. They signed with Ruffhouse Records in 1993 and released their debut album, "Blunted on Reality," in 1994.

The Fugees hit their stride in 1996 on their second release, *The Score*, produced by Jean. The album went triple-platinum, garnering two Grammy Awards and selling six million copies nationally and 20 million internationally. Jean assembled or participated in numerous high-profile charity benefit events for multiple causes including aid for his native Haiti.

He launched his solo album "The Carnival," in 1997, which garnered a Grammy nomination and featured a roster of guests including Pras, Lauryn Hill, Jean's siblings, Celia Cruz, the Neville Brothers and Bob Marley's female backing vocalists the I Threes. It hit Billboard's Top 20 and went triple-platinum.

Sunday

Hidden Beach NAACP Image Award nominated saxophonist Mike Phillips has been entertaining audiences with his genre-blending sax play and the help of notable artists from an array of musical arenas. They include contemporary jazz luminaries the likes of Wayman Tisdale, Jonathan Butler and Jeff

In 1985, Freddie Jackson landed a recording contract with Capitol Records, and issued his debut album, *Rock Me Tonight*. The Laurence-penned title track stormed the R&B charts, spending six weeks at number one, and made Jackson an instant hit on urban contemporary radio. "You Are My Lady" gave him a second straight R&B chart-topper, and also proved to be his highest-charting single on the Billboard Hot 100, peaking at number 13. With "He'll Never Love You (Like I Do)" and "Love Is Just a Touch Away" also hitting the R&B Top Ten, *Rock Me Tonight* topped the R&B album chart and went platinum. Jackson issued the follow-up *Just Like the First Time* 1986, on the heels of a number one R&B duet with Melba Moore, "A Little Bit More" (from her album *A Lot of Love*). Another platinum seller, *Just Like the First Time* continued Jackson's dominance of the R&B singles charts; "Tasty Love," "Have You Ever Loved Somebody," and "Jam Tonight" all hit number one, while "I Don't Want to Lose Your Love" went to number two.

After returning to the charts with "It's Your Move" in February 2004, Jackson released his tenth studio album, "Transitions," in September 2006 under the record label Orpheus Music.

As a Grammy and American Music Award-winning recording artist with five best-selling albums and ten Billboard No. 1 singles, it's evident that Stephanie Mills' impact over the last 25 years has not gone unnoticed.

2007 BVI Music Festival Schedule

Friday

5 p.m. — DJ Jam Session
 5:40 p.m. — Nicole Prescott
 6:25 p.m. — Cool Session Brass
 7:30 p.m. — Opening Ceremony
 8 p.m. — Extreme Band
 9 p.m. — Jamesie P
 9:55 p.m. — Denise Belfon
 10:30 p.m. — Alison Hinds
 12:10 a.m. — Destra Garcia & Atlantik

Saturday

2:30 p.m. — DJ Jam Session
 3:20 p.m. — Adjik
 4:20 p.m. — Show Time
 6:20 p.m. — Xpress Band
 7:35 p.m. — Roses & Champagne Fashion Show

8:35 p.m. — Out Of The Desert
 10:05 p.m. — Lucky Dube
 12:05 a.m. — Cherine Anderson
 12:35 a.m. — Wyclef Jean

Sunday

2:15 p.m. — Steel Pan Music
 3:45 p.m. — P'Your Passion
 5:15 p.m. — Lashing Dogs
 6:45 p.m. — Percy Sledge
 8:25 p.m. — Mike Phillips
 9:55 p.m. — Stephanie Mills
 11:25 p.m. — Freddie Jackson

Monday

Noon — DJ Dre
 4:30 p.m. — DJ Commodore
 6:30 p.m. — Mr Vegas

sweet serenade to her baby son and tugs at our heart strings on the moving and uplifting Bebe Winans-penned title track, "Born for This."

Monday

Using the same "Playground" riddim Beenie used for "Who Am I," Clifford "Mr. Vegas" Smith recorded the hectic "Nike Air," an instant Jamaican hit, according to All Music Guide. As soon as "Nike Air" hit the top of the charts, "Heads High" was issued and became a smash not only on the island but the U.K. as well. The singer was now

called upon to accompany crooners like Sean Paul, since producers assumed Vegas was a quick, forceful toaster with no croon of his own. He finally got to show some of his lover side when his debut full-length on the Greensleeves label, *Heads High*, hit the streets in 1998. *Damn Right* appeared in 2001 with Shaggy and Big Yard guesting and a bit more R&B and hip-hop flavor. The Eastern-flavored "Pull Up" became Vegas' next big hit and the title track to his 2004 album for his new label, *Delicious Vinyl*.

Reichhold
 Center for the Arts

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Weekend!

A guide to what's happening in the Virgin Islands • Friday, May 25, 2007



**Step Afrika! brings
dance history to V.I.**

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Music



World-renowned entertainers coming to BVI for annual Music Fest.

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Art



Nii Ahene exhibits his work at two galleries on St. Croix.

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St. Thomas

Agave Terrace

Colony Point Pleasant Resort
775-4142

LIVE MUSIC: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7 to 10 p.m. **Aben Marrero** on steel pan.

A Whale of a Tale

American Yacht Harbor,
775-1270

LIVE MUSIC: Harpist **Jesus Zamore** from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Sundays and Mondays.

Betsy's Bar

Frenchtwn,
774-9347

LIVE MUSIC: Guitar **Scotty** from 7 to 10 p.m.

GAMES: Pool, foosball, darts, etc.

Blue Bar at HAVANA BLUE

Morningstar Beach Resort,
715-BLUE

ENTERTAINMENT: Cuban lounge music nightly from 5:30 p.m. Call for special event details.

Blue Moon Cafe

Secret Harbour, 779-2262

LIVE MUSIC: Fridays 7 to 10 p.m. **Andrew Douglas** on steel pan and vocals.

Bridge Club

Al Cohen's Mall, Raphune Hill,
775-6184

LESSONS: Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.

GAMES: Mondays and Thursdays at 7 p.m. and Wednesdays and Fridays at 1 p.m.

Cabana Bar

Bluebeard's Castle,
774-1600 ext. 4526

LIVE MUSIC: Thursday, Saturday and Sunday with **Dennis Frett** on piano.

Caribbean Saloon

American Yacht Harbor,
775-7060

DANCING: Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. with **DJ Rob**.

Changes Nightclub

Charlotte Amalie, 714-2060

DANCING: Thursdays, Ladies night 2 for 1 specials with **DJ X Factor**; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. **DJ Avalanche** and **The Witch Doctor** playing hip hop, house, reggae and calypso

Chef's Table

Downtown,
776-6120

LIVE MUSIC: Live jazz Wednesday to Sunday evenings.

Club Reign

75 Kronprindsens Gade,
998-1773

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT: call for details.

DANCING: Thursday through Sunday.

Club 75

Downtown,
344-9068,

EXOTIC DANCERS: Gentlemen's club, open 6 days a week

Live Action & Night Life

9:30 p.m. **Aben Marrero** on steel pan.

Fungi's

Colony Point Pleasant Resort,
775-4142

LIVE MUSIC: Fridays 7 to 10 p.m. with **Arthur Williams** on steel pan and saxophone.

Giggling Gecko

International Plaza,
774-7777

LIVE MUSIC: Jazz on Thursdays at 5 p.m. with **Sally Smith** and **Jerry Harris**.

The Green House

Waterfront, 774-7998

DANCING: Tuesdays "Two for Tuesday" with **DJ Peter C** from 9 p.m.

LIVE MUSIC: Fridays "Soca Reggae Night" from 10 p.m. with **P'Your Passion** playing calypso, reggae and high-energy soca.

Havensight Cafe

Havensight Mall

LIVE MUSIC: Tuesdays from 3 to 5 p.m. **Nicky "Mighty Whitey" Russell**

Hull Bay Hideaway

Hull Bay Beach, 777-1898

LIVE MUSIC: call for details
GAMES: Pool, darts, horseshoes and volleyball.

Iggie's Beach Bar and Grill

Bolongo Bay, 693-2600

LIVE MUSIC: Mondays 7 to 10 p.m. **Jason Jones** on guitar; and Wednesdays, Carnival Night at 8 p.m. with the **Sammy Watts Calypso Band**.

KARAOKE: Thursdays from 8 p.m. to midnight with **Jason Jones**. Prizes and giveaways also.

GAMES: Sports with seven TVs. Call about special events or private parties.

Indigo Bar and Restaurant

Magens Point Resort, 776-0474

LIVE MUSIC: Mondays from 6 to 9 p.m. **Andrew Douglas** on steel pan and vocals; and Wednesdays from 7 to 10 with the **PopTarts** on flute, guitar and vocals; Saturdays 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. **2 Blue Shoes** playing Tom Waits, Taj and originals.

Island Beachcomber Hotel

Lindbergh Bay, 774-5250

LIVE MUSIC: call for details

Jack's Wings

Tillett Gardens, 776-9464

LIVE MUSIC: call for details.

LaPetite Fenetre

Frenchtown (near ballfield)

GAMES: Wednesdays at 8 p.m. bid whist.

L3 at LOTUS

Red Hook, 774-SAKE

DANCING: Fridays 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. with **DJ Batenda** featuring 2 for 1 Sexy Sakejitos.

Latitude 18

774-2790

LIVE MUSIC: "Romantic Sunset Sundays" from 7 to 9:30 p.m. with classical guitarist **Chris Robbert**.

Molly Molone's

American Yacht Harbor, 775-1270

LIVE MUSIC: Nightly, **Cletus McBride** playing rock 'n' roll and Irish music.

National Scrabble Association of the V.I.

Frenchtown Deli, 776-2035.

SCRABBLE GAMES: Thursdays from 5:30 p.m.

Old Stone Farmhouse, Nosh courtyard

Mahogany Run, 777-6277

LIVE MUSIC: Fridays, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., jazz by the **Johnson Project**.

Offshore Bar and Cyber Cafe

Havensight,

779-6400

DANCING: Saturday: Cruzan Rum Zouk Night with **DJ J** at 10 p.m.; Wednesday: Jack Daniel's Country Night with **DJ Peter C** at 8 p.m.; and Thursday: Ladies dance night with **DJ Peter C**.

Paradise Point Bar

Havensight, 777-4540

LIVE MUSIC: Tuesdays from 5 to 7 p.m. **Hurricane Bob** playing island favorites with tramway open until 7:30 p.m.; Wednesday's sunset party and tram rides from 5 to 9 p.m., bands vary weekly.

LIVE BIRD SHOWS: Daily at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Call 777-1274.

Pilgrim Terrace

777-1016

KARAOKE: Fridays at 8 p.m.
LIVE MUSIC: call for details.

Pirate's Cove Bar and Grill

Pirate's Cove Marina,

714-2135

LIVE MUSIC: Wednesdays from 7 to 10 p.m. with **Guitar Scotty** playing classic rock and blues.
OPEN MIC: Fridays from 7 to 10 p.m. with **Guitar Scotty** playing classic rock and blues.
GAMES: Saturdays at 7 p.m. until Texas Hold 'em Poker, pool, fooball, and darts.

Robert's American Grille

Elysian Beach Resort,

714-3663

LIVE MUSIC: Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays 7 to 10 p.m. with **Freddie Rabuse**; Fridays 7 to 10 p.m. **Barry Adams**; and Sundays 6 to 9 p.m. **Marty Beechler** on piano and vocals featuring the music of Frank Sinatra and mellow rock classics.

Sharky's Sports Bar and Restaurant

Upstairs of Wendy's, 714-2618

GAMES: pool.

KARAOKE: Wednesdays, 9 p.m.
LIVE MUSIC: Live music and DJs on weekends.

Shipwreck Tavern

Al Cohen's Mall, 777-1293

LIVE MUSIC: Every Thursday, jazz, funk, rock

BRIDGE GAMES: Mondays and Thursdays at 7 p.m., Fridays at 1 p.m.

BRIDGE LESSONS: Tuesdays at 7 p.m.

Tavern on the Waterfront

Waterfront, 776-4328

LIVE MUSIC: Fridays 7 to 10:30 p.m. live jazz with **Jerry Harris** and **Sally Smith**; and Saturdays 7 to 10 p.m. **Kris Woodrum** on acoustic guitar.

Tickles Dockside Pub

Crown Bay,

776-1595

OPEN MIC: Wednesdays from 7 to 10 p.m. with **Nicky Russell**.
LIVE MUSIC: Saturdays with **TNT** and Saturday with **Dan the Pan Man**. All entertainment from 7 to 10 p.m.

Wyndham Sugar Bay Resort

Smith Bay, 777-7100

DANCING: Saturdays, 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. with **DJ Snow** spinning top 40, dance and retro.

GAMES: Ocean Club Gaming Center — entertainment 7 nights a week; games triple sevens, black jack, keno, video poker and more from 2 p.m. to 1 a.m. daily.

ENTERTAINMENT: Mangrove Cafe — Caribbean Night Thursdays 6 to 11 p.m.; show starts at 9 p.m.

XO Bistro

Red Hook, 779-2069

LIVE MUSIC: Wednesdays 7 to 11 p.m. **Jason Jones**.

Water Island

Joe's Beach Bar

514-6722

LIVE MUSIC: Sundays, 4 to 8 p.m.

St. John

Aqua Bistro

Coral Bay

LIVE MUSIC: Wednesdays, 5 to 8 p.m., **Lynell Callwood** on steelpan; Fridays, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., **Mark Wallace** on guitar and vocals; Sundays 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. **Wayne Clendenin** playing reggae.

Banana Deck

LIVE MUSIC: Thursdays, 6 to 9 p.m., **Lemuel Callwood** on steelpan.

The Balcony

Wharfside Village

LIVE MUSIC: Tuesdays 7 to 10 p.m. **Paradise People**.

The Beach Bar

Cruz Bay,

777-4220

LIVE MUSIC: Sundays 4 to 7:30 p.m. Jazz Jam with **Steve Simon** and the **Jazz Islanders**.

Caneel Bay Resort

Island Blues

KARAOKE: Wednesdays from 7 to 10 p.m. with **Debbie**.

LIVE MUSIC: Fridays, 7 to 10 p.m.: **Iguanas**.

OPEN MIC: Thursdays 8 to 11 p.m.

Larry's Landing

Wharfside Village, 693-8802

GAMES: Nightly, pool until 2 a.m.

La Tapa

Cruz Bay

LIVE MUSIC: Mondays 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. with **Sambacombo** playing Latin jazz.

Lizard's Landing

Cruz Bay

LIVE MUSIC: call for details.

Miss Lucy's

Friis Bay, 693-5244

LIVE MUSIC: Brunch from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sundays featuring **Rich Greengold** and **Eddie Bruce**, playing tropical jazz.

Morgan's Mango

Cruz Bay, 693-8141

LIVE MUSIC: Tuesdays, 7 to 10 p.m. **Greg Kinslow** on guitar featuring **Shikima Jones** on vocals; Thursdays, 7 to 10 p.m.: **Mark Wallace** on guitar and vocals; Fridays, 6:30 to 10 p.m. **John Bryan** and **Eddie Bruce**.

Satyamuna

Marketplace

LIVE MUSIC: Saturday, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. with **Rich Greengold** playing tropical jazz.

Shipwreck Landing

Coral Bay, 693-5640

LIVE MUSIC: Sundays, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. **Hot Club of Coral Bay**; Thursdays, 7 to 10 p.m. **Slammin'**

Sputniks II

Coral Bay

LIVE MUSIC: call for details.

Sun Dog Cafe

OPEN MIC: Wednesdays, 7 to 10 p.m.

Westin Resort

Great Cruz Bay, 693-8000

Chloe and Bernard's

LIVE MUSIC: Fridays, 7 to 10 p.m. **Dennis Frett** on piano; Mondays, 7 to 10 p.m.: **Sally Smith** on piano; Wednesdays, 7 to 10 p.m.: **Marty Beechler** on piano; Thursdays, 7 to 10 p.m., **Gregg Kinslow** on guitar.

Snorkels Pool Bar

LIVE MUSIC: Saturday, 1 to 4 p.m.: **Orlando Haynes** playing steel pan.; Sunday, 1 to 4 p.m.: **Orlando Haynes** playing steel pan.

St. Croix

CheeseBurgers in Paradise

East End Road, 773-1119

LIVE MUSIC: call for details.

Chicken Charlie's Roadhouse

85C Estate Solitude, 713-5174

LIVE MUSIC: Wednesdays with **Charles Lindbergh**