

STEP AFRiKA!



By using the body as an instrument, *Step Afrika!* performers create rhythm while they dance.

Cue sheet FOR STUDENTS

Welcome to *Cuesheet*, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. This *Cuesheet* is designed to help you enjoy the dance performance by *Step Afrika!*

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The gumboot marks topics for discussion or activities you may want to do with other students, friends, or family.

About the *Step Afrika!* P

What is Stepping?

Stepping is a dance that uses the body as an instrument. It combines footsteps, claps, and spoken words to produce complex rhythms, and has roots in African dance and military marching. In stepping, the dancers wear hard-soled shoes that crack and slap against the floor. *Step Afrika!* is a dance company committed to furthering the tradition of stepping.

College: Where Stepping Was Born

In the early 1900s, African American students who were members of college organizations called sororities and fraternities developed stepping. (Sororities are for women and fraternities are for men.) Stepping became a way members could show pride in their club.

The Company

Step Afrika! is a troupe of dancers who all attended U.S. colleges and universities. Its performers share three core values that allow them to be good steppers as well as great students:

- teamwork—working together
- discipline—having self-control
- commitment—being dedicated to something or someone

It's Everywhere

Though stepping is traditionally associated with college groups, the art form is universal and highly appealing to young people. Today, stepping can be found in elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States as well as in churches and community-based organizations. Are there step teams in your community? Where?

Dances You Will See

At the *Step Afrika!* performance, you will see the following:

- **a South African gumboot dance** (above). In this dance, the dancers wear rubber boots (gumboots) that they hit with their bare hands to make rhythms (patterns of sound).
- **a South African Zulu dance** (left). This dance features athletic kicks, energetic movements, and words in the Zulu language. The costumes were made in Johannesburg, one of the largest cities in Africa, especially for the dancers.
- **high-energy step routines** (right). *Step Afrika!* will demonstrate collegiate step traditions as practiced by men and women all across the United States. Look for the use of props, creative formations, and chants that appear in each step.

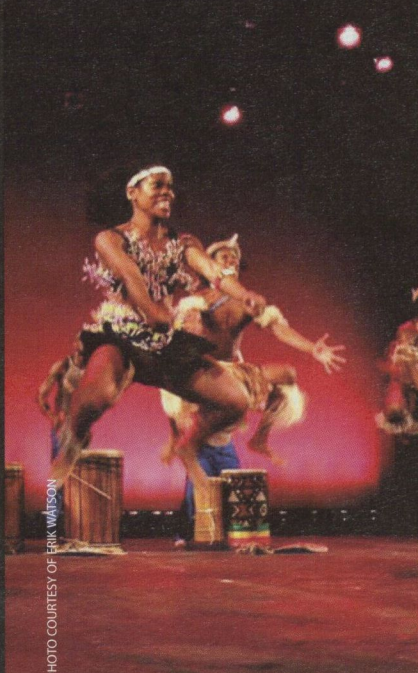
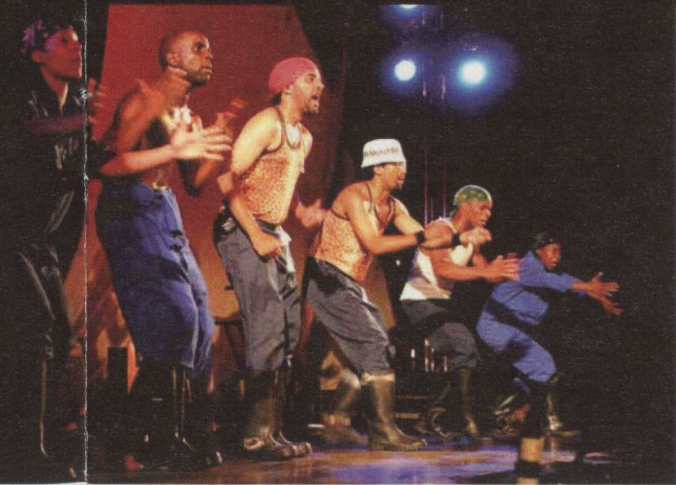


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!Performance



Dance Creation

Choreography is the art of making a dance. Choreographers are the people who create dances by putting movements together into phrases (connected series of dance movements). Some of *Step Afrika!*'s dances were choreographed by the late Mbuyiselwa Jacob ("Jackie") Semela, a respected choreographer from Soweto, South Africa.

Create a Simple Dance



Choreographers often create a dance by:

- repeating a movement
- changing the pattern or steps that they use
- changing the direction of the movement
- slowing down or speeding up movements
- changing levels by having dancers reach up high or down low

Create one simple movement using your arm or leg. Change it, using the ideas above. Demonstrate your dance for others. Then, explain your choreography.



Influences and Styles

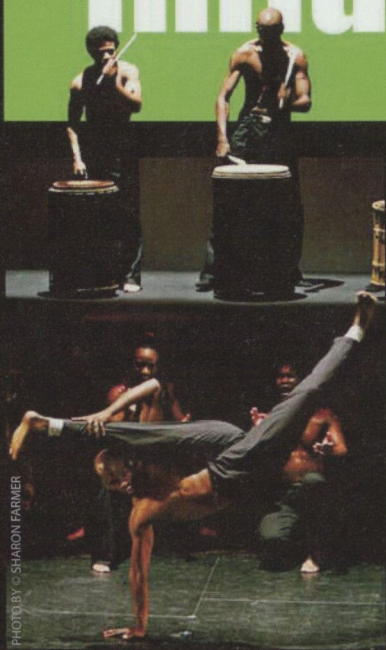


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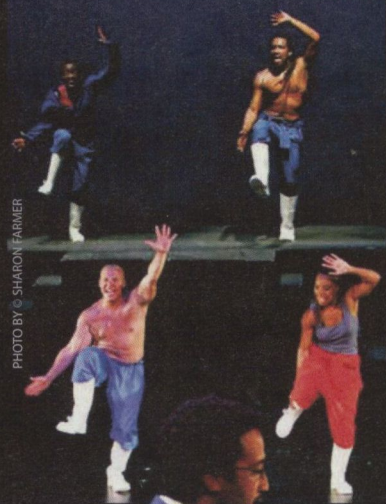


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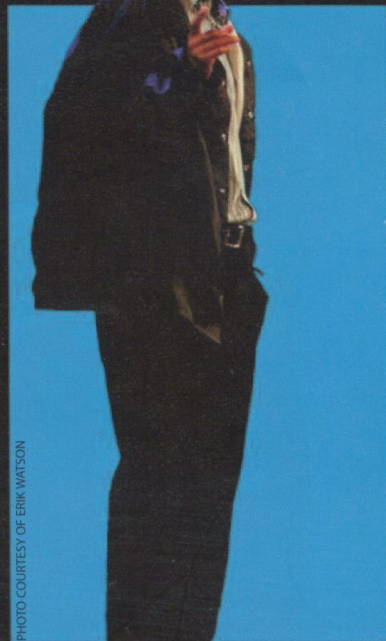


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American Dance Meets African Dance

African tradition has influenced the dances of *Step Afrika!* The American and African dances that *Step Afrika!* performs share the following qualities:

- They are percussive, meaning dancers strike their feet and hands to create rhythms.
- They are polyrhythmic, meaning dancers play several different rhythms at the same time.
- They involve call and response, meaning a leader makes a statement with words or movements, and the other dancers answer.

Styles of Stepping

There are many styles of stepping. Fraternities and sororities develop their own particular style. In the past, male step teams were more athletic in their stepping, hitting the floor harder and performing more stunts, while female

teams focused on hand work and singing. This is changing because female teams have become more physical.

Gumboot Dancing

African mine workers developed gumboot dancing nearly 100 years ago, around the same time stepping began in the U.S. The name of the dance comes from the rubber-soled boots worn by the mine workers. Miners danced for enjoyment during breaks from their dangerous work.

Gumboot dancing resembles stepping—using foot stomping, hand clapping, thigh slapping, and singing. However, the footwork in gumboot dancing is often slower and the movements of group members are less uniform.

Watch and listen for:

- the sounds made by gumboots versus the hard-soled shoes of stepping.
- routines performed by women only. How are the stepping styles different from the men's?
- some of the dancers switching to become drummers.



The Step Afrika! dancers change footwear depending on the style of dance being performed. In traditional African dances (top left), no shoes are worn. Gumboot dances (middle) require the rubber-soled gumboots. Traditional college step routines (left) use hard-soled shoes to create loud sounds as the feet move.

Dance in Africa



Who Dances?

In some African cultures, dance and music are a necessary part of everyday life. In these cultures, both young and old dance and make music to mourn the dead, connect with their gods, and encourage growth of crops. The African belief that dance is for everyone is a basis of the stepping tradition.

Dance as Music

In African cultures where dance is highly regarded, music and dance are not considered separate activities. Musicians sway as they play music and dancers create sounds when they move. *Step Afrika!* dancers make music with their bodies by tapping and stomping, and often move to the drum beat.

These dancers use hand slapping and foot stomping to create audible rhythms with their bodies.

Body Music

Watch the dancers make music with their bodies. They stomp their feet, clap their hands, and use their voices. After the performance, choose a partner from your class. Together, pick out four of your favorite sound movements. Practice these movements with your partner until you can perform the sequence several times. Together, perform this dance for your class.



“If you
can talk,
you can
sing; if you
can walk,
you can
dance.”

—African proverb

Drumming and Rhythm



Beat It!

The drum is a very important musical instrument in African culture. In some parts of Africa, each family has its own unique drum rhythm, and this rhythm is passed down through generations. Drums help send messages across long distances, like announcing births or marriages to neighboring towns.

When the slave trade brought Africans to America, the Africans brought their drum rhythms with them. They used drums to “talk” to neighboring slaves. When plantation owners discovered that messages were being sent, drums were forbidden.

As a result, enslaved Africans continued to play drum rhythms, but they began to use their bodies to make the sounds. Dance forms such as tap, hambone, and stepping are all examples of how the drum now lives in African American culture.

What is Rhythm?

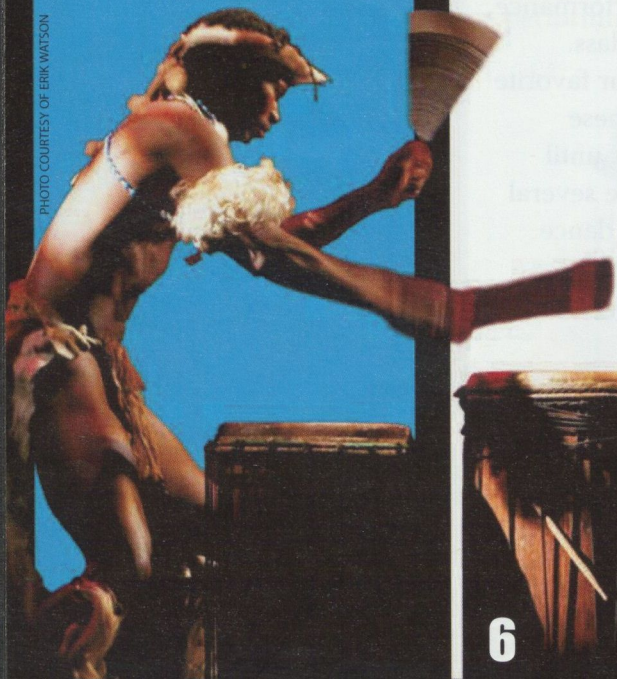
Rhythm is patterns of long and short sounds organized by beat, accent, and tempo:

Beats are sounds that repeat again and again in a regular pattern. Beats are everywhere: from the ticking of a clock to the sound of footsteps. When people clap their hands to music, they sound the beats.

Accents are beats that are sounded more strongly than others. In most American music, beats are arranged in groups of two or three with the accent on the first beat. In African music, the accent is usually on the second beat.


Tempo is the speed at which the beats are played. Listen for the rhythms *Step Afrika!* creates. Is the tempo fast or slow?

Step Afrika! frequently travels to Africa to share and learn dances and drumming traditions with the people of South Africa.



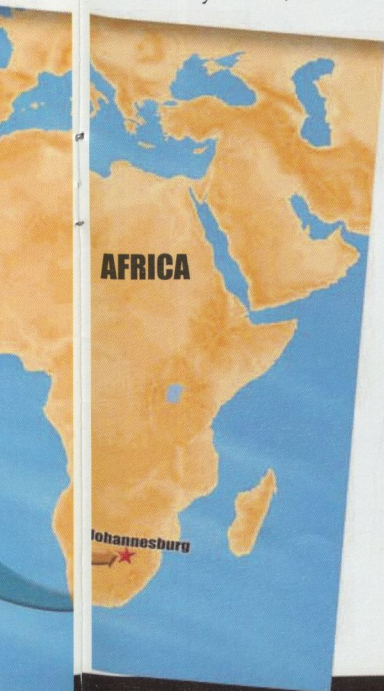
Rhythm Around You

Creating Polyrhythm


 In class or at home, divide into four groups, A, B, C, and D. Each group should choose a different part of the body to create rhythm. For example, one group can clap their hands, another can slap their knees, another can stomp their feet, and the last can repeat a short word like “yes!”

Group	BEATS			
	1	2	3	4
A	●	●	●	●
B	●	○	●	○
C	○	●	○	●
D	●●	●●	●●	●●


Look at the chart above. See that group A sounds all four beats, group B sounds beats 1 and 3, group C sounds 2 and 4, and group D sounds twice on each beat. Each group should rehearse by itself, counting the beats out loud and practicing until members can repeat the rhythm three times with accuracy. Then all four groups can perform together.



Practicing Call and Response

 Call and response occurs when a leader calls out words to which others respond; call and response can also be danced. *Step Afrika!* has taught the following call and response sequence to students all around the country.

Rhythm in Life

 Spend a day listening to the rhythms that are part of your everyday life. For example, do you hear crickets sounding a slow beat? What rhythms do members of your family make when they go up the stairs? Memorize and practice one of these rhythms. Then share it with your class.

CALL	RESPONSE
Attention!	Huh!...Huh!
Brothers and Sisters!	Yes!
Brothers and Sisters!	Yes!

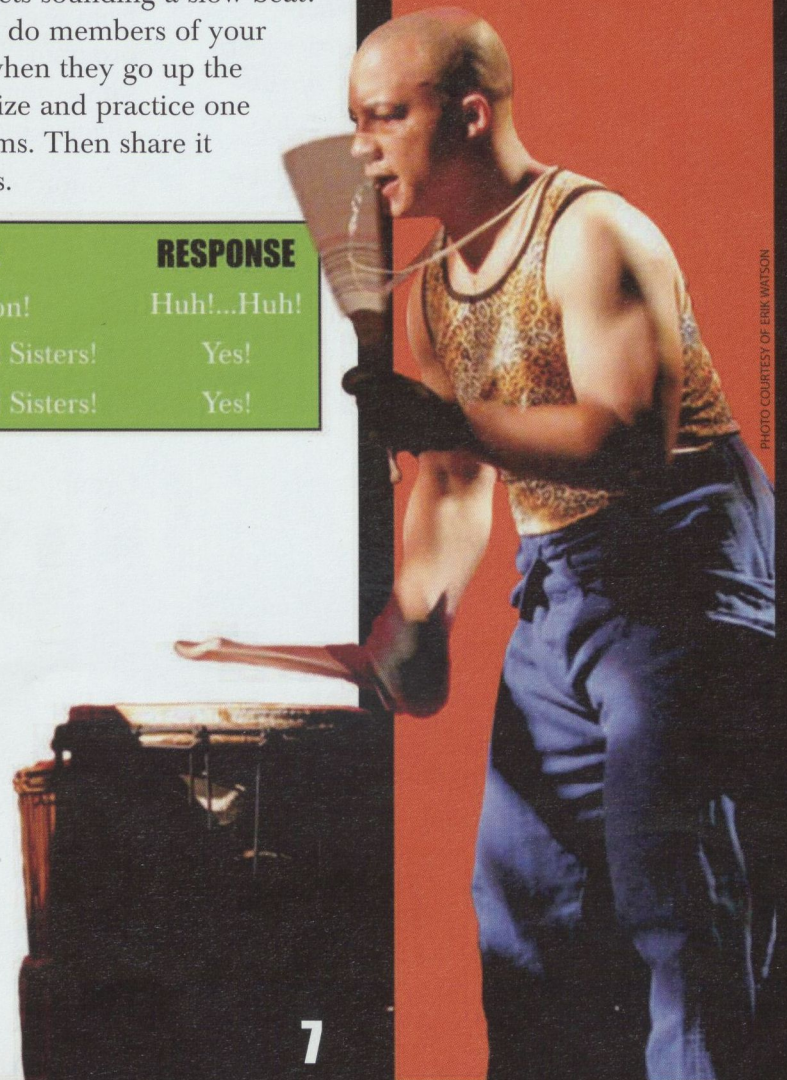


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More About *Step Afrika!* and the Performance

In Your Backyard

Brian Williams, the founder and director of *Step Afrika!*, attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he learned how to step. Later, he visited South Africa, where he saw a young boy dancing in a style that looked very similar to stepping. Brian wanted to find a way for Africans and Americans to share their dances, so he started *Step Afrika!*

Each year, *Step Afrika!* organizes a dance festival where dancers from different countries learn from each other. When *Step Afrika!* needs new dancers, Brian goes to college step competitions to find people who love to step.



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You, the Audience

Leader: Attention!

Group: Huh!

Leader: Brothers and sisters!

Group: Yes!

Leader: The performers in *Step Afrika!* need help from you, the audience. You are an important part of the performance!

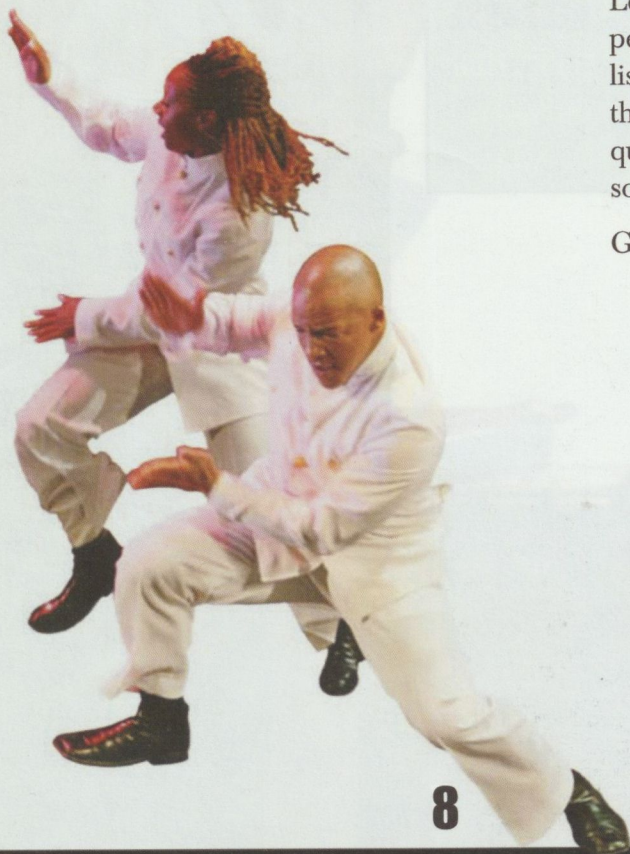
Group: Yes!

Leader: Being a member of an audience in a theater is different from watching a movie or a television program. The performers are in the same room with you and are affected by what you do.

Group: Yes!

Leader: To do their best, the performers need you to watch and listen closely. The other members of the audience also depend on your quiet attention during the performance so they can watch and listen, too!

Group: Shhh!



Resources

You may want to... read:

Fine, Elizabeth. *Soulstepping: African American Step Shows*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Malone, Jacqui. *Steppin' On the Blues*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996.

go online:

Step Afrika! www.stepafrika.org



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