

# STEPPING ON THE SCENE:

## AN EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE GUIDE

*“We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back.”*

*—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*Strathmore Presents*

# STEP AFRiKA!



# STEP X PLOSION



An event in honor of  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



### *Featuring:*

- K.A.O.S.S. Entertainment Inc.  
(Kids Always On the Same Step)
- Dem Raider Boyz Step Squad
- QuaDrew Step Team
- The Ladies of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority  
Inc.—Alpha Chapter
- B.A.S.S.: Blue Assassin Step Squad
- The Main Event Step Team of Lambda  
Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Inc.

*Sunday, January 18, 4pm*

**THE MUSIC CENTER AT STRATHMORE**

# STRATHMORE

# STEPPING ON THE SCENE

*Ready to be blown away?* Whether you are new to stepping or have already seen or participated in it, you're in for a foot-stomping, heart-pounding display of the exciting world of step dance. This unique American art form, which emerged from historically African-American fraternities and sororities, has broken out of the campus yards of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) over the last 20 years, thanks in large part to Step Afrika!, the world's first professional step company.

At this performance, Step Afrika!, celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, will draw you in to the ever-widening world of step and celebrate the form's ability to break boundaries and create communities united by rhythm, poetry, movement, and energy. They also present performances by six other step teams that show the traditions of the art form and the diversity of talent, style, themes, and technique in stepping—all in honor of a man who sought a greater community for all people, for all to walk together—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## WHAT IS STEPPING?

Stepping is a percussive dance form that uses the body as an instrument. Steppers are both musicians and dancers. To make the rhythms, the steppers clap their hands together or against other parts of their body and stomp their feet. Words—spoken, chanted, or sung—help produce the complex rhythms for the steppers' movements.

## Distinguishing Steps

Each team develops its own style of stepping, but step performances typically share some basic features:

- percussive sounds using the body as an instrument
- polyrhythm, or different rhythms performed simultaneously
- call-and-response
- wordplays, storytelling, and poetry
- hard-soled shoes
- group movement done mostly without touching other performers
- serious and strong demeanors
- same-gender teams from fraternities and sororities, but more mixed gender groups from elsewhere
- basic common steps, like hands crossed or clapped above and below the thighs, hopping, blades (arms swung sharply to the side), punches, spins, slides, and training (rhythms and movements resembling a train coming down the tracks)



Step Afrika! performance

## STEPPING OUT OF THE BOX WITH STEP AFRIKA!

Like all the stepping you'll see on stage, Step Afrika!'s performance has deep roots in fraternity and sorority stepping. That's where Step Afrika!'s founder C. Brian Williams first learned to step as he pledged to become a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. at Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1989. When he graduated, Williams moved to Lesotho, an independent country within South Africa. While there, he first saw the South African gumboot dance—a percussive dance similar to stepping that African boot-wearing gold mine workers would perform for enjoyment and communication. Fascinated by the dance's similarity to step, Williams sought ways to bring the two art forms and peoples together. In 1994, in conjunction with artists in South Africa, Williams founded Step Afrika! and held festivals in Johannesburg for several years before returning to the United States in 1996 to start teaching American children the art form of stepping.

Step Afrika! is the first professional step company in the world, and it has broken new ground ever since its founding. All its members have attended colleges and universities and share core values of teamwork, discipline, and commitment. As it has grown, the company has attracted performers with backgrounds in other art forms such as ballet, tap, and hip-hop. Step Afrika! strives to use stepping to motivate and inspire children and to be strongly involved in community service. The company also takes stepping in new directions, both in preserving and celebrating past traditions, and making new ones, such as collaborations with rap artists, Irish step dancing companies, and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

## During Step Afrika!'s performance, watch for:

- a Zulu dance, a traditional African dance hundreds of years old and often done at celebrations, performed in bare feet with drums
- More traditional steps done in hard shoes, with costumes, themes, and music
- Creative use of props (items the dancers perform with, like canes or suitcases)



A Zulu dance



A more traditional step performance



C. Brian Williams, founder & executive director of Step Afrika!

# STEPPING EVOLVES

## STEPPING UP

To celebrate the diversity and vibrancy of step today, the performance also features six different teams from the East Coast. Watch and listen for the differences among them and for the DJ playing music between performances.

### SPOTLIGHT ON K.A.O.S.S. Entertainment Inc. (Kids Always On the Same Step)

Many younger teams seek goals of discipline, commitment, and growth similar to fraternities and sororities. K.A.O.S.S. (pronounced kay-oss), a community-based nonprofit, is a case in point. From summer camp to competitions, this team of elementary, middle, and high school boys and girls from all backgrounds based in Suffolk, Virginia, has been going places since it was founded in 2008 and is now one of the top three step teams in the nation.

Of the name, says founder and artistic director Jamall Evans, “We’re always on the same step on stage and in the walk of life. We walk together, side by side.” And they are reaching toward being limit-breakers with an emphasis on scholarship, discipline, self-awareness, and social awareness.

He describes their style as intense and precise. Some of their signatures include their “peacock chant,” body snaps, and hair whips. Watch how their performance reflects on recent events in the news in what Evans describes as a “display of artistic resistance.”



K.A.O.S.S. Entertainment Inc.

Courtesy of K.A.O.S.S.



B.A.S.S.

### SPOTLIGHT ON B.A.S.S.: Blue Assassin Step Squad

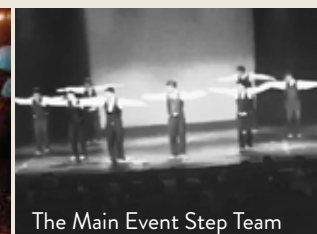
B.A.S.S., an all-male step team, grew out of a quest for unity by members of the D.C. chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc. With a style combining complexity, precision, and entertainment (and featuring blue or white costumes and canes in this performance), they strive to competitively “kill” the competition (hence their name!). Watch for the team’s signature upbeat “partywalk” style.

### ALSO PERFORMING:

- Dem Raider Boyz Step Squad, the award-winning all-male high school team from Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Prince George’s County, Maryland.
- QuaDrew Step Team of Howard University, college men and women from all across the country who love stepping and show pride for campus life.
- The Ladies of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.—Alpha Chapter from Howard University who showcase stepping and pride for sisterhood and their organization.
- The Main Event Step Team of Lambda Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Inc., the organization’s national step team, is based in New York and features steppers from chapters across New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.



Dem Raider Boyz Step Squad



The Main Event Step Team

Courtesy of The Main Event Step Team

Stepping is a unique American art form born out of African-American culture and experiences. Its roots trace back to college campuses in the early 1900s, where African American students began to form fraternities and sororities to help promote leadership, scholarship, a supportive social climate, and community service (the nine national groups today are sometimes called The Divine Nine). The process of “pledging” to join a fraternity and sorority is where stepping began.

**1920s and '30s**—Pledges were seen “marching on line,” or walking in unison around campus wearing their group’s colors.

**1940s through '60s**—Pledging rituals became more disciplined and elaborate, with chanting, singing, and the body being used as an instrument.

**1970s**—More step shows occurred on college campuses and more members of fraternities and sororities, not just pledges, participated.

**1980s**—The term “stepping” became more widely used and appeared in popular movies like Spike Lee’s *School Daze* (1988) and the television show *A Different World*.

**1990s–Present**—Stepping broke out nationally with step teams performing at events like the Opening Ceremonies of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. More and more people became captivated with the art form and its potential to bring pride, discipline, and fitness—and new and creative ways to express themselves artistically—to groups beyond college campuses.

1958 Howard University *Bison*, p. 95, courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives



Alpha Kappa Alpha members marching on line at Howard University in 1958.



1989 Howard University *Bison*, p. 221, courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives

Fraternity members demonstrate the “Omega Bop,” a more elaborate move appearing in the 1960s.

# INFLUENCES ON STEP

Along its evolution, stepping absorbed and re-crafted parts of African-American experiences:

- African culture—drumming and complex rhythms as well as dancing (like the Zulu and gumboot dances)
- 18th & 19th Century African-American Songs and dances of enslaved Africans—spirituals (religious folksongs often featuring call-and-response) and body percussive dances such as the ring shout (a circle dance with shuffling and stomping) and the Juba (a dance featuring stomping and rhythmic clapping and slapping of hands)
- Military themes from the popularity of African-American drill teams and cheerleading as well as the experiences of returning African-American World War veterans
- Popular culture such as the coordinated singing and dancing of The Temptations and The Four Tops in the 1960s, and, more recently, acrobatics and hip hop

## PERCUSSIVE DANCE QUICK LOOK

**Tap Dance**—an American jazz dance featuring complex syncopated rhythms performed by striking the floor in shoes fitted with metal taps

**Stepping**—an American art form using the body as an instrument

**Gumboot Dance**—a South African dance that resembles stepping but with performers wearing rubber boots

**Irish Step Dancing**—a dance of rapid leg and foot movements, jumps, hops, and steps performed with a mostly stiff upper body and in both hard and soft shoes

# HONORING DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

*“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.” —Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

An American pastor and civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. unified different groups of people behind the cause of ensuring equal rights for all citizens and overcoming racial discrimination against African-Americans in civil life, education, and government. Dr. King’s leadership at the 1963 March on Washington and other efforts helped lead to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Of this performance on Dr. King’s birthday weekend, Williams says, “King was about community and bringing

people together across all backgrounds. Step Afrika!’s performance is our way of bringing community together for a unique experience and celebrating the vibrancy of cultures everywhere and giving them a place to share.”

Step shows involve the whole community—and that means you, too! Teams are counting on you to cheer them on, respond to their calls, and make some noise. As Williams says, “It’s a two-way conversation...it’s a different way to witness art.”

## WELCOME TO STRATHMORE

We have always been amazed by the artistry that exists in our neighborhoods and communities. That’s one reason we’ve hosted Montgomery County’s Latin Dance Competition for four years—and have loved it every time. *Step Afrika! Step Xplosion* is another perfect way to showcase that local talent and energy. Together with the internationally renowned Step Afrika!, six regional step teams will join this celebration of a uniquely American dance form on Sunday, January 18. The performance is not only the culmination of a week of educational outreach by Step Afrika!—it’s also the kick-off for what we hope to be a long, collaborative friendship with the step dance community.

Strathmore is thrilled to partner with Step Afrika! to present the power, rhythm and beauty of step dance in the Concert Hall. Enjoy the show—I know I will!



Eliot Pfanstiehl, CEO



Step Afrika! founder C. Brian Williams engages the crowd



Step Afrika! company members reaching out to the community

## SEEING STEPPING AT STRATHMORE

Step shows take place in many spaces—gyms, college yards, big halls, even stadiums. Seeing a step show at Strathmore is a unique opportunity because the Music Center was built specifically for acoustics—to allow any performance to have the richest and highest-quality sound. Stepping will never have looked or sounded so good.

### COME EARLY, LEARN MORE!

Join a pre-performance panel discussion, moderated by Janice Ferebee, MSW (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.), on The Divine Nine and the origin and emergence of step at American historically black colleges and universities. Seating is limited and is on a first-come, first-served basis.

**MANSION MUSIC ROOM, 2:30PM**  
**FREE WITH PERFORMANCE TICKET**



Step Afrika! performing a gumboot dance

# STEP INSIDE.

*Don't miss these upcoming shows at Strathmore.*

## LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO

*Friday, January 30*

## SAVION GLOVER'S STePz

*Friday, February 6*

## TANGO BUENOS AIRES: SONG OF EVA PERÓN

*Wednesday, February, 25*

## CARLOS NÚÑEZ AND FRIENDS FEATURING THE SEAN CULKIN DANCERS

*Tuesday, March 17*



photos L-R: Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Savion Glover, Tango Buenos Aires, Carlos Núñez by Javier Salas

## ABOUT STRATHMORE

Strathmore, located in North Bethesda, Maryland, nurtures art, artists and community through creative and diverse programming of the highest quality. A cultural destination, Strathmore hosts world-class performances by major national artists of folk, blues, pop, jazz, show tunes, and classical music as well as classical and modern dance. At the local level, Strathmore works to present and preserve the rich music and fine art traditions of the Washington, D.C., region. And through education programs for all ages, Strathmore helps all engage in creating and experiencing fine art, music and dance.

## STRATHMORE STAFF

Eliot Pfanstiehl, Chief Executive Officer  
Monica Jeffries Hazangeles, President  
Shelley Brown, Vice President, Artistic Director  
Sam Brumbaugh, Director of Programming  
Lauren Campbell, Director of Education  
Betty Scott, Education Program Coordinator

Special thanks to C. Brian Williams and Alorie Clark of Step Afrika! for their help with this guide.

## STRATHMORE

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