




# STEP AFRIKA!

## PERFORMANCE GUIDE



THE PARAMOUNT THEATER

# ARTS EDUCATION



215 East Main Street, Charlottesville, VA 22902

# STEP **AFRIKA!**



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# STEP **AFRIKA!**



# Stepping with Step Afrika!

**Using the body as an instrument, Step Afrika! performers create many rhythms while they dance.**

**This educational guide is designed to help you enjoy the dance performance by Step Afrika! Learn About:**

- The history and significance of stepping
- Influences and dance styles
- The definition and elements of rhythm
- Step Afrika! history and programs



# What is

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

– African proverb



## College: Where Stepping was Born

In the early 1900s, African American students who were members of college organizations called sororities (for women) and fraternities (for men) created stepping. Stepping became a way that members of these organizations showed pride.



## Styles of Stepping

There are many styles of stepping. Fraternities and Sororities develop their own particular style. Traditionally, male step teams were more athletic in their style of stepping; hitting the floor harder and performing more stunts. Female step teams focused on hand work and singing. In recent years, female step teams have developed more physical choreography.

# Step Afrika!

## We Step

We promote an appreciation for stepping and its use as an educational, motivational and healthy tool for young people. We structure our performances and programs to connect intimately with our audience and create a positive influence on students' lives.

## We Tour

Step Afrika! performs in more than 50 U.S. and Canadian cities each year. As a cultural ambassador, Step Afrika! also partners with various organizations to perform for audiences all over the world.

During international visits, Step Afrika! joins with local dance groups and other arts organizations to develop performances that blend the styles of different cultures and create a unique experience for the audience. Step Afrika! programs are a testament to the power of the arts; bringing communities together and building tolerance, unity and acceptance among young people everywhere.

## We Teach

Step Afrika! has been dedicated to arts education since its inception. We present the art, values, and culture of stepping to students of all grades and backgrounds. We have become a model for using stepping as an educational tool. Exhibiting the organization's core values of teamwork, discipline, and commitment, Step Afrika! presents the following programs:

- *Stepping with Step Afrika! in-school performance*
- *Step Up to College residency program*
- *Step Afrika! Step Shop*
- *Summer Steps with Step Afrika! summer camp*
- *Step Afrika! Youth Ensemble*
- *Step Afrika! Scholars Program*

For more information about our arts education programs, visit [www.stepafrika.org](http://www.stepafrika.org), or email [info@stepafrika.org](mailto:info@stepafrika.org).



# All About



**C. Brian Williams**, the founder and executive director of Step Afrika!, attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he learned how to step. Later he visited South Africa, and saw a young boy dancing a style that looked very similar to stepping. Recognizing the connection, Brian wanted to find a way for Africans and Americans to share their dances, music, and culture. In 1994, he founded Step Afrika! as the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. Step Afrika! ranks as one of the top ten African American dance companies in the United States.

# Stepping?

Stepping is a dance that uses the body as an instrument. It combines footsteps, claps, and spoken words to produce complex rhythms. Dancers wear hard-soled shoes that create loud sounds against the floor. Step Afrika! is the first professional dance company dedicated to the tradition of stepping.

## Stepping Today...

Stepping is historically associated with college groups, but today the art form is universal and highly appealing to young people. Stepping has become a mainstream artform, and has been highlighted in motion pictures such as *Stomp The Yard*, *School Daze*, and *Drumline*.

Stepping can also be found in schools, churches, and community-based organizations across the United States. Are there step teams in your community?

## Resources to Read

*Soulstepping: African American Step Shows* by Elizabeth Fine

*Steppin' On the Blues* by Jacqui Malone



# Stepping



## Dance Creation

Choreography is the art of making a dance. Choreographers are the people who create dances by putting movements together into phrases (series of dance movements). Some of Step Afrika! dances were choreographed by the late Mbuyisekwa Jacob “Jackie” Semela, a respected choreographer from Soweto, South Africa. Creating and learning dance is a very collaborative process, and takes a lot of hard work and dedication. Step Afrika! teaches three core values that are necessary to be a great dancer:

**Teamwork:**  
working together to  
accomplish a goal

**Discipline:**  
having the self-  
control and focus  
necessary to achieve

**Commitment:**  
being dedicated  
to something

These core values are not only important for dancing, but for everyday life.

# Rhythm

## Activity: Create Polyrhythm

Get a bunch of your friends together and divide them into 4 groups; A, B, C, and D. Each group should choose a different part of the body to create a sound. For example, one group can clap, another group can slap their knee, another group can stomp their feet, and the last group can repeat a word or sound.

Groups	Beats			
	1	2	3	4
A	•	•	•	•
B	•		•	
C		•		•
D	••	••	••	••

Look at the chart above. Each dot represents one sound, and each number represents one beat. Group A makes one sound on all 4 beats. Group B makes a sound on beats 1 and 3. Group C makes a sound on beats 2 and 4. Group D makes two sounds on each beat. Each group should rehearse individually, counting the beats out loud and practicing until all group members can repeat three times accurately. Finally, bring all four groups together to perform.





# Creating



## What is Rhythm?

**Rhythm** is a pattern of long and short sounds organized by beat, accent, and tempo:

**Beats** are sounds that repeat again and again in a regular pattern. The ticking of a clock, the sound of footsteps, and hand clapping to music are all example of beats.

**Accents** are beats that sound stronger 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?

# is Dance!



## Dance as Culture

Dance and music are an important part of everyday life. In cultures all over the world, people of all generations dance to celebrate accomplishments, communicate messages, and show community pride. Teaching dance and music ensures that the cultural history lives on forever. Many cultures believe that dance is for everyone, just as Step Afrika! believes that stepping is for everyone!

## Dance as Music

Some dances require musical instruments for an accurate performance, other dance forms require that the body be used as the musical instrument. These are known as percussive dance forms. Just like stepping, the dancers create music as they move. Tap dance and gumboot dance are great examples of percussive dance forms. Some dances also require vocal sounds to add to the creation of the music. During the performance, you will hear Step Afrika! dancers make sounds with their bodies and their voices to add to the musical beat.

## Activity: Create a Dance

Dances are created by:

- repeating a movement
- slowing down or speeding up a movement
- changing the movement, but keeping the same beat
- changing the direction of the movement (left, right, front, back, diagonal)
- slowing down or speeding up movements

Use these 5 elements and create your own step choreography. Explore different ways to make sounds with your body. What special movements or tricks can you add? Practice your dance to make sure you remember it. Pick a friend and teach them your choreography. Make sure you both can perform it several times without forgetting. Then perform it together for family and friends.





# Influences

## American Dance Meets African Dance

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

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

## Dances You Will See

Step Afrika! dances three distinct styles:

**Traditional Stepping:** Step Afrika! will demonstrate collegiate step traditions as practiced by men and women all across the United States. During the show, look for the explanation of fraternities and sororities, and notice the unique style of stepping.

**Contemporary Stepping:** Today, stepping has gained mainstream exposure. Stepping has grown from college campuses to churches, schools, and movies. As more and more people create step choreography, popular dance moves and chants are incorporated. During the show, look for special moves, creative formations, and chants.

**South African gumboot dance:** In this dance, the dancers wear rubber boots, or gumboots, that they will hit with their bare hands to make rhythms, or patterns of sounds.

# and Styles

## The South African Gumboot Dance

South African mine workers developed the gumboot dance nearly 100 years ago, around the same time stepping began in America. The name of the dance comes from the rubber-soled boots worn by the mine workers. Miners came from countries throughout Southern Africa, such as Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. They created the dance as a form of common communication. They also danced for enjoyment during breaks from their dangerous jobs.

Gumboot dancing resembles stepping. It uses foot stomping, hand clapping, thigh slapping, and singing. The footwork in gumboot dancing is often slower and the movements of the group are less uniformed.



## Activity: Learn How to Gumboot Dance

Put on your rain boots at home. Create choreography similar to what you saw in today's performance. Slap the side of your rubber boots, stomp on the ground, and clap your hands to create unique sounds. Ask a friend to join you and create a gumboot dance together.

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