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for american theater

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

Molly Smith Artistic Director Edgar Dobie Executive Producer Zelda Fichandler Founding Director

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ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES THREE-YEAR PARTNERSHIP WITH STEP AFRIKA!

*** The collaboration will begin in Fall 2021 and extend through 2024 ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is excited to announce a newly formed three-year partnership with Washington, D.C.-based dance company Step Afrika!. The partnership will begin in Fall 2021 as part of Arena's 2021/22 Season and continue through 2024. Three productions will be presented or produced over the course of three years beginning with the production of *Drumfolk* in Spring 2022. *Drumfolk* is a rhythmic storytelling of the history of African American percussive traditions inspired by the Stono Rebellion of 1739 and the Negro Act of 1740.

As part of Arena's commitment to championing diverse voices and engaging audiences, this partnership between the two award-winning companies will further enhance collaboration, experimentation and build upon our combined strengths in serving our community. Arena Stage's partnership with Step Afrika! highlights a shared commitment to artistic excellence and involves providing design support, rehearsal space, dramaturgical and an artistic support to focus the ability for both companies to connect and engage new audiences through online engagement.

"This is a fantastic partnership. I have admired Step Afrika!'s work for years and this is an opportunity to bring their work to Arena audiences," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "Step Afrika! is a distinctive and explosive dance company and a powerful part of Washington's artistic community. They often tour around the world and Arena is pleased to offer the company a home base. Both organizations will share important resources with each other to create a mutually beneficial relationship, from design to dramaturgy to work online. Arena has had several partnerships over the years, but I'm excited that this relationship with Step Afrika! is for three years since the depth of time will mean a profound relationship between the companies."

Step Afrika! is the first professional company in the world dedicated to the tradition and cultural heritage of stepping. The company blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities, African traditional dance and influences from a variety of other dance and art forms. This unique collaboration with Arena will help guide Step Afrika!'s desire to develop works that merge best practices from both the theater and dance worlds.

"Step Afrika! is largely credited for bringing the art form of stepping to the American theater, and Arena Stage is by far one of our country's greatest theaters," says Founder and Executive Director of Step Afrika! **C. Brian Williams**. "This partnership will be an incredible opportunity to develop one-of-a-kind productions that can then tour the world. Washington, D.C. is a world-class city for the arts and I look forward to audiences everywhere enjoying the fruits of our creative collaboration."

Step Afrika! ranks as one of the top ten African American dance companies in the United States. The award-winning company has toured across the globe to over 60 countries and reaches tens of thousands of Americans each year through a 50-city tour of colleges and theaters. Step Afrika! headlined President Barack Obama's Black History Month Reception at The White House and is featured prominently at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture with the world's first stepping interactive exhibit.

Further details on productions and dates will be announced at a later date.

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Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. Arena Stage produces plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep and dangerous in the American spirit, and presents diverse and groundbreaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Arena Stage is committed to commissioning and developing new plays and impacting the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its eighth decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

Step Afrika!: Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. Under Mr. Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's cultural exports, touring more than 60 countries across the globe, and the Company now ranks as one of the top ten African American dance companies in the United States. Step Afrika! blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities; traditional African dances; and an array of contemporary dance and art forms into a cohesive, compelling artistic experience. www.stepafrika.org

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