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AMERICAN PROPHET

BY **FREDERICK DOUGLASS**,

MARCUS HUMMON & CHARLES RANDOLPH-WRIGHT

MUSIC & LYRICS BY **MARCUS HUMMON**

DIRECTED BY **CHARLES RANDOLPH-WRIGHT**

KREEGER THEATER | **JULY 15–AUGUST 28, 2022**

Charles Randolph-Wright (*Arena's Born for This: The BeBe Winans Story*, Broadway's *Motown the Musical*) returns to Arena Stage with a groundbreaking musical powered by Frederick Douglass' own speeches and writings. Coupled with soaring new melodies and an original script from Grammy Award-winning songwriter Marcus Hummon and Randolph-Wright, Douglass rises as a fierce abolitionist and distinguished orator. Filled with an electrifying new score, this world premiere celebrates the revolutionary legacy of one of history's first freedom fighters, whose fire is needed now more than ever.

SUBSCRIPTION SEASON

SPARKLING ROMANTIC COMEDY

HOLIDAY

BY **PHILIP BARRY**

DIRECTED BY **ANITA MAYNARD-LOSH**

FICHANDLER STAGE | **OCTOBER 7–NOVEMBER 6, 2022**

An up-and-coming Wall Street lawyer from a working-class family aspires to quit and enjoy life once he's made enough money, a prospect that doesn't thrill his wealthy, well-born fiancée but excites her more unconventional sister. Can his dreams survive his soon-to-be bride's narrow view of affluence? Opposing societal hierarchies and differing views of success confront each other in this timely commentary on how to pursue a life worth living. This classic romantic comedy set in the 1920s became a beloved 1938 film starring Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn.

POIGNANT NEW AMERICAN STORY

SANCTUARY CITY

BY **MARTYNA MAJOK**

KREEGER THEATER | **OCTOBER 21–NOVEMBER 27, 2022**

Pulitzer Prize winner Martyna Majok brings us the powerful story of two young DREAMers who fight to establish a place for themselves in America, the only country they know as home. Poignant, timely and highly theatrical, *Sanctuary City* illuminates the triumphs and challenges these lifelong friends face, and how much they are willing to risk for each other when they have everything to lose.

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2022/23 SEASON!

DRAMA, MUSICALS AND MUSIC-FILLED

QUIRKY CULT MUSICAL

RIDE THE CYCLONE

BOOK, MUSIC & LYRICS BY

BROOKE MAXWELL & JACOB RICHMOND

DIRECTED BY **SARAH RASMUSSEN**

KREEGER THEATER | **JANUARY 13–FEBRUARY 19, 2023**

Part comedy, part tragedy and wholly unexpected, this wildly imaginative story delivers surprises at every turn. The lives of six teenagers from a Canadian chamber choir are cut short in a freak accident aboard a roller coaster. A mechanical fortune-teller invites each to tell their story of a life interrupted, offering the chance to come to terms with their fates. At once quirky and smart, edgy and beautiful, *Ride the Cyclone* ultimately reveals the resilience of the human spirit in spite of senseless tragedy.

VISCERAL POWER PLAY

THE HIGH GROUND

BY **NATHAN ALAN DAVIS**

DIRECTED BY **MEGAN SANDBERG-ZAKIAN**

ARLENE AND ROBERT KOGOD CRADLE | **FEBRUARY 10–APRIL 2, 2023**

A Black man in an army uniform stands his ground atop Tulsa's Standpipe Hill, bearing witness to the destruction and desecration of Tulsa's Greenwood District — but other forces, both friendly and hostile, conspire to remove him. A play in conversation with Tulsa, Oklahoma's 1921 race massacre, *The High Ground* offers a complex portrait of what it means to root, to resist and to proceed from devastation.

GREAT AMERICAN EPIC

ANGELS IN AMERICA, PART ONE: MILLENNIUM APPROACHES

BY **TONY KUSHNER**

DIRECTED BY **JÁNOS SZÁSZ**

FICHANDLER STAGE | **MARCH 24–APRIL 23, 2023**

Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize- and Tony Award-winning drama *Angels in America* is one of the great epic American plays of this past century. We meet Louis and Prior and Harper and Joe, two couples whose relationships are on the rocks; the former because of Prior's AIDS diagnosis and Louis' inability to cope with illness, and the latter because of Joe's closeted homosexuality and Harper's incessant fears and hallucinations. The brilliant Hungarian director and filmmaker János Szász will stage *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches* in-the-round 30 years after its Broadway premiere.

WICKEDLY FUNNY POWER PLAY

EXCLUSION

BY **KENNETH LIN**

KREEGER THEATER | **MAY 5–JUNE 25, 2023**

A reluctant historian is thrown out of her element when her acclaimed book about the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is optioned by a larger-than-life Hollywood mogul with a track record for making smash-hit TV shows. The professional bleeds into the personal when she finds herself weighing the historical facts against her own awakening ambitions. In a hilarious workplace comedy with teeth, tensions rise and deals are made and broken.



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DRUMFOLK

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Anne Paine West, Arena Stage's
longtime Director of Board and
Donor Relations who retired in 2020.

ARENA STAGE MISSION

Arena Stage is the voice of American theater resident in our nation's capital. Focused on American artists, our productions are innovative and representative of stories from across the country. We nurture new plays and reimagine classics. We celebrate our democracy and diversity through a multitude of voices in our productions and community engagement programs to inspire people to action. We produce all that is passionate, exuberant, profound, entertaining, deep and dangerous in the American spirit.



the mead center
for american theater



Arena Stage is built on the land of the Piscataway people of the Algonquin-speaking tribes, as well as the lands of the Native American people of the greater Anacostia, Potomac and Tidewater regions.



Step Afrika! is a distinctive and explosive dance company and a powerful part of Washington's artistic community. I am excited to formally begin our multi-year partnership with this production of *Drumfolk* in the Fichandler.

I have admired Step Afrika!'s work for many years. Founder C. Brian Williams has built a deeply meaningful artform that blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities through an array of contemporary dance and other art forms. The work of the company is vital and full of dynamic power and joy.

Drumfolk is inspired by historical events, a rhythmic storytelling of the history of African American percussive traditions. When faced with a prohibition on using musical instruments, enslaved people lost the right to use their drums. This dramatic telling shows how the beats still found their way into the bodies of the people. The Fichandler will echo as a drum itself as the theater as an instrument is inspired by this story.

Behind the scenes, Arena embraces the opportunity to provide the company with a home base and both organizations will share important resources with each other. Arena has had several partnerships over the years, and I'm excited that this relationship with Step Afrika! is for five years; this depth of time will mean a profound relationship between the companies. Our hope is that this unique collaboration will help expand both Arena Stage and Step Afrika! through this partnership.

When considering a long-term partnership like this, it's important to have a connection for audiences, artists and be rooted in Arena's mission. Showcasing American stories from different artistic angles is vital to ensuring that the voices ringing through our theaters are varied and diverse.

At its core, art is about storytelling, and plays and dance share this same perspective. Even if there are no words, there is story, vocalization and music. Having an artistic partner with a different discipline will challenge us both and help us to grow artistically. Brian and I have had conversations that are invigorating about how we can build on each other's successes.

I look forward to sharing next steps with this partnership as it evolves. Welcome Step Afrika! We are so glad to have you in residence at Arena Stage!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Molly Smith".

Molly Smith
Artistic Director

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



The Mead Center for American Theater was built with the vision to serve Arena Stage's artistic mission (briefly stated: focused on American artists to produce all that is passionate, exuberant, profound, entertaining, deep and dangerous in the American spirit), and also our community. This was envisioned as public-facing partnerships for productions, performances, events, as well as behind-the-scenes sharing of resources with fellow artists and artistic organizations.

This aspirational goal was highlighted during the pandemic.

You may think that is strange to say, when the pandemic forced closure of theaters and stopped live performance. This goal was reinforced by the recognition that Arena's beautiful and dormant facility was a community-supported resource that needed to be shared even beyond Arena's direct programming.

Arena's five-year partnership with Step Afrika! not only fulfills this envisioned goal but most importantly provides Step Afrika! with an opportunity to share their artistry to new audiences. It's a win-win.

When we were planning the Mead Center, it never occurred to us that there would be a world-wide pandemic in the building's 10th year. Yet the idea for sharing the space was there from inception, with several successful attempts along the way, including pandemic-related ones, like the high-capacity COVID-19 vaccination site hosted here March to July 2021, with thousands of DC residents vaccinated. Forging a multi-year relationship as with Step Afrika! is key to truly sharing this wonderful space on an ongoing basis. The meaningful and spirited performance you are about to experience is just the tip of the iceberg for great artistic collaborations and sharing of expertise over this time.

Arena has also recently entered into a relationship with DC Jazz Festival, sharing valuable office space and, we hope, opportunities to help fulfill their artistic programming with presentations as well. Years ago we were able to share office space with the SWBID when it had just started. So we know from experience that sharing the less-public parts of our facility provides deep connections to the community and a needed resource to other organizations.

Gil and Jaylee Mead would be proud to see the facility that bears their name having strong community connections and partners. It is so very important to recognize the resources that were created through generous community support are worth protecting so they can be shared broadly with our community in an inclusive and equitable way. In Arena's case we have a physical space to share, but beyond that many other talents to contribute to our new friends' success and growth. I am personally excited to have the energy and sounds of Step Afrika! and DC Jazz animating our halls and theaters. Thank you for joining us today.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Edgar'.

Edgar Dobie
Executive Producer
President of the Corporation



FOUNDER'S NOTE



I am extremely excited to introduce *Drumfolk*, a new work by Step Afrika! that chronicles and celebrates the African-American experience in America. Grounded in extensive research and over 28 years of percussive practice, *Drumfolk* reveals hidden, transformative events that greatly impacted American life, and the performance explores the drum as an instrument of community, resilience and determination.

The Stono Rebellion of 1739, a revolt initiated by 20 enslaved Africans in the then-British colony of South Carolina, is one of the largest rebellions organized by Africans in the “New World.”

Africans used their drums as a call for action, leading a fight for freedom that would spark fear throughout the colonies.

Their defiance, however, would lead to the devastating Negro Act of 1740, a bill enacted by the South Carolina Assembly “for the better ordering and governing of Negroes and other slaves in this province.” The Act singled out the drum as an illegal weapon and greatly restricted Africans’ rights to read, to gather in groups, to wear clothing “above their stature;” and to use their drums.

Who were these African/American activists who rejected the institution of slavery? Are they early examples of American protest, speaking out against tyranny, oppression and systemic racism? Why haven’t we learned more about their fight against injustice years before American colonists revolted against Imperialist England at the Boston Tea Party?

Drumfolk is Step Afrika!’s intention to reclaim the history of these unsung American heroes and heroines who so bravely fought for freedom. There is still so much of American history to explore and uncover...and we welcome you on this journey!

A stylized signature of C. Brian Williams in black ink.

C. Brian Williams

Founder & Executive Producer, Step Afrika!

THE STONO REBELLION

Stono is the name of a riverbed just outside of Charleston, South Carolina. It is also known as the site of one of the bloodiest revolts organized by enslaved people in North America. In 1739, South Carolina was a colony of Great Britain, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade had begun abducting citizens of African nations and bringing them to North America for the purpose of brutal slave labor.

Map inset showing Stono River. Crisp, E., Nairne, T., Harris, J., Mathews, M. & Love, J. (1711). Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004626926/>.










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ABOUT

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping — a polyrhythmic, percussive dance form that uses the body as an instrument. Through 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. Performances are much more than dance shows; they integrate songs, storytelling, humor and audience participation. The blend of technique, agility and pure energy makes each performance unique and leaves the audience with their hearts pounding.

Step Afrika! promotes stepping as an educational tool for young people, focusing on teamwork, academic achievement and cross-cultural understanding. The Company reaches tens of thousands of Americans each year through a 50-city tour of colleges and theaters and performs globally as Washington, D.C.'s one and only Cultural Ambassador.

Step Afrika! has earned Mayor's Arts Awards for Outstanding Contribution to Arts Education, Innovation in the Arts, Excellence in an Artistic Discipline and headlined President Barack Obama's 2016 Black History Month Reception at The White House. The Company is featured prominently at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture with the world's first stepping interactive exhibit.

Visit www.stepafrika.org to learn and see more.

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

Lamar Lovelace, *Executive Director*

Connie L. Perez, *Director of Institutional Relations and Research*

Kristen L. Taylor, *Company and Communications Manager*

Joe Murchison, *Arts Education Consultant*

C. Brian Williams, *Founder & Executive Producer*

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Arena Stage
Molly Smith, Artistic Director | Edgar Dobie, Executive Producer

PRESENTS

DRUMFOLK

BY STEP AFRIKA!

DIRECTED BY
JAKARI SHERMAN

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, STEP AFRIKA!

C. BRIAN WILLIAMS

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, STEP AFRIKA!

MFONISO AKPAN

ASSISTANT ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

**CONRAD R. KELLY II AND
JORDAN SPRY**

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COSTUME DESIGNER

KENAN M. QUANDER

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ERIK TEAGUE

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MARIANNE MEADOWS[†]

SOUND DESIGNER

PATRICK CALHOUN[†]


SOUND ENGINEER

DANIELLE MCBRIDE

STAGE MANAGER

KENDALL ARIN

Prime Sponsorship for *Drumfolk* is generously provided by **AARP**.
Real Possibilities

Supporting Sponsorship for *Drumfolk* is generously provided by  **AT&T**.

The presentation of *Drumfolk* was made possible by the
New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from
the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation** and **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**.

[†] A member of the United Scenic Artists Local USA 829.

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FOR THIS PRODUCTION / ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOR THIS PRODUCTION

Production Manager.....	MARIANNE MEADOWS
Assistant Production Manager	KENDALL ARIN
Assistant Lighting Designer.....	YANNICK GODTS
Assistant Stage Manager.....	MISHA MICHEL
COVID-19 Compliance Officer	TREVOR COMEAU
Stage Carpenters.....	JESS RICH, SARAH SCHLEHLEIN
Props.....	ALESSANDRA SHINES, GRACE TRUDEAU
Wardrobe Supervisor	ALICE HAWFIELD
Wardrobe Crew	EMILY MCCORT
Light Board Operator	KELSEY SWANSON
Audio Engineer	DREW MOBERLEY

The videotaping or other video or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.

Please turn off all electronic devices, unless using specifically for
GalaPro closed captioning service.

All patrons who visit the Mead Center for American Theater and/or attend performances
must be fully vaccinated by the date of their visit.

Eating and drinking are not permitted inside the theater.

Masks must be worn at all times during the performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Drumfolk is made possible by the **New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project** with lead funding from the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation** and **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**.

Lead Commissioning Support provided by **ArtsEmerson, Hancher Auditorium, Eugene M. Lang Foundation** and the **Strathmore Performing Arts Center**. Additional support provided by the **Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, The New Victory Theater, Delaware Art Museum, Meany Hall, The Soraya** and the **DC Commission on Arts and Humanities**.

Production Residency funded by the **New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project**, with funding from **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**. Additional Production Support provided by the **Publick Playhouse**.

Special thanks to **Simone Baskerville** for her work as the Production and Stage Manager for the National Tour of *Drumfolk*.



CAST *(in alphabetical order)*

Christylez Bacon Emanuel "Manny" Chacon
Agyei Keita Edwards Dionne Eleby Kayshon Hawkins
Akievia Hickman Jabari Jones Conrad R. Kelly II
Abdou Muhammad Ayana (Reed) Ogunsunlade Dustin Praylow
Anesia Sandifer Joel Santiago Jakari Sherman
Valencia Odeyka Emonni Springer Jordan Spry
Pelham Warner Robert Warnsley Kanysha Williams

SETTING

Drumfolk begins in a Praise House in 1739 amid the formulation of the Stono Rebellion in the British Colony of South Carolina.

The Praise House

The central structure for *Drumfolk* is the Praise House, a simple, clapboard structure built by Africans as a place for worship and significant community events. Meetings in the Praise House usually occurred on week nights rather than Sunday mornings and the structures provided a rare “safe space” for Africans to gather. Even under the degrading conditions of slavery, religious life and practice strengthened and sustained the African community. The building of the praise houses reveals the struggle of the enslaved to maintain their humanity in the midst of an inhumane system.

REFERENCE: W. Scott Poole, South Carolina Encyclopedia.
<https://www.sencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/praise-houses/>



Praise house at Sapelo (1939). Photograph by Muriel and Malcolm Bell. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011645376/>.

“They took the drums away... but they could not stop the beat.”

— Dr. David Pleasant

Drumfolk20

*Choreography by Jakari Sherman, Dr. David Pleasant,
Jeeda Barrington and Mfoniso Akpan*

When Africans lost the right to use their drums, the drum found its way into the body of the people. Acclaimed Folk Artist Bessie Jones called them the “Drumfolk:” a people who created rhythm with their bodies, giving rise to new American movement practices like ring shout, tap, hambone and stepping.

In the Wilderness

Choreography by Dustin Praylow and Ronnique Murray

Under the cover of night enslaved Africans often risked their lives to gather for secret meetings and to plan acts of resistance. These gatherings often took place in a “praise house,” a building of no more than 150 square feet, and one of the only places where Africans were able to congregated in groups. Women often played a very important role in organizing such meetings across the South.

The work includes music and lyrics from “All Africa” by Max Roach, “In de Wildaness” composed and recorded by Steven M. Allen and lyrics based on “A Plantation Melody” by Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Stono

Choreography by Jakari Sherman, Jordan Spry, Mfoniso Akpan and Júlio Leitão

The Stono Rebellion, an uprising initiated by 20 enslaved Africans, is one of many large-scale confrontations where tyrannized communities challenged their persecutors. The Rebellion began near the Edisto River in South Carolina on September 9, 1739. About 20 Africans raided a store near Wallace Creek, a branch of the Stono River. Seizing guns and other weapons, the rebels headed south towards a promised freedom in Spanish Florida, waving flags, beating drums and shouting “Liberty!”

As they marched, many colonists were killed, and the rebellion numbers grew from 20 to approximately 100. Once the rebels reached the Edisto River, even more colonists descended upon them and the revolt was defeated. After Stono, South Carolina authorities moved to greatly restrict the lives and culture of Africans in the colonies, leading to the Negro Act of 1740.

Intermission

Un/Afraid

Choreography by Jakari Sherman with contributions from Jeeda Barrington, Conrad R. Kelly II and Dustin Praylow

The Negro Act of 1740 prohibited enslaved Africans from growing their own food, learning to read, moving freely, assembling in groups or earning money. Africans also lost the right to use and play their drums.

Un/Afraid responds to this historically impactful code of law through the lens of 21st Century American culture. While the drum was physically taken away hundreds of years ago, art forms like beatboxing, hip hop and stepping demonstrate how the instrument retained a significant space in the lives of African-Americans.

The work includes “Ezekiel Saw de Wheel” performed by the Tuskegee Institute Choir and arranged and conducted by William L. Dawson. “Nxt/Step Hip Hop” was composed and recorded by Jakari Sherman.

Free

Choreography by Jakari Sherman

Stepping is an art form whose origins have been in question since the very beginning. *Free* centers the art form firmly on American shores but welcomes back the drum, the stamping stick and the rhythms shaped by the Africans who first arrived here in 1619 (and before!).

Though the drum was taken away and labeled a tool for insurrection, the instrument has been reclaimed through generations of music and dance traditions nurtured in African American communities for over 400 years.

STAY SAFE

We are excited to welcome you back to the Mead Center for American Theater. Our team is confident in our ability to safely provide you with groundbreaking entertainment!

VACCINATION REQUIREMENT

- All audiences must provide proof of full vaccination on the date of their visit. Arena staff and volunteers are required to be fully vaccinated as well.

MASK REQUIREMENT

- All audiences, staff and volunteers must wear facial masks that cover their mouth and nose.

HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

- We are asking any audience member who is feeling ill to please stay home and utilize our many ticket exchange options. Our staff and volunteers are expected to do the same.

HVAC UPGRADE

- We have upgraded our HVAC systems with MERV 13 filters wherever possible to ensure superior air quality, per CDC recommendation.

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CAST



CHRISTYLEZ BACON is a GRAMMY® Nominated Progressive Hip-Hop artist and multi-instrumentalist from Southeast, Washington, D.C. Christylez multi-tasks between

various instruments such as the West African djembe drum, acoustic guitar and the human beat-box, while continuing the oral tradition of storytelling. With a mission towards cultural acceptance and unification through music, Christylez is constantly pushing the envelope. He has received multiple awards including the Washington Area Music Association Artist of the Year in 2013 and the Montgomery County Executive Award for Excellence in the Arts.



EMANUEL "MANNY" CHACON is a dancer and choreographer from Wilmington, Delaware. His love for movement began at a young age with the Afro-Brazilian

martial art of Capoeira followed by his collegiate experience with Lambda Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Inc. and mentor J-Romeo. His styles include Capoeira, Hip Hop, Reggaeton, Afro & Caribbean movement, Stepping/Body Percussion, Gumbboot and Zulu. He has performed on Telemundo, MTV Tr3s and Revolt TV.



AGYEI KEITA EDWARDS is a recorded professional drummer and percussionist. His debut as a dynamic performer was at the tender age of 3.

With a rich history of performances under his belt, to include venues such as the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Millennium Stage of the Kennedy Center, Agyei has performed for and with celebrated artists such as

Sheila E. In 2021, as a choreographer, dancer and drummer, Agyei shared the stage with the acclaimed rapper and record producer Busta Rhymes for the MTV Video Music Awards. Agyei has been in the business of West African percussion for over twenty years and is certifiably an accomplished, sought-after artist; he continues to accompany bands nationally and internationally. Agyei is a spiritually-grounded, powerful musician and Musical Director of Farafinakan percussion ensemble. Agyei's motto is: Do it with excellence or don't do it at all.



DIONNE ELEBY is a graduate of Elon University where she majored in Musical Theater and minored in African-American Studies and Business Administration. A

native of Atlanta, Georgia, Dionne has performed with the African American Dance Ensemble, ArtPark Regional Theatre and Rotterdam's Lef in Holland. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.



KAYSHON HAWKINS is a dancer, choreographer and teacher from Henderson, North Carolina. He has been teaching dance for four years, teaching all ages,

specializing in hip-hop. He taught at The Pointe! Dance Studio in Greensboro, NC, for two years. Kayshon graduated from Fayetteville State University with a Bachelor's degree in Theatre in 2018, with a profession in audio and sound.



AKIEVIA HICKMAN is a native of Tallahassee, Florida. She attended Florida A&M University where she received a BA in Business Administration and an MBA. Akievia was

introduced to stepping in high school as a member of the Code Red Step Team. In college she joined the Rampage Step Team. She is trained in hip-hop and jazz and she studied modern contemporary dance under the direction of Shepiro Hardemon as a member of Mahogany Dance Theatre. She is a member of the Beta Alpha chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.



JABARI JONES is a native of Detroit, Michigan. He started dancing at the age of 8—inspired by the performances of recording artist Usher. He was a featured performer for

artists such as Aloe Blacc, Detroit 1-8-7, Elijah J, Jacob Latimore, K Jay Music and The Music Factory. He has performed in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and acted in productions of *College Boyfriends* and *Mooz-Lum*. Jabari studied English at Morehouse College. He joined Step Afrika! in 2017. He is a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.



CONRAD R. KELLY II, Assistant Artistic Director of Step Afrika!, is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he attended Dillard High School of the Visual and Performing Arts. While

attending Florida A&M University, he became a member of the Marching 100 and the Strikers. After college, Conrad became a soloist for The Rolle Project in Las Vegas as well as a dance instructor with Studio 305, where he regularly taught classes in hip-hop, contemporary and jazz dance. Conrad plans to use his performing and teaching experiences to open a mentoring program for young male dancers.



ABDOU MUHAMMAD is a native of Washington, D.C., and has studied West African drumming since the age of 2 years old. Muhammad has studied and performed with

various African Dance companies in the Washington, D.C. area, such as Coyaba Dance Theatre, African Heritage Dancers & Drummers, KounKouran Dance Company and Ezibu Muntu African Dance Company. Throughout his 28 years of drumming, Muhammad has performed at various venues, such as the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., Brooklyn Academy of Music in Brooklyn, N.Y. and The State Theatre in Austin, Texas. Currently, Muhammad is a Musical Director of Coyaba Dance Theatre. Muhammad is on faculty at The Davis Center, The Washington Ballet and at Inner City Inner Child, an early child care program based in Washington, D.C., that introduces literacy through music and dance.



AYANA (REED) OGUNSUNLADE is a singer and actor from Washington, D.C., who is becoming known for her unique ability to capture an "audience's emotions"

as mentioned by the press. She is on a mission to bring meaningful stories to life on stage and in front of the camera. Ayana showcases her versatility through performances such as an opera debut in Italy as Pamina in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* to starring in the Helen Hayes-nominated blues musical *Blackberry Daze* which garnered rave reviews from *The Washington Post*. Her performance skills were developed at the renowned Duke Ellington School of the Arts high school and the Friends of Carter Barron Performing Arts Foundation, landing her on stages as prestigious as the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Theatre.

WHO'S WHO

She has a Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance and a minor in African and African American Studies from George Mason University. Ayana is an acting student of Anthony Abeson of New York.



DUSTIN PRAYLOW is a native of South Carolina. He began his dance training at Dancin' On Main Studios in Lake City under the instruction of Karl Singletary and Paige

Strickland. Dustin studied modern, contemporary and ballet at the University of South Carolina, where he received his BS in Biology with a minor in Dance. Dustin began his professional dance career in 2016 with Norwegian Creative Studios, performing in the Broadway show *After Midnight* on the Pride of America, RSSC Mariner and the Norwegian Escape. This is Dustin's third season with Step Afrika!



ANESIA SANDIFER is a native of Augusta, Georgia. She attended the University of Georgia where she received a BBA in Finance and minored in Dance. She is a member of

the Zeta Psi chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc, where she served as Step Master. Anesia was a full scholarship recipient at the 2015 Debbie Allen Summer Intensive in Los Angeles, CA. She has performed on ESPN for the Special Olympics 2015 World Games as a dancer for O.A.R. and Siedah Garrett.



JOEL SANTIAGO is a musician and interdisciplinary music artist—a vocalist and multi-instrumentalist based in Baltimore, Maryland. Besides his

distinguished performance portfolio,

what makes his artistry unique is that his projects are multi-media, combining music, art, poetry and animation to create a journey that represents the challenges and triumphs in his own life and experience.



JAKARI SHERMAN is a passionate choreographer, ethnochoreologist and performer whose experience extends over 20 years. Rooted in the African American tradition

of stepping, his work pushes the boundaries of percussive dance using technology, storytelling and diverse musical scores. Jakari served as Step Afrika's Artistic Director for seven years. He directed *The Migration: Reflections of Jacob Lawrence*, *Green is the New Black*, *Symphony in Step*, among others. He is the Founder of Ordered Steps, a nonprofit that teaches stepping as a tool for youth outreach. Jakari received a M.A. in Ethnochoreology from the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance and is undertaking groundbreaking ethnographic work related to structural analysis, teaching methodologies and historical archiving of stepping in the U.S. Jakari has lectured on stepping throughout the world, including Greece, Kazakhstan, the U.K. and Belgium.



VALENCIA ODEYKA EMONNI SPRINGER is a native of Brooklyn, New York. Valencia received her BA in Elementary Education and served as the first "Stand Queen"

(captain) with the Ambassadors of Sound Marching Band at Virginia Union University. She studied ballet, jazz, African, hip-hop and contemporary dance at Restoration Youth Arts Academy and has performed with Forces of Nature and Dance Africa (Brooklyn, NY). Valencia is a proud member of the Nu Chapter of

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. and the Eta Psi Chapter of Tau Beta Sigma National Honorary Band Sorority. This is her third season with Step Afrika!.



JORDAN SPRY, Assistant Artistic Director of Step Afrika!, a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, joined Step Afrika! in 2012. He was first introduced to

stepping in high school, when he joined the Progressive African American Cultural Society. Jordan attended Howard University and graduated with a BBA in Marketing. At Howard University, he stepped with Drew Hall Step Team. Jordan served as a head coach for the Drew Hall Step Team, where he choreographed many first-place winning pieces for the Howard University Homecoming Step Show. Jordan is also a freelance photographer, capturing moments from Step Afrika!'s tours around the world and personal work at home in the D.C. area, as well as an aspiring model.



PELHAM WARNER, a native of The Bronx, New York, attended Dutchess Community College. As a teenager, Pelham was a member of The Players Club Steppers. He then

found his home stepping with the Harlem, New York-based group, The Order of the Feather Fraternity, where he served as the team's Step Master and captain for five years. He is blessed to have the opportunity to continue his passion for stepping, performing and teaching with Step Afrika!.



ROBERT WARNSLEY is a native of Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Illinois State University with a BS in Information Technology. Robert learned to step and stroll as a member of the

Eta Tau chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. In addition to stepping, he practices hip-hop and Chicago-style footworking. This is Robert's third season with Step Afrika!.



KANYSHA WILLIAMS is a native of the Washington metropolitan area and a dynamic actress and singer. She began studying vocal performance at the age of

14 at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, D.C., and she continued her studies at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and George Mason University. Kanysha has performed at Carnegie Hall in New York, NY and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Kanysha has performed in *The Color Purple*, *The Wiz*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Off stage, Kanysha is a museum educator for the Smithsonian Institute and a private voice and piano instructor.

CREATIVE

MFONISO AKPAN (Artistic Director, Step Afrika!) has trained extensively in tap, ballet, jazz, modern, African dance and step. While attending the State University of New York at Stony Brook, she majored in biochemistry and cultivated her stepping skills as a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Mfon began her training at the Bernice Johnson Cultural Arts Center and has performed at Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, the Apollo Theater, the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Lincoln Center. Mfon toured with the off-Broadway show *Hoofin' 2 Hittin'*, where she was a featured stepper and dancer.

KENDALL ARIN (*Stage Manager and Assistant Production Manager*) is thrilled to be a part of Step Afrika!'s *Drumfolk*. She is a native of Detroit, MI. She received her BFA in Acting & Stage Management from the Conservatory at Point Park University. Kendall is an all around theatre artist trained both on and back-stage. Her recent stage management credits include *HERstory* (Kennedy Center), *Stirring the Waters* (The REACH @ Kennedy Center), and Step Afrika!'s *Magical Musical Holiday Step Show*. She has also held titles in film as Assistant Production Coordinator on *Peace of Mind with Taraji* (Facebook Watch, Emmy Nominated) and Second Assistant Director with Octet Productions. Compelled by her faith in Christ and commitment to community, she always reminds herself — “it’s an *US thing!*” and Philippians 2:1-11.

PATRICK CALHOUN (*Sound Designer*) is a native of Charlotte, North Carolina. He received a BS in Technical Theatre from Greensboro College and he completed graduate studies in Sound Design at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Patrick is an East Coast-based sound designer living in New York City, working in Broadway, Off-Broadway and regional theatres around the country. Highlights from his recent work: Step Afrika!: *The Migration*, *Magical Musical Holiday Show*, *Drumfolk*; Broadway: *The Nap* (Assoc.); Off-Broadway: *Drunk Shakespeare*, *The Migration*, *Amerike — The Golden Land*, *Little Shop of Horrors* (Assoc.), *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (Assoc.), *KPOP* (Assoc.), *Trainspotting Live NYC* (Assoc.); International Tour: *Wit’s End Puppet Theatre: Saudade*; Selected Regional: Boston Colonial Theatre (Pre-Broadway): *A Beautiful Noise* (Assoc.); *Drunk Shakespeare* — DC & Chicago; Kennedy Center: *Bud, Not Buddy*; Woolly Mammoth: *An Octaroon*; Folger Theatre: *The Winter’s Tale*, *Mary Stuart*; Everyman Theatre: *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, *Wait Until Dark*. Patrick is a member of United Scenic Artists Local 829. www.patrickcalhoun.info

YANNICK GODTS (*Assistant Lighting Designer*) is a Washington, D.C.-based lighting designer and visual artist. He has worked with Step Afrika! since 2019, designing various works for the company and as the touring lighting supervisor for *Drumfolk* since 2020. He is currently the lighting supervisor for Pilobolus Dance Theater and his lighting and props designs for Pilobolus have been seen across the US, Europe and the Middle East. When not on the road, he enjoys taking care of his many plants.

MARIANNE MEADOWS (*Lighting Designer and Production Manager*) is delighted to continue her work with Step Afrika!, and doubly delighted to be at Arena Stage where she did her graduate school internship. She lives in Royal Oak, Maryland and has been a designer since 1982. She received a BA from Sarah Lawrence College, an MFA from the University of Washington and additional training from Lester Polakovs Studio and Forum of Stage Design, NYC. She is a resident designer for Solas Nua (*Johnny Meister* and *The Stitch, The Smuggler*), Open Circle (where she also serves as a board member), Washington Stage Guild, Scena Theatre, Theatre Lab and Histro. Previous productions include *Eleanor*, *The Blackguards* (Ford’s Theatre); *Quills* (Helen Hayes nomination), *The Dead Monkey* (Woolly Mammoth); *Old Wicked Songs* (Helen Hayes nomination), *Desk Set* (Studio Theatre); *The Chosen* (Theater J, Helen Hayes nomination); *The Adding Machine* (Washington Jewish Theatre, Helen Hayes nomination). Marianne is a member of United Scenic Artists Local #829. She is a recipient of Theatre Lobby’s Mary Goldwater Award, 2004.

MISHA MICHEL (*Assistant Stage Manager*) is a native of Miami, Florida. She holds a BFA in Dance from Florida State University and is a member of the Kappa Epsilon Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Misha trained under the

direction of Maribel Fruitstone and Traci Young-Byron as a member of the Young Contemporary Dance Theatre (YCDT). As the YCDT SUPAStarz captain, Misha was featured on two Lifetime series, *Step It Up* and *Bring It!*. This is Misha's third season with Step Afrika!.

KENAN M. QUANDER (*Costume Designer*) is a Washington, D.C., native who now lives in Staunton, VA. She has worked on everything from television to Broadway. She is a freelance costume designer, currently the Resident Costume Designer and Shop Manager for Washington and Lee University. She has been designing for Step Afrika! for the last seven years and she considers *Drumfolk* one of her favorite designs to date. She is extremely excited and proud of this production.

JAKARI SHERMAN (*Director, Drumfolk*) see bio on page 25.

C. BRIAN WILLIAMS (*Founder and Executive Producer, Step Afrika!*) is a native of Houston, Texas and graduate of Howard University. He first learned to step as a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.—Beta Chapter, in the Spring of 1989. While living in Southern Africa, he began to research the percussive dance tradition of stepping, exploring the many sides of this exciting, yet under-recognized American art form and founded Step Afrika! in 1994. Williams has performed, lectured and taught in Europe, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and throughout the United States. He is the founder of the monumental Step Afrika! International Cultural Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa. Through Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's newest cultural exports and inspired the designation of Step Afrika! as Washington, D.C.'s official "Cultural Ambassador." Williams has been cited as a "civic/community visionary" by *NV Magazine*, a "nation builder" by the

National Black Caucus of State Legislators and a "minority business leader" by the *Washington Business Journal*. He is the recipient of numerous Artist Fellowships; the Distinguished Arts Award from the Coalition for African-Americans in the Performing Arts; the Pola Nirenska Award for Contemporary Achievement in Dance. He is also featured in *Soulstepping*, the first book to document the history of stepping. He also earned the 2008 Mayor's Art Award for Innovation in the Arts and has led the company to multiple Metro DC Dance Awards for "Outstanding New Work," "Excellence in Stage Design/Multimedia" and "Outstanding Group Performance." In 2018, Williams received the Mayor's Arts Award for Visionary Leadership from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

ARENA STAGE LEADERSHIP

MOLLY SMITH (*Artistic Director*) has served as artistic director since 1998. Her more than 30 directing credits at Arena Stage include large-scale musicals, like *Anything Goes*, Disney's *Newsies*, *Carousel*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Oklahoma!*, *My Fair Lady*, *The Music Man*, *Cabaret*, *South Pacific*; new plays, like *Sovereignty*, *The Originalist*, *Camp David*, *Legacy of Light*, *The Women of Brewster Place*, *How I Learned to Drive*; and classics like *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Great White Hope* and *All My Sons*. Her directorial work has also been seen Off-Broadway at 59E59 in New York, Portland Center Stage, Canada's Shaw Festival, The Court Theatre, The Old Globe, Asolo Repertory, Berkeley Repertory, Trinity Repertory, Toronto's Tarragon Theatre, Montreal's Centaur Theatre and Perseverance Theater in Juneau, Alaska, which she founded and ran from 1979–1998. Molly has been a leader in new play development for over 40 years. She is a great believer in first, second and third productions

of new work and has championed projects, including *Dear Evan Hansen*; *Next to Normal*; *Passion Play*, a cycle; and *How I Learned to Drive*. She led the re-invention of Arena Stage, focusing on the architecture and creation of the Mead Center for American Theater and positioning Arena Stage as a national center for American artists through its artistic programming. During her time with the company, Arena Stage has workshopped more than 100 productions, produced 39 world premieres, staged numerous second and third productions and been an important part of nurturing nine projects that went on to have a life on Broadway. In 2014, Molly made her Broadway debut directing *The Velocity of Autumn*, following its critically acclaimed run at Arena Stage. She was awarded honorary doctorates from American University and Towson University. In 2018, she was honored as Person of the Year by the National Theatre Conference and inducted into the Washington DC Hall of Fame. In 2020, she was awarded the Director of Distinction in Cairo, Egypt, from the Academy of Arts. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, she developed the concept for two online films, *May 22, 2020* and *The 51st State*, overseeing the production direction as well as directing pieces within the films. She also spearheaded a variety of other new online content, including a weekly talk show Molly's Salon, during the live performance hiatus.

EDGAR DOBIE (*Executive Producer*) Born in Vernon, British Columbia, a village next to the Rocky Mountains (three years after Arena had its first performance in 1950), I am one of five brothers raised by my Dad Edgar, a mechanic and small businessman, and Mom Connie, a telephone operator and union organizer. I am the only Dobie to make a career in theater. Luckily for me, drama was an arts elective I was offered at the tender age of 12 so I hung up my hockey skates

and joined the drama class, led by teacher Paddy Malcolm and her fledgling Powerhouse Community Theater after school. By the time I graduated from high school, we volunteers had built ourselves a 200-seat, fully equipped theater on its own piece of land in the center of town and found a sold-out audience for the full season of plays we had on offer. That experience taught me so many lessons about the power of theater to foster collaboration and share meaningful stories, as well as the public values that attach themselves to building a safe place where everyone is welcome. All those lessons served me well as a managing leader and producer both sides of the border and both sides of the commercial and non-profit theater divide. Arriving here in Southwest with my good wife Tracy and our daughter Greta Lee in 2009 makes me feel like I am well-equipped to do a good job for you all.

This theater operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association.



The actors and stage managers are members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.



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To learn more, please contact
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**For more information, please contact Maya Weil
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The cast of *The Pajama Game*. Photo by Margot Schulman.



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 Founding DirectorZelda Fichandler
 (1924-2016)
 Founding Executive
 Director Thomas C. Fichandler
 (1915-1997)

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Associate Artistic DirectorTeresa Sapien
 Dramaturg Jocelyn Clarke
 Literary ManagerOtis C. Ramsey-Zoe
 Artistic Associate, Casting Joseph Pinzon
 Artistic Development
 Coordinator Melissa Singson
 Current Commissioned WritersThe Bengsons,
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 Nathan Alan Davis, Emily Feldman,
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Building Technicians Larry Serious,
Keaun Windear
Stage Door AttendantsKay Rogers, Ric Birch

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Production Manager Trevor A. Riley

SCENIC

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Associate Technical Director Zachary Fullenkamp
Scene Shop Supervisor.....Travis Smith
Charge Scenic Artist.....Li Qiang
Carpenters.....Matthew Grisdela, Julia Junghans,
Hannah Martin, Logan McDowell
Frank Miller, Jess Rich, Erick Boscana

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Associate Properties Director ..Lance Pennington
Assistant Properties Director..... Jonathan Borgia
Head Props Artisan Niell Duval
Props ArtisanKyle Handziak
Props Assistants Alessandra Shines,
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Assistant Lighting Supervisor.....Paul Villalovoz
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Scott Folsom, Kelsey Swanson

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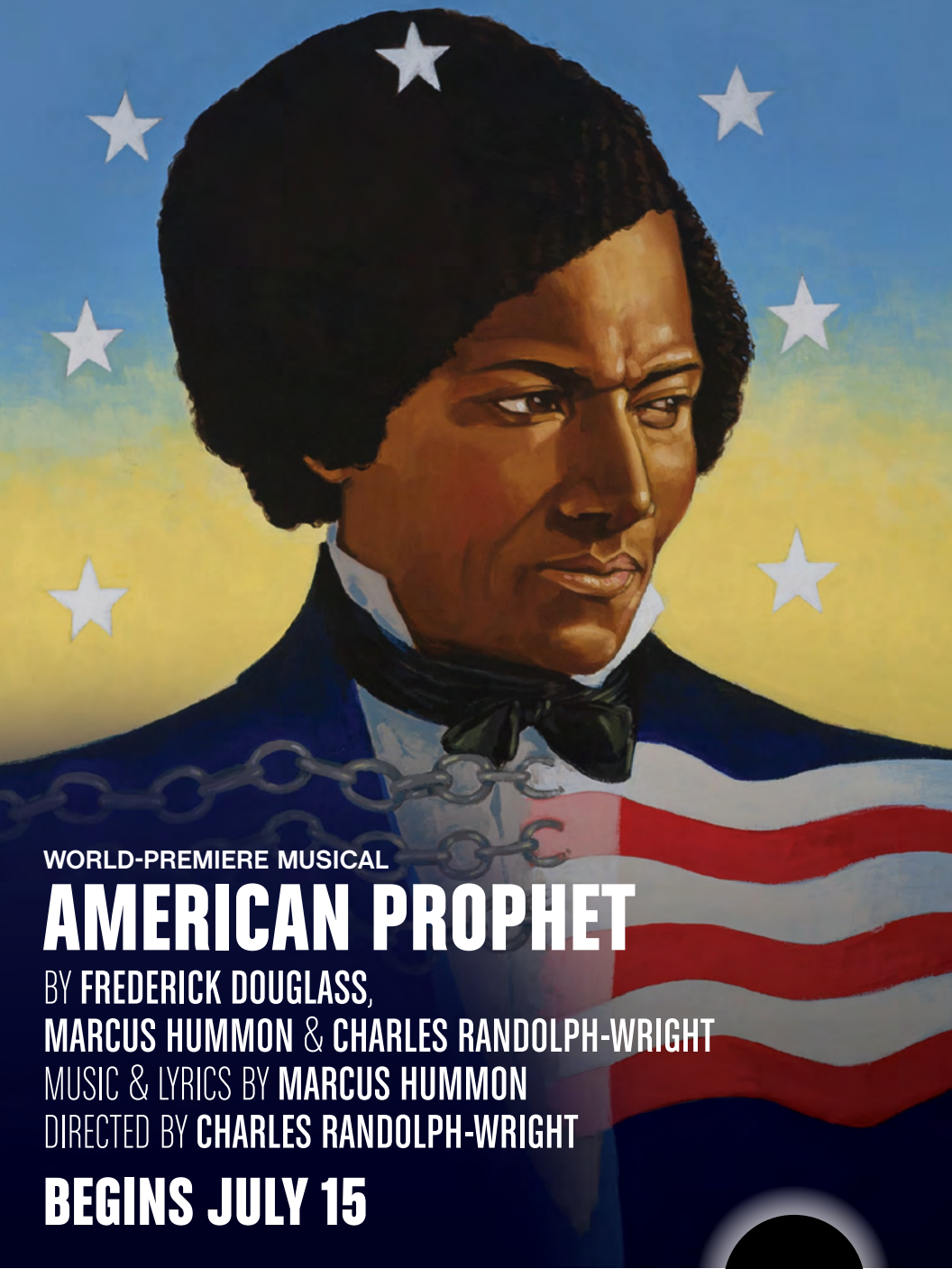
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Associate Costume DirectorCierra Coan
Drapers.....Carol Ramsdell,
Steven Simon
First HandsMichele Macadaeag,
Elizabeth "Liz" Spilsbury
Craftsperson.....Deborah Nash
Wardrobe Supervisors Alina Gerall,
Alice Hawfield
Costume Assistant.....Kathleen Crescenzo
Costume and
Wardrobe AssistantAdelle Gresock

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