

THE MIGRATION

REFLECTIONS ON JACOB LAWRENCE



2023/24 SEASON





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THE MIGRATION

REFLECTIONS ON JACOB LAWRENCE

BY STEP AFRIKA!

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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.



Photo by Nic Lehoux courtesy of Bing Thom Architects.



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.

ARTISTICALLY SPEAKING



"I was leaving the South to fling myself into the unknown... I was taking a part of the South to transplant in alien soil, to see if it could grow differently, if it could drink of new and cool rains, bend in strange winds, respond to the warmth of other suns and, perhaps, to bloom."

— *The Warmth of Other Suns*

It is a thrill and a profound honor to continue Arena's artistic partnership with Step Afrika!—this time in collaboration with The Phillips Collection—to celebrate the bold, bright, and soul-affirming art of one of America's most inspired and influential artists. Welcome to *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*.

In her award-winning literary masterpiece, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson vividly captures the emotional odyssey of the Great Migration, a movement of exodus that began in 1910. Over six million Americans, many less than one generation removed from America's four century-long practice of chattel enslavement, fled the Jim Crow South in search of safety and greater educational and economic opportunities in the American North, Midwest, and West. Jacob Lawrence, the first of his generation born in the North, grew up fully conscious of the thematic power and possibility of 'movement' both as a term with great political and cultural implications and as a central thread in his creative endeavors so much so that it is nearly impossible to extricate the Lawrence family's journey from Virginia and South Carolina to the bustling city streets of Harlem from Jacob's iconic series.

Though the lingering fingerprints of the Post Reconstruction-era policies that incited the Great Migration are still visible and reverberating in our collective consciousness, today we bear witness with profound joy to Step Afrika!'s divine and daring dancers as they breathe literal life into Lawrence's portraits of a community—and a nation—in transition, bringing this history vividly into the 21st century. Their unique interpretation of the 60-panel archive, split between The Phillips Collection and New York City's Museum of Modern Art, collectively encapsulates this pivotal period in American History with syncopated rhythms that carry and exalt the power of a thousand dreams.

Though brilliant as stand-alone works, each of the panels showcased in *The Migration Series* was created and intended to be witnessed as parts of the whole. In recognition of that impulse, every moment of choreography you will witness tonight pulls direct inspiration from the series and hopes to capture a community that Lawrence described as "vital, energized, and very alive."

It is a distinct privilege to close my first season as Arena's Artistic Director by sharing in this collective witnessing of embodied past and present—in the brilliantly imagined, polyrhythmic joy of Step Afrika!, as they bring one of our nation's most beloved and prolific artistic collections to life.

With gratitude,

Hana S. Sharif
Artistic Director, Arena Stage

In service of those who serve

Boeing is grateful to service members and their families for their dedication and we are proud to support the Voices of Now Military Ensemble at Arena Stage and their efforts to tell more military-connected stories.

Learn more at boeing.com/community

FROM THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



One of the best aspects of live performance is being able to take a two-dimensional idea and make it four dimensional. Theater has often brought a piece of history to life in order to tell a particular story and bring voice to those who less often or never are given a voice.

Arena's friends at Step Afrika! bring the poignant paintings of Jacob Lawrence to life through movement. Lawrence's telling of the story of Black migration to the North through image was an immensely creative endeavor, adding a unique depth to history. Step Afrika! takes Lawrence's inspiration one step further, literally—bringing the story to life not through words, but movement, images, and sound. Storytelling is a wonderful art form because stories are told in so many ways.

Theater has a penchant for taking other written words and putting them on the stage possibly more often than looking to visual arts partners for inspiration, however, there are certainly significant examples of just such a crossover. A very recognizable example is Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* (produced at Arena in 1997 with co-production partner Signature Theatre). Georges Seurat's painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* comes to life—again in a literal way, but also through character and song. Another very recognizable adaptation of visual art to performing art is *Crowns* by Regina Taylor, inspired by the photographs of Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry in *Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats*. The magnificent head wear and, of course, the beautiful Black women who owned them came alive through costume and song on Arena's stages four times between 2003 and 2009.

Considering visual artists themselves as well as their artwork, John Logan's *Red* (produced in 2012 with co-production partner Goodman Theatre) brings Mark Rothko to life and features an intense scene where the two characters attack a canvas with their red paint. Georgia O'Keeffe is voiced in *The Faraway Nearby* by John Murrell (produced in 1999) with a tale of her personal relationships set among a backdrop of desert landscapes.

The Migration has also given Arena an opportunity to connect with our colleagues at The Phillips Collection, which houses many panels of Lawrence's epic piece. The Phillips Collection has a focus on modern and contemporary art, including a Rothko Room (since I mentioned him above), and a current exhibition featuring the collections from the Howard University Gallery of Art entitled *Where We Meet*. The intersection of visual and performing art has endless possibilities, and perhaps in this digital age we will find more and more inspiration from a deeper look at ourselves and our world as represented visually.

Thus Arena's 2023/24 Season finishes its cycle. Whether this was your first time to Arena this season, or your 500th, thank you for being with us, and I hope to see you all in the theater again soon.

Warmly,



Edgar Dobie
Executive Producer
President of the Corporation

This is the story of an exodus of African-Americans who left their homes and farms in the South around the time of World War I and traveled to northern industrial cities in search of better lives. It was a momentous journey. Their movement resulted in one of the biggest population shifts in the history of the United States, and the migration is still going on for many people today...

“
To me,
migration
means
movement.”

” — Jacob Lawrence

The **Brown Sanchez Family** is proud to support the incredible work of **Step Afrika!**
Keeping Up The Movement

STEP AFRIKA! FOUNDER'S NOTE



Dear Friends,

Welcome to *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*, one of Step Afrika!'s most celebrated productions. This is not just a performance, but a unique opportunity for you to witness the fusion of dance and visual art. Drawing direct inspiration from Jacob Lawrence's renowned work, "The Migration Series," which chronicles the movement of over six million African Americans from the South to the North, our performance honors a pivotal moment in American history. Through this production, Step

Afrika! proudly merges the performing and visual arts realms to bring Lawrence's evocative paintings to life on stage.

For this special rendition of *The Migration*, Step Afrika! has been granted a unique privilege. We are extremely proud to project images from both the even and odd panels of "The Migration Series," a collection split between MoMA in New York City and The Phillips Collection here in Washington, DC. This is a rare opportunity to witness the unification of these panels through the power of dance, and we are thrilled to share it with you at Arena Stage!

As Step Afrika! celebrates 30 years of stepping and performing across the globe, our 30th Anniversary season is a testament to our commitment. It brims with domestic and international engagements, arts education initiatives, new community programs, all in ultimate celebration of our three-decade commitment to share the joy and cultural significance of stepping everywhere. We are proud to have you with us on this journey.

Thanks to our incredible Board of Directors and Reg Brown and Tiffeny Sanchez, whose unwavering and generous support of Step Afrika! has played a crucial role in bringing this production back to life. We couldn't have done it without you!

Finally, we extend our deepest thanks to you for joining us on this extraordinary journey through history and art. I look forward to the future of Step Afrika! and our tremendous partnership with the amazing artists and administrators of Arena Stage. I truly hope you will stay with us every step of the way!

Warm regards,

A stylized handwritten signature in black ink.

C. Brian Williams

Founder and Executive Producer, Step Afrika!

P.S. To delve deeper into Step Afrika!'s history, please visit our 30th Anniversary Timeline at timeline.stepafrika.org.

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the Local Landscape**

STEP AFRIKA!

THE STORY OF STEP AFRIKA!

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the world's leading authority on the art form 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 ranking as one of the top 10 African American Dance Companies in the US.

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, DC'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 was inducted into the National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) Hall of Fame, the first Dance Company to earn this honor. Step Afrika! headlined President Barack Obama's Black History Month Reception and performed at the first ever Juneteenth Celebration 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.

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

C. Brian Williams, Founder and Executive Producer
Lamar Lovelace, Executive Director
Artis Olds, Director, Arts Education and Community Programs
Margo Cunningham, Marketing Manager

ARTISTIC TEAM

Mfoniso Akpan, Artistic Director
Conrad R. Kelly II, Assistant Artistic Director
Jakari Sherman, Director, *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*
Marianne Meadows, Lighting Designer and Production Manager



Learn more about Step Afrika!
Share your experience! #StepAfrika
www.stepafrika.org

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Altria is proud to support Arena
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Afrika's *The Migration: Reflections
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ARENA STAGE

HANA S. SHARIF, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR | EDGAR DOBIE, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

PRESENTS

THE MIGRATION REFLECTIONS ON JACOB LAWRENCE

BY STEP AFRIKA!

DIRECTED BY
JAKARI SHERMAN

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, STEP AFRIKA!

C. BRIAN WILLIAMS

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, STEP AFRIKA!

MFONISO AKPAN

ORIGINAL SCENIC DESIGN BY

HARLAN PENN

LIGHTING DESIGNER
AND PRODUCTION MANAGER

MARIANNE MEADOWS*

ORIGINAL COSTUME DESIGN BY

KENANN QUANDER

PROJECTION DESIGNER
JAKARI SHERMAN

ORIGINAL SOUND DESIGN BY
PATRICK CALHOUN

The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence is presented through
generous funding from **Reg Brown and Tiffeny Sanchez**
and made possible by



Altria

with additional support provided by **B. Thomas Mansbach**.

We are grateful to **Destination DC** for their promotional support of this production.

Images from Jacob Lawrence's "The Migration Series" generously provided by The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC
and the Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

*Member of the United Scenic Artists Local USA 829

“Must we remain in the South or go elsewhere?
Where can we go to feel that security which other people feel?”

— A Colored Woman in Alabama, 1902

DRUM CALL

Choreographed/Composed by Jakari Sherman and W.E. Smith
Original Recording of “African Villages” by W.E. Smith

The drum has always been essential to African culture everywhere and is critical to the rhythm of migration. *Drum Call* depicts an African village, the arrival of foreign ships, and the ensuing turmoil.

GO WEST: circa 1890

Choreographed by Makeda Abraham, Mfoniso Akpan, and Delaunce Jackson
Drumming by Abdou Muhammed, Agyei Keita-Edwards, and Conrad Kelly II
Flute by Lionel B Lyles II

When Africans arrived in America, their music and dance traditions were ingrained in the culture. *Go West* explores how West African dance and drum traditions spread and maintained their vitality in the New World.

DRUMFOLK

Choreographed by David Pleasant

Drumfolk is a celebration of the early development of African American percussive traditions including patting juba, hambone, and ring shout—giving way to art forms like tap dance and stepping. While exploring this heritage, *Drumfolk* reflects on the harsh conditions in the South that coincided with the practice of these transcendent musical forms. The work shows how the progression of such hardships preempted escape and migration, and how the fortitude of the enslaved led to the creation of new traditions like spirituals, field hollers and shouts.

WADE SUITE

Choreographed by Kirsten Ledford, LeeAnet Noble, and Paul Woodruff
Vocals by Ariel Dykes, Briona Jackson, Greg Watkins, and Kanysha Williams

Wade shows the continuity in African and African-American percussive dance traditions by blending the South African Gumboot Dance, tap, and stepping with the African American spiritual.

Movement One: THE DEACON’S DANCE

The African American spiritual played a significant role in lifting the spirit in troubled times. In *The Deacon’s Dance*, a deacon prepares for Sunday services.

Movement Two: WADE

After the abolition of slavery, the church remained a center of refuge and community-building amidst the harsh conditions and served as a primary means of communication for industries recruiting labor during World War I. *Wade* highlights the importance of the church in helping African Americans survive the South, and its critical role in helping vulnerable migrants resettle in the North.

Intermission

“I was leaving the South to fling myself into the unknown.
I was taking a part of the South to transplant in alien soil, to see if it
could grow differently, if it could drink of new and cool rains, bend in strange
winds, respond to the warmth of other suns, and, perhaps, to bloom.”

— Richard Wright

TRANE SUITE

Original Recording of “Trane” by W. E. Smith
Saxophone by Lionel B. Lyles II

Throughout the Great Migration, the train was an important means of transporting people to the North. The entire railroad industry recruited heavily in the South and thus, economically, became a primary means of African American’s “one-way ticket” to a new life. Named in reference to John Coltrane and paying homage to Duke Ellington’s “Take the A Train,” *Trane* is a journey in three parts, following the story of the Great Migration.

Movement One: TRANE

Choreographed by Jakari Sherman
Creation of Trane made possible by the DC Jazz Festival

The opening movement, *Trane*, establishes the connection between past and present: the rhythm of the train North; and the Alpha “train,” a time-honored element of stepping practiced by brothers of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Movement Two: OFF THE TRAIN

Choreographed by Jakari Sherman

Three men arrive in the North, luggage in hand...thrilled about the possibilities.

Movement Three: MY MAN’S GONE NOW

Choreographed by Mfoniso Akpan, Aseelah Alien, Dionne Eleby, Kevin Marr, and Jakari Sherman
Recording of “My Man’s Gone Now” by Nina Simone

During the migration, it was common for men to journey North without their wives or children because of the high cost of travel. This left many women at home in the South caring for children and struggling to find work. *My Man’s Gone Now* is the story of three women, each in a different phase of their transition to the North and ready to be reunited with their loved one.


CHICAGO

Choreographed by Jakari Sherman

Between the 1910s and 1920, more than 400,000 African American migrants left the South for many Northern and Western cities, including Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Chicago. By the end of the 1920s, that number exceeded 1.2 million.

Chicago finds the migrant’s new rhythm in everyday situations. It is a percussive symphony using body percussion and vocals to highlight the collective self-transformation of these brave men and women once they arrived “Up North.”

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#DCTheatre #ACreativeDC #OnlyIDC

COMPANY / FOR THIS PRODUCTION / SPECIAL THANKS

COMPANY

Kenneth L. Alexander Nya Christian Jerod Coleman
Ariel Dykes Keomi Givens Jr. Leander Gray Jordin Greene
Kamala Hargrove Briona Jackson Nepri James Terrence Johnson
Agyei Keita-Edwards Conrad Kelly II Lionel D. Lyles II
Abdou Muhammed Isaiah O'Connor Na'imah Ray Valencia Springer
Ericka Still Brie Turner Joseph Vasquez Pelham Warner Jr.
Robert Warnsley Greg Watkins Kanysha Williams

FOR THIS PRODUCTION

Associate Lighting Designer YANNICK GODTS
Projections Coordinator JONATHAN DAHM ROBERTSON
Show Caller CHRISTI B. SPANN
Production Assistant KELSEY NICOLE JENKINS
Production Assistant TREVION WALKER
Deck Carpenter MAX MARSHALL
Props Technician ERICA FEIDELSEIT
Light Board Operator KELSEY SWANSON
A1 ALEX CLOUD
A2 LIV FARLEY
Wardrobe Supervisor ADELLE GRESOCK
Wardrobe Supervisor ALICE HAWFIELD
Wigs, Hair, and Makeup Supervisor JAIME BAGLEY

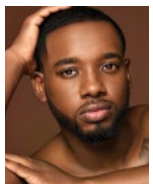
SPECIAL THANKS

Andrew R. Ammerman is the Directing Sponsor of the 2023/24 Season. His support allows Arena Stage to feature the work of the finest directors on our stages.

The beautiful costumes you see in the 2023/24 Season are generously sponsored by **Lola C. Reinsch and the Reinsch Pierce Family Foundation.**

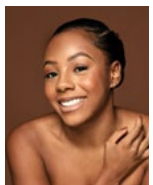
The videotaping or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited. Please turn off all electronic devices. Drinks with a lid are allowed in the theater. Eating is not permitted inside the theater.

COMPANY



KENNETH L. ALEXANDER is a native of Savannah, GA, with a BFA in Interior Design from Valdosta State University. First introduced to stepping through the Sigma Beta Club, Kenneth

went on to become a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. He has taught and performed in and around Tampa Bay, FL, and most recently had the honor of performing at the Super Bowl LV Halftime Show. This is Kenneth's first season with the company.



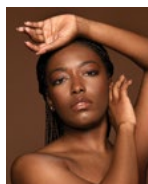
NYA CHRISTIAN is a native of Cleveland, OH, with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, Sociology and Dance Arts from Howard University. A member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority,

Incorporated, she has served as the Alpha Chapter Parliamentarian, Step Mistress, and Stroll Captain. Nya has choreographed works for Taste of Howard, the White House Initiative on HBCU Step performance, Howard University's 2022 Homecoming Step Show performance, DC-based Black History Month performances, and the 2023 North Atlantic Regional Step Show's winning number. She has also represented the Howard University National Panhellenic Council and her Sorority on *Good Morning America* for "The story of 9 historically Black fraternities and sororities" segment during Black History Month. This is Nya's first season with the company.



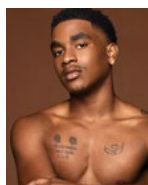
JEROD COLEMAN is a native of Columbus, GA, with a BA in History from the University of South Alabama. A member of the Theta Delta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., he has

served as both step and stroll master. Jerod has performed with the Atlanta Braves, Atlanta Falcons, Red Bull Dance Your Style, and DreamHack ATL entertainment teams. He taught at Thomas H. Brewer Elementary School in Columbus, Georgia, where he also ran an all-boys step team called the B.L.U.E. Steppers. This is Jerod's first season with the company.



ARIEL DYKES is a native of Gainesville, FL, with an Associate of Arts Degree in Musical Theatre from Santa Fe College and a BFA in Dance from the University of Florida. Ariel

was introduced to stepping and strolling as a member of the Iota Lambda Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., where she choreographed step routines for the chapter and UF's National Panhellenic Council. She has trained in traditional and post-modern dance, jazz, voice, and acting, and has worked with such artists as Ailey Dancers' Nathaniel Hunt and Saman tha Barriento, Tony Award winner Scott Coulter, and Galen Hooks. This is Ariel's second season with the company.



KEOMI GIVENS JR. is a native of Miami, FL, where he trained with Ricardo Dume, Traci Young-Byron, Jakari Sherman, Conrad Kelly II, Tanisha Cide I, Maribel Trujillo, and Robert

Battle. He has studied at the New World School of the Arts and the Mahogany Dance Theatre, where he served as a Rehearsal Director and choreographer. Keomi has danced with Gravity Dance Troupe and Young Contemporary Dance Theatre (YCDT) and has previously toured nationally with Step Afrika! as a guest artist. In addition to his exceptional work as a dancer, Keomi has choreographed for the legendary 100 of Florida A&M University, RickyDanco, and Booker T Washington Lady Twisters. This is Keomi's first season with the company as a full-time artist.



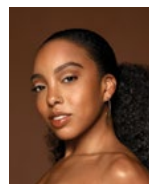
LEANDER GRAY is a native of Washington, DC, and a previous BFA candidate with a Contemporary Dance concentration at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Leander

has performed at the Black Leaves Project, CityDance Creating the Magic concerts, Art All Night DC, Elements Urban Arts Collective Annual Showcase, and the DC Youth Freestyle Battle. He has participated in the prestigious Monsters of Hip Hop Intensive and the Kennedy Center Dance Lab and was featured in one of Revolution Marz's music videos. This is Leander's first tour with the company.



JORDIN GREENE is a DMV native and graduate of Howard University where she received her BFA in Theatre Arts and Dance from the Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine

Arts. She has a technical dance background in tap, ballet, jazz, contemporary, hip-hop, Horton, Dunham, and Graham. Jordin is currently a working artist with the local DC company SOLE Defined, with which she has performed and toured across the US, including notable stages like The Lincoln Center and The Kennedy Center. She has had the privilege of working with notable choreographers and artists such as Darrell Moultre, Hope Boykin and HB Dance, Tommie Waheed, Janice Rosario, Royce Zackery, and Brian Flynn of Roul't Dance Company. Jordan is grateful for all her experiences thus far and looks forward to a bright future in theater and dance.



KAMALA HARGROVE is a native of the Bronx, NY, with a BA in Mathematics, Theater, and Dance from Trinity College. Kamala studied with the Alvin Ailey School and Dance Theater

of Harlem and has appeared in various music videos and live performances. She

has performed with artists including Estelle, Mr. Vegas, Wizkid, and French Montana. Kamala has also worked as a teaching artist in New York City, teaching elementary, middle, and high school students. This is Kamala's second season with the company.



BRIONA JACKSON is a vocalist, actress, songwriter, and teaching artist reigning from Washington, DC. She graduated from the prestigious Duke Ellington School of the Arts and

earned her B.M. in Vocal Performance from George Mason University. As a multi-generist performer, Briona has starred in a variety of roles across opera, theater, film, and musical tours. Her credits include *One Mo' Time* (Anacostia Playhouse), *Waldy Street* (Broadway), and *Step with Kevin Ross* (Today Show/National Tour).



NEPRI JAMES is a native of Atlanta, GA, with a BA from North Carolina A&T State University. Step Master for her Alpha Phi Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., she is known for

bringing her step team to victory at the 2018 Homecoming Step Show. Nepri has worked for the Thurgood Marshall College Fund Rise and Contra Tiempo and has previously toured nationally with Step Afrika! as a guest artist. This is Nepri's first season with the company as a full-time artist.



TERRENCE JOHNSON is a native of Broward County, FL, with a BA in General Studies from the University of Central Florida. Terrence has previously stepped with the ADIMU: Men of

Excellence Step Team, and served as a co-founder, president, and performer with the Hazard Step Team. He is also a 2015 inductee of the UCF Chapter of Progressive Black Men, Inc. This is Terrence's first season with the company as a full-time artist.



AGYEI KEITA-EDWARDS is a professional drummer and percussionist who made his dynamic debut at the tender age of three. With a rich performance history at prestigious venues like the

Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Millennium Stage of The Kennedy Center, Agyei has shared stages with celebrated artists, including Sheila E., and most notably, the acclaimed rapper and record producer Busta Rhymes at the MTV Video Music Awards. Agyei has over twenty years of experience in West African percussion, establishing himself as an accomplished and sought-after artist. He continues to accompany bands both nationally and internationally, including guest performances with Step Afrika!. A spiritually grounded and powerful musician, Agyei is the Musical Director of the Farafinakan percussion ensemble. His motto, "Do it with excellence or don't do it at all," is evident in every performance.



CONRAD R. KELLY II is a native of Fort Lauderdale, FL, who studied Criminal Justice at Florida A&M University. Following his time with A&M's Marching 100 and The Strikers,

Conrad became a soloist for The Rolle Project in Las Vegas and a dance instructor with Studio 305, where he regularly taught classes in hip-hop, contemporary, and jazz. Conrad has won numerous awards as a choreographer and dancer, and is a two-time recipient of the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities' prestigious Arts and Humanities Fellowship Program. A longstanding member of the company, Conrad serves as Step Afrika!'s Assistant Artistic Director and most recently choreographed *The Movement*, an epic tribute to Black Lives Matter and the domino effect of activism experienced in 2020. This is Conrad's seventh season with the company.



LIONEL D. LYLES II is a native of Boulder, CO, with a degree in Music Education from Morgan State University and a Master of Music in Jazz Studies Saxophone Performance

from North Carolina Central University, where he studied under jazz legends such as Branford Marsalis, Joey Calderazzo, Jimmy Heath, Roy Hargrove, Brian Horton, Robert Trowers, and Dr. Ira Wiggins. His ensemble The Lionel Lyles Quintet has produced three albums: *The Lionel Lyles Quintet: The September Sessions* (2006), *The Lionel Lyles Quintet: At The Precipice* (2014), and *The Lionel Lyles Quintet: Simplistically Complex* (2019). Lionel has received the JAZZY award for Best Jazz Tenor and has been recognized by the *Washington City Paper* as both the Best New Jazz Tenor Player and Best Performing Artist. His extensive teaching career includes positions as Director of Bands in the Baltimore City Public School System and Prince George's County Public Schools, as well as a Woodwind Adjunct at Loyola University Maryland. In 2023, he joined the faculty of Morgan State University as the Director of Jazz.



ABDOU MUHAMMED is a native of Washington, DC, and has studied West African drumming since the age of 2 years old. Muhammad has studied and performed with various

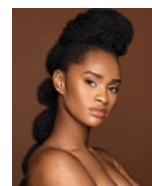
African Dance companies in the Washington, D.C. area, such as Coyaba Dance Theatre, African Heritage Dancers and Drummers, KanKouran Dance Company, and Ezibu Muntu African Dance Company. Throughout his 28 years of drumming, Muhammad has performed at various venues, such as the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, Brooklyn Academy of Music in Brooklyn, NY, and The State Theatre in Austin, Texas. Currently, Muhammad is a Musical Director of Coyaba Dance Theatre and is on faculty at The Davis Center, The Washington Ballet, and at Inner

City Inner Child, an early childcare program based in Washington, DC, that introduces literacy through music and dance.



ISAIAH O'CONNOR is a native of Miami, FL, with a BS in Biology from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. A student of hip-hop, modern, and urban soul,

Isaiah has previously stepped with the Strikers Dance Troupe under the direction of Shepiro Hardemon. This is Isaiah's second season with the company.



NA'IMAH RAY is a native of Brooklyn, NY, with a BFA in Dance from Montclair State University. Na'imah performed as a Centennial Stepper with her sorority, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority

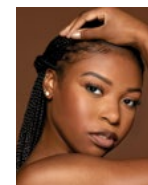
Incorporated, at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. She has trained with Dwana Smallwood, Earl Mosley, Christian von Howard, and Beatrice Capote, and participated in dance programs at The Ailey School and Earl Mosley's Institute of the Arts. This is her second season with the company.



VALENCIA ODEYKA EMONNI SPRINGER is a native of Brooklyn, NY, with a BA in Elementary Education from Virginia Union University. 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 and served as the first "Stand Queen" (captain) with the Ambassadors of Sound Marching Band. Previously a student of Restoration Youth Arts Academy, Valencia has performed with Forces of Nature, Dance Africa (Brooklyn), and as part of a live installation entitled "A Primordial Place." She has also worked as a social studies and science teacher, dance teacher/

coach, guest choreographer for local New York/Virginia majorette teams, and as a model for New York and Richmond, Virginia, fashion weeks. This is Valencia's fifth season with the company.



ERICKA STILL is a native of St. Petersburg, FL, with a BA in Health Science, Pre-Occupational Therapy, and Rehabilitation Management from Florida A&M University. Ericka previously

stepped with AKAdemy Exquisite Gems and studied under the direction of Paulette W. Johnson and Shepiro Hardemon as a member and Co-Assistant Artistic Director of Mahogany Dance Theatre. This is Ericka's second season with the company.



BRIE TURNER is a native of Lithonia, GA with a BA in Strategic, Legal, and Management Communications from Howard University's Cathy Hughes School of

Communications where she graduated magna cum laude. As an exceptional dancer, choreographer, and communications professional, Brie's unwavering dedication to her craft has propelled her to great heights in her knowledge of performing arts. She has dedicated over 10 years to technical dance training, shaping her into a versatile and well-rounded dancer. During her undergraduate career at Howard, Brie became a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc., where she served as president and her passion for stepping was nurtured. Additionally pursuing a minor in Theater Arts Administration, she rose to captain and co-captain roles in the Howard University Bisonettes Dance Ensemble. In her second season with the company, Brie is excited to continue bringing life to African diasporic stories and dance styles.



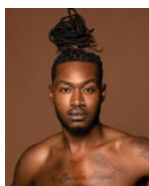
JOSEPH VASQUEZ is a native of Guttenberg, NJ, with a BS in Exercise Science from Rutgers University in New Brunswick where he served as a member of Lambda

Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity Incorporated. Joseph has led and choreographed for the Bachata Performance Team, and previously performed with The Revels, a stroll team led by Francisco Pozo and Carlos Zapata. This is Joseph's second season with the company.



PELHAM WARNER JR. is a native of The Bronx, NY, and has a BA from Dutchess Community College. Pelham is a member of The Order of the Feather Fraternity where he served

as the team's Step Master and captain for five years, and has previously danced with The Players Club Steppers. Pelham has worked as a dance instructor in the greater New York City area, and recently performed in the a capella musical *The Movement* by Kathy D. Harrison at the National Black Theater Festival. This is Pelham's fifth year with the company.



ROBERT WARNSLEY is a native of Chicago, IL, with a BS in Information Technology from Illinois State University. A member of the Eta Tau Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity,

Inc., Robert served as the step and stroll master and has organized, competed in, and placed first in numerous step shows. He has taught stepping to the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and actively participates in community service projects in the city of Chicago, teaching dancehall and various Afro styles in the DMV and NYC areas. This is Robert's fifth season with the company.



GREG WATKINS is an award-winning artist and purpose-filled educator. Having graduated from Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Howard University (B.M., Music Education), and

American University (M.Ed, Policy & Leadership), Mr. Watkins is a Helen Hayes Award winner (*Legally Blonde*, 2019, Keegan Theatre), Capital Fringe Festival Best Musical awardee (*The Poet Warriors*, 2010) and two-time Dr. Quincy Jones Award winner. He has served as music director to Tony Award winner Phylicia Rashad and Kennedy Center Honors recipient Debbie Allen. As a performer, Mr. Watkins has co-starred in numerous professional productions in the Washington Metropolitan area, including *Jubilee* (Arena Stage), *Aida* (Constellation Theatre Company), *Rock of Ages* (Workhouse Arts Center), *Sister Act* (ArtsCentric), *King Lear* and *Gospel at Colonus* (Avant Bard), and *Beyond the Mask* (PBS documentary). He is the former artistic director of The MusicianShip Washington Youth Choir. Currently, Mr. Watkins serves as Director of Choral Activities and Drama at Washington Christian Academy. He is thrilled to return to Arena Stage and re-engage in collaboration with Step Afrika!.



KANYSHA WILLIAMS is a versatile singer, songwriter, actress, and performer from Washington, DC. She began her formal voice training at 14 at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts

and continued her education at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, earning her Bachelor of Music from George Mason University. Kanysha has performed at prestigious venues like Carnegie Hall and The Kennedy Center, sharing the stage with both international and local artists. Known for her flexibility across genres, she has been prominently featured in Washington, DC's theater community, gracing stages such as Arena Stage,

Signature Theatre, Olney Theatre Center, and more. In addition to her performing career, Kanysha is a singer/songwriter with music available on all streaming platforms and a podcaster with "Downstage Center" available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts. She continues to work as a singer, actress, performer, and music educator in the Washington, DC area.

CREATIVE



C. BRIAN WILLIAMS (Founder and Executive Producer) is a native of Houston, Texas, and a graduate of Howard University. Brian 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. Through Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's newest cultural exports and inspired the designation of Step Afrika! as Washington, DC's official "Cultural Ambassador." In 2022, the National Endowment of the Arts designated Williams as a National Heritage Fellow, the nation's highest honor in folk and traditional arts. He is the recipient of numerous Artist Fellowships; the World Alive! Distinguished Artist Award by ArtsEmerson; the Mayor's Arts Award for Visionary Leadership from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities; Distinguished Arts Award from the Coalition for African Americans in the Performing Arts; and 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 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." 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*. His work is featured prominently at the Smithsonian Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington, DC.



LAMAR LOVELACE (Executive Director) As Executive Director for Step Afrika!, Lamar Lovelace is responsible for the organization's strategy and operations, leading its staff,

programs, and the execution of its mission. Working closely with Step Afrika!'s board of directors, he spearheads fundraising, marketing, operations, and long-range planning for the organization. He brings deep expertise from academia and has managed the organization's humanities-based partnerships. In July 2017, Lamar joined Step Afrika! as Deputy Executive Director, where he oversaw the dance company's communications and marketing strategy, fundraising efforts, and financial operations. Previously, Lamar spent 8 years at Columbia University as Assistant Director in the Office of Community Outreach and Education and Director of Public Programs and Events. At the New York City-based campus, he managed community-based partnerships and special events and produced large-scale, humanities-based programming opportunities to engage students, faculty, and staff. At Broward College in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Lamar was Director of Cultural Affairs and Student Engagement,

where he created arts-based social justice programs and exhibitions. He holds Master's degrees in Arts Management and Oral History from Carnegie Mellon and Columbia, respectively, and a BA in Speech and Hearing Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Lovelace is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.



MFONISO AKPAN (*Artistic Director*) 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.

JARKARI SHERMAN (*Director, The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*) 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 *Drumfolk*, *Green is the New Black*, and *Symphony in Step*, among others. Jakari received an 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.

MARIANNE MEADOWS* (*Lighting Designer/ Production Manager*) is a member of United Scenic Artists local 829. Nominated for the Helen Hayes Award four times, she holds a BA from Sarah Lawrence College and an MFA from the University of Washington, with additional training at Lester Polakov's Studio and Forum of Stage Design in NYC. Her internship was completed here at Arena.

ARENA STAGE LEADERSHIP

HANA S. SHARIF (*Artistic Director*) has enjoyed a multi-faceted theater career, including roles as an artistic leader, director, playwright, and producer with a specialty in strategic and cross-functional leadership. Hana began her professional career as an undergraduate student at Spelman College. From 1997 to 2003, Hana served as the co-founder and Artistic Director of Nasir Productions, a theater dedicated to underrepresented voices challenging traditional structure. Hana joined the Tony® Award-winning regional theater, Hartford Stage, in 2003. During her decade-long tenure at Hartford Stage, Hana served as the Associate Artistic Director, Director of New Play Development, and Artistic Producer. Hana launched the new play development program, expanded the community engagement and civic discourse initiatives, and developed and produced Tony®, Grammy, Pulitzer, and Obie Award-winning shows. Starting in 2012, she served as Program Manager at ArtsEmerson, a leading world theater company based at Boston's Emerson College. During her tenure at ArtsEmerson, Hana launched an Artists in Residency program, led a research program assessing barriers to inclusion across the region, and leveraged her

regional theater experience to freelance produce for smaller theater companies looking to expand and restructure their administrative teams. Hana was Baltimore Center Stage's Associate Artistic Director from 2014 to 2019 and was the architect of the innovative CS Digital program: a platform that pushes the boundaries of traditional theater and looks at the nexus point between art and technology. Her other achievements at Baltimore Center Stage included prototyping the Mobile Unit focused on historically underserved audiences, strengthening community engagement, producing multiple world and regional premieres, and helping to guide the theater through a multi-million dollar building renovation and rebranding effort. Hana became the first Black woman to lead a major regional theater in 2018 when she was named the Augustin Family Artistic Director of The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. During her tenure at The Rep, Hana guided the organization through a strategic alignment, revolutionized the New Works program, expanding access to underserved communities, and centering equity and anti-racism as the organization's foundational values. Hana holds a BA from Spelman College and an MFA from the University of Houston. Hana is the recipient of USITT's 2023 Distinguished Achievement Award, Spelman's 2022 National Community Service Award, the 2009-10 Aetna New Voices Fellowship, EMC Arts Working Open Fellowship, and Theatre Communications Group (TCG) New Generations Fellowship. Hana is a founding member of The Black Theatre Commons (BTC). She serves on the board of directors for the TCG, BTC, and the Spratt Family Foundation.

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. I am honored to have been recognized for my service to, and leadership of, the Washington, D.C.-area theater community as a recipient of Theatre Washington's inaugural Victor Shargai Leadership Award in 2022.

Arena Stage is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theater.

*Member of the United Scenic Artists Local USA 829

Headshots of the Company and Mfoniso by Drew Xeron, headshots of C. Brian Williams by Jim Saah.



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The Arena Stage Young Patrons Board seeks to strengthen and support the future of American theater at Arena Stage. The Young Patrons Board supports the artistic mission of Arena Stage by being active ambassadors to the community and arranging opportunities for people under 40 years old to engage with the theater.

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THE MOLLY SMITH FUND FOR NEW WORK

The Molly Smith Fund for New Work was created to honor the tremendous legacy of Molly Smith, Arena Stage's Artistic Director Emeritus, who retired at the end of the 2022/23 Season after 25 years of visionary leadership. The fund will support the artistic development of new work at Arena Stage, a pillar of Molly's vision.

Thank you to the following donors who supported this initiative through their philanthropic leadership.

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In Memory of Guy Bergquist



We are deeply saddened by the passing of a member of the Arena extended family, Guy Bergquist. Guy joined Arena's staff in 1982 and served in many roles over his 25 years with us, including production manager, producer, and interim managing director. Perhaps his most notable role at Arena was his last, serving as facility project director for the construction of our home at the Mead Center for American Theater.

"There may never be another who knows the history of Arena's operations inside and out like Guy," shared former Artistic Director Molly Smith at the time of his 2010 retirement. In fact, he

had the unusual distinction of working under our first three artistic directors — Zelda Fichandler, Douglas Wager, and Molly Smith.

In addition to his many Arena credits, his work included roles at the O'Neill Theatre Center, the National Theater of the Deaf, the National Playwrights Conference, and the Theater and Interpretation Center at Northwestern University. He co-owned Melodrama Theater in Austin, Texas.

We would not be who we are or where we are without Guy. He will be truly missed.



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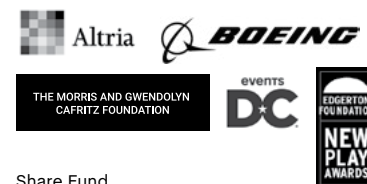
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