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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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
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

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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
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...

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

PROJECTION DESIGNER
JAKARI SHERMAN

ORIGINAL COSTUME DESIGN BY
KENANN QUANDER

ORIGINAL SOUND DESIGN BY
PATRICK CALHOUN

*Member of the United Scenic Artists Local USA 829

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.
“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 Allen, 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.”
ENJOYING THE SHOW?

We seeing your experience at Arena on social media! Give us a follow, like, or tag and we’ll you back! 😊

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instagram: @arenastage @stepafrika
tiktok: @arenastage @stepafrika

TALK ABOUT US:

#ArenaStage #ArenaStageDC #StepAfrika
#DCTheatre #ACreativeDC #Only1DC

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
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.
KAMALAHARGROVE 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 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.

LEANDER GRAY is a native of Miami, FL, where he trained with Ricardo Dume, Traci Young-Byron, Jakarta 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.

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 performed with a variety of artists such as Darrell Moultie, Hope Boykin and HB Dance, Tommie Waheed, Janice Rosario, Roce Zackery, and Brian Flynn of Roult 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

BRIONA JACKSON 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, Incorporated, she has served as the Alpha Chapter Parliamentarian, Step Mistress, and Soll Starrant. 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.

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 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.

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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 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 New Jazz Tenor Play award. 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 Eizabi 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.

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 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.

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.

VALENCIA ODEYKA 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/
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 Reels, a stroll team led by Francisco Pozo and Carlos Zapata. This is Joseph's second season 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 “Dance Stage 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 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 member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

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 Polakos’ 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 Sprott 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.

*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.
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.

“May there 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 engaged with the theater.

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Steven Bralove
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Estate of Eric Weinmann
Estate of Frankie and Jerry Williamson
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For more information on the benefits of becoming an Annual Fund contributor, please call the Development Department at 202-600-4177.

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**Legend:**

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- Founder’s Circle..........$50,000-$99,999
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Senior Artistic Producer ............. Reggie D. White
Literary Manager ......................... Otis C. Ramsey-Zoe
Artistic Associate, Casting ........... Joseph Pinzon
Artistic Development Coordinator ... Melissa Singson
Dramaturg ............................................. Jocelyn Clarke
Artistic Development Fellow ......... Vanessa Dalpiaz* 
Current Commissioned Writers ...... The Bengsons, Lee Cataluna, Kia Corthron, Lady Dane Figureaux Eddi, Emily Feldman, Idris Goodwin, Caleen Sinnette Jennings, Deepak Kumar, Octavio Solis, Vera Starbard, Cheryl West, Lauren Yee, Karen Zacarias, Zack Zadek

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ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT
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Senior Artistic Producer ............. Reggie D. White
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Wigs, Hair, and Makeup Supervisor .......... Jaime Bagley

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