

2025/26 SEASON



# STEP AFRiKA!



## MAGICAL MUSICAL HOLIDAY STEP SHOW

DECEMBER 5 – 23



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## ARENA STAGE

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*Step Afrika's Magical Musical Holiday Step Show* program book published December 5, 2025.

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Photo of Step Afrika!s Magical Musical Holiday Step Show at Arena Stage. Photo by Jati Lindsay.



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2025/26 SEASON

# Coming Up Next



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Co-Directed by **Tony Goldwyn** and **Savion Glover**

**THE DEBATE THAT SHOOK THE NATION.**

**FEBRUARY 27 – APRIL 5**

[ARENASTAGE.ORG/INHERIT](https://arenastage.org/inherit)

By **Jerome Lawrence** and **Robert E. Lee**

Directed by **Ryan Guzzo Purcell**

## INHERIT THE WIND



**WHEN A MIDLIFE CRISIS MEANS ROOMING WITH NUNS.**

**MARCH 27 – MAY 3**

[ARENASTAGE.ORG/GOODDAY](https://arenastage.org/goodday)

By **Lameece Issaq**

Directed by **Lee Sunday Evans**

*Bold Stories Real Theater*





# THE MOTION

THEY CAME TO TEST A THEORY—  
NOW REALITY IS TESTING THEM.

**MAY 6 – JUNE 14**

[ARENASTAGE.ORG/MOTION](http://ARENASTAGE.ORG/MOTION)

By **Christopher Chen**  
Directed by **Hana S. Sharif**



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**JUNE 12 – AUGUST 9**

[ARENASTAGE.ORG/TLC](http://ARENASTAGE.ORG/TLC)

Written and Directed by **Kwame Kwei-Armah**  
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Choreographed by **Chloe O. Davis**  
Music Supervision, Orchestrations, & Arrangements by  
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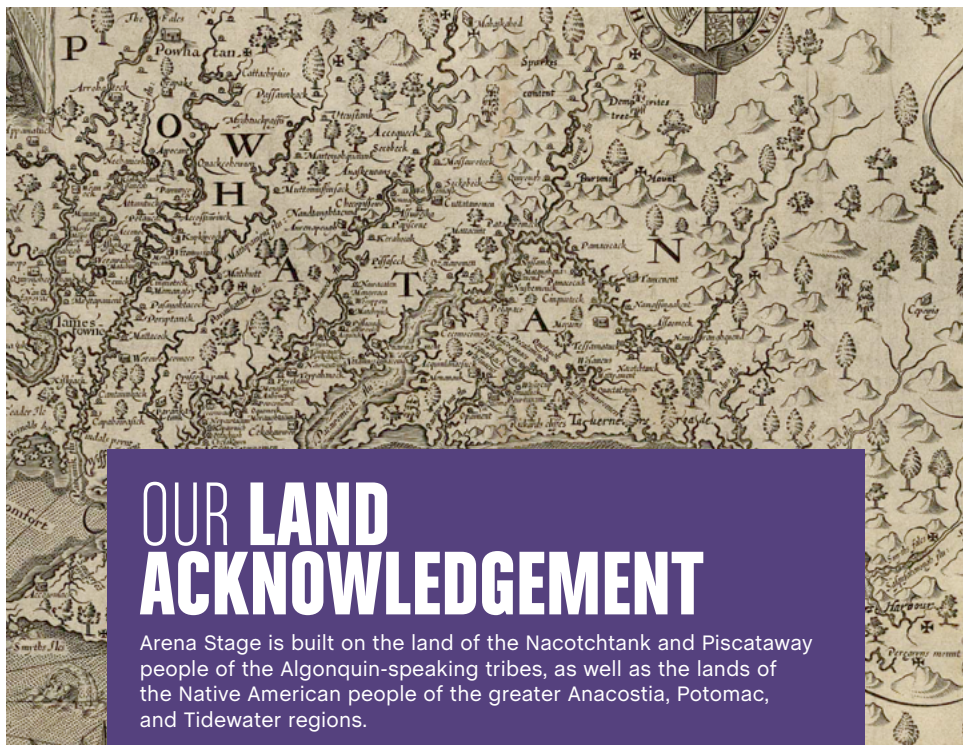
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# ARENA STAGE'S MISSION

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.



## OUR LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Arena Stage is built on the land of the Nacotchtank and 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

**Season's Greetings** and welcome to one of the brightest, most beloved traditions of our year! As the days grow shorter and the world leans into winter's glow, there is no better place to gather than here—together—sharing in the irresistible joy of *Step Afrika!'s Magical Musical Holiday Step Show*. Each December, our Fichandler Stage transforms into a kaleidoscope of rhythm, energy, and celebration, and each year you—our audience—bring the sparkle that makes this holiday tradition shine even brighter.

What makes this homecoming so special is not simply the dazzling footwork, the heart-pounding percussion, the unbelievable acrobatics, or the infectious laughter that ripples through the theater (though you're in for plenty of all four)! It's the remarkable way this production gathers us—across generations, traditions, and neighborhoods—and reminds us how good it feels to celebrate side by side. Step Afrika!'s artistry offers a universal language of joy: no translation necessary, just open hearts, tapping toes, and an opportunity to boogie with our friends from the Arctic Kingdom.

We're thrilled to welcome back our brilliant partners at Step Afrika!, whose creativity and vision ignite the season year after year. Their exuberant performances turn the theater into a living heartbeat—one that connects strangers, delights children, awakens nostalgia in adults, and invites every person in the room to join the rhythm. In my own family, this show has become a treasured tradition; watching the wonder on my children's faces renews my belief in the magic of this art form, and in the power of community to warm even the coldest winter day.

So tonight, whether this is your first *Magical Musical Holiday Step Show* or one you eagerly anticipate each year, thank you for choosing to spend part of your holiday season with us. May the lights, music, and movement you're about to experience fill you with delight, kindle cherished memories, and perhaps even inspire a new family tradition of your own.

From our Arena family to yours—may your season be bright, your spirits lifted, and your hearts full.

With warmth and joy,

**Hana S. Sharif**  
Artistic Director



Arena Stage  
Washington, DC



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# FROM THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

At a time of year when the pull to commercialism is strong, taking stock of how we spend and save money is not a new question. “Does money buy happiness?” Did Howard Hughes say it first?

“Whoever said money can’t buy happiness simply didn’t know where to go shopping.” — Gertrude Stein

“Money can’t buy happiness, but it can make you awfully comfortable while you are miserable.” — Clare Boothe Luce

“Money is numbers and numbers never end. If it takes money to be happy, your search for happiness will never end.” — Bob Marley

“People always say that money is not the key to happiness, but I always figured if you have money, you can have a key made.” — Joan Rivers

Certainly, a key to a happy life is having the resources to support oneself, one’s family, and one’s community. As a non-profit organization, Arena’s goal is to provide the service of theater to our community, though we certainly need money to operate. Continuing my season-long arc to share the amazing team that supports the capacity side of Arena’s mission (ambition), I’m happy to introduce you to Judy Leventhal, Arena’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Judy has had a dynamic career in non-profit finance at organizations such as McCarter Theatre Center, Big Apple Circus, New 42/The New Victory Theater, and Symphony Space.

*My role as CFO oversees daily accounting as well as annual and long-term budgeting and forecasting. Meeting discussions range from the profit margin on concessions to managing millions of dollars in Arena’s endowment. You might think a financial officer doesn’t have a lot of opportunity for creativity, and you would be incorrect! Not in the “creative accounting” sense that is cheating or illegal, but in the hunt for efficiency and creating mechanisms that make tasks easier to provide savings.*

*Balancing resources to ensure financial security can be challenging. While I often am the voice of caution in the room to keep us aware of Arena’s resources, I appreciate how mindful everyone on staff is. We also appreciate Arena’s generous donors and the audiences who purchase tickets. Remember, the cost of the ticket you purchased covers only a small portion of the resources necessary to bring you these fabulous shows.*

*I have worked in a range of organizations and came back to theater because I so enjoy and believe in Arena’s mission. I love music too, and jazz especially, so I was delighted to know that Arena has a partnership with the DC Jazz Festival. Like this partnership with Step Afrika!, it is wonderful to be surrounded by so many talented artists—and to have the privilege to support them.*

Thank you, Judy. As she mentioned, the best part of all our jobs is supporting the art. One more quote:

“Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.” — Franklin D. Roosevelt

Happy Holidays. Let’s all be kind in our pursuit of happiness always.

**Edgar Dobie**  
Executive Producer  
President of the Corporation

---

# ABOUT STEP AFRIKA!

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. Under Mr. Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into one of America's cultural exports, touring more than 60 countries across the globe and 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 and is the Guinness World Records™ title holder for the "largest STEPPING dance".

## ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

C. Brian Williams, *Founder & Executive Producer*

Lamar Lovelace, *Executive Director*

Mfoniso Akpan, *Artistic Director*

Conrad R. Kelly II, *Assistant Artistic Director*

Pascha Barnwell, *Company Manager*

Margo Cunningham, *Senior Marketing Manager*

Milen Matthews, *Manager, Arts Education and Community Programs*

Chrysal 'Chrys' Vaughan, *Manager, Events and Special Projects*

Tiffany Ates, *Development & Marketing Associate*

## LEARN MORE



Scan the QR code or  
visit [stepafrika.org](https://stepafrika.org)  
to learn more!





# STEP AFRIKA! FOUNDER'S NOTE

## *Welcome to Step Afrika!'s Magical Musical Holiday Step Show!*

We're thrilled to share this joyful blend of music, dance, and holiday cheer with you. After an incredible year of performances, touring, and arts education across the country, it feels wonderful to be home in Washington, DC—and especially here at Arena Stage, where the holidays always feel a little more magical.

This year's performances mark the 15th Anniversary of *Step Afrika!'s Magical Musical Holiday Step Show*—a milestone that reminds us of the joy this production has brought to audiences of all ages.

Created for both the young and the young at heart, this show invites everyone to make music, move, and celebrate together. Your energy fuels the performance—the more sound, clapping, and joy you bring, the more unforgettable the experience becomes.

As we look ahead to 2026, Step Afrika! remains deeply committed to the work that began more than 30 years ago. We'll expand our arts education programs across the region, embark on a national tour, and premiere a brand-new production right here at Arena Stage next fall.

Please visit our lobby table to learn more about Step Afrika!'s work, including our award-winning Summer Steps with Step Afrika! program. If you know a young person who loves stepping, encourage them to join us this summer. You can also sign up for our newsletter at [stepafrika.org](https://stepafrika.org) to follow the Company's journey—both here in DC and across the country.

Thank you for spending part of your holiday season with Step Afrika!. Your support means the world to us.

Wishing you joy, peace, and all your favorite things this season and in the year ahead.

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of the letters 'CB' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

**C. Brian Williams**

Founder & Executive Producer, Step Afrika!



Photo of Step Afrika!'s *Magical Musical Holiday Step Show* at Arena Stage. Photo by Jaiti Lindsay.



Photo of Step Afrika's Magical Musical Holiday Step Show at Arena Stage. Photo by Jati Lindsay.



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

# STEP AFRIKA!

## MAGICAL MUSICAL HOLIDAY STEP SHOW

DIRECTED BY  
**MFONISO AKPAN**

STEP AFRIKA!  
FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
**C. BRIAN WILLIAMS**

STEP AFRIKA!  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
**MFONISO AKPAN**

STEP AFRIKA!  
ASSISTANT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
**CONRAD R. KELLY II**

LIGHTING DESIGNER &  
PRODUCTION MANAGER  
**MARIANNE MEADOWS\***

ASSOCIATE  
LIGHTING DESIGNER  
**YANNICK GODTS**

\* Member of the United Scenic Artists Local USA 829

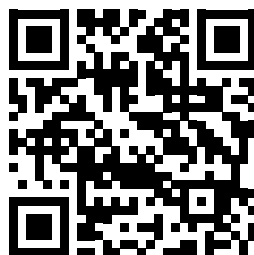
We are grateful to Destination DC for their promotional support of this production.



Thank You For Joining Us!  
Thank You For Joining Us!  
Thank You For Joining Us!  
Thank You For Joining Us!

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YOUR THOUGHTS



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# PROGRAM

- 1. PA DRUM PUM PUM PUM
- 2. JABULANI!
- 3. MARCH OF THE NUTCRACKERS
- 4. POPPER THE PENGUIN'S ARCTIC STEP CHALLENGE
- 5. DJ NUTCRACKER'S YULETIDE STEP WORKSHOP
- 6. CANDY CANE LANE
- 7. HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Audience participation has been a part of the step tradition since its inception in the 1900s. Members of the audience are invited to clap, stomp, cheer, and participate in call and response with the Company.

This year's maracas were made possible by the Step Afrika! Board of Directors.

# COMPANY

KWADJO BEDIAKO — NYA CHRISTIAN — JEROD COLEMAN  
ARIEL DYKES — KEOMI GIVENS JR. — TERRENCE JOHNSON  
CONRAD R. KELLY II — JAYDEN KING — JEMEEMA S. MONTROSE  
ISAIAH O'CONNOR — KEONDRE PASCAL — KEANU POWELL  
ERICKA STILL — JOSEPH VASQUEZ — PELHAM WARNER JR.  
ROBERT WARNSLEY — TRESHAWN WILLIAMS  
WITH SPECIAL GUEST: JEEDA BARRINGTON

# FOR THIS PRODUCTION

Show Caller.....	CHRISTI B. SPANN
Production Assistants .....	HOWARD BOLDEN, TIFFANY KO
Props Technician .....	KAYLA PROUGH
Light Board Operator .....	NICOLE TRANTUM
Audio Engineer .....	ANN TRAN
Wardrobe Supervisor.....	ALICE HAWFIELD
Wardrobe Technicians.....	CAITLIN O'BRIEN, SABRINA SIMMONS
Wigs, Hair, and Makeup Supervisor.....	JAIME BAGLEY

The videotaping or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.  
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Eating is not permitted inside the theater.

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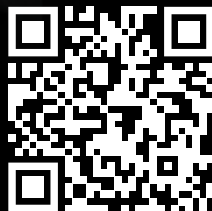
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# COMPANY



**KWADJO BEDIAKO** is a native of Queens, NY, and holds a BA in Psychology from Stony Brook University. A proud Ghanaian educator, he brings the high-energy Azonto dance style to schools and studios across the

tri-state area. Kwadjo began his step training with Francis Lewis High School's nationally ranked Nu Gamma Psi Step Team and later performed with Stony Brook University's Cadence Step Team. He expanded his Afro training as a member of Stony Brook's L'Afrique Dance Team before joining the professional Afro dance company Afro-Afrique. He is also a member of P.L.A.Y.E.R.S. Club Steppers and has worked on projects with artists including Davido, Ms. Lauryn Hill, and Koffi Olomide. This is Kwadjo's first season with the Company.



**NYA CHRISTIAN** is a native of Cleveland, OH, and holds a BA in Political Science with minors in Sociology and Dance Arts from Howard University. A proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated,

she has served as Parliamentarian, Step Mistress, and Stroll Captain of the Alpha Chapter. Nya has choreographed for the White House Initiative on HBCUs and Howard University's 2022 Homecoming Step Show. She is formally trained in ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, modern, and West African. Nya was a member of ELEVATED Dance Crew's award-winning National 1st Place Championship team at the World of Dance competition, and she has performed on *Good Morning America* as part of the Black History Month segment "The Story of 9 Historically Black Fraternities and Sororities." This is Nya's third season with the Company.



**JEROD COLEMAN** is a native of Columbus, GA, and holds a BA in History from the University of South Alabama. While in college, he crossed into the Theta Delta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., where

he served as Step and Stroll Master. Jerod has performed with the entertainment teams of the Atlanta Braves and Atlanta Falcons, and has competed in Red Bull Dance Your Style and DreamHack ATL. He also taught at Thomas H. Brewer Elementary School in Columbus, where

he founded and led an all-boys step team called the B.L.U.E. Steppers. This is Jerod's third season with the Company.



**ARIEL DYKES** is a native of Gainesville, FL, with an Associate of Arts in Musical Theatre from Santa Fe College and a BFA in Dance from the University of Florida. She is a member of the Iota Lambda

Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., where she choreographed step routines for her chapter and UF's National Panhellenic Council. Ariel has trained in ballet, jazz, West African, and post-modern dance, as well as voice and acting. She has worked with notable artists such as Ailey Dancers Nathaniel Hunt and Samantha Barriento; Tony Award winner Scott Coulter; and Grammy Award-winning Gospel artist Smokey Norful. This is Ariel's fourth season with the Company.



**KEOMI GIVENS JR.** is a native of Miami, FL, where he trained with Ricardo Dume, Tyrell Rolle, Conrad R. Kelly II, Tanisha Cidel, Maribel Trujillo, and Robert Battle. He studied in the PAVAC Magnet program at Miami

Northwestern Senior High School, as well as at New World School of the Arts and Mahogany Dance Theatre, where he served as Rehearsal Director and choreographer. Keomi has performed with Gravity Dance Troupe and Ricky Danco, and has choreographed for the Marching "100" of Florida A&M University, Ricky Danco, and the Booker T. Washington Lady Twisters. This is Keomi's third season with the Company.



**TERRENCE JOHNSON** is a native of Broward County, FL, and holds a BA in General Studies from the University of Central Florida. He has over a decade of stepping experience, serving as a founding member

of Hazard Step Team in Orlando, FL, and previously performing with the Adimu Men of Excellence, Inc. Step Team. In 2015, he was inducted into the UCF Chapter of Progressive Black Men, Inc. Terrence began his journey with Step Afrika! in 2023 as a guest artist and now enters his third season with the Company as a full-time artist.

# BURKE

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**CONRAD R. KELLY II** is a native of Fort Lauderdale, FL, who studied Criminal Justice at Florida A&M University. During his time at FAMU, he performed with the Marching "100" and The Strikers. Conrad later became a soloist for The Rolle Project in Las Vegas and a dance instructor at Studio 305, where he taught hip-hop, contemporary, and jazz. He has won numerous awards as a choreographer and dancer, including being a two-time recipient of the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities' prestigious Arts and Humanities Fellowship Program. A long-standing member of the Company, Conrad serves as Step Afrika!'s Assistant Artistic Director and recently choreographed *The Movement*, an epic tribute to Black Lives Matter and the wave of activism in 2020. This is Conrad's ninth season with the Company.



**JAYDEN KING** is a native of Miami, FL, and a graduate of Florida A&M University with a Bachelor of Science in Pre-Physical Therapy. She has trained extensively in ballet, jazz, contemporary, modern, and hip hop at Artistic Soul, ICTalent Dance Studio, Arthur and Polly Mays Conservatory of the Arts, and New World School of the Arts. Jayden is a former member of Mahogany Dance Theatre under the direction of Shepiro Hardemon, where she served as Assistant Rehearsal Director, Rehearsal Director, and President. She has performed works by Conrad Kelly, Tyrelle Rolle, Christopher Huggins, Clarence Jones, Allyne Gartrell, and others, and has trained with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Dance Theatre of Harlem through summer intensives. This is Jayden's first season with the Company.



**JEMEEMA S. MONTROSE** is a native of Brooklyn, NY. She attended ASA College, where she studied Health Information Technology. Jemeema is a proud member of Swing Phi Swing Social Fellowship, Incorporated, and has served as the Chair Facilitator of the National Step and Stroll Committee. She has led performances on numerous college campuses across the country, and Jemeema has also served as a step coach for middle and high school students. This is Jemeema's second season with the Company.



**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 fourth season with the Company.



**KEONDRE PASCAL** is a native of Broward County, FL, and an alumnus of Dillard Center for the Arts. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Music Education from Florida A&M University, where he was a member of the

world-renowned Marching "100" and Images Modeling Troupe, later serving as Trainer. A proud member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia Fraternity of America, Inc., Keondre held multiple leadership roles and also served as Mr. Alpha Kappa Alpha and the university's beloved mascot, the FAMU Venom. His dance training includes mentorship from Shepiro Hardemon and Manny "Fresco" Acosta, with performance credits including World of Dance, Kenny Haiti, and EverythingArlon. An educator and mentor, he launched a business to train young dancers, and his work has been recognized in *Shoutout Miami* and *Bold Journey*. This is Keondre's first season with the Company.



**KEANU POWELL** is a native of Decatur, GA, with a BBA in Management from Howard University. While at Howard, Keanu became an active member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., serving as 2nd

Vice President and Step Master. He is also a member of Kappa Kappa Psi National Honorary Band Fraternity, Inc., through the Eta Omega Chapter, and served as Drum Major for the 2021-2023 seasons. Keanu was prominently featured on *Good Morning America* representing Howard University. He has also performed nationally with Howard's band at major events, including Nike Headquarters and the inaugural NBA HBCU Classic. This is Keanu's second season with the Company.



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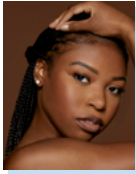
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**ERICKA STILL** is a native of St. Petersburg, FL, and holds a BS in Health Science, Pre-Occupational Therapy, with a minor in Rehabilitation Management from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. She previously stepped with AKAdemy Exquisite Gems and trained under Paulette W. Johnson at SADA and Shepiro Hardemon as a member and Co-Assistant Artistic Director of Mahogany Dance Theatre. This is Ericka's fourth season with the Company.



**JOSEPH VASQUEZ** hails from Guttenberg, NJ, and has a BA in Exercise Science from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. In college, Joseph danced with the Rutgers Bachata Performance Team, where he choreographed and led the team for four years. He is a member of Lambda Sigma Upsilon Latino Fraternity, Incorporated—the first Latin fraternity to step and stroll—and The Revels Stroll Team, where he was led by former team captains Francisco Pozo and Carlos Zapata. This is Joseph's fourth season with the Company.



**PELHAM WARNER JR.** is a native of the Bronx, NY, and holds 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 he 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 cappella musical *The Movement* by Kathy D. Harrison at the National Black Theatre Festival. This is Pelham's seventh 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 for four years and has organized, competed, and placed first in numerous step shows. He has partnered with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America to teach stepping, and he actively participates in community service projects in Chicago. Robert also studies, practices, and teaches dancehall and various Afro styles in the Chicagoland, DMV, and NYC areas. This is Robert's seventh season with the Company.



**TRESHAWN WILLIAMS** is a native of Davenport, IA, and holds a BFA in Dance from the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in Los Angeles. He was introduced to competitive stepping as a child through Step with Soul (formerly Wayman AME Steppers), where he later became the first junior artistic director. TreShawn has trained extensively in ballet, jazz, and hip-hop, and has performed with Inspire Danz Company, the LA Sparks, and the Disney & Lego web series. He has choreographed for musicals, dance teams, and concerts, including Kanye West's Donda Choir. This is TreShawn's second season with the Company.

## SPECIAL GUEST

**JEEDA BARRINGTON** is a native of Glenarden, MD, and a graduate of Bowie State University where he earned his Bachelor's in Music Technology and Master's degree in Human Resources. A member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Jeeda has served as the choreographer for various traveling step and "partywalk" teams. He continues his love for rhythms through disc jockeying at events across the United States.



Photo of Step Afrika!'s Magical Musical Holiday Step Show at Arena Stage. Photo by Jati Lindsay.

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# STEP AFRIKA! LEADERSHIP



## C. BRIAN WILLIAMS

*(Founder & 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 eight 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.



# ARENA 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.

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Headshots of the Step Afrika! Company and Staff by Keith Major and Jati Lindsay.

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The cast of *My Fair Lady* (2012/13 Season). Photo by Suzanne Blue Star Boy.

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