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RHYTHM. RESILIENCE. REFLECTION.

ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES COMPANY AND CREATIVE TEAM
FOR 2026/27 SEASON OPENER

THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOR

By **STEP AFRIKA!**

Directed by **JAKARI SHERMAN** with **CONRAD R. KELLY II** and **VUSI MDOYI**

(Washington, DC) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announced today the company and creative team for its 2026/27 Season opening production, ***The Fruits of Our Labor***. The highly anticipated next installment of a multi-year partnership between the Tony Award-winning theater and the National Heritage Fellowship-awarded Dance Company **Step Afrika!**, *The Fruits of Our Labor* is a powerful meditation on patriotism, identity, and what it means to carry hope for a nation still in the making. Directed and choreographed in collaboration with **Jakari Sherman**, **Conrad R. Kelly II**, and **Vusi Mdoyi**, the percussive, visceral world premiere will run **September 10 – November 1, 2026**, on the **Fichandler Stage**. Press Night will be held on Thursday, September 10. For information and tickets, visit arenastage.org/fruits.

“This will be a production unlike any work we have ever done,” said **Sherman**, who also directed critically acclaimed productions of *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence* (2023/24 Season) and *Drumfolk* (2021/22 Season) at Arena Stage. “I am exploring sound, music, and movement with the dancers in rich, new ways. Step Afrika! will be both the dance and the music as we fill the stage with explosive and intricate rhythms.”

As America marks 250 years, *The Fruits of Our Labor* examines the endurance, labor, and beliefs that continue to shape the American story. Created in collaboration with artists Sherman and Kelly, inspired by Mdoyi’s standout work *Isithukuthuku*, and featuring striking visual imagery and poetry from revolutionary writers like Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, and Langston Hughes, the work blends stepping and song into a rhythmic composition of percussion and patriotism.

“Creating *The Fruits of Our Labor* has allowed Step Afrika! to reflect on the people, traditions, and collective efforts that have shaped America—and to consider the work that still lies ahead,” added Step Afrika! Founder **C. Brian Williams**. “As our nation commemorates 250 years of history, this production is not intended to provide easy answers. Instead, it offers an opportunity to listen, to question, to celebrate and to imagine what is possible when we move forward together.”

The piece will be premiered by 14 Step Afrika! Company members, including **Kwadjo Bediako**, **Nya Christian**, **Jerod Coleman**, **Ariel Dykes**, **Terrence Johnson**, **Conrad R. Kelly II**, **Jayden King**, **Jemeema S. Montrose**, **Keondre Pascal**, **Keanu Powell**, **Ericka Still**, **Joseph Vasquez**, **Pelham Warner Jr.**, and **Robert Warnsley**, plus guest artist **Agyei Keita Edwards**.

For the first time in the two companies' partnership, Step Afrika! will engage the design talents of Arena Stage senior production staff and artisans to bring its new work to life. *The Fruits of Our Labor* will feature set design by Arena's Scenic Charge Artist **Colleen Doty**, costume design by Arena's Associate Costume Director **Cierra Coan**, lighting design by longtime Step Afrika! collaborator **Yannick Godts**, and sound design by Arena's Sound & Video Supervisor **GW Rodriguez**. The show will be called by Arena's Resident Stage Manager **Christi B. Spann**.

"In Step Afrika!, Arena has made a profound and lasting friendship," said Arena Stage Executive Producer **Edgar Dobie**. "Collaborating between our companies strengthens both of our artistries. Brian, Jakari, Conrad, and all of the artists bring an illuminating exploration of what it means to be American—just as Arena's mission is proud to state. We look forward to continuing to examine the American spirit together for years to come. Special thanks to Tiffeny Sanchez and Reg Brown, who support both organizations and are sponsors of this production."

Expanding on the heart and sound that defined previous Arena Stage and Step Afrika! collaborations, *The Fruits of Our Labor* advances the acclaimed Dance Company's artistic commitment to connecting history, culture, and identity through the language of stepping and expression. The production marks its first world premiere since 2020. Following its inaugural run in the nation's capital, *The Fruits of Our Labor* will head west on a three-city national tour, kicking off in January 2027.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

The Fruits of Our Labor

By **Step Afrika!**

Directed by **Jakari Sherman** with **Conrad R. Kelly II** and **Vusi Mdoyi**

On the Fichandler Stage | September 10 – November 1, 2026

ABOUT: In commemoration of America's 250th anniversary, Step Afrika! premieres *The Fruits of Our Labor*—a powerful new production exploring rhythm, resilience, and the unfinished story of the American experience. Blending stepping, percussion, and striking visual imagery, this visceral new dance piece examines what it means to believe in a nation still in the making. Created in collaboration with artists Jakari Sherman, Conrad R. Kelly II, and Vusi Mdoyi, *The Fruits of Our Labor* asks: What have we inherited and what are we still fighting to become?

The Fruits of Our Labor is made possible through the extraordinary generosity and visionary support of **Tiffeny Sanchez and Reg Brown, Lead Sponsors of the production and national tour.**

Lead Commissioning Support provided by **ASU Gammage** and the **Charleston Gaillard Center**. Additional Commissioning Support provided by the **Modlin Center for the Arts** at the University of Richmond and the **Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts**.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

TICKETS

Tickets start at \$47. Ticket prices and availability are subject to change.

Tickets are available at arenastage.org. Tickets may also be purchased through the Sales Office by phone at 202-488-3300, Tuesday through Sunday, 12-6PM, or in person at 1101 Sixth Street, SW, Washington, DC, Tuesday through Sunday, 2 hours before the show begins on performance days.

Groups of 10 or more may book tickets at arenastage.org/groups or via email at groups@arenastage.org.

Arena Stage's many savings programs include discount tickets for those aged 35 and under; military, first responder, and educator discounts; and "Southwest Nights" for those living and working in the District's Southwest neighborhood. To learn more, visit arenastage.org/savings-programs.

PERFORMANCE DATES

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday at 7:30PM

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 8PM

Saturday and Sunday at 2PM

Weekday matinees at 12PM on September 23 and October 8, 14, 22, 28, and 29

Times are subject to change. Please confirm on the website upon booking.

Southwest Night Performances: Friday, September 11 through Wednesday, September 16

Early Curtain Performance: Sunday, October 11, at 6PM

Audio-Described Performance: Saturday, October 10, at 2PM

ASL-Interpreted Performance: Saturday, October 10, at 8PM

Closed Captioning: Globetitles will be available at all performances.

College Night: Saturday, September 12, at 8PM

Students, grab \$35 tickets using code COLLEGE, with valid student ID. The night is yours!

Pride Night: Wednesday, September 16, at 7:30PM

Celebrate with \$40 tickets using code PRIDE. Come for the show, stay for the vibes!

Arena is proud to partner with the DC LGBTQ+ Community Center and Impulse Group DC for a Pride Night centered on connection, service, and community.

Young Professionals Night: Saturday, September 19, at 8PM

Network over happy hour at 6:30PM, catch the show, and connect with fellow theater lovers! Use code YOUNGPRO (ages 21–45) for \$35 tickets.

HBCU & Friends Night: Wednesday, September 23, at 7:30PM

Rep your colors! Calling all HBCU students, staff, and alumni to come out to the show that will have everyone talking. Use code HBCU for \$40 tickets. Stick around after the performance for an afterparty with JeedaTheDJ.

Arena Conversations

Connect with the show beyond the performance at a post-show conversation on September 23 and October 8 following the 12PM matinees, and on September 29 following the 7:30PM performance.

TRAVEL: Limited parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage for \$22 to \$35; call 202-488-3300 to purchase in advance. Drive-up valet parking is also available for \$35, cash only. For more information on transportation and other parking options around the Mead Center, visit arenastage.org/parking.

*The first racially integrated theater in our nation's capital and a pioneer of the regional theater movement, **Arena Stage** was founded in 1950 in Washington, D.C. Today, under the leadership of Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. We produce plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep, and dangerous in the American spirit, and present diverse and groundbreaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Consistently contributing to the American theatrical lexicon by commissioning and developing new plays, Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement and serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org*

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, **Step Afrika!** is the world's leading authority on the art form of stepping. The Company has toured more than 60 countries across the globe and reaches tens of thousands of Americans each year through a 50-city tour of colleges and theaters as Washington, DC's one and only Cultural Ambassador. 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. The Company is a leader in the field of arts education and promotes stepping as an educational tool for young people. Through critically acclaimed programs like Stepping with Step Afrika! and Step Afrika! Reads, the Company teaches principles of teamwork, academic achievement, and cross-cultural understanding to more than 50,000 K–12 students each year. stepafrika.org

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