

2021/2022 SEASON

 HANCHER AUDITORIUM

# STEP AFRIKA! *DRUMFOLK*

A HANCHER CO-COMMISSION



Photo: Jim Saah

Saturday, September 11, 2021  
7:30 pm

**IOWA**

# NEW FOR THE 2021-2022 SEASON: THE HANCHER SEASON CUP!

**JUST \$5**

Our new Hancher Season Cup allows patrons to take drinks purchased in the Stanley Café into the auditorium to enjoy during performances. The cups are refillable (and dishwasher safe) and can be brought back to Hancher to be used at subsequent events.

Purchase yours at the Stanley Café or in the Hancher Showcase.



*Only beverages purchased from the Stanley Café can be taken into the auditorium. Patrons should not bring beverages from home. Also, alcoholic beverages cannot be taken out of Hancher Auditorium in a Hancher Season Cup as this would violate "open container" restrictions.*



PRESENTS

# ***DRUMFOLK***

## **CAST**

Yao Adu	Christylez Bacon	Emanuel Chacon
Dionne Eleby	Jabari Jones	Conrad Kelly II
Misha Michel	Ayana (Reed) Ogunsunlade	Dustin Praylow
Anesia Sandifer	Ajah Smith	Valencia Springer
Jordan Spry	Pelham Warner	Robert Warnsley

## **CREATIVE AND PRODUCTION TEAM**

C. Brian Williams, *Founder, Step Afrika!*  
Jakari Sherman, *Director, Drumfolk*  
Mfoniso Akpan, *Artistic Director, Step Afrika!*  
Simone Baskerville, M. A., *Production Manager & Touring Stage Manager*  
Kenaan M. Quander, *Costume Designer*  
Erik Teague, *Mask Designer*  
Mary Rathell, *Wardrobe Assistant*  
Marianne Meadows, *Lighting Designer*  
Yannick Godts, *Lighting Supervisor*  
Steven M. Allen, *Composer*  
Jeremiah L. Davison, *Sound Designer & Engineer*

## EVENT PARTNERS

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Wendy H. Carter and Don Heistad

Michael S. and Renee Favo

Ed and Patricia Folsom

Bruce Gantz

Iowa House Hotel

Ed and Ann Lorson



Photo: Jim Saah

# FOUNDER'S NOTE

I am extremely excited to introduce *Drumfolk*, a new work by Step Afrika! that chronicles and celebrates the African-American experience in America. Grounded in extensive research and over 25 years of percussive practice, *Drumfolk* reveals hidden and transformative events that greatly impacted American life, and the work explores the drum as an instrument of community, resilience, and determination.

The Stono Rebellion of 1739, a revolt initiated by 20 enslaved Africans in the then-British colony of South Carolina, is one of the largest rebellions organized by Africans in the "New World." Africans—20 Angolans in fact—used their drums as a call for action, leading a fight for freedom that would spark fear throughout the colonies.

The subsequent Negro Act of 1740, a legislative response to the rebellion, singled out the drum as an illegal weapon and greatly restricted Africans' rights to read, to gather in groups, to wear clothing "above their stature," and to use their drums.

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

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

Thank you so much for coming!

C. Brian Williams  
September, 2021

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## AN EXCERPT FROM THE THE NEGRO ACT OF 1740

*WHEREAS, in his Majesty's plantations in America, slavery has been introduced and allowed, and the people commonly called Negroes, Indians, mulattoes and mustizoes, have been deemed absolute slaves, and the subjects of property in the hands of the particular persons, the extend of whose power over such slaves ought to be settled and limited by positive laws, so that the slave may be kept in due subjection and obedience, and the owners and other persons having the care and government of slaves may be restrained from exercising too great rigour and cruelty over them, and that the public peace and order of this Province may be preserved: We pray your most sacred Majesty that it may be enacted...*

A link to the full Negro Act of 1740 can be found at  
<https://hancher.uiowa.edu/2021-22/step-afrika>.



## ABOUT STEP AFRIKA!

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the world's first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping—a polyrhythmic, percussive dance form that uses the body as an instrument. Step Afrika! promotes stepping as a contemporary dance genre through critically acclaimed performances and arts education programs. Creatively engaging audiences in this nascent art form, the Company creates full-length productions that expand on stepping's unique American history.

With nine full-time dancers and an administrative team of seven, Step Afrika! is one of the top ten African American dance companies in the world. The Company reaches thousands each year through a 50-city tour of American colleges and theaters and performs globally as an official U.S. Cultural Ambassador. Acclaimed works, such as *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence* and *Drumfolk*, tour to major U.S. cities. Step Afrika! is prominently featured at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History & Culture with an interactive exhibit on the art form of stepping.

# PROGRAM

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

-Dr. David Pleasant

## ***Drumfolk20***

Choreography by DAVID PLEASANT, JAKARI SHERMAN,  
JEEDA BARRINGTON, and MFONISO AKPAN

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

## ***Stono***

Choreography by RONNIQUE MURRAY, JAKARI SHERMAN,  
JORDAN SPRY, MFONISO AKPAN, and JÚLIO LEITÃO

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

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

## ***-Intermission-***

## ***Un/Afraid***

Choreography by JAKARI SHERMAN with contributions from  
JEEDA BARRINGTON, CONRAD KELLY, and DUSTIN PRAYLOW

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

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

# MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

**JAKARI SHERMAN** is a passionate choreographer, ethnochoreologist, and performer whose experience extends over 20 years. Rooted in the African American tradition of stepping, his work pushes the boundaries of percussive dance using technology, storytelling, and diverse musical scores. Jakari served as Step Afrika!'s artistic director for seven years. He directed *The Migration: Reflections of Jacob Lawrence*, *Green is the New Black*, *Symphony in Step*, among others. He is the founder of Ordered Steps, a nonprofit that teaches stepping as a tool for youth outreach. Jakari received a MA 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.

**MFONISO AKPAN** 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.

**C. BRIAN WILLIAMS**, founder and executive director of Step Afrika!, is a native of Houston, Texas, and graduate of Howard University. He first learned to step as a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. - Beta Chapter, in the spring of 1989. While living in Southern Africa, he began to research the percussive dance tradition of stepping, exploring the many sides of this exciting, yet under-recognized American art form and founded Step Afrika! in 1994. Williams has performed, lectured, and taught in Europe, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and throughout the United States. He is the founder of the monumental Step Afrika! International Cultural Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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



# THANKS/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

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

The presentation of *Drumfolk* is also supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.



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## UI INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Iowa is located on the homelands of the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe (Chippewa), Báxoje (Iowa), Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo), Omāēqnomenēwak (Menominee), Myaamiaki (Miami), Nutachi (Missouri), Umo<sup>h</sup>ho<sup>n</sup> (Omaha), Wahzhazhe (Osage), Jiwere (Otoe), Odawaa (Ottawa), Pó<sup>n</sup>ka (Ponca), Bodéwadmi/Neshnabé (Potawatomi), Meskwaki/Nemahahaki/Sakiwaki (Sac and Fox), Dakota/Lakota/Nakoda, Sahnish/Nuxbaaga/Nuweta (Three Affiliated Tribes) and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) Nations. The following tribal nations, Umo<sup>h</sup>ho<sup>n</sup> (Omaha Tribe of Nebraska and Iowa), Pó<sup>n</sup>ka (Ponca Tribe of Nebraska), Meskwaki (Sac and Fox of the Mississippi in Iowa), and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska) Nations continue to thrive in the State of Iowa and we continue to acknowledge them. As an academic institution, it is our responsibility to acknowledge the sovereignty and the traditional territories of these tribal nations, and the treaties that were used to remove these tribal nations, and the histories of dispossession that have allowed for the growth of this institution since 1847. Consistent with the University's commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, understanding the historical and current experiences of Native peoples will help inform the work we do; collectively as a university to engage in building relationships through academic scholarship, collaborative partnerships, community service, enrollment and retention efforts acknowledging our past, our present and future Native Nations.



# HANCHER AND STEP AFRIKA!

Hancher and Step Afrika! have been collaborating since 2016 when the company was part of the opening season of the new auditorium. Our work together has centered on issues of social justice and the history of the Black experience in America. We are proud to have commissioned and presented three works by Step Afrika!, including *The Migration: Reflections of Jacob Lawrence, Stono*, and *Drumfolk*.

## **Artist Residency, October 17–19, 2016**

Step Afrika! led a master class for University of Iowa dance students [1, 2] and visited an Intro to Arts Management class. The group also conducted a workshop with youth from Dream City at City High School and had public stepping workshops at the Old Capitol Museum [3] and at the African American Museum of Iowa in Cedar Rapids [4]. Step Afrika! also led stepping workshops for students at Lucas and Mann Elementary Schools.

## ***The Migration: Reflections of Jacob Lawrence*, October 20, 2016 [5]**

*A Hancher commission*

## **Student Matinee of *The Migration: Reflections of Jacob Lawrence*, October 21, 2016**

All 8<sup>th</sup> graders from Iowa City Community School District, plus K-12 students from as far as Fairfield, came to Hancher Auditorium for a presentation of *The Migration* [6].

## ***Fields of Opportunity*, October 21, 2016**

The performance of *The Migration: Reflections of Jacob Lawrence* coincided with the release of *Invisible Hawkeyes*, edited by UI professors Lena Hill and Michael Hill and published by University of Iowa Press. Several events, collectively known as *Fields of Opportunity*, connect the performance and the book release.

## ***Stono* (Virtual Premiere), September 9, 2020**

*A Hancher co-commission*

The coronavirus pandemic necessitated a shift in how performing art was presented. Hancher provided lead commissioning support for *Stono*, a 30-minute dance film [7] by Step Afrika! that premiered online on the anniversary of the Stono Rebellion of 1739. The premiere was followed by a live panel discussion including Iowa City Mayor Bruce Teague [8].

## ***Lift Every Voice* (Zoom discussion), December 10, 2020**

*A partnership with UI Athletics*

Members of Step Afrika! engaged student athletes in a discussion about the Stono Rebellion, the Negro Act of 1740, and the shared lessons dancers and student athletes can learn from the Drumfolk who used their bodies to fight for justice so many years ago [9].

## ***Lift Every Voice* (Zoom discussion), May 20, 2021**

Members of the public watched a clip from *Stono* and discussed the legacy of systemic racism and the suppression of protestors in the modern era [10].

## ***Drumfolk*, September 11, 2021**

*A Hancher co-commission*

# 2021/2022 HANCHER PARTNERS

Hancher is grateful for the generous support of all our donors, especially during this past year of challenges. We welcome and thank those of you who joined us as first-time donors this year. We thank those who donated the value of your tickets for the cancelled performances in the spring of 2020. We thank those completing your pledges to the Fund for Rebuilding Hancher. And we thank our donors who have created and are creating endowed funds to support Hancher in perpetuity. That steady support will be critical to our ability to serve the campus, community, and state in the years to come.

We've weathered the pandemic and will continue to adjust to the changes in university funding because of your steadfast generosity—both financially and in terms of ongoing encouragement. Thank you all!

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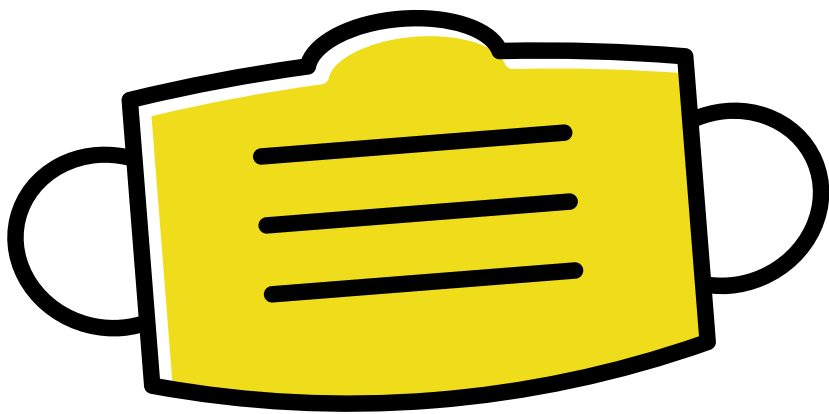
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