EDUCATION WORKSHOP

Step Afrika!

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Grades 2nd-Adults

CHARLESTON GAILLARD CENTER

Support for this program is made possible by generous donors who have committed time and resources to the Charleston Gaillard Center's Dance Initiative.

ABOUT THE SHOW

"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 the company now ranks as one of the top ten African American dance companies in the United States. 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."[1]

READ MORE

What is Stepping?

The African American fraternities and sororities' song and dance traditions served as the inspiration for the percussive, extremely energizing art form known as stepping. Stepping transforms the body into an instrument, creating complex polyrhythms with the use of claps, spoken word, and footfalls.[2]

Where are the origins of Stepping?

African Americans started enrolling in colleges in greater numbers in the early 1900s. Once on campus, they made the decision to create their own Greek-letter organizations to help the students in academics, social connections, and community service. Stepping evolved into a technique for members of these student organizations—now referred to as the Divine Nine—to show affection and pride for their organizations.

[1] "The Story of Step Afrika!," Step Afrika!, accessed September 26, 2023, https://www.stepafrika.org/about/.
[2] "What is Stepping?," Step Afrika!, accessed September 26, 2023, https://www.stepafrika.org/arts-education/stepping/.

ABOUT THE SHOW

WATCH

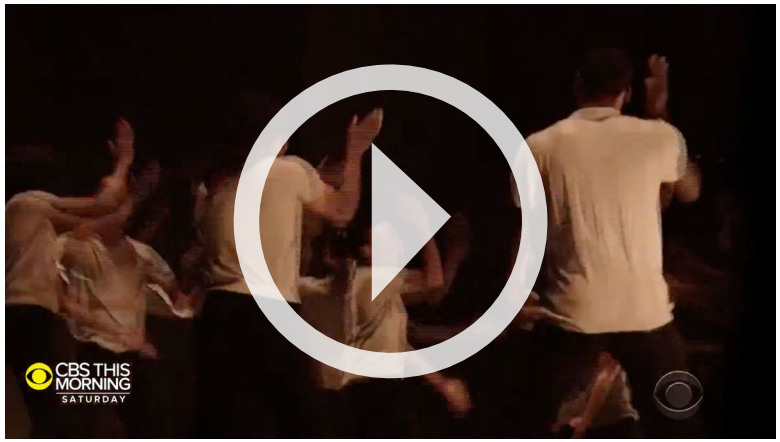
Step Afrika!

Step Afrika! Celebrates the Little Rock Nine

ABOUT THE SHOW // *Drumfolk*

"Inspired by the Stono Rebellion of 1739, *Drumfolk* explores this little-known event in history that would forever transform African American life and culture. When Africans lost the right to use their drums, the beats found their way into the body of the people, the Drumfolk. New percussive forms took root leading to the development of some of our country's most distinct performance traditions like ring shout, tap, and stepping."[3]

WATCH



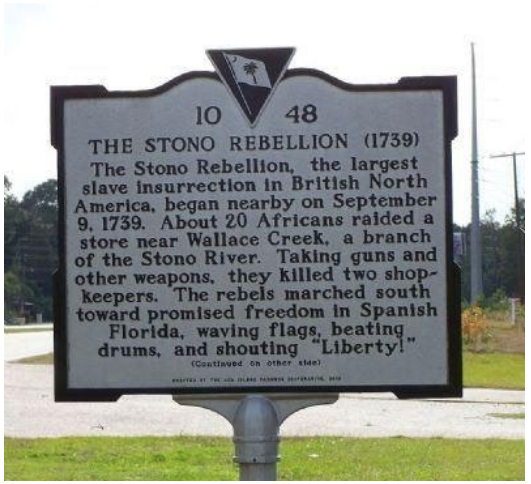
Resistance, Resilience, Reclamation

[3] "Drumfolk," Step Afrika!, accessed September 26, 2023, https://www.stepafrika.org/drumfolk/.

ABOUT THE SHOW // *Drumfolk*

The Stono Rebellion, A Freedom Movement

On September 9, 1739, the largest insurrection in British North America began about twenty miles southwest of Charleston. About twenty enslaved African freedom fighters raided a store near Wallace Creek, a branch of the Stono River, and began to march south toward St. Augustine, Florida where they were promised freedom and land. On their fifteen mile march, they were joined by forty to fifty more freedom fighters waving flags, beating drums, and shouting "Liberty!". The freedom movement ended late that afternoon when militia caught the freedom fighters. Those who were able to escape were captured and executed. The South Carolina assembly soon enacted a harsh code for enslaved people, which was enforced until 1865.[4]



Photographed by Mike Stroud, November 15, 2008.

READ MORE

[What Was Stono?]

[The Stono Trail]

[4] Mike Stroud, "The Stono Rebellion," The Historical Marker Database, December 26, 2008, https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=14855.

ABOUT THE SHOW // *Drumfolk*

WATCH

The Stono Rebellion: Crash Course Black American History #6

The Banning of Drums

The enslaved were able to maintain their cultural traditions by using African music, dancing, and instruments on the ships and began to incorporate dance into their everyday routines. The enslaved would dance to the beat of the drum and converse about the freedom they had in Africa during Saturday night dances. Their dance rituals developed ties to resistance and survival. The culture of music and dancing among the enslaved had a role in the development of group identity and self-esteem. During the Stono Rebellion, the freedom fighters had used drums to communicate with one another. This freedom movement reaffirmed the enslavers' mistrust of the drums' ability to convey information. Following that, the enslaved were banned from using drums.[5]

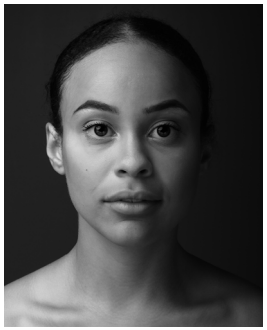
[5] Emma Higgins, "A Double Edged Drum: The Power of the Drum from Africa to America," Fordham University, December 6, 2018, https://emh30.ace.fordham.edu/2018/12/06/a-double-edged-drum-the-power-of-the-drum-from-africa-to-america/#:~:text=This%20threatened%20the%20system%20of,subsequently%20banned%20from%20using%20drums.

EXPLORE // Classroom Workshops

Drum Circle | 2nd-8th grade
In this workshop, students will learn about the art of African drums and will participate in a drum circle. Students will use mini drums to create rhythmic patterns.
Click Here for Workshop

Two Day Visual Art Residency | 2nd-8th grade
In this two-day workshop, students will learn about the African tradition of mask making. Students will use various materials to create a mixed-media mask.
Click Here for Workshop

STEP Workshop | Ages 2nd-12th grade
In this workshop, students will be introduced to the history of STEP dancing and will learn STEP basics. Teaching artist, Jordan Giocursio, will discuss African American culture and arts with an emphasis on traditions like ring shout, tap, and stepping.
Click Here for Workshop



CONNECT // African Arts and Dances in and from Charleston

[International African American Museum]

[Deninufay African Dance & Drum Production]

[Okeeba Jubalo African American Art Gallery]

CONNECT // African Arts and Dances in and from Charleston

JUBA Dance

The Pattin' Juba dance, also known as the Juba dance or hambone, is an African American type of dance. Between 1735 and 1740, the over-and-cross sembuka step made its way to Charleston. It entails clapping, "patting" ("Pattin' Juba"), slapping the arms and chest, and stamping.[6]

WATCH

JUBA DANCE: The dance of African slaves in American plantations

Josephine Baker performing The Charleston on August 24th, 1928.

Ring Shout

An ecstatic, transcendent religious ritual known as a shout or ring shout is one in which worshipers dance in a circle while shuffling, stomping, and clapping their hands. This ritual was first conducted by African enslaved people in the West Indies and the United States. In spite of the name, shouting is not a necessary component of the ceremony.[7]

[6] Ksenia Parkhatskaya, "The History of the Charleston Dance," Ksenia's Secrets of Solo (blog), August 23, 2020, https://secretsofsolo.com/2020/08/the-history-of-the-charleston-dance/.
[7] Wikipedia, s.v. "Ring Shout," last modified September 23, 2023, 13:39, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring_shout.

CONNECT // African Arts and Dances in and from Charleston

WATCH

Plantation Dance Ring Shout

EXPLORE // African Arts and Traditions

[A Timeline of African Art]

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