

For Immediate Release

Tap, Step, Ring Shout and Beatboxing by Step Afrika! Explore the Resilience of African American Life and Culture in High-Energy Dance Performance from Arts Commons Presents

Calgary engagement includes education opportunities for Calgary students and local dancers in the art and history of step dance.

April 11, 2023 - CALGARY – Percussive dance shakes up the Jack Singer Concert Hall stage at Arts Commons as Step Afrika! explores the creation of stepping with *Drumfolk*. Exploring the little-known history of the Stono Rebellion, *Drumfolk* digs into the evolution of the rhythmic dance forms of tap, step, ring shout, and beatboxing, using the dancers themselves as the language. Join Arts Commons Presents for [Step Afrika! Drumfolk](#) as part of the **BD&P World Stage** series from **Arts Commons Presents** on **Wednesday, April 26, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.**

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. Using their unique combination of high-energy dance, audience participation, music, and educational storytelling, Step Afrika! is acclaimed by audiences and critics alike. They now rank as one of the top ten African American dance companies. in the United States, touring to over 50 countries around the globe. For the Canadian premiere of their latest performance, *Drumfolk*, they bring the historical events of the Stono Rebellion of 1739 in Colonial America, as Williams calls it “*one of the largest rebellions by African people against the institution of slavery in the New World,*” to life through dance. *Drumfolk* demonstrates how when their rights, their freedoms, and their instruments were taken away – the music was reborn in the bodies of the people.

“These are dancers inspired by this movement, so we’re taking a historical moment and interpreting it through our bodies,” says Williams. “The artists of Step Afrika! are the best in this art form of stepping in the world. I’ve assembled 16 of the most beautiful dancers who practice and love the tradition of stepping.”

Hailed by critics as an “expressionist experience, with the enthusiasm and energy to send you soaring into next week” (The Washington Post) and praised by the New York Times, which said, “In the bodies of these skilled performers, the beat is obviously unstoppable,” Step Afrika! has demonstrated the power of these dance forms to convey a story and inspire empathy for historic events. Step dance originally stemmed from gumboot dance, which was a form of communication used by miners in South Africa. The dance form travelled with its people across the ocean to the New World, finding a new incarnation in the historical events of the Stono Rebellion, which is depicted in *Drumfolk*. Step Afrika! is featured prominently at the Smithsonian’s new National Museum of African American History & Culture with the world’s first stepping interactive. **Interviews with Step Afrika! founder C. Brian Williams as well as [high quality footage](#) is available by request.**

“Step Afrika! is an amazing addition to our World Stage lineup this season. The costuming, the choreography, and the storytelling that brings it all together – it’s an unforgettable experience,” says Stephanie Hutchinson, Associate Director of Presenting.

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In addition to Step Afrika!'s live performance, they will be conducting two arts education engagements to share their specialized skills in step dance and the historic roots of the dance form. On Tuesday, April 25, from 10:15 – 11:00 a.m., they will perform for over 800 Elementary and Jr. High School students in the Jack Singer Concert Hall followed by a Q&A with the cast. In the evening, they will be working with local dancers from Woezo Africa Music & Dance Theatre for a masterclass in step dance at Arts Commons.

“Education opportunities such as student presentations and master classes with local artists create valuable connections that otherwise wouldn’t be established,” says Josh Dalledonne, Associate Director of Social Impact. “We want to inspire conversation and facilitate learning moments between local Calgary artists and their international colleagues.”

The 2022-23 season of the BD&P World Stage series produced by Arts Commons Presents features an outstanding lineup of performers that celebrate a diversity of live arts from around the globe. The 2022-23 season of BD&P World Stage includes a cultural phenomenon that literally shook the walls of the Jack Singer Concert Hall, YAMATO – The Drummers of Japan: *Hinotori*, the harmonious collaboration of *Strings for Peace*, the upcoming percussive perfection of [Step Afrika! Drumfolk](#) on April 26, the Reggae icon [Luciano the Messenjah](#) on May 18, and the showstopping double-bill of [The Soul Rebels & CimaFunk](#) on June 23, 2023.

What: BD&P World Stage – Step Afrika!: *Drumfolk*
When: Wednesday, April 26, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.
Where: Jack Singer Concert Hall, Arts Commons
Preshow: DJ Jadé
Tickets: 403-294-9494 or visit artscommons.ca/presents

To purchase tickets to [Step Afrika!: Drumfolk](#) please call 403-294-9494 or visit artscommons.ca/drumfolk.

Arts Commons wishes to express our sincere appreciation to the Title Sponsor of BD&P World Stage, **Burnett, Duckworth, and Palmer**, supporting sponsors **ALSA Road Construction** and **Servantage Services** as well as the **Government of Canada** through **Canadian Heritage**, the **Government of Alberta** through the **Alberta Foundation for the Arts**, and our friends at **The City of Calgary**.

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Arts Commons Presents invites you to discover the transformative power of the Arts. As the programming arm of Arts Commons, the largest performing arts centre in Western Canada, Arts Commons Presents is one manifestation of this mandate, achieved through the programming and presenting of our in-house series: BD&P World Stage, National Geographic Live, PCL Blues, TD Amplify Cabarets, and Jazz, as well as the work that we do in the community. Through this work, we are able to do our part to further enrich our city, as well as create opportunities for Calgary-based artists on a multitude of levels.