

STEP AFRiKA!

Presents

A Demonstration & Performance

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Presented By:



ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

American Dance Meets African Dance

African tradition has influenced the dances of *Step Afrika!* These dances share the following qualities:

- ⌘ They are percussive, meaning dancers use their feet, hands, and voices to create rhythms. A rhythm is what makes you want to tap your feet or dance when you hear music. It is made up of strong and soft beats that repeat.
- ⌘ They are polyrhythmic, meaning dancers play several rhythms at the same time.
- ⌘ They involve call and response, meaning a leader makes a statement with words or movements to which other dancers answer.
- ⌘ Individuals dance apart from one another or together.

What is Stepping?

Stepping is a dance that combines footsteps, claps, and spoken words to produce complicated rhythms. African-American college students who were members of clubs, called sororities and fraternities, invented stepping. Sororities are for women and fraternities are for men. Stepping became a way members could show pride in their organization.

In Your Backyard

Brian Williams, the founder and director of *Step Afrika!*, attended Howard University in Washington, DC, where he learned how to sept/ Howard University was the birthplace of six historic African-American sororities and fraternities, which emphasized doing well in school, helping their communities, and self-improvement.

Later, he visited South Africa where he saw a young boy dancing. The dance the boy was doing looked like the stepping Brian had learned in college. Brian wanted to find a way for Africans and

Americans to share their dances, so he started *Step Afrika!* Each year, *Step Afrika!* organizes a dance festival where dancers from different countries learn from each other. The performance you are seeing is the result of these festivals.

South African Influences

Gumboot dancing looks like stepping. Mine workers developed gumboot dancing in South Africa about 100 years ago, around the same time stepping began in the United States. The name of the dance comes from the rubber-soled boots, called gumboots, worn by mine workers. Mining is dangerous work; miners danced for enjoyment during their breaks. Today, young people in South Africa gumboot dance with their friends to have fun.

What is Choreography?

Choreography is the art of making a dance. Choreographers are people who make dances by putting movements together into phrases. A phrase is a connected series of dance movements.

Create a Simple Dance

Choreographers often create a dance by:

- ⌘ repeating a movement
- ⌘ changing the pattern or steps that they use
- ⌘ changing the direction of the movement
- ⌘ slowing down or speeding up the movement
- ⌘ changing levels by heaving dancers reach up high or down low

Create one simple movement using your arm or leg. Change it, using the ideas above. Demonstrate for your class.

A LOOK AT THE DANCES

Styles of Stepping

There are many styles of stepping. Each fraternity and sorority has its own particular style. Traditionally, step teams have been either all male or all female. In the past, male step teams were more athletic in their stepping, hitting the floor harder and performing more stunts, while female teams focused on hand work and singing. This is changing because female teams have become more physical. In *Step Afrika!* men and women dance together as well as separately.

During the performance, watch for:

- ⌘ stepping routines by women only.
- ⌘ stepping routines by men only.
How are the styles different for women and men?
- ⌘ stepping with and without the beat of a drum.

Gumboot Dancing

Gumboot dancing resembles stepping. Both of these dances use foot stomping, hand clapping, thigh slapping, and singing. However, the footwork in gumboot dancing is often slower and the movements of group members are less uniform. Watch for the similarities and differences between gumboot dancing and stepping.

After the Performance

Think about the kinds of stepping you saw. Recall the sounds and dancers created with their feet and their bodies. Did you hear any changes in tempo or rhythm?

Dance in Africa

“If you can talk, you can sing;
and if you can walk, you can dance.”

- African proverb

Who Dances?

In Africa, dance and music are a necessary part of everyday life for all people. The young and old dance and make music to mourn their dead, to connect with their gods, and to encourage crops. The African belief that dance is for everyone is a basis of the stepping tradition. When they are not performing, the dancers in *Step Afrika!* work as writers, teachers, graphic artists and business people. When *Step Afrika!* needs dancers, Brian Williams goes to college step competitions to find people who love to step.

Dance as Music

In African culture, dance and music are not considered separate activities. Musicians sway as they play music and dancers create sounds when they move. *Step Afrika!* dancers make music with their bodies and sometimes move to the beat of a drum.

Body Music

Watch the dancers make music with their bodies. They stomp their feet, clap their hands, and use their voices. After the performance, choose a partner from your class. Together, pick out four of your favorite sound movements. Practice these movements with your partner until you can perform the sequence several times. Together perform this dance for your class.

THE BEAT OF THE DRUM

The Drum is a very important musical instrument in African culture. In some parts of Africa, each family has its own unique drum rhythm and this rhythm is passed down through generations. Drums help send messages across long distances. For example, drumbeats announce births or marriages to neighboring towns.

When the slave trade brought Africans to America, the Africans brought their drum rhythms with them. They used drums to “talk” to enslaved Africans on other plantations. When plantation owners discovered that messages were being sent, drums were forbidden. As a result, enslaved Africans continued to play drum rhythms; however, they used their bodies to make the sounds.

What is Rhythm?

Rhythm is patterns of long and short sounds usually organized by beat, accent, and tempo.

Beats are sounds that repeat again and again. Beats are everywhere: in the ticking of a classroom clock, in the sound of footsteps, and the sound of your heart. When people clap their hands to music, they sound the beats.

Accents are beats that are sounded more strongly than others.

Tempo is the speed at which the beats are played. In most American music beats are arranged in groups of two or three with the accent on the first beat. In African music, the accent is usually on the second beat. Listen for the rhythms *Step Afrika!* creates by the way they accent beats and listen to the tempo. Is it fast or slow?

Rhythm Is All Around You

Spend a day being aware of the rhythms that are part of your everyday life. For example, do you hear crickets sounding a slow beat? What rhythm does each member of your family make when they go up the stairs? Practice one of these rhythms you have noticed until you know it. Then share it with your class.

MAKING YOUR OWN RHYTHM

Creating Polyrhythms

After the performance, look at the chart on this page. In class, divide into four groups, A, B, C, and D. Each group should choose a different part of their body to create rhythm. For example, one group can clap their hands, another can slap their knees, another can stomp their feet, and the last can repeat a short work like 'yes!' Using the chart on this page, group A sounds all four beats, group B sounds beats 1 and 3, group C sounds 2 and 4, and group D sounds twice on each beat. Each group needs to rehearse by itself and count the beats out loud and practice until they can repeat this rhythm three times with accuracy. Next, all four groups come together for a performance.

Beats	1	2	3	4
Group AX	X	X	X	
Group BX		X		
Group C	X		X	
Group D	XX	XX	XX	XX

After the performance, your teacher may appoint a leader to "call" the question and the class will respond. Use the following movements instead of words.

	Call	Response
Leader	Stomp foot once	
Class		Clap 4 times
Leader	Stomp foot twice	
Class		Take 4 steps forward
Leader	Stomp foot 3 times	
Class		Clap 4 times
Leader	Stomp foot 4 times	
Class		Take 4 steps backward

Practicing Call and Response

Call and response occurs when a leader calls out words to which others respond; call and response can also be danced. *Step Afrika!* has taught the following call and response sequence to students around the country.

	Call	Response
Leader	Attention!	
Class		Huh!
Leader	Brothers & Sisters!	
Class		Yes
Leader	Brothers & Sisters!	
Class		Yes

ON PERFORMANCE DAY & RESOURCES

You, the Audience

The performance in *Step Afrika!* need help from you, the audience. You are an important part of the performance.

Being a member of an audience in a theater is different from watching a movie or a television program. The performers are in the same room with you and are affected by what you do. To do their best, the performers need you to watch and listen closely. The other members of the audience also depend on your quiet attention during the performance so they can watch and listen, too.

Watch. Listen. Think. Imagine.
Enjoy Step Afrika!

Resources

You many want to:

read:

Fine, Elizabeth. *Soulstepping: African American Step Shows*. Chicago:University of Illinois Pres, 2003.

Haskins, James. *Black Dance in America*. New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Junior Books, 1990.

Malone, Jacqui. *Steppin' On the Blues*.Chicago:University of Illinois Press, 1996.

listen to:

Indestructible Beat of Soweto.Various Artists.Shanachie,1990.