

# STEP AFRIKA!: *STONO*



**Saturday, April 10 at 7:30 PM**

The first professional dance company dedicated to the tradition of stepping, Step Afrika! celebrates the pursuit of freedom, deeply embedded within the American experience, in their latest virtual production, *STONO*.

On September 9, 1739, the largest insurrection of enslaved Africans in North America began in South Carolina on the banks of the Stono River. Twenty Africans marched south toward a promised freedom in Spanish Florida, waving flags, beating drums, and shouting 'Liberty.' One year later, when Africans lost the right to use their drums through The Negro Act of 1740, they began to use their bodies as percussive instruments in response. This act of cultural survival and activism earned them the name of "Drumfolk," and gave rise to some of the country's most distinctive art forms including the ring shout, tap, hambone, and stepping.

Fueled by the artistry and traditions of these art forms, Step Afrika! ensures that this little-known yet history-altering movement is recognized for its transformation of African American life and culture and honors its place in the story of America.

This presentation of *STONO* will be followed by a live discussion.

**Learn to Step with Step Afrika! Virtual Dance Workshop: Saturday April 10th, 10:30 AM**

## CONNECT

TOPICS AND THEMES THIS PERFORMANCE ENGAGES WITH:

- Cultural Studies
- Dance
- American History
- Political Science
- Activism
- Equity and Inclusion
- Communication
- Music/Percussion

## ONLINE RESOURCES

[Trailer of Step Afrika!'s production \*STONO\*](#)

[Learn more about Step Afrika!](#)

[Read The Negro Act of 1740](#)

## ENGAGE

[The Negro Act of 1740](#) was a harsh and direct result of the Stono Rebellion. The Act banned enslaved Africans from gathering in groups, speaking native languages, earning money and learning to read or write. It established that white slaveholders were permitted to kill rebellious slaves. The Negro Act also banned them from having drums. As a result, they used their bodies as percussive instruments to communicate, giving them the name "Drumfolk" which we see represented in *STONO*.

- How do you think the banning of drums influenced the creation of art forms such as stepping? Why is the development of body percussion seen as an act of cultural resistance?

**There are an estimated 3,000 tribes in Africa each with unique cultural elements.**

- If elements of your culture were stripped away what cultural practices would you mourn the loss of most? How tied to culture is identity?
- When you think about African American culture today, how did outlawing elements of their native culture contribute to the creation of entirely new culture? Why do you think people refer to Black culture rather than Nigerian culture, for example?

**African tradition has greatly influenced and inspired the dances of Step Afrika! and the art form of stepping. The American and African dances that Step Afrika! perform share the following qualities:**

- » **They are percussive - Dancers strike their feet and hands to create rhythms.**
- » **They are poly-rhythmic - Dancers play several different rhythms at the same time.**
- » **They involve call and response**

**In stepping, the body becomes an instrument, using footsteps, claps and spoken word to produce complex poly-rhythms. Stepping has traditionally been performed by African-American fraternities and sororities.**

Do you see these elements in other art forms? If so, which ones? How are they similar or different?

- What other body percussive art forms can you think of? How is stepping similar or different from those forms?
- Where have you seen stepping represented in popular culture?
- Why is it important to recognize the cultural history of the art form?