

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**BRINGING THE SOUNDS AND SPIRIT OF
THE STONO REBELLION TO THE DIGITAL PLATFORM**

**ARTSEMERSON CO-COMMISSIONS STEP AFRIKA!'S
30 MINUTE VIDEO CENTERED ON THE STONO REBELLION**

STONO

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9 @ 8PM

**IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY A LIVE PANEL DISCUSSION
WITH STEP AFRIKA! FOUNDER C. BRIAN WILLIAMS
AND OTHER SPECIAL GUESTS**

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**WILLIAMS ALSO JOINS ARTSEMERSON'S "THE DAVIDS" FOR
IN CONVERSATION: STEP AFRIKA! AND ARTSEMERSON
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4 @ 12NOON**

[Boston, MA – August 27, 2020] – As part of the institution's long presenting history with D.C.'s Step Afrika! troupe, ArtsEmerson is excited to welcome these brilliant artists back, this time in the digital realm. Step Afrika!'s powerful, pulsing, world premiere piece, **Stono**, highlights the spirit of resistance and activism of a part of American history that has often been overlooked. The premiere will be shared on Wednesday, September 9, 2020, marking the 281st anniversary of the Stono Rebellion.

The 30-minute virtual premiere will be immediately followed by a 30-minute live panel discussion moderated by Lesli Foster (Evening Anchor, WUSA) and joined by C. Brian Williams (Founder and Executive Director, Step Afrika!), Dr. Aimee Cox (Associate Professor of Anthropology and African American Studies, Yale University), Kendall Thomas (Nash Professor of Law, Columbia University Law School) and Bruce Teague (Mayor of Iowa City, IA). Panelists will explore the Stono Rebellion and its relevance to issues regarding political protest and structural inequities that dominate American conversations today.

In advance of that premiere, ArtsEmerson's executive director David C. Howse and artistic director David Dower will welcome Step Afrika! founder C. Brian Williams for **In Conversation: Step Afrika! and ArtsEmerson**, where they will discuss the two arts organizations' long arc relationship, adapting live performance for digital spaces, and what audiences can expect from **Stono** and Step Afrika! in the future. This conversation takes place on Friday, September 4, 2020 at 12:00noon, and everyone is welcome.

These Step Afrika! virtual events are free, however, guests are encouraged to [donate to Step Afrika!](#) to help the organization navigate this unprecedented time and fortify their work to explore digital opportunities ahead. For more information on how to access these virtual events, visit [ArtsEmerson.org](https://www.ArtsEmerson.org).



Step Afrika! artists perform in **Stono**
Photos courtesy of Step Afrika!



C. Brian Williams

Stono highlights the largest insurrection of enslaved Africans in North America on [September 9, 1739](#) which began in South Carolina on the banks of the Stono River. Some 20 Africans marched south toward a promised freedom in Spanish Florida, waving flags, beating drums, and shouting “Liberty!” When Africans subsequently lost the right to use their drums, through The Negro Act of 1740, they began to use their bodies as percussive instruments in response, giving rise to ring shout, tap, hambone, and stepping. They were referred to as “Drumfolk,” keeping their traditions alive in the face of oppression and inequity.

Lead Commissioning Support for **Stono** is provided by Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa. Additional commissioning support is provided by AARP, Arts Emerson, ASU Gammage, Capital One, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts/University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Lied Center for Performing Arts (University of Nebraska), Strathmore, Verizon and the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts at California State University, Northridge. Step Afrika! extends deep gratitude to Events DC and the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities for operating support as Washington, DC’s largest African American arts organization.

EVENT CALENDAR FOR STEP AFRIKA! VIRTUAL EVENTS

Friday, September 4, 2020 at 12:00pm

In Conversation: Step Afrika! and ArtsEmerson

FREE with RSVP

Live ASL interpretation will be provided; captioning will be available in the recording.

Step Afrika! founder and executive director C. Brian Williams joins ArtsEmerson executive director David C. Howse and artistic director David Dower for a conversation about the two arts organizations' long arc relationship, adapting live performance for digital spaces, and what audiences can expect from **Stono** and Step Afrika! in the future.

Pre-register [here](#).

Wednesday, September 9, 2020 at 8:00pm

Stono

FREE with RSVP

Guests are encouraged to [donate to Step Afrika!](#) to help the organization navigate this unprecedented time and fortify their work to explore digital opportunities ahead.

This virtual premiere will be immediately followed by a live panel discussion moderated by Lesli Foster (Evening Anchor, WUSA) and joined by C. Brian Williams (Founder and Executive Director, Step Afrika!), Dr. Aimee Cox (Associate Professor of Anthropology and African American Studies, Yale University), Kendall Thomas (Nash Professor of Law, Columbia University Law School) and Bruce Teague (Mayor of Iowa City, IA).

Panelists will explore the Stono Rebellion and its relevance to issues regarding political protest and structural inequities that dominate American conversations today.

Pre-register [here](#).

For production stills and other media kit assets, click [here](#).

STONO CREDITS

C. Brian Williams, *Founder and Executive Director of Step Afrika!*

Brian is a graduate of Howard University and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Beta Chapter. After living in Africa, he began to research 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, South and Central America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Caribbean and throughout the United States. He is a founder of the historic Step Afrika! International Cultural Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa. Under Brian'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. Brian has been cited as a "Civic/Community Visionary" by NV Magazine and "Nation Builder" by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. He is featured in *Soulstepping*, the first book to document the history of stepping, and several documentaries discussing the art form. Brian is also a recipient of numerous awards including the Mayor's Art Award for Innovation in the Arts and the Pola Nirenska Award for Contemporary Achievement in Dance.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

Step Afrika!

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 50 countries across the globe. Step Afrika! 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 West and Southern 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. Step Afrika! promotes stepping as an educational tool for young people, focusing on teamwork, academic achievement and cross-cultural understanding. The Company reaches tens of thousands of Americans each year through a 50-city tour of colleges and theatres and performs globally as Washington, DC's one and only Cultural Ambassador. Step Afrika! has earned Mayor's Arts Awards for Outstanding Contribution to Arts Education (2005); Innovation in the Arts (2008); and Excellence in an Artistic Discipline (2012); and performed at the White House for President Barack Obama and the First Lady. Step Afrika! is featured prominently at the Smithsonian's new National Museum of African-American History & Culture with the world's first *stepping* interactive. In 2017, Step Afrika! made its *Off-Broadway* debut with the critically-acclaimed production, *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*. To learn more, visit StepAfrika.org.

ArtsEmerson

ArtsEmerson is Boston's leading presenter of contemporary world theatre. Our mission is to bring people together to experience powerful performances that delight, provoke, and inspire, celebrating both our differences and common humanity. Founded in 2010 by Robert J. Orchard — the year the U.S. Census confirmed there was no single cultural majority in Boston — we committed to building a cultural institution that reflects the diversity of our city. Our imaginative season of globe-spanning performances, film, and dialogue invites each of us to be part of a Boston that is more creative, equitable, and connected. ArtsEmerson is led by Artistic Director, David Dower and Executive Director, David Howse. For more information visit ArtsEmerson.org.

Emerson College

ArtsEmerson and HowlRound Theatre Commons both operate from within the Emerson College Office of the Arts. Based in Boston, Massachusetts, opposite the historic Boston Common and in the heart of the city's Theatre District, Emerson College educates individuals who will solve problems and change the world through

engaged leadership in communication and the arts, a mission informed by liberal learning. The College has 3,780 undergraduates and 670 graduate students from across the United States and 50 countries. Supported by state-of-the-art facilities and a renowned faculty, students participate in more than 90 student organizations and performance groups. Emerson is known for its experiential learning programs in Los Angeles, Washington, DC, the Netherlands, London, China, and the Czech Republic as well as its new Global Portals, with the first program launching this fall in Paris. The College has an active network of 39,000 alumni who hold leadership positions in communication and the arts. For more information, visit Emerson.edu. For media inquiries specific to Emerson College, please contact Michelle Gaseau (E: Michelle_Gaseau@emerson.edu, O: 617-824-3547, C: 617-429-2624).

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