

They took the drums away, but they could not stop the beat!

**Step Afrika! Returns to The Soraya
with the West Coast Premiere of
Drumfolk
Chronicling and Celebrating the African-American
Experience in America**

**Special Black History Month Presentation Features
Guest DJ Producer Taylor McFerrin**

Sunday, February 23 at 3:00pm

(Los Angeles, CA) February 5, 2020 – Step Afrika!’s high energy, full-bodied percussive dance returns to The Soraya for the West Coast premiere of *Drumfolk*, the Company’s 25th Anniversary production now on tour. 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.

Drumfolk will feature special guest DJ producer **Taylor McFerrin** on Sunday, February 23 at 3:00pm. Tickets start at \$36 and can be purchased at The Soraya, (818) 677-3000 and online at TheSoraya.org.

About *Drumfolk*

“*Drumfolk* is the second work by Step Afrika! that celebrates and chronicles the African-American experience in America,” said **C. Brian Williams**, Founder and Executive Director of Step Afrika!. “This new production is grounded in extensive research and over 25 years of Step Afrika!’s percussive practice and investigation into the tradition of stepping. We’re thrilled to be sharing it with our audiences.”

Drumfolk takes audiences on a journey from the 17th century, when the African drum found itself in the then-colony of South Carolina, to present-day America, where the instrument has shaped new art forms like hip hop and African-American social dance.

Highlights include: Step Afrika!'s first presentation of dance and drumming traditions from Angola; an exploration of the ring shout, which is a 200+ year-old African American dance rarely seen on our country's stages; a contemporary routine of stepping and vocal percussion to demonstrate the drum's influence on other mediums; and an appearance by special guest Taylor McFerrin in select numbers.

A seminal addition to Step Afrika!'s dance canon, *Drumfolk* is inspired by the Stono Rebellion of 1739 – an uprising of 20 enslaved Africans from Angola, who used their drums to start a revolt in South Carolina. Although the rebellion was suppressed, this little-known event in American history forever changed African-American life and culture.

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 survival and activism earned them the name of “Drumfolk,” as coined by famed folklorist Bessie Jones, and their percussive movement gave rise to some of the country's most distinctive art forms, including the ring shout, tap, hambone and stepping.

Step Afrika!'s *Drumfolk* explores this pivotal moment in history and honors the succeeding cultural evolution. The work is a celebration of human will and perseverance.

The presentation of Step Afrika! was made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

About Step Afrika!

Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the world's first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping—a polyrhythmic, percussive dance form that uses the body as an instrument. Step Afrika! promotes stepping as a contemporary dance genre through critically- acclaimed performances and arts education programs. Creatively engaging audiences in this nascent art form, the Company creates new full-length productions that expand on stepping's unique American history.

With 14 full-time dancers and administrative team of 6, Step Afrika! is one of the top 10 U.S. African-American dance companies. The Company reaches thousands each year through a 50-city tour of American colleges and theaters and performs globally as an official U.S. Cultural Ambassador. New work, such as *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence* and *Drumfolk*,

tour to major U.S. cities. Step Afrika! is featured at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History & Culture with the world's first interactive stepping exhibit.

About Taylor McFerrin

With *Love's Last Chance*, his brilliant new studio album and first solo release in five years, Taylor McFerrin has emerged as the "complete artist" he's always dreamed of becoming, writing and singing his own lyrics and vocals on top of his dazzling instrumental and production work for the very first time. Recorded in his recently adopted hometown of Los Angeles, the collection finds McFerrin working with more freedom and spontaneity than ever before, tapping into the moment with captivating performances that blur the lines between old-school R&B, classic funk, experimental electronic music, and progressive jazz. McFerrin's vocals convey both deep intimacy and unsparing self-reflection, and their very presence on the album signals the start of a brand new chapter in an already-impressive career.

When McFerrin released *Early Riser*, his 2014 debut for Flying Lotus' Brainfeeder label, he largely focused on instrumentals, relegating the occasional vocal part to special guests (including his father, the ten-time Grammy Award-winner Bobby McFerrin). The collection – which also featured appearances by Hiatus Kaiyote frontwoman Nai Palm, bass/production wizard Thundercat, and R&B titan Robert Glasper among others – earned praise on both sides of the pond, with *Pitchfork* hailing it as "an album built for slow weekend mornings spent in bed with a loved one" and *The Line Of Best Fit* calling it "superb." Tracks from the album racked up nearly 20 million streams on Spotify alone, and McFerrin landed festival dates everywhere from Glastonbury to Central Park Summerstage.

In addition, McFerrin also discovered a new approach to recording thanks to his work with the jazz fusion supergroup R+R=Now, which found him teaming up with Glasper, trumpeter Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, bassist Derrick Hodge, drummer Justin Tyson, and synth/vocoder player Terrace Martin, who's produced Kendrick Lamar and Talib Kweli, among others.

Calendar Listing for Step Afrika! Drumfolk Featuring Special Guest Taylor McFerrin

Date: Sunday, February 23 at 3:00pm

Venue: Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)
18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330

Tickets: **Prices:** Starting at \$36. Prices subject to change.
By Phone: (818) 677-3000
Online: TheSoraya.org

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About Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)

The 2019-20 Season marks the ninth year for the award-winning Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts which has quickly become one of the cultural jewels of the greater Los Angeles region. Under the leadership of Executive Director Thor Steingraber, The Soraya continues to expand its programming and outstanding multidisciplinary performances. The Soraya presents a wide variety of performances that not only include new and original work from the Los Angeles region but also work from around the world appealing to all of LA's rich and diverse communities.

Located on the campus of California State University, Northridge, The Soraya's season offers a vibrant performance program of nearly 50 classical and popular music, dance, theater, family, and international events that have served to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley, and further establish itself as one of the top arts companies in Southern California. The award-winning, 1,700-seat theatre was designed by HGA Architects and Engineers and was recently cited by the Los Angeles Times as "a growing hub for live music, dance, drama and other cultural events."

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