



Glen Echo Park Celebrates Opening Weekend of Historic Carousel with Carousel Day Festival featuring FREE performances including Step Afrika!

Carousel Rides, Free Performances & Kids Arts & Crafts, Food Trucks, and More!

For more information, email jcloud@glenechopark.org.

GLEN ECHO, MD (April 4, 2025) – **Carousel Day**, an annual tradition at Glen Echo Park and one of the Park's most popular festivals, will be held this year on Saturday, May 3, from 11am to 4pm. In addition to **free** performances, Carousel Day features art projects for kids, open art studios and galleries, a parade through Park grounds led by resident performers, and more. Carousel Day is presented by the Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture (the Partnership) and often attracts up to 4,000 people who come to the Park to celebrate the opening of the 104-year-old Dentzel carousel for the season.

The Partnership is thrilled to include in this year's program **Step Afrika!** Founded in 1994 by C. Brian Williams, Step Afrika! is the world's leading authority on the art form of stepping. Under Mr. Williams' leadership, stepping has evolved into **one of America's cultural exports, and the company has toured more than 60 countries across the globe and is one of the top 10 African American Dance Companies in the U.S.**

Step Afrika! blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities; traditional African dances; and an array of contemporary dance and art forms into a cohesive, compelling artistic experience. Performances 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.

With Step Afrika! headlining, the festival presents a special "**Percussive Dance Showcase**" on the historic Spanish Ballroom stage. Other dancers featured in the showcase include:

- **Furia Flamenca**, an award-winning dance company that **brings the ferocity and passion of flamenco to the stage**, transporting audiences to Southern Spain in technically refined, emotionally explosive, and dynamically choreographed dancing. Founded in 2004 by Estela Velez de Paredez, the company has **performed at the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Theatre, National Theatre, Wolf Trap, Baltimore Lyric Opera House, Publick Playhouse, Dance Place and Alden Theatre**;
- **Rhythmaya Dance**, a dance company and school, founded in 2005 by Nirathi Rao, that celebrates diversity by sharing Southeast Asian cultures through dance and music. Performances **take the audience on a cultural journey, spanning from Bollywood Dance—a beautiful blend of classical Indian dance, folk Indian dance, and current R&B, hip-hop music—to Kathak**, one of the eight forms of Indian classical dance that traces its origins to the nomadic bards of ancient northern India. The company has **performed throughout the U.S., from NBA games to local libraries**;
- **The Culkin School of Traditional Irish Dance**, an academy keeping Irish dance and music alive through a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum for ages 5 through adult. Founded in 1997 by Sean and Denise Culkin, the school prides itself on its sense of community and has been able to foster relationships that last a lifetime through the ties of Irish culture and the interest in Irish dance. Culkin dancers have **performed at Strathmore, The Kennedy Center, Wolf Trap, BlackRock Center for the Arts, the Irish Embassy, and The White House**.

"We're thrilled to have Step Afrika! leading the Percussive Dance Showcase," said Emily Crews, Dance & Events Program Director for the Partnership. "Bringing these amazing groups together is so special, and we know our Carousel Day visitors are in for a treat. **To be able to present artists of this caliber to the community through free programming**



is a privilege. We are so grateful to our Carousel Day sponsors [Child's Play](#), [Nora Roberts Foundation](#), and [Washington Waldorf School](#) who helped make this happen!"

In addition to the featured percussive dance groups, Carousel Day performers include **Mark H Taiko Connection**, a taiko drum group combining traditional taiko rhythms and styles with modern performance and musical sensibilities to truly embody the spirit of connection, and **The Rainbow Bird**, an interactive dance performance and story led by Carla Perlo & friends. Several Glen Echo Park resident organizations will also present performances, including an opening parade to kick off Carousel Day led by the **Washington Revels**, a performance by Washington Revels Gallery Voices, and a joyful Maypole dance! **Other performances by resident artists will include Washington Conservatory of Music**, the Park's resident music school and **Adventure Theatre MTC's** Pre-Professional Ensemble.

The diverse array of artists featured at Carousel Day and throughout the season reflects the Partnership's 2025 theme of **the arts as a cultural mosaic, symbolizing the richness of different cultures blending, yet maintaining their distinct identities**. "Visual and performing arts are powerful tools for celebrating both the individuality and interconnectedness of cultures," said Ama Mills-Robertson, Chief Program Officer at the Partnership. "Like a mosaic, an art form where each piece contributes something unique and essential to the whole, we find unity, connection—and joy!—in our shared humanity through stories, music, dance, and other forms of creative expression. **It's all about celebrating different cultures coming together, each one adding its own unique voice while staying true to its roots**. And all of this will be on display for families to enjoy at Carousel Day!"

Art-making projects for kids will include carousel animal fans, butterfly and dragonfly paper hand puppets, Create-Your-Own-Carousel, a Rainbow Bird craft in conjunction with the interactive dance performance, and more! And on display in the Partnership Galleries will be three exhibitions: **Glen Echo Pottery's *Color Wheel 2025*** in the Park's Popcorn Gallery, **Eric Celarier's *Evolving Worlds*** in the Stone Tower Gallery, and **Lauren Scavo-Fulk's *Contemporary Landscapes*** in the Park View Gallery. Other resident visual arts studios and galleries in the Park will also be open for art viewing and sales. Visitors can also check out **art demonstrations throughout the Park** by Resident Artists, including Jordan Bruns painting the carousel, glass blowing demonstrations by Glen Echo Glassworks, a Cyanotype Printing & Painting activity with Photoworks, an Egg Tempera demo by visiting artist Bennett Vadnais, and ring-making and hammering demonstrations with SilverWorks Studio.

Of course, the day would not be complete without the star of the Park – the 104-year-old Dentzel carousel. [Carousel rides](#) are \$2.00 per ride or \$5.00 for an all-day ticket.

In between performances and arts activities, Carousel Day will feature roving artist Sabrina Selma Mandell of **Happenstance Theater** and a puppet friend from **the Puppet Co.** A **National Park Service Mobile Visitor Center** will also be onsite, with fun and informational Junior Ranger Books and Badges available. Visitors can also attend screenings of documentary short films by Wide Angle Youth Media for the Maryland State Arts Council. These short films document traditions in Maryland through **Folklife Apprenticeships and Heritage Awards**.

Food options for visitors include **Praline Cafe** and a **food truck** (TBA), as well as smoothies & more from **Pacha Mama Juice Co.**

Also happening at Glen Echo Park on Carousel Day:

Carousel Day visitors interested in learning more about how the Dentzel Carousel played a role in the Civil Rights protests to desegregate Glen Echo Amusement Park can start their visit early with a ranger-led **Glen Echo Park Civil Rights and History Tour**. Families can also [book a visit](#) to the **Glen Echo Park Aquarium**, or attend a **children's theater** show. [Tickets are on sale now](#) for Adventure Theatre MTC's production of *Charlotte's*



Web and *Jeghetto's Workshop* by Jeghetto's Entertainment at the Puppet Co. Visitors looking to extend their day at the Park are welcome back for an evening social dance with **DC Rawhides** in the Bumper Car Pavilion, or **Waltz Time's *An Evening with Strauss*** Viennese Waltz Ball in the Spanish Ballroom. Carousel rides (tickets purchased separately) will be open for dancers, along with wine, beer, and other refreshment sales from Praline Cafe.

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High resolution images and carousel b-roll available by emailing jcloud@glenechopark.org.

About the Denzel Carousel

Installed in 1921 by the Dentzel Carousel Company of Germantown, Pennsylvania, the Glen Echo Park carousel is one of only 135 functioning antique carousels in the country and one of the few still in its original location. Listed on the **National Register of Historic Places**, the carousel is truly a Washington area treasure! Known as a “menagerie carousel” because of the variety of its animals, the Glen Echo Park carousel includes 52 animals: 40 horses, 4 rabbits, 4 ostriches, 1 giraffe, 1 deer, 1 lion and 1 tiger. It also features two circus chariots. With its playful animals and striking ornamentation, the carousel has been an iconic symbol of the Park throughout the site's amusement park years and into its current phase as an arts and cultural center for the past half-century.

In the summer of 1960, Howard University students led protests at the Park along with local residents. The students rode the carousel and were arrested for doing so in violation of the privately-owned amusement park's segregation policies. The case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court. Their continued protests under the heat of the summer sun – and the active engagement of community members in the fight – led to the amusement park's desegregation, opening the venue to everyone for its 1961 season and every year thereafter until the amusement park closed after the 1968 season.

Today, the carousel is the **only remaining historic ride from the amusement park era at Glen Echo Park site**. It is ridden by more than 50,000 people each year – including multi-generations of families visiting the Park. In 2021, the carousel celebrated its 100th Anniversary in the Park. Find information on the Carousel 100th Anniversary Celebration at glenechopark.org/carousel100.

About Glen Echo Park and the Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture

Glen Echo Park is a vibrant arts and cultural center presenting festivals, exhibitions, and dances, as well as children's theater, music programs, nature programs, and art classes to close to 300,000 visitors each year. The Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture, a nonprofit organization, oversees these and other activities, including preserving the historic structures in the Park. Glen Echo Park, part of the National Park Service, is located in Glen Echo, Maryland, six miles northwest of Georgetown along the scenic Potomac River palisades. For more information on Glen Echo Park, visit glenechopark.org or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

The Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture is supported in part by the Maryland State Arts Council (msac.org) and also by funding from the Montgomery County government and the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County (creativemoco.com). All programs are produced in cooperation with the National Park Service and Montgomery County, Maryland.