workout

Capoeira, the latest exercise craze, promises to burn fat and promote passion. If this sounds good, the Brazilian martial arts dance is for you. By Janie Larmour.

move like a capoeirista

## rules of the game



# We've spent 70 years experimenting with sunscreen so you don't workout

the lingo

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ven though capoeira has been around since the 1500s, this Brazilian martial art has taken off in Australia as the most invigorating way to become fit and toned. This unique form of exercise, which involves two "players" kicking in the air, twirling and manoeuvring around each other to the beat of the drumming and singing of those who have encircled them, has fascinating roots. It was originally developed by African slaves in Brazil who practised it as a means to learning self-defence under the watchful eye of their masters. Effectively, it was the study of potentially bone-crushing moves camouflaged as dance.

Many teachers report that even the most reserved person is brought out of their shell by this art form. A feeling of collectiveness and support is inherent to capoeira (pronounced Cap-oh-way-rah). Indeed, after joining in and watching a few classes, it's incredibly easy to see why capoeira is on its way to becoming the next

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yoga. The trance even has retro-appear, some saying it was breakdancing's precursor.

Forget the hype though, because according to Andre Cerutti, or Mestre (head teacher) Peixe, as he is known at his Group Capoeira Brazil studio, capoeira is, first and foremost, one of the best ways to get your body into fantastic shape. "They come in fat and leave skinny," he says playfully. "Capoeira uses every muscle in the body, every muscle!"

After checking out the group's body tone and strength, there is no choice but to believe him. The moves of capoeira involve physical strength, fitness and stamina that anyone at any stage of fitness can build on. And when I peer into some of the player's eyes, I notice some very mischievous looks - there's an energy here that has

very mischievous looks – there's an energy nere that has to be experienced to be believed.

"Capoeira is a way of life," says Mestre Peixe. "Some people come for the physical aspect, then at some stage, the mental and spiritual aspects start to affect each

player. It is a whole body, mind and soul experience as well as the fact that each player is involved in not just the dance but the music and singing as well. What happens in the game reflects real life and therefore teaches you how to react to challenges in your life."

## game of life

So powerful is capoeira that it was banned until the 1930s. The powers that be considered it a subversive art form. Now it is taught with pride in Brazilian schools.

There are two main forms of the dance. The original, capocita angola, is a slower game which is played low to the ground and concentrates on muscle strength. Capocira regional features more traditional martial arts moves, and is danced higher from the ground.

Jeronimo Dasilva, or Mestre Jeronimo, is head of JC's Capoeira Angola School, and likens the former style to Capoeira Angola School, and likens the former style to 

"a game of chess, a game of honour and intelligence. It 
is the game of life, finding the solution for the 
challenging in the roda (playing circle) and the same in 
your life." He teaches two-hour classes at the Bondi 
Pavilion, but says that the bonds the players form with 
each other often extend beyond class time and into 
friendships. "We don't just turn up for class and gohome. Caroeira promotes such a sense of belonging we home. Capoeira promotes such a sense of belonging we usually go down to the beach or go and have pizza after.

It is a way of living and connection It is a way of living and connecting spiritually, emotionally as well as learning the dance."

Mestre Peixe teaches capoeira regional one-and-a-half hour classes that instruct aspiring capociristas on the basic steps and later, the more challenging sequences of moves.

Whichever form you choose, both are awe-inspiring and give you such a workout that you should bring two and give you such a worken that you should bring two
and plenty of water. The added benefits – the
contagious passion, the air of collectiveness – is so
intoxicating. You just may find yourself craving to know
more about Brazilian culture.

# the lingo

roda - the circle that the group forms while they sing, clap and play instruments for the players to play their game in.

iogo - the actual game that is played between the two players.

ginga – the basic step that every move comes from. This is done between other moves and is used

to catch one's breath.

berimbau – an instrument that is played (usually by the master) to set the rhythm of the jogo.

mestre - master, the senior capoeira teacher.

capoeirista - capoeira player angola - traditional style of dancing capoeira.

regional - modern capoeira

# move like a capoeirista

The basic step. Step your right leg straight back landing on the ball of your foot with the heel in straight line behind, your right arm is bent in front with your elbow in line with shoulder, hand in front of your face. Your left arm is straight back by your side. Step forward on your right leg and then step your left foot back, your left arm now bent in front. Repeat starting with the left foot.

## balance and belly strength

Stand back to back with a partner with some distance to you. Both turn to face each other and clap your hands together, making eye contact. Then spin around and clap hands with your legs slightly bent. The centre of movement, balance and power comes from the belly below the navel. Keep moving from side to side, getting faster and faster.

up into a handstand. Focus on perfecting your centre balance until you don't need a wall. Add leg movements. You're aiming to eventually be able to spin around on your hands.

## rules of the game

Cappeira is not about beating up your partner. Brazilians see it more as a game.

Try not to be predictable or your opponent will easily outsmart you. This is a game of skill as well as respect. It trains the mind as well as the body.

See contact with your partner is essential. Even if you make a turn, whip your head back to face your partner.

Mestre Peixe
will be giving capoeira
demonstrations as part of
the Sydney Festival 2004 at the Sydney residual 2004 at Darling Harbour's Aqua Shell from January 14 to 18 at 8pm. He also teaches eight-week courses at his Surry Hills studio from Monday to Saturday at 6pm to 7,30pm, for \$120 accuracy Control details. \$120 a course. Contact details: (02) 9130 1326 or

Mestre Jeronimo holds classes at the Bondi Pavilion, Bondi Beach, on Wednesdays from 7pm to 9pm and on Saturday from 4pm to 6pm. Casual classes are \$20: Casual classes are \$20; a monthly attendance, which is eight or nine classes, costs \$90. Weather permitting, he holds free demonstrations every Sunday at the Bondi Pavilion at 4pm. Contact ss.jeronimo@bigpond.com.au.

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