

## Why has capoeira had such appeal to the world of contemporary arts and media? By Agnes

Until the 1970s Capoeira was rarely experienced outside of Brazil, but in the last decades one experienced an explosive development of travelling practitioners of Brazilian art, capoeira and music, with performing groups such as Brazil Tropical, Olodum and others. Starting in the mid 70s in USA with mestre Jelon Viera and later Mestre Acordeon, capoeira was introduced through dance and folkloric shows in New York and the East coast and later academies were established in USA. Capoeira schools have been now been established all over the globe from Japan to Kenya, from Australia to Spain and to the north of Norway. The first Capoeira classes taught in London in 1971 was at The London school of contemporary dance and in the mid 1980s London School of capoeira was the first to establish a full time school dedicated only to Capoeira in Highbury Islington, North London.

Capoeira has had an extraordinary appeal beyond its cultural base of Brazil. It is interesting to see that Capoeira always has been embraced by the dance and performance scene rather than the Martial Arts milieu. It is the performative quality of capoeira which has been the driving force for the international travel it has undergone.

Being a unique fusion of dance, fight, corporal expression, musical rhythm and song, the art-form is photogenic, expressive and impressive, therefore highly inspirational to choreographers, directors and filmmakers. Capoeira has been seen in numerous films such as Only The Strong, Oceans 13, Catwoman, Black Orpheus, Cordao De Ouro, Resident Evil, The Apocalypse and many others. Also in the world of advertising Capoeira has been frequently portrayed. The remarkable Nokia advert, where Mestre Sylvia and Mestre Marcos are captured in a beautiful, fluid and close game on the beach is one example of how eye-catching and mind-blowing capoeira performance is on the screen.

Noticeably, capoeira has also been a great contributor to contemporary dance and physical theatre. Dancers and actors have been attracted to the heightened physicality of the movements and the game, hence finding inspiration to widen their movement vocabulary. Many actors and dancers have trodden the threshold of London school of Capoeira to train the style, movements and play of this unique art form. Dance troupes such as Ballet Rambert, Archaos, DV8 and Wim Vandekeybus have clearly used Capoeira or integrated moves from the form capoeira.

In 1993 mestre Sylvia and mestre Marcos established their own dance company Passo Passo, which is dedicated to exploring a new performance language using capoeira, dance and physical theatre. With their productions they have made capoeira visible and a proudly existing in the contemporary arts scene.

It is interesting to see that while in the early years of Capoeira in England one could trace choreographies inspired by capoeira to the practitioner who had studied capoeira, such as Laurie Booth or Russell Maliphant, who was a student at London School of Capoeira in the late 80s, beginning of 90s. In contemporary dance today the techniques are integrated into the vocabulary taught in the dance schools, without necessarily any reference to capoeira as a form any more.

Capoeira, with its vivid and challenging body work, has also been an integrated part of many acting programmes around the world. The collective and improvisational nature of capoeira

is also as important in all theatre work. In dance and theatre, the experience of the performance is depending on the interaction, energy, skills and focus provided by the players at the time of the event. This is also true for the capoeira roda. When the playwright and actor Steven Berkoff saw capoeira for the first time he wrote:

“It’s quite amazing, these dancers who combine music, dance and unarmed combat into an artform the like of which I’ve never seen...all based on daring of seeing how far the body can go, of what miracles of speed and defiance it is capable. True theatre. Powerful, risk taking and awesome to behold...dance, martial art, children’s street games, songs are grist to the mill of the theatre. ... The audience was transported by them and felt better watching by them. The sign of good theatre: it makes you feel better.”

So the answer to the question of why capoeira has such appeal to the world of contemporary arts and media is that whether you are experiencing it live, through a lens or in your own body, it is its immediateness, physicality and beauty, its truly including and collective nature that simply makes you feel better! In our technical and often alienating world, this is much what we yearn for and need.

Axé capoeira! Enjoy the event!

Prof. Agnes sept. 2010