

ABADA Capoeira has a real "jeite" going on

By Elizabeth Milos

Capoeira, that includes elements of martial arts, dance and performance art, has been popular in the Mission for some time. A new capoeira school has just opened its doors in the neighborhood, ABADA Capoeira, (Brazilian Association for the Development and Support of Capoeira), founded by Mestre Camisa in Rio de Janeiro.

Led by teacher, Marcia Cigarra, this group of students move with a certain *jeite*, or distinction, to rhythms native to the African roots of Brazilian culture. "Capoeira originated from the African slaves in Brazil," explains Marcia, "which were brought from different regions. They taught each other the self defense forms from each of their different cultures. Initially, the dance and music was included to camouflage the exercises so the slave owners wouldn't notice them. Afterwards, capoeira became known as a street form. It was also outlawed for a while."

During this year's carnival, two other capoeira teachers and Marcia will supervise groups of capoeiristas doing the open *roda* or round

Under the direction of Mestre Camisa, ABADA Capoeira has approximately 2,000 members worldwide with a body of over 30,000 students dispersed among 17 states in Brazil and 11 countries.

When Marcia Cigarra became a teacher, she came to San Francisco to start another school: "We started this from zero and formed this school five and a half years ago." The same rigorous level of training applies to all of the schools. "Mestre Camisa comes

every year during the graduation exams," adds Marcia.

Becoming a teacher also involves commitment to learning the philosophy. "When you become a graduate you give free classes to children, while the teacher supervises, says Marcia, "I taught street children in Brazil for three years before I became a teacher." Now Marcia also teaches in East Oakland and will soon teach children from the Tenderloin.

Mestre Camisa developed his particular methodology of teaching capoeira by following the innovative concepts of the great Master of Capoeira Regional, Mestre Bimba. According to Marcia, becoming a Master is not something to be awarded like a diploma but rather it comes of itself, through your lifelong and relentless commitment to improving yourself as a capoeirista and as a person.

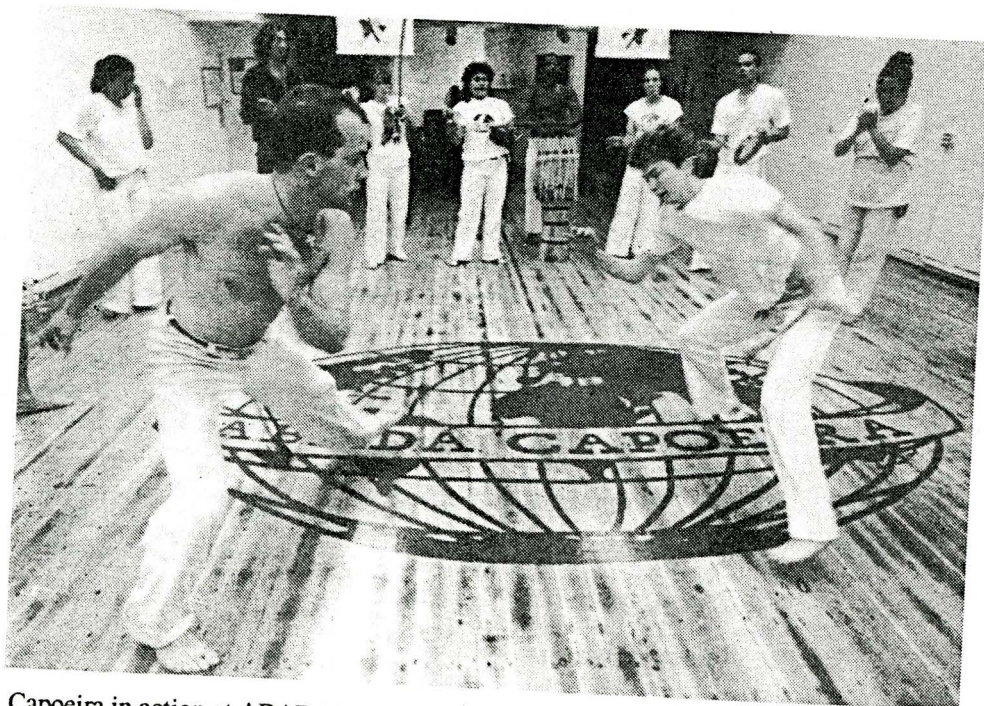
"We also believe in sharing other aspects of Brazilian culture with our students", adds Marcia, "We instill an awareness about the rainforest destruction in the Amazon and about the plight of Brazil's thousands of street children and the independent fishermen as well. Before, there were older people drawn to capoeira, then Mestre Camisa began sending graduates to teach the children at the favelas (the shantytowns)," explains Marcia.

Soon the children began learning about their history and culture, how to make instruments, or the importance of teamwork and respect. "ABADA Capoeira has been able to save many children because some of them have become teachers themselves. Also time with us is time off the streets and out of trouble."

Most people know Brazil only from the carnival and the partying. But there's also a sad reality behind it. "People sometimes spend all of their hard earned money just to buy or make a costume. Now carnival in Brazil is mostly about money. People have to pay just to watch," says Marcia. "In Bahia and Recife, there still exists that old style of carnival. It would really be nice if people here could also join in like they do over there."

"Carnaval here in San Francisco is very exciting because people from all the different cultures participate to celebrate their heritage. It's very beautiful to see," says Marcia. "Students from all of the different schools can participate, so we can all do capoeira together".

ABADA Capoeira is located at 2376 Mission Street, (415) 284-6196.



Capoeira in action at ABADA's Mission Street studio. Photo By Nancy Opitz