



Capoeiristas are jumping for joy: it's part of the sport

Get your kicks from Capoeira

Mission to host international conference on Brazilian sport

by Victor Miller

Capoeira — a game, a dance and a self-defense practice all rolled into one — has been slowly building an enthusiastic following in the United States. If you've ever wanted to learn a little more about the white-clad capoeiristas you've seen performing at Carnaval, or if you're already an aficionado of the sport, the opportunity to experience the very best of capoeira is coming up this month.

From October 19 - 24 the Mission District will be the epicenter of world-class capoeira, with the Seventh International Capoeira Conference. This year's conference brings together some of the world's most accomplished players and instructors of this Afro-Brazilian cultural phenomenon.

For the last six years, ABADÁ Capoeira San Francisco - Brazilian

Cultural Academy has combined its graduation ceremonies with workshops and lectures on Capoeira's history. This year's featured speaker and performer is Mestre Camisa, founder of Rio de Janeiro-based ABADÁ Capoeira Foundation, an organization with branches in 17 countries and 30,000 members world wide. ABADÁ San Francisco, with its Mission Street storefront near 20th Street, is the largest school outside Brazil. ABADA SF is hosting the first two days of the conference. Number-one-rated female Capoeira practitioner, Mestranda Marcia Cigarra, who is also director/founder of the SF school, will also be on hand. Other featured luminaries journeying to SF for the event include Professors Tucano Preto and Peixa Cru of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

In addition to four evening workshop/master classes, there will be a concluding ceremony at Mission High School, with 100 students participating in a batizado or baptism. This traditional initiation

ceremony features neophytes dancing/playing with a master. Other highlights include African-Brazilian dance by Tania Santiago, former lead dancer with OLODUM, and a presentation of the Maculelê, a traditional Brazilian dance performed with sticks and machetes.

While Capoeira at times appears simply as a robust style of Afro-Brazilian dance, it is in fact a multi-faceted discipline, inextricably linked to the history of slavery and rebellion in Brazil. The first known written reference to Capoeira dates back to 1770, but accounts of its development — which is known to have occurred during a much earlier era — are almost non-existent. This gap in Capoeira's history is traced to 1890, the year when Brazil's Finance Minister, Ruy Barbosa, in the attempt to purge his country of the shame of slavery, destroyed all records of that institution and consequently, of Capoeira during its formative era. There remains only a general outline of the art form's evolution.

Capoeira originated as a form of self-defense and cultural preservation among

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African slaves in Brazil. Africans found themselves among other Africans whose language and customs they often did not share; nonetheless, all were at peril from slave owners. Capoeira emerged as a unifying expression of Pan-African culture combining the dance and music of different regions of the Mother Continent. These artistic elements also disguised the fact Capoeira was being practiced as a martial art. It remains a very specialized form of combat, using footwork almost exclusively. This emphasis, again, comes out of the slavery experience, when hands were often manacled, and therefore a less effective means of fending off an attack.

Escaped Brazilian slaves set up their own communities or Quilombos, and it was here that Capoeira developed as a means of village defense and as a part of periodic attempts to liberate those still on plantations.

With the end of slavery in 1888, Africans were not immediately welcomed into the mainstream of Brazilian society. Many were still consigned to the bottom economic rung: working the plantations. Some rose up against the system and Capoeira was a part of these uprisings. Alarmed, the Brazilian government condemned and outlawed the sport. The ban came to an end in 1937, when the President of Brazil requested a demonstration of Capoeira by Master Bimba (Miguel dos Reis Machado), who impressed the chief executive sufficiently to gain permission to open his own school.

So, despite it's centuries of tradition, Capoeira has been an underground and illegal activity for all but the last 50 years. (Mestre Bimba's student, Mestre Camisa, will speak at the conference on the early and modern history of Capoeira.)

Dance, play, combat, or pageant, Capoeira not only demonstrates the richness of Afro-Brazilian culture, but through the joy with which it is undertaken, this complex and graceful form becomes an exuberant expression of the human spirit.

Workshops for those who are already students of Capoeira will be held at ABADÁ - Capoeira San Francisco, 2376 Mission Street between October 19-23rd. The closing Ceremony and Batizado will take place at Mission High School October 24th at 5pm, admission at the door is \$10-\$15. For more information call 284-6196.