

THE MONTSERRAT REPORTER

Feature

Vol. VII No. VI

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Friday March 1, 1991

Earlier this month for one solid, fun-filled hour, I was taught how to get in touch with my body. Abandoning the harsh realities of a 8 to 4 day for an imaginary world of lions, giraffes, monkeys, and other symbols of Africa which we only read about, or see in the movies.

My uplifting experience took place at the newly renovated recreation room of the Boyd Education Agricultural Trade Schools (BEATS) in Parson's, head-quarter for Aerobics With Soul, perhaps the hottest dance aerobic workout to hit the market today.

"Aerobics With Soul" is the brainchild of Maria Nhambu Bergh, a native Tanzanian who specializes in the teaching of African culture and dance. Maria introduced "Aerobics With Soul" to Montserrat in 1984 and since then, classes have continued under the supervision of capable local instructors.

Maria first came to

Montserrat in 1974 with her Norwegian-born husband, who at that time was a speculator in pre-fab housing. According to Maria, "From the minute I landed in Montserrat I said, 'Yes, this is it!' I fell in love with the island at first sight."

Since then, Maria has been spending two months in each year on the Emerald

Isle. She later trained 3 local instructors to conduct classes in her absence.

With "Aerobics With Soul" Maria has brought an exercise an fitness programme to Montserrat where previously all one heard of was Jane Fonda or Richard Simmons.

Being a certified member of the International Dance



Exercise Association for Fitness Professionals (IDEA) Maria is qualified to create fitness programmes for individuals of all age groups and physical fitness. Says Maria: "My classes are very safe, I have been trained in anatomy and physiology and I have also created exercise programmes for diabetics, the obese, the disabled and the pregnant woman.

With each class, participants not only get a physical workout, but there's also the novelty of the dance routines based on African tribal dances and Afro-rhythms. In "Aerobics With Soul", continues Maria, "the emphasis is not only on participants' but also on the choreography which generates energy and enthusiasm."

The music used is African contemporary or Caribbean, and not only provides background, but plays a prominent part in the success of the programme, so much so that "Aerobics With Soul" video tapes are rated by such tabloids at the Daily New of New York, Fitness Plus magazine, and Glamour magazine as one of the five best exercise videos in the USA.

Maria's physical appear-

ance is testimony of the validity of her programme. In her late forties, she's a living picture of the look that a mature woman strives for - one of beauty, poise, health, and that overall confidence in herself. Looking at her dance you can see total abandonment of the African spirit - free and earthy.

One of the dance sequences called "Pata, Pata," encourages participants to communicate with each other by touch. As Maria laughingly says: "When 'Pata, Pata' is performed in Africa, dancers' hands just keep going down, down."

Maria is very proud of the fact that "Aerobics With Soul" is the first time that ethnic dance has been used for aerobics exercise. Her videos and cassettes are therefore designed to bring dance through exercise into people's living rooms.

The programme taught here in Montserrat has been suitably adapted for local participation. BEATS is the perfect venue for classes. The hall is spacious with toilet facilities and is located at the foot of Chances Mountain, with the winds coming off the foothills, providing a naturally cooling atmosphere for after-class socializing.

Tourist and visitors to Montserrat can also take advantage of "Aerobics With Soul". The classes are 45 to 60 minutes long and range from beginner to advanced level. These are just perfect for getting you in the mood for that special dinner or a night out on the town.

Most participants are women, but Maria hopes that men will soon start turning up at the Tuesday and Thursday classes.

The class routines are especially good for athletes who are hoping to improve their co-ordination, gain muscle-control, or just achieve all around toning for their bodies.

In Maria's absence, instructors Terry Bodkin and Rose Willock will conduct the classes. Both Bodkin and Willock have been with the programme since its inception and have gone through extensive training under Maria's strict supervision.

For more information about

*Aerobics With Soul*TM:

800-423-9685