

Conditioning  
the Total  
Person

# Aerobic Soul

by Marion Witcher

Some say Jane Fonda is the queen of exercise videos. A growing number of people are quick to disagree. There's another queen on the scene in America. Her name is Maria Nhambu Bergh, born in Tanzania, East Africa. She takes over where Jane Fonda and others failed to get started. Bergh, convinced that real health involves your body, mind or soul, and spirit, has produced a series of three videos widely known as, *Aerobics With Soul*. This creative workout offers total conditioning for the whole person and is geared toward African Americans.

Bergh stated that most of the workout videos marketed to the Black audience simply combine a Jane Fonda and Kathy Smith type of movement with Black music. Bergh says, that this is okay; however, she wanted to create something more culturally stimulating. She followed the guidelines of the fitness industry to modify some of the traditional African dances into a workout that could be enjoyed by people of all ages, including a 70-year-old lady in her studio classes.

Bergh developed a workout that sets the captive exerciser free. She successfully combined aerobics with the African movements she learned while growing up in Tanzania. The result is a workout that utilizes all the major muscle groups in a natural and creative way.

As Blacks, we are accustomed to being free and moving our bodies and hips in a way that is natural. *Aerobics With Soul* respects the freedom of a people who move instinctively. The workout is a sweet rescue from the sounds of, "and one ... and two ... and three... and four..."

Keeping count is the furthest thing from one's mind when working out to the compelling sounds of *Aerobics With Soul*. One is immediately captured by the rhythm of the music, and the beautiful tranquil African scenes shown on the video throughout the workout. Blacks can workout, watch this and be proud of their rich African heritage. Bergh says that everyone can enjoy the exercises because "it gives you a good feeling as you're working out, and you feel very dignified knowing the Black culture is so rich."

There's nothing too traditional about this cultural workout. Bergh teaches her students to imitate the natural, graceful movements of wild animals like the ostrich for shoulder and arm movements and the giraffe for the neck and spine. The fun is in relaxing and becoming uninhibited with your own body.

In addition, Bergh breaks all tradition by allowing the music to become a major part of the workout. As a part of the foreground rather than the background, Bergh encourages exercisers to "listen to the beat, feel it in your heart, and



stomp it with your feet." She says that the only requirement for enjoying *Aerobics With Soul* is an open mind and a relaxed body.

extensively throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean. She fluently speaks Kiswahili and French. As a result, *Aerobics With Soul* is known on an international level. However, her goal is to educate as many Black Americans as possible about the rich culture of her East African homeland and to teach that you don't have to jump around furiously to get results.

*Aerobics with Soul* has three videos, the latest being *Aerobics With Soul, Kilimanjaro*. Kilimanjaro is a cultural workout and masterpiece of beauty. This workout was named after Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, gracing northern Tanzania. Although Kilimanjaro is an advanced workout, it includes levels for the beginning and intermediate exerciser. Bergh recommends that beginners start out with *Aerobics With Soul, Serengeti*, a low impact, high energy workout. Once they master this, they can climb Mt. Kilimaiijaro.

Bergh has made various television and radio appearances. In addition, *Aerobics With Soul, Karibu*, received critical acclaim in publications such as *Billboard* and *Video Choice*. ABC's *Good Morning America* has recommended it to its viewers. R & B Singer, Anita Baker says that she uses the video daily to get a good workout, and to learn authentic African dance. She adds, "I find that I'm culturally and physically energized throughout the day."

Bergh lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with her husband Kjell. They have two children. For more information on *Aerobics With Soul*, call (800) 423-9685.