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WORKING WOMAN'S GAZETTE

AFRO-BEAT AEROBICS

By MONTE WILLIAMS
Daily News Staff Writer

Fed up with Jane Fonda? Sick of Kathy Smith?

Maria Bergh was. That's why the Tanzanian-born dancer devised a sizzling workout video that celebrates her East African heritage.

"Aerobics With Soul" (Crocus, \$19.95) is a sure way to fire up your fitness program. But be forewarned: Bergh's exercise routine, which combines the discipline of aerobics and the creativity and grace of African dance, is rigorous.

"Actually, there is something for everyone, including beginners," says the certified aerobics instructor, who once taught French and Swahili to Minneapolis college and high-school students. "They can just do the warm-up; that's the beauty of the tape."

Wild animals provide the inspiration for many of the dances on the video. Participants mimic the fleet movements of the ostrich, giraffe and gazelle to pulsating African rhythms.

"I move my body naturally, the way it was meant to move," says the 46-year-old mother of two. "In each dance, the entire body is being worked."

Such comprehensive movements require mental absorption. "In the aerobics classes I used to take, you could plan your trip to Iowa, decide what to put in your meat loaf and never miss a beat," says Bergh. "In my program, you have to concentrate on your body."

Afro Workout, as Bergh dubs the regimen, is designed to give participants "smooth lines and curves, not a muscular, sculptured look." If you want that look, Bergh says, buy Fonda's videos.

At one point in the 60-minute tape, dancers use khanga, colorful African fabric, to add flashes of color to an already breathtaking dance.

Bergh apparently places a premium on beauty; the video is high on esthetic appeal. During the 20-second respites between routines, panoramic views of the East African landscape, replete with shots of frolicking animals, fill the screen.



Married to a Norwegian entrepreneur, Bergh says she decided to devise a workout that would reflect her heritage because she wanted to educate Americans about this aspect of East African culture. Americans, she says, are largely ignorant of Africa. "I've had people ask me if they have to be black to do Afro Workout." (You don't.)

The only prerequisite to doing Afro Workout is the ability to "relax, relax, relax," says Bergh. "Don't be intimidated by something different."

Aerobics With Soul™ is available from Bergh International at 800-423-9685.