



FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 7, 1988

Billboard.

"Afro-Workout: Aerobics With Soul," Crocus Entertainment, 60 minutes, \$19.95.

Although the title may conjure up images of James Brown or Aretha Franklin putting an aerobics class through its paces, "Afro-Workout" is actually a fusion of aerobics and traditional African dance movements. Host Maria Bergh has been teaching African dance and lecturing on African culture since she came to the U.S. from Tanzania more than 20 years ago. In this sensuous, lively, and fun exercise tape, she leads a vigorous workout that demonstrates the essentials of several expressive, fluid, and fascinating African dances. And behind the steps are the infectious rhythms of songs by Phillip Gonzales, Derf Reklaw, Alphonsus Casel, and Hassan Omari. If there is any one tape that can beat the boredom suffered by jaded fitness seekers, this unique video is it.

CHRIS MCGOWAN

VIDEO CHOICE

EXERCISE AND HEALTH

AFRO-WORKOUT: AEROBICS WITH SOUL

Content: ★★★★★
Production: ★★★★★

Aerobics with Soul draws on the dances and music of Africa to create a workout routine that is challenging and different. Maria Bergh, narrator and choreographer, is from Tanzania. The movements she demonstrates are patterned after those of wild animals—the giraffe, ostrich, and monkey. Bergh encourages you to go with the music and relax your body and mind as she leads you through steps that are a delightful change from the traditional, and that challenge you to dance in ways you may never have tried. Various levels of exertion are recommended for beginning and advanced dancers.

Overall, it may take some practice to learn the steps so that you can dance without stopping and keep your heart rate up. And movements do deviate from the more traditional aerobic moves—for example, the arm segment contains moves that are graceful and fluid, rather than power moves.

The back cover of the video describes the Afro-Workout as low impact/high energy; however, one segment contains vigorous hopping. And although the tape has warm-up and cool-down sections, there's no stretching routine before the dance segment. Most dancers will be unable to accomplish the final stretch in the cool-down and may want to substitute, while those with bad backs may want to modify some of the moves that involve bending.

Brief rest periods interspersed throughout the video allow Bergh the opportunity to show clips of life in Africa and of wild animals; they also give Bergh time to explain the origins of the dances. And they just might inspire you to give this very different type of workout a try.

Crocus Entertainment
Time: 60 minutes

Video Insider 2/29/88

Crocus' Afro-Workout Has Soul

Afro-Workout: Aerobics With Soul - Crocus Entertainment. 60 minutes. Priced at \$19.95

Of all the unique videos I'm reviewing here, Crocus Entertainment's *Afro-Workout: Aerobics With Soul* is my personal favorite. It's one of the most original and fun workout videos I've seen in a long time. It's an excellent production, shot on film, with beautiful African scenery interspersed with the exercises. The instruction is also excellent. But what I liked best about it is the original African music in the background. If it doesn't make you get up and move, nothing will.

Aerobics With Soul's instructor is Maria Bergh, a Tanzanian now teaching in the United States who has specialized in African culture and dance. She has her own studio in Minnesota where she teaches a blend of African dance and aerobics. It's this blend that she uses on the video, a fun variation on low-impact aerobics. She claims that low-impact aerobics actually originated in ancient African dance. The claim may be a little haughty, but you find from this video that combining dance with exercise is a lot of fun.

Now for the "weird" part. Bergh uses moves she's named after animals, like the "giraffe," the "ostrich," and "monkey jumping jacks." There's even an instruction sheet packaged with the video that shows you how to do these moves. You feel a little funny trying them at home. But Bergh and her background exercisers make the moves look natural on the screen, making you see that they're fun to do when you put a little "soul" into them. (Some of the background exercisers, though, are a little klutzy-looking; they could have used a little more soul.) No matter how funny you feel doing these exercises, you're still having fun. And you're also getting in shape.

Unlike some of the other videos mentioned here, this one is for a wide audience. It's also a good candidate for retailers who do well with black video (see related article in this issue's *Breaking News* section). Although I think people of all races should try it, it's especially good for blacks because there aren't many exercise videos available with a black host.