

## Studio Now

### Capoeira Aché Brasil in Vancouver

BY PIA LO



**T**HE Capoeira Aché Brasil Academy immediately caught my attention as I walked down Broadway in Vancouver's Mount Pleasant area. The big window of its street-level studio shows capoeira classes in progress and it's like a live-action movie playing out in the otherwise mellow neighbourhood. As soon as I went inside, I felt a rush of excitement from the music and the energy of the acrobatic capoeiristas who were playing in the *roda* (the circular formation in which capoeira is performed accompanied by live song and music). The instructors gave me a warm welcome and led me to class, where I experienced first-hand the rich culture of this Brazilian dance-martial art.

Capoeira originated among African slaves in Brazil around the sixteenth century, when Brazil was a Portuguese colony. It was a fighting style as well as an expression of their hardships, colonial oppression and the diverse African cultures from which the slaves originated. It became such a lethal martial art that, in the nineteenth century, anyone caught practicing capoeira risked arrest. Today, capoeira is a major part of Brazilian history and an expression of Brazil's diverse ethnicity.

Born in Recife, in northeastern Brazil, Mestre Eclilson de Jesus established what is possibly one of Canada's earliest capoeira



"Playing capoeira is the fun part, and it's more about showing your wit than brute force" ~ Mestre Eclilson de Jesus

groups after he was invited to perform in Vancouver in 1990. The current studio was established in 1999. He and his instructors are passionate about capoeira's culture and this is integrated into all of their lessons. Aché is a Yoruba word meaning "everything that is positive in the universe" and this philosophy comes through every aspect of de Jesus' academy.

The academy runs a one-hour introductory level class almost daily, and everyone's first class is free. It's for absolute beginners or people with some experience to brush up on their technique. Monthly class cards are priced according to the number of classes you want to take; drop-ins are also possible. *Rodas* are about one hour long and are free of charge; students must attend *rodas* in order to advance. The academy also offers classes in samba and Brazilian folk dance. The Aché Brasil performance group puts on shows featuring all of these forms throughout the year and definitely at Mardi Gras celebrations in February; they are incredibly lively and worth looking out for.

All capoeiristas adopt a nickname; my instructor is called Camara. He is twenty-five years old and has been practicing capoeira most of his life. My introductory class began with an aerobic warm-up that had us counting out loud in Portuguese. One must learn the language in order to understand capoeira's culture and songs and reasonable fluency is required when one advances to higher ranks. Camara emphasizes the importance of stretching, particularly in Canada's climate, which is much cooler than Brazil's. Like most academies, Capoeira Aché Brasil teaches the contemporary style – a blend of the Angola and Regional styles that also incorporates current knowledge of human kinetics and injury prevention. Camara taught us basic kicks and escapes and then we partnered up

to practice. Playing capoeira is the fun part, and it's more about showing your wit than brute force. It's a playful interaction of attack and defense techniques with emphasis on a positive and challenging experience for you and your partner.

The class went by really quickly and although I was sweating and tired, I wanted to play some more. Judging by everyone's smiles, I don't think I was alone. Each class ends with the instructor's loud salutation to capoeira, to which we answer with as much gusto "Salve!" as an affirmation. It is a reminder of the roots of capoeira and expresses our gratitude towards the capoeira masters. ~

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## What's In Your Dancebag?

### Capoeira master Mestre Eclilson de Jesus



#### Uniform

The *abada*, consisting of white cotton pants and a *camisa*, a T-shirt.

#### Berimbau

A string instrument and the lead instrument of a *roda*.

#### Pandeiro

The drum played in a *roda*.

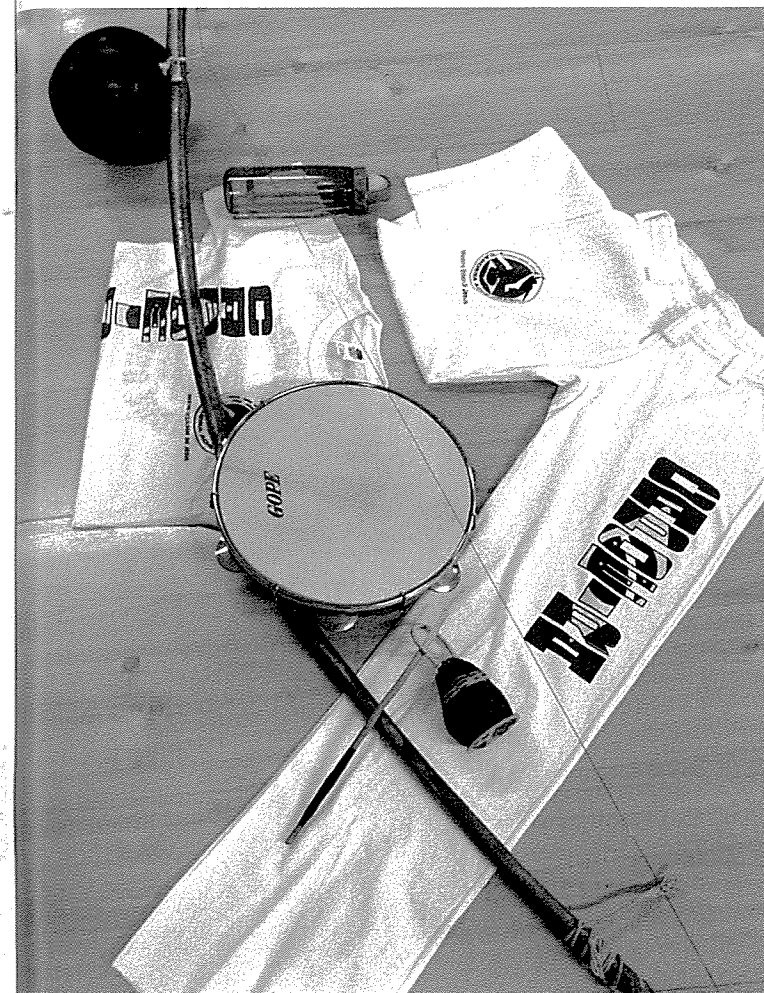
#### Bottle of alkaline water

I prefer it to plain water as it helps contribute to a better pH balance in the body.

#### There isn't room for much else

In capoeira, less is more – remove bulky jewelry and piercings, and trim your nails. This is for the safety of you and your partner – you will be in close contact with one another. ~

Mestre Eclilson de Jesus is a master (mestre), the highest rank of capoeira artist. He has devoted over thirty-four years to capoeira and established what is possibly one of Canada's first capoeira groups. He received his first degree mestre belt in 1995 and, in 2007, he was acknowledged with a second degree mestre belt in recognition of his years of dedication to teaching, training and promoting capoeira. His passion and generosity to the art form is shared through the Capoeira Aché Brasil Academy. It is headquartered in Vancouver, with studios all over the world including Brazil, China, France, Japan and Malaysia.



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