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FEATURING  
Contra-Mestre Tisza &  
Mestre Bobby Cooper

## CAPOEIRA ANGOLA CENTER NEWSLETTER

### 2010: HISTORY CONTINUES WITHIN THE CAC COMMUNITY

*Two more members of the CAC community are honored as Mestre João Grande gives recognition to Contra-Mestre Tisza and Mestre Bobby Cooper.*

THIS HAS been an eventful year at the Capoeira Angola Center as Mestre João Grande has honored some of his students, giving well-deserved recognition to five of his disciples. The Capoeira Angola Center of Mestre João Grande, it's students, and community would like to congratulate two more of it's camaradas:



*Contra-Mestre Tisza and Mestre João Grande*  
PHOTO: Gya Watson

### Contra-Mestre Tisza (August 21, 2010)

TISZA COELHO (Rio de Janeiro, 1966) began Capoeira in 1981 with Mestre Garrincha. In 1982 she started performing with folkloric groups. Tisza was part of the first female group in Brazil to perform at the National Capoeira Meeting in Rio de Janeiro (1984). It was the first time in world history that Capoeira Masters had seen 30 women together doing everything in Capoeira: music, games, drums, and Maculele.

TISZA STARTED teaching Capoeira in 1987 while she was studying pedagogy. She met Mestre João Grande in 1986 in Salvador and soon they worked together on a project in the south of Bahia (Santa Luzia dos Pretos) in 1988.

TISZA MOVED to Europe in 1991, where she lived in Paris and later Amsterdam to teach Capoeira. During her time in Europe, she travelled and performed in several countries: France, Italy, Finland, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Portugal and Czechoslovakia. In 1992 she did the first Capoeira workshop in Bratislava, Slovakia, introducing Capoeira to the country for the first time at the National Dance and Theatre School. IN 1993 Tisza moved to Boston (USA) and started teaching at MIT University (Cambridge, MA). In August of 1994 she decided to move to NYC and practice Capoeira Angola with Mestre João Grande. By moving to NYC, Tisza put teaching aside in order

to become a student and learn the language of Mestre João Grande's Capoeira. Because of this great opportunity Tisza developed her skills in music by working with music ensembles, singing and playing percussion.

TISZA MOVED to Serra Grande (Bahia) in 2004 and started sharing Mestre João Grande's legacy in rural areas teaching at schools, community places and at her own academy. Since then she is continually developing a project called Fazenda Cultural Ouro Verde and DanceBatuKeira Fest with her life partner Cabello Rolim where the goal is to preserve and spread Mestre João Grande's Capoeira Angola and enforce oral traditions of Brazil. Currently Tisza plays with an instrumental band "Chorinho Brasil," sings with Ouro Verde Samba Band, teaches Capoeira Angola at Centro Cultural Barracao D'Angola and tours all over Brasil and abroad leading Capoeira Angola workshops.

TISZA IS in NYC every year and she continues to be an active member at the Capoeira Angola Center of Mestre João Grande. In 2008 and 2010 she was part of Capoeira Angola Center Conferences in NYC teaching Maculele and samba classes, and assisting with Mestre João Grande's Capoeira classes.

TISZA IS one of the few of the 1st generation of Capoeira women in Brazil and has dedicated her whole life to work with Capoeira. Next year she will celebrate her 30th anniversary in Capoeira along with 16 years with Mestre João Grande. "Capoeira gives a lot to us, and to be with Mestre is a divine opportunity and great inspiration", Tisza says.

TISZA'S RECOGNITION as Contra-Mestre of Capoeira Angola fills us with pride. She becomes the first woman to receive such honor from Mestre João Grande and consequently she is a groundbreaking figure. Contratulations Contra-Mestre Tisza!

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All photos are from public archives unless otherwise indicated.

All content is reviewed and approved by Mestre João Grande.

## Mestre Robert "Bobby" Cooper

(October 24, 2010)



Mestre Cooper and Mestre João Grande

PHOTO: Mestre Bobby Cooper

Robert Jerry Cooper was born in New York City in 1936. At the age of 30, as he was forming himself as a teacher in college, his interest in the martial arts began. Mestre Cooper was inspired by the iconic figures of Bruce Lee and Superman but soon became very aware that there was no African martial arts icon, so he took it upon himself to become one and succeeded. In 1967/68 he began his path in Tae Kwon Do and Jujitsu, and later on became one of the most renowned American figures in those arts.

WHILE ATTENDING New York University in 1975 he was introduced to a "black music" video as part of one of his classes. He was fascinated not only with the music, but with the movements that two of the "participants" in the video were doing. To most of his classmates they were dancing, but to his trained eye, he knew they were doing more: they

were actually defending and attacking, clear elements in the martial arts he was already studying. He decided right away that he wanted to learn that art, and in his quest to do so, he was introduced to a dance company called Viva Bahia. Mestre Cooper met Mestre Jelon Viera and Loremil Machado, capoeiristas and choreographers of Viva Bahia. He invited them to teach Capoeira on regular basis. In 1975 Capoeira began to spread on American soil, thanks to Mestre Cooper. From then on, many famous Capoeira figures have visited the United States and continue to do so even today.

IN 1990 a special figure was brought to the United States, his name was Mestre João Grande. He came along with Mestre Moraes, Mestre Cobra Mansa and other known capoeiristas who practiced Capoeira Angola. Mestre Cooper immediately noticed a difference from the style of Capoeira that he was first introduced to. Contrary to what he had seen in Capoeira to that day (strength, speed, aggression) this Capoeira Angola was different, it seemed slow and fast at the same time, and most distinctively it looked fun. It seemed to incorporate African traditions and it used three berimbaus instead of one. Mestre Cooper became fascinated by it.

MESTRE COOPER'S admiration and respect for Mestre João Grande goes beyond words: "Mestre João Grande is extremely skilled, subtle, deceptive, hard to predict. He is sincerely dedicated to improving all the time; He is a humble teacher and practitioner." He notices that although Mestre João Grande de-emphasizes combat verbally and his moves seem simple, they are full of malícia. "All moves have possibilities as I have seen in no other place." When Mestre João Grande's students teach "his system is repeated and successful." This, according to Mestre Cooper, exemplifies how Mestre João Grande is not only an extraordinary teacher, but has the ability to create good teachers as well which is not easy. "His students are serious about what they do" even when Mestre is travelling (which he does quite frequently) his students "faithfully come daily and follow the rules." Classes and rodas follow the same rules and expectations as when Mestre is around.

"MESTRE JOÃO Grande gave me a great honor. I was surprised and shocked. This creates a greater responsibility and I will do my best to earn it," Mestre Cooper says. Over the years during his practice and involvement with Capoeira Angola Center, Mestre Cooper has diligently documented games, rodas, and special moments with his photo and video cameras. He wants to take his photo and video collection of Capoeira Angola to the next level. "Mestre João Grande is an undiscovered treasure and we have him right here". He plans to classify and secure the many years of video and picture archives he has created so that he may place it in the safe hands of a credible institution for historical preservation so that it may be available for future generations. "History makes itself and it is not replaceable. It cannot be duplicated and there is only one Mestre João Grande. This information cries to be preserved."

ALL OF the students at the Capoeira Angola Center in New York and around the world are honored to have Mestre Cooper, the first African-American from the United States named Mestres of Capoeira by Mestre João Grande, as part of our Capoeira family. Congratulations Mestre Cooper!

### *SPECIAL THANKS FROM The Capoeira Angola Center of Mestre João Grande*

AS WE approach the end of 2010, we'd like to take some time to thank Mestre João Grande for another year of sharing his knowledge and wisdom. We want to thank Mestre Cooper and our Contra-Mestres: Jurandir, Cabello, Mario and Tisza, for always being a source of inspiration. We also want to thank all the friends and students of the Capoeira Angola Center, who continue to contribute to our community. We look forward to a new year with plenty of Capoeira and many more great moments worth sharing!

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