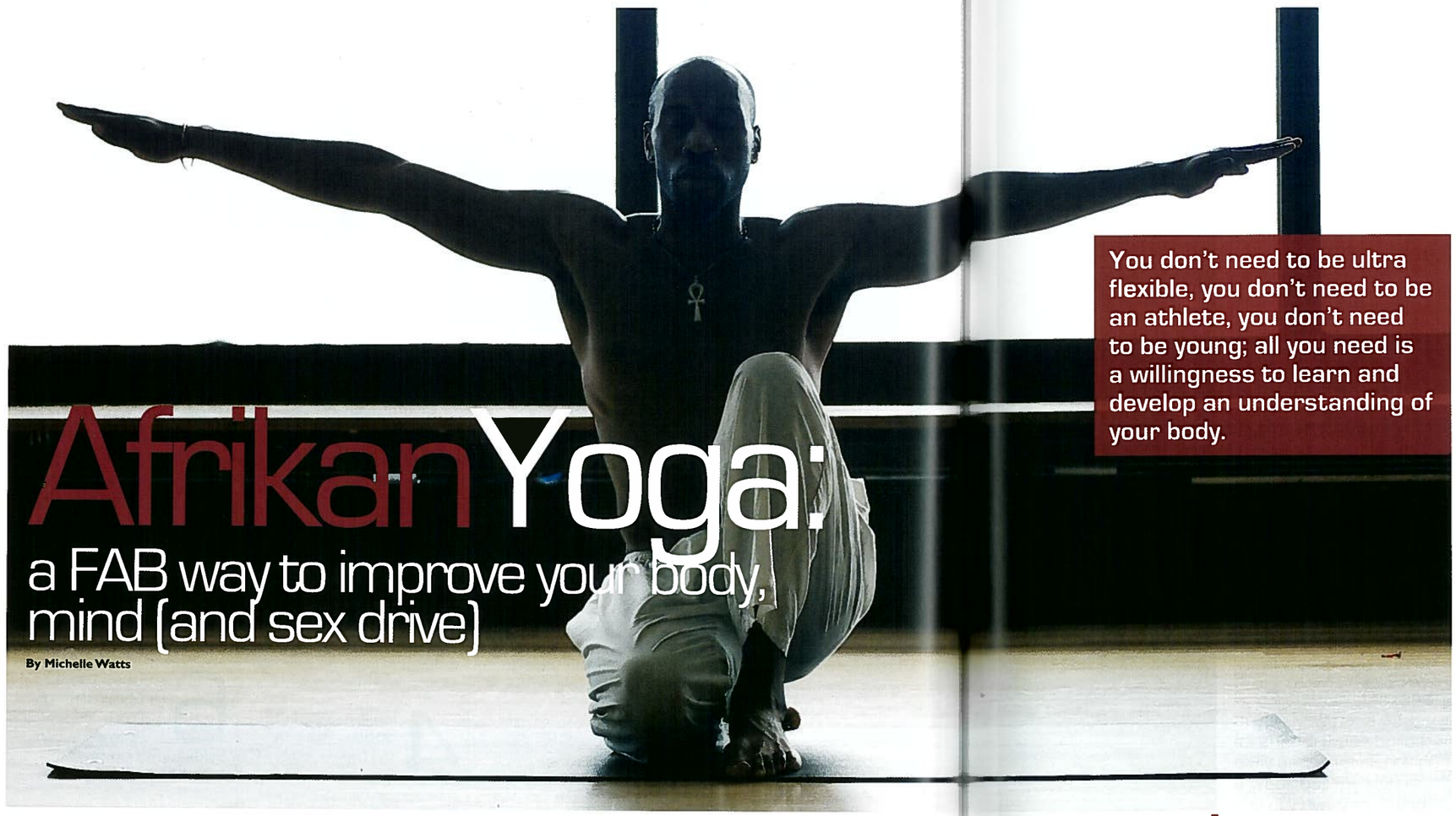

Afrikan Yoga: a FAB way to improve your body, mind (and sex drive)

By Michelle Watts

Think of yoga today and you are more likely to conjure up images of organic-loving New Age types looking serene in the lotus position, or A-list celebs photographed with their yoga mats under one arm, rather than the traditional yogis practising in solitude in the Indian jungle.

In the past few decades, yoga has exploded into a massive global industry, estimated at *$18billion, and is a staple class in most gyms. Yet, it's not a practice you would typically associate with black men from the 'hood.' Pablo Imani, founder of Afrikan Yoga, is flouting this convention.

Sitting in a café in Kampala, Uganda (where he resides when not teaching in London or other parts of the world) Pablo takes time out to tell *FAB* all about the origins and benefits of Afrikan Yoga.

Q You grew up in Manchester, UK - how did you come to found Afrikan Yoga?

I was into dance as a youngster and had a love for stretching, so much so it became a bit of an addiction. One day, my brother's girlfriend saw me stretching and seeing how supple I was, she introduced me to hatha yoga. But yoga was not something I thought was cool. I thought, "I'm a black man from the 'hood'…" Yoga was not something I would tell my friends about, so I did it in private.

I later got involved in African martial arts and began to learn the ancient art of stretching, and by now this was becoming cool to me. I wanted to learn more about my African self, so I started reading books by African scholars and got introduced to Dr. Muata Ashby, author of *Egyptian Yoga*. We met in London and had a discussion about yoga originating from Africa. I wanted to know more, particularly about the healing practices, so I started reading and learning from books and decided it was something I wanted to go deeper with.

> "One of the key health benefits is derived from improved blood circulation, which lowers high blood pressure."

Q So what is Afrikan Yoga and how does it differ from other forms of yoga?

Yoga is universal; the practice, philosophy and idea of re-connecting or connecting to your higher self or to the divine is a universal principle. Every indigenous culture around the world has some form of practice that does this. Yoga, originally called Smai or Sema was practised in ancient Egypt. The main differences in Afrikan Yoga are that it's not guru based and there are 24 to 34 different postures in the Afrikan system, whereas the yoga practised today has 8,400 as different teachers continually add their own variations.

So, I practise the most ancient form of yoga, which incorporates postures, dance, Hudu (Afrikan Tai Chi), visualisation, meditation and hikau.

Q How easy is it to learn Afrikan Yoga, do you need to be ultra flexible?

No, this is a myth that needs to be broken! You don't need to be ultra flexible, you don't need to be an athlete, you don't need to be young; all you need is a willingness to learn and develop an understanding of your body.

Q What are the health and physical benefits of Afrikan Yoga?

One of the key health benefits is derived from improved blood circulation, which lowers high blood pressure. It also keeps the heart healthy, lowers calories, detoxifies the blood, improves coordination, releases stress and anxiety, helps your digestive system, improves and tones your muscle structure, strengthens you and improves your balance and overall wellbeing. Oh, and it gives you a spirit of youthfulness and improves your libido. I remember one of my students in London saying that she was telling her friends to do Afrikan Yoga because it was so sexy!

Q How important is diet to Afrikan Yoga?

A pure plant diet helps to purify the mind. Eating meat adds too many toxins to the body, so this kind of goes against the practice of detoxifying your body. I'm not one to dictate what you should eat, but I would say let your diet be balanced; lots of fruit, lots of vegetables and lots of wholegrain and you'll be fine.

Q Yoga encompasses more than physical exercise, how does it impact your lifestyle?

Yoga is not a schedule or something you timetable into your week, it is a lifestyle. It's like the five fingers on your hand: one is proper exercise, two is nutrition, three is meditation, four is positive affirmations or positive thinking and the fifth is devotion – how you treat other people and respect the planet. These are all the things that make up Afrikan Yoga.

Q Yoga is not typically associated with African men; do you have many practising Afrikan Yoga?

I have a lot of black men who practise Afrikan Yoga, unfortunately, not many become teachers so I have an urge to initiate more of them. I have found a difference between African men in Africa, who tend to be more interested in the practice than women here. But in Europe and America, I find more women than men are practising yoga, which is an interesting contrast.

Q What would you say to encourage people to take up Afrikan Yoga?

If you are training and you find your body is really stiff, try Afrikan Yoga. If you find you are very anxious or developing high blood pressure, then try it. If you want to get rid of your 'spare tyre' around your waist, then please try Afrikan Yoga. If you want to improve your libido, then do Afrikan yoga!

I'd also say pick up my book or DVD to find out more about it.

Q Where can people find Afrikan Yoga classes?

There are instructors in London and you can get information from my Facebook page. I run retreats around the world as well as a teacher training course in Uganda. **FIN**

Sounds like Afrikan Yoga is taking fitness back to the fundamentals and growing worldwide. It also sounds like a FAB alternative to the treadmill! **FAB**

Source: * http://wikileaksnews.net/bali-profits-from-business-of-soul-searching.html

Book and DVD: *Afrikan Yoga: A Practical Guide to Wellbeing Through Smai Posture, Breath and Meditation*

Afrikan Yoga UK classes are available to book now on **www.afrikanyoga.com**