

Horses Are Born



Dancing

By PAULA JOSA-JONES, MA, CMA

Photographer: Jeff Anderson Dancers: Dillon Paul, DeAnna Pellecchia, Ingrid Schatz, and Paola Styron, Rider: Brandi Rivera



A dancer and choreographer much of my life, I came back to riding on the cusp of middle age, hungry for horses - a deep passion of my childhood - now suddenly calling me. Shortly after beginning my early, awkward lessons, I begin to hear an inside voice saying, "I want to dance with them." I felt that I could dance into an even deeper connection with horses than my riding would allow.

In the Argentine tango, the dance allows you to see the music. There is a respect between partners, and a shared commitment to the dance. Finding the rhythm of elegant partnering between you and your horse requires the ability to improvise, to listen and to wait. At its best riding is a resplendent, unwritten language of skin, bone, nerve and fluid. True horsemanship is a shared rhyme and rhythm, a vibrant poetry of the flesh. At its very best, it is improvisatory, an unfolding jazz played by two bodies streaming a vernacular spoken in touch and skin and movement.

Horses are born dancing; theirs is an intricate kinesthetic language (Hearne), an understanding and language of touch, movement and sensual perception. Horses, like us, are playful, social, but unlike us, not burdened by the human habit of endlessly cycling through the detritus of the past and worries about the future. Dancers cultivate body-mind awareness and physical skill through a myriad of body-mind practices, including improvisation, the ability to invent movement and respond to external and internal cues spontaneously.

Over the past thirteen years, the dancers and I have tested out layers of this dance by following their beauty wherever it has led us. We have danced with Capprichio, my brilliant black Andalusian stallion, impeccably trained to Grand Prix by the gifted Sabine Schut-Kery. He brings an expressive charge, a fiery maleness and fierce presence to our dances. When we first introduced him to human flight

with the brilliant dancer/aerialist, Paola Styron, he was undone. Capprichio is a seasoned exhibition performer; but this human bird, lifting off the ground and floating, spiraling above his head was too much. But by the performance, when he and Paola flew across the arena, he at a full canter, her revolving in flight in the air about fifteen feet off the ground, he seemed to feel her soaring, delight in this new way of being with a human - a seamless duet.

With Escorial, the liberty horse trained by Sarah Hollis of Tintagel Enterprises, our experience was different. Escorial has a "divo" personality and insists on clarity from the dancers. He demands that we do the movement again and again, until it is right, until we are speaking perfectly. Because he is at liberty, he will leave the arena stage if we have offended or confused him. At the end of our performance, he lies down, and allows DeAnna and Ingrid to roll and suspend on his back - a contact improvisation. This is all the more astonishing, because Escorial will not tolerate a rider, feels it s below him to be mounted!

We have danced gloriously with Sanne, Roy Wind, Judgie, Goliath, Tillie, Djuma, Bijli, Mozart, and Norman. Each horse has his or her own ineffable nature, with highly specific lessons for us to learn, and an unstinting willingness to teach. They show up each day for the dance, teaching us that there is no boundary to beauty, no actual place where we end and they begin.

PAULA JOSA-JONES, MA, CMA, RSME/T, is a choreographer, director and equestrian. She premiered RIDE©, a groundbreaking work of equestrian dance theater. Paula is a certified Laban Movement Analyst, a registered Somatic Movement Therapist/Educator and Tellington TTEAM Practitioner. She includes in her teaching Body-Mind Centering (BMC), Authentic Movement, Pilates and Yoga.