



Shall We Dance?

There are more and more riders today, especially women, who want to learn how to ride in a light and balanced way. They are not interested in riding big, powerful gaits, or performing ground-covering movements with their horse laying heavily in their hands.

Their preference is to relax and glide from one movement to the next with the ease and fluidity of a ball room dancer. Many have a deep desire to create beauty with their equine partner, and it doesn't matter what breed of horse they have or what their discipline is. They dream of someday experiencing that floating, soft, cloud-like fantasy ride. Simply put, they want to dance with their horse.

Up until now there has not been a recognized venue that rewards and/or addresses these needs, however, an inspiring competition is being introduced that offers riders a way to learn and improve, while enjoying a very special journey with their equine partner.

This competition is called The Baroque Equestrian Games©. It embodies the original techniques and exercises of Classical Equitation as practiced in the Baroque Schools of Horsemanship when artistic riding reached its zenith.

The purpose of The Baroque Equestrian Games Competition is to help riders understand and experience this system of training, which was conceived out of an age that revered beauty, nature, and art in all its forms, including horsemanship. Therefore, the goal of this competition is to demonstrate the ART of Classical Horsemanship and be rewarded for the qualities to which it aspired.

This resourceful competition was created by Tina Cristiani Veder and Bruno Gonzalez of Caballos de los Cristiani. It is open to all breeds and they believe that every horse and rider can benefit and improve by correctly practicing the progressive exercises and patterns of the tests set forth in the Classical Schooling Section© of the Competition, however, this system of training had its origins in showcasing the unique abilities and qualities of our classical horses. It was, after all, our Iberians who were the glorious horses of the Baroque Period. They were heralded as the easiest to train, the most desired, and the finest of riding horses. As a result, they were instrumental in creating the Art of Classical Horsemanship during this period.

It is the opinion of Tina and Bruno, that The Baroque Equestrian Games Competition will serve as a venue to acknowledge and reward the Iberian breeds for their incredible contribution to classical equitation, while, at the same time, giving modern-day equestrians a clearer understanding of how to train, ride, show, and enjoy their horses using the system that was passed on to us by them.

Classical horses, especially in the United States, have not had a competition specifically created to reward their attributes and capabilities. Today most of the competitions that they are being shown in, including competitive dressage, are disciplines that were originally created to market and enhance the gaits and proficiencies of other breeds, but now The Baroque Equestrian Games offers a complete classical system of training and showing that was developed by and for our horses centuries ago. It celebrates what they can do better than all other equines, which is to become round, uphill, balanced, fluid, and light.

There are three Sections, or Segments, to The Baroque Equestrian Games Competition. Each Section reflects a way in which the Baroque horses were trained, ridden, and presented. The first is The Classical Schooling Section©. It includes four Phases (levels) of Training beginning with walk and trot, and ultimately progressing to the High School Phase, which embraces full collection. Each Phase of Training includes 3 tests. There are a total of 12 tests overall.

The tests in The Classical Schooling Section are comprised of exercises designed and practiced by the Classical Masters themselves to create a horse with balance, suppleness, and self-carriage, and to produce a rider with proficiency, finesse, and grace.

The Classical Schooling Section determines what Phase of Training the horse and rider will be entering in the following two Sections of the competition. It employs a different scoring system than competitive dressage and puts emphasis on different criteria. It can be ridden in any style of tack including dressage, western, or heritage. The attire requirement for this Section is a vest of any style or period, worn over a white, or light colored, long sleeve shirt. Attire and tack must match in style.

The Baroque Equestrian Games Section© is next. It employs certain games and maneuvers practiced during the Baroque period to test the training of the horse and the skill and accuracy of the rider. Every Phase of Training is represented in this Section. Even an Initiate, or beginning, walk-trot rider can challenge and enjoy themselves by performing the test exercises put forth in this Section.

Nothing in the Baroque Games Section is timed. As in all the tests, the goal is to present a picture of grace and harmony by the rider, and relaxation, lightness and effortless by the horse. If done correctly, the maneuvers and exercises in the Baroque Games Section will improve the competence of the rider, while increasing the responsiveness and correctness of the horse.

The Presentation Section© is the third Section. It is the showcase of the competition. It gives the rider and horse a way in which to express the unity and harmony achieved by creating a costumed, musical freestyle that is reminiscent of the gala equestrian court displays of old.

Any Phase of Training previously established in the Classical Schooling Section is eligible to perform in this section. The rider is free to choose whatever attire, tack, costume or period of time they desire to portray, including fantasy or futuristic. The Presentation Section honors Classical Equitation as a performance art. It is limited only by one's imagination and eventually will be open to teams or quadrilles.

The Baroque Equestrian Games is being introduced this year through demonstrations and schooling shows. A judge's and trainer's certification program is underway, and many from across the US have already requested to join up. The first demonstrations were at the Region 6 ERAHC show held in Mt. Holyoke, MA on July 22-24, and the IALHA Regional ERAHC Classic Show held in Lexington, VA on Sept 2-4. It was enthusiastically received at both shows, and a series of clinics and schooling shows are being planned for the winter in Florida.

It is the hope of its creators that The Baroque Equestrian Games© will act as a vortex to connect modern horsemen to the heritage and knowledge of a time-honored system that created the most beautiful movements that have ever united man and horse.

In their opinion, this festive, yet educational competition offers even ordinary riders a chance to feel extraordinary about their riding by giving them a joyful way to learn, challenge, fulfill, and express their dreams. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Creation of Beauty is Art', therefore, we pose the question, shall we just ride or..... Shall we Dance?