

extraordinary people



Dancing with Fire under the Wings of a Dream

By **CLAUDIA LESCHONSKI** | Photography by **PAULA DASILVA**

A popular saying states that "zebras are horses of a different color" - which can mean, amongst other things, that a lot of beauty can be found in diversity. In this profession which is like no other, and could be described as more of a calling than a daytime job - the dedication demands attention round the clock. And who could argue that this beauty is not found in an equestrian spectacle which combines dazzling horsemanship, handsome Iberian horses and medieval pageantry, complete with falconry? Such is "Le Zebre", an equestrian group founded by Silvia Elena Resta, an Italian woman who from early age set out on a quest for the world's finest showmanship on horseback.

Silvia was born in Treviglio, a small town near Bergamo, Italy, 30 years ago. Her family traces its roots back to an old noble Russian line, bringing forth cavalrymen as well as dramatists and poets. Silvia likes to think that her passion for horses and for the scenic arts originated in the Russia of the czars. Her devotion to the theatre and fascination of the circus, brought forth her desire to become a trainer and show rider of Iberian horses. Further inspiration would arise from watching "Zingaro", the equestrian theatre founded by Bartabas, and Manolo's Centaur Theatre, both from France. Later on, falconry peaked her interest and became an intricate part of her equestrian presentations.

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Of her several equine actors, Silvia considers the Andalusian Fidalgo, with his creamello coat and blue eyes, to be the greatest magnet for the public. "He has a strong personality and is a bit of a character. He likes to show off better than to rehearse: many times things do not go so well during training, but once on the stage he will behave impeccably and always give his best." Talons and hooves, manes and wings.

In recent years, falconry both as a sport and show has regained popularity in Europe and North America. This ancient form of hunting, enables the audience to reminisce about the pageantry held in the Middle Ages; with the beautiful birds of prey holding a mystique all their own. Equestrian artistic performers have become astutely aware of this, and have concluded that if the public is already fascinated by horses and hunting birds separately, together they pull off a stunning display.

Silvia herself has always been captivated by falconry and "by the idea of empathy and trust that must develop between

the bird and its master: it is put to fly in absolute freedom, and yet one must be certain of its will to return. Thus, a bird may share with us a sense of freedom, of conquering the skies". Still according to Silvia, "It isn't hard to get horses and birds used to each other; this part of the training process, demands the utmost in patience and kindness."

Little routine, lots of work

For Silvia and her group of performers, daily work involves constant training, preparation and caring for the animals, as well as study and research for new presentations. The many details include; choreography and stunt work, costumes and dramatic content, and public relations to develop new business contacts. According to Silvia, "passion and dedication must go hand in hand to achieve any constant success in this area; ability to communicate with the public is also important". Silvia also gives riding and training lessons, and several working students are a constant part of her entourage. Always working to perfect her presentations both from technical and artistic viewpoints, Silvia states that "we would like to go on a more extensive tour, perhaps as a part of an already established circuit. We are working to obtain a sponsorship, which would enable us to develop and promote many young equestrian artists among our students, many of whom have great potential for success". •