

11/8/09

Brad Rayl
Board Member: Kansas State Fair Board
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Re: Cavallo Equestrian Arts/2009 Kansas State Fair

In 60 years of attending the Kansas State Fair (Yes, my folks took us when we were babies since Dad was president of the Hutch Jaycees who worked the grandstand at the night show every year. We three were wrapped in blankets and slept in bleachers next to mom. When we were old enough to walk, we spent each day with Dad at his Eaton Metal exhibit, handing out wooden nickels and talking to passers-by through the hidden microphone in the 10' Metal Man Statue. When I was 6, I was old enough to ride my bike to Haskard's house (which shared a back fence with the Fairgrounds), climb the fence and walk over to the horse barns. When I was 8, I rode my own horse over to the barns, where I spent the next 50+ years of my Fair-going life.), I had never seen an exhibition which captivated me as much as the Cavallo Equestrian Arts.

Cavallo's combination of dressage, vaulting, trick riding, and aerial acrobatics displayed top levels of expertise in each area. As a charter member(1973) of the US Dressage Federation, I'm hyper-critical of dressage performances. I watched 12 shows of Cavallo, and in each, Olissio Zoppe showed the classical movements of volte, passage, piaffe, Spanish Walk, levade and pesade to perfection. (I had never seen a pesade pirouette, much less a double 360, which was thrilling.) The exquisite lightness of his riding was a joy to watch – no spurs, no kicking, no whipping, no harsh pulling on severe bits – the aides were invisible (as they are supposed to be but tragically rarely are in any horse venue). He wove the dressage into theatre, making it entertaining for the non-dressage crowd as well.

Although I'm not an expert in any of the other areas, I tried a little trick riding before I started jumping, and I've had dressage students from France who were vaulters, so I'm familiar with the talent and training necessary to perform those disciplines at that highest level. Cavallo was superb. The general public may not have realized the high difficulty level of the movements and tricks they were seeing, but knowledgeable horsemen were extremely impressed. It was such a pleasure to watch the horsemen of Cavallo that I hope they are invited back for next year.

The show is so colorful and charged with action, and the horses are so well conditioned and beautifully presented, it is visual art as well as skillful horsemanship. I photographed the performances with Olissio Zoppe's permission. *Horses in Art Magazine* has accepted my article and 5 photos for publication. (I'm hoping for a cover, which would be my third horse magazine cover.) I've entered other Cavallo photos in juried contests, including *Ex Arte Equinus* and *National Geographic Magazine's* annual photo contests.

George Bernard Shaw, when asked at age 93 whether he missed his contemporaries who had passed on, said, "No, I miss what I once was." I heard numerous folks at the Cavallo performances comment in jest: "When I was younger, I could do that!" Realistically, none of us could do that, no matter how far back we turned the hands of time. But in our dreams, we are all Cavallo.

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