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Lippizzaner stallions today at Germain Arena

By MARY WOZNIAK

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The graceful movements, flowing white manes and flashing hoofs of the Lipizzaner stallions are coming to two Southwest Florida arenas.

Today the world-famous horses will perform at the Turner Center in Arcadia.

On Saturday, Jan. 19, their equine dance can be seen at Germain Arena in Estero.

The stallions are on their 38th anniversary tour, originating from a Lipizzaner training and breeding center called White Stallion Productions in Orlando.

They perform across the United States and all over the world, including Ireland, Norway, The Netherlands, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand, said Gary Lashinsky, the show's producer.

The choreography and acrobatics performed by the highly trained horses were developed more than 400 years ago, Lashinsky said.

But their movements — often equated to a ballet — come from a warlike, not artistic tradition.

The horses were bred for battle, and the maneuvers were meant to protect the rider in battle against the enemy.

"These are not tricks," Lashinsky said. "Tricks are for circus horses."

The maneuvers are taught according to principles of a discipline first originated by a Greek soldier and historian named Xenophon 2,500 years ago, he said.



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A Lipizzaner performs.

The Lipizzaners have the Spanish blood of the Iberian horse mixed with the bloodlines of the Arabian, African Barb and other European breeds, Lashinsky said.



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Lipizzaner stallions

IF YOU GO

- What: Performances by the Lipizzaner Stallions
- When:
 - 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 19 at Germain Arena in Estero
- Cost:
 - At Germain Arena, tickets range from \$20.50 to \$27.50. Call 948-7825 or visit ticketmaster.com
- Information: lipizzaner.com

AIRS ABOUT THE GROUND

Here are three movements performed by the Lipizzaners in this dramatic section of the show.

- Capriole: The horse tucks its front legs under its chest and kicks back, a move first meant to strike at foot soldiers on the ground.
- Mezair: The horse rears on its hind legs with the rider in saddle and comes down to strike an enemy on the ground.
- Courbette: The horse balances on the hind legs and then jumps, keeping the hind legs together and the forelegs off the ground.

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Their military history began in 1580 when Archduke Karl of the Austrian empire acquired the horses from Lipizza, a part of Slovenia, he said.

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The archduke wanted to create a horse worthy of royalty as well as the best war horse.

"They were like the smart bombs of the 16th century," Lashinsky said. Before technology was used in battle, there were horses and riders, he said.

"Now we preserve that as a living form of equestrian art."

Dressage is performed on the ground and has several different levels. Each level increases the horse's athleticism and ability to meet the beat and cadence of music, so it appears as if they are dancing.

The highest level of dressage is called Grand Prix, which is now a competitive Olympic sport.

Airs Above the Ground is the name given to a series of spectacular movements when the horse becomes airborne.

There are about 3,300 Lipizzaners throughout the world today, Lashinsky said.

They were nearly wiped out at the end of World War II when a few stallions and group of mares and foals were taken to Houstau in German-occupied Czechoslovakia, he said.

The horses were being killed to feed hungry troops and refugees.

The horses were rescued by General George S. Patton in 1945.

A Disney movie, "The Miracle of the White Stallions," recounts the tale.

Lashinsky imports his horses from the Piber Stud Farm and Spanish Riding School of Vienna. His training center has 43, with two more that will be born soon.

The horses are born dark brown or black and eventually turn white at about 7 to 8 years old, he said. Lashinsky doesn't begin training them until they reach age 4.

In Arcadia and Estero, about 12 to 14 of the stallions will dance to music ranging from military marches to Big Band.

And yes, you too can own a Lipizzaner. The farm sells older mares for prices ranging from about \$10,000 to \$15,000, Lashinsky said.
