

THE PASSIONATE ENTERTAINER

Scott Benjamin

by Urszula Leczycka – Arabhorsepromotion.com
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With a lifetime of animal industry experience, Scott has been actively involved with Arabian horses for nearly 30 years. Starting from his family farm - Benjamin Arabians - through his years as a youth rider and passionate Animal Science student, he went on to become a judge, breeder and one of the most recognizable managers in Arabian horse community, working for some of the leading Arabian horse farms internationally, including Bishop Lane Farm, Cre-Run, Toskhara Arabians Blommerod Stud (Sweden), Michalow State Stud (Poland) and Aria International. Currently as the director of an equine consultancy, Benjamin Equine based in Calgary, Scott is also proud to serve on the Arabian Breeders World Cup Show Management Committee and is probably the only American in the community who speaks the difficult Polish language fluently. His charismatic "encouraging scream" during the bid spotting has become one of the trademarks of the Pride of Poland auction



Scott calling in bids for ELANDRA - 2005 Pride of Poland Top Seller



Scott leading Pride of Poland 2006 as Auctioneer





Discussing the Lifetime Achievement Award Presentation with Judy Forbis & Scott Bailey at the 2009 Arabian Breeders World Cup

in which Scott has been involved for many years. Revisiting the past and recalling his wide experience, Scott tells some secrets about how to be a wise judge, breeder and manager and the incredible way he acquired this unique knowledge...

TuttoArabi: Scott – do you feel more Polish or more American?

Scott Benjamin: To be honest, I feel very much a citizen of the world.

I grew up in the United States and am proudly a 16th generation North American. I think there must be some genetic influence that has been passed down through the generations that feeds my passion for travel and discovery. There are many countries and cultures that have changed me as a person and made me better but the United States, Poland & Canada have had the most significant influence on me. I owe my optimism and passion to my American childhood and education. I became an adult in Poland – 5 years of hard life lessons during the most critical decade of my “20s”. My mature outlook and perspective on life and the world was shaped by that Polish Experience. For the last 11 years I have called Canada home – it is the perfect middle ground between Europe & the United States – the American “feel” with European “sensitivity”. It is the best place to live and raise a family which is my highest priority in life at the moment. I definitely feel more Canadian than I do American in terms of my place in the world. As for Poland and “feeling Polish” – it will always be that special place that changed my world forever and I definitely can identify with “feeling” Polish and I am proud to be identified so.

TA: For over 30 years, you have been active in many va-

rious fields of the Arabian horse industry – which point of your career was for you the most important and which one the most satisfying?

SB: There are many aspects of my life in the Arabian industry that I enjoy – all of them are satisfying for different reasons. I love to judge – it’s a privilege I take very seriously. Since I first discovered judging at university, I have had a natural affinity for the artistic and analytical aspects of this craft. It allows me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the pluses and minuses of each horse and of the various bloodlines. It has taken me around the world to see so many great horses from diverse breeding programs. One of the greatest moments for me as a judge was judging



Michalow Stud winning the Breeders Cup at the 2009 World Cup in Las Vegas with Supreme Champion Mare EMANDORIA (Gazal Al Shaqab x Emanda by Ecaho) with Greg Gallun & Reserve Supreme Champion Mare EMBRA (Monogramm x Emilda by Pamir) with Rafael Curti. Both mares are members of the EMIGRACJA family.

desert-bred Arabians in Saudi Arabia. These horses were absolutely magnificent – well conformed, with incredible athletic ability and unmistakably Arabian. It was a rare privilege that ignited my passion for the breed anew. My main passion has always been breeding – everything I do with the Arabian horse revolves around this cornerstone philosophy. My tenure at the Polish State Studs – especially Michalow, was the best classroom to learn the triumphs and tragedies of breeding and management. These two are the aspects of the industry in which I am most in my element – like my passion for the Arabian horse, breeding and management are just part of my DNA. Education is another aspect of my career that I thoroughly enjoy. Sharing my experiences and knowledge with others to make the world better for themselves and for the Arabian horse is a very high priority in life. Promotion, whether event management or an article in a trade magazine, is also a job that I approach with enthusiasm. I love horses and people so I find great satisfaction in brokering – bringing to-



Selling FALLADA (Monogramm x Fanaberia by Probat) at the Pride of Poland 2009



Selling KWESTURA (Monogramm x Kwesta by Pesennik) for the record sum of 1.125 million euro in Pride of Poland 2008



A quiet moment with ELANDRA (Monogramm x Erlanda by Eukaliptus) - Scottsdale Champion & US Reserve National Champion Mare



Working the ring at Pride of Poland 2007

the great horses and great people in a win-win situation. Good event management is essentially brokering on large scale. My calendar revolves around the World Cup in Las Vegas & Polish Arabian Horse Days. I'm very proud to be involved with both. The Vegas Show is very much a



"My beloved EMIGRANTKA (Eukaliptus x Emigracja by Palas) - Polish National Champion, European Champion and Dam of Distinction." At Michalow in 1995



"One of my favourite pictures - a fantastic moment with Polish National & European Champion ESKLAWA (Eukaliptus x Ekstaza by Celebes) at the Michalow Breeding Parade in 1995"

labour of love for all of us. The success of the show in such a short period of time is truly gratifying. For almost a decade now I have been contributing to multiple facets of Polish Arabian Horse Days and I truly enjoy every opportunity to be involved there. I love to be in and out of the ring. Bid spotting at the auction is a thrill for me - I thoroughly enjoy creating a fun and entertaining atmosphere while selling some great horses.



"My first summer in Poland as a student with Polish National Junior Champion ESTARDA (Gadir x Estancja by Palas). She was my first training horse in Poland (as a yearling). ESTARDA would later be named European Reserve Champion Mare before her untimely death."

TA: Let's talk about the beginning – how did you get interested in Arabian horses particularly – when and why?

SB: I really wanted a motorbike. I was nine and my dad insisted on using the small sum of money my brother and I had earned doing odd jobs to buy a pony. One pony became two in six months... The second pony happened to be a Half-Arabian/Welsh named Trojan's Sir John. He was 17 when we bought him and could do everything. We owned "John" for the majority of his life – he passed away at 35 years of age. This little pony was the perfect ambassador for the Arabian breed. His willingness to do anything asked of him with skill and kindness convinced my father to purchase our first Arabian the following year. The collection of horses eventually grew into a small family operation known as Benjamin Arabians. After about 6 months I knew my life would be involved with Arabians in some major way. I read all the magazines, went to the shows, rode and competed. By the time I left for university, I was the chief caretaker of the entire horse operation of over 30 horses. I decided to pursue veterinary medicine at Michigan State, which coincidentally had a well established herd of Arabian horses. My involvement as an employee at the university farm enlightened me to change my major to Animal Science and to pursue a career in management rather than medicine. It also kept me very actively involved with the Arabian breed. This university connection then led to a study opportunity in Poland and the rest just fell into place. Three life-changing incidents and three immensely influential men changed the course of my life. I thank my father for having the foresight to realize that a pony was a better "passion builder" in life than a motorbike. I thank Dr. John Shelle from Michigan State University for nurturing that passion and giving me the tools and courage to make that passion a career. And I thank Director Ignacy Jaworowski from Michalow Stud for giving an overly en-

thusiastic young man the opportunity of a lifetime to learn in the greatest living classroom on earth.

TA: Are there any special Arabian horses that changed your experience as a horseman?

SB: Since that Half-Arabian pony there are many special horses that have left a lasting impression on me. In Poland, it was the mares: Wizja – she was the epitome of grace and presence with the best eyes I have ever witnessed – period. Even infirmed, she was radiant. Etruria – it was as if a spotlight from heaven was always shining down on her. Emigracja has been an inspiration – to have witnessed the accomplishments of her extraordinary descendants first-hand from nearly the beginning has been a unique privilege. I adored Eukaliptus as a horse and a sire – confident and regal with the eyes into which you could see eternity. His daughters were my favorite collection of mares. Amongst these, my uber-favorite was Emigrantka – she will always be the "perfect" Arabian mare in my humble opinion. All class and charm with the sweetest character. The Monogramm impact has been another epochal era with which I was very involved from the beginning. I knew all of the great ones as foals – Kwestura, Zagrobla, Palmira, Fallada, Ekstern, Ganges. My favorite amongst all of those is Elandra. She is Emigracja, Eukaliptus and Monogramm in one irresistible package!

TA: Why did the young American graduate student decide to take his first career steps in far away Poland, a country behind the Iron Curtain at that time?

SB: The Iron Curtain had just fallen months earlier when I arrived in June of 1991. Michigan State University offered the opportunity to pursue a Senior Thesis in an area of the student's choice. I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to learn more about the art and philosophy of breeding (bloodlines) and to learn the secret to creating a better Arabian horse in the real world. When all of the inquiries sent to farms in North America were met with skepticism, I decided to inquire with the States Studs of Poland. The reply was not affirmative – more like "that sounds like a good idea". For me, anything short of "no" was a neon flashing "YES". I was offered the opportunity to spend the summer at Michalow working and learning on the farm. I was a sponge – I actually don't remember sleeping – just working with the horses and reading all the pedigree books available in English. Director Jaworowski and I had a very good rapport – I think he appreciated my enthusiasm and passion. I begrudgingly left Poland in mid-October to write and defend my thesis "The Philosophy of Arabian Horse Breeding in Poland". By that time, I had fallen in love with everything about the country – especially the horses and the people – and couldn't imagine working anywhere else. I phoned the Director after my formal defense and asked for a job – he told me to buy a ticket and come as soon as I could! It was the choice that changed



Judging at the Diamond Showcase (Melbourne, Australia) in 2008

my career and the course of my life in general. For me, every activity in the Arabian horse world after Poland was indelibly shaped and affected by the Polish Experience.

TA: *Did you find the conditions of work and everyday living in Europe and Poland difficult?*

SB: *When I look back on it now, it all seems*



Scott judging the 2009 Al Khalediah Arabian Horse Festival

toes, some embarrassing knockdowns and a very bruised ego, I learned very quickly how to say Polish "prrr"... Food was an adjustment at the start... I had a very amusing experience with a soft-boiled egg on my first morning in Michalow having breakfast with the Director. Right up there with the all-time most embarrassing moments ever. One of my favorite stories is that of a visit by an elderly professor from the UK one summer afternoon. I had been working with the farrier all day. We had not taken a lunch break, we were hot, hungry, tired and had been pushed around all day by uncooperative yearling fillies. Director Jaworowski strolled into the barn with the professor, and in his characteristic style, decided to play a trick on her. He explained in his broken English that the standard at Michalow was such that all the grooms were to be fluent in the English language. He asked me to say something to her and I babbled off some fatigue-induced small talk with a very heavy American accent. She stared at me in amazement for several seconds, before replying very curtly "Well - they certainly don't speak English very well!". Most of the staff at Michalow are still convinced I don't speak English well... The Poles are very generous - thankfully. I could have not survived without their patience, tolerance and kindness.

TA: *What else did you learn, during the five years of your*



Scott with Dr. Marek Trela (Director of Janow Podlaski Stud) and Jen Miller (Horsefly Films) in May of 2009 on the final day of filming the Pride of Poland Video Catalogue"



Scott as Ringmaster at the Polish National Show 2009 - Organizing the presentation of the Mare Championship awards

was in Poland that I learned to be a global citizen and my sense of travel and adventure was nurtured. Nearly every aspect of my perspective on breeding and management was forged during my tenure in Poland. This has matured and expanded over the years, but the foundation was laid at Michalow and Janow Podlaski. I learned to appreciate the mare – they are the secret of every great breeding program. Every great stallion has a great dam. Cull ruthlessly – I learned to be brutally honest about every attribute of every horse. I will always be grateful to have been included in the semi-annual breeding inspections of the State Studs. The sheer numbers of horses to evaluate was a lesson in itself, not to mention being privy to the discussions about the present day horses from the men and women who had created and nurtured several generations of their ancestors. It was the greatest honour to learn from their experiences. I



The 1995 Polish National Show - Awards Presentation for the Senior Mare Class "A photo that sums up so much of my Polish Experience (from left to right) Izabella Zawadzka, Michalow Director Ignacy Jaworowski, class winner (and later that day Polish National Champion Mare) ESKLAWA, Stud Manager (current Director) Jerzy Bialobok, handler Tadeusz Wojtal and myself with second place WENDETA. All of these people had a profound influence in my life."

stay in Poland, that was important for your future career – besides becoming fluent in the Polish language?

SB: Speaking Polish has come in handy - in Poland. It also taught me to see the world from a global perspective. When I arrived I was very Amero-centric in my way of thinking. It was a crash course in tolerance and "thinking-outside-the-box". I learned to respect and honor cultural differences and the importance of "blending in" with the locals - and how to drink vodka in vast quantities... It

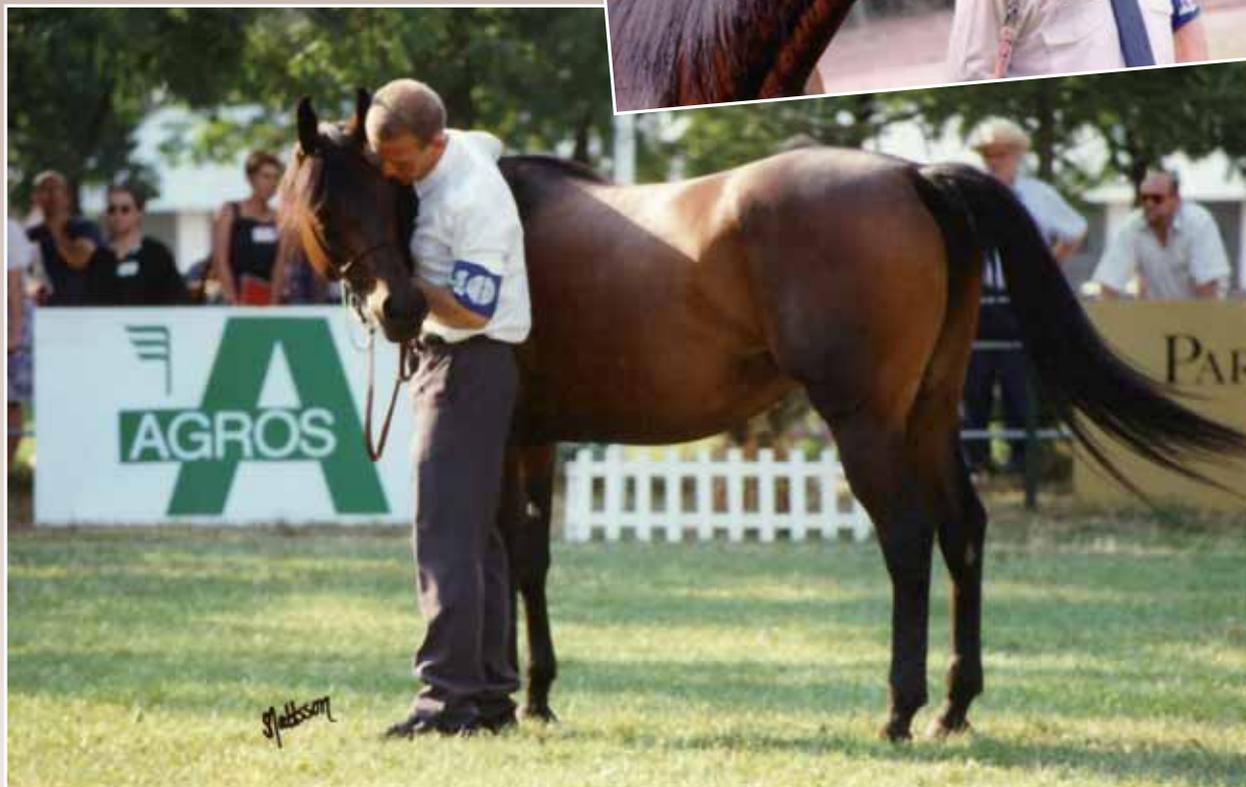


Scott showing PREMIA (Palas x Pliszka by Gedymin) to 1994 Polish National Champion Mare



"Polish Nationals 1995 with WENDETA (Palas x Weneda by Gedymin). We are waiting in the collecting paddock for our turn to show. She put on the show of a lifetime that afternoon and received several well deserved 20's for type, head & neck and movement. The memory of that afternoon always makes me smile."

learned about marketing and promotion preparing for the annual auctions and how a successful outreach must appeal to a broad array of cultures and perspectives. I learned how to REALLY brush a horse – there is no amount of shampoo or any fancy clip job that can produce the coat quality of a thorough daily grooming, often multiple times. I learned real horsemanship – how to communicate respectfully and get the most desired results with consistency and fairness. I was absolutely fascinated to discover the inherent social aptitude of horses raised in a herd environment. I learned to train and show a halter horse naturally – if a Polish mare can't teach you how it should be done properly, then you should seek a different profession. Run fast on a loose, elegant lead and she will do all the rest – remember to smile, have a good time and give her



"The other star of the 1995 Polish National Show for me was WIAZMA (Arbil x Wizja by El Paso). As the last daughter of WIZJA, she was a personal favorite. She had her mother's incredible eyes and commanding show ring attitude. She was always a sure bet for 20's in movement, but was a real challenge to show. You always had to be so aware with her. She had this bad habit of

striking at her handler in the show ring - she broke Tadeusz Wojtal's foot at the Polish National Show in 1993. Beyond the show ring excitement, WIAZMA was truly a sweet mare. I gave her a big hug in the championship line-up just to show the audience that she was really a big pussycat. WIAZMA sold in Pride of Poland 2007 to Paul Gheysens of Belgium."



"A Blast from the Past - with Shirley & Charlie Watts and WIOLETA (Palas x Weneda by Gedymin). Halsdon purchased WIOLETA (a full sister to WENDETA on the previous pages) in 1993 at the Polish Prestige Auction. She later went on to be Towerlands Reserve Champion Mare."

a well deserved pat on the way out of the ring (smile).

TA: How did you use the experience you got in Poland and further in Sweden going back to the US? – while it seems the market, fashion for Arabian type, disciplines and methods of work seem to be so different?

SB: My experiences in Europe certainly made me an outsider, but they also made my perspective very unique. The horsemanship learned in Poland, especially the social aspects of raising horses, really affected how I expected horses to be managed in North America. The happiest horses are those that know and understand their role within the herd. My training methods had also considerably softened – I was much more respectful of horses. Since my first trip to Poland I have always looked at the Arabian horse industry as a very international community. That perspective encouraged me to seek out horses and programs in every corner of the world, and to bring the best ideas and genetics onto a world stage.

TA: Looking into the past from your current, American view – is there anything that the European market could still get from the US one – and in turn – what Americans could learn from Europeans regarding the Arabian horse industry?

SB: I have always had the greatest appreciation for beautiful Arabians that can do something in performance and do it well. This is the ideal of the breed for me. Europe sometimes strays too far away from this ideal with the "toy" show horses – cute to look at with some extreme features, but not a very good horse. The American industry often gets too focused on suitability to a particular discipline, resulting in horses that often look vastly different than the breed type. There are still European, American, British, Brazi-

lian and Australian types of Arabians to be found in the world. This diversity is a good thing. I do believe the international show standard is beginning to look more like the breed ideal at the leading events around the world. The American market needs to learn to think outside the box – beyond their own borders and definitely outside the show ring. The total number of Arabian horses outside North America may only be half the number found at home, but the global market is and will continue to be a huge driving force in the market. And remember – a long snakey neck and a hard stand-up is never enough!



Scott with Shirley Watts during the awards presentation at the 2009 Polish National Show

The Europeans need to reacquaint themselves with "utility" – one of the essential elements of authentic Arabian type. For millennia, Arabians have had a purpose in life as ridden horses and riding is the primary reason most people get involved with horses. Failure to develop an organized outlet for ridden Arabians in Europe is not only short-sighted and a wasted marketing opportunity, it is a disservice to the breed.

TA: You say that education is your passion – you also used to educate the young people and the newcomers in the world of breeding and marketing Arabians. What do you say to your students as the main advice for their future in this business – considering your own experience?

SB: Carve out your own niche around your interests, skills and passion. There is a huge need for authenticity and genuine commitment in business – meet that need. Do what you love – it is the only way to wake up contented each and every day even when the times are tough. Go out and find your way – no one is going to hand it to you. Keep your eyes open and listen before you speak – the customer will tell you what they want and need. Always look for the positive first in every horse – assess the negative characteristics against



"Past & Present - ZAGROBLA & me at Michalow in 1995 (right) and 2009 (above). ZAGROBLA was the first Michalow-bred Monogrammm daughter to achieve success in the show ring. She was would later go on to be US National Champion, All Nations Cup Champion & World Champion Mare. She is a yearling full of promise in the 1995 photo and a content broodmatron in the 2009 photo enjoying some pasture time at Michalow. ZAGROBLA taught me so much - she will always have a special place in my heart."

the collective "good" of each individual. Give generously – it always better than receiving. Know your horses – nothing beats practical, hands-on knowledge. Understand that the Arabian is truly the global breed – there is a world of opportunity wherever you go. The future of the breed depends on our active involvement and cooperation. The Arabian horse has given me the greatest life I could have ever imagined – with dedication, passion and hard work, it can do the same for you.

TA: Is there anything else that you would like to still learn in this field?

SB: The older I get and the more I know, I discover how truly little I do understand. I always learn something new every time I step in to the ring as a judge, organize an event, get up in front of an audience to speak, see the result of a breeding decision, or crack open a new book. I can always be better – that is the challenge that pushes me forward. I am always looking to discover more insight on marketing and promoting. I was trained as a scientist, not as a business professional. As it does not come to me as instinctually as does the science, I am always striving to be better in business.

TA: It seems you enjoy your profession very much – is there any non-Arabian activity you enjoy as a hobby or are Arabians just your whole life?

SB: Arabians really are my all-consuming passion. Fortunately, the majority of what I enjoy doing most is enhanced

by my involvement with the horses. I love to travel and discover different parts of the world. I really enjoy understanding the history and culture of the places I visit. My involvement with the horses has taken to me to some truly spectacular and unforgettable places. I enjoy keeping fit – staying in shape to keep up with the trot on the Polish horses really inspired me to stay athletic. I enjoy sports with my sons – they are both active in hockey and soccer and I am learning new aspects of both sports through their eyes. Discovery and learning in general inspire me – whether it's a good book, an engaging movie or the next adventure.



TA: If there were no Arabian horses in this world – where we could find Scott Benjamin?

SB: A world without Arabian horses – that would be a sad place indeed. Please don't send me to any heaven without horses! I would hope to find another equally all-consuming passion in life. I would certainly be involved with animals as I have always had an affinity towards them so I probably would have ended up as a veterinarian. My earliest aspiration was to be a zookeeper – part of me still thinks it would be the ultimate job (laugh)... I would still be educating and advocating – it is just who I am. I also love to entertain – given the chance to do it again with no Arabian horses in the world, I would most definitely pursue a life in musical theatre with great abandon. Think singing, dancing Dr. Dolittle... □

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