

Monsieur Baucher and His Art a Serious Word with Germany's Riders

Louis Seeger



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Translated by Cynthia Hodges, J.D. LL.M., M.A.

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First Edition



Auriga Books
Edmonds, Washington

Seeger, Louis. *Herr Baucher und seine Kuenste. Ein ernstes Wort an Deutschlands Reiter.* Verlag von Friedr. Aug. Herbig. Berlin, 1852.

Originally printed by G. Bernstein in Berlin, Mauerstr. Nr. 5.

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ISBN: 978-1-60944-003-9

Published in the United States by
Auriga Books
Edmonds, Washington

Printed, and bound by Vladimir Verano
at Third Place Press, Lake Forest Park,
on the Espresso Book Machine v.2.2.
thirdplacepress.blogspot.com

foreword

When Louis Seeger wrote the little known but, nevertheless, highly instructive book, *Monsieur Baucher and His Art: a Serious Word with Germany's Riders*, he did so in defense of Classical Principles. Those principles, rooted in the works of Xenophon, were cherished and cultivated throughout the ages by masters such as Gustav Steinbrecht, author of the equestrian Bible, *The Gymnasium of the Horse*, and highly respected student of Louis Seeger.

It is with great satisfaction that I see Seeger's book available for the first time in English. With this translation, Cynthia Hodges presents the English-speaking riding public with the welcomed opportunity to access a piece of priceless equestrian literature that, until now, was only available to an elite group of European experts.

In electing to take on this monumental task of translating *Monsieur Baucher and His Art*, Ms. Hodges has succeeded in presenting the content of the book, often filled with, for the layman, difficult *termini technici* into an easy to read historical document. The interested reader aspiring to familiarize himself with Louis Seeger and this pillar of equestrian literature will discover a plethora of timely advice and guidance.

Consistent with my own equestrian background and philosophies, it is my belief that this book will finally bring answers to the century-long dispute over the values of Baucher's method, thus clarifying many misconceptions still in existence. This knowledge will, without doubt, serve to enhance the experiences of today's more informed rider, as well as present the novice with much to think about and evaluate for generations to come.

Karl Mikolka

Introduction

Modern-day dressage seems to be divided between adherents of the Classical School and those who consider themselves to be “competition” riders. Some of the techniques used in competitive dressage derive from the training system developed by François Baucher. In this book, Louis Seeger compared and contrasted the Old School methodology and Baucher's system.

Seeger was a dressage master in Berlin who had trained with Max Ritter von Weyrother of the Spanish Riding School and was the instructor of Gustav Steinbrecht, author of *Gymnasium of the Horse*. He was also the inventor of the dropped-noseband, which has become ubiquitous due to its proven value in dressage training. He was compelled to write *Herr Baucher und seine Kuenste. Ein ernstes Wort an Deutschlands Reiter* in 1852 after witnessing Baucher's presentations of horses he had trained.

Seeger considered Baucher's methods to be incorrect training techniques that were deleterious to the horse's soundness and well-being. In this book, which has been translated as *Monsieur Baucher and His Art: a Serious Word with Germany's Riders*, Seeger defended the Classical principles of dressage. He tried to warn riders that the methods Baucher was propounding would be destructive to the horses' training. Seeger predicted some of the problems that can now be seen in even high levels of competitive dressage, caused by adherence to Baucher's methods. Seeger advocated a return to Old School principles of horse training to preserve the health, soundness, and mental well-being of the horse.

Seeger's work is available to English-speaking dressage enthusiasts for the first time. Cynthia Hodges' translation, which reflects a writer's feel for and facility with the language, includes a foreword by Karl Mikolka, former *Oberbereiter* of the Spanish

Riding School and coach of the Brazil Olympic Team, and artwork by Bonnie Hodges. The original format of Seeger's book has been preserved. This translation is sure to add to the debate between classical and competition dressage training.

About the Translator

Cynthia Hodges has a Doctor of Jurisprudence from South Texas College of Law in Houston, Texas and an LL.M. in Environmental/Animal Law from Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Oregon. She also has a Master's of Arts in Germanic Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. Hodges has a Certificate of Proof of German Language Ability (required to study at a German university), the International Business German Certificate (German American Chamber of Commerce), and passed the U.S. Department of Defense's written German test. She also taught high school German and worked as a professional translator.

Hodges has approximately 20 years experience riding, training and showing dressage. She is a United States Dressage Federation (USDF) Qualified Rider, has shown through Third Level, and has schooled to FEI. She has clinicked with Karl Mikolka, Rachel Saavedra, Gerhard Politz, Gunnar Østergaard, Franz Rockowansky, Hans Biss, and other prominent riders. Hodges has participated in USDF Instructor Certification workshops and also trained in Germany one winter.

Hodges has written a number of articles on dressage, many of which have appeared in *Topline Ink Equestrian Journal*, local newsletters, and national magazines such as *Dressage Today* and *Dressage & CT*. Hodges has also published articles on animal and equine law, such as legal liability for racehorse trainers. Please see <http://www.cynthiahodges.com/animals> for links to those articles. Hodges also translated *Anatomy of Dressage* by Heinrich Schusdziarra, which was published by Half-Halt Press.

Hodges maintains a website dedicated to classical dressage at <http://www.cynthiahodges.com/dressage>. Hodges may be contacted there, or through her professional website at <http://www.cynthiahodges.com>.

About the Artist

Bonnie Hodges is a fine artist located in Edmonds, Washington (near Seattle). Hodges has a B.A. in Studio Arts from the University of Maryland and worked as an illustrator for the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C. Hodges teaches oil painting at a community college.

Hodges works with a variety of media, but prefers oil, pastel, and digital media. Hodges paints lovely landscapes, portraits (animals and people), still lifes and also does photo restoration and graphic design. Hodges' beautiful and life-like paintings have been featured in galleries, national and international art shows, and are on display in collections in the USA and Europe.

Hodges donates a portion of the commission she receives for animal portraits to an animal charity.

Hodges' portfolio can be viewed online at <http://www.bonniehodges.com>. She can be contacted through the website.

Monsieur Baucher and His Art
a Serious Word with Germany's Riders

Louis Seeger

François Baucher has been an extraordinary sensation in his lifetime due to his book, *Méthode d'Equitation Basee sur de Nouveaux Principes*.¹ In this book, he rejects proven riding methods, and considers his to be the only ones worth preserving. This is because he thinks his methods will prove to be the salvation of riding, an art that lies in ruins. Until recently, we in Germany were only able to judge Baucher by his theories. Thankfully, he gave us the opportunity to judge him in person.

Because my book, *System der Reitkunst*,² and my other books have consistently shown me to be an opponent of his methods, the reader will perhaps expect from me a definitive answer to this dispute, a dispute that has been waged in different lands and with different weapons, but has yet to be resolved. I feel it is my responsibility to take this step to resolve the dispute because I hope to prevent much damage. I feel I am especially qualified to judge because Monsieur Baucher was nice enough to let me ride horses trained according to his method. I rode these horses to his satisfaction, obeyed his instructions, and, in his opinion, had them in proper balance at the end. I have also had the opportunity to watch him work horses on more than one occasion, horses that were not yet fully trained. From these experiences, I have thus formed my opinion.

It is my opinion that Monsieur Baucher's esteem is based on his talent for making his methods change to suit the audience. What his long-term effect will be and what the ultimate result for France will be can be disregarded. The essential question is whether the German riding system offers something acceptable and whether it is worth preserving. The presentation of the effects of the Baucheristic methods on his own horses force this question.

Baucher's method gives the impression of being a complete system, a close-linked chain, where the removal of one link will destroy the entire system. All aspects have their purpose and one

must either accept the method in its entirety, or completely reject it. There is no middle ground.

In this case alone is his method original, i.e. it is either all or nothing. The individual links do not offer much that is new. Baucher is not an inventor. He has simply taken all the different, incorrect methods from the Duke of Newcastle and from all of those trained in the old Italian schools and made them into “his method” to the ruination of the art of riding and to the confusion of riders everywhere. He has basically just taken the mistakes of others and made them into his principles. We should be thankful for the great number of bad riders that have gone through his system. They act as a mirror; nothing could be more advantageous than to hold him and his method up to the riding public as a sobering example.

His system is, therefore, not original. The only novelty is the habitual weakening of the natural impulsion of the horse, which is brought about by the various incorrect methods.

We do not wish to criticize Monsieur Baucher directly for producing only circus horses here. There could have been other reasons or outside contributing factors for that. However, such a coincidence is not without meaning. The relationship between Baucher's methods and that of the goals of the people presenting the circus riding becomes all the more obvious.

Since it has become known to the circus directors that the presentation of lower trained horses, or at least ones that have not been fully trained in dressage, fills the circus' coffers, they either try to take up the training methods themselves or let someone else train the horses.

If the achievements of such horses are announced as a “Presentation of the Higher Art of Riding,” one must forgive these circus riders for boasting. This is partly due to their ignorance of the higher art of riding, which is not just the training but also a condition of the preparatory dressage,³ and also because they care

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mainly about the wallets of the audience. The audience is assumed to be ignorant.

Connoisseurs of the art of riding do not expect to see completely trained school horses in the circus. This is because the small, round area without corners does not allow for correct dressage or for the presentation of a horse trained in it. If anyone other than Monsieur Baucher had made such claims, no one would have said a word because they would not have expected much in the first place.

Monsieur Baucher is entitled to a serious viewing of his presentation because he is the prophet of a totally new riding method, which should, supposedly, become the one and only. He is also the author of works that have caused much discussion worldwide. One could not believe such an extraordinary man would endanger his reputation by trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the German audience with imperfect presentations.

From what we saw here in Berlin, his presentations must have been, in his opinion, good examples of his riding ability. That said, one is able to judge his system accordingly.

We would first like to portray Baucher as presented to us by the circus of Monsieur Dejean. We had the opportunity to see this presentation almost on a daily basis. We intend to first describe the overall impression. Following that will be a deeper critique of his method.

First of all, I would like to compliment Baucher as a writer, as I am unable to compliment him as a rider. His books, although their original form was born of spirit and grace, must be re-evaluated after the appearance of Baucher as a rider. He presents us with a paradox. If he really sat as freely and lightly on the horse with as lovely a posture as he says, he would have had an easier time introducing his system.

He who has even the smallest capacity for observation will notice that Baucher's riding gives the impression of anything but

freedom. The constantly gripping calves, together with a stiff upper body, give him a tortured elegance, which is worlds apart from the secure posture of a cavalier from the Old School.

However, not too much importance has been given to these superficial impressions; only the effectiveness of the riding will now be dealt with.

It is my opinion that Baucher's training robs the horses of their impulsion. The many horses presented by him are proof of this. They do not travel on the bit because they are not given the necessary aids by the rider. Most betray this deficiency by the way they carry their tails. Their hindquarters lack the spring-like action of the hind legs. The forehand shows no self-carriage or free shoulder movement. There is no lifting of the legs with energy, and no strength in the steps.

These mistakes appear in all of the gaits that Baucher showed. In the walk and trot, the forelegs call attention to themselves through limp, almost falling shoulder movement. The hind legs, rather than pushing off energetically, are pulled along. The gaits are without elasticity because they contain no springiness.

The unpleasant jarring of Baucher's horses in the trot was less apparent to the audience because of his firm seat. Baucher made the sitting trot more comfortable by usually riding with loose reins, even if he did this for other reasons. A definite contact on the horse's mouth is not seen very often and is never constant. However, frequent aiding on the right rein of the Weymouth bit and the so-called "piano-playing"⁴ is. This playing with the reins is probably meant to replace the missing contact. It is not sufficient for there to be no contact between the horse and the hands holding the reins.

Baucher does well to keep his trot presentation short. This is because it 1) most obviously shows the mistakes of his system, and 2) the public can be fooled more easily by the canter. Serious

riders who care more about correct training than about exhibition know that the trot is the most important gait. The trot is the basis for the other gaits and their perfection or ruination depends on the trot's development, either for better or for worse. When awarding prizes, the principle should be adhered to that the rider that shows a better trot but has neglected the canter should be rewarded over the one who has done the opposite.

Following this principle, Baucher's canter must be faulty, and indeed it is. If the strides in the trot were trailing, rather than pushing, the canter strides were hopping, rather than jumping. This bad situation is caused by Baucher totally ignoring the flexion in the haunches through which the spring-like power of the hocks is developed.

Baucher does not sit his horse down in the canter, but rather lets it "fall in" and canter on the forehand. In all of his presentations, the croup was always high because the haunches lacked flexion. The hind legs did not reach under enough. This reaching under, however, is essential for collection, as this prepares the horse for the canter and makes him maneuverable. Baucher's horses, therefore, are not collected. When he, despite this, tests their maneuverability, the stamp of artifice and lack of energy is apparent.

Baucher also performs his *changements de direction* differently from how we change direction. If one cannot call his method of turning a "throwing around," it is nonetheless not a turn according to the rules. This is because he just uses outside rein and outside leg to turn his horse in an irregular fashion. While we prepare the horse with inner rein and leg, letting the horse lift his forehand into the turn, he waits and suddenly throws his body to the side. We will let the knowledgeable rider decide which of these two methods is more effective.

Baucher impresses the layperson with his flying changes⁵ every stride (*changement de pied au temps ou à chaque foulée*),

