

Demystifying Nevzorov Haute Ecole - An NHE Workshop

By Michael Bevilacqua

Nevzorov Haute Ecole (NHE) is being whispered around the world. It is showing up on YouTube and stirring passions on horse forums in every language from East to West. There are implacable supporters or furious opponents of Alexander Nevzorov.

Near St-Peterburgh, Russia, Alexander and his wife, Lydia Nevzorova do not make their primary living from horses, but they are capable of schooling horses for Haute Ecole using no force, no restraints, no bits, no bridles, no spurs, and no punishment. All this with a horse that is in natural collection. They stand to protect the horse that has been subjected throughout history as our servants for work, war, and human entertainment. They support and promote the physical, mental and emotional health of the horse.



Alexander with Kaogi – The Black Stallion –photo by Lydia Nevzorova

Alexander believes that any type of competition, even if just for a piece of cardboard with a coloured ribbon, supersedes the welfare of the horse. Despite what people in competition say about `loving` their horses, those horses are still used to support human ego or the money. Some people find this, among other parts of his philosophy and rules, extreme. But, there can be no compromises when it comes to the welfare of the horse.

We either adhere to it, or we do not. It is putting our own personal desires aside. It is we who must adapt to the gentle nature of the horse and not the horse that must be subject to our selfish, forceful nature.

As Lydia says, *'This schooling is not effected through human dominance nor submission of the horse. We do everything to inspire, to enkindle a horse, to awake its interest and to reveal its full natural potential.'*

There is a lot behind the philosophy of NHE, but it boils down to being equal with the horse. Not a human and a horse, but two living beings that need to find a synergy. If this seems really complicated to grasp, then just ask a child what their view is.



Lydia Nevzorova bringing NHE to the world – photo by Lydia Nevzorova

Lydia started the website and an online forum that has rapidly exploded in numbers with members worldwide. www.hauteecole.ru There seems to be a new level of awareness in people in regard to horses. Even more surprising are the growing numbers of young people who do not even want to begin with any type of standard horse training and will never walk into a typical riding school. The new mentality is completely different than what has been adhered to for thousands of years. In Russia, it is aptly named Horse Revolution.

Perst was Alexander's greatest challenge and the catalyst for change. This horse would crush Masters against arena walls. Alexander decided to do away with all the standard gadgets that man has created that force a horse to obey through pain. No metal, no restraints of any kind. The change was astounding. He developed an honest, open relationship with this horse. Everything he had learned was thrown out the window.



*Get rid of pain and domination and the most rebellious horse will meet you halfway
– photo by Lydia Nevzorova*

NHE does not follow the rules established by generations of horse trainers and riders, that used mainly forced control through the pain of the bit and negative reinforcement. Alexander experienced that a true relationship and love were of the utmost importance. What follows is pure science of biomechanics. Moves that are safe and natural for a horse. What appears to the average horse owner as some fantasy or unattainable by regular standards, the NHE approach has been successful for people and horses of all ages worldwide. Alexander does not give classes to the public in his manege, however, thanks to Lydia, the website and the online school, there are great success stories. It is not success because someone wants their horse to piaffe or sit. If one is thinking dressage, they are on the wrong wavelength, and this is definitely not trick training. The attainment of a particular move is not of primary importance. It is a lifestyle. It is a way of being. It is completely removed from the linear thought of horse training.

The virtual medium can be a positive way for some people to learn, especially if they already come in with the right feelings in their hearts and open minds. There is no ABC method and no great secrets to be revealed. Everyone is capable of doing NHE, yet, even those who have been on the forum for over a year, and in the online school for months, sometimes realize they are blocked because some part of traditional thought still clings to them like vines in an ancient forest. Reading something on a page is not the same as

living the experience. We may logically align ourselves with what we read, but only through action and living the experience with our horses can those words on the page crystallize into real meaning. The online school can give guidance, but it can be misinterpreted because of what has been ingrained in us throughout our lives about horses.

At a NHE workshop held in Palgrave, Ontario in August, 2007, all but one of the participants were NHE members. There were many moments when people had their head in their hands as first-hand explanations were being discussed. New realizations and understanding were taking place. For some, their world was being turned upside down for a second time!

The host of the workshop, Elaine Polny, had this to say: *‘In August/07 I hosted a workshop for Michael Bevilacqua the Senior Representative for Nevzorov Haute Ecole. It was nothing short of an amazing experience for all who participated, including and most importantly, the horses.*

Since I had been a forum member since last year, I felt I had a clear understanding of the philosophy and principles, yet, personally having the opportunity to discuss these ideas and witness them in motion was what truly brought more clarity and certainty to my world with horses. It was a further confirmation that the way we wish to interact with horses has a direct link to how we choose and conduct ourselves in our lives. Seeking a path to mutually co-exist where the differences between man and horse are put aside and instead replaced with oneness and equality.

Focused intent, clarity and patience provide the answers to synchronicity and togetherness.’



Patience and clarity and comprehension for togetherness

- photo by Dayne Polny

People see Lydia's photos on the NHE website or the award winning film, 'Horse Crucified and Risen' by Alexander and are amazed and long for the beauty that is possible with their own horses. Yet, they feel that it is only a dream. We try to bring out the best in our horses, but it is quite possible to bring out the best in ourselves, too. The workshop was to show how simple that this could really be. To break down that invisible wall that holds people back from themselves and their horses.

This kind of workshop is where people work the hardest at learning, not the horses. It is absolutely not like a standard clinic where a horse is put into an enclosure and put through several hours of forced groundwork and repetition to get a desired result. Many times, the people already have a good understanding, and just need some personal support to guide them through some details and to be reassured that they are doing things right.



It is the people who do most of the learning. In turn, the horses do just fine!

- photo by Katelyn Kent

Elaine points out what a lot of people realize. That what they were looking for was right in front of them the whole time: *'An obvious conclusion to the effectiveness of the workshop was noticing once my awareness opened further so did a shift in awareness from my horses. It was like looking into the eyes of an old friend to suddenly notice a new wiser friend was in there. And that wasn't just me seeing them, it was them seeing me differently as well. Allowing, respecting and encouraging the horse's spirit to be free is the most natural place to begin. This I learned for sure: Michael Bevilacqua is unequivocally a True Master. His ability to connect directly to the horses "being" was obvious and inspiring. I witnessed him sharing special moments with my horses in such a way that I knew only a person with true honesty and the highest level of integrity and expertise would be able to accomplish..*



*Frequent breaks and play bring back the free spirit and fun in learning
– photo by Katelyn Kent*

Horses, in the standard horse world, tend to be viewed as very large, strong animals that need to be subdued and shown `who is boss`. What ends up happening is far from being the beauty that drew us to horses in the first place. More people are beginning to realize that.



*After play, horses come back with a renewed spirit - photo by Dayne Polny
- photo by Katelyn Kent*

If we think of the horse as a child, then it is possible to simply ask. The big difference here is that the horse has a choice. Obedience, to us, means willingness. If we can prove ourselves to be honest and interesting, then the horse will want to `play`. And, play is a big part of the interaction. There are simple steps to go through in order to show the horse what we are asking. We do this for no more than ten minutes. It prevents us from becoming too focused on a result and also prevents the horse from becoming frustrated or bored. There is a lot of `recess` time to change thoughts and to keep the entire experience pleasurable and relaxed. We take part in the play time and people begin to see a different side to their horses that they never noticed before.



*Play brings out bursts of exuberance and surprisingly nice moves!
- photo by Katelyn Kent*

The workshop only clarifies the information that already exists on the free Nevzorov forum and school. The advantage of the workshop is that it brings together like-minded people and the energy and fun of putting theory into practice. We all learn a little more than we would on our own because of the open discussion and varied questions that spontaneously arise.

With enthusiasm, a cordeo (a thin strap that lies loosely about the horse's shoulders), and a fragile twig, we set out to practice the basics of asking for a simple move. The touch of a hair on the horse with the twig, clarity in our request, adjusting to how the horse responds, plus encouragement, and soon a silent dialogue with understanding takes place. It is not a physical reaction from the horse. It is active thinking. Taking the time to open this dialogue is well worth it. It opens the door to limitless possibilities.

From a gentle touch, the twig can become a pointer. We can ask to move a leg, or place a hoof upon a pedestal. This is also the beginning of flexibility. When the horse understands these simple signals and willingly cooperates, then pieces can start to be placed together in unison. A jambette (where the horse raises one leg forward) combined with a walk in-hand produces the Spanish Walk. An alternating signal to diagonal hooves without moving forward begins the Piaffe. Combine the vertical flexion which gradually advances to full collection with other exercises, and we have a horse that consciously goes into natural collection doing moves that can be safely executed with willingness and confidence.



Open dialogue and encouragement lay the foundation for trust and understanding
- photo by Monica Bretschneider

By explaining to the horse in small steps what it is we are trying to convey, and knowing that they have the choice to leave at anytime, they remain calm and more receptive. We do what most training methods would consider unthinkable. By giving horses the freedom to choose, they actually offer even more than expected. When this magic starts to happen, most people do not care anymore about what they were expecting to begin with! The idea of `training` is dissolved. That is when most people will go on to attain what they previously thought impossible.



Establishing the dialogue to begin practicing vertical flexion
- photo by Katelyn Kent

About the author:

Michael Bevilacqua is currently the Senior NHE Representative for North America. He oversees the NHE international online school and provides seminars and workshops upholding NHE principles. He is located in Quebec, Canada. More can be seen at his website: www.beyondthedreamhorse.ca

