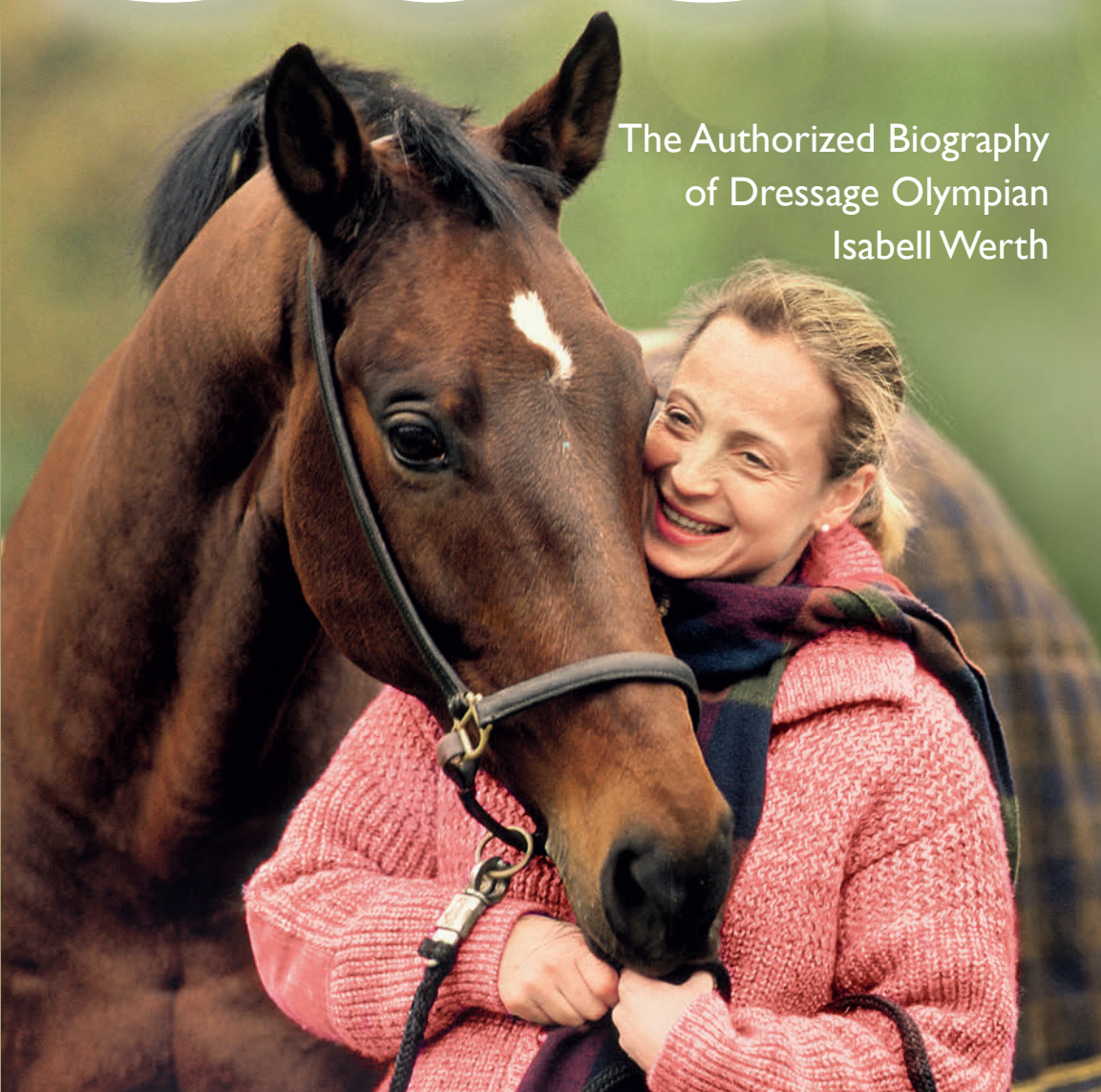


Isabell Werth | Evi Simeoni

# FOUR LEGS MOVE MY SOUL

The Authorized Biography  
of Dressage Olympian  
Isabell Werth



# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>RHEINBERG</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>GIGOLO</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>THE DOCTOR</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>ROLLKUR</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>SATCHMO</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>MADELEINE</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>TOTILAS</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>BELLA ROSE</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>THE PIAFFE</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>DOPING</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>WEIHEGOLD</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE CARRIED</b>	<b>277</b>
	Appendix I Isabell Werth's Most Important Horses	295
	Appendix II Isabell Werth's Greatest Successes	297
	Acknowledgments	301
	Index	303

## 8 BELLA ROSE

Bella Rose is a born diva. When she performs, the crowd goes quiet and everyone watches her. If the chestnut mare with three white stockings and a long curved blaze was running across a field somewhere with ten other horses, all eyes would be on her. Even in a group of horses, everyone automatically looks at Bella. She radiates the same magic as some people do—those who pursue a career on the big screen, on the catwalk, or in politics. They have this mesmerizing effect, this charisma that you cannot learn and that can unleash a magnetic power of attraction for everything with eyes and ears. We do not want to exaggerate—Bella Rose is still an animal and not a Hollywood actress. But that is exactly it. Her gaze is not only captivating and confident—at the same time, it is defined by infinite gentleness, and thus, free of any vanity or arrogance. It is a loving greeting from nature, although she does not lack in personality or power.

*Bella Rose is my dream horse. A dream that has materialized in reality. I was allowed to enjoy it for a short time without*

*restrictions. There were perfect moments where nothing was missing. No questions remained unanswered. There was nothing to criticize, to correct, to mold, to change. Just delight, and the feeling of what it is to finally learn what perfection feels like. She has given me pure happiness on four legs—moments that I would have loved to continue, but that were hard to hold on to, as is so often the case with happiness.*

At first, Isabell did not even get to enjoy an entire international season with her “ultimate” horse. They only had eight performances on the grand stage before, in the late summer of 2014, a painful ordeal started for the then ten-year-old Bella Rose. The dream-like rides were over, almost as soon as they had begun. Searching for the problem, finding it, treating it, and rehabilitation took three and a half years—but then the chestnut mare gave Isabell a World Championship that transported her to Cloud Nine. At the 2018 World Equestrian Games in Tryon, North Carolina, the two of them won the Grand Prix team competition and the Grand Prix Special. And, if the Freestyle had not been cancelled—the FEI did not manage to organize to have the final test moved after heavy rainfalls during Hurricane Florence wreaked havoc on the venue—it was possible they would have danced through to their third gold medal. Isabell laughed with happiness during her rides, and tears of joy streamed down her face afterward. It was yet another high point in a lifetime of career highlights—and felt all the more indulgent on the wonder-horse, Bella Rose.

*I saw Bella Rose for the first time when she was three years old. Finding the horse had a somewhat complicated background: My employee Anna was friends with Matthias Bouten, the individual who took care of the young horses at the facility of*

*a family of breeders named Strunk from Bochum, Germany. Anna had seen Bella Rose there and tipped me off, and so I went to Bochum one day to look at the mare myself. I still remember what it was like when I stepped onto the Strunks' property. I went through the gate and down the barn aisle. To the right, a little entrance opened up into the indoor. That's where I stood, chatting with the breeders, while watching with one eye through the door of the arena, where Matthias was longeing the young Bella Rose. The mare started to trot, and I was breathless.*

*It was like electricity in my body. I felt like I had been zapped—it was incredible. It was a kick, an ignition, and I immediately told myself: "This is your horse."*

*While I enjoyed the view of Bella Rose trotting past me, I was thinking, "Let's hope this is not an illusion, directly followed by a fall from grace—some problem in the canter, some deal-breaker that will ruin my excitement." But the horse went in walk, trot, and canter, and I tried to keep my facial features in check. This narrow, long-legged horse, the equine equivalent of a fashion model, had completely enchanted me. I knew that I had never met a horse like her and that I would also never find one again. And her name was Bella—the same name I was and still am called by some very close friends: Monica Theodorescu, former Olympic Champion and German National Coach, calls me Bella, as does Heike Kemmer, with whom I have ridden together on the same team at numerous championships.*

*I made an effort to contain my euphoria. We left the barn as Matthias kept working the mare, and I was only capable of one thought: "How do I get this amazing horse?" All I said aloud was, "Interesting," but Anna could read the truth in my eyes.*

*The breeders suggested a fair price for a horse of her class that had just been started under saddle, and I called*

*Madeleine, who could already tell from my voice what was up. She didn't even ask much about the mare, but only said, "Okay, go ahead."*

*Of course, the Strunks knew that Bella Rose was a fantastic horse, but they might have not been aware of her entire potential. They did, however, ask to be allowed to present her at the annual Westphalian mare performance test. The German breeding associations award their permission for targeted reproduction at these events. In this case, however, their scores were slightly off: Bella Rose only received 6.5 points out of 10 for her trot. "Whaaat?" Madeleine asked. "What kind of animal did you buy there?" I just said, "Relax, Mado. This horse can never move in a way that she would only get a 6.5 for the trot. It would be like Kate Moss getting a D for modeling on the catwalk, or Michael Jackson a D for dancing."*

*I didn't care about the performance test scores. All I cared about was Bella Rose coming home to Rheinberg with me and spreading her charm in the dressage rings of the world. It was 2007, one year after Satchmo and I won the World Championships and time to build up the next "golden horse." Bella Rose was one of those, I was sure of it—certainly, the best horse I had ever had. Not a day went by when I didn't feel the fascination I first felt watching her all over again.*

*Bella Rose was my horse, the culmination of everything I had experienced before...she was the perfect image, formed from the best puzzle pieces of all my top horses. She had Gigolo's athleticism, and his commitment, willingness to move, and sportsmanship. She had Satchmo's charm, flexibility, and his genius, but lacked his madness. And, just like Weihegold, she was not complicated at all and highly talented for passage and piaffé.*

*The best of everything.*

*When I first sat on Bella Rose, I felt almost apprehensive. I still don't have words to describe the feeling. It was incredible. The freedom of movement she had in her shoulders and hind legs—the elasticity. It was a completely new feeling. It is inef-fable how this horse could use her body. And then the canter: I could see her front legs flying. Bella didn't only captivate you from the ground, she did so from the saddle.*

*A God-given ability to move: Satchmo's half-pass, for example...those kinds of lateral movements that require the highest degree of elasticity have always seemed perfect to me. Bella Rose added another nuance on top of that. And her pas-sage and piaffe—the most elevated, celebratory movements, which, simultaneously, require physical effort, balance, body control, and feeling for rhythm—well, I had never felt before how intensively these movements could go through the horse's entire body. With this mare, the transition from passage to piaffe was hardly perceivable; it was as if her body contin-ued to produce the rhythm like a metronome. I could bring the piaffe into her body in one spot, almost by simply wishing it to be there. In and out, it was always swinging through her entire body. After all my years riding, it was an eye-opener for me, even though I had not done anything else in my life other than trace the movements of a horse's body and swing my own body in time with it. The mixture of asking and receiving is what constitutes equestrian sport; we need to grasp the idea that limits are perceivable and revocable at the same time. Riding is an experience of great intensity because of this.*

*Bella Rose was extremely sensitive and delicate. Once, when I was riding her in a rain shower as a five-year-old, the drops drummed lightly on her croup, and she immediately started to prance in a little bit of a piaffe. At the same time, she was so excited to move, had such an urge to move, that*

*she was hard to control. When I rode Bella on our racetrack, it was a major effort. She wanted to go, and she wanted to do so with such motivation and enthusiasm that I could hardly hold her.*

*As it had been with all the other horses with which I had followed a path to great success, my most important task with Bella was to channel her temperament in the right direction.*

*Bella tended to overdo her forwardness and to go out of her way when it came to keenness. I had difficulty achieving mental relaxation with her. That was the only challenge with this mare, and it has remained the only one until today.*

*Bella Rose had such reserves of energy that she didn't tire easily. Working her for an hour to "let out the steam"—that was pretty much a waste of time with her. She also never got distracted by her surroundings or succumbed to hysteria. She could cope on her own and was not interested in flowerpots or umbrellas. She fed on excitement from her own self. When she got going, it was because she was excited by her own activity and movement, especially in the canter. She was like an engine that runs and runs and becomes hot in the process. She learned all the movements easily. The question really was, how was I to get her to perform them in the arena without incident?*

When Bella Rose turned six years old, Isabell presented her to the world of dressage experts for the first time at a show in Munich. The news spread like wildfire. Everyone wanted to see Bella Rose. The Dutch star Edward Gal, still riding Totilas then, and his partner, Hans-Peter Minderhoud, who was also riding on the international circuit, asked, surprised: "Who's the chestnut mare you have there?" Bella competed in a dressage test, not yet at the Advanced Level, and the insiders stood along the side of the ring, mouths wide open, taking in the horse's



aura. Already, Bella Rose showed a trot “tour” that silenced onlookers. During the walk phase, between the two required turns-on-the-haunches and out of sheer *joie de vivre*, she started to piaffe, which was not even asked for at her level. The spectators grinned. The mare’s urge to move was overwhelming. And besides all her other qualities, she was also a model student. Sadly, she was just starting to learn the sport when she injured herself. Isabell did not get to keep going with Bella and her training; she didn’t get to develop the “fireworks” and to fire them when she wanted them. The mare’s training and development would only continue—eventually—after years of delay.

*I don’t even want to imagine what could have happened, had I had been able to focus totally on Bella Rose’s progress. Naturally, we would have grown even closer. The mare had learned quickly what was important—that, for example, sometimes, she had to calm down mentally to do her “job.” She had quickly grown accustomed to the daily show routines, had gained more and more experience, and had become quite comfortable with the competition business. I can imagine that we would have rocked the scene. Even British star Carl Hester, rider and of course trainer of the then dominating pair that was Charlotte Dujardin with Valegro, believed that there was only one horse out there that would have made their life difficult: Bella Rose.*

Charlotte Dujardin on Valegro became World Champion, European Champion, and Olympic Champion. But Hester was deeply impressed by Bella Rose. Their first remarkable performance: the qualifier for the World Equestrian Games 2014 in Normandy, which was located in the remote Province of the Saarland in Germany, at the luxurious facility of a pharmaceutical company owner in Perl-Borg. All of Brazil, as well as

public viewing areas in Germany, were in the grip of the FIFA World Cup soccer playoffs at the time. But, on the neatly raked showgrounds where the potential team horses and riders for the World Games were to be evaluated, Bella Rose performed as if she had to score the deciding goal. She easily cracked the 80 percent mark with her score in the Grand Prix—the invisible borderline where “good” becomes “world class.” It was a particularly important result, since this was the test that decided the team ranking at a World Championship, and *that* was what the German Equestrian Federation was most interested in. Individual medals were a bonus.

It was as if audience members were guests on a launch pad as Bella Rose rocketed to victory with almost provocative coolness and nonchalance. She knew everything already, it was just patience that was not her thing. She had to learn to *wait*. She sometimes shot ahead, before her rider's signal from the saddle had even reached her. Because of this, Isabell had continuously halted when riding the test during training, letting the mare catch her breath, and giving her a sugar cube. When it finally counted, however, this method proved to be a source of errors: Bella Rose hesitated in all those places where Isabell had made her work sweeter before, awaiting her reward. Instead, she now received a leg aid telling her to keep going, which she now felt was a little bit too strong. Rather than continuing her elegant walk, then, Bella Rose started to jog. The knowledgeable bystanders noted down in their programs: *mistake*. Of course, it was also proof that this mare reacted to every little signal in a highly sensitive way. Her finely-tuned reactions cost points for the time being, but Isabell took it in stride.

“She doesn't make the mistakes,” Isabell said about Bella in Perl-Borg. “*I* make the mistakes.”

It was a time when Isabell's seasoned fighting spirit had a break. The "old Isabell," who took pleasure in climbing into the ring with each of her unruly horses, was not needed in Bella Rose's saddle. The new Isabell did not have to fight for control or for answers for the first time; she could just enjoy.

In the meantime, it had also gotten around amongst the stallions present that a very attractive equine model was out and about. First, they became nervous; then, they tried to put the moves on her. Totilas, the forever injured, neighed, although he was not known as a particular go-getter. Matthias Rath played it safe, preferring to isolate his horse and move his training sessions from the outdoor warm-up to an adjacent indoor arena. It is rare that a single mare has a measurable effect on her male surroundings. You have to consider that studs are not generally known to have a particularly differentiated taste in the mares in their lives. They usually even function pretty well at the sight of a leather-covered, wooden rack upon which they are perfectly happy to jump. But Bella Rose awoke unexpected amorous desires. Desperados, Christina Sprehe's beautiful, well-behaved, black stallion could not resist the chestnut either. Usually, his rider had control over him, even when pretty mares coyly waltzed past. But at the sight of Bella Rose, Desperados lost all composure. The risk that, this time, he would rather follow the call of nature than his obligations as a mannerly dressage horse was high. He made it very apparent he wanted to be free to follow his desires, and Isabell on Bella Rose's back was in serious danger. They had to separate the two horses.

"In any case, the gentlemen," remarked Isabell later when she was safely on the ground, "have good taste."

By now, the Dutch national coach had already called out to Isabell: "Have fun in Rio! They will be your Games."

It was still two years until the Olympics.



10 With Dr. Schulten-Baumer and the Honda DAX. *Photo by Jacques Toffi*

11 Training with The Doctor. *Photo courtesy of Isabell Werth*

