



PROFILES



Film & TV Unit Links

Equine Excellence

[*Cavalía: A Magical Encounter Between Man and Horse*](#) underpins the principles of American Humane by beautifully illustrating the emotional connection people share with animals. Staged inside a luminous, multi-peaked tent, *Cavalía* features more than 30 trained horses and 32 dancers, riders, and acrobats performing before an ever-changing background projected on a 160-foot screen. *Cirque du Soleil* co-founder Normand Latourelle created the surreal spectacle in collaboration with renowned French equestrians Frederic Pignon and his wife, Magali Delgado.

The show opened at the Santa Monica Pier in California, and organizers generously donated a portion of the night's proceeds to the American Humane Association. President and CEO Marie Belew Wheatley walked the red carpet and helped build awareness and support for American Humane's valuable mission of protecting children and animals from abuse and neglect.

Several Hollywood luminaries, including Rod Stewart, William Shatner, Bo Derek, and *N.Y.P.D. Blues*' Dennis Franz, turned out for the star-studded opener, which featured celebrity riders Daryl Hannah and David Carradine. Kansas Carradine, the actor's daughter, is an accomplished trick rider and a regular member of the *Cavalía* troupe.

Carradine says working with *Cavalía*'s horses was a "gestalt kind of experience." This philosophy of multiple physical, spiritual, and psychological elements shaping man's relationship with horses is precisely what sets trainer Frederic apart and has led to his revered status as a true "horse whisperer."

Hannah, who fell in love with *Cavalía* after attending a performance in Glendale, California, earlier this year, says Frederic is more than a horse whisperer he's a horse magician. "It's incredibly satisfying when you have that mutual understanding," she says. That mutual understanding is a hallmark of Frederic and Magali's training style.

A Peek Behind the Curtain

American Humane's Film & TV Unit had the privilege of spending an afternoon with Frederic at *Cavalía*'s stables in Glendale last April. American Humane was pleased to see the facility was immaculate, and stable hands and grooms provided the show's stars with 24-hour care and every imaginable comfort.

SPOTLIGHT ON

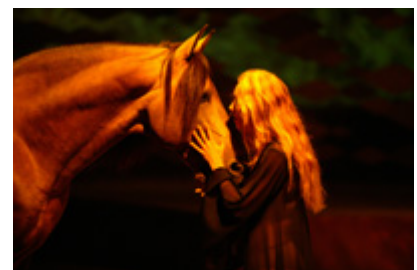
[*Cavalía*](#)

[Jean-Jeaques Annaud](#)

[Rex Peterson](#)

[Steven Sommers](#)

Cavalía



The simple concept of putting the horse first, of listening rather than imposing, is the foundation of Frederic's training philosophy. While others focus on attaining technical precision as soon as possible, Frederic thrives on the emotional experience of working with the animal. Frederic says the measure of a good trainer is not how fast he can deliver results in a horse's performance, but how happy the horse is to perform.

Cavalia showcases a wide variety of equestrian styles, from basic dressage and liberty work, to Roman riding and *haute école*, and the show's choreography has evolved in a completely organic way. "The character of the horse and its own personality dictates what they're going to do during the show," says *Cavalia*'s publicist. "Frederic and Magali know when the horses are very young whether they are very disciplined or just playing around. If that's the case, they're going to do liberty with them, and if not, they're going to do dressage. It really depends on the horses' personalities."

Simplicity is the key. Frederic explains, "Magali and I just try to see how we can keep this natural and nice." He adds, "We never want to have a bad experience with a horse, because a bad experience is forever."

Good Things Come to Those who Wait

It was Templado, a silver-maned Lusitano stallion and *Cavalia*'s diva extraordinaire, that helped shape Frederic and Magali's knowledge and understanding of horses. Templado did this simply by being utterly exasperating much of the time. Born at the Delgado horse farm in the South of France, Templado was sold at age one but returned home a few years later because his owner couldn't handle him. Templado had become fearful, headstrong, and dead-set against having a rider on his back—he craved liberty at all costs.

As part of the Templado's five-year "reeducation" process, Frederic and Magali learned to tune into the horse's most minute expressions. According to *Templado: A Star at Liberty*, "It was a question of reading what his nostrils, ears, eyes and general attitude had to tell us, whether he was happy or not, satisfied or not." All this watching and listening eventually helped the couple understand that Templado could feel comfortable only when he had complete freedom. Frederic and Magali followed Templado's lead and slowly built an unrestrained relationship based in play.

Although breaking down Templado's emotional barriers required patience and hard work, the good-natured Frederic says, "It was a good experience for me. I thought, 'If I can work with this horse, I can try to have a good relationship with anyone.'"