

# PIANISSIMA

*The passing of an icon*

Era sua vista si dolce superba  
ch'i' lasciavi per seguirla ogni lavoro:  
come l'avaro che 'n cercar tesoro  
con diletto l'affanno disacerba.

Francesco Petrarca, Canzoniere, Rime Sparse 190

Her look was so sweet and proud  
that to follow her I left every task,  
like the miser who as he seeks treasure  
sweetens his trouble with delight.

Francesco Petrarch, Scattered Rhymes 190,  
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An article from [polskiearaby.com](http://polskiearaby.com)



WONDERFUL, UNIQUE, ONE OF A KIND, ETHEREAL,  
PEERLESS, UNRIVALED, ENCHANTING, AN ICON OF THE  
ARABIAN BREED - THAT'S HOW WE USED TO SPEAK AND  
WRITE ABOUT THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MARE IN THE WORLD,  
BORN IN JANÓW PODLASKI IN 2003 - PIANISSIMA.  
SHE PASSED AWAY ON OCTOBER 17TH, 2015.

*Escher*

**W**e easily took pride in the fact that it is Poland that has a horse which is a dream of breeders from all over the world. A horse of pure perfection, personifying such beauty that it was difficult to put in words. She was a national treasure, our pride, an ambassador of Poland and at the same time a charming mascot that was affectionately referred to abroad as "Penny". It is hard to believe she is gone. People that stood by her have no words to express their grief. "I knew good horses, very good horses, superb horses and Her", told us her breeder, Janów Podlaski Stud Director Marek Trela. She was to bring fame to Polish breeding for a long time and be living proof that Poland is a birthplaces of horses that are not found anywhere else. Unfortunately, things took a different turn.

The news of Pianissima's passing spread like lightning in the Arabian horse community across the globe. But not only there. Her death was also commented in nationwide media which usually turn their attention to Arabian horse breeding once a year when announcing auction record prices. But Pianissima was Janów's queen, a celebrity and a symbol of the success of Polish breeding.



Pianissima, Janów Podlaski 2004

### **An unusual combination of genes**

Pianissima's dam, the born in 1998 Pianosa (Eukaliptus – Pinia/Probat), granddaughter of the unforgettable Pilarka by Palas – also boasted a huge dose of beauty and delivered similar thrills in her day as daughter Pianissima. A representative of the valuable Szamrajówka damline, as a yearling she claimed

the title of Junior Champion and Best in Show in Białka and in 2004 became Polish National Senior Reserve Champion. At the same time she held her own at the racetrack, winning twice, coming second twice and third thrice from seven starts. When the Qatari multichampion sire Gazal Al Shaqab came to Janów Podlaski, Pianosa was bred to him. "It would be difficult to call



Pianissima, accompanied by Mrs. Anna Stefaniuk and Dir. Marek Trela (right) and by Greg Gallun (left), Janów Podlaski 2008

him an "outside" stallion as the situation was quite similar to the one with Palas", explained Director Trela in an interview for [polskiearaby.com](http://polskiearaby.com)<sup>1</sup>, "he was the result of blending an Egyptian stallion with a Polish mare. The thing that really charmed me about Gazal was his beautiful mother Kajora: a strong mare, with an enormous eye, long neck and great achievements in the United States – she became a champion of that country."

And so, on January 13th, 2003 this mating produced Pianissima, in which the beauty gene expressed itself in an unprecedented way. Director Trela recalled Pianissima's progenitor, Pilarka: "I remember a standing ovation in Oostend. The mare wasn't doing anything at all, just standing and watching the people, and the audience was absolutely crazy, screaming and applauding. The boy held the end of rope and the horse caused these emotions itself. She received loads of twenties from seven judges; it was an unforgettable experience"<sup>2</sup>.

Pilarka was a product of a true „Golden Cross” – a combination of the Egyptian line of Nazeer (through Aswan and his son Palas) with the line of Skowronek (through Naseem and his son Negatiw). A European and World Champion, she distinguished herself not only with exceptional beauty, but also with intelligence and gentle nature. „Oh, she was the queen of the herd. And director Andrzej Krzyształowicz's favorite. She loved to pose", said about her Zofia Raczkowska, a splendid photographer, author of Pilarka's most well-known photographs.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth mentioning here that the long and dramatic history of the Szamrajówka (~1810, bred by Biała Cerkiew) damline, which is more than 200 years old, is inseparably connected with the tragic history of Poland itself. Biała Cerkiew, the oldest Polish stud, established in 1778 by Crown Grand Hetman Franciszek Ksawery Branicki (1729–1819), disappeared during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and all horses at the stud perished. More than sixty Arabian mares were slaughtered by machine guns as "equine aristocracy".<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, many horses sold earlier



Pianissima at the Al Khalediah Arabian Horse Festival, Saudi Arabia 2008

or given as gifts survived. The Szamrajówka damline was prolonged in Poland by the grey Kewa 1923 (by Siglavi Bagdady II), imported in the interwar period from Yugoslavia to Janów Podlaski. But in 1939 this excellent mare was taken together with her daughters to the USSR. It was not until 1956 that her granddaughter Piewica 1953 (Priboj – Włodarka/Ofir) came to Poland from Tersk. From this moment on the line is called the "P" line, as with that letter begin the names of all of Piewica's descendants. "She differed from our mares", told me Roman Pankiewicz, a breeder from Albigowa who remembers her very well, "but she was correct in build, though not very refined. However she had her charm which photographs do not convey." For the family of Szamrajówka it was an epochal and symbolic moment: together with Piewica the bloodline of horses from Biała Cerkiew – which seemed to be irretrievably lost – returned to Poland. Piewica joined the Albigowa herd and during all her life (first in Albigowa, then in Janów Podlaski) produced 13 foals: 7 colts and 3 fillies. Without them there would be no successes of Pianissima, as well as the other representatives of this world famous damline today.<sup>5</sup> The best mares of the P-line achieve sky-high prices: Pinta 2005 (by Ekstern), Polish National Junior Reserve Champion and her full sister Pieta 2003 were purchased at previous Pride of Poland auctions by Mrs. Shirley Watts for 500 and 300 thousand euro, respectively. Pepita (by Ekstern) was sold this year for one million and four hundred thousand euro!

Pianos, unfortunately, just like Pianissima now, passed away in the prime of her life, at just 10 years of age. Apart from Pianissima she left the stallion Polon 2005 (by Ekstern, today at Halsdon Arabians), Pianissima's full sister Passionaria 2007 (a reserve champion from Białka and a valiant racer) and the stallion Paladid 2008 by Al Adeed Al Shaqab, affectionately called in Janów "Stefan". Pianosa's last foal enjoys special attention at his home stud after being successfully treated from a severe injury.

"Perhaps in Pianissima's case a certain lack of immunity to sudden weather changes or pressure surges was a genetic issue", wonders PAHBS chairman Mrs. Anna Stojanowska. "On Thursday during the breeding inspection the pressure was high and the air rather chilly. Pianissima felt well and looked excellent. A day later came a sudden worsening of the weather, a decrease of air pressure, rain. Oftentimes such conditions result in colic in horses. Everything unfolded very quickly and despite an immediate reaction nothing could be done."

### How to describe beauty incarnate

Pianissima was the first among 59 foals (including 37 Janów-bred) by the stallion Gazal Al Shaqab, born in his first Polish crop. "I have the privilege to see foals right after birth and can assess their value", says Director Trela. "When I saw Pianissima, I immediately knew that she was an excellent filly, with great hopes for the future. But it was difficult to foresee at that moment that she would turn out to be such a star, because that is the result of much, much more. She bewitched everyone not before she performed for the first time in Białka, though she was shown earlier at breeding inspections, PAHBS meetings... I had my ears wide open, listening to what those gathered had to say, yet I heard no words of admiration. But it is true that foals quickly become overgrown with fur and it is not so easy to see what is underneath their winter coats. That's why I waited



calmly for Białka. She presented herself in full beauty there and showed what she's worth."

"I've seen thousands of horses in my life, many of them wonderful", told us Greg Gallun, who later took care of her in the US. "But I'll never forget the day when I first saw Pianissima. It was here, in Janów. We were walking through the stables with Director Trela and George Z and I was looking at the pedigrees. I first saw the name Pianissima. Then she turned and looked at me – I froze. I knew something extraordinary is taking place. I thought: Oh my God, could this be true? I looked at her again and then at George Z. I saw the same awe in his eyes. And Director Trela was just smiling, he already knew what treasure he had!"

This is how Pianissima is described by Professor Krystyna Chmiel in her book "One tworzyły piękno" ["They created beauty"]: "A true phenomenon, with a kilometer-long, swan-like neck, large eye and nostril and a muzzle so short that only a Pekingese or Persian cat may have a shorter and more dished one. Furthermore Pianissima is dry as the proverbial bone and has a topline shaped just as perfectly as her dam". "Pianissima's phenomenon was that on one hand she won everything in the world that an Arabian horse could win and on the other – she represented a modern type of Arabian beauty, she perfectly fit the current canon of how Arabians should look



Pianissima with Johanna Ullström, Janów Podlaski 2012  
photo: Stuart Vesty



Pianissima, All Nations Cup, Aachen 2008

like today”, explains Anna Stojanowska. “Her passing away is a multidimensional loss – a loss for breeding and a loss of a symbol, a sort of cult, that has grown over the years.”

“Pianissima was in my opinion the most beautiful mare in the world. She was unique. Her face was not a caricature, and not extreme in shape, but it was extreme in beauty. She had the best nostrils in the world, and they just added to her very special look, on top of that, her eyes and the expression in her eyes made me and I think everyone who saw her just unable to stop looking at her. She had such a feminine, expressive, sweet look in her face,” recalls Johanna Ullström, who showed Pianissima to her first European successes.

She was appreciated by everyone, also people from outside of the Arabian industry. “She bewitched not only experts from the Arabian community. When school trips visited the stud, they went to her – because it was a beautiful horse. Beauty is universal and with Pianissima you didn’t have to be an expert to see it”, says Director Trela. She had one more trait – she was photogenic. She attracted the eyes and camera lenses. She could pose, like a professional model.

„There’s been so many things said about her by so many people. She was a definition of a horse celebrity, she was loved and admired by so many people around the world, there is almost nothing that hasn’t been said about her, almost...” says Jan Trela, her first trainer and presenter. „Pianissima is a mare that transcended nationalities and was loved by all that saw her”, Jeffrey Wintersteen, who followed her career from the very beginning, wrote on Facebook after her passing. „No history book on the Arabian horse can ever be written without her significant place in it. She set the standard to which we will all always aspire as breeders and as lovers of the Arabian horse”, wrote Jeff Sloan, from the group of her American lessees. „She is without question the Queen never to be replaced”, the words of Nancy Gallun.



Al Khalediah Arabian Horse Festival, Saudi Arabia 2008. Pianissima with (from the left): Greg Gallun, Dir. Marek Trela and George Z Zbyszewski

## Conquering Europe: Audrey Hepburn among bay fillies

Arabian Horse World magazine, by means of Emma Maxwell, wrote about the 2004 Białka show (Dec. 2004): „As a group Gazal fillies look to be a renaissance of the Polish Koheilan type, deep bodied with short backs and short heads, an upright set of neck and, of course, many rich to dark bays highlighted by just a star and no white on the legs (...) However the rest of the fillies were forgotten when the winner Pianissima walked in (...) The Audrey Hepburn of bay fillies, this perfectly balanced and ladylike filly had a large crowd of fully grown adults cooing and gurgling in enchantment every time she stepped into view and she graciously received all “20s” for type and head and neck from the judges (...) Pianissima has already taken her place as the new Polish legend”.

Emma Maxwell was followed by Betty Finke in the same issue of AHW, who covered the All Nations Cup in Aachen: „I don’t think anyone can contest that this is simply the most breathtaking filly to appear in the showing for a long time, as well as Janów Podlaski’s masterpiece”.

In Poland the year old Pianissima was shown by Jan Trela. „Life crossed our paths in a mysterious way”, he says. “I saw her the night she was born, put a first show halter on her head, won first shows together and later even when I moved to the USA, she was right there, just 5 minutes away. Even when she had her first foal I was there again. Years passed by and we both went back home from California. Coincidence? Or meant to be? It seemed like she would be there always. But life is not always fair, and brought us together one last time...”. It was with him that she claimed her first trophies: the Junior Mare Championships and Best in Show – first in Białka, then Falborek and later Janów Podlaski (as well as the highest score of the show – 93,33, including three “20s” for type, three “20s” for head and neck and three “19s” for body and topline). Later she was taken



Pianissima, European Championships, Moorseele 2008

under the care of Johanna Ullström and her Belgian European Training Center. "I will never forget when Mr. Trela called me to ask if I would like to take her to my barn and to show her," recalls the trainer. "I still have a shoe of her from each of her wins: Aachen, European Championships and Paris. Sprayed in gold! Mr. Trela has her All Nations Cup Champion shoe, that he kept in his pocket during the world championships". In Aachen our young star was awarded with top marks for type and head and neck, as well as very high marks for body and topline (five "19s"), which gave her a total of 93,7 pts and soon also the title of Junior Champion Mare. She repeated this success first in Moorseele at the European Championships and later in Paris, claiming her first Triple Crown and becoming the second in history, after Esteem (1994), winner of three European Title Shows. "Pianissima was a diva", Johanna Ullström sums up her experience from that time. "But a sweet one! A gentle princess! She was very easy to have around, she preferred to cuddle than to work and, every horse loves carrots, but I think she was a carrot monster for real. She never caused any trouble whatsoever, gentle and easy from morning until evening."

### Conquering America: Pianissima in the pasture like Charlize Theron in a T-shirt

A year later, in September of 2005, Pianissima journeyed across the ocean and began her American adventure with Greg Gallun and the Pride of Poland/USA LLC consortium, her lessees. In May of 2006 Greg Gallun told Arabian Horse World: „Pianissima is absolutely awe-inspiring. Her physical beauty is just crazy – she makes people stop whatever they're doing and take her in." Rich Sloan added: „Pianissima is the most exotic mare in the world. What else can – or needs – to be said? To be in her presence is to witness a living legend." Jeff Sloan was not shy to boast that such a great treasure went under his care: „Pianissima is the ultimate ambassador for the Arabian breed.



Pianissima with Paweł Kozikowski, Gerard Paty (left) and Joanna Wojtecka, World Championships, Paris 2013

She's the living embodiment of the Gladys Brown Edwards drawing of the perfect Arabian (...). To think that we have her here in the USA with us is beyond belief. What a privilege." Both brothers also recalled that they were very impressed by Pianissima when they saw her still at Janów, out on the pasture, among other horses. „It was wonderful to learn through that experience that she's not just an exquisite photo, or standard-setting specimen, but also more simply just a genuine, natural Arabian mare. Kind of like hanging out with Charlize Theron at home in her jeans and a T-shirt."

In Scottsdale Pianissima won the 3 year old fillies class and during the US National Championships – 20 years after the triumph of Penicylina, a mare from the same Janów P-line – she was chosen Junior Champion Mare. Director Marek Trela recalled: "The people travelled a thousand miles to see her, to stand near her for five minutes and to stroke her".<sup>6</sup>

Upon her return journey from the US Pianissima made a short stop in Saudi Arabia, where of course she won, receiving the show's highest score: 94 pts. Director Trela reminisced: "It wasn't the World Championships that gave me the biggest pleasure, but a show at Al Khalediah. Something incredible happened there: I realized the Arabian orchestra had been playing the Polish national anthem and it had been in Nejd – the place where Arabian horses come from! A horse from Poland wins a championship there; it was an incredible loop of history... This puts the Polish breed in the history of the breed. And a Polish flag with Polish anthem between Mecca and Riyadh in these horses' native country – it has been an enormous joy."<sup>7</sup>

The 2008 European show season could not have ended better for Pianissima, Janów and Polish breeding. It brought her the titles of: Polish National Senior Champion with a score of 95 pts („The mare, as though she understood the unleashed around her frenzy of screams and applause, neighed happily during the playing of the national anthem" – we wrote after the

show on our website); All Nations Cup Champion; European Champion and World Champion. And so Pianissima became the only mare in history to be a double Triple Crown holder.

And later Pianissima was again welcomed on American soil where she travelled to give birth to her first produce, a foal by Ganges. Director Trela explained the decision of sending her to the States: "It is an extraordinary mare, it is impossible to define her value in prices that were given in this business. Whatever the people say, this horse will be treated a very special way (...) Pianissima deserves the highest quality care. She deserves that her first foal which will be born the natural way, shall have the safest birth. She will have her first foal at the age of 6. In case medical care would be necessary – the best is in the United States. And it is immediate!"<sup>8</sup>

The mating with Ganges delivered Pia. In 2011 another foal was born – Pianova by Eden C. In February of 2012 Pianissima returned to Poland and already in March won in Dubai (DIAHC).

During the Polish National Show at Janów Podlaski she was awarded with the WAHO Trophy. "When I got to hold her in the ring at the Polish Nationals presentation of honor the last time, I was a bit touched and proud, but when she put her little face into my arms, trying to get her nose under my arm, just as she always did as a yearling, when I praised her for something good, and she got scratches, I forgot all about pride and just enjoyed a very emotional moment with her alone, no matter how many people were watching" says Johanna Ullström. During this show it was announced that Pianissima is ending her show career. However she was shown once more – in 2013 in Paris (in the hands of Paweł Kozikowski), where she received the title of Platinum World Champion Mare. Nobody believed that she wouldn't be seen on the arena anymore. "At foreign shows the majority of conversations began and ended with Pianissima", recalls Anna Stojanowska. "People asked how she was doing, whether she really wouldn't be shown again, will she never be for sale? She was a symbol. But life showed that she

Pianissima, Platinum World Champion Mare, Paris 2013



photo: Krzysztof Dużyński

was also just a living being. No horse, whether worth millions of euro or a thousand Polish zlotys, is immortal."

"I was there from the very first till the last minute of her life and had to say goodbye to the greatest friend I've ever had. I am honored and grateful for being such a big part of your life, Pianissima", so Jan Trela bid farewell to his equine pupil.

### **A producer – directly and indirectly. Princess Pamina**

Meanwhile in 2009, during the jubilee Janów auction, buyers were offered – for the first time in the event's history – an embryo out of Pianissima by a sire of the buyer's choice. The offer achieved 175 thousand euro. The possibility of getting the Pianissima's dream foal was bought by the Royal Arabians stud from the US, and the winning bidder was Greg Gallun.

In total Pianissima left nine produce. The afore mentioned Pia 2009 (by Ganges, bred by Janów Podlaski) was her first daughter that she foaled the natural way. Pianissima was also mated with Persahn El Jamaal (EVG Piassondra 2007, bred by Evergreen Arabians), with Ames Charisma (Nisamat Albidayer 2007, bred by Albidayer Stud), El Nabila B (AJ Penelope 2008, bred by Pride of Poland USA, LLC), Enzo (PA Encore 2008, bred by Ponderosa Arabians), Eden C (Pianova 2011, bred by Janów Podlaski and Royal T Phorte 2011, bred by Royal Arabians) and FA El Shawan (Prometeusz 2012, bred by Janów Podlaski). This year Pianissima foaled her first produce on home soil – Pamina by Pogrom.

The filly's foaling drew great attention. Breeders from Janów Podlaski announced a contest for the name of the foal via the TV news show "Teleexpress". The winning proposition came from Kołobrzeg. The name comes from Mozart's opera "The Magic Flute". Pamina was the daughter of the Queen of the Night, so the name fits just right – if Pianissima was the queen, then Pamina is definitely a princess.

### **Pianissima's legacy**

"It seems that Pianissima's best foal is the last one – a filly by Pogrom", says Anna Stojanowska. "Despite a linebreeding to Gazal, it is the most successful combination. There is a problem with mares such as Pianissima, because they are a final "product", it is difficult to expect anything better. Each foal, compared to the dam, appears worse. But her daughter Pia may turn out to be a better producer than Pianissima herself.

In the US there is also Prometeusz, who will soon return to Poland."

"In the case of such an exquisite mare you should not expect to "improve" her", agrees Director Trela. "First of all you must try to not "destroy" her. Second – to create a group of reliable and useful daughters that would allow to have those genes carried onto the next generations. I think that the mares we have now fulfill these requirements. Pia, a daughter of Ganges, produced a very promising daughter by Pogrom this year. So we can already see that she will be a great broodmare. But we are most happy about the weaned several weeks ago Pamina, daughter of Pianissima and Pogrom. She took the best traits from both dam and sire. Of course she is just a foal, she has her life – may it be the longest – still ahead of her. We are breeders, we know that it is hard to predict anything. But you have to buy the ticket to win the lottery. We are trying to buy the best ticket we can."

Pia who today is a broodmare at stud, in 2014 foaled also the colt Pio by Kahil Al Shaqab. Nisamat Albidayer is a dam of two fillies, one by Marajj (Nabeelah Al Bidayer 2011) and one by Kanz Albidayer (Nisreen Albidayer 2013, UAE Yearling Bronze Champion Filly), and of a 2014 colt by Shanghai EA Rakan Al Bidayer. AJ Penelope produced the colt AJ Ravello (2012, by Vervaldee) and this year a filly by Pogrom. PA Encore is the sire of the filly Encores Bonita 2012 (out of EE Magic Marquer/Magic Dream).

"I think there is a great chance for excellent grandchildren from Pianissima", declares chairman Stojanowska. "Of course what is needed is a bit of luck – the kind that accompanied the foaling of Pianissima. Usually such a horse comes along once in a breeder's lifetime. For Pianissima we had to wait several generations. We believe, however, that Polish breeding will still see an equally brilliant representative of this line."

Director Trela adds: "A breeder is lucky if he even gets one such horse. It's hard to expect to have them happen more often."

"A horse's uniqueness is determined by charisma, something that binds all its other traits – and she had it", Anna Stojanowska has no doubts. "Among tens of other pretty horses she immediately drew attention. This year I myself discovered this again. After many days of hard work, after the sale, after the Janów breeding parade, I sat down tired and turned my mind off for a moment, not looking at what was going on in the ring. Suddenly something snapped me out of my daydream – it was Pianissima walking by..." 

Pianissima with her friend Mrs. Izabella Pawelec-Zawadzka, who also passed away this year.  
The picture was taken just after Mrs. Pawelec-Zawadzka put her gift – a pendant – on Pianissima's neck. Janów Podlaski 2012



photo: Krzysztof Dużyński

**NOTES**

<sup>1, 2, 6, 7, 8</sup> It's easiest to breed other people's horses. Interview with Marek Trela, Monika Luft, [polskiearaby.com](http://polskiearaby.com), 2009.

<sup>3, 4, 5</sup> 200 years of the „P” line: How inconspicuous dams produced queens. An incredible story of the Szamrajówka damline, Monika Luft, Arabians Horse Mag, 2011