

Escaramuza: Riding from the Heart is an immersive film which takes the viewer on a two-year journey following the trials and tribulations of Escaramuza Charra Las Azaleas, a team comprised of first-generation Mexican American female riders, on their quest to represent California and the United States at the National Charro Championships in México. Producer Robin Rosenthal and Director Bill Yahraus seek to make the viewer a witness to the events and circumstances surrounding the all-female team as they pursue their dream.

The documentary is an intimate look at the sometimes closed world of Charrería in the United States. The view through the looking glass provides a firsthand experience of



the challenges the women face, not only in their almost acrobatic, synchronized, perilous patterns of precision, but more specifically, the role, the responsibility, and sacrifice these women undertake to keep their rich heritage alive when juxtaposed with a modern lifestyle of work, family, and school.

When first presented with the idea for a documentary, the members of the Azaleas had some reservations about participating.

“Initially, there were mixed feelings—Charrería can sometimes be controversial and were unsure of the way it would be represented,” said Sandy Torres, one of the founders and captain of the team.

The apprehension quickly diminished as the Azaleas agreed that this was a unique

Escaramuza: Riding from the Heart

opportunity, not only for Escaramuzas, but for Charrería as a whole. According to Sandy, “After discussion, we saw it as an opportunity to introduce Charrería as a legitimate sport to others outside our culture.”

Sandy’s story is similar to many who participate in Escaramuza. She began participating at the age of 11, because her father was an active Charro. Such participation through proxy is a common thread among escaramuzas.

As Sandy Torres says, “Growing up, every Sunday was spent at a charreada with dad. Instead of football on Sundays, we had charrería—making it easy for me to participate in competitions. Charrería kept our family closeness alive.”

The struggle to maintain this tradition against the backdrop of modern society is a difficult task requiring discipline and dedication.

lege of editing and post supervising director Carla Garapedian’s multi-award winning human rights documentary “Screamers” featuring the band System of a Down. Robin was a video artist and art instructor in San Antonio before coming to Los Angeles to work in film and tv post production. Bill began his career in the documentary unit at KQED, and made music and social issue documentaries collectively in San Francisco and Los Angeles. After a long stint editing feature films, he returned to his roots in documentary to form Pony Highway with Robin.

As Pony Highway Productions, we’ve been making indie documentaries together since 1995. We like to work in an immersive, observational style that gives us the intimacy we value, and yields stories full of the nuance and drama of the real. The REAL real.

Our feature doc “A Circus Season: Travels with Tarzan” was a PBS primetime special. Our 3-part series “On the Muscle: Portrait of a Thoroughbred Racing Stable” won horseracing’s Eclipse Award, and was an American Library Association Booklist Editors’ Choice DVD. We also had the privi-



Team being reviewed by judge

This was something Robin Rosenthal realized, “The amount of hard work and time that goes into perfecting their routines was a revelation, as well as the family involvement and multi-generational support required for any team to be successful.”

Rosenthal & Yahraus’ films seek to engage the viewer through their



Sandy Torres Adjusts her hat

comprehensive scope. “It’s not until you spend the kind of time we spend with our subjects that you understand the nitty gritty of how everything works. A lot of truth comes from the details of how things are.”

For equestrians, this documentary provides a great view of the inner workings of the escaramuza and their struggle to keep a cultural tradition alive while wrestling with the pull of a modern society.

As Sandy Torres sums it up, “we put all our heart and soul into our riding. The documentary shows how important these traditions are for us and for our culture.”

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Robin Rosenthal & Bill Yahraus

