

Jumping the Shark?

I'm always distressed when rock groups get popular enough that their lyrics become self-referential. You know, Tom Scholtz singing "We were just another band out of Boston" or Bob Seger whining "On the Road Again" or Jackson Browne's lament: *We've got to drive all night and do a show in Chicago. . . or Detroit, I don't know. We do so many shows in a row. And these towns all look the same.* Et cetera. I always think, "Come on, Jacks Boy, that's why they pay you the big bucks. Suck it up and write me a love song or a protest, but stop complaining!"

But here I am doing the same thing, writing about reactions to **DRESSAGE Unscrambled**. I apologize (a little) in advance.

Before the book came out, I amused myself by creating a storyline about its publication: the human relay of Ethiopian long distance runners carrying the manuscript in a plastic Publix bag from the Half Halt Press office in Maryland to the printer in Illinois. Robbie Knievel bringing out his father's Sky Cycle to get the bag over the Ohio River. The all night candle-lit vigil outside the wire as fans awaited the first copies. White smoke issuing from the printer's chimney to announce its completion. And of course, the police escort down Pennsylvania Avenue to deliver copy number one to the Library of Congress. All this nonsense went up on our website, on FaceBook, and to a mass of people who had—at one time or another—inadvertently revealed their email addresses to me.



Then came more meant-to-be absurd hype: endorsements from Barack Obama, from Rush Limbaugh, from Stephen Hawking wearing his **DRESSAGE Unscrambled** t-shirt, and from the Taliban lady in her burka, among others.



So the book had been in people's hands for a month or two and had begun to be reviewed on the Amazon website and in a few of the magazines when I got this email from the mother of one of my adult students:

Dear Bill, Is there *really* a book? I thought it was all just a joke." I hastened to explain that the answer to both questions was YES!

Next came a reaction from one of my most endearing and amazing pupils [Yes, yet again the lady who set the llama on fire]. She told me, "Bill, I really liked your book, but you used a *lot* of big words!" To that I was relatively speechless.

The book has allowed me to reconnect with lots of old friends whom I'd lost touch with over the years—former students and riding acquaintances—all of whom I was tickled to catch up with. One of the better letters went something like this:

“Hi, Bill, You don’t know me, but I’m a writer too. Your editor gave my editor a copy of **DRESSAGE *Unscrambled***, and she passed it along to me. I enjoyed it very much, but you know, I think I’m the person on page 22.”

And SHE WAS! We corresponded, and indeed, she was the woman back in the mid-‘80s at a Vermont show who got so nervous that she turned down the centerline the wrong way and made her final salute with her back to me. As she said in her email, she’s a successful professional now, and she has always told that same story to her own students to make them realize that nothing that they could do could be any more ridiculous, and she had survived just fine!