



# Sankofa Archives

Did You Know? Tidbits #9

## “Who am I?”



Meet Selika Lazevski. Images of her have been on the internet for years now, but no one seems to know much about this elegantly dressed equestrian lady. It is not even clear whether Selika Lazevski was her real name. She may have taken the surname Lazevski from the Polish circus horseman and haute école rider Valli de Laszewski, who was married to a Frenchwoman. Selika may have been his student. If this is the case, she would have taken his last name as it was common practice at the time for performers to take their teachers’ names. Another possibility is that Selika Lazevski is the stage name under which she performed.<sup>1</sup>

This 19<sup>th</sup>-century lady may have been an *écuyère* (horsewoman) in Belle Époque Paris (1871–1914). If so, she would have ridden her horse sidesaddle in circuses and hippodromes. This style of riding, and the shows that she would have taken part in, indicate that she was a very skilled horsewoman.<sup>2</sup>

Author Susanna Forrest claims that Lazevski “was a black *amazone* in Belle Époque Paris, a city where black ‘Amazons’ were shown in a human zoo.”<sup>3</sup> This is possible as, during this time, several countries, including France, tolerated the shameful practice of “ethnological expositions,” that is, human zoos in which individuals from various races and cultures were put on public exhibition.

Another possibility is that she was a studio model. There are only six photographs of Lazevski, all taken by Studio Nadar (a photography workshop; the photographer is probably unknown).<sup>4</sup>

A short movie based on Selika and starring the French actress Karidja Tourém, *The Adventures of Selika*, was released in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

Selika Lazevski, a mysterious lady whose past is lost to history but who has now been reincarnated and lives on in the digital age.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> “Everything I Don’t Know About Selika Lazevski,” Medium, Accessed July 28, 2020, <https://medium.com/@susanna.forrest/everything-i-dont-know-about-selika-lazevski-252f3734d39c>

Black Female Equestrians. September 24, 2013. “Selika Lazevski (Dressage).” Accessed July 28, 2020, <https://bfequestrian.wordpress.com/2013/09/24/selikalazevski/>.

<sup>2</sup> Black Female Equestrians. September 24, 2013. “Selika Lazevski (Dressage).”

<sup>3</sup> Forrest, Susanna. February 9, 2018. “Selika, Mystery of the Belle Epoque.” *Paris Review*. Accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/02/09/selika-lost-mystery-belle-epoque/>.

<sup>4</sup> Forrest, Susanna. February 9, 2018. “Selika, Mystery of the Belle Epoque.” *Paris Review*.

<sup>5</sup> Wilkinson, Marjorie. “The Adventures of Selika Lazevski, Equestrian Extraordinaire,” *horsenetwork.com*, March 27, 2017. Accessed July 28, 2020, <https://horsenetwork.com/2017/03/the-adventures-of-selika-lazevski-equestrian-extraordinaire/>

## References

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## Images

Studio of Paul Nadar. *Selika Lazevski*. (Public domain via Wikipedia Commons.)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Selika\\_Lazevski](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Selika_Lazevski).