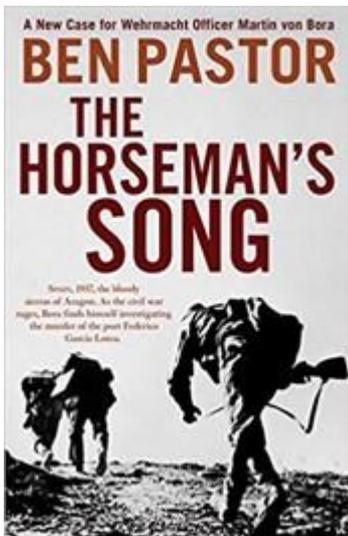


The Horseman's Song

[Written by Ben Pastor](#)

[Review written by Keith Miles](#)

Keith Miles is probably best recognised by readers under the pen name of Edward Marston. He writes several well-received historical mysteries spanning the 11th century through to the 19th century. His website is www.edwardmarston.com



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Ben Pastor is the pseudonym of Maria Verbena Volpi, an Italian-born author who has taught archaeology at a series of universities in the United States. An abiding theme of her books is the psychological damage that war can inflict on even the most balanced and unprejudiced of people.

Martin Bora, the protagonist in *The Horseman's Song*, made his first appearance in *Lumen*, where he and a Chicago priest investigated the death of a nun in Nazi occupied Poland. In her latest novel, Pastor takes Bora back to the Spanish Civil War in 1937. He's a fascinating character, a German officer turned detective, clever, tenacious yet deeply troubled and suspicious of his companions in the Nationalist ranks.

When Bora finds the dead body of Federico Garcia Lorca, the Spanish poet and playwright, he is determined to track down the killer. It's also a mission embraced by Philip Walton, an American volunteer in the Internationalists. As the two men begin their painstaking work, they move ever closer against the background of shifting successes and failures in the war. Though neither is Spanish, each of them understands the significance of Lorca's death to a nation that idolised his talent. While Bora and Walton move slowly forward, they take care to glance over their shoulders at men who are nominally on their side but whose minds have been warped by armed conflict.

Bora is based on Claus von Stauffenberg, the German officer who took a leading role in the failed July plot of 1944 to assassinate Hitler. He paid for his betrayal with his life. Bora is equally tormented, forever uncertain about loyalties and moral obligations. As the novel shifts between the opposing sides, there is a steady build up of tension and excitement. *The Horseman's Song* is not an easy read but well worth the effort. The writing is sharp, the tone gritty, the characterisations vivid and the atmosphere of war brilliantly evoked. It's a novel that destroys romantic notions about the Spanish conflict and shows how quickly hopes turned sour and disillusion set in.

Highly recommended.