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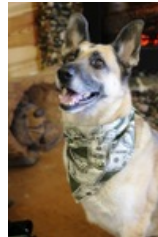
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The Heidi Chronicles, Chapter 22: Stage work

9:45 AM, December 15, 2008

This is Heidi. She was "discovered" this year in the park by a pet talent agency; since then, she has embarked on a one-dog quest to break into the business. This is her Hollywood story as chronicled by Times staff writer Diane Haithman. And this is her "head shot": That longing look was the result of seeing a biscuit just out of reach.



The late George Carlin used to do a comedy routine about creating sentences you will most likely never hear; one was "Hand me the piano." I admit to taking perverse pleasure in finding real situations that call for such sentences.

Shortly after moving to L.A. from Detroit, I was invited to a Tupperware party in Beverly Hills, and went — not because I really needed a vegetable crisper to protect me from those bendy "hula carrots," but because I liked saying: "I went to a Tupperware party in Beverly Hills."

My newest sentence in this category: "I just took my dog to her first improv class." Yes, Heidi recently became the first four-legged student in an improvisation class at the **Performing Arts Studio West** in Inglewood. She didn't care that this studio trains actors with disabilities, and the actors had no problem with the fact that she's a dog, so it made for a perfect match.

When I first called the studio, I thought they might agree to let Heidi watch a class and maybe meet a few pros; instead, I was surprised when founder/director John Paizis suggested that Heidi actually participate in the day's improv scenes, for the performers to play off, "just like any another actor." I agreed, but secretly wondered if she could pull it off. In training, Heidi's biggest problem is not learning to do a behavior, but running back to "Mom" afterward for approval. If she does that on a set, they'll quickly hire another dog.



I've been working on moving a baby step farther away from Heidi each time she gets a certain command, but it's hard enough achieve separation in her own backyard. Could she ignore me and stay focused on an actor she didn't know, in a new situation fraught with

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distractions? Time to find out.

From the outset, it was clear that instructor Diana Jordan was not going to cut Heidi any slack because she's "different" — in this crowd, take a number. But she also afforded Heidi the same respect she would a two-legged actor, asking the audience to refrain from applause so as not to mess with Heidi's concentration.

Diana had devised several scenarios that included a dog. The first was a TV ad for canine products, in which the human actor would invent the product and Heidi's job was to remain onstage and look appreciative. My favorite was the "Furrinator," guaranteed to give Heidi a beautiful coat for just \$9.95; call in the next 30 seconds and get a second one free!

At first, Heidi would reluctantly stay put throughout a scene, but then would slink off the stage to the side where I was waiting. But we soon figured out that an actor holding a treat could keep Heidi's attention longer than one without. And as you can see in this photo with performers Andre Fogenay-Wilson (standing) and Nicholas Weiland, Heidi began to warm to the new situation.

She came when the actors called her, and happily lounged onstage. Applause? Attention? Snacks? Mom who? She also stayed completely, and sweetly, focused during a scene in which a young woman playing another scene — finding a stray dog in a park and deciding to name her "Heidi" — flung her arms around Heidi's neck and burst into tears. "I love you, Heidi," she sobbed.

While she's still not a pro, Heidi certainly proved she has the chops to work with a cast and crew, and even "spoke" a thank you on the stage at the end of class.

And, by the way, I still have that Tupperware crisper; it works for celery, too.

Photo credits: Diane Haithman / Los Angeles Times

Posted by Alice Short on December 15, 2008 in [Dogs](#), [Entertainment](#), [Heidi Chronicles](#), [Nutrition](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Bookmark it:](#) [Digg](#) [submit](#)

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im so impressed she is a very smart dog! its about time she got noticed! this is so funny, you have to post where we could go watch her perform! WE LOVE HEIDI!!!!

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