

Comedy Goes to the Dogs

Popular Vegas pet performers come to the Hult Center

BY WILLIAM KENNEDY

As any owner of a house cat knows, it's difficult to get cats to do anything — much less perform for an audience. But award-winning performer Gregory Popovich of The Popovich Comedy Pet Theater thinks he knows the secret: "You cannot push a cat to do something," says Popovich, whose act has been voted Las Vegas' Best New Family Show. "As a trainer I have to see what [the cats] like to do and then create tricks" based on the natural habits of the animal.

Popovich is a native of Russia and comes from a long line of circus artists. "I represent fourth generation circus performer," Popovich says with a thick Russian accent. His mom and dad performed with dogs, so while Popovich initially came to Vegas as a juggler, he drew on his childhood background and fondness for animals when developing his own show — working with house pets like dogs and cats and even ducks and geese. All have been rescued from animal shelters, Popovich says, and are treated humanely. Unsurprisingly, he adds, dogs are eager to please and often the easiest to train. "All you have to do is channel a dog's energy to the right direction."

Popovich feels his show's success comes from creating situations that are natural for the animal but also relatable for the human audience: like a dog sitting behind a desk, barking to answer questions or doggy firefighters rescuing cats from a burning building. He also says the animals definitely sense they are performing. He trains in his living room, gradually introducing the pets to stage lights and audiences — making certain they feel comfortable. He even tells a story of bringing a couple retired cat performers along to shows just to hang out in the dressing room — simply because he felt certain they'd feel lonely and depressed leaving show biz entirely.

Audiences at The Popovich Comedy Pet Theater should expect more than just pet tricks. Popovich stresses his show is for all ages, not just children — expect a storyline, acrobats, jugglers and, most of all, fun. ■

The Popovich Comedy Pet Theater comes to Eugene for one night only 7 pm Friday, Dec. 13, in the Soreng Theater at the Hult; \$25-\$35, youth (ages 1-12) discounts available.



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