



The décor was perfect for the event.

Dog-Day Matinee

Every year the State Theater, in Modesto, California, has a matinee where the audience may bring their dogs to a family-friendly film (the pooches get discounted tickets after their humans affirm vaccinations, good behavior, and leashes). My wife, Wendy, and I have watched countless movies in cinemas, private screening rooms, and even big-screen “drive-in” nights in our paddock, but we’d never done anything like this before.

Our friends Tawn and Bud raised the idea. They would bring Max, their gregarious Papillion-mix and we would take our older girl, Tezzy—a veteran of the show ring and lure coursing (and the most unflappable of our Salukis).

The film was the animated *Balto* (1995), about the desperate sled dog race to get diphtheria serum to Nome, Alaska in 1925 (which inspired the modern Iditarod competition).

HOWLS, BUT NO PUDDLES

Appropriately, in the audience was a Husky and Husky-cross who cavorted in a wildly enthusiastic reunion and then found curious moments to happily howl during the showing. It was a good crowd with 30 or so dogs. Down front a Poodle-mix periodically barked opinions. From behind us in the higher seats we heard sudden deep barks (never

did figure out who made those). There were fun-sized terriers, mixed breeds of all dimensions, a Doberman, and even a mellow Great Pyrenees who seemed to be supervising the whole affair.

Jack Cooke, programming manager at the State, says their staff enjoys the doggy matinees as much as the ticket holders do. For the first effort in 2018, Cooke prudently scheduled it the day before the annual carpet steam cleaning. But there have been no accidents or misbehaviors (with the dogs, at least) in the years the event has been offered.

During the film, I found my attention divided between the action on screen and the live-dog performances. One bored pooch slipped her leash to go visiting. Dashing down the aisle with whispered apologies, the owner scooped her up and went back to their seats. Tezzy was content to sit on her fleecy pad and eagerly accept popcorn morsels from Wendy. Behind me, Max would periodically burst from Tawn’s lap to delightfully lick my ears (something that hadn’t happened to me in a theater since teenage dating).

After the house lights came up, people and dogs made their way up the aisles, under the 1930s wall decorations of golden Greyhounds perpetually chasing golden antelopes. In the lobby, the carpet with intricate designs must have seemed to the dogs like an oversized living room of scent heaven. In between doggy greetings, their hypersensitive noses inhaled the kaleidoscope aromas of popcorn, potato chips, and the body odors of previous moviegoers.

It was definitely a fun experience—not so much the movie but observing all the doggy interactions in the seats and aisles. And Tezzy will go back—if there’s buttered popcorn. —Brian Duggan



The author, Wendy, and Tezzy (front) and Tawn, Bud, and Max (behind)

COURTESY/AUTHOR