

# Edgemar Center teaches young actors & actresses.

By Lys Sparrow

A Star is Born when you enroll your child in an eight-week on-going actor's workshop at the Edgemar Center for the Arts.

For years I've watched my now nine-year-old daughter boldly sign herself up for school talent shows. She'd tell jokes that only she thought were funny, sing out of key and perform magic tricks. When I was growing up I studied dance for 14 years and at the top of my game I threw it away to pursue a "real profession" in science.

Any discussion of my daughter's career in the arts were forbidden until it became more horrifying to see

*"Each week, Roxie's methods seemed to unify the children, as they left class giggling arm in arm."*

her take the stage without any training.

The edgy, Gehry complex located at 2437 Main St. in Santa Monica is home to the Edgemar Center for the Arts (ECA) which opened its doors in 2002. The ECA gained its 501 (c)(3) status prior to finding a home from Michele Danner's efforts and vision to have a center of the arts for under-privileged children, teens and elders.

Tucked behind the Museum of the Modern Arts store, upon entering the ECA one immediately notices the grandeur yet simplicity of the lobby furnished by exquisite art pieces.

Living up to part of its mission, the center sought to house a 'physical environment that nurtures the creative process.' Artists in the disciplines of fine art, mixed media, photography, and sculpture are encouraged to submit their works to exhibit in the art gallery.

The ECA has some hollywood clout as well with an impressive list of Board Members that include Steven Spielberg, Neil Simon, Jason Alexander, Kate Capshaw and Patricia Heaton to name only a few.

With two state-of-the-art theaters seasoned actors from TV and film enjoy returning again and again to the Edgemar Center for the Arts to indulge in live theater. The main stage seats 99 people and currently is running The Night of the Black Cat.

Winner of the 2005 LA Music Awards for the Best Stage Musical of the Year, the production is a must see. Inspired by "Le Chat Noir," the French cabaret of 1881. The present is Directed by Deborah La Vine.

The Night of the Black Cat

takes place on a magical night when a collection of France's most famed artist travel through time to entertain in the salon of Germaine de Stael. It's a provocative and fun musical, featuring forbidden poetry, passionate dance and sensual music.'

While the ECA relished in the accolades of winning the prestigious award, the spotlight continued to shine on the younger generation of actors, studying and performing on the second stage theater that seats 65. Both theaters were carefully designed so from any seat one can fully enjoy seeing the entire stage.

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On instructing the kid's workshop Ms.Sarhangi says, "I believe it is very important to help children at a very early age to trust their instincts and express themselves while simultaneously developing their imagination and self-esteem."

For the final showcase each child was asked to perform a monologue. My daughter selected one about a girl who had a sick cat and later learned it was put to sleep at the veterinarian's office. The piece was compli-



Student Hopi Hernandez with Instructor Roxie Sarhangi.

On Saturdays moms and dads dropped off their children age 6-9, 10-14 & 15-17 for an acting and improvisation workshop or for an introductory workshop featuring on-camera cold readings. (There is also an after-school creative workshop exploring acting, art and writing on Mondays and Tuesdays. All programs are for 8 weeks and are on-going.)

Both instructors for the kids and teens workshop, Roxie Sarhangi and Dana Koellner studied under Executive Artistic Director, Michele Danner and Artistic Director, Larry Moss. Ms. Danner has been coaching actors for over 15 years. Two of her most recent protégées are Jason Chatwin, seen in "War of the Worlds" and Caitlin Wachs who plays the daughter of Geena Davis on "Commander and Chief."

My daughter studied acting and improvisation with Roxie. Each week Roxie's

cated in that it allowed one to portray many emotions.

But the true test of her performance came the eve before the showcase. Following a dinner at our home for two classmates and their mother, my daughter excused herself. Five minutes later she came running back to those of us who were still seated at the table. Looking fiercely into my eyes she recited her monologue. By the end of it everyone had realized she was acting except one of her friends. He was on the verge of hysteria and utterly confused because he was sure he had seen our cat just minutes earlier.

As for the performances that followed the next day, all the young actors were courageous and centered when doing their improvised scenes. Their monologues ranged from dark and dramatic to witty and comedic while all the performers remained confident and poised.



Instructor Roxie Sarhangi with students: Nelson Del Rio, Emma Bailey, Valentina Velez and Bennett Gershwin. Student not present Ruby Csupo.

To conclude Edgemar's mission, 'To invite the community to observe, engage and interact, and to add its voices to our creative discovery,' I am grateful my child had the opportunity to be part of the Edgemar Center for the Arts.

As a parent who strives to enrich my daughter, I no longer cower in fear when she says, "I want to be an actress."

ECA offers out-reach programs through the YMCA, and musical out-reach to seniors,

as well as staged readings, songwriters circle, poetry series and acting study for adults. The center is available to rent for corporate functions or private parties.

For questions about the center or any of the programs call Alexandra Guarnieri, Managing Director at (310) 399-3666, [www.edgemar.org](http://www.edgemar.org).

Students who completed a workshop with Instructor Dana Koellner were: Jennifer Fiederer, Ryan Slough, Samantha Aotaki and Athen Sheld.

*Night of the Black Cat  
back by popular demand*

