

Becoming a hero

Dana Davis joins the cast of hit NBC series

By RITA SHERROW
World Television Editor

Dana Davis, who played a mean fiddle in the teen flick "Raise Your Voice," is kicking butt and taking names on NBC's sci-fi series "Heroes."

Davis, who played the youngest hostage in last season's canceled NBC series "The Nine," is Monica Dawson, a new-this-season hero with the power to see something once and mimic those actions with proficiency.

It can be anything from piano playing to double-dutch to executing karate kicks. The piano playing was no problem — she's a classically trained musician, having studied the viola for more than a decade. But the scenes requiring physical prowess are another matter.

"I was kind of thrown into it," said the actress who plays the granddaughter of "Star Trek" icon Nichelle Nichols on the show. "It was really hard because I'm out of shape. I'm an actor. I don't even work out. My idea of working out is walking up stairs to my apartment. So I have spent a lot of weekends sore."

In Monday's episode, Davis' Monica Dawson, who would give up everything to help the people around her, gets to put her abilities to the test. One week later, she is captured by a street gang.

In addition to the physical requirements of the role, just as tough is playing a character in a heart-wrenching storyline about a family surviving in post-Katrina New Orleans.

"I have to say, in the beginning, it was," said Davis, who can be seen alongside Samuel L. Jackson in the film "Coach Carter." "When I did my research and watched the documentary footage of New Or-



CHRIS HASTON/NBC

Dana Davis stars as Monica Dawson in "Heroes," airing at 8 p.m. Monday on NBC, channel 2 and cable channel 9.

leans during and after the hurricane, it was tough. I take on that emotion, so sometimes I run from it. This time, I couldn't run. It made it real to

me. Bringing in this element of reality was hard for me at first. I keep that with me all the time."

In her storyline, she is living

with her grandmother (Nichols) who is also caring for her grandson Damon (Carlton Jeffery) and Monica's cousin, Mi-

tv

What: "Heroes"

When: 8 p.m. Monday

Where: NBC, channel 2 and cable channel 9

whose mother (played by Ali Larter) has amazing strength and a dangerous split personality.

For all its high-tech special effects and out-of-this-world plotlines, "Heroes" is still a series about family, Davis said.

"Sure, this is a surreal story, and it's about people with powers. But the story behind that story is family. You saw that in season one and then in season two with this girl who dropped out of college after her mother died to take care of her family to work this job (as a waitress)."

Davis said her love of acting started at age 6 with a trip to a theater with her mother.

"I was so amazed by it, and I just said, 'Hey, Mom, can I do this, too?' So she signed me up for a little theater class. I remember my first audition for a play when I was 7 years old was for 'The Thankful Elf,' and the whole time I was watching other auditions, I was thinking, 'No, the Thankful Elf would not say that.'"

"I asked mom when I was 10 years old 'Can we move to L.A.? Please, please?' I would look in the Chicago Times for auditions and I'd be like 'Mom, there's an audition in Chicago, can you take me?' She'd be like, 'No, you've got to wait,' but we didn't have the money to do that. I waited until I was 18. I went college hunting when I was 16. I was on a mission, like, I knew what I wanted to do when I was just a little girl."

A native of Davenport, Iowa, the actress graduated from Loyola Marymount with a degree in classical voice and moved to Los Angeles in 1997. Her resume includes singing in the children's choir as backup for Peabo Bryson and Robert Flack and for Barbra Streisand on her "Timeless Tour" in Los Angeles. Her credits include theater and guest-starring roles on hit television series including "CSI: Miami," "Gilmore Girls," and "Cold Case." She has also had recurring roles on "The O.C.," "Point Pleasant," "Boston Public" and "Veronica Mars." Next up for Davis is the slasher film "Prom Night."

Getting to act opposite actress Nichols every day was as exciting as getting a starring role on "Heroes," she said.

"I was familiar with her work and her importance in television. I hate to admit this, but when I found out I was joining the cast, the producers told me about Nichelle and I was like, 'Shut up!' I punched him, I was so excited. I called my manager and they were like 'No way!' Everyone was so excited. My mom was more excited that I was working with Nichelle than that I was on 'Heroes.'"

"But it was so cool. I mean, she has so much grace and beauty that I'm so totally upstaged by her. But it's great. I'm a big fan and I don't get starstruck that often so it's cool to be in her presence. . . I always say I'm jealous of Monica because if I could pick a grandma, it would be Nichelle."

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gallery



AP photo

"I've never discussed it with anybody before — intentionally. I thought maybe I would tell it to Caroline when I met her someday."

Neil Diamond, revealing that President Kennedy's daughter was the inspiration for his smash hit "Sweet Caroline." He performed the song via satellite at Caroline Kennedy's 50th birthday party last week.

J.K. Rowling earns top honor

J.K. Rowling landed on the cover of Entertainment Weekly as the magazine's entertainer of the year.

The magazine said the "Harry Potter" author deserved props for getting "people to tote around her big, old-fashioned printed-on-paper books as if they were the hottest new entertainment devices on the planet."

Editors separated celebs into five other categories that evoke school cliques: prodigies, class clowns, most popular, most buzzed-about and valedictorians.

George Clooney was named a valedictorian along with Will Smith, Angelina Jolie and the cast of "The Sopranos."



Matt Damon made the list of most popular, as did Carrie Underwood, Katherine Heigl, Johnny Depp and Kanye West.

The prodigies: Zac Efron, Shia LaBeouf, Rihanna and Miley Cyrus.

Tina Fey, creator and co-star of "30 Rock," was recognized as a class clown. Other clowns: Vanessa Williams, "The Simpsons" and director Judd Apatow and his gang of actor buddies including Seth Rogen and Paul Rudd.

Amy Winehouse, Gerard Butler, Tyler Perry and the A&E series "Mad Men" were named the most buzz-worthy.

— Associated Press

Writers strike delaying season four of 'Lost' series

ABC's "Lost" is being forced to halt filming because of the Writers Guild of America strike.

The series will run out of completed scripts, an ABC publicist said.

Filming on Oahu will halt on completion of the eighth episode, out of 16 planned for the fourth season. The episode is expected to wind up no later than Nov. 30.

The network still expects to kick off the new season in February, as planned, and to run the series without interruption, ABC said. However, circumstances could change, depending on the outcome of the writers' walkout.

— The Honolulu Advertiser



AP photo



Disney

'Enchanted' moments

The new Disney movie "Enchanted" is sprinkled with trivia treasures, said Director Kevin Lima, a die-hard Disney-ophile.

"These are references only a true fan would get," he said. See if you caught the more obscure nods to the classics:

— The troll who chases Giselle is modeled on the giant in the 1947 short "Mickey and the Beanstalk." His loincloth is patched together with remnants of dresses worn by Snow White, Belle, Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella, and he's wearing earrings made of Ariel's shells from "The Little Mermaid."

— The restaurant where Amy Adams' Giselle and Patrick Dempsey's lawyer Robert have a "date" is called Bella Notte, after the song during the spaghetti-eating scene at Tony's restaurant in "Lady and the Tramp."

— The law firm where Robert works is Churchill, Harline and Smith, the last names of the songwriters from "Snow White."

— The divorcing couple's last name is Banks — like the family in "Mary Poppins."

— USA Today

Brad Pitt leaves movie

Brad Pitt has backed out of a Universal Pictures movie set to begin filming this year, a newspaper reported.

"State of Play" was to star Pitt as a political consultant-turned-journalist who helps investigate the death of a congressman's mistress.

The actor left the production earlier in the week, Hollywood trade paper Daily Variety reported on its Web site.

"Brad Pitt has left the Universal Pictures production of "State of Play," the studio said in a statement. "We remain committed to this project and to the filmmakers, cast members, crew and others who are also involved in making the movie. We reserve all rights in this matter."

A message left early Friday for Pitt's publicist, Cindy Guagenti, was not immediately returned.

— Associated Press



AP photo