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### Lassie Comes Home

An American classic returns to its roots in Great Britain  
By Tiki Kastor  
Scholastic Kids Press Corps



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**Saturday, May 6**—*Lassie*, the first movie in the Lassie tradition to be filmed outside the U.S., made it across the Atlantic to premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival this week. The collie, accompanied by British director Charles Sturridge, basked in the brilliance of camera flashes and fanfare on the Tribeca Performing Arts Center's red carpet today. I had a chance to get a sloppy lick from Lassie and some wonderful insights from director Sturridge about his new take on the original 1943 movie classic.

"When I was growing up, *Lassie* was a television series set in America on a ranch, so when I thought of Lassie, it was as an American story," said the director. "Then I read the original book [by Eric Knight, written in 1938] which, to my surprise, is set in England just before the Second World War."

In the new film, a Yorkshire boy named Little Joe has a dog that is sold and relocated to Scotland.

The determined efforts of Lassie to return home highlight the theme of man's inhumanity to man (and animal). Class differences are also explored as Lassie navigates an obstacle course of cages, dogcatchers, mountains, lochs, or lakes (complete with the monster Nessie), and all types of people, good and bad. In some ways, I thought the movie was really an examination of human character from Lassie's point of view.

#### Directing Animal Actors

When asked what it was like to direct an animal actor, Sturridge said, "It's tricky. You have to re-imagine everything you want the animal to do from the animal's point of view and invent a game that she will enjoy, because she won't do something if she doesn't enjoy it."

He gave as an example a scene in which actor Nicolas Lyndhurst has a stick and seems to be fighting with Lassie. Lassie jumps up at him, but she's not attacking him—she's actually playing with him! She knows he has a ball in his pocket and she's trying to get it. To the movie viewer, however, it looks like a fight.

Like many human actors, Lassie has a couple of stunt doubles. One dog, Mason, did most of the stunts seen on-screen. Another dog, named Dakota, performed a lot of the jumping and the swimming, while a third, named Julie, did all the running.

None of these talented collies is a direct descendant of Pal, the original Lassie. British quarantine restrictions made it extremely difficult to get an American dog cleared in time, so the movie was filmed with British dogs.

In my opinion, the movie was no worse for the lack of a direct "Lassie" descendant; collies seem to be smart, friendly, and beautiful, wherever they



Lassie hits the red carpet at the Tribeca Film Festival. (Photo: Jen Boggs)



Kid Reporter Tiki Kastor talks with director Charles Sturridge about his new film, *Lassie*. (Photo: Jen Boggs)

**2004 Festival**

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are born. It's fitting that a British dog gets to finally play the famous role of Lassie (Scottish slang meaning girl). Lassie represents a breed of sheep-herding dogs originally from Scotland. Another homecoming, for sure!



Kid Reporter Tiki Kastor poses for a picture with the star of the show.  
(Photo: Jen Boggs)