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# The Most *Faithful* Dog You **NEVER** Heard Of

...and how  
he inspired  
**RICHARD GERE**  
to make a movie!



Richard Gere and one of the three dogs who played Hachiko; a faithful Akita waits for his master's train in the movie.





Above, the statue of Hachiko in Shibuya. Opposite, from top: Gere and a big-screen friend; Joan Allen, Sarah Roemer, Robbie Sublett, and Gere as the movie's Wilson family; Gere and Jason Alexander.

Richard Gere sharing top billing with an Akita? Richard Gere starring in a heart-tugging, tear-jerking family movie? Even Gere was skeptical when his agent contacted him. "It's not a movie you'd expect I'd be drawn to," he says. But then he read the script. "I cried like a baby," he confesses. "And I said, 'Oh man, I'm gonna have to do this, aren't I?'"

The result is *Hachiko: A Dog's Story*, which comes out on DVD this month, starring Gere, Joan Allen, Sarah Roemer, Jason Alexander—and three Akita actors in the title role.

Gere passed the script on to director Lasse Hallström, his friend and neighbor in New York City's northern suburbs. Hallström had directed Gere in 2006's *The Hoax*, and the two were eager to work together again. They'd both also appeared in director Mark St. Germain's 2009 documentary *My Dog: An Unconditional Love Story*, in which

they and other celebrities (including Glenn Close, Edie Falco, and Richard Belzer) talk about their four-footed best friends. So *Hachiko* seemed like a natural fit. "It was really a gift for me, because it's such a wonderful story," says the Swedish-born Hallström, who made his bones in the United States with 1985's *My Life as a Dog*. "And being the lover of dogs that I am, this was fantastic."

*Hachiko* is an American retelling of a true-life story that has captured hearts in Japan for more than 70 years and has been the subject of a Japanese hit movie (*Hachiko Monogatari*, which came out in 1987) and at least two children's books.

The original Hachiko was an Akita who was taken to Tokyo (from Akita province) by his owner, Hidesamuro Ueno, a professor in the agriculture department of the University of Tokyo, in 1924. For the next year Hachiko started each day by seeing Professor Ueno off at the front door. Then, every evening, he was there to greet him as