



Craig Strong and his wife, the former Tara Charendoff, offer a Web site, Voicestarz, and voice-over instruction.

SHOP TALK

Southland voice-over actors teach art on Web, disc

By Greg Hernandez
Staff Writer

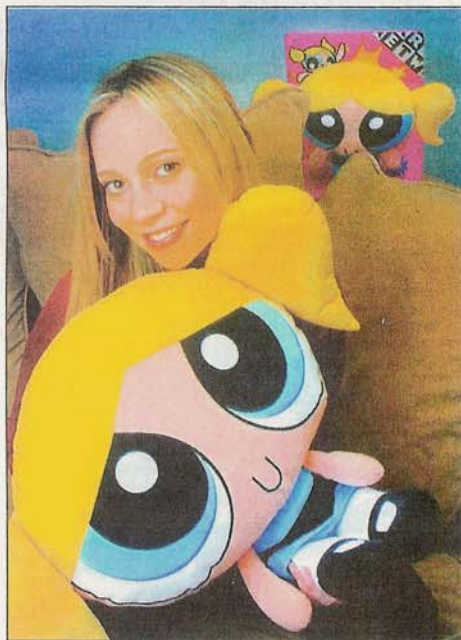
After 10 years of juggling sporadic acting work and survival jobs such as serving food and bartending, Craig Strong finally found his voice.

The New York City native had recurring roles in soap operas and guest spots on some prime-time series, but he wasn't able to support himself entirely through acting until he landed his first voice-over gig for a national Coors beer commercial. He continued to work steadily in the voice-over field.

Strong is now president and chief executive of Voicestarz, an online company that brings together some of the biggest names in the voice-over business on a Web site, launched a year ago, and a new CD-ROM, debuting this week, to mentor and educate performers who aspire to break into the field.

"It's open to anyone who loves to act and anyone who loves animation," Strong said. "There's an opportunity to really learn what to do with your gift in your own home and where to go from there. A lot of people have a gift but don't know where to go. It's a great first step."

Two years ago, Strong married Tara Charendoff, one of the most successful actresses in the field of animation voice-over. Among her many roles are Bubbles on the "Powerpuff Girls" series and upcoming



Actress Tara Strong holds a doll of Bubbles. She is the character's voice on the "Powerpuff Girls" series.

feature film, the voice of Baby Dil Pickles on the "Rugrats" series and feature films, and the voice of Timmy on the series "The Fairly Odd Parents."

"When I married Tara, I read her fan mail, and they all

asked, How do you get into this? So I made a little Web site with a Q&A about a year ago, and we started getting all these hits on it, thousands of hits," Strong said.

With such powerful interest, Strong decided to develop a

full-blown Web site, www.voicestarz.com. The site gives aspiring performers the opportunity to learn about the field and interact with other members through a monthly newsletter, an online chat board, scheduled chats with featured stars, a guide to classes and information on who's who in the voice-over industry.

"There are so many places you can pretty much make a living using your voice, and sometimes when you go after one, it just opens up a door to something else," said Strong, who currently voices commercials for Saturn dealerships. "There are many different areas to use your voice today from animation, commercials, promos and industrial projects."

Strong also developed a new double CD-ROM featuring multimedia classes taught by his wife and other high-profile voice performers, as well as directors and casting directors. Talent and casting agents also appear. So does a representative from the Screen Actors Guild.

"After you are finished with the CD-ROM and feel you have a grasp of what is going on, you are able to download a bunch of scripts at the end, choose a character and put their voices on there," Strong said. "You then send it in on a tape, and one of the featured stars will critique it and tell

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David Sprague/Staff Photographer

A recording booth is part of the decor in Craig Strong's home in Encino. He and his wife instruct aspiring voice-over actors.

Voices of Saturn, Bubbles talk shop

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you what they liked and didn't like."

Strong said Voicestarz can be of particular benefit to aspiring voice actors who live outside of Southern California.

"Someone in Colorado is not going to come in here for six weeks just to take a class," he said. "For people outside of L.A., it's beneficial because they don't have access to the teachers who are in Los Angeles, and they are the best in the business."

The price for a one-year membership is \$179, about one-third of the cost of a regular class. It will cost \$79 per year for a membership renewal that will include an updated CD-ROM each year, Strong said.

Wes Stevens, head of the voice-over department at Talent Group Inc. in Beverly Hills, is among several agents who are participating in Voicestarz. He said the program

could help to identify potential actors.

"We are trying to find the people who should be doing this kind of work," Stevens said. "I can only find work for someone who has the raw talent. It's a tough nut to crack in terms of how to break in. This is one more step to let people get a little bit closer and, hopefully, find a way into the market if they are someone who really, truly should be doing this kind of work."

Actress Grey DeLisle, whose parts include voicing Emily Elizabeth on "Clifford the Red Dog," Daphne on "The New Scooby Doo" and Betty Rubble on the new version of "The Flintstones," is also on the Voicestarz roster.

"People ask me how they can get involved in voice-over, what they should do and what classes they can take," she said. "I don't have to answer the questions over and over again. It's been great to be able to say just go to the Web site."

Daran Norris, a voice actor who plays the

characters of Cosmo and dad on Nickelodeon's "The Fairly Odd Parents," agreed to participate simply because of his love for the industry.

"It's the most fun I have ever had working in the business, especially in animation voice-over," Norris said.

Other voice-over actors on the CD-ROM include E.G. Daily, who is Tommy Pickles in "Rugrats"; Billy West, the voices of both title characters in "The Ren and Stimpy Show"; and Tom Kenny, who plays the title character in "SpongeBob SquarePants."

While Tara Strong has had an enviable career so far, she cautions that the odds of success in the field remain quite slim.

"We're not guaranteeing work. It's very realistic," she said. "If it's something you really believe in your heart you want to do, you have to go for it. There's definitely room for people with the natural ability and the drive."