
This is the archive site for Asia Pacific Arts.
[Click here](#) to visit its current home at USC.



She's the one with the "woe is me" look on her face. Courtesy of Craig Schwartz.

Tamlyn Tomita: Dame Derring-Do

By [APA Staff](#)

Tamlyn Tomita tells it like it is. In this exclusive interview, she takes APA (and its readers) to task on WWII, being sucky, and the adrenaline rush that theater provides.

When meeting Tamlyn Tomita, one is tempted to use a whole bunch of F-words to describe her: Fiery. Feisty. Fun. Fantastic. Lucky for us, Tamlyn lets her acting do the talking. And really, a quick peek at her exhaustive profile reveals a little something for everyone: she's got the halcyon days of our youth covered (*Karate Kid Part II*). She's done her share of female-empowering family sagas (*The Joy Luck Club*). She knows how to walk the tightrope between big-budget, blow-em-up blockbusters (*The Day After Tomorrow*) and the little guys tucked away in some corner of indie-ville. (Greg Pak's *Robot Stories*.) So is it any surprise that the woman who has it all holds absolutely nothing back when she's onstage, no more than a few feet from the closest audience member, giddy with the idea that by the end of her performance, she has left you bleary-eyed and slack-jawed? Well, no. Because, to loosely paraphrase her, it's what actors live for. More importantly, it's what guides her fearless (wouldn't you know it: another f-word) instincts and drive for self-betterment. And if all else fails? Well, she just hopes that she doesn't f*** it all up. -- *Chi Tung*

[Click here](#) to view the interview in Real Player.

[Click here](#) to view the interview in Windows Media.

APA: Can you talk about your film coming out, *Only the Brave*?

Tamlyn Tomita: *Only the Brave* is an independent film written, directed, produced, and starring Lane Nishikawa, who is a Japanese-American third generation actor based out of San Francisco. It's a fictional story based on the rescue of lost batallion in WWII by the 442-100th batallion Japanese-American regiments. As we all know -- or you *should* know in your history, young buck and young gal -- segregation in US military. Japanese-American soldiers volunteered to enter the army even though their families were left at home because of the concentration camps, and one of the most heroic exploits of the US military in history is the rescue of the lost batallion, the Texas batallion, the 141st I believe, who were stuck and surrounded by German soldiers.

It's an independent film. I play -- I'm not a solder [snaps] but I play the wife of one of the characters, and what's

wonderful about the story is that we get to flash back to seven of the soldiers, their personal lives before they enter the war, so we get a fully dimensionalized picture of these soldiers -- who they are, where they came from, why they did what they did.

APA: do you think it's a story that has been overlooked?

TT: Absolutely, absolutely. If I remember correctly, the only movie that's been done on a full scale is *Go for Broke!* starring Van Johnson in 1952, black and white, wonderful picture. But damnit, Spielberg, Tom Hanks, all those big producers -- it's such a big trend now, these types of pictures. And it [*Only the Brave*] deserves as much attention as any of those pictures -- *Band of Brothers*, etc. *Schindler's List* is of course on a much larger scale, but if you're talking about American heroism -- this is a picture that deserves to be seen because we're seen our kinds of faces. They're speaking our language. They're doing it under our red, white, and blue stripes, the patriotism and the honor and duty of doing it under the American flag for our country. It's absolutely a story that needs to be told, and I think there's a lot of apprehension because -- how do you market it? You gotta do it under the *Band of Brothers* banner. You gotta do it under a that kind of attitude, that kind of feeling that this is an American story. It deserves as much attention as the Chinese-American fighter pilots who were involved in WWII. The Japanese-American union was led by a Korean american soldier, a colonel Young Oak Kim. These things are not well-told.

APA: Your career has been widely varied in terms of roles you've taken. What stands out to you?

TT: Well, the first one's always going to be the most special one. *Karate Kid 2*, which I did before I even knew I was going to be an actor, and I just did it on a fluke. Because I majored in history, I wanted to become a teacher. And what I found out in the process of creating a character, learning the story, figuring out what are you trying to say, what is the message that's underlying, what is your agenda. I mean, you're trying to fulfill something, you're trying to give, you're trying to teach, you're trying to educate people that there are stories out there that can't be overlooked. And [*Karate Kid 2*] was such a personal adventure for me, because of the close relations that I developed.

Joy Luck Club is another one, bringing a highly popular book with very universal stories between mothers and daughters. That was very special because of those relationships and those kind of generational stories that all of us who come from immigrant families have strapped on our backs, that we have to deal with in being American in America. But, we also have to recognize and acknowledge our history and our legacies and say, "I have that too." But always, that's what the interesting part of being an ethnic American is: every day we're going "Wow, how do I play this, or how am I going to react that someone is going to throw some racist sh*t at me," and say, "Am I going to just suck it up, am I going to confront it, am I going to say Hey why are you saying this?" There's all kinds of variables.

But yea, in my career, I've done great projects, I've done sucky projects, but each one I've done for a reason, even for the lowest kind of common denominator to pay the rent or pay my bills. But there are those wonderful jewels.

APA: Do you enjoy doing theater?

TT: A play is always different for an actor. That is the joy. If every actor could get paid what they get for doing a TV show or film, we'd be seeing some stars on stage all the time. Because, to live a story, to live a character from A to Z, without any cuts, and the risk. You cannot rely on saying "Oh geez, I screwed up that line." You don't any retakes. You have to think on your feet, you have to know your character, you have to invest in all your through lines and what you want, what you're trying to deliver, what you're trying to say, and the conflicts and fights and the circumstances in which you find your character in. That's what the brilliance of being onstage is all about.

APA: Thank you for your time.

[Click here for a description of A Distant Shore, by Chay Yew and actors Eric D. Steinberg, Emily Kuroda, and Tamlyn Tomita.](#)

[Emily Kuroda](#)

[Eric D. Steinberg](#)

[Chay Yew](#)

[A Distant Shore review](#)

Date Posted: 6/8/2005

Asia Pacific Arts is a bi-weekly web magazine • © UCLA Asia Institute.