

**Q+A with Yuko Miyamura**  
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**The Japan Foundation, Sydney**

**Yuko Miyamura, voice of Asuka, in conversation with Ryan Huff from Geek of Oz. Interpreted by Kenji Iwasaki.**

**Ryan Huff:** First off, can you please sign this? (laughs)

**Yuko Miyamura:** Yes, of course. I'd be more than happy.

**RH:** Wow, my name and everything. (laughs) You'll all get your chance. First of all, everyone's here because we love *Evangelion*, right? It's been around for twenty-something years or thereabouts. Twenty years ago when you read the script, did you think that you'd be in Australia in a room of people still wanting to talk about it?

**YM:** When I was auditioning for Asuka's voice 20 years ago, I was just given the script for the audition, just a couple of lines from her role, and all I knew was some vague settings and plots, and I knew that she was a girl in a schoolgirl uniform in a robot anime. Up until about Episode 11, when I got through the audition and got the role, I just thought it was a normal robot anime and I never, ever, ever, ever thought it would become so 'bloody' popular. Up until about Episode 11, usually because in a television series you get a script per week, or you get it a couple days before you have to record it. Up until Episode 11 that was the case, but about Episode 12 that suddenly stopped. The script didn't come early enough; you'd get the script on the day right before you had to record. At about Episode 11—if you guys remember Episodes 12 or 13, then you'd know the context—the plot starts to get deeper, starts to get more psychological and it just becomes a lot deeper. Rather than thinking whether this was going to be popular, I was thinking, can we air this? Is it ok to air this? This is a normal robot show—I mean, what is this?

**RH:** Before we get into all the *Evangelion* stuff—even though that's what we're here to talk about—you're here, so let's talk about you. How did you get into the business?

**YM:** Originally I wanted to become a theatrical actress—that's what I majored in university. And actresses in Japan, you don't get paid a lot, to put it straight. I knew a lot of colleagues of mine doing that business and a lot of them were doing voice acting as well as theatrical acting and I decided to do the same thing. So I stepped foot in a voice acting agency. That's where I began.

**RH:** Was there anything beyond just walking into an agency? Was there anything that inspired you into voice acting as a lifelong career?

**YM:** When I was studying drama, I realised that my voice goes very well with children, so I did a lot of roles that were children—little girls and little boys. So I wanted to do roles that were a fit for my voice, naturally. That was one reason. The second reason was I, personally—not as a job but personally—I love manga and anime. In Japan, voice acting isn't just for anime and manga, you also do foreign movie dubs and there are agencies that specialise in that sort of dub. However I wanted to put myself in an environment in which I could work for manga and anime. That's my second reason.

**RH:** So many anime fans want to work in the industry somehow and voice acting is one thing. So what advice do you have for anyone that wants to get into the industry, specifically into voice acting?

**YM:** So there's two pieces of advice I'll give you all to become a voice actor in Japan. One is—well, Captain Obvious—learn Japanese. In a series that I voice acted, *NieA 7*, there was a coffee shop in the anime and it starred an Indian who spoke relatively, well, not that good Japanese. But he was in the show and he wasn't a voice actor, he was just some Indian we found on the streets. (laughs) So I just wanted to let you know that roles like that do sort of exist, but if you really want to be a proper voice actor then you should learn Japanese, and hopefully hone your skills in the Japanese language. The second one is to experience Japanese culture. That's very important because most anime are set in Japan and have some sort of Japanese context to it, and without experiencing that for yourself first hand then it's very difficult to act. If you have done so and if you've immersed yourself in Japanese culture to a certain degree, then your acting will have a lot more depth to it.

**RH:** Now the immersion into Japanese culture, that's something that I think all anime fans try and do, but it kind of brings me to another question, and it's an ongoing argument, and it's one that we could have for ever: but the validity of subbed vs. dubbed anime. (laughs)

**YM:** Yeah, that's actually a very good question, and it's a question that I would actually want to ask all of you. I usually watch anime with Japanese voices and English subtitles and I feel a lot of the time that the subtitles are short and most of the time can be pretty wrong. This is because it's very difficult because subtitles have a limited word count to convey a lot of information so I know it's difficult. So I am actually wondering—it is actually a mystery to me—if the sensitive Japanese nuances are conveyed to the audience by this short sentence. I actually want to know that. I actually have a daughter who's now eight years old and she watches anime in English and Japanese and sometimes I want to know which is actually better for her, because she currently can understand some level of Japanese and English, which one she feels more comfortable with listening to. But it seems like she forgets which language she was actually listening to after she's watched something. She'll still remember the anime itself, so it's not really the language itself as it is, she doesn't remember it word for word or as a language, she

remembers the feeling that she's left with after watching anime. We all know how this feels. So while language is also important I don't think it's the most important thing when you're watching an anime. It's just a question that is something I want to personally know and ask all of you here today.

**RH:** Since the internet has been around for a long time, it's been debated; I don't think its going to be fixed anytime soon so we'll move on. Now that you live in Melbourne, how do you audition for roles? Do you do it via the internet? Do you go over to Japan every year or something like that?

**YM:** When I audition I actually have to go to Japan. When I have to go and do recordings and when I have to work I go to Japan. When I was pregnant three years ago, because I had to take care of my children, I had to have a lot of my jobs—not cancelled—but reduced, and right now I'm only doing two jobs. As all of you would know Asuka is one of them, and Kazuha from *Detective Conan* is the other one.

**RH:** All right, now well move on to *Evangelion* because that's what everyone wants to hear about. Why do you think that, after twenty years and so many different anime series and different endings—plus you've got the films, the books, you've got manga, you've got everything—why is it so enduring?

**YM:** Well, the popularity of *Evangelion* I think is partly due to the fact that the television series ending was fairly ambiguous and it left a lot of spots here and there, and that may have led to the popularity. Of course *Evangelion* is sort of a robot anime; it has a lot of fighting, it has a lot of cool battle scenes with angels from out of the sky and just monsters—well, not really monsters, not within our boundary of imagination—and it's really, really bloody cool. The fact that the story didn't really leave an ending, that's a very big point, because the ambiguity that it left the audience for *Evangelion* in Japan at the time made people feel really weird. It actually made people make their own endings for various different media. Pachinko—you know what that is—has its own ending if you can believe it. The manga have their own endings and manga artists will make their own renditions of their own ending. It drove people to really spread *Evangelion* in that sort of respect—their own ending. Even a life where Shinji and Asuka were just normal school children and they just led normal lives also exists, and that's because that's the ending that they wanted. So I think this is a very intriguing phenomenon *Evangelion* has created and it's probably one big reason why it's so popular. I mean, if you could do that for all the different games that exist now—"Oh, I don't like this ending, let's change that"—for any games that you buy, wouldn't that be fantastic?

**RH:** It was weird; it left me feeling weird that's for sure. Those middle episodes around 12, 13, where it just got crazy, there were a lot allusions to religion and a lot of Freudian psychoanalysis. So it was deep. Anno-san, he seems like a very mysterious kind of guy, and he doesn't seem to get his face out there much. What can you tell us about him?

**YM:** If I had to describe him in one word, it would be that he is an otaku. He is known as one of the top four otaku in Japan, but he's also a very persistent man. He

is fairly pragmatic and he won't stop until he gets what he wants from his actors. That means about 20 to 30 retakes for different scenes in *Evangelion*. In my opinion, otaku are intelligent, very intelligent people, and he is also that. Sometimes I think this guy must be travelling in space. What is he thinking? Sometimes I think that, and you just have to wonder what he's doing, what he wants. That might be why he's thought to be pretty mysterious and pretty intelligent, but in one word he is just an otaku like us. For example, in *Death and Rebirth*, there is a scene at the end of the movie—I'm sure you all know it—where Shinji strangles Asuka and there's a little voice I had to act, where she is strangled and trying to breathe. I did thousands of retakes for that, just so many, and I got so confused that I didn't know what he wanted. "What do you want?" "Do you want me to die?" (laughs) So Megumi Ogata, the voice actor for Shinji, decided to do this: "Okay, Miyamu—" (that's my nickname) "—lie down." So I lie down and she got on top of me and started to strangle me. That was recorded, and that was ok. (laughs)

**RH:** Wow, I don't know where to go from there. (laughs) So *Evangelion* means something to everyone in this room, that's why we're here. What does it mean to you?

**YM:** *Evangelion* has continued for so long and it has become so popular, and first of all, I want to say that I'm absolutely happy and honoured that it's become something like this. I'm happy, absolutely ecstatic, to be a part of this. Maybe one reason was that the airing of *Evangelion* also doubled up with the spread of the internet, so the distance of foreign fans and Japanese fans got so small that it allowed foreign fans to also be a part of this movement, this phenomenon. I thought that was really good timing for the airing of *Evangelion*. The meaning of this—and I've been thinking for a long, long time—being because there are so many fans that love *Evangelion*, foreign and in Japan, I just began to think that this was a part of a movement to bring the overseas cultures and the Japanese cultures together as one. And I'm part of this? I'm just really happy to be part of this movement.

**RH:** Well, we went from being strangled to a love story. (laughs) We've got time for one last question before we kick it over to you guys [the audience] and you can start asking your own questions. A couple of years ago I spoke to Tiffany Grant, the American voice actress of Asuka, and she said that she thinks of Asuka as being like a little sister to her and that's the way she sees her in her mind. How do you see Asuka?

**YM:** Ever since the TV series began twenty years ago—it's been twenty years and at the time Asuka was just 14 years old. Now twenty years have passed and now that I've become a mother, now I just feel like Asuka is one of my daughters.

**RH:** On that note, guys, I think we might kick over to a bit of a Q and A from you; I'm sure there's lots of questions that you'd like to ask as well.

**Audience:** In the end of the *Evangelion* movie, and also in *Death and Rebirth*, in the last scene when Shinji and Asuka are left, and Shinji is strangling Asuka, her last phrase was "disgusting". Why did she say that?

**YM:** In regards to this scene, I don't know what people are saying on the internet, for example, and what other people think. But in the acting scene, the recording scene of *Evangelion*, the scripts change a lot. It changes so often that it's not funny. This was one of them, but this particular phrase wasn't anything special at all. At that particular moment Hideaki Anno gave us voice actors a lot of examples of different scenes to think about to see what we would think. He does this a lot and he will change the scripts according to what answers he gets. So this is one example: you are in bed, at your home, at like 2am in the night and this guy enters your room, somehow, through the fence or the windows. He could've assaulted you, he could've done a lot of things but he decides to stand there and start masturbating (laughs) and you wake up—you must've heard a sound. This was the director's question: "When you wake up and see a man masturbating over your sleeping body, without assaulting you or without touching you, what's the first word you would think?" And my answer was, "disgusting". So that was the meaning of that phrase; that was the phrase that got changed after I said that. Hideaki Anno went, "Oh right! It's disgusting! Ok, change the script." (laughs) That's what happened.

**RH:** We finished on such a nice note and then this happened. (laughs)

**A:** Hideaki Anno is now going to be voicing the main character in the newest studio Ghibli movie. As a voice actor, how do you feel about Hideaki Anno voicing an anime character?

**YM:** I've never heard of this. (claps) As a voice actor, it doesn't really matter what your voice is like so long as your voice is fit for the character you're acting out. So if his voice will fit well with the character he is voicing then it's good, it's fine. However, I hope he goes through a lot of trouble (laughs) and I hope he has to sit through a lot of retakes (laughs) and has to agonise himself in the process of thinking, "What does the director want out of me?" (laughs) Not only that, I would like to see him go through this. (laughs, claps, cheers)

**RH:** Alright guys we've got time for one more question.

**A:** Thank you for voice acting in *Evangelion*, it might sound weird saying this but I actually learned a lot from it. Do you happen to know of any of the changes regarding Asuka in *Evangelion Kyu* during the production process?

**YM:** *Kyu*, the movie itself, is unlike the TV series, it's unlike any of the movies, it's unlike any of the newer movies. It will be a completely different thing and because it hasn't aired properly in English, I can't really speak much about it. But if that's the sort of change you are thinking of, then it's a big change. The script changes all the time, it basically just doesn't exist, so that's normal. I don't think there were any drastic changes to the whole production, her character or anything like that. *Jo*, *Ha* and *Kyu*—the three movies—were actually supposed to finish with just three movies but in the process of making *Kyu*, the director was like, "This is really long. We need another movie after this." (laughs) So I guess that's another change that happened during *Kyu*—a big one, I guess. "Oh we'll just make another movie,

nothing big.” (laughs) But I’m convinced—well, at least I assume and I hope—that in the director’s mind, his spacious mind from time and space, that there is something in there. That he knows that the ending is like this and that he will direct the movie like this and there will be one direction and one ending. Let’s go right towards that. I think. (laughs) But other than that, there have been no big, drastic changes.

**RH:** Unfortunately boys and girls, that’s all the time we’ve got for today. But I’d just like to finish up by saying thanks to a few people. First thanks to Onitsuka Tiger for dressing me for the occasion and also for supporting The Japan Foundation and the Japanese Film Festival every year. It’s one of my favourite events of the year so thanks for their continuing support. Thanks to Kenji, he’s done a fantastic job of translating from Japanese to English, and from bogan to Japanese (laughs). Thanks to Madman, Nippon Television Network and The Japan Foundation for actually putting on this event and putting it on for the first time outside of Japan.

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**Presented by**



**Transcript by**

