

## TV: The Voices: Talking to Yuri Lowenthal & Tara Platt



By Steve Fritz

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Part 1 of a 2 part article & interview

If you hadn't heard, Superman relocated to Hollywood. He flies about town fighting the neverending battle. When not, he can be seen in a voice booth under the secret identities of Sasuke Uchia, Ben Tennyson or Bobby Drake. When he goes home, he's greeted by Wonder Woman. She's also been known to go to work as Temari of the Sunagakure or Dream Girl of the Legion of Super-Heroes.

Actually, those are just some of the roles Yuri Lowenthal and Tara Platt, two of the fastest rising stars in the voice acting world have had in recent years. Since the turn of the millenium, they have been part of a brash new batch of voice actors whose roots were in anime, and are rapidly expanding into other arenas.

The fans are noticing it, too. When Yuri and Tara recently appeared at the recent Florida Supercon, the line at their table stretched out of the room, with fans asking for autographs on pictures of the characters they've voiced - anime, animation, gaming or otherwise.

The two have been married since 2002. This interview was conducted just before the holidays. Here's what they had to say:

**Newsarama:** It looks like you two started your careers around the same time.

**Yuri Lowenthal:** It really started building up with the turn of the millenium. Both of us were working primarily in New York, doing theater, off-Broadway stuff and student/independent films that no one has ever seen. We even produced our own plays.

**NRAMA:** So when did you two finally feel like you've made it?

**Tara Platt:** It probably started around a year, year-and-a-half ago. That's when we started to get asked to go to conventions and do autographs just because we are who we are. That's when we started feeling like we were getting recognition for the overall work we were doing. Nothing really changed in our lives. We still have to work hard to make a living. It was just that change in the situation brought an added kind of 'Oh! That's kind of cool' feeling.

**YL:** It was definitely took a while for the work to build up. Then we both hit a kind of point where the public started to pay attention to just who we are personally. It was also when we started getting different kinds of work. Personally, the first year when I started making enough money just from acting, by that I mean not doing anything else but acting, was around 2003.

**TP:** Yeah. That's when I feel we did it. We've been basically doing nothing but for the last five years.

**YL:** Obviously, for the longest time, that's always been the dream, to not have any other kind of job.

**NRAMA:** And how does it feel to be in that position?

**BOTH:** Great!

**YL:** Are you kidding me? It's the dream and I'm thankful for it every day.

**TP:** Of course, it also always comes with a little bit of fear because we still never really know where the next job is coming. I always live with the feeling of 'OK. I've done this so far but what's next?' It hasn't gotten

to the point where you go from this to this to this, and you're almost assured longevity. We still have to figure out what we're doing next January.

**YL:** I think where we are we've made getting more work about half of our job is hustling more work.

**NRAMA:** Would you say *Naruto* was what put the hammer to the head as far as recognition?

**TP:** Absolutely.

**YL:** As far as anime is concerned, yes. Not as much for other animation stuff. It's funny. You never really know what show is going to hit, and that show was what did it for us.

**NRAMA:** Yes, but it seems like after *Naruto*, the bigger domestic studios started paying more attention to you and a lot of other members of that cast. I mean, after that Yuri, you started doing Superman in *Legion* and *Ben 10*. Tara, you also started doing Dream Girl in *Legion*. So do you think that got you name recognition?

**TP:** I don't know. It's hard to say because it felt like a whole lot of things came to a head at the same time. To us, it felt like we were building together and it all culminated simultaneously. I would say though the more recognition you get in one arena, the more other people start to pay attention to you in others. I wouldn't be surprised that what happened was a lot of producers' kids started watching the show and the producers started associating our names to the voices they heard. Next thing you know, we became familiar to them.

It's the same thing we try to do with on camera work. We try to take one success and use it to build another. Next thing you know, you become known for one thing and you do your best to make that work for you.

So I agree that it didn't hurt us at all. I also will say that we've been slaving away for a while and it's all happening simultaneously.

**YL:** I would just add to that. The line between anime and regular animation is very difficult to cross, even for

people who have been doing anime successfully for years. I think it's because we were pushing on all fronts. We just wanted more.

**NRAMA:** Well, isn't always the ambition of a truly good actor to jump from one field to another?

**BOTH:** Yes.

**NRAMA:** Keeping on the *Naruto* front, you stated that you started recording Temari again. That means you must be working on the sequel, *Shippuden*...

**TP:** It's been awesome. What I enjoy about doing Temari is she's now a bit more mature, she is a bit more aware of who her team are. After all, when *Naruto* started, they were all young kids. They were trying to make their mark on the world. For them, they were young ninjas and everything's great as long as they were fighting.

Now the stakes have gotten so much greater. That means there is much more room for the emotional life of each character and relationships. Those elements, which were only hinted at before, are going to be a lot of fun to explore.

**NRAMA:** The *Shippuden* manga has been out for a while. Do you find it interesting to have fans asking you questions about things you haven't even recorded yet?

**YL:** Absolutely! I honestly think the fans get excited telling us what's going to happen even before we see the scripts. It's safe to say they are pretty savvy at this point. They know they know more than we do. So they like giving us that information.



I mean it's always easy to get the information if we want it because Viz is more than willing to give it to us. That doesn't mean we want to have it either.

**NRAMA:** Tara, you mentioned at the convention that you loved playing Temari because you love playing characters that kick butt. Is that continuing in *Shippuden*?

**TP:** Definitely. Now that we've started doing the *Shippuden* stuff, I won't say my character is fighting as much, but I am doing a lot of story. I mean we've just started. We've only done about five episodes that Temari's been in. So I'm still in a position where I'm starting to verify what Temari's role is in all of it. I've actually been learning a lot about what has happened to her in the last three years, where she has been going, what she's done, who are the new people that are being introduced.

As many probably know, just about every character has moved up in rank except Naruto. So a lot of these little Genin ninjas are now more powerful than in the first series. So there's a lot explaining going on. Also, there are hints of her having a relationship.

What I'm enjoying is in a way, Temari's siblings and I, you know, Kankuro and Gaara, have kind of switched sides. They have become the good guys now. So there's a lot of time spent on that and building that up. While I personally haven't participated in a lot of action yet, I have the feeling that's just around the corner and it's going to be some really exciting stuff. I mean, if you read the manga, they are talking about the death of one of my siblings (Gaara). So there's also some heavy emotional stuff going on.

**YL:** And if I'm not mistaken, *Shippuden* marks a time jump for a lot of the characters. So there is a lot of information to catch up on regarding every character.

**NRAMA:** Speaking of characters, Yuri, what about Sasuske? Have you gone back to the booth yet?

**YL:** Just a little bit. I've only done him twice, so far. One was for the very first episode, where there's sort of a flash forward, a bit of what's to come. You're going to see that there's some bad, bad coming. It's very powerful stuff. I also was involved with what I think is Naruto having a hallucination. He imagines Sasuske and all the other people in his life. He hasn't really come back full force yet.

**NRAMA:** So are Mary Elizabeth McGlynn, Liam O'Brien and the rest of the crew still involved?

**YL:** As far as I know, except for some new characters, all the original production crew and voice cast are exactly the same.

**NRAMA:** This has turned into a very steady gig for you guys, that's for sure.

**TP:** Yeah. No complaints here.

**YL:** Unless you're a character like Sasuske who does one major arc then disappears for 60 episodes at a time.

**NRAMA:** Not that it's been going against you, Mr. Superman and Tennyson.

**TP:** He's always been the busy bee. Still, you should see what happens when he's in front of a lot of fans. The character of Sasuske is still his best known, and so loved and hated at the same time.

What's really funny is when kids come up to us and ask us what it's like being a millionaire. I mean it's really great that they are great fans of us, but the lifestyle still isn't as awesome as they might think. They have this vision of Yuri working every day as Sasuske, making millions of dollars.

**YL:** What's also something to think about, when you look at the character of Sasuske, he's really the quiet, sullen guy. He doesn't talk a lot anyway. So when it comes to me playing that character as opposed to someone like Maile Flanagan playing Naruto or Kate Higgins playing Sakura, it's not a lot of work. They don't have me standing in front of the microphone staring sullenly at the world. He's more the Clint Eastwood type.

**NRAMA:** So what you say has to count.

**YL:** Exactly. And that role is what got me invited to a lot of conventions.

**NRAMA:** Moving on a little bit, you worked with Glen Murakami before in *Teen Titans: Trouble In Tokyo*. Now



you're working with him on *Ben 10: Alien Force*. What's it like working with him?

**YL:** I love Glen to pieces because he's a big nerd like me. We speak exactly the same language. I remember one of the things he said early on in *Ben 10*. You see we didn't know each other that well. I had only a small part in *Trouble In Tokyo*, so I didn't get that much time to forge a relationship with him.

So, getting into *Ben 10*, he told me that Ben was now a little bit older, not quite as prone to say a wisecrack like he would before. At the same time he said "I don't want him to veer into the whining, Luke Skywalker 'I got to go to this space station to pick up some moisture evaporators' kind of character." At that moment I fell in love with Glen Murakami. He knew exactly how to talk to me!

**NRAMA:** What about Dwayne McDuffie?

**YL:** Dwayne's a little quieter when we go into session, but he always has input. He's always there. He's also a big geek and certainly speaks my language. It's kind of a dream job in that respect. I go to work and get to hang out with nothing but my kind of guys!

**NRAMA:** How does it feel that *Alien Force* is renewed?

**YL:** We'll see. I'll ride it as long as I can.

*NEXT COLUMN: We move on to Wolverine & The X-Men, Wonder Woman, their own production company and lots, lots more. .*

Platt explained how long it took for them to get really busy, and how working on *Naruto* helped get them there. Then Yuri gave some deserved shine to Glen Murakami and Dwayne McDuffie, who picked him to be Ben Tennyson in *Ben 10: Alien Force*.

Of course, that isn't all Yuri and Tara have going for them. Fans of the game *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* might recognize Tara as Wonder Woman. Canadians might like to know Yuri is Bobby Drake on *Wolverine & the X-Men*. That isn't all, either.

So read on, and just find out how busy these two are:

**NEWSARAMA:** Now what are you doing with *Wolverine & the X-Men*?

**YURI LOWENTHAL:** Well, you can watch the show if you're in Canada. Last I heard, it will be coming to Nicktoons this January. I'm Bobby Drake, better known as Iceman.

The word of mouth has been good, so far. I'm hoping that when it comes to the U.S. it also goes over well. We recorded 26 episodes and I want to do another season.

**NRAMA:** You've worked with Steve Blum [voice of Wolverine] before, right?

**YL:** Many times.

**NRAMA:** There are a lot of people from the same circle doing the voices. It must make sessions almost like a family thing there.

**YL:** It is. That's another job I love showing up for. It's a room full of really talented people, and it's hard to get all that talent in a room at one time, to be honest. Jamie Simone, the vocal director, is very patient with us.

Also, it's absolutely in the line of the Marvel comics we all enjoyed. Being a fan myself, I was really impressed, in fact I was stunned, at how the creative guys kept it real. I was also stunned by the story line



they came up with. They've gone into some deep dark places in these first 26 episodes. I got to see the first three episodes and my jaw dropped. Some of it is so close to the comic; no whitewashing or backing off of anything. It has some really difficult elements.

**NRAMA:** From what I understand, they are televising the show on a later time period, so they can go into more mature areas.

**YL:** Yeah. I was very surprised that Nicktoons took it. It took a very long time for that show to find a home in the United States. From what I understand, it was really British money that funded it. They knew they had a BBC deal, but for the longest time they had no commitment here. I was also kind of surprised when it was Nicktoons. They are not really known for superhero stuff. I guess they are now having their own superhero phase.

**NRAMA:** Just to be complete, Tara have you appeared on *Alien Force* or *Wolverine* yet?

**TARA PLATT:** No I have not. I would love to. I know the guys who work on the show, so it's always possible. I'll just wait to see how both series plays out. I'm working on it.

**YL:** We're all working on it. I'd look forward to it.

**NRAMA:** That brings up another interesting thing. Tara, your growth has been more horizontal than Yuri's. For instance, I noticed you do things like being a feng shui consultant. You don't just do acting.

**TP:** I just love learning. The best way to put it is if Yuri calls himself a geek, I call myself a student. I love learning. I love reading and figuring stuff out. So, to keep

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## Animated Shorts: The Voices - Yuri Lowenthal & Tara Platt

By Steve Fritz

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Part 2/2

There's a rule in Hollywood, it's always good to be busy. [In Part One of our interview](#), Yuri Lowenthal and Tara

myself active and going, I take a lot of classes when I'm not working as an actor. Then I'm basically in school. Not only am I a certified feng shui consultant, but in the last year I've become a certified hypnotherapist. In the end I've wound up with all these degrees afterwards.

**NRAMA:** So you collect diplomas the way Yuri collects comic books?

**TP:** I suppose so! [laughs].

**YL:** Suffice that she's the smart one in the family.

**NRAMA:** Yuri how would you describe *Afro Samurai's* Kuma as a character, both in the first series and how he's portrayed in the upcoming *Resurrection*?

**YL:** Kuma's huge for me. You'll get me talking a lot about that on the DVD extras for *Resurrection*. He's such a thrill to play. He starts out as Afro's best friend and ends up his worst enemy. I get to go to the dark places. He got me teamed up with bad men like Sam Jackson and Ron Perlman, two of my favorite guys in the business. Plus, no matter how many times they kill him, he keeps coming back. Kuma's big journey was in the first installment of *Afro*, not as much screen time in this one, but he plays a pretty big part in the end and he's got a badass chopper, so who cares?

You get to see a lot of him in the *Afro* video game which comes out the same day as *Resurrection*, I think. I can't wait for Jan. 27th, basically.

**NRAMA:** Also, considering your admitted geekdom, what is it like playing Superman?

**YL:** Once again, don't even get me started. I couldn't even—I still can't even—wrap my head around it. As a comic book nerd who grew up running around the yard in tights and a cape—even, you know, last week [laughs]—you play a role like that and you might as well retire afterwards. The pressure I felt going into it was immense. Like it wasn't hard enough auditioning for a role like that, but actually getting it. I don't know. I wish I could have done it longer.

*Legion of Super Heroes* was a really good show that fell victim to bad timing and studio mismanagement. I'm glad that team at least got to go on to Batman afterwards. *Brave and the Bold* is pretty damn cool. But in the end, I got to be freakin' Superman. What else is there to say?

**NRAMA:** What in the world is *Van Von Hunter*? **YL:** That remains to be seen. It's an odd project I worked on with some guys at Tokyopop. They had a manga they were trying to develop into a film, and in the casting found out that the guy in the manga is actually based on a real guy. The writers of the manga hadn't told them that...and the real guy actually shows up. They've got no real choice but to cast him. I thought I was gonna have a bigger role in the film, honestly, but they ended up spending more time on this guy. I became more of an assistant than anything. This guy's pretty wacky, like, not even really an actor. I don't know if they'll ever be able to put together a film out of what they got. The guy kept going off the rails, never learned any of his lines, and I'm pretty sure his accent was fake. Who knows, man. Half the stuff I've worked on never gets completed. You'll probably never see it.

**NRAMA:** Tara, I saw you are working on two other projects. What can you tell me about: playing Jade in *Love Sick Diaries* and Lacey in *The Last Bad Neighborhood*

**TP:** Well, when I'm not working behind a mic in voice over, my passion is acting in front of the camera, and those titles are two recent feature films that I worked on which are just finishing up and getting prepped to release soon.

*Love Sick Diaries* is a really edgy love story in which I play the best friend of a girl caught up in things and I attempt to help her as things spiral out of control. *The Last Bad Neighborhood* is a fun indie action film. I even have a fight scene in it, which is totally cool. I never really think of myself as the tough chick, and yet, here I am getting into fights, throwing my weight around and having a blast.

It is also a really interesting movie in that the

filmmakers had the experimental idea of mixing comic illustrations with the action, so it almost feels like you are inside a comic book, like the characters are popping off the pages; bouncing between live action and illustrated images. I went to the cast screening at the end of last year and I am really looking forward to it getting released this year, if for nothing else than to show off my guns!

**NRAMA:** So what is Monkey Kingdom?

**TP:** Monkey Kingdom is our production company. I don't like to be still. I like to keep a lot of things going. I also believe in creating your own opportunities, finding your own creative voice, and building your own niche. For us, what we decided is as our careers developed, if things got slow, which often happens the way the industry works, we had to assure that we had projects to work on whether we were hired by someone else or not.

So, a couple of years ago, Yuri and I decided that we should create our own production company. This way we can do film that we're excited and passionate about. We are actually in post-production on our first feature film, which is called *Tumbling After*.

**NRAMA:** What kind of film?

**TP:** It's a psychological thriller.

**YL:** More thriller than horror.

**NRAMA:** Are you guys performing in it?

**TP:** We took small roles in it because we like to keep working, but we're both producing. Yuri wrote the script.

**YL:** It should be coming out next year. I don't know when exactly or what venue. We're talking to several distributors. We're waiting to see who is interested. It's definitely a genre festival type of film.



**NRAMA:** So are you trying for Sundance, festivals like that?

**YL:** I don't think it's hardcore enough for Sundance.

**TP:** I think it will go more towards horror/thriller festivals, which are growing all over the U.S. There are so many genre-specified festivals. I'm certain that's a really good target market audience. We are really pleased. We think it ended up a really good movie. It's our first movie and we are very pleased with the results.

**YL:** The idea behind Monkey Kingdom and doing our own shows is Hollywood can be a very frustrating place to work in. You constantly feel your career is in the hands of other people. It's been really hard to generate our own projects. So getting this done has been very positive. It's given us a modicum of control.

**NRAMA:** So are you planning to do more Monkey Kingdom projects in the future?

**TP:** Absolutely. We're also talking about what film we'll produce next year [2009]. There is a couple that we are interested in. So, by the end of next year we want to go into production on our second movie. Yuri and I have written a number of scripts. Yuri is a really good writer. So we are trying to produce some projects that we're really passionate about.

We're also looking at doing some things like web features. We've also talked to our voice acting representatives about pitching an animated project. So there are a lot of little fires going on.



**YL:** We're also doing a book on voice over.

**TP:** We're co-writing it.

**NRAMA:** Cool. I've seen the DVD Bang Zoom! did. It's interesting to see all the kids who are now wanting to do that as a career, isn't it?

**YL:** Every week we get an inbox full

of emails, a lot of it being what does it take to get into voice acting. After a while, it gets hard to answer the same question every time.

**TP:** Then when a number of our friends, who are also into acting, started asking questions, we thought it was time to do the book. So we really try to break it all down, real nuts and bolts, but keep it very much our voices. We are writing it for our fans and friends, including tips and tricks we have learned over the years.

**NRAMA:** Speaking of roles, one of my friends who's into gaming told me to tell you Tara that Wonder Woman does thump.

**TP:** Yes, she does kick butt, doesn't she? I haven't had an opportunity to get a copy, but someone sent me to a YouTube site that has her. When I saw it all I could think was "She's awesome!"

**YL:** One thing I have to add is I don't have the time to play like I used to, so YouTube has become one of my favorite places. It's great to have all these people who not only play the game, but then post the characters from all the games we play on YouTube so we can see them.

**NRAMA:** One thing Tara, your voice is a little higher in real life. Did you lower it to play the Amazon?

**TP:** I did a little bit. The truth is the majority of roles I play tend to be those strong, mature kind of women. It's what I tend to get cast in. I find it awesome because I love those kinds of roles. So I did lower my voice a little bit. Actually, how I do it is I mainly just change my attitude. I think about being a strong warrior, and that's what mostly changes my voice. I get into the attitude. That's what creates the voice for me.

**NRAMA:** Was it a satisfying project for you?

**TP:** It was so much fun! It's like when Yuri got to play Superman. How can you not enjoy playing fantastic, strong, iconic characters like that? Of course, it was a little terrifying for me because they had me on phone patch with the executives from DC. Being it was

Wonder Woman, they really wanted to get it right. She's very important to them. They literally had to approve every single thing I said. That was nerve wracking. I'm glad that I got the role because I really wanted to do Wonder Woman. It definitely isn't a sucky job. Still, it's pretty intimidating to hear a voice on the phone criticizing you every thing that you do.

**NRAMA:** That sounds kind of what Richard Epcar told me he went through when he did the Joker.

**YL:** Richard was on Cloud 9 for so long after that role it was getting funny. Every time I ran into him he was constantly going (in Epcar's natural voice): "Hey Buddy! Did I tell you I'm doing the Joker?" And I would have to say "Yes Richard, you told me the last ten times we met, too."

**TP:** I thought he did a great job.

**NRAMA:** That's funny, considering *Robotech* is continuing and you are now involved in it Yuri. [He's cast as Marcus].

**YL:** Yeah! It's an amazing thing for me, too. I've been a fan of *Robotech* since I was in high school. That's when I started watching it. I would literally cut my last class to get home in time to see it. I thought by the time I was doing voice work, that I'd miss that boat. There wouldn't be any more new *Robotech* stuff. For me to get to work on that, especially under Richard's tutelage, it was a dream come true.

**NRAMA:** So a new *Robotech* project is go, right?

**YL:** I think so. It might be on hold because of Warner Bros. acquiring the rights to do a feature film. So it's kind of in a holding pattern.

**NRAMA:** So you might wind up working for Bruce Timm before you know it.

**YL:** Hey! There aren't many better people to work for. Worse things can happen.