

# BETWEEN THE GYM FLOOR AND THE BIG SCREEN

*Japanese born  
Masa Yamaguchi  
talks about life as a  
personal trainer and  
acting alongside  
Hollywood's best.*

**B**ONDI PLATINUM personal trainer, Masa Yamaguchi, tells me that the day he can no longer perform a daily backflip is the day that he'll consider himself old. I ask him when he started having this profound insight? 'It's kinda been my ritual for a long time and usually when I wake up in the morning I do it. I have been so physical all my life, so the day when I can't do a backflip I will know I am getting old,' he says.

Although he harboured a passion for soccer, Masa trained in martial arts from age four, a given, considering his father owned a martial arts gym in Japan. Working in the fitness industry and becoming a personal trainer was a natural progression. 'I grew up in the gym, hanging out with the big guys and exercise became second nature to me, so people starting asking me to train them,' explains Masa, 'I went from 1 to 10, to 50 sessions per week!' ▶

Between working with clients, which is anywhere up to 62 sessions a week, he's also currently training to beat the current bench press World Record. 'The World Record for my weight, in the Masters Category (drug tested) is 167.5kg. I can already press 170kg, and hopefully I can press 175kg on competition day at the end of the year,' he says.

Growing up in Japan, it wasn't until 1990 that Masa moved to Australia. Shortly after he landed a role in a Shakespearean play at 16, and a star was born. 'I did a 10-minute monologue and they were looking at me and listening to what I had to say; it was really weird. It gave me a buzz that they were interested in what I had to say,' explains Masa.

From here, bigger and better things greeted the budding, young actor after he starred alongside Patrick Stewart of *Star Trek* fame and Gregory Peck in *Moby Dick*. 'I worked on it for four months and loved it. When I asked Patrick about acting he took me aside and said "you should audition for NIDA".' This great idea saw Masa graduate from the esteemed acting academy in 2001. 'I was the only Japanese person who had been there (NIDA), and the teachers didn't really know what to do with me.'

At age 27, after graduating, he was cast in his first role as an 18-year-old in the TV show *Crash Palace*. Masa laughs as he recalls, 'I lost my virginity on TV as an 18-year-old!'

Often cast as the 'the bad Asian guy', Masa craves to expand his repertoire. 'For me to play "Jack" (i.e., just anybody), I've got to compete with good-looking Caucasian guys who have blue eyes and blonde hair. I just want to be cast as that "Jack" guy.'

Last year Masa spent five months travelling between Australia, Tokyo and Bangkok, working on films including *The Wolverine* and *The Railway Man*. Working as a stuntman on *The Wolverine* he says that it was pretty hectic. 'Most of it was shot on the green screen – I hurt my back, hurt my shoulder, broke my chest, lots of things.' Working with Hugh Jackman for 12 weeks perfecting a fight scene can't be all that bad though? 'Everyone is a villain in the movie – there's Hugh and then there's everyone else,' he laughs.

In between shooting *The Wolverine* Masa was back on the Fitness First PT floor, adding another client to his very long list. Masa calls actor, and wife of Hugh Jackman, Deborra-Lee Furness his guardian angel. 'I trained her for six months and she's such an amazing person. She helped me a lot with advice about the film industry and she introduced me to her manager in the States,' he explains. 'She told me to be proactive towards your dream every day. And she would ask me, "Have you done something today?"'

Alongside being a good parent and doing a backflip everyday, it's really holding the golden statue and thanking his wife that sparks a glow. 'Fitness is certainly my passion but my dream is to win an Oscar,' says Masa. With a mantra 'aim high, live full and respect others', he has all the ingredients to achieve his dream. Lookout for Masa in *The Wolverine*.

**TONI KRASICKI, BHMS (EX SC) PGDIPHLTHPROM**

Toni has 25 years of experience in the fitness industry and has been lugging her backpack to many corners of the world for just as long. She is a freelance writer and can be contacted at [tkrasicki@hotmail.com](mailto:tkrasicki@hotmail.com) or visit [www.adventuregirlwrites.com](http://www.adventuregirlwrites.com)

**SHURE**  
LEGENDARY  
PERFORMANCE™

**PERFECT SOUND. FROM EAR TO EAR.**

Shure headphones bring together dynamic high-performance audio with unparalleled build quality.

A closed back design minimises background noise, while lightweight construction provides sustained comfort that makes them ideal for any listening experience, from the cardio room, to the weights room, they provide complete sound throughout any workout.

Distributed by

**JANDS**

[www.jands.com.au](http://www.jands.com.au)