



From left: Shannon Holt, Emily Kuroda, Tamlyn Tomita and Dian Kobayashi are the voices at JANM's Question 27, Question 28.

Photo by Greg Schwartz

BY ANNE KELLY-SAXENMEYER  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Writer and director Chay Yew is adept at coalescing different elements into a whole. His latest endeavor is *Question 27, Question 28*, for

**THEATER REVIEW**

which he has quilted interviews, testimonials, transcripts and historical documents to bring the lives of Japanese Americans confined in internment camps during World War II into intimate focus. The thoughtful stage documentary runs through Feb. 29 at the Japanese American National Museum (JANM), and true to the spirit of joining components on and back stage, it's a collaboration between the Mark Taper Forum's Asian Theatre Workshop (which Yew heads), East West Players and JANM.

In the play, four actresses take on a variety of internees and historic figures: a girl struggling to reconcile her American pride with her internment, young women coming of age in the camps, interned mothers with sons serving in the U.S. armed forces, observers on the outside filled with distrust or ashamed sympathy, and the Roosevelts, speaking of "necessity" in wartime sound bites. As the outstanding cast — Shannon Holt, Dian Kobayashi, Emily Kuroda and Tamlyn Tomita — reads the interspersed accounts, one first attempts to seize on the individual threads of story. By the end, however, individual impressions and sharp images merge into a single portrait. To absorb it is a powerfully emotional experience, but its overwhelming message is one of caution.

"We began to speak in whispers," says one woman, recalling hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbor while at a

### JANM Play Uses Historical Documents to Dramatize Japanese Internment

church service. After the bombing occurs, the voices refer again and again to their "state of shock." First it's the shock as Americans and victims of an attack, then the shock of being categorized with the enemy and shunned by longtime friends, neighbors and employers, and lastly, the shock of being betrayed by the U.S. government and torn abruptly from their homes, communities and often their families.

It is in the details that this experience comes to life. One speaker's mother digs up her prized flowers, giving them to friends for safekeeping, conceding one to a bold, insensitive neighbor. Entire households of furniture acquired by years of

hard work are sold for a few dollars. A speaker tells of a woman separated from her disabled son, who was deemed unfit to be interned but died without his mother's care. All the while, as curfews and rules are imposed upon the soon-to-be prisoners, one speaker says, they "frantically wanted to do what was American," buying war bonds and wrapping Red Cross bandages even while preparing for their departure.

Inside the camps, we are made to imagine what it might've been like to attempt normal family life inside a horse stall. Beyond the humiliating conditions and the tragedies of inadequate medical care, however, the speakers show the determination of internees not only to survive but to thrive in the face of injustices. There are weddings, empty hours to be filled with classes, and once barren, dusty camps decorated with crepe paper flowers and planted with seeds packed along by the families.

The voices also recall "the days of Question 27, Question 28," when internees were made to sign questionnaires pledging their loyalty to the United States and their willingness to serve on its behalf. Yew shows how the terrible irony behind that request and the residual anguish of internment resonate in the Japanese-American and American legacies. The most resounding entreaty in that inheritance, say the voices, is that we not let it happen again.

*Question 27, Question 28* runs through Feb. 29 at the Japanese American National Museum, 369 E. First St., (213) 625-0414 ext. 2237 or [taperahmanson.com](http://taperahmanson.com).

## 'Question 27, Question 28'

Created and directed by Chay Yew, "Question 27, Question 28" is a staged reading of documentary theater that illuminates the lives and personal stories of Japanese American women who were sent to internment camps during World War II. Certainly a dark chapter in modern American history.

Somewhat long and repetitive, it's still absorbing — a live version of oral history.

Four women (three Asian, one Caucasian) dressed in black stand and read from scripts on music racks in front of them. The stage is bare. Behind them is the provocative drop design of Christopher Komuro: three strands of barbed wire on a red background.



BY  
ED  
KAUFMAN

venue  
Japanese American  
National Museum,  
Los Angeles  
(Through Sunday)

the bottom line  
Albeit too long,  
this staged  
reading is  
thought-provoking.

A joint project of Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum's Asian Theatre Workshop in association with the Japanese American National Museum and East West Players, "Question 27, Question 28" — a loyalty oath for Japanese during World War II — draws from testimonials, transcripts, interviews and historical documents.

Avoiding political polemics, writer Yew has chosen to tell his tale from the vantage point of ordinary women who went sent to such places as Tule Lake, Manzanar and Santa Anita, where they lived in makeshift barracks and even stalls once used to house racehorses.

While their men were drafted



From left: Shannon Holt, Emily Kuroda, Tamlyn Tomita and Dian Kobayashi

into the U.S. Army, the women, children and elderly were shipped to internment camps, whether they were Isei (Japanese-born) or Neisei (American-born, with all the rights and privileges of an American citizen). All Japanese, and this includes Japanese Americans, were forced into internment camps when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order

9066 in 1942.

Yew deftly and adroitly explores their lives, blending bewilderment, anger and acceptance as the women struggle with their uprooted lives, families that are torn apart, suspicion and prejudice — and the aftermath when they are finally released.

What emerges is a simple sort of  
See "QUESTION" on page 19

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## 'Question'

*Continued from page 15—*

dignity and courage on the part of the women as they struggle to make a life for themselves within the barbed wire of their internment camps.

What is most confusing to them is that they consider themselves loyal, patriotic Americans — and not as suspicious “Japs.”

Credit Dian Kobayashi, Emily Kuroda and Tamlyn Tomita for terrific multiple roles as the interned Japanese voices on the “inside,” while Shannon Holt is

equally wonderful as the many American voices from the “outside” expressing a variety of attitudes, including those of FDR and wife Eleanor.

### QUESTION 27, QUESTION 28

Presented by Center Theatre Group/  
Mark Taper Forum's Asian Theatre  
Workshop in association with the  
Japanese American National Museum  
and East West Players

**Credits:** Creator-director: Chay Yew; Drop  
design: Christopher Komuro. **Cast:** Shan-  
non Holt, Dian Kobayashi, Emily Kuroda, Tam-  
lyn Tomita.



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# Show Guide

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West  
Southern CA March 24, 2004

## Question 27, Question 28

Reviewed By Wenzel Jones

It's one of life's anomalies that xenophobia is generally exhibited by the people who are least likely to be able to spell it. Creator/director Chay Yew's documentary approach to the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II certainly gives a nod to that segment of the population, but it's a far richer piece than that, focusing primarily on the experience of females both inside and outside the camps. The work thus has a distinctive voice that is neither didactic nor polemic.

A great deal of the power comes from the sheer simplicity of the production. With nothing more than a graphically stunning representation of barbed wire as their set, four of the finer actors in town simply stand and read Yew's compilation of testimonials and historical documents. On the night reviewed it was the estimable quartet of Linda Gehringer, Amy Hill, Dian Kobayashi, and Emily Kuroda onboard, with Janellen Steininger and Tamlyn Tomita waiting to step in to subsequent productions. Character names are announced in a clipped and efficient fashion before each speaks, keeping things clear for the audience and giving the production an inherent energy and rhythm.

Unless you grew up listening to these stories as family history, it's likely you'll get a bit of an education from the show as well. It never even occurred to me before to wonder, intellectual breadth not being my forte, what Chinese-Americans did during this period. White America has never, after all, been noted for its ability or interest in the discernment of physiological differences among non-white races, so how did it suddenly develop the knack of distinguishing between people of Chinese (ally) and Japanese (enemy) background? Helpfully, the Sino-Americans wore buttons reading "I Am Chinese." It's almost a throwaway joke in the show, but the implications, both for the wearers and the audience of the button, have been churning in my head ever since.

There are much larger stories, of course, from one woman's realization that the gathering and shipping inland of the Japanese-American population wasn't going to blow over and would, in fact, only get worse, to the plight of Caucasian wives and teachers whose association with the camp left them tarred with the same brush of prejudice. There are surprisingly a great many lighthearted moments, as well, as life in the camps went on in spite of the bizarre conditions. It wasn't until the camps were declared illegal by the U.S.

"Question 27, Question 28"

presented by East West Players in association with the Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum's Asian Theatre Workshop and the Japanese American National Museum at the David Henry Hwang Theatre, 120 N. Judge John Aiso St., L.A. Fri. 7:30 p.m., Sat. 11 a.m. & 3 p.m., Sun. 2 p.m. Mar. 19-28. \$10. (213) 625-

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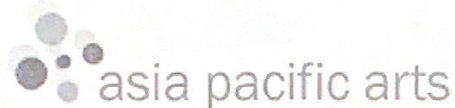
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Supreme Court in 1944 that a substantial population of American citizens had its basic civil rights restored. I don't know, however, if anyone at the time referred to them as "activist judges," as would most likely happen today.



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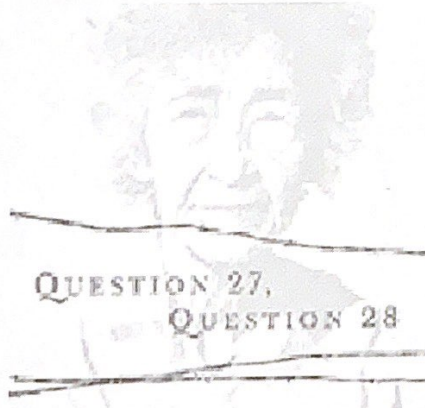
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Courtesy of eastwestplayers.org.

## Remembering Japanese Internment

by [Karen Sakai](#)

**Japanese-American Theatre Project remembers the stories from the past to send a message to the present and future.**

February 19th is recognized by the Japanese American community as Remembrance Day, marking the day President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, sending anyone of Japanese descent to internment camps. This injustice is undoubtedly an important part of American History that must be remembered, but as each year passes and the internees get older, who will tell their story?

To commemorate this year's Remembrance Day, the Mark Taper Forum's Asian Theatre Workshop, in association with the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) and East West Players brought *Question 27, Question 28* to Los Angeles' Little Tokyo. This play, directed by Chay Yew, surprised audiences with a performance unlike any other. Simplistic, yet very dramatic, four women stood in front of music stands and read first hand accounts found from testimonials, transcripts, interviews and historical documents of Japanese Americans.

Performing to sold-out audiences, the all-female cast took on multiple roles to capture the history of Japanese American women from immigration through post-internment. Tamlyn Tomita, (*Joy Luck Club, Robot Stories*) brought an element of class to the production, while Dian Kobayashi and Shannon Holt also held their own. Holt courageously took on the challenging role as the only non-Japanese woman of the cast, captivating the anti-Japanese racism and Roosevelt's government stance. Emily Kuroda (*Gilmore Girls*) gave a memorable performance and touched the audience with her own emotions as she wiped tears from her eyes during her performance.

While the project spoke of themes of discrimination and discussed the identity struggle of what it meant to be Japanese-American, the performance also included some light-hearted memories of camp. Kobayashi shared a woman's story of a Japanese woman's cure for her sister, using a special camp remedy of broth, made of earthworms. In the row across from mine, a man in the audience, once an internee himself, smiled and whispered with nostalgia, "Yes, that really happened."

*Question 27, Question 28* brought audiences back to the 1940s but also brought audiences together in the twenty-first century. During the intermission, audience members spoke with each other, and some openly talked with strangers. They discussed what they knew about internment and some shared their own memories of camp. Although the tone of the play was solemn, an ambience of the theater created bonds between patrons.

Now, unfortunately, there are fewer surviving internees to listen to, and it is disheartening to think that one day Japanese American internment may become another memory the younger generation will skip over in their history books. It is important to keep their stories alive because it helps us look at life in the 21st century.

How does Chay Yew think the story affects today's society? "Question 27, Question 28 and all internment camp stories belong to the Japanese Americans as they belong to non-Japanese Americans. As much as we recognize the adversity of these remarkable Americans, we must also be vigilant and proactive when this history revisits us, especially in this time in American history," says Yew. Yes, that is an important message to remember.

The East West Players will be holding encore performances of *Question 27, Question 28* at the David Henry Hwang Theater, starting on March 19th. To learn more about the East West Players and upcoming shows, visit: <http://www.eastwestplayers.org>.

For more information about the Japanese American National Museum go to: <http://www.janm.org/main.html>.

#### Did you know...

- During World War II, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated into camps around the western interior of the United States from 1942 to 1946. Nearly two-thirds of those people were legal, U.S. Citizens. There is still a debate to the correct terminology of the Japanese American camps. While "concentration camps" was the term used by U.S. officials at the time, many feel that it cannot be compared to the concentration camps in Europe. Also, to make the concept more acceptable, the U.S. government's decided to shroud the incarceration in euphemistic terminology. Today, many people, including Japanese Americans, also refer to the camps as "internment" or "relocation" camps. The Japanese Americans were told that they could bring only what they could carry. Some abandoned their property, many hurriedly sold possessions at great losses, and a few were able to find non-Japanese American friends to care for their houses and businesses during the war. The financial losses were incalculable.
- The title of the play, *Question 27, Question 28* refers to the 1943 survey that the U.S. War department distributed in the relocation camps to anyone over the age of 17, to test their loyalty to the United States.
- Question #27 asked: Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?
- Question #28 asked: Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese Emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization?

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THE CHICAGO JAPANESE AMERICAN NEWS

Friday, February 18, 2005

## “Through the Voices of Women” Day of Remembrance



Photo(L) Documentary Staged Reading “Question 27, Question 28”  
Photo(R) The Playwright, Chay Yew, at Q&A, following the performance



On February 15, Chay Yew's documentary piece, “Question 27, Question 28,” made the voices of dozens of Japanese American female internees heard inside and outside the community.

The staged reading was featured “Day of Remembrance,” the JA community's annual

event to commemorate the 63rd Anniversary of the Signing of Executive Order 9066, which allowed the government to incarcerate some 120,000 Japanese Americans during WWII.

Entitled “Through the Voices of Women: Question 27, Question 28,” this year's pro-

gram looked at the impact on JA women of the signing of EO 9066 by Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, through the performance, followed by a Q&A session with the playwright.

Over 200 participants gathered at the event, which took place at the DePaul University

Student Center on N. Sheffield Avenue, Chicago, and shared the intense emotions that Japanese American women had gone through.

Based on testimonials, transcripts, documents and interviews with JA female detainees, Yew depicts how the “land of the free” took freedom

### 今週の主なニュース

- 連転ビジネスシリーズ  
ブレイクスルーグローバルイノベーションの契機  
中村建一氏
- 大統領命令 9066  
2度と繰り返させないために
- シャンバーグ姉妹都市提携  
委員会を設置し強化

from Japanese Americans to be as American as they were.

Although the lives for Issei Japanese and their American born kids were not too easy in this country even before the war, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor made the situation worse. People, even their friends, turned their backs on “Japs.”

During internment they struggled with a dilemma. Once they recited the Gettysburg Address on July 4 in a camp, looking at a picture of Lincoln with an American flag behind him.

“I know it didn't make any sense but we wanted so much to believe that this was a government by the people and for the people and that there was freedom and justice.”

And, once they had to answer loyalty questionnaires, Question 27, Question 28, feeling ridiculous about answering

See page 22, Women



**Women**  
from page 24

to "Will you be loyal to this country?" under barbed wire, guard towers, search lights, and armed guards.

"Had I not wanted to leave camp, I might have answered 'No' to both 27 and 28. But I chose to be practical and said 'Yes'...yet I was bothered by not answering honestly. It was the only way out."

But, they survived no matter what, sometimes finding happiness in a sprout of morning glory.

"I felt wonderful the day I left camp...and bought a Coke. A nickel Coke. It wasn't the Coke, but what it represented—that I was free to buy it...."

During a Q&A session with the playwright, Chay Yew, he said that he realized that usually internment pieces were

written from male's perspective. He was interested in how women manage to survive, which led him to focus on women's experience.

When asked about a Japanese Americans' response to today's situation, that Arab/Muslim people have faced after 9/11, a member of the Day of Remembrance committee, Sam Ozaki, responded, "We have invited the Arab, Muslim community to participate in our day of remembrance because of the parallel." He continued, the Japanese American community was "definitely supportive of our Arab and Muslim American brothers and sisters."

An attendee, who was 19 when interned, commented he always thought the day of remembrance is not necessary "just to relive the whole experience again". He, however, said this piece brought back what he had forgotten himself,

and the injustice done by the government.

Carrying an unyielding message that this should "never happen again to any group of Americans," the playwright noted education about the internment situation, which is not given much priority in this country, is important.

Chay concluded the event, saying such events should come more often to make a situation better. "That's why I'm in the theater, because I believe stories make us remember. In this culture, history is rewritten so quickly. We can't forget the big thing, especially as a legacy to our children and new generation of Americans."

One of the four actresses, Cheryl Hamada, commented after the event. Growing up in a Jewish neighborhood as a third generation Japanese American, she said that she knew her parents' camps

were not death camps, which was "still a big thing". She didn't know much about camp until she started reading books in college. "It's true issei and nisei don't talk."

Cheryl said, reading this piece was a tremendously powerful experience and "so moving". She explained that different women's voices compounded on top of each other shook her up at several points. "You can just picture" those poor people, she said.

The program was co-sponsored by Chicago Japanese American Council, Chicago Japanese American Historical Society, DePaul University, Chicago Chapter of Japanese American Citizens League, Japanese American Service Committee, in collaboration with Silk Road Theatre Project.

Committed to theatre that elevates human consciousness, expands representation, and

challenges prevailing stereotypes, Malik Gillani, Executive Director of Silk Road Theatre Project said that they brought Question 27, Question 28 to the community as a good match with the purpose of the event. The theatre has established relationships with the Japanese American organizations through the staging of the Japanese American play, "Tea," last year.

**Question 27:** Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?

**Question 28:** Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?

**Horse's Mouth**

**By George Yoshinaga**



**"A Messy Situation, Indeed"**

How did we ever get into

After watching the basketball... what Dodger player

an 80-year-old shouldn't be climbing up ladders, even a

Of course, there are still a lot of people from Hawaii who visit Vegas but don't move there.

Last year, 229,000 Hawaii residents visited Vegas. And most stayed at the California Hotel.

Little wonder you can find some of Hawaii's favorite food being served in the Cal's Mar-

mailed me the following: "This is to inform you of a Chinese food restaurant that is owned by a part of the family that owned the Far East Cafe. The name is New Formosa Cafe at 241 5 E. Cesar Chavez Ave. in East L.A. Open from 11 -3 p.m., Tuesday to Friday, Saturday 11 to 7 p.m. Closed Sunday and Monday. Street