

BREAKING THE MOLD

ACTRESS-MODEL TARA BASRO IS SET TO MAKE A BIG IMPRESSION
ON THE LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT SCENE.

WORDS JUSTINE LOPEZ | PHOTOS CHRISTINA PHAN

Tara Basro sits patiently inside Shanghai Blue, the kitschy Menteng restaurant that will serve as the backdrop for her photo shoot with *JPlus*. There isn't a stitch of makeup on the young actress' face, yet her skin is flawless and undeniably beautiful.

She is intelligent, thoughtful and mature beyond her 24 years. She also reveals a rebellious side, as she slyly hides her nose ring for the photo shoot, speaks off the cuff about politics and discusses the pitfalls of the Indonesian concept of beauty.

She is also willing to poke fun at herself and comes across as very easy going.

She also knows firsthand how tough it is to make it in Indonesia as a "dark-skinned" model. It took years and countless rejections for the model-cum-actress to break through and land her first major role in *Catatan (Harian) Si Boy* (Boy's Diary) in 2011.

Now her acting career is really taking off, as evidenced by her lead roles in the hit martial arts film *Pendekar Tongkat Emas* (The Golden Cane Warrior), released at the end of 2014, and Joko Anwar's upcoming *A Copy of My Mind*. Tara also stars on the TV sitcom *The East*.

Tara, who has a small role in *Filosofi Kopi*, now in theaters, is still trying to discover who she is.

"Maybe it's because I'm still 24 but I want to explore,"

she says. "Right now, if I want to get a tattoo or a piercing, I'll do it. I don't want my job to somehow put me in a box; I don't want it to limit me. I want to be able to express myself in any way because

being yourself feels really good!"

Her confidence, curiosity and desire to try new things largely comes from her experiences as a child. Because of her father's work as an airline

executive, Tara spent most of her life moving around and living in far flung locations like Paris, Beijing and Hong Kong.

She admits that all the moving around wasn't always easy but constantly being exposed to different people, customs and cultures indelibly shaped Tara and the way she approaches her career.

Her modeling career started like any other. She cobbled together jobs by entering modeling competitions, posing for magazines and auditioning for commercials. But all along the way she was consistently told that her caramel-colored skin was too dark.


"It was really hard at first because nobody wanted to cast me. Before I did my first movie I used to go to castings for commercials – I didn't book one of them!" she exclaims.

For Tara, who donned a short haircut during her early modeling years, the phrases, "your skin is too dark" and "your hair is too short" became painfully familiar.

"At first I tried to fit in and use whitening products. I didn't realize that I was actually hurting myself because I wasn't accepting myself for who I am."

It was her experience studying in Perth, Australia, that changed the way she perceived beauty. Unlike in Indonesia, women came in all shapes, sizes



A woman with dark hair styled in a vintage fashion is wearing a black, sleeveless, floor-length dress with a lace collar. She is posing in a restaurant setting with red walls and traditional Chinese decor. To her right is a large wooden pillar with vertical Chinese calligraphy. In the background, there are tables with blue napkins and warm lighting.

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Wardrobe Vintage dress, stylist's own
Location Shanghai Blue, Jl. Kebon Sirih
79, Menteng, Central Jakarta



and colors in Australia, and as a result Tara realized that it wasn't her that needed to change, it was the industry.

"My manager tried to book me for a job and the casting director said, 'she's so dark.' He's telling me to get my skin fixed. It's my skin tone!" she says incredulously. "No, I don't want to do that job."

"I don't know, it's kind of hurtful when people make comments about your physical appearance without knowing your struggle, and I'm pretty sure I deserve better than that."

SETTING AN EXAMPLE

With her now flourishing career, Tara says she has a responsibility to set an example for Indonesian girls and women. She wants others to embrace their differences and feel confident about the way they look, even if they don't have porcelain skin or straight brown hair.

"Back when I was a kid I would read magazines and say, 'I want to be this girl,'" she recalls. "And it's hard when you have dark skin and say, 'I don't look like them.' You know? I want to be the person that [people] can relate to."

Despite her success, Tara's skin still poses

challenges for her – she feels that she is commonly stereotyped because of her “exotic” look. .

“A lot of times people see me as this sexy character – which I’m not in real life – and I don’t know why. I think it’s my eyes, especially with makeup. I think that my eyes are really playful,” she ponders.

With a half-smile it appears that Tara is slightly amused by how misconstrued she is by the public.

“People think that I’m very high maintenance, really difficult. But no, I’m chill,” she laughs, timidly. “In real life I’m easy going. In my daily life I wear sneakers and shorts – I think you can tell a lot about a person from their shoes.”

Tara doesn’t necessarily mind being viewed as sexy, but the idea of being typecast as such is a real concern for the young actress.

“Being typecast is limiting you as an actress. If I see Scarlett Johansson, I don’t think I can see her doing a heavy, serious role. And I don’t want to be like that. Some actors are scared to look ugly and I’m not. I’ll do whatever.”

This desire to experiment and defy the status quo played a large role in her decision to star in *A Copy of My Mind*, set for release later this year.

“I always love working with Joko Anwar. He has such a big vision to improve the film industry here,” she says. “I think what he’s trying to do is give something different for the audience to see. Even though sometimes the audience isn’t able to accept it.”

The film, which will be released later this year, tells a gritty and suspenseful story about life and politics in contemporary Jakarta. Tara plays Sari, a reclusive woman who leads a hopelessly mundane life working at a facial salon in the city.

“The story is about picturing urban life from the lower class point of view. Like, if you see the pictures, it’s so real. Sometimes people

capture Jakarta in a beautiful way but this [film’s] not like that. It’s dirty; it’s just how is. I think this film is pretty risky because it involves politics as well.”

Joko praises the actress.

“She’s tremendously talented, and has an incredible screen presence. She’s very easy to work with, and highly dedicated,” he says.

“And, uhm, craaaazy!”

Joko’s kidding aside, it’s Tara’s willingness to take risks in her career, and her persistence and unbreakable confidence, that make her unique.

There’s no telling what Tara will do next. **■**



Wardrobe Sebastian Gunawan

TARA Tidbits

My guilty pleasure ...
French fries!

And pet peeve ...
I like everything to be hygienic. I hate it when people don’t wash their hands.

People would be surprised to know ...
That I take public transport.

My celebrity role model ...
Léa Seydoux, the French girl in *Blue is the Warmest Color*.

Favorite place I’ve lived ...
Makassar. I was there during my junior high school days. I guess because it’s different from Jakarta. In Makassar I could hang out at home with my friends and play at the beach. It’s something you don’t get here.