New faces

Esther Yoo

Who is she?
Esther Yoo is 19-year-old violinist whose innocent appearance belies a fierce and impassioned playing. She caused quite a sensation with her performance of the Sibelius Violin Concerto on a recent tour with Lorin Maazel, and will release her first CD later this year.

So, another of those amazing female prodigies from Far-East Asia?
Yes, but Yoo has an unusual pedigree. Her parents are both Korean, but she was born and raised near New York. "I remember being taken to all these wonderful concerts at the Lincoln Centre and Carnegie Hall, that's where my love of music began," she days. At the age of six, the family upped sticks to Brussels, where she has lived ever since.

Where does she feel at home?
"Oh that's a really hard question!" Yoo says: "I go to Korea once a year to see family, and speak the language at home. I read novels in English, but my schooling was all in French. When I was around 10, my parents had an opportunity to go back to the States, but I was settled in school, and really serious about the violin, and Brussels seemed the right place to be. I guess I feel very European, I love old places and the feeling of tradition in Europe. And that goes with

Eclectic: Yoo loves a wide range of music, from Bach to Taylor Swift

playing the violin, because, after all, this is where classical music was born."

Who does she admire among musicians?
Yoo isn't just inspired by other violinists: "The violin is such a vocal instrument, I find I can learn just as much from a great singer like Maria Callas as from a violinist." But it is the really classical violinists that Yoo admires: "The ones who just let the music arise through the instrument without trying to impose their own personality on it, such as Arthur Grumiaux."

Who is her desert island composer?
"Oh, it's Bach for sure," Yoo says. "I play his music every day, it's so cleansing. It feels like going back to the source of all music."

What does she listen to for fun?
Yoo has eclectic tastes, and listens to "all kinds of stuff". Currently her iPhone is home to country-pop megastar Taylor Swift, Adele and British jazz pianist Jamie Cullum. "I'm really envious of musicians who improvise," she says, "it's something we do so rarely in classical music."

Ivan Hewett

Esther Yoo appears with the Philharmonia Orchestra on Mar 11, 21, and 23; estheryooviolin.com