



## Crossing Continents

**Raymond Yiu's first Violin Concerto, specially written for Esther Yoo, receives world premiere at Barbican Centre with BBC Symphony Orchestra and Sir Andrew Davis (20 March 2024)**

**New work recalls troubled life of Ma Sicong, a great musician and educator forced to flee Mao's China during the Cultural Revolution**

**Esther Yoo's UK season includes her debut with the New York Philharmonic (8 to 13 February), three-concert tour with the Philharmonia Orchestra (23 to 25 February) and her return to Wigmore Hall with duo partner Jae Hong Park (3 July)**

Esther Yoo is ready to take centre stage in what promises to be one of this season's most moving world premieres. The American-born Korean violinist, recently hailed by Chicago Classical Review for her "*burnished tone*" and "*gleaming virtuosity*", is set to give the first performance of Raymond Yiu's Violin Concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Conductor Laureate Sir Andrew Davis at the Barbican Hall on Wednesday 20 March 2024. Written specially for Yoo, the 35-minute work explores themes of identity, displacement and homesickness whilst reflecting on the eternal plight of all those forced into exile. A BBC co-commission with the Hong Kong Philharmonic and Seattle Symphony, Yiu's concerto for violin, his first, also offers what he describes as "*a meditation on the turbulent history of China in the 20th Century, and the place of Chinese musicians in the realm of western classical music.*"

Raymond Yiu has built a close creative partnership with the BBC Symphony Orchestra over the past decade. Their collaboration began when the orchestra gave the premiere of his 'symphony game' *The London Citizen Exceedingly Injured* in 2013, followed by the critically-acclaimed *Symphony* at the 2015 BBC Proms. The partnership has strengthened since by a run of other memorable performances, including the London premiere of *The World Was Once All Miracle*, given at the Barbican Centre under the direction of Sir Andrew Davis in 2018. The seeds of his Violin Concerto were planted nine years ago at the Royal Festival Hall when Yiu and Yoo met for the first time while taking part in a charity concert. The Hong Kong-born, London-based composer came to hear her perform several times thereafter and was inspired to write a concerto for her.

"*It's very exciting to work with Ray on such a wonderful new composition.*" comments Esther Yoo. "*Getting to know and understand his Concerto has been a tremendously rewarding experience. The piece was inspired by the life of Ma Sicong, a great Chinese violinist and fine composer who studied in Paris during the 1920s. At the time of China's Cultural Revolution, he managed to escape the authorities and found refuge in the United States where he remained for the rest of his life. Ray has used motives from Ma Sicong's 'Nostalgia', the second movement of his 'Inner Mongolia Suite' for violin and piano, and carried the emotional spirit of the piece into the concerto.*"

Ma Sicong experienced many of the great upheavals of China's modern history. Born in 1912 in Guangdong province, he began playing violin at the age of eleven and travelled to Paris with his older brother soon after to receive lessons on the instrument. Ma returned to China in 1929, where he was feted as the 'King of Violinists', before journeying back to Paris to take composition lessons. He survived the deadly famine that swept Guangdong in 1943 as a consequence of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45); following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1948, he was appointed the first president of Beijing's Central Conservatory. Like countless creative artists, Ma was a prime target for the anti-elitist persecution unleashed by the outbreak of Chairman Mao's Cultural Revolution in 1966. Having been tortured by the Red Guards, he and his family escaped China by boat to Hong Kong and eventually made their way to America, where Ma died in 1987.

Raymond Yiu was deeply affected by Ma's story and by the yearning violin melody of *Nostalgia*, written in 1937 around the time of Japan's merciless invasion of Manchuria. The piece, he notes, is regarded by many Chinese as a meditation on the sorrows of exile. Yiu's use of its music in his Violin Concerto projects what he calls "*a hymn to celebrate the forgotten achievement of an immigrant in a strange land, as well as to provide a musical gateway for audiences to explore the development of Western Classical music in 20th-century China and*

beyond.” The new work combines diverse musical styles with the customary richness of Yiu’s orchestral writing. “There are nods to Chinese songs and instruments, such as the erhu, and echoes of Cantopop that Ray grew up listening to in Hong Kong.” observes Esther Yoo. “There are so many reflections in the piece of China at different points in its modern history and of the feelings of an exile far from home.”

Yoo first worked with Sir Andrew Davis eight years ago for a performance of Mozart’s Violin Concerto No.5 with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. “It was a great pleasure to work with Sir Andrew on the Mozart, so it will be fascinating to spend time with him again on such a different piece.” she notes. “And it has already been a delight to work with Ray, whom I know really well, and to be part of the Concerto’s creative process. He’s so open to feedback and very considerate to my thoughts as a violinist, and it has been a genuinely collaborative process. I’ve given several premieres in the past, but this one feels quite different because Ray wrote it with me in mind from the very beginning.”

Before bringing Yiu’s new concerto to life, Yoo will make her debut with the New York Philharmonic performing Bernstein’s *Serenade (after Plato’s Symposium)* under the baton of Santtu-Matias Rouvali (8, 10, 11, 13 February). Later that month Yoo will appear as a soloist for a short UK tour with the Philharmonia Orchestra and rising-star Finnish conductor Emilia Hoving. Their itinerary starts at The Anvil, Basingstoke on Friday 23 February, followed by De Montfort Hall, Leicester (24 February) and concludes at the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury (25 February). The bill includes Prokofiev’s Violin Concerto No.1 in D major Op.19, which the composer began in 1915 and completed two years later on the eve of the October Revolution in Russia.

Following their highly-successful duo debut in November 2023 (“*The concert lasted a lunchtime, the memory will last a lifetime*”, MusicOMH review), Esther Yoo returns to Wigmore Hall with pianist Jae Hong Park for an evening recital on Wednesday 3 July 2024. They open with Beethoven’s Sonata for violin and piano No. 8 in G major, Op. 30 No.3 before moving to Sibelius’s Sonatina in E major Op.80. The programme’s second half comprises the intriguing coupling of Arvo Pärt’s *Fratres* with Prokofiev’s sombre Sonata for violin and piano No.1 in F minor Op.80. The latter, written for and dedicated to David Oistrakh, began life during the dark days of Stalin’s Great Terror in the late 1930s and was completed in the aftermath World War Two. “It’s always a great pleasure to work with Jae Hong,” notes Yoo. “We launched our duo partnership with great success at Wigmore Hall last November. Our next Wigmore programme is built around Prokofiev’s First Sonata, which we’ve wanted to do for some time, but all the pieces we have carefully selected will lead our audience through a broad range of textures and emotions, and everything we can bring to them.”

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**Thursday 8 February, Tuesday 13 February, 7.30pm / Saturday 10 February, 8pm / Sunday 11 February 2024, 2pm**

**David Geffen Hall, New York**

[Event link](#)

**Bernstein *Serenade* (after Plato’s ‘Symposium’)**

**R. Strauss *An Alpine Symphony***

**Esther Yoo violin | Santtu-Matias Rouvali conductor | New York Philharmonic**

***Philharmonia Tour***

**Friday 23 February 2024, 7.30pm**

The Anvil, Basingstoke

[Event link](#)

**Saturday 24 February 2024, 7pm**

De Montfort Hall, Leicester

[Event link](#)

**Sunday 25 February 2024, 7.30pm**

Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury

[Event link](#)

**Sibelius** Lemminkäinen Suite: Lemminkäinen's Return

**Prokofiev** Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19

**Tchaikovsky** Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

**Esther Yoo** violin | **Emilia Hoving** conductor | **Philharmonia**

**Wednesday 20 March 2024, 7.30pm**

**Barbican Hall, London**

[Event link](#)

**Tippett** *The Midsummer Marriage* – Ritual Dances

**Yiu** Violin Concerto (BBC co-commission, world premiere)

**Beethoven** Symphony No 7 in A major, Op. 92

**Esther Yoo** violin | **Sir Andrew Davis** conductor | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

Further performances of the Yiu Concerto with Esther Yoo as violinist are scheduled in 2025 with the Hong Kong Philharmonic conducted by Jaap van Zweden and Seattle Symphony (conductor TBC).

**Wednesday 3 July 2024, 7.30pm**

**Wigmore Hall, London**

[Event link](#)

**Beethoven** Violin Sonata No. 8 in G major, Op. 30, No. 3

**Sibelius** Violin Sonatina in E major, Op. 80

**Pärt** Fratres

**Prokofiev** Violin Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 80

**Esther Yoo** violin | **Jae Hong Park** piano