



YAY FOR YAEJI

MARTA COLOMBO explores the psychedelic deep-house sounds of rising Korean-American producer YAEJI



LISTENING TO YAEJI'S dreamy techno-infused house is a psychedelic experience. On her two EPs, *Yaeji* and *EP2* (both released in 2017), she masterfully mixes elements of deep house, EDM and dance with soft English and Korean vocals that she sings herself. In less than two years, the 25-year-old Korean-American DJ and vocalist has become a recognisable name with her unique approach to dance music. She's broken cultural and artistic boundaries, has already landed a spot on the prestigious BBC Sound of 2018 list, and has played international festivals including Coachella and Sonar.

Yaeji, born Kathy Yaeji Lee, is everything that you'd expect from a contemporary woman making music. From her quirky outfits to her decision to make music in the two languages she grew up speaking between South Korea, Queens, Long Island and Atlanta, the 88rising artist makes intriguing, inimitable tracks that reflect her multiculturalism.

Hailing from Brooklyn, where she's now a respected member of the vibrant local artistic community, Yaeji makes polyandric art – she produces her own music, spins records, sings and creates visual content. With an “act local, think global” approach, she's also been hosting her ultra-popular parties “Yaeji and Friends” in her neighbourhood, which sell out in minutes.

If you don't know who Yaeji is – and it isn't for the fact that her “importance” is certified by the blue tick – you certainly wouldn't know it from her Instagram posts, where the globetrotting DJ and producer appears as a quirky, hip music lover who's equally passionate about American and Korean pop culture.

Yaeji's universe takes perfect shape in her glitchy music videos. Some scenes in “Raingurl”, the smashing house hit that's annoyingly addictive, seem inspired by a classic Wong Kar-wai movie and could be



mistaken for a short avant-garde film you'd see at a contemporary art exhibition in Berlin. Yet it's just Yaeji, dancing to her own tunes in a transparent raincoat, surrounded by some of her artist friends in an ode to Brooklyn's evolving rave scene.

One of Yaeji's most viral tracks – listening to it two times is enough to be seduced – is the eccentric “Drink I'm Sippin On”, which fuses Korean and English with hip-hop and trap elements. Strangely enough, it's quite common to see young adults and teenagers all over the US, Asia and even Europe singing along (in both English and fake broken Korean) in clubs and at festivals – something that her most loyal fans keep mentioning across social media platforms. In a recent video interview with music website *Genius*, Yaeji explained that the song was born during her daily commute, from a moment of introspection while using an app on her phone that produces basic loops and sounds. The English part, according to her, represents

the part of herself that feels confident. When she uses the Korean expression 그게아니야 (or “that's not it”), which she describes as “phonetically beautiful and almost therapeutic”, she exposes her insecurities. Most of the lyrics, like in many other tracks, are confusing on purpose – and that's what makes her music fascinating beyond the club experience.

Mass-market EDM isn't usually associated with storytelling, but Yaeji proves that it's possible to make danceable, exhilarating hits that carry a message and represent her background. While her tone is hushed, intimate and almost whispered, lending her songs a chill indie-like atmosphere, the energetic beats of the bass really get you dancing hard. Yaeji produces the type of music that makes you “dance like nobody's watching” or, like her, makes you not care if anybody is. Maybe that's what her fans and friends refer to when they say “raving like and with Yaeji”. #