

# Wet T-shirts need not apply

The violinist Leila Josefowicz can and does do glossy, but her art isn't in it, she tells **Nina Large**

SHE HAS been photographed for Chanel's Allure campaign. She appeared on an album cover posing in front of an American flag, her hair an effulgent blonde. But that's not the image that Leila Josefowicz wants to portray or indeed is the essence of her art.

She has been consistently vocal about the seriousness of her vocation: she has never been tempted by the supposed accessibility of "crossover", nor by the big bucks of wet T-shirt antics, à la Vanessa-Mae. Nevertheless, she is well acquainted with the difficulties of balancing the media-friendly with the music.

"I think by now enough has happened in my life where I'm able to sit back and see certain things more clearly," says the 27-year-old Californian-born violinist who won a scholarship to Philadelphia's exclusive Curtis Institute of Music at 13, made her Carnegie Hall debut at 16 and won a recording contract with Philips at 17.

She readily admits that she enjoys photoshoots, but rather wishes she could lose the "model" label: "Hell, there are worse things that can happen to you,

**'I want people to think: this is a great violin player, not a great girl'**

but it's not really what the music is about."

This is the crux of the matter. The industry, it seems, has been so interested in her age, her good looks, her marriage at 21 to the conductor Kristjan Järvi and subsequent divorce, as well as her new life as single mother of one, that her reputation as a musician has sometimes had to struggle to maintain its stature in spite of all her good intentions.

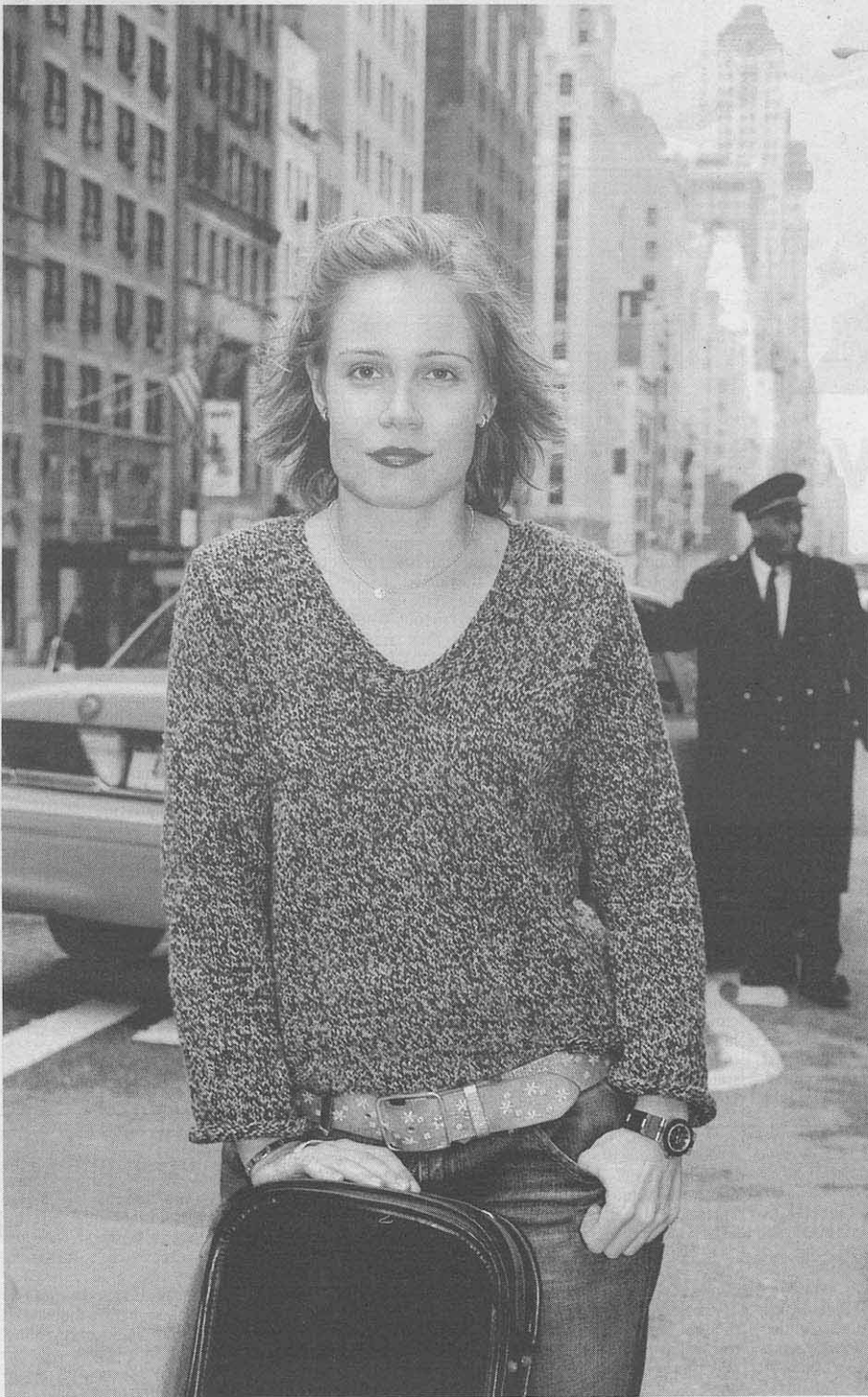
"You have to navigate your way through that," she says. "When I perform, above all I just want people to think: 'This is a great violin player, not a great girl or woman or mother, just a great musician.'"

Despite her sunny demeanour, Josefowicz is a self-confessed "obsessive thinker", and her playing is equally intense. She's a hugely physical performer who takes control of the stage, but her muscular tone is underpinned by an arrestingly tender sweetness.

She is certainly a striking woman, although when we chat in her apartment on the Upper West Side in New York she is in faded jeans and a sweater that she knitted herself. I suspect that in some ways she is making a point.

"I hate the glossy thing," she confirms. "That's why I look the way I look right now. There's nothing wrong with

NINA LARGE



**Blonde ambition:** "A lot of players are young and good-looking," says Leila Josefowicz. "There's the market that buys that, and then there's the market that buys Alfred Brendel. In a sense I'm just trying to appeal to both"

## WHEN YOUTH TAKES A BOW

**Anne-Sophie Mutter**

She made her debut with Herbert von Karajan at the Salzburg festival in 1977 — at the age of 14.

**Maxim Vengerov**

"I learnt the whole language of violin playing in just over a year," explains the Russian virtuoso.

**Sarah Chang**

She was just 9 years old when Menuhin described her as "the most ideal violinist I have ever heard."

**Nigel Kennedy**

Remember the time when the punk Villa fan was just a fresh-faced, prodigiously talented musician?

stand when things are only light and fluffy. I want music to be something meaningful and reflective."

The limitless horizons of contemporary music have been an emancipation. While Josefowicz was pregnant she learnt John Adams's Violin Concerto, and the composer is frank about the direction it took her. "By going around playing my piece so much and with such panache and command she has raised the public opinion of herself," he says. "There was a level of the classical music world that raised eye-

**'Music is so complicated, intense and passionate'**

brows because they thought of her as the young girl in the strapless gown. But I figured that anybody who walked out the very first time and played it from memory had to be unique."

As well as Adams, Oliver Knussen, Salonen and Grey are among her dearest friends, and Josefowicz is passionate about working with them. "I was trained to regard amazing figures like Beethoven with such distance. To go out for meals with John or Mark, tell silly jokes and talk about the way they compose — that's the biggest difference there could be in music. You understand it all in a different way."

Despite numerous distractions, Josefowicz has made the transition from *wunderkind* to adult virtuoso and she's determined to stay there. "The music means more to me than it ever has," she says.

● *Leila Josefowicz* is released by Warner Classics. She performs the album at the Barbican (020-7638 8891) on April 23

simply being me." On stage she takes care not to wear low-cut dresses or very short skirts. "Music is so complicated, intense and passionate so the last thing I want to do is mix that stuff up in it. It totally confuses the message.

"A lot of players are young and good-looking," she adds. "There's the market that buys that, and then there's the mar-

ket that will buy someone like Radu Lupu or Alfred Brendel because of who they are — established musicians. In a sense I'm just trying to appeal to both."

Enter Warner Classics, whose new recording *Leila Josefowicz* (her first since the move from Philips) seems to mark a new stage in her career. "More than any other

album I've done this one really shows my relief at finding my path and my voice," she says. "What made me happy was that Warner's really understood my wavelength. They could see what I am trying to do instead of trying to change things."

The repertoire was originally dreamt up by Josefowicz as a touring recital programme

for her and her long-term collaborator, the pianist John Novacek. It is a challenging but satisfying combination of Brahms, Beethoven's Tenth Sonata, Messiaen and Ravel, with contemporary works by Esa-Pekka Salonen and Mark Grey. It's music that demands concentration on the part of the listener and that's exactly what she wants: "I don't under-