

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist



"Ivan Ilić urns up the dynamic contrasts and sharpens the edges in a disc containing all 24 of Debussy's fearsome yet tonally entralling Préludes from both books. Each spin...reveals fresh insight. After much listening...I couldn't help but gain respect for Ilić's strong will."

- John Terauds **Toronto Star** Canada, February 17th 2009

[Read an interview with the Toronto Star](#)

"For those of an eclectic bent, pianist Ivan Ilić's Friday recital at San Francisco's Old First proved a delight. The program was an adventure in learning as well as a brilliant display of technical prowess, all free of clichés. Ilić was technically flawless, offering lots of color plus an uncommon sensitivity to Debussy's expressive little tone paintings."

- Heuwell Tircuit **San Francisco Classical Voice** USA, February 16th 2009

"This high quality new disc on the French 'Paraty' label played on a magnificent Steinway by young American artist of Serbian origin, Ivan Ilić is now an outstanding recommendation. Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest is a very dynamic piece simulating the powerful, menacing wind, perhaps the loudest in the series, but even here the pianist never pounds the piano. It comes as a breathtaking climax."

- Janos Gardonyi **Wholenote Magazine** Canada, February 2009 issue

"The performance from Ilić was full of composure and restraint, with a unique command of phrase and texture."

- John Packwood **Bristol Evening Post** England, January 30th 2009

"Ivan Ilić is one of America's leading young pianists. In his new CD, he takes on Claude Debussy's Préludes in an entirely original and fascinating way: rather than wading into oceans of misty-eyed tone colors, he approaches them simply and analytically. In this way, he arrives at a purified tableau: one that remains comprehensive and iridescent, but doesn't distract from the masterly form of the miniatures."

- Michael Wruss **Oberösterreichische Nachrichten** Austria, January 16th 2009

Ivan Ilić is a young Paris-based American pianist whose attributes of evenness of touch, sure facility and lovely if compact tone impress..."

- James Manishen **Winnipeg Free Press**, Canada, January 3rd 2009

"I have always preferred the Etudes to the Préludes (which alone should get me kicked out of the classical music writers club), but pianist Ivan Ilić sparkles, balancing Debussy's sustained washes of color without sacrificing elegant contrapuntal precision."

- Christopher DeLaurenti **The Stranger**, Seattle, USA, December 31st 2008

www.IvanCDG.com

Updated on March 15th 2008

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"At 28, Ivan Ilić already knows Debussy's music perfectly. His reading is lively, ethereal, and dark all at once: there is power and weightlessness simultaneously." **Four stars**
- François-Xavier Lacroux **France Catholique**, Paris, December 12th 2008

"The American pianist Ivan Ilić gives us a remarkable version of these Préludes, which break down tonal order without renouncing the essential principles of tonality itself. We realise how much these incomplete chords and complex rhythms are familiar to us today, and how obvious they now seem in retrospect. **Four stars**
- Yvette Canal **Prestige Audio Vidéo**, Paris, November-December issue 2008

"[Debussy's] aural explorations gave rise to two of his most important works, the two books of piano preludes that are the subject of the new album by young pianist Ivan Ilić. Ilić, an American based in Paris, has a deftness of touch that allows him control over both Debussy's exuberant climaxes and his quiet, subtle moments. The sound is rich and clear, with a broad range of dynamics but a solid rhythmic pulse, without which Debussy's misty soundscapes would descend into mush...This album might be the ideal introduction for listeners who are just beginning to discover the charms of the greatest exponents of French quirkiness and colour."
- Dillon Davie **Mail & Guardian**, South Africa, November 24th 2008

"The highly gifted Ivan Ilić clearly adores these microcosmically compressed pieces, yet never loses sight of their multifaceted individuality. More than ever the préludes emerge not as studies in pianistic sonority but character pieces of enhanced sophistication...the rich humanity of these priceless miniatures [is] joyfully relished."
International Piano, London, November-December issue 2008

"On his début album, American-born but Paris-based pianist Ivan Ilić plays Debussy's solo piano pieces cleanly and precisely, relishing in the evocative and expressive powers of both sets of préludes."
- **Classic Feel Magazine**, South Africa, November issue 2008

"Ivan Ilić specialises in well constructed programmes that stimulate the mind as well as the ear. He's recently brought out a CD of the Debussy Preludes books 1 and 2. It's a well recorded disc with sound quality to match the quality of the playing which is robust and highly coloured. Ilić presses at the boundaries of expression and phrasing with readings of these inventive pieces that are both considered and surprising. Familiar repertoire like La fille aux cheveux de lin and La Cathédrale engloutie positively glow on this recording, with strong interpretive lines that hold the ear even as Debussy's spirit of invention attracts pianists to these Préludes again and again."
- Andrea Rea **Belfast News Letter**, October 31st 2008

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"Ivan Ilić, who just finished a world tour playing the Préludes, is a consummate pianist and brings out all the nuances Debussy intended. He manages the subtlety of the habanera and flamenco rhythms in La Puerto del Vino, Debussy's interpretation of the Alhambra as well as the hint of the La Marseillaise in Feux d'artifice (Fireworks) inspired by the Bastille Day celebrations. Ilić brings out the intense colours and dappled lights of the post impressionists as well as the introspection of the turn of the century French poets whose work inspired him. His background as a mathematician means he also brings a measured analytical, interpretation so that each note, chord and phrase is understood and positioned so that they form an exquisite equation."

- John Daly-Peoples **National Business Review**, New Zealand, October 31st 2008

"Two Ballades from Brahms's Opus 10 set revealed lyrical and sensitive playing."

Western Morning News, England, October 26th 2008

"Among the most successful Préludes are Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir, which is particularly well done, a wonderfully slapstick General Lavine - eccentric, and Ondine, the little-known gem, to which Ivan Ilić brings an appropriate mysterious quality."

- Bertrand Boissard **Pianiste**, Paris, October 21st 2008

"The pianist is careful not to play in too impressionistic a manner and instead searches to exploit the natural resonance of the Préludes. Ivan Ilić achieves this with great lucidity in works with evocative titles: The hills of Anacapri, Veils, The wind on the plain, Undine, etc...the pianist's technical mastery is ultimately convincing and he sweeps us into a whirlwind of complete, fugitive sensations."

- Christophe Le Gall **Resmusica**, Paris, October 19th 2008

"Les deux livres de Préludes de Debussy (1909-1912) sont des opus incontournables de la littérature pianistique. Le jeune pianiste américain d'origine serbe Ivan Ilić adopte un jeu clair, sans langueur superflue."

- Jacques Freschel **La Marseillaise**, France, October 19th 2008

"The program [had] an arching and enticing symmetry...Ilić brought youthful energy to the Préludes, as well as the sensitivity they demand."

- Iris Lorenz-Fife **Independent Coast Observer**, USA, October 17th 2008

"His playing is characterised by clarity, vivacity and his intuitive feel for systems in the music...the pianist, who has real personality, listens attentively to the music he is making, and his name is one to remember."

- Jean Roy **Le Monde de la Musique**, Paris, October 2008 issue

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"Ivan Ilić's approach is intimate and poetic without being over-indulgent; clearly this is spirited and yet very carefully distilled playing, and I especially admire the pianist's straightforward manner in La Cathédrale engloutie and Feux d'artifice, which brews up huge intensity while allowing in the finer needles of light. Ilić's La terrasse de audiences du clair de lune is pedalled robustly and he is suitably irreverent in Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C., but the most interesting playing comes in Les tierces alternées, a perpetuum mobile of considerable flightiness."

- Mark Tanner **International Record Review**, London, October 2008 issue

"Le pianiste, lui, est tellement habité par la partition qu'il nous envoie un seul message : laissez vous aller et écoutez....fermez presque les rideaux, et surtout fermez les yeux... Il s'agit également, et il faut le souligner, du premier disque d'un tout jeune pianiste prometteur, Ivan Ilić. D'origine serbe, il a vécu longtemps aux Etats-Unis, et habite depuis peu Paris. Pur produit des conservatoires de San Francisco et de Paris, où il obtenu ses prix, son touché n'en est pas moins sensible et raffiné...L'avenir semble prometteur à Ivan Ilić."

- Grégoire Moreau-Bonnescuelle **RCF en Berry**, Bourges, September 18th

"A swirling west wind, spectral underwater cathedral or quirky military gent...Ilić, a 28 year old American based in Paris captures each of Debussy's mini-portraits vividly. The order of the preludes on disc is unconventional but fidelity to what the score says is impeccable." Four stars

- Phil Sommerich **Classical Music Magazine**, London, September 24th 2008

"An ardent interpreter of Debussy, Ivan Ilić deploys crackling fire and a refined, chiselled, and hyper-reactive sensibility, which expresses all the facets of the Preludes' delicious seduction. His muscular playing brings out the richness of Debussy's writing. This album is a revelation." **Top 5 CDs of the month**

- Guillaume-Hugues Fernay **Classique News**, France, September 15th 2008

"Debussy's two sets of Preludes occupy Ivan Ilić, an American pianist of Serbian heritage now living in Paris. Mr. Ilić certainly has the credentials, and he's obviously a pianist of skill and thoughtfulness. [the] music [is] caringly served up from the printed page..."

- Scott Cantrell **The Dallas Morning News**, USA, September 13th 2008

"[Ilić's] technical prowess was forged without detriment to a musical sensitivity especially suited to these expressive pieces by Claude Debussy. It is in this kind of repertoire, whose difficulties are extremely varied, that we can fully realize and appreciate the genius of the performer. With this recording we are in a world full of poetry where Ivan Ilić is the most talented bard!" **Lexnews**, Paris, September 4rd 2008

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"[T]here is much in American pianist Ivan Ilić's performances of Debussy's Book 1 and 2 Preludes to draw fresh responses from such well-known works. The clarity in his playing, and minimal use of pedal, gives sharp definition where others prefer a more reverberant haze...[in] character pieces [such] as General Lavine – eccentric, Ilić's personality is at its most decisive."

- Kenneth Walton **The Scotsman**, Scotland, September 1st 2008

"He responds best to some of the faster preludes giving a fine performance of the most powerful piece in the collection, Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest, albeit downplaying its fury, and managing the difficult Feux d'artifice quite dazzlingly...Best of all is La Cathédrale engloutie which Ilić programs as Book 1's finale. Adopting a slightly faster tempo than what one usually hears Ilić holds the piece's sections together with well-judged tempo relationships and he seems to take Debussy's instruction for how to play the loud chords in the middle ("Sonore sans dureté") as an inspiration to seek a special burnished sound for the whole piece. There is none of the pomposity or fragmentation that one often hears in performances of this most orchestrally conceived of the preludes."

- Paul Orgel **Classical Voice New England**, USA, August 29th 2008

"[Ilić's] fine interpretations of these remarkable préludes show him to be a pianist of both discernment and virtuosity."

- Editor **New Classics**, UK, August 4th 2008

"Ilić's playing is clean and precise...each note is distinct, treated as a separate point in a shimmering constellation of sound."

- Sarah Canice Funke **Suite 101**, USA, August 4th 2008

"Ivan Ilić has so soaked himself in the idiom of this music that he doubtless dreams extra préludes in his sleep...[he] takes playful delight in steering Shakespeare's Puck through his capricious steps. At another extreme is the technical bravura of cascading rockets and whirling Catherine wheels in Feux d'artifice, superbly managed by Ivan Ilić at the end of a memorable disc."

- Robert Anderson **Music & Vision**, UK, August 3rd 2008

"Ivan Ilić gives us brilliant cascades to start with Debussy's Fireworks."

- Sean Rafferty **BBC Radio 3** (In Tune), UK, July 25th 2008

"The adventurous Paris-based pianist (who studied both music and mathematics at Berkeley) likes his music on the brainy side."

- **The New Yorker** [Carnegie Hall preview] USA, June 23rd 2008,

"Ivan Ilić makes his Carnegie Hall debut with a most ambitious program."

- **Time Out New York** [Carnegie Hall preview] USA, June 23rd 2008

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"Here is a solo performer who can bring all the sensuality, colours and contrasting evocative moods of the works being performed while dazzling with the panache and technical mastery tackling challenging pieces. This charismatic playing emphasised the power of silence and resonance, delighting in the reflection and retention of the sound before the fingers descend for the next scintillating delight. Whether it was bringing a freshness to familiar pieces or, with composer in the audience, being the deliverer of contemporary composition Ilic oozes style and intelligence, charisma and élan."

- Mike Smith **Western Mail**, Wales, March 18th 2008

"Haydn is a composer who never ceases to surprise, lulling one with tunes of almost naïve simplicity before suddenly veering off into unexpected and challenging territory. This is true of his Sonata No 30 in B minor, especially in the Trio of the Menuet section, and Ilić did full justice to both extremes. The Presto finale is a hell-for-leather ride, and the soloist's technical dexterity came through triumphantly."

- Ben Ridler **Y Dydd**, Wales, January 26th 2008

"The silence that greeted the build-up of tension towards the middle of the piece was evidence of Mr Ilić's tremendous stage presence and charisma...[he] paid particular close attention to the pacing of [Liszt's Dante Sonata] as a whole, and he measured silences and tempi the way a master chef measures ingredients for a main course. He held nothing back, and the result was thrilling...an unforgettable pianist, one who takes risks with his audience and leaves a room full of new fans."

- Leslie Gordon **Inverurie Herald**, Scotland, November 16th 2007

"...Ilić's control of the sound of the piano is staggering, and the subtlety and precision of his playing are enough to make you blink. But Ilić has something more to offer in addition to his total command at the piano: his humanity. The [Liszt Dante] Sonata is a tremendous showpiece...he launched into demonic tempos with gusto...Ilić was greeted with a roar of enthusiasm after the final chords."

- Rebecca Davidson **Stornoway Gazette**, Scotland, November 15th 2007

"The music was full of light, space and colour...the second half, which started with Chopin's Polonaise-Fantasia, relaxed into a more rhapsodic, richly colourful and evocative mood. [Ilić] played it with sensuality and eloquence and the sound of the piano became lush and romantic. [He] explored all these musical avenues in a lucid and exciting way."

- Peter Podmore **Southern Reporter**, Scotland, November 15th 2007

A bold mix of modern and Romantic works...[Debussy's] Préludes...were navigated with mastery and finesse by Mr Ilić, who is obviously very comfortable in the French repertoire...a transparent and moving account of the Chopin Polonaise-Fantasy. The evening closed with Liszt's Sonnet no 47 and the Dante Sonata. The first was a lesson in elegance, the second in virtuosity..."

- Brian Maclean **Northern Scot**, Scotland, November 9th 2007

www.IvanCDG.com

Updated on March 15th 2008

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"...the entire hall seemed to pulsate... Ilić played with verve and panache, obviously enjoying himself...[his] luminous sound was well-suited to the Chopin Polonaise-Fantasy and the Liszt Sonnet, whereas Liszt's Dante Sonata proved that Ilić is happy to indulge his considerable gift for impetuous virtuosity. Perhaps most impressive was his control of the sound of the instrument throughout the afternoon, the silences well-judged, and the gratifying louder passages never marred by excess. Let's hope he'll return."

- Christina Prescott **Western Telegraph**, Wales, October 29th 2007

"Ivan Ilić is one of those select performers who possess the extra spark that makes them thrilling and truly memorable artists. Ilić began his recital at the Tabernacle Arts Centre in Machynlleth this month by taking a big risk with Afterglow, recently written for him by the American composer Keeril Makan. This haunting piece, almost metaphysical in mood, was paced brilliantly by Ilić. The entire work had an underwater feel, and the six Debussy Préludes that followed emerged from a similarly refined approach to resonance. Ilić's sensual playing and fluid gestures sculpted each sound, each silence."

- William Harper Owens **County Times**, Wales, October 19th 2007

"The concert demonstrated artistic potential of the highest order...the harmonic richness of eight Debussy preludes from the second livre was palpable, and Ilić brought out the subtle shades of colour with a poet's ear. Ondine was particularly compelling, the elusive spirit of the water nymph captured exquisitely. Following the intermission, Ilić gave one of Chopin's most satisfying works, the Polonaise-Fantasy. He brought out Chopin's complex lineage of Bach and Schubert, and the playing was restrained and elegant throughout..."

- John Morgan **Western Mail**, Wales, September 25th 2007

"Once in a while you experience something quite extraordinary at a concert, and this was one of those occasions. Ivan Ilić is an extremely talented American pianist with a wonderful technique, a relaxed style and an easy manner with his audience...Ilić has the ability to get under the skin of his music...he gave a dazzling performance of music by Händel, Debussy, Chopin and Liszt. Nothing interrupted the glorious flow of music and the depth of feeling in every note, making this a very special concert."

- Malcolm Rees **South Wales Evening Post**, Wales, September 22nd 2007

"This evening was an exceptional occasion...because it allowed us to listen to two virtuosos, Ivan Ilić and Noël Lee. Each has his own sensibility; their musical color (subtly shaded) and their joint talent served Debussy's Prélude to the Afternoon of a Faun tremendously, for a magnificent four-hand performance. The first half, played solo by Ivan Ilić, showed the entire pallet of this talented young artist, who mixed the works of Lucien Durosoir with those of Brahms to great effect."

- Jean-François Lepetit **Lexnews**, Paris, July 5th 2007

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"...an astounding dynamic range...supremely technically gifted. From the elegaic Feuilles mortes to the sparkling conclusion of Feux d'artifice he held me spellbound...Ilić gave a triumphant performance....the treat of a lifetime."

- John Jones **Coleraine Chronicle**, Northern Ireland, June 20th 2007

"Flying fingers at pianist's concert...a great chance to hear such a brave choice of live music from a very accomplished pianist...refreshing and innovative."

- Michael Holohan **Drogheda Independent**, Ireland, April 4th 2007

"...remarkable...a pianist of high stylistic assurance...[he] impressed [with] the integrity, vividness and rhythmic control of his playing, notably in La Puerta del Vino and the final, pyrotechnic Feux d'Artifice. It's such a joy to come upon a pianist with an abundant armoury but who refuses to sacrifice intelligence to prodigal display."

- Nigel Jarrett **South Wales Argus**, Wales, March 30th 2007

"Ivan Ilić wowed the audience with his solo recital...he proved himself to be a pianist of some style and many convictions...he will hopefully return here with his tasty recital programmes again and again."

- Andrea Rea **Belfast News Letter**, Northern Ireland, March 27th 2007

"...a totally absorbing performance...an exceptional artist...acute concentration was a hallmark of his playing...the complexities of the Brahms and Liszt were thoroughly mastered, and the latter exploded to end the first half...Ilić performed all the pieces with an enormous depth of understanding and skill."

- Anne George **County Echo**, Wales, March 9th 2007

"Clearly something of a maverick, Ivan gave his own slant to works by Händel and Liszt...the pieces were full of light and shade, a perfect balance...his recital was full of emotion, rich textures, and the confidence that only comes from a master at work."

- Ronnie Kerswell **Carmarthen Journal**, Wales, March 8th 2007

"He plays with complete mastery of his instrument, and with great intensity."

- Ruth Owen **Cambrian News**, Wales, March 7th 2007

"...a hugely successful concert by rising star Ivan Ilić."

- Maggie Fraser **Stornoway Gazette**, Scotland, October 26th 2006

"...technique and accuracy ruled...Liszt's Variations on a theme by Bach brought an energetic end to the first half. After the break Mr. Ilić showed a different, more contemplative style that responded to the twists and turns of French music very well...he captivated his audience."

- Doris O'Keefe **Cambrian News**, Wales, February 28th 2007

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"The final, fugal section [from Händel's Suite in F Major] gave a taste of what we could expect in his playing throughout the evening...perfect clarity and a ringing brilliance...Ivan seemed perfectly at home with the fiendish work [Liszt's Variations]...conveying both drama and tenderness and setting pulses racing with an electrifying performance...Ivan's technique was ideally suited [to the Debussy Préludes]...the rippling flourishes were dazzling, especially in the climactic Fireworks."

- Ellie Hoare **Western Mail**, Wales, February 16th 2007

"Unforgettable in 2006...Ivan Ilić played an unusual programme including Liszt's Variations on a theme by Bach, 'Weinen, Klagen'...[he] offered a clear interpretation fusing Liszt's luxurious, virtuosic pianism with Bach's Baroque polyphony."

- Gordana Krajačić **Naša Borba**, Serbia, December 30th 2006

"...rich colours and sheer depth and luxuriance of sound...crisply played and cleanly articulated...Liszt took the full Romantic sledgehammer to Bach's elegant theme, calling for a full Lisztian technique. The pianist removed his jacket in recognition of the task ahead, and emerged with great credit from the challenge."

- Kenny Mathieson **Inverness Courier**, Scotland, October 27th 2006

"Throughout Händel's Suite in F Major [Ivan Ilić] showed a stylistic knack for bringing out the polyphonic lines and respecting the slow tempi...he navigated the Adagio from Mozart's Sonata in E-flat Major completely differently, highlighting the supernatural, subtle tenderness with tasteful doses of pedaling and wonderfully beautiful singing melodic lines."

- Gordana Krajačić **Naša Borba**, Serbia, June 9th 2006

Ilić's début CD, which received **Mezzo Television's** Critics Choice Award in France, was recently broadcast on BBC Radio 3, Radio France, Radio 4 Netherlands, ABC Classic FM Australia, CBC Espace Musique Canada, Catalunya Radio Spain, Rádía Classic FM Prague, Radio Classique Montréal, BBC Radio Ulster, Klassika Raadio Estonia, Latvijas Radio 3, RTÉ Lyric FM Ireland, Saarländischer Rundfunk 2 KulturRadio Germany, Radio New Zealand, Classic FM South Africa, Classically Melbourne Australia, Rete Toscana Classica Italy, WGBH Boston USA, Minnesota Public Radio USA, WBJC Baltimore USA, Musiq'3 Brussels, and throughout France.

www.IvanCDG.com

Updated on March 15th 2008

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"Debussy's piano music - in fact, almost the whole of his compositional output - is an amalgam of the fugitive and the precise. The performer is rarely in doubt as to the intentions enshrined in score-marking yet is asked to create an impression that somehow reaches beyond them and is difficult to pin down.

"Nowhere is this problem of deliberate cause and uncertain effect more pronounced than in the two books of Preludes, a pinnacle of modern pianism in which some of the titles illustrate the nebulous and the comically picturesque.

"Ivan Ilić, an American pianist of Serbian origin and currently based in Paris, is virtually an unknown compared with the many performers whose recordings of the Preludes are still in the catalogue, so his decision to join them with this cleanly-recorded CD on the French Paraty label, which holds the piano in just the right place, is brave.

"However, as those who have heard him in recital will testify, he has made thorough preparation, not least revising the order in which these miniatures are played, leaving the *Danseuses de Delphes*, for example, to number eight in the first set and opening with an exhilarating account of *Les Collines d'Anacapri*.

"As a result, his linear progress is interesting and not a little revelatory and fully justifies the shuffling of parts. That '*General Lavine*' - *excentrique* rises to the surface to open Book Two is a response to the need for a witty wake-up call rather than the mystery of *Brouillards* (however superbly that is played, as it is here) which always seems to have drifted over from the end of Book One when taking pole position.

"The playing throughout this disc is colourful and confident and marked by a rigorous approach to phrasing and dynamic that embraces the extremes of Debussy's sound world, from the semi-transparent, as in *Voiles*, to the outwardly flamboyant and idiomatically-Iberian, as in *La Serenade Interrompue*, *La Puerta del Vino* and *Feux d'Artifice*, the last impossible to dislodge as a pyrotechnic tailender.

"Ilić has arrived on the scene with impeccable credentials and this recording will surely lift his career, illustrating as it does a performer who refuses to flinch when deciding to essay a work that will, almost by definition, never be definitively set down.

- Nigel Jarrett, **South Wales Argus**, September 2008

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

"The American pianist Ivan Ilić (who seems to be of Serbian origin) enters a very competitive arena in terms of Debussy's piano music and not least the two Books of Préludes – whether it be Gieseking, Zimerman, Rogé, Bavouzet, Arrau (particularly in Book I), Planès and Ciccolini, to name just a few very distinguished interpreters of this endlessly fascinating music.

"However, Ilić can join the best exponents of these evocative and sound-conscious pieces. He plays with admirable poise and clearly relishes both the evocative and expressive powers within each one. He also commands a wide range of colour and dynamics, both essential to painting pictures (not that this was Debussy's sole concern; the titles of each Prélude are printed after the music) and Ilić's pedalling is also noteworthy, sometimes creating a well-judged haze that is then contrasted with altogether 'cleaner' playing – the opening of the very first Prélude (here 'Les collines d'Anacapri') is a fine demonstration of this.

"Although the listener can of course choose individual Préludes, there is something very satisfying about taking each Book as a whole; it seems that Ilić has conceived his playing of each Book as an entity given that each one follows the next with a minimum of pause and somehow seems related to what has gone before. But, here's the novelty: he doesn't play them in the published order! Although such a stratagem may raise an eyebrow, his ordering does convince and the Books are left as compiled if not as published.

"There is no shortage of imagination in Ilić's playing but he doesn't overdo the imagery or (when it appears) the potential for sentimentality; nor does he force the more dramatic numbers (such as 'Ce qu'a vu le Vent d'Ouest', here number 9 of Book I rather than number 7) and his articulation (as throughout) is impressive. In short, Ilić plays all 24 pieces first and foremost as musical structures with a benevolent regard for the potential of characterisation. 'Minstrels' is maybe too laconic, however, but 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' (The Girl with the Flaxen Hair) is most tenderly created. Some listeners may be disappointed with the swifter-than-usual 'La Cathédrale engloutie' (The Engulfed Cathedral) – here the last Prélude of Book I (rather than number 10) but the climax's lack of bombast is welcome and refreshing.

"The pieces that make up Book II are maybe not always as engrossing – as music – as their counterparts in the first Book. (A personal reaction!) Nevertheless Ilić's refinement comes into its own in the most elusive creations (although in this re-ordering they can seem too much grouped together) and his shapely phrasing of 'Brouillards' is beguiling.

"It might have been an idea to play the Préludes in chronological order (if known), which would have meant finishing (according to the booklet note) with 'La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune'; Ilić in fact closes with 'Feux d'artifice' (as published), which is

Selected Reviews 2006-2008

Ivan Ilić, pianist

here appropriately brittle and pregnant before collapsing to ghostly uncertainty. It's a shame that Debussy's very last piano miniature, *Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon*, could not have been included (as it is on Bavouzet's Chandos recording of the *Préludes*).

"If there is one reservation then it is over the recording quality, which places the piano slightly too distantly in what seems quite a reverberant acoustic (presumably the venue is named after Alfred Cortot – a good omen!). But the ear adjusts and one has the feeling that the sounds and dynamics created are very much those of the pianist.

"In such a crowded market as far as different versions of Debussy's *Préludes*, it would be difficult to set one pianist off against another. What I can report is that Ivan Ilić brings individuality to his task that makes for persuasive listening; this is a release that I am pleased to have and to recommend."

Colin Anderson
Classical Source
August 2008