

Review: ■ Ivan Illic ■ Paget Rooms, Penarth

Pianist begins tour with a flourish

If you were looking for a quiet, intimate night out for Valentine's Day then you wouldn't have gone wrong visiting the Paget Rooms in Penarth.

The venue, decked out in flowers and balloons for the occasion, was playing host to a recital by the American pianist, Ivan Illic.

This was his Welsh debut and the first in a series of concerts he is performing throughout Wales, in venues as diverse as Caldicot Comprehensive School and the Wales Millennium Centre.

Ivan is an award-winning pianist who has studied in both the US and in Paris and he brought us a pleasant, accessible and varied program for the evening's concert.

He started with a Handel suite. The final, fugal section of the work in particular gave a taste of what we could expect in his playing throughout the evening – the fugal

Ellie Hoare

newsdesk@wme.co.uk

entries coming through the thickening texture with perfect clarity and a ringing brilliance. He contrasted this with five short pieces by Brahms, pieces well suited to the occasion with their lyrical melodies and romantic sound.

Ivan was then joined by violinist, Naomi Excell, a graduate from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, for a *Romance* by Dvorak, a duet enhanced by the warm tones produced by both violinist and pianist.

The first half of the concert concluded with one of the evening's highlights, the *Variations on a Theme by Bach* by Liszt. Ivan seemed perfectly at home with the fiendish work, his fingers flying over the keys with mathematical precision,

conveying both drama and tenderness and setting pulses racing with an electrifying performance.

For the second half of our evening, Ivan performed Debussy's second book of preludes. It was nice to have this second, lesser-known book of preludes played and Ivan's technique was ideally suited to these pieces. The precision and clarity he possesses in his playing meant that Debussy's complex harmonies were un-muddied (despite a muddy low register on the instrument played), the beautiful melodies sang out through the textures, and the rippling flourishes were dazzling, especially in the climatic *Fireworks*.

This series of professional concerts is being sponsored by the Arts Council of Wales as a part of their Night Out scheme. Full details of Ivan's tour dates can be found on his website at www.ivancdg.com.