

First classical music show for An Lanntair

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AN Lanntair's first ever classical music show was held on Friday (October 20) evening, with a hugely successful concert by rising star on the Parisian classical music scene, American pianist Ivan Ilic.

As such a significant event for the Stornoway Arts Centre, An Lanntair purchased a new Kawai piano, and Friday was also the 'inauguration' of the piano.

Visitors from as far afield as London and Germany travelled to Stornoway last week for the show by Ivan — who is quickly gaining international recognition for his 'unique blend of a Gallic touch, a Slavic soul and a mathematician's precision'.

A good crowd gathered in the Arts Centre for the 28 year old pianist's show, which included works by Debussy, Liszt and Schubert.

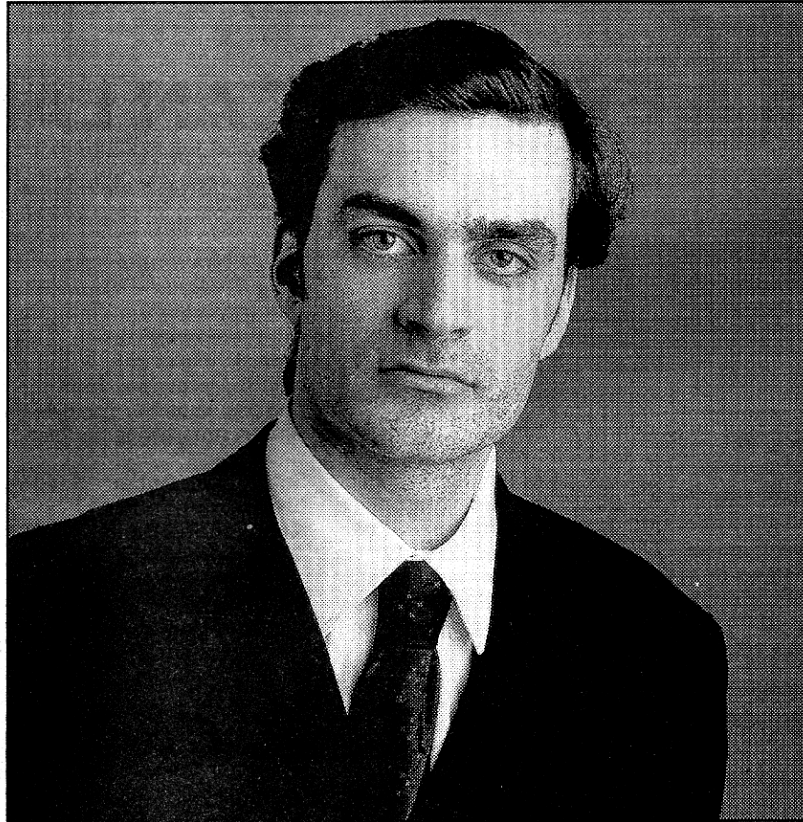
A disciple of the legendary François-René Duchâble, Ivan spoke to the 'Gazette', just hours before he was due to make his debut performance in Stornoway.

"I was born in California, but my parents are from Serbia," he explained. "I am now based in Paris, and this concert is part of a tour of Scotland."

"I have just been in Inverness, and this is all part of a tour I started in April. I was going to go to Orkney, Skye and some other islands, but all of a sudden, I was offered the opportunity to record in Paris, so I had to cut the show short, and this is now me coming back and making up for it. I believe this is the first classical concert to be held here, and I think tickets are selling well."

"This tour so far has been a lot of fun, and I'm planning a tour of Northern Ireland next spring."

Ivan explained that he



Ivan Ilic

started musical studies at the age of six and gave his recital debut at the age of 11. He went on to take degrees in music and mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley. After capturing all of Berkeley's music awards, including First Prize in the Concerto Competition, an Eisner Prize, First Prize in the Senior Recital Competition, and a Mary J. Nunes travel grant to the Aspen Festival, he left for Paris with a Hertz Memorial Travelling Fellowship from the University.

A few months later, Ivan was admitted to the esteemed Conservatoire Supérieur de Paris, where he was awarded a Premier Prix (First Prize) in piano performance, followed by a Diplôme à l'Unanimité and a Diplôme Supérieur from the École Normale de Musique in Paris. Before he turned 20, he had launched an international career of solo recitals that has taken him to Belgium, Ireland,

Serbia, the Czech Republic, America and throughout France and the United Kingdom.

Ivan recently completed a one-year residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts; for the 2006-07 season he has a grant from the Nadia Boulanger Foundation in Paris.

His playing has been broadcast on television and radio stations in America, France, and Serbia. The City of Paris sponsored his last recording.

"I have been playing for more than 20 years, and I always practiced, but I didn't think I was going to be a professional pianist until I was 13," Ivan admitted. "That was when I really started getting serious."

"I have been in Paris since 2001, and over the past few years I've been touring all over the place."

He continued: "I have just landed a new recording contract, and it's a really interesting project about a long lost French composer (Durosoir). He

fought in World War I, and he left lots of music, much of which has not been performed for 50 years. As an experiment, a couple of musicians got together and performed the music and it was very well received, so now they are trying to find people to record and promote it."

"The composer's son started a competition and the idea was to promote the music of his father and father's friends. They were part of a group of famous musicians in Paris. I won a prize in 2004/05 and that's when he first heard me and wanted me to be involved."

He added: "There is this huge piece of piano sonata, which is 45 minutes long, and it's never been performed even though it was written in 1926. The French are really interested because it's part of their cultural heritage. I like the music, but it's really hard, and I'm quite nervous about the whole thing. It's going to take a while."

John L. King has also written work for the talented pianist, and some of the pieces were premiered in Inverness and also featured in the programme in Stornoway.

The pair met during their undergraduate studies at UC Berkeley where they both studied mathematics and music — and also improvisation with the world-renowned saxophone player Steve Coleman.

Ivan commissioned King's 'Piano Sonata' in June, because he feels that much of the modern repertoire for piano is badly written.

King, an accomplished jazz pianist himself, has taken special care with his new Sonata, and he wants his music to be liked by performers and audiences alike.

And it goes without saying that the Stornoway audience thoroughly enjoyed the music on Friday night!

"The centre just bought a new piano, and I will be the first solo classical pianist to play on it," Ivan revealed on Friday afternoon. "They were pretty nervous about it because it's a big investment, and I've given them a bit of advice."

For his performance, Ivan planned to work with the lighting in An Lanntair, because 'it's a theatre and a cinema'.

"In a theatre, people are used to being in the dark and having a spotlight on the performer, but classical music is not so dramatic," he said. "Also, because the place is small, I will be introducing the pieces and the composers, and break the ice that way. It also makes me less nervous to do that! I'm definitely looking forward to performing."

Projects for 2007 include new works written for Ivan by Reynold Tharp and Fernando Benadon, a recording on Alpha of songs by André Caplet, and multiple tours of Ireland, Wales, England and France.