

Iiro Rantala - Twelve Months (My Finnish Calendar)

As I anticipated Iiro Rantala's 'Twelve Months (My Finnish Calendar)', the recital at the Flagey Studio on November 6, organised by our Finnish Group. This recital was part of the cultural programme of the third Finnish Presidency of the European Union, earlier Finnish Presidencies took place in 2006 and 1999.

I knew it was bound to be very special: he is a hugely accomplished and versatile classical and jazz musician. However I hadn't anticipated that he would also be a really amusing person.

After the formal introductions, he ambled to the seat beside his piano and talked to us about the reasons for his recital piece 'Twelve Months'. Echoing Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons', which follows the changing Italian seasons, Rantala wanted to stress the more extreme weather conditions of his native Finland. He explained how it influenced the mentality of the Finnish people as their state of mind is narrowly linked with the erratic climate of the country.

Starting with January, Rantala said the Finns were sobering up after a Christmas and New Year's hangover!

The Finns really love snow, and there is a lot of snow! Rantala went on to relate several amusing snow stories, before playing a fun jazz piece indicating just how the Finns enjoy their snow time. Behind him, an enormous video screen showing us films of just how much snow there was and how the people were enjoying it - and occasionally, Rantala himself.

Rantala continued through the months, playing pieces that indicated the changing moods of the Finns. By March, the snow was too much and it was becoming boring! April is not a happy month, and is apparently when most suicides take place. But if Finns survive it, May is the big party month: the music style changed significantly here, becoming faster and jollier. This is the month when people start planning and buying tickets for the summer. However, June is frequently a disappointment: the weather is often colder than forecast, and never meets the expectations of the Finns!

July is very special in Finland: a whole month of vacation, most likely in holiday cabins - where the males never seem to relax. Everyone would like to continue with their holiday in August, but they have to work and the children must go back to school: there is always something to complain about (which they do, at length!).

By September, the leaves are starting to fall: although it's autumn elsewhere, it's effectively the start of winter in Finland. It's also the time when Finns are most likely to look for a new love and a new life, The Autumn is a good time to be romantic in Finland, since by November there is near total darkness! Finally, December is a stressed month: the Finns take Christmas very seriously - but it still hurts them to spend their money, particularly on Christmas presents!

We were taken through all 12 months with mostly jazz-orientated music that was appropriate to the changing moods of the Finnish people. Twelve Months was a happily exhausting musical weather experience and afterwards, we cheerfully went on to the welcome reception.. Many, many thanks to our Finnish Group and the Finnish Embassy for such an exceptional musical and entertaining experience.

Patricia Cendrowicz
U.K. Group