

Winds blow around the world

Birmingham Symphonic Winds CBSO Centre

With its exemplary record of supporting new music, Birmingham Symphonic Winds has done more than its bit to push forward the cutting edge of concert band repertoire, but on Saturday, conductor Keith Allen cheerfully plundered the entire genre to present a light programme with a round-the-world theme.

Inevitably there was national pastiche, from the contemporary in Alfred Reed's *International Dance Suite* and Nigel Hess's exuberant *Global Variations*, to vintage Malcolm Arnold and Henry Wood. These works' surface appeal revealed substantial ensemble skills in a mellow and generally well-balanced sound, gutsiness sustained by agility, versatility and responsiveness, with some higher register tuning the only niggle. There was much impressive solo work (from cor anglais, alto sax, flute and piccolo), and in the beautifully light-footed canons of Martin Ellerby's *Venetian Spells*, proof of consistent sectional strengths.

Less successful was the concert's central interlude, a slightly bewildering musical travelogue (proving among other things that good instrumentalists can't necessarily sing well), which inexplicably incorporated a humorous introduction to percussion.

Things were brought smartly back on track with the premiere of Raymond Head's *Touching Eurydice*, as its opening, slightly menacing Monteverdian pomp first fragmented into



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dissonance and then resolved into salsa – an eccentric but convincing progression.

Guest Ken Shifrin's expressive and uncannily vocal trombone solos in Elizabeth Raum's *Three Jazz Moods*

provided yet further colour in a vibrant evening, which for all its energy, quality and appeal, sadly did not attract a full house.

Clare Mackay