

Birthday boy reveals wide range of work

Guy Woolfenden gala concert, Birmingham Symphonic Winds

CBSO Centre

★★★

Guy Woolfenden was recently awarded the OBE for his services to music and this well-devised and excellently played programme, given by Keith Allen and Birmingham Symphonic Winds, with Woolfenden as guest conductor, was given to mark his 70th birthday, coming shortly on July 12.

Best-known for highly successful and effective incidental music for the Royal Shakespeare Company, where he headed the music department for more than 30 years, his output includes concertos and four full-length ballets, renowned works for wind band and a variety of film music, even including a song for Cilla Black (*Work is a four letter word*), later covered by The Smiths.

The evening revealed some of this wide range, with an attractive mixture of major works, chamber pieces and theatre songs.

The world of symphonic wind can seem a somewhat hermetic one, with its repertoire known only to its practitioners, but for more than 20 years Woolfenden has been at the heart of a freshly-invigorated interest in the medium and his close relationship with BSW has resulted in many new works.

Highlights were the *Illyrian Dances*, *Curtain Call*, and an excerpt from his newest piece, *Divertimento for Band*, receiving its premiere in Ireland next month, which impressed with its deftness and energy.

His style harks back to the English renaissance, with echoes of both the 16th century and the early 20th century, but with rhythmic twists and a harmonic piquancy which avoids the obvious, and the *Suite Française* for wind octet was a delight in its craftsmanship and colour.

Linda Merrick was the clarinet soloist in the sparkling *Rondo variations*, and finally *Gallimaufry*, his best-known work, concluded in a blaze of brazen grandeur, before the audience joined in singing Happy Birthday.

John Gough