

# High energy on a blustery day Birmingham Post 22/3/04

## Birmingham Symphonic Winds

CBSO Centre

With its cheerful flair for self-promotion, Birmingham Symphonic Winds was no doubt delighted to have scheduled Saturday's *Windy City* concert for such a dramatically blustery day.

The title actually referred to BSW's recent trip to Chicago, and transatlantic pizzazz was recreated on the home patch with one of the band's typically high-energy, adventurous programmes (all but one of the eight pieces were written within the last three years), and the appearance of Dr Matthew George from

Minnesota as one of a three-man conducting team.

Directing styles contrasted sharply (Dr George was measured, Guy Woolfenden staccato and Musical Director Keith Allen vigorous) but the players' response was consistently colourful, rhythmically tight and secure in the sectional and individual strengths so much wind band writing demands. Horns were spectacularly good, but there were also lovely flute, oboe and euphonium solos; the double bass was heroically supportive and only the heaviest brass lacked some resonance.

However, percussionist Simone Rebello seemed to inspire the best from everyone in Michael Daugherty's brilliantly

imaginative *UFO* where vivid instrumental combinations, eerie scalar riffs and a heavy rocking finale provided the perfect context for Rebello's versatile and stunningly convincing evocation of alien communication.

Textures were not so finely crafted in Philip Sparke's Clarinet Concerto, but Linda Merrick's incisive, bright tone and unfussy lyricism made the most of its jazzy eclecticism.

Kenneth Hesketh's *Whirlegig* was the evening's premiere, its pert, jig-like opening and warm sax/horn timbres unashamedly English, nostalgic and appealing.

Clare Macknoy