

A feast to remember

Birmingham Symphonic Winds

CBSO Centre, Berkley Street

Professionalism was the name of the game from Birmingham Symphonic Winds; a veritable feast with Gershwin & Co as the main course in a whole evening's entertainment of relaxed informality.

A capacity crowd gradually drifted into the CBSO Centre for a pre-concert chat between pianist Jack Gibbons and Keith Allen, conductor, the family atmosphere setting the scene for a well organised concert.

Transcriptions from full orchestra to 45 winds could sound diminished, but rarely in this concert as we relished the rhythms of the Cuban Overture, a lively starter for a fun evening.

Paul Hart's lovely solo trumpet featured with sighing harmonies in a smoochy *Embraceable You*, leading to a novelty performance of *An American in Paris* complete with cleverly handled Hollywood snippets on screen. Inevitable blurring of clarity occurred as top woodwind were swamped by saxophones, with some linking passages somewhat heavy handed. However, overall this was imaginatively performed, from daring pianissimos to some delightful nifty tuba and bass underpinning.

Variations on *I got Rhythm* were for the most part, unsatisfactory. In spite of fistfuls of notes, the solo piano (Jack Gibbons) was hard pressed to compete with thick scoring: teasing or irritating? Hard to tell. Two familiar solos, piano-roll style, were churned out as encores, efficient but tedious.

Prelude Fugue and *Riffs* is notoriously difficult to pull off, but our heroes triumphed with superbly sleazy stripper music, wonderful jazzy clarinet shriekings from Simon Purkess, crisp brass, chunky saxophone chords and the solid backing of a good kit drummer. Ending with rumbustuous Sousa arrangements, we then 'struck up the band' in true American style and withdrew to more camaraderie and foyer music. A great evening.

Maggie Cotton