

VSO's assistant conductor sails through six demanding works with aplomb

**Border Crossings: Music that ignores
the genre lines**

Vancouver Symphony Orchestra
Saturday, Feb. 11
Roadhouse Community Centre
Ken Hsieh, Conductor

BY DAVID GORDON DUKE

It was particularly lucky for the VSO that assistant conductor Ken Hsieh was prepared to fill in for scheduled conductor Alain Trudel on the Saturday *Border Crossings* program, the first of this season's Symphony at the Roundhouse showcases for contemporary music. Not every conductor has the flair or the technique to cope with a diverse menu of new

work. Hsieh sailed through six demanding works with aplomb and confidence.

The program got off to a fine start with Bradshaw Pack's *Arioso Distante*.

Pack's work is obsessed with counterpoint, but his florid tangle of notes is presented with such vibrancy that it never feels obscure or thick.

Supposedly derived from techno and death metal, Australian Matthew Hindson's *Technologic 145* is a harmless trifle — innocuous, self-consciously cute, and little more than a few layered dance rhythms capped with a dime-a-dozen happy ending.

Brit Colin Mathew's *Hidden*

Variables was billed as a spoof on minimalism, but proved a sour, snide joke.

Starting up the program's second half, Linda Catlin Smith's *Les fleures anciennes* was the most original and radical work on the program. Smith's re-consideration of 14th century French music (known for its subtlety and intellectualism) slowly but inexorably unfolded a fragile eloquence.

To bring out Smith's ephemeral poetry is a daunting task requiring absolute ensemble precision; the baker's dozen of VSO strings gave a serious and intense reading of music far more difficult, and rewarding, than it may at first appear.