

Until now, Ilminster Arts Centre concerts have focussed almost entirely on jazz and classical music. Our first venture into World music, with Ricky Romain, sitar and Jon Sterckx, tabla, was seen as a bold move, carrying with it a significant risk of a small audience. How wrong we were. Preceded by a delightful curry supper, the near capacity crowd enjoyed an evening of spellbinding music, which the majority had never heard live before. The reaction of seemingly everyone present was overwhelmingly positive, with most saying (including myself) that they had never properly listened to this sort of music before.

As a lifelong jazz aficionado, I was myself doubtful about tuning my ear to the Sitar and Tabla, but I had not realised how much in common these two musical genres have. The ragas began with a very slow introduction, with many intriguing similarities to traditional guitar blues, which gradually developed into a very simple tune comprising only twelve notes, of which probably only five were different. Ricky and Jon then proceeded to spend about forty minutes to play each of them. These notes, and the key and scale from which they came was chopped up, mixed around, turned upside down, back to front, formed into ascending and descending spirals and many other shapes, punctuated every so often with a reminder of where we started, all the while building a relentless rhythm and intensity. The performance made me think of the many well known extended jazz performances based on classic "standards", whilst at the same time the build up of intensity was reminiscent of Ravel's Bolero (a favourite of mine, but admittedly not everybody's).

From the original pre-concert doubts, this turned out to be a superbly atmospheric and fascinating evening's entertainment which delighted everyone present.

Tony Hayward. Ilminster Arts Centre.