

Times-Argus Article published Oct 24, 2011

Music Review: **Burlington orchestra does Vermont proud**

By Jim Lowe. Staff Writer

The success of the Burlington Chamber Orchestra is indicative of just how far Vermont's professional classical music scene has grown in recent years. Now in its sixth year, the professional ensemble has proven itself over and over again, most recently at its 2012-2013 season opener Saturday at Saint Michael's McCarthy Arts Center.

Twenty years ago, there weren't enough good professional string players in northern Vermont to form an orchestra like this. (The Vermont Symphony Orchestra did and does import players from Montreal, Boston and New York, though far fewer these days.) Today, more than half the players of the 20-something BCO strings - it varies from concert to concert - began in the Vermont Youth Orchestra, and they remained to work and live in the area.

The biggest success of Saturday's well-attended concert, guest conducted by Andrew Massey, was Josef Suk's 1892 *Serenade for Strings*, a late Romantic work that presaged the more complex harmonies of the 20th century. Massey led BCO strings in a richly lyrical performance that successfully delivered both its passion and its tenderness. And they did so with a not so easy to achieve clarity.

Particularly moving was their performance of the Adagio, which was intense and intensely beautiful, the result of beautifully restrained passion. The finale, too, was rich and warm. It was joyful music-making.

Also representing joyful music-making was the world premiere of Burlington composer Don Jamison's intriguing *Through the Clouds* for solo clarinet, bassoon and strings. Sort of a travelogue, the high pitched clarinet begins in the "clouds" a bed of strings, descends into the "world" where it is joined in duet by the bassoon, accompanied by the strings, finally returning to the clouds - all in about 8 minutes.

The language is superficially tonal and accessible, much like Jamison's popular choral music, but subtle tonality changes kept the music striking and subtly biting throughout. The soloists, clarinetist Betsy LeBlanc and bassoonist Rachael Elliott, delivered their virtuosic parts with flair, a warm lyricism and real understanding of the music. It was a compelling performance of compelling music.

Not so compelling was Burrill Phillips' 1942 *Concert Piece for bassoon and strings*, Although well-crafted, incorporating modern and jazz influences, the result is more trite than inspired. Elliott's performance of the solo part, however, proved quite inspired, full of easy virtuosity and flair.

The program opened with a charming but unexciting performance of Arcangelo Corelli's *Concerto Grosso in C Major, Opus 6, No 10*.

Although largely well-executed, with solos by BCO principals, it lacked the rhythmic incisiveness and passion that brings this Baroque music to life. Still, it was full of beautiful lyricism.

Massey is another example of how far Vermont has come in the classical music world. The British-born conductor makes his home in Montgomery Center, conducts the Middlebury College Orchestra, all the while maintaining an international conducting career.

Some people seem to think classical music is dying. They haven't been to Vermont.