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BCO, Orgel tackle Shostakovich Music Review

By [Jim Lowe](#) Times Argus Staff

BURLINGTON – Central Vermont is developing another fine professional chamber orchestra. The Burlington Chamber Orchestra, conducted by its founder and music director Michael Hopkins, opened its third season over the weekend at the UVM Recital Hall with a rewarding program of traditional masterpieces. In these concerts on Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon, Shelburne pianist Paul Orgel cemented his position as one of Vermont's finest pianists and musicians.

The BCO brings the number of professional chamber orchestras up to four, if you include the Vermont Symphony Orchestra's "Made in Vermont" touring ensemble. (The two others are the Waterbury-based Eleva and the Hanover (N.H.) Chamber Orchestra.) Hopkins has brought together some 22 area string players, many of them VSO players. (This weekend's concerts were strings-only – plus one trumpet – but future concerts will employ woodwinds and brass as well.)

The major work on the program was Dmitri Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 1, Opus 35, for piano, trumpet and strings. Written in 1933, it is full of Shostakovich's sardonic wit, but finds its depth in 20th century romanticism.

Orgel was the able soloist, and his performance on Sunday afternoon was quite simply beautiful. His clarity and ability to give the contrapuntal lines their own voices brought across the depth of Shostakovich's knotty score. Although somewhat reserved dynamically, Orgel's performance proved quite exciting.

Hopkins and the BCO accompanied Orgel and managed Shostakovich's knotty score, though not always perfectly, deftly. Ray Vega successfully delivered the punctuating trumpet solo with feeling.

Also successful, also knotty was Paul Hindemith's Five Pieces for String Orchestra, Opus 44. These pieces, though written by the intellectual 20th

century German composer for a student orchestra, are packed full of adult emotions, and not particularly happy ones.

There is Kurt Weill-forlorn quality to this music, but in the hands of Hopkins and the BCO, it was exhilarating.

The BCO is specializing in Handel's concerti grossi (string concertos for multiple instruments), performing one of these Baroque gems on each program. This time, it was No. 6 of the group Opus 6, and although the performance did not achieve pinpoint accuracy, it was full-bodied, rich and effervescent – a real pleasure.

For Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, a concerto grosso for strings, Hopkins employed only principals. Although not always perfectly accurate, the performance was full of life.

Burlington Chamber Orchestra concerts are proving to be truly rewarding musical experiences.
