

BCO is an impressive addition to area music scene

The fourth and last concert by the Burlington Chamber Orchestra, under the baton of Music Director Michael Hopkins, took place June 20 in the UVM Music Building Recital Hall.

What had begun as a precise and exciting adventure with a new group ended at even a higher pitch of enthusiasm, partly indicated by an increased audience and evidenced by the quality and style of the playing of this excellent ensemble.

The orchestra opened the program with a Concerto Grosso from Handel's Opus 6, the fourth one, and they played it splendidly—style, uniform outlook on the music, and every aspect of the performance was ideal. In the short time of one year, this ensemble has created a space for itself within the local music community that no one can come close to filling.

The BCO held a competition, and the two winners, both violinists, Sally Bruce and Anna Landell, were the featured soloists in the Concerto Grosso in A minor Op. 3, No. 8 from "L'estro Armonico". These two young women, both sophomores in high school, played with all the passion and conviction and stylistic aplomb that would have graced the performance by an older player. They are both the pupils of Ira Morris, who is concertmaster for this group, and both play in a youth orchestra in Montréal. Their confidence and their technical ability allow them interpretative freedom in their playing, and it was a terrific performance.

The second half of the program was occupied by the Sinfonia no. 5 by Felix Mendelssohn, written when he was quite young. The Chamber Orchestra lightened the texture of their playing to match the music that Mendelssohn had written.

The program closed with Tchaikovsky's Serenade in C Major op. 48. Once again the chamber orchestra changed the panel of its sound to reflect the much more romantic attitude of Tchaikovsky's music. It was a real audience pleaser on top of everything else, and it was played with a great deal of conviction and sentiment.

To top off the quality of this year's performances, and they were all surprisingly but pleasingly of high musical quality, the program for next year was listed. It is a total joy to see the programming that this fine group will be bringing our way next year.

The September concert will feature Paul Orgel in the Shostakovich piano Concerto no. 1, and will be on a program that otherwise includes Bach, Hindemith and Handel. The second Concerto will feature Sergey Antonov, cello, in the Variations on a Rococo Theme by Tchaikovsky, and will be presented together with the UVM Lane Series. The third concert will feature music by Handel, Bottesini, Sibelius and Janacek. The Young Artist Competition winner/winner's will be presented on their final concert, together with Handel and Haydn and a new work for string orchestra still to be written.

They are also taking the brave step forward to present two versions—Saturday night and Sunday afternoon—of their first and fourth concerts. Based on the size of the audience at this most recent concert, I do not think they are being overly optimistic about filling the recital hall twice.

Based on its track record for the 2007-08 series of concerts, God and the money people willing, this orchestra should be around for a long time and should continue to extend its value to the local community for the repertoire that they can command. If they take it as carefully and as considerately as they did with every aspect of this year's performances, we are looking at a major presence musically.

Burlington resident Dan Wolfe observes and critiques the local arts scene for the Times Sentinel. His column appears weekly.

