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Music Review: Inspired performance by local pros

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COLCHESTER — When the Burlington Chamber Orchestra formed in 2007, its mere existence was a landmark. It was the first time there were enough professional string players in the greater Burlington area to make such an ensemble even a possibility.

Saturday at St. Michael's College, the orchestra achieved another milestone, proving itself capable with excellent performances delivering a powerful and beautiful musical message.

It's no accident that this evening of inspired performances came during what has come to be an annual residency by violinist Soovin Kim, a product of the Vermont Youth Orchestra — as are many members of the BCO — who has gone on to an international solo career.

The concert (which was repeated Sunday afternoon) culminated with Mozart's gloriously lyrical Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat Major, K. 364. Violinist Kim and violist Mary SangHyun Yong, a fellow Marlboro Music Festival alum, proved outstanding soloists, delivering just the right combination of expressiveness and restraint to deliver the work's sublime Classical power.

Kim, very familiar to Vermont audiences despite living in New York, played with his characteristic skill and lyricism, but this was more sensitive and elegant than previous Mozart performances. Yong matched Kim all the way, barely restraining her enthusiasm, with a rich sound and musical warmth.

The strings and the winds, led by Kim from the violin, played not only cohesively but with warmth and elegance. The joy of their music-making, obvious from the many smiles among the players, infected an enthusiastic audience.

For the first half of the program, Kim led the BCO strings in some intriguing music. Although well known, Sibelius' "Valse Triste," Opus 44, No. 1, took on a new intimacy in Saturday's performance as it worked its way through its quietly dramatic journey. In Kim's arrangement for strings (eliminating winds and timpani), it proved compelling chamber music.

The concert opened with Kim and BCO principal players performing the String Sextet from Richard Strauss' opera "Capriccio," Opus 85. While the lines weren't always clear, Strauss' trademark quirky harmonic and rhythmic lyricism was delivered with warmth and depth. It's an intriguing work that was played convincingly.

The program was rounded out by lyrical works of Edvard Grieg, "Badnlåt" from Two Lyric Pieces, Opus "Kulokk & Stabbelaten" from Two Nordic Melodies, Opus 63. Led by Kim, the BCO strings performed warmly.

Saturday's concert proved an inspired and inspiring experience.