

## **VSO ends season with brilliance**

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**BURLINGTON – The Vermont Symphony Orchestra ended its 2008-2009 Masterworks series at the Flynn Center Saturday with a burst of brilliance.** The brilliance was from Igor Stravinsky's first ballet, "The Firebird," a marvel of orchestration and musical excitement. (The ballet was premiered in 1911, 25 years before the VSO was founded, but the Suite No. 3 was put together by Stravinsky in 1945, well within the 75 years that the orchestra is celebrating this and next season.)

**Saturday's performance by the VSO and its music director Jaime Laredo, too was a celebration of brilliance – of the orchestra itself.** Not only did the players deliver the intricacies of this complex piece precisely, they combined to give it the colors and excitement that has made this one of the most popular works of the 20th century.

Cynthia Phelps, principal violist of the New York Philharmonic, and a brilliant player, was the soloist in two very different works. Paul Hindemith's 1936 "Trauermusik" is a somber and austere one-movement work with a haunting beauty. Phelps, who plays deftly and expressively with a light tone, delivered the suppressed passion of this masterpiece beautifully.

Joan Tower's 2005 viola concerto, called "Purple Rhapsody," proved a much thornier work, with very little rhapsodizing. In Berlioz's viola concerto, "Harold in Italy," the violist plays a character on a journey through colorful Italy; in Tower's work, the viola also seems to be a traveling character, but here the journey is through an unsettling surrealism. This is one of those works that is difficult to take in on one listening. Still, it proved fascinating and well-crafted, and Phelps, Laredo and the VSO delivered the work with precision and passion.

The program opened with another work of great brilliance, Benjamin Britten's 1936 "Soirées Musicales," five delightful dance movements. The music is superficially charming and immediately attractive, yet more complex underpinnings, expertly written, give the work both depth and longevity. Laredo and the VSO truly enjoyed the colors of this masterpiece.

This concert ended the VSO's year of exclusively music written within its 75 years of existence; 2009-2010, the VSO's 75th anniversary season, returns to the traditional symphonic repertoire – but there'll be some premieres too.