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BOLLING Suite for Flute & Jazz Piano Trio: *Baroque & Blue; Sentimentale; Irlandaise; Javanaise; Veloce. Suite for Cello & Jazz Piano Trio:* *Galop; Romantique. Picnic Suite:* *Tendre; Badine* • St. Michael Trio; Pat Klobas (db); Josh Friedman (gtr); David Rokeach (dr) • PRESENTATION PARTNERS 891 (51:47)

Nowhere on the CD box or in the liner notes does it say who arranged these pieces by Claude Bolling for three strings (violin and cello from the St. Michael Trio, bass by Klobas), piano, guitar and drums, so until proven wrong I'll have to assume that all three members of the Trio had some input towards them. But it doesn't matter, because their style and élan are simply spellbinding, even more so than on their previous release (*Warning: May Cause Mood Swings*) which I gave a positive review to previously.

For those unfamiliar with Bolling, he's been playing his own classically-influenced jazz since about the late 1950s, wrote his *Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio* in 1973, and is a living legend in France. His music isn't entirely improvised though it contains improvised passages; more often, it's based on very strict classical form—listen, for instance, to the “Galop” from the Cello Suite on this disc. It's almost like hearing Schumann or Franck with a jazz beat. Thus this disc, appropriately titled *French Fusion: The Crossover Jazz of Claude Bolling*, clearly illustrates the dual nature of his music, the crisp, almost Baroque quality of his uptempo numbers and the lyrical quality of his ballads. Happily, the composer himself endorses this disc on the back of the cover.

Jazz musician David Benoit, who has not only heard the St. Michael Trio play some of these pieces in person but has also played Bolling himself (with such backup musicians as Dave Brubeck and Angel Romero), hits the nail on the head in the liner notes, claiming that “They've taken Bolling's raw material and elaborated it for their instruments...What you get is...a frenchified style of California cooking and it's fabulous.” I was particularly delighted by both the music and the performance of *Javanaise*, a piece which, like Paul Desmond's *Take Five*, alternates bars of 3/4 and 2/4 in its principal theme to create a 5/4 beat. Cellist Michel Flexer's solo in *Romantique* is played with impeccable technique and superb feeling. Moreover, though this is not an SACD, the sound is absolutely terrific. I can't think of another recent jazz album I've heard where the band sounds like it's right in your living room.

All in all, a terrific CD for those who don't mind some formalism in their jazz. Mingus it isn't, but it's still an interesting and delightful excursion back to the early '60s when the Claude Bolling Trio was riding high. **Lynn René Bayley**