

## **Performance Investigation: Bolling Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio: Baroque and Blue**

In this investigation I will examine two recordings of Baroque and Blue from the Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio (composed by Claude Bolling in 1975). The first is the original recording made by Bolling with French flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal recorded in the same year. The second recording was made in 2004 by Laurel Zucker.

'This suite has been composed for a "classic" flute and a "jazz" piano. The style of writing for each instrument is somewhat different. It should be interesting to bring out those oppositions in the interpretation'.<sup>1</sup> This is important when one plays this piece as there is a significant variation in interpretation of this statement.

There are considerable differences in the two different recordings even before we start to look at the music. The Bolling recording was done with Bolling's standard trio and with him playing a period piano which gave the recording a big band sound and this is also reflected in the mixing of the piece, in which you can almost imagine it being recorded in a jazz club. This is in direct contrast to the Zucker's recording in which all the members had not met but were top studio or concert musicians. The studio mix meant that the result was a very clean, very technically accurate recording, although possibly losing some of the authenticity and spontaneity which one feels while listening to the Bolling recording.

Both have different flutes which affects the quality and tone of the sound. Rampal was famous for having a special custom made Boston gold flute which he claimed created a much warmer sound. This contrasts with Zucker's solid silver flute which has a clear but otherwise bland sound.

When one takes a look at the previous recording histories of these artists it becomes clearer why there is such a difference in the two recordings. Bolling was a former child prodigy whose jazz groups have become known all over Europe and he remains one of the most popular classical/jazz musicians in France (if not Europe). Rampal made a large number of classical recordings but his main focus was on cross over and progressive music, as shown clearly by his desire for the piece to be written in the first place. Zucker's recordings have all focused on Baroque, Classical and Romantic music with very little in terms of contemporary music. This remains her only jazz/cross over album.

In regards to tempo, Rampal's recording begins slightly faster than Zuckers, and very close to the tempo prescribed at the start. Rampal starts at dotted minim = 53 (55 is written) in comparison to Zucker starting at 51. The next major speed change is at the 1<sup>st</sup> blues section (E). Rampal marks this at minim = 70, while Zucker minim = 68. At the return to the Baroque section (H) Rampal returns to the same speed as the original section and this

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<sup>1</sup> Front page from Score – Claude Bolling

consistency in tempo is shown throughout the piece (for example when it goes to the next blues section (L) it is at the same tempo as the other blues section). This differs with the Zucker recording which is slightly more variable, with Zucker moving the second blues second up to minim = 70. The final major speed is at the jazz waltz section (N) where Rampal moves up to dotted minim = 73 and Zucker moves to 71. This again is consistent with the fact that throughout the recordings Rampal and Bolling are always just slightly faster than Zucker and in this regard it gives the entire piece a significant lift in terms of energy released in a sustained fashion throughout the recordings. There is not too much in the way of tempo changes throughout this (apart from the return to the Baroque section which naturally reverts to or close to the original tempo set) until the very end.

There are varying amounts of rubato in the two recordings and at different sections within the piece. The Rampal recording generally is very straight and strictly in time during the Baroque sections and then changes within a couple of seconds of entering the jazz sections to being very relaxed and playing around with the beats. At Y Rampal pushes forward in pace, but this is an exception within the recording. Naturally Bolling does what he wants in the piano cadenza section at FF. This lack of lots of rubato is perhaps because of the slightly faster tempo that has been adopted by Rampal. However, with Zucker in which there is a fair bit more rubato. Zucker starts off strictly in time until E where with the introduction of the blues it becomes relaxed and swung. After returning to a strict time at H, it again becomes swung at L where interestingly the pianist has improvised/composed a different piano solo to that which is written and as a result it is swung in his particular style. It relaxes into O (where there is the jazz waltz section), but it is still clearly measured. This is an effective combination of swing and emphasised measures. It slows up in the last three bars before U where it becomes straight and strict again. In the piano cadenza there is some rubato as expected. Other than this it remains straight for the rest of the piece.

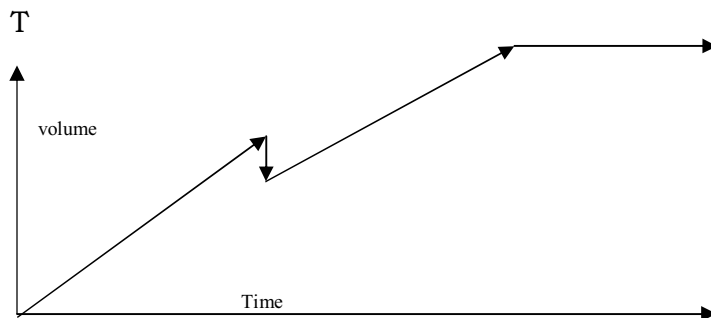
Zucker begins the piece at a good level for the mf marked, however the piano entry is not p in comparison to the flute. However the fact that it is pretty level (other than the increase to f at C) beyond E might suggest that this is due more to the studio mix rather than the musicians themselves. It is interesting to note that there is no significant change at E even though there is a marked change from p to mf. The flute mf is consistent in both Baroque stages. At M we begin to see the piano having more of an active dynamic range with natural crescendos occurring at M. The flute remains constant up till the last five bars of Q where there is a diminuendo. Around the cantabile section the piano follows the pitch line with dynamics to match, interestingly the flute does not do the same. This almost lackadaisical approach by Zucker towards dynamics continues as she ignores the dynamic markings four before V, and has very little dynamic or 'colour' in the repeated notes between BB and four after FF. This contrasts with the piano which through accents and subtle dynamics makes the repeated notes more interesting and exciting four before V. At FF there is great dynamic variation within the piano during the piano cadenza. The flute however is consistent with the mf

at the last Baroque section, and does push up to a FF at the end of the piece as suggested in the score.

Due to a completely different musical education which tended to focus on the music rather than the technique which Rampal received from his father who was an orchestral player, you find that Rampal without premeditation has good instinct about where to pitch dynamics. When one gets to articulation and phrasing this becomes even more apparent. What this does mean is that in sequences which ascend and descend he does a crescendo or a dim to follow as well as always having direction towards the climax or the ends of phrases. The first four bars of O is a good example of natural crescendos. At J Rampal does a crescendo which isn't in the score which displays he was determined to do what he felt was more effective. However at the high note four bars into Q, there is no stress and possibly slightly refrained, which is a slight anti climax. It is interesting that with the definite direction towards the last note of the phrase before S, Rampal does a crescendo even though it is against a fall in pitch.

T is a great example of this natural ability to sequence the dynamics accordingly with the notes and is what might be considered an incredibly classical technique.

Insert Copy of Score at T



Rampal follows the dynamic marking last four bars before V just as he does throughout the piece; however it is worth noting that there aren't very many dynamic markings in the piece. He puts an accent on the first note of X and this makes the dim into an fp. He shapes the last notes before V and Y. Interesting an exception to the rule of Rampal following the natural rise and fall is between AA and BB. GG is where Rampal really shows off his musicality by being able to play p when the piano has the tune and this really adds to the true jazz group sound. The only other notables are at OO where there is a real increase in volume in the piano left hand and Bass ostinato patterns. At PP there is a build up towards the end, but Rampal doesn't sound like he is playing right at the top of his dynamic range, but rather at the top of where he can still produce a beautiful sound.

Both of these performers are very good at remaining in tune throughout the pieces. This is clear especially on notes like E natural in the third octave which are notorious among flautists for being out of tune. Both artists are

also very in tune with their respective ensembles and there are few if any occasions to state otherwise. Zucker has a very clear tone throughout the piece with no cracked notes at all – this is representative of the studio mix and the look for a perfect recording. Bolling on the other hand wanted a more authentic jazz experience and went for one take recordings, and as a result in the second bar of KK, the tonal quality of Rampal drops with a slightly cracked note. However this is the only occasion in the recording, and rather than detracting from it, it adds to the authenticity and spontaneity of the recordings. This is similar in recent years to computer generated sounds of guitars having recorded fret noises added to them to make them more believable.

When one looks at Zuckers previous recording history, it is not surprising that there is a fairly consistent vibrato running through the piece. This can be seen on the last note of D where there is a heavy vibrato played on the note. Interestingly, Rampal does the same in this occasion. Zucker in this recording has two ‘colours’. Her ‘Baroque colour’ (found around the Baroque sections) consists of a slight vibrato throughout and a heavier vibrato on longer notes. This is coupled with an emphasis on accents and articulation. The second colour can be found between U and W and between PP and the end and this is a much more spiky tone with a stronger vibrato throughout.

In contrast Rampal has a bright tone throughout. This is coupled with vibrato on accented and long notes in Baroque sections. Rampal has a wonderful clear tone which is fairly simple. This could be for a number of reasons: 1) flute technology of the time or 2) choice. Whatever it was it is ideally suited to this piece where one is required to change style/articulation and emphasis very quickly.

There are a number of different articulation patterns in this piece. The most prominent is one that I shall refer to as the ‘Baroque’. This consists of one staccato, followed by two slurred (starting with an accent) and then staccato. Both closely adhere to this pattern throughout all Baroque sections and indeed the articulation is pretty accurate all the way through.

Q poses a problem for every performer; with Bolling writing three repeated notes; a pattern which is impossible for most instruments. It is unclear whether Bolling made it clear to Rampal what he meant by this articulation pattern but both performers do different things with this section. Zucker decides to articulate the repeated notes not by use of the tongue but rather by separating the air through contractions in the diaphragm muscles. This causes the notes to be separated through with a slight ‘huh’ at the start. On the other hand, Rampal tongues the three notes.

- Insert Copy of Score at Q.

During the Jazz Waltz (N) Zucker is accurate with the articulation even though there is a great variety in this section. However at U, Zucker breaks this pattern of keeping with the accuracy of the articulation as written in the score. At U Zucker staccatos the quavers even though it only suggests

tonguing and not staccato explicitly. There is an interesting event second bars before **W** in which Zucker staccatos the notes as in the score. However when the same passage occurs before **BB**, Zucker follows the scoring and plays them slurred. Rampal on the other hand plays both sections staccato probably in the idea that it was more appropriate to remain consistent.

In the first bar of **Y**, Zucker slurs all 6 quavers instead of the three quavers which are slurred. What is interesting is that two bars later, Zucker makes a big thing of separating the two 3s. Apart from this, the rest of the articulation throughout **Y** and **Z** is accurate even though it is fairly awkward. In contrast Rampal tongues all the notes at **Z** even though the opposite is written in the score. This is in direct contrast to **Y** where he plays the awkward articulation pattern. At **AA** there is the same problem of what to do with the repeated notes. While Zucker articulates them using the diaphragm, Rampal decides to tongue all the notes even the ones which are not repeated. By **BB**, Rampal is back playing the articulation as written. What is interesting is that at **BB**, the repeated notes are not double tongued as one might expect. This gives it much more energy and clarity. At **GG**, both Zucker and Rampal takes the last note in the pattern to mean shortened rather than legato tongued. At the forth of **HH**, Rampal makes the articulation more awkward than written, tonguing the last two notes. This is a weird break with a simple phrasing pattern.

Attach pattern of **GG**

In terms of balance, you can hear all the instruments clearly throughout both recordings. However the emphasis is different. Zucker's recording clearly suggests Flute with backing, while Rampal's suggests a band with flute and piano lead. This might be due to the different make ups in the respective bands. In Zucker's band, Zucker is clearly the most famous member, and she was the one who wanted to record the suites. On the other hand, both Bolling and Rampal were big musicians in France at the time and because it was collaboration from the beginning, you feel as though there was a more of a duet with accompaniment rather than solo with accompaniment.

When judging accuracy, it has been in reference to the score published by Hal Leonard. This is been the only major publication of this suite. Zucker's recording has a number of discrepancies. The piano solos are altered: like at **E** the solo is embellished with grace notes and a different bass line while between **L** and **M** there is a completely different solo to that which is written. As has been previously mentioned; at two before **BB** Zucker adheres to the score articulation even though it is opposite to a previously done pattern. At forth of **EE**, Zucker puts the flute part up an octave for one bar which is not understandable. One of the strangest things is that at **FF**, the piano cadenza is played as written, which is strange when one considers the level of alteration to the other piano solos. Zucker and Rampal embellish the last section slightly, with Zucker using a mordant elaboration onto the **E** natural in the bar before **HH** and **JJ**. Three bars before **OO**, Rampal slides to the **b** natural. This is very jazzy, but possibly loses the idea of remaining classical,

however the spontaneous nature of this embellishment fits in with the rest of the recording.

There was a quotation which really inspired Claude Bolling's recording and that is one made by famous jazz musician Sidney Bechet: "You can't feel the Sun, unless you're in the sun, it's the same with music"<sup>2</sup>. The way this influenced Bolling was the understanding that if a classical musician wanted to experience jazz, then it wouldn't be by some half hearted cross over, but by bluntly placing them in the jazz environment and this explains the jazz atmosphere, the ambient recording techniques and the old style piano sound that has been successfully achieved by this recording. He accepted this might mean that the classical musician played classical style music so they could forgo the extensive experience it required to become a successful jazz musician. Over time he realised how exciting this juxtaposition might or could sound and this explains the jazz atmosphere, the ambient recording techniques and the old style piano sound that has been successfully achieved by this recording.

On a different level the recording techniques and sound are different in both recordings. The recording technology in use in the 1970s means the quality of recording is not as high as the one in 2004. At around '30 (E) in the Bolling recording you can hear what appears to be a member of the group singing along; and while this adds a certain authenticity to the sound, it would not be tolerated in a more modern recording as demonstrated in the second recording with the complete lack of any sound other than that which is clearly specified within the piece.

It can be seen that these two are very different recordings. They are successful in different ways, and represent a shift in musical traditions over 30 years. They are the results of two very different players, using different instruments, and different attitudes and mixing techniques but attempting to achieve not the "impossible fusion of classical music and jazz"<sup>3</sup> but rather the "strong exciting juxtaposition for the ear"<sup>4</sup> which was the very aim of this piece.

### Useful Links

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dVtLVSzESU> – This is a performance by the same line up playing at Versailles Palace. This is not used in the comparison, although it is useful in appreciating the immense respect each had for the other and the ability to communicate among the group.

<http://www.claude-bolling.com> – Discography, and information behind composition and recordings.

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<sup>2</sup> Private correspondence with Bolling

<sup>3</sup> Michel Perrin – Tele 7 Jours.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Perrin – Tele 7 Jours.

## Appendix 1: Background to Suite and Recordings

Bolling's recording is largely thought of as being the definitive version and was extremely successful especially in the USA, remaining at the top of the US Hit Parade Jazz Album for two years and within the top 40 of the same one for an astonishing 10 years; it is now a platinum album

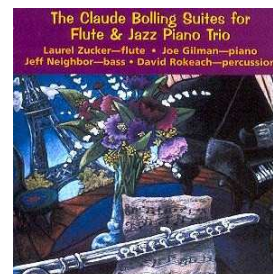
Zucker's recording has also been very successful with praise coming from Bolling who wrote "Dear Laurel Zucker, your recording is beautiful, musician partners are excellent and your flute playing superb!!"<sup>5</sup>

Bolling recounts how this composition became reality: "The Sonata came out when I met the flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal that I admired so much." "Jean-Pierre listened and, with a spontaneous enthusiasm, told me: "I love jazz without knowing how to play, but I dream of having an experience with jazz



musicians. Write me something that is classic for my flute and jazz for you." "I was really taken by considering this request as a real challenge. It was a little bit of a crazy gamble!" Over the weeks, the first three movements were born from the pen of Claude Bolling. The "Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio" was born.<sup>6</sup>

Being one of the men behind the original idea, one might expect Rampal had a good idea of how he wanted to play it, and as one of the great supporters of cross over music which meant he was used to playing different styles of music. Bolling was playing with his usual group and has considerable success as a jazz pianist. As it was his own composition it feels naturally easy and comfortable under his hands even if the piano part is technically as difficult as the flute part if not harder.



<sup>5</sup> As Quoted in <http://www.laurelzucker.com/pdfs/PressKit-Bolling.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Claude Bolling on [www.claude-Bolling.com](http://www.claude-Bolling.com)

## Appendix 2: Email correspondence between Elliot Black and Claude Bolling

To: Claude Bolling  
From: Elliot Black  
Date: March 25<sup>th</sup> 1.15pm

Dear Sir

I am an A level student studying at a 6<sup>th</sup> form College in Britain. For part of my music A – Level, I am required to compare two recordings of a piece which I am then expected to perform in a recital. As I play the flute, I have chosen to play a number of movements from your first suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio. I am therefore comparing your groundbreaking recording made in 1975 with JP Rampal of Baroque and Blue, with the more recent recording by Laurel Zucker. It would be most helpful if you could help me in a couple of queries:

1. I have heard a number of sources claim that you recorded the piano part on an old upright you found in a jazz club somewhere in Paris. However I can find no exact references to the type or make of piano.
2. Were there any key references to famous musicians which influenced not only the composition but the performance/ recording which you aimed to achieve.
3. Were you surprised with the success it met in the US?

Thank you so much for your time.

Yours Sincerely

Elliot Black

To: Elliot Black  
From: Claude Bolling  
Date: March 28<sup>th</sup> 7.43 pm

Dear Elliot

You would be amazed by the amount of response I still get regarding Baroque and Blue; let alone the rest of the suite. However, most of the queries come from people much older than you, so it is nice to feel my music is appealing to younger people as well.

You are correct that the piano used is an upright which I found in the Lionel Hampton jazz club which is part of the Meridian which is a large hotel in Paris. I can't remember the exact make or model, but remember doing a big band concert there on a number of occasions (recently released a CD entitled Live at the Meridian). I enjoyed the piano and liked the sound, and persuaded the owner to let me do the recording you are now comparing. It has confused a number of people because they released a picture of me and Rampal on the back of the score which was actually of a later performance, and there is a Steinway all around us!!!



Sidney Bechet's quotation "You've got to be in the sun to feel the sun, and it's the same with music" (or something like that) really inspired me. It made me realise that if I was going to compose and perform a piece of cross over music then I needed to give the classical performer a real jazz experience, where we would lose the orchestra, the formality and even if they themselves were playing classically, then everything else about it would be jazz. This then extended to the one take recordings, me forcing the engineer to keep the singing you can hear early in the record in an effort to make the experience authentic not only for Rampal, but for the listener at home. Rampal himself inspired me with his enthusiasm. Even though he was largely ignorant of most jazz conventions and history, his enthusiasm injected energy into places which I had previously thought were pretty lacking. Indeed he was almost a co - composer.

I was surprised how it did in the America but there had been a lot of ideas and bands playing relatively similar music. People are much more open to new ideas, and possibly some of the Ellington influences in my work appealed to them.

I hope this helps you with your work, and I apologise for slightly lacking English in this email!!!

Yours sincerely

Claude Bolling