

# Saxophone JOURNAL

Jan/Feb 1995 Volume 19, Number 4

## CLASSIC SAXOPHONE

Vol. 2: *Music da Camera*

**FRANK BONGIORNO**

*Liscio LCD-09193*

With its varied styles and settings, *Classic Saxophone Vol. 2* is a superb smorgasbord for the saxophone. Frank Bongiorno has given the listener a musical equivalent of the increasingly popular "restaurant buffets." On the menu are some new delights, as well as some old favorites, translated into excellent, new settings. From baroque to classical to jazz, Frank gives us authoritative performances of classical saxophone literature. The setting for each of the pieces is imaginative and exciting; the performance on this CD is excellent. As the subtitle, *Musica da camera*, implies, this CD contains all the charms and subtleties that are demanded in the intimate setting of chamber music.

Frank Bongiorno is an active performer throughout the country. In 1988 he was the third prize winner in the Seventh Annual Young Performers' Competition and was a quarter finalist in the Concert Artist Guild International, New York Competition. In addition to his performing schedule, Bongiorno is an Associate Professor of Music at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He holds a doctorate at Indiana University and has studied with such well-known teachers as Eugene Rousseau, Jim Riggs, Steve Mauk, David Baker, and Rich Matteson. As a champion of new music for the saxophone, Bongiorno has premiered several works written for him by composers such as David Kechley and David Baker.

Frank Bongiorno's saxophone performance is sensitive and creative. His tone is warm and fluid, with a well-controlled vibrato that is supple and intense. His fingers are even and

precisely coordinated with his articulations. He is capable of subdued playing, yet has all the passion and fire that music demands. His use of the altissimo register is excellent and so masterfully developed that it slides by the ears unnoticed, except for the music involved. He leads the listener through the musical excitement gently and yet fills the listener's soul with the fervor of the composition. Frank Bongiorno is a master performer with the ability to totally charm his audience.

The opening selection is *In the Dragon's Garden* by David Kechley. This is certainly an East-meets-West piece that is very thought-provoking and written for alto saxophone, guitar (Robert Nathanson), and crotales (David Kechley). The guitar provides the Eastern-like background and the alto repeats mantra-like phrases. The piece begins quietly and builds, invoking Westerner's thoughts of Eastern philosophy and beyond. The trio creates an excellent sense of ensemble and, through their flexibility, gives the listener a tale that will tickle the wildest of imaginations.

The CD jumps to G.P. Telemann's *Sonata I* arranged by Larry Teal. Mr. Bongiorno does the impossible and plays both parts through the magic of double tracking. The charm of Telemann never wears out and in the hands of our soloist, who is a duo in this case, Telemann's charm bursts alive. The performance is unified and enjoyable. The adagio is simply beautiful; the articulation in the allegro is breathtaking.

The venue jumps to a quartet from the duo platform. Frank Bongiorno plays soprano; Jamal Rossi, alto saxophone; April Lucas, tenor; and Tony Alduino, baritone. We also jump forward in time to the Mozart *Oboe Quartet*. The quartet has been deftly transcribed for the

saxophone quartet by our featured artist, Frank Bongiorno. It is a beautiful piece and a welcome addition to the quartet repertoire. The quartet members respond extremely well to each other allowing the music to really come out. The quartet phrases delicately allowing lines to sing. They establish a group timbre that is very satisfying and a group style that truly enhances the thought of Mozart and saxophones. It is this type of sensitive ensemble that will perpetuate the saxophone and its literature.

Steven Galante's *Saxsounds III: Diminishing Returns* is an outstanding new piece for the saxophone and a digital delay processor. It is an amazing piece and you truly have to hear it to believe it. Next is Bongiorno's beautiful arrangement of Fauré's *Sicilienne from Pelléas and Mélisande* for guitar and soprano saxophone. It is a gem of a piece that has been given another lovely setting.

The concluding piece is David N. Baker's *Faces of the Blues* for five saxophones. The previous quartet is joined by Steven Mauk of Ithaca College. Frank Bongiorno plays alto while the other three remain the same. With the addition of Steven Mauk, the listener is now hearing the Empire Saxophone Quartet plus Frank Bongiorno. The *Faces of the Blues* is an enjoyable piece well-crafted and similarly performed. There are some open spots for solos which are performed extremely well. This is an exciting piece for the listener, but it must be a great deal of fun for the performers to play.

*Classic Saxophone, Vol. 2* is indeed a classic. This CD should go on your "must get or at least listen to" list. Bongiorno is an excellent saxophonist who has the magic to tell stories through his saxophone performance. Not only does he tickle the listener's ear, but he fires up the imagination and stirs the soul.

-Paul Wagner/Joe Viola