

Barry MILLS (b. 1949)

Interbeing

All the Mornings in the World (2017) [32:32]

Hard Times – Different Times (2017) [5:15]

Mirrored Moments (2009) [19:41]

Cherry Blossom (2019) [2:25]

Falling Leaves (2018) [3:14]

Septet (1989) [9:40]

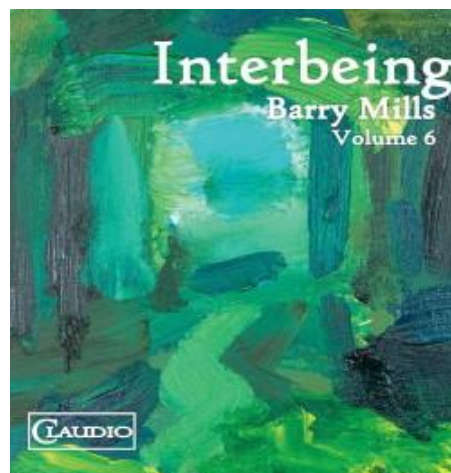
Interbeing (2016) [8:52]

rec. 2019, St Bartholomew's Church, Brighton and The
Birley Centre, Eastbourne College, UK

Stereo 24/192 (as reviewed) and 24/96

Also available on CD CC6044-2

CLAUDIO BD-A CC6044-6 [82:15]



I previously reviewed Volume 5 of this series. This is Barry Mills's sixth disc for Claudio. As previously mentioned [his website](#) is full of interest. It reveals amongst other things that he is mostly self taught and cannot be described as a professional composer because he worked as a postman to give himself afternoons to compose. One continues to admire such dedication.

The title for this disc is taken from the very last set of pieces for solo piano. It should perhaps have been taken from the first set which is much the longest. *All the Mornings in the World* consists of nine movements united not by thematic or structural links but by various interpretations of the concept of 'morning'. As the composer says in his thorough and useful notes, mornings can be beginnings not only of days but of lives, seasons, human relationships and so on. Each movement has a descriptive title which acts with the music itself to guide the listener towards the mood or picture Mills wishes to invoke. The instruments used, a string quartet, flute, clarinet, piano and percussion, are often subdivided into various combinations, making listening a constantly beguiling experience. The opening of the first movement *Silver Paper – Bright Morning Star* emerges from absolute silence so slowly that one is uncertain if it has actually started. This sort of subtlety is hugely aided by the superbly clear and very wide ranging recording. Frequently in this lengthy suite Mills quotes folk songs and a hymn, contrasting them with his own modern-impressionism to great effect, rather reminiscent of Copland's use of *Simple Gifts* in *Appalachian Spring*. I found the composer's descriptions helpful in following the myriad fragmentary impressions of his music. The playing throughout this work and indeed the rest of the disc is of the highest standard.

After the thirty-plus minutes of *All the Mornings in the World* the next work comes as an aural shock because there are no instruments, just a pure-voiced folk singer and four accompanying voices as a balancing chorus in a complex setting of the folksong *Hard Times*, onto which Mills has grafted some of his own ideas and words. This piece is only six minutes long but it grips one's attention. This is partly due to the lovely sounds but also the emotional impact he conveys. A splendid piece recorded with great clarity. With *Mirrored Moments* we are back to another suite of impressions, this time more disparate and united only by their being played in sequence. The chosen instruments, clarinet, violin, cello and piano, are not a standard grouping and make for yet more intriguing sound combinations, a characteristic of all the ensemble pieces on this disc. Once again Mills's notes guide one through his intentions.

The two pieces *Cherry Blossom* and *Falling Leaves* are for guitar duo and apart from being atmospheric, well played and astonishingly well recorded are of little musical interest to my ears. The *Septet* for flute, clarinet, harp and string quartet is the earliest piece on the disc and, whilst perfectly listenable and not outstaying its welcome, sounds very obviously like 'modern music', in that it lacks any obvious lyricism and sounds like an expert academic exercise. It doesn't surprise me at all to read that it was written for

the Society for the Promotion of New Music. *Interbeing* is a set of three contemplative piano pieces reflecting, says Mills, the Buddhist experience of the interconnectedness of things. These fall pleasantly on the ear and round off the disc comfortably.

As is obvious from my reactions, the most interesting pieces are the ensemble works which take up the major part of the disc and here Mills shows a notable talent for combining sounds and provoking emotional states. This is no small achievement and make the issue overall worth purchasing.

The Claudio Recording is of course excellent. The advantages of simple microphone techniques – only two were used – and a good acoustic are once again very obvious indeed. Colin Attwell is not alone in using such approaches, BIS often keep things similarly simple, but he is amongst the best. Top marks once again for technical quality in a programme which is not all gentle sounds by any means and has some very dynamic moments when the percussion gets going.

I note that the music on this Blu-ray Audio disc is available in both 24/96 and 24/192 formats. I can't see any indication as to how one chooses one or the other. This review was of the default 24bit 192 kHz on my Oppo 205. I should also note that the short piece *Falling Leaves* is only on the BDA and not the CD, presumably for reasons of time.

Dave Billinge

Performers: Julian Broughton (conductor), Katrin Heyman (flute), Steve Dummer (clarinet), Adam Bushell (percussion), Nancy Cooley (piano), Andrew Thurgood and Anna Cooper (violins), Matthew Quenby and Ellie Blackshaw (violas), Sarah Carvalho-Dubost (cello), Charlotte Spong (folk singer), Antonia Hyatt (soprano), Sarah Newington (alto), Nick Boston (tenor), Clive Whitburn (bass), Seána Davey (harp), Jon Rattenbury and Brian Ashworth (guitars)

