

Barry Mills (b.1949)

Volume 7 – Portraits

Trio for oboe, cello and piano (2019)

String Sextet (2020)

Portraits for piano (2018)

Trio for clarinet, viola and piano (2020)

String Quartet (2021)

Sea Movements for piano (1990)

Walking in Beauty for soprano and lute (2021)

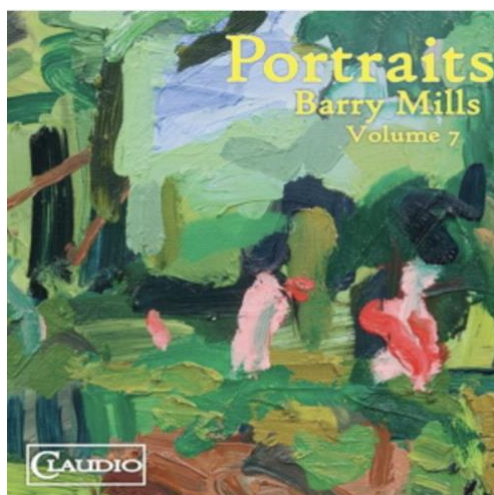
Ensemble Reza, Brighton Chamber Ensemble,

Rachel Fryer (piano), Sam Brown (lute), Timea

Gazdag (soprano)

rec. 2020-21, Brighton, UK

Claudio CC6050-2 [73]



By academic provenance initially a biochemist, Barry Mills emerged in the mid-late 1970s. His composition tutors included Colin Matthews.

A lyric practitioner to his core and fingertips, he has carved a name for himself among the generality of the music appreciative public through his series of Claudio CD recordings. That label issued this volume and its successor in tandem.

The *Trio for oboe, cello and piano* was written for the Brighton Chamber Ensemble here represented by Dan Elson (oboe), Siriol Hugh-Jones (cello – and perhaps related to composer Elaine Hugh-Jones?) and Stephen Carroll-Turner (piano). Mills' home is in the Brighton area and the city is very much his 'stamping ground'. The Trio's five movements make no secret of the debt the composer owes to melody, and to folk-song in particular. It's a work of dewily plangent emotions. Movements I and III are elegiac and fluent but there's a measure of gawky entertainment, Lambertian half-lights and hints of supernatural depths plumbed in II, IV and V.

The 2020 *String Sextet* owes its existence to Ensemble Reza. Across its three movements it moves from superbly calculated calm to chaffing disquiet. The third movement, the finale, is again touching and pays out its message lode without a breathless moment. Identifying this score, the composer refers to compassion; that elusive quality is certainly patent here. The players in this recording are Lucy Jeal, Andrew Thurgood (violins); Anna Cooper, Matthew Quenby (violas); Sarah Carvalho-Dubost, Pavlos Carvalho (cellos).

Portraits – a three-movement work – is played here by pianist, Rachel Fryer. The innocence of childhood is projected with wonderfully balanced tonal resources and as with the other works no insurgency of dissonance. The vignettes are *Giraffes*, *Cherry Blossoms* and *Daisy*, the latter, the daughter of pianist, Rachel Fryer.

Another *Trio* (2019) follows but this time for clarinet, viola and piano. It, too, is a work written for the Brighton Chamber Ensemble. The four movements (*Prelude*; *In Turmoil*; *In memoriam Glen Capra*; *Postlude*) owe their existence to the feelings generated, in the composer by the death, by his own hand, of his friend Glen Capra. The sea is a counterpoint to an affecting mood drama. The trio of instrumentalists comprises Zoe Davies (clarinet); Ros Hanson-Laurent (viola) and Stephen Carroll-Turner (piano).

I have already mentioned Ensemble Reza; Mills' String Quartet was written for them. There are four movements but this time, as with the Sextet, without titles. The music is subtle and appealing, eerie and flighty. In III lamentation plays its part but finally there's a quasi-Elizabethan pavane akin to similar 'antique' movements in Warlock's *Capriol* and Moeran's *Serenade*. The players are: Lucy Jeal (violin I), Andrew Thurgood (violin II); Anna Cooper (viola); Sarah Carvalho-Dubost (cello).

Sea Movements, from 1999, is a true miniature for solo piano and is over in less than three minutes. It depicts the "constantly changing surface of the sea" a subject further explored in Claudio's volume 8.

Walking In Beauty (2021) is in three movements which are initially locked-in to Lord Byron's poem. Its three folk-pastoral movements are gently blandished in by soprano Timea Gazdag. Sam Brown with his lute is surely a nod towards the last movement of the Quartet. As a three-song cycle this stands as a passive-modest valediction to this recital of seven works. The presentation of this CD, in a nicely calculated measure, is distinguished by longish dignified silences between works and movements.

This disc stands as a model that reflects a lyric composing talent. It is another engaging calling-card for a composer who can loosely be bracketed with Robin Milford. Mills' is one of that cadre of music-painters who rejoice in water-coloured emotions – gentle and outwardly modest.

Rob Barnett