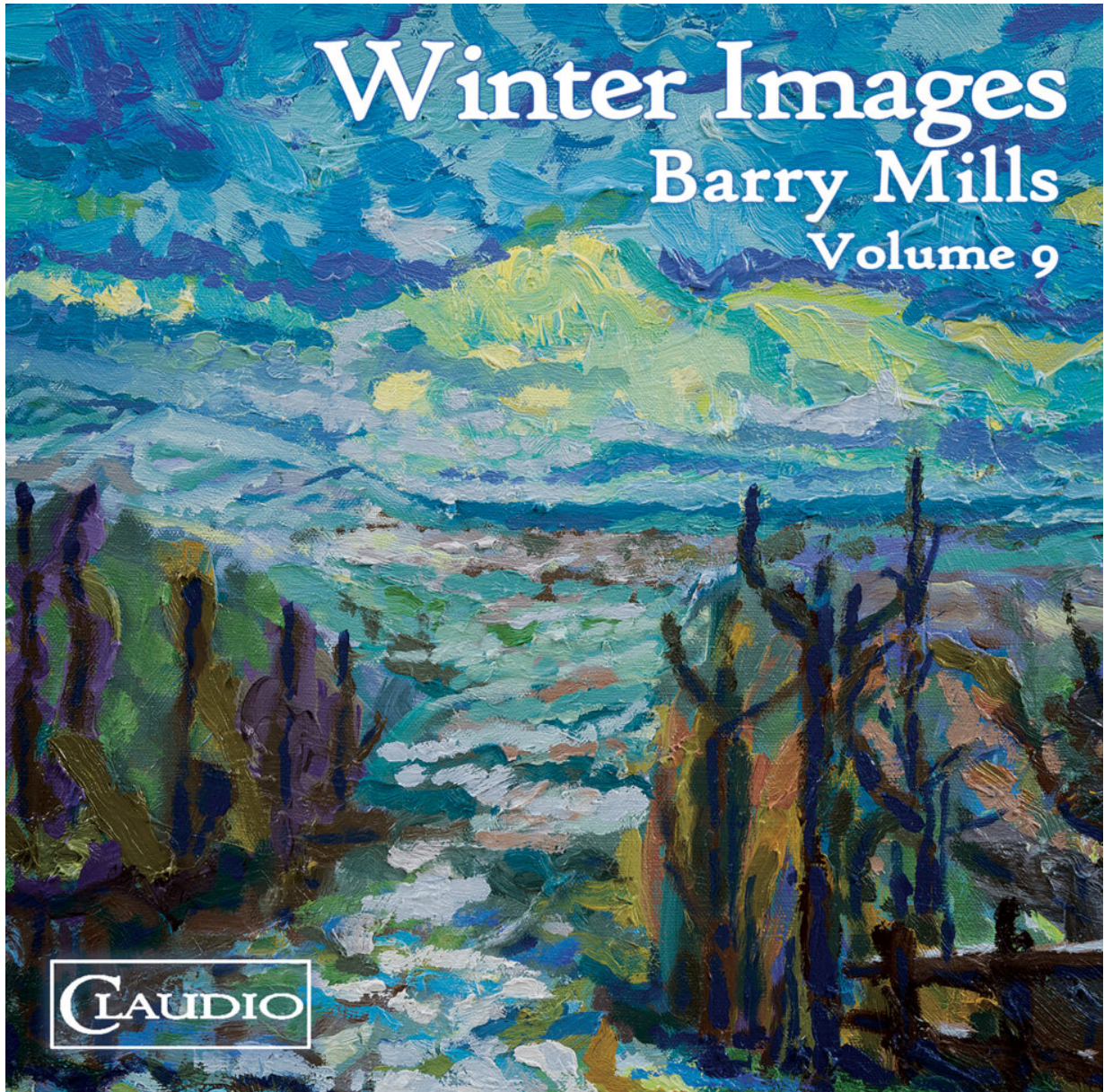


BARRY MILLS: Winter Images

Sep 21, 2023 | CD reviews



CLAUDIO Contemporary CC6052-2

Here on this CD are eight vibrant chamber works by Barry Mills (b. 1949). Several contain multiple movements – 22 pieces in total. The word *Images* in the title is significant. Mills paints pictures with his music. Actually, these are not just still pictures, they are motion pictures. Movement is so very crucial to his music.

Many of the 13 performers on this CD have worked for Mills before. There are four pianists, two of them soloists, a cello duo, two violinists, one of whom plays in a duo with a viola player. There is a lutenist and a guitar duo. Taken together they are surely a company of the finest musicians from the South of England across a wide range of instruments.

Winter Images is the title of the opening work. Three solo piano movements are played eloquently by Michiko Shimanuki. Stillness across a gleaming snow-covered landscape shines forth from the piano in *Snowscape*, then with *Swirling Snowflakes* the piano drives a blizzard. A series of single notes describe drops of water from the trees in *Melting Snow*. All three movements are wonderfully graphic.

This is equally true of *Cello Duo* especially *The Searing Wind*. Then warm harmonies suggest a peaceful sunset in *Evening Thoughts*.

Evening and Night is a real performance high point. Trumpet player Imogen Whitehead is teamed with pianist Jennifer Walsh. Different trumpet mutes are used, first to create a cityscape with a suggestion of jazz, then a darker vision of *Night Sea*. *Questioning the Stars* is a fine anti-war piece.

Lute Sketches performed by Sam Brown is more like pure abstract music especially *Variations*. Mills can do that too. In his *Three Pieces for Michiko*, the first is more thoughtful, dealing with the innocence of young children who do not even understand racism. However, with *The Storm* and *Autumnal Atmosphere* the music is once again radiantly pictorial.

Falling Leaves for guitar duo is amazing. It opens with the instruments used in percussion style, graphic in a most imaginative way. *Three Places in Costa Rica* takes us on a colourful pictorial journey. The *Duo for Violin and Viola* is a serious work with four movements dealing with memories of the Covid Pandemic. The final work *The Calm Lake* is for piano solo. Here Nancy Cooley restores happier feelings to close the recital.

Review by Alan Cooper