

# Reviews

## Review of “Elan Valley”

### APRIL - JUNE 2018 MUSICAL OPINION QUARTERLY

barry-cd-cover-5.jpg ↵

The titles of the individual pieces, and those of the separate movements in the concertos, are cleverly designed to put the listener in the correct receptive frame of mind to experience the haunting qualities of these finely wrought scores by Barry Mills (b. 1949).

His musical language is inherently founded upon late-Impressionism in terms of the creation of instrumental imagery, and the contemplative qualities the music undoubtedly possesses betoken a creative mind inherently inspired by natural phenomena - the observance, and being moved by, deeply layered forces of nature.

If the inner movement of Mills's music has the almost inevitable quality of pacification - in the sense of nature as one with humanity - the foreground surface of his larger works is full of fascinating details of orchestration and instrumental timbres, with the soloists in all three concertos not so much taking centre stage at all times but adopting what might be termed a universal co-operation for tone and inner movement - the musical foreground constantly 'on the move' whilst the musical background providing the foundation of the surface impressions at all times.

This is music of, inherently, a profoundly contemplative nature, and as such speaks to our troubled and often chaotic times with a profound sense of inherent calm.

As such, it is music for those moments of reflection - too rarely encountered in art of all kinds today. Mills is honoured by what appear to be excellent performances; the recording quality is first class.

[Robert Matthew-Walker, Musical Opinion Quarterly Apr – Jun 2018](#)

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### Classical Guitar Magazine Summer 2018

#### **Compelling concertos and orchestral works from English composer.**

The music of Sussex England-born Barry Mills certainly deserves to be heard. Of the pieces on offer here, only two works include the guitar, but one of them – the beautiful Guitar Concerto (The Travels of Turlogh O’Carolan) is quite substantial in six movements and lasting more than 32 minutes. O’Carolan was a 16th century Irish harpist, popular today with many guitarists, and here Mills has interwoven some of O’Carolan’s melodies with musical episodes of his own evoking wind, sea, rivers, mountains, and night, to give the listener a sense of the blind harpist’s lifestyle of constant travelling. The music is magical from start to finish, and this concerto really deserves to be discovered and played. The style, naturally, is very Irish-folk and therefore highly accessible, but also gripping. Sam Brown is the guitarist, and he plays the piece wonderfully well. The Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra is conducted by Peter Vronsky and, of course, adds much to the piece.

The other guitar work is the Mandolin and Guitar Concerto, in four movements, and again concerned with nature – three of the movements are “Rainfall”, “The Piercing Wind”, and “The Ever-Changing Sea”. The style is more modern, but very tonal throughout, and again full of wonderful moments, effortlessly played by both soloists.

The non-guitar pieces are Mandolin Concerto and two orchestral works, both in the same lovely, almost ethereal style. A wonderful recording!

[Chris Dumigan, Classical Guitar Magazine Summer 2018](#)

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## MusicWeb International

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Barry MILLS (b.1949)

Elan Valley – orchestral (2016) [8:24]

Mandolin and Guitar Concerto (2003) [13:28]

Evening Rain – Sunset (2012) [6:51]

Guitar Concerto (2014) [31:48]

Mandolin Concerto (2016) [13:20]

Daniel Ahlert (mandolin)

Birgit Schwab (guitar)

Sam Brown (guitar)

Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra/Vronsky

rec. Redula Hall, Olomouc, Czech Republic, 2017

Stereo 24/192 (as reviewed) and 24/96; also available on CD  
CC6040-2

### **CLAUDIO BD-A CC6040-6 [71:33]**

Barry Mills is a new name to me, and it makes a change to review music by someone who is both alive and younger than I am. Mills seems to be active around the Brighton area and has a considerable quantity of music of all sorts to his name. This is his fifth disc for Claudio. His website at [barrymillscomposer.com](http://barrymillscomposer.com) 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 has to admire such dedication. One suspects that there are a lot of such people in the arts world who wish to create but cannot earn enough from it to live on. The history of music is full of such. It would seem that riches are not the expectation of most creative artists.

The two short orchestral pieces and the three concertos presented here were all written well within the last two decades. On this occasion he has gained the cooperation of a fully professional orchestra, in the Czech Republic, to present his

works in the best possible light. Engaging with Claudio records to advise on, master and market the disc, as he has before, Mills has guaranteed one thing few can claim, even some of the biggest names, and that is well nigh perfect recording quality. Listening to these beautifully crafted works, full of the most delicate and attractive orchestral effects has been an easy job for this reviewer. Mills does not believe in making life uncomfortable for the audience in that these pieces, though clearly modern, are never raucous or noisy, and indeed often have a very tuneful quality. The tunes are sometimes folk melodies but treated to a rather atmospheric development. I am tempted to draw parallels with some of the gentler minimalists but Mills gets somewhere quite quickly and here at least none of his music outstays its welcome. The three concertos are each in several movements which have descriptive titles referring mostly to the environment. Mills is very much a landscape artist in music. The music has a meditative quality mixed with rhythmic flourishes that enliven the flow of colourful sounds giving a certain narrative quality to the experience. The soloists are all very expert players and articulate the music very cleanly under the intense audio scrutiny of a microscopically clear recording.

As implied above, all five works are well played and recorded with the usual outstanding Claudio fidelity, resulting from using very simple recording arrays placed in exactly the right position and of course using the finest microphones. The majors could learn much from this.

[David Billinge of Musicweb International](#)