

Review of “Elan Valley”

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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.

