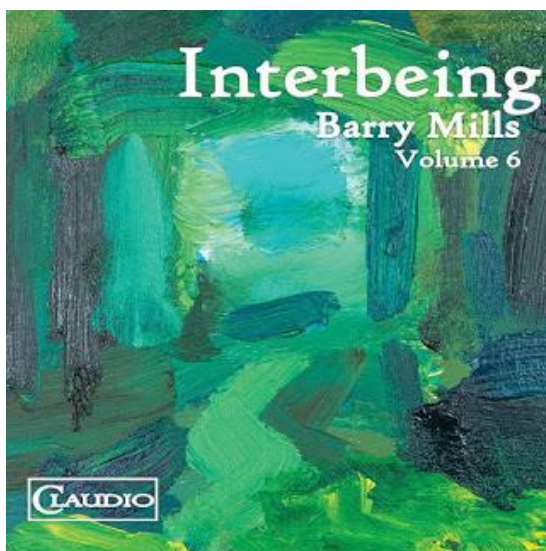
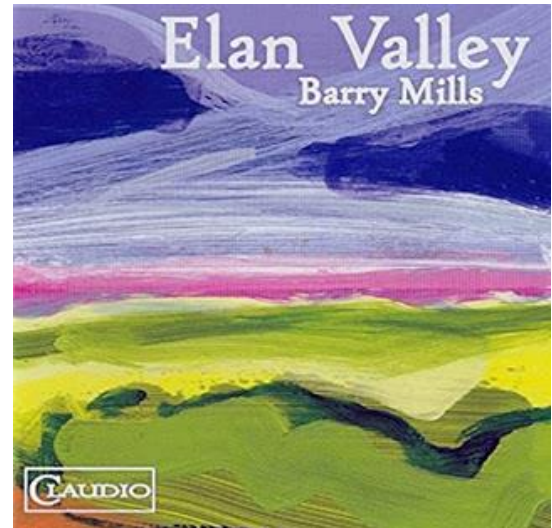


A couple of years ago I had the privilege to take part in a project with contemporary local composers, commissioned by [New Music Brighton](#) to write works drawing on or inspired by traditional folk songs, for a combination of classical and folk musicians. Brighton-based [Barry Mills](#) (b.1949) was one of the composers, and went on to record the work from that project – you can find it on his CD *Interbeing Volume 6* (Claudio Records CC6044-2). Barry kindly also sent me a copy of another of his CDs, entitled *Elan Valley*, after the orchestral work that opens the disc. This is an atmospheric, pastoral evocation of the Welsh landscape, drawing on a Welsh folksong at its heart. The orchestration is highly effective, with shimmering, watery strings and gentle harp and woodwind writing. The orchestra here, the [Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra](#) under Petr Vronsky, bring out the detail with great warmth here. They also excel in the other orchestral work here, ‘*Evening Rain – Sunset*’, composed for the [Sussex Symphony Orchestra’s](#) 20th anniversary in 2013. Insistent repeated rising phrases build through the first half of the piece, before a calmer second section, with overlapping chords and



successive use of the sections of the orchestra, leading to a highly atmospheric conclusion. There are three *Concertos* on this disc, one for Mandolin, one for Guitar and one for Mandolin and Guitar together. Mills obviously has an affinity for both instruments, and he makes good use of their melodic, rhythmic and subtle textural qualities. The double concerto is performed here by [Daniel Ahlert](#) (mandolin) and [Birgit Schwab](#) (guitar), for whom it was composed, and in its four movements, Mills contrasts the lightness of touch of the soloists with relatively simple orchestral textures, to avoid drowning out the two quiet solo instruments. The first movement has a persistent, running rhythm over built up string chords, whilst in the second movement the soloists take it in turns with solo

passages, supported by the orchestra more in the background here. The ‘piercing wind’ whistles through the third movement, with racing scale passages, and the gentler final movement uses repeated rising and descending patterns passed around the orchestra and soloists. The *Guitar Concerto*, titled ‘*The Travels of Turlough O’Carolan*’, places Mills’ arrangements of folk melodies by Turlough O’Carolan (1670-1738) alongside his own musical episodes evoking wind, sea, rivers, mountains and night. So sometimes the guitar (here played by [Sam Brown](#)) has the folk tune, sometimes it accompanies and in the fifth of the six movements, *Under the Stars*, it is totally unaccompanied. This gives Brown the chance to show a great range of the instrument’s abilities, and he is particularly impressive in that solo movement, with its harmonics and subtle strumming effects. Folksong appears again in the *Mandolin Concerto*, this time an Irish folk song, ‘*My Singing Bird*’, and evocations of bird song are abundant here, as well as shimmering strings and dark whole tone scales.

Mills, B. 2017. *Elan Valley*. Daniel Alert, Birgit Schwab, Sam Broan, Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, Petr Vronsky. Compact Disc. Claudio Records CC6040-2.

[Mills, B. 2019.](#) *Interbeing, Volume 6*. Julian Broughton, Katrin Heyman, Steve Dummer, Adam Bushell, Nancy Cooley, Andrew Thurgood, Anna Cooper, Matthew Quenby, Sarah Carvalho-Dubost, Charlotte Spong, Antonia Hyatt, Sarah Newington, Nick Boston, Clive Whitburn, Ellie Blackshaw, Seána Davey, Jon Rattenbury, Brian Ashworth. Compact Disc. Claudio Records CC6044-2.