

**Barry Mills (b.1949)**

*Elan Valley* (2016)

Mandolin and Guitar Concerto (2003)

*Evening Rain – Sunset* (2012)

Guitar Concerto (2014)

Mandolin Concerto (2016)

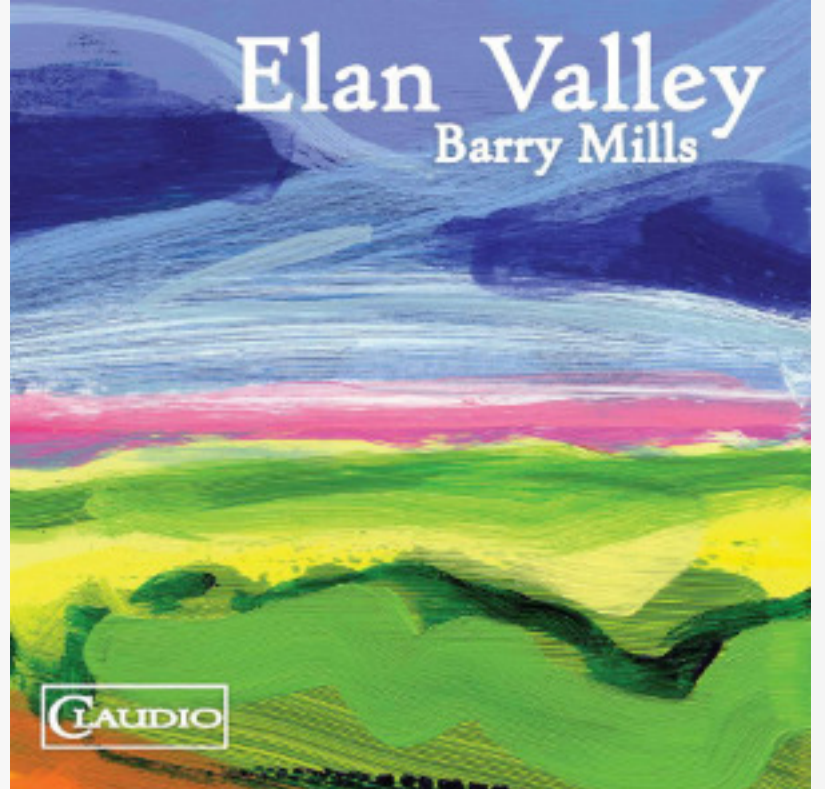
Daniel Ahlert (mandolin); Birgit Schwab (guitar);

Sam Brown (guitar)

Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra/Petr Vronský

rec. 2017, Olomouc, Czech Republic

**Claudio CC6040-2 [72]**



I thank Barry Mills for sending this disc for

appraisal. It is a natural companion to earlier reviewed volumes of his numerous Claudio series. I still feel it that needs a second personal look. These works all date from the last two decades.

***Elan Valley*** is, like all of this music, tonal, boasting a light-suffused sound. It is enveloped in this composer's taste – concisely expressed – for sun-dappled romance and ecstatic sounds of nature. Flute and celesta stand to the fore in this aural poem on the mid-Wales reservoirs of Elan Valley. It has some Ravel-like moments but two other more northerly composers also come to mind: Arthur Butterworth in his moorland evocations and Maurice Johnstone's lapidary *Tarn Howes*.

The four-movement ***Mandolin and Guitar Concerto*** is a piece that finds its poise in the tension between poetry and display. Mills' invention is to the point and does not ramble. You might regard this is a sort-of Downland *Concierto de Aranjuez*. The finale, which is called *The Ever-Changing Sea*, reminded me of parts of Mills' [Four Places in Tenerife](#).

The emotional temperature in ***Evening Rain – Sunset*** premiered in Hove Town Hall – is cooler yet still the sort of mood painting we have come to expect from this sensitive composer; or perhaps I should say, composer of sensitively-expressed music. Like all of his orchestration, as far as I have heard it, the textures are open in weave and never suffocated with detail.

The ***Guitar Concerto*** is in five movements. Their thread pays an affectionate tribute to the Irish musician Turlough O'Carolan. Irish folk songs provide the palimpsest from which this lambent music is derived. Mills has his chillier, almost static, moments as in *In the Mountains* (a very Moeran-like title), *Following the River* and *Under the Stars*. The finale *Bridget Cruise* is a gentle and rounded thing with mood parallels drawn with music by [Robin Milford](#) and [John Jeffreys](#). It was composed for Sam Brown who plays it here.

The ***Mandolin Concerto*** is in four, short, concentrated movements. Again, the music is gently misted with nostalgia. This is so even when there is a shiver in the air, as in the ultimate and penultimate movements which bear emotional scorch-marks. The words from *The Tempest*, "Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not" seem apt here.

I mentioned Mills' *Tartano* in an earlier review and I have now heard this piece on a VMM disc (VMM3041) from 1997. It was written in 1991, so it is much earlier than the pieces emerging from playing the Claudio CD. In truth, though it shares with *Elan* and the other pieces an openly conjured sound it is rather less enchanting. Its shuddering and groaning gestures are reminiscent of many other contemporary British composers; pleasantly modest but less personal. It is played here by The Moravian Philharmonic, Olomouc and conducted by Jiří Mikula. The composer tells us that *Tartano* is a response to a journey to a village of that name in Valtellina in Northern Italy.

The present Claudio disc is a valuable souvenir of Mills' sensitive music-making. His booklet notes and these conducive performances and recording technology add well to the picture.

Mills, by the way, was born in Plymouth and is now musically active in Brighton, Sussex.

**Rob Barnett**