Michael Price - Tender Symmetry (2018)

A1 Sandham 05:10 A2 Speke 10:51 A3 Willow Road 07:08 B1 Quarry Bank 07:20 B2 Fan Bay 05:29 B3 Fountains 07:32 B4 Shade Of Dreams 03:00   Grace Davidson - soprano Peter Gregson - cello Shards - choir Immix Ensembleand Manchester Collective Michael Price - conductor

Emmy award-winning composer Michael Price will release Tender Symmetry, his second album with Erased Tapes, on August 31st 2018. The ambitious musical project takes in a series of iconic National Trust locations across the UK as its inspiration, turning them into unlikely recording spaces. Michael and a host of musicians and collaborators — including soprano Grace Davidson (featured on Max Richter's Sleep) and Shards (the choir on Nils Frahm's All Melody) — travelled across the country in pursuit of places far removed from the traditional recording studio to create seven unique and moving pieces, straddling the past and the future.

The diversity of Michael Price's choices ranges from the ruins of Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire to the Fan Bay WWII shelter, cut deep into the chalk cliffs of Dover. All owned by the National Trust save one, each venue became both the inspiration and the recording studio for Michael Price and his accompaniment of renowned musical ensembles, choirs and soloists.

"For Tender Symmetry, I stopped admiring and started participating in these buildings. This began as an exploration of writing and recording out in the world beyond the studio. I am interested in where we build our homes in an increasingly virtual world and the spirit of place we feel as we walk our local streets, our schools, temples and public spaces. Taking inspiration from a place, and the stories it told, then going back to that place to record, sometimes in less than ideal conditions, made the two-year adventure much more like shooting a film than making a record."— Michael Price, bandcamp.com

Great music is not exclusively built on big ideas. Often, inspiration comes haphazardly, with little or no intellectual foundation. On the flip side, too much thinking can get in the way of the composing process. There are plenty of recordings in the world with great backstories and not much more.

Every now and then though, a big idea connects with inspired execution. These rare, outsized accomplishments deserve to be celebrated more than most. Such is the case with Michael Price's exceptional Tender Symmetry.
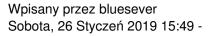
The Emmy award-winning composer has been thinking about "where we build our homes in an increasingly virtual world and the spirit of place we feel as we walk our local streets, our schools, temples and public spaces."

This, along with an interest in recording outside of conventional studio settings, landed Price in a number of the U.K.'s National Trust buildings. The list includes North Yorkshire's 12th century Fountains Abbey ruins, Quarry Bank, an industrial heritage site in Cheshire and the Fan Bay Deep Shelter tunnel complex, built into the White Cliffs of Dover during the Second World War. These seven new pieces are each based on, named after and recorded at one of the locations.

The two-year project wasn't easy. Each spot imposed its own unique challenges. At times, lit mining helmets proved as important as sheet music. And it must be reported that Peter Gregson's beautiful cello did not fare well in the cliffs of Dover.

That said, it's difficult to do this new work justice in a short review. It is warm, sad, big, rich and so much more. It features the brilliant soprano Grace Davidson performing excerpts from William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience. We also get world-class performances from the vocal choir Shards, the aforementioned Gregson, avant-gardists Immix Ensemble and Manchester Collective.

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Tender Symmetry will be remembered among the major works of 2018. ---Kevin Press, exclaim.ca

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