

Newspaper reviews of the BBC NILO in Dublin

Disciplined Ease of BBC Orchestra

by Mary McGoris, *Irish Independent* Music Critic

The Music Festival brought up its light cavalry in the form of the BBC Northern [Ireland] Light Orchestra under the command of David Curry, and very agile skirmishers they proved at the National Stadium. Swift in attack and flexible in manoeuvre, they went through the evening's campaign with the disciplined ease of trained and tried troops.

Trooping the colours brilliantly with Suppé's Light Cavalry Overture, they advanced through constantly changing terrain, particularly successful in the Latin countries (Mexican Hat Dance and Espana) and Austria (Thunder and Lightning polka); late they made a victorious foray on sea (in H.M.S. Pinafore).

Such reverses as were met with were due mainly to mistakes of the high command (for example, Richardson's faulty planning of the strategy of Garryowen) and hardly reflected on the ability of the forces in the field.

Brendan O'Dowda organised transport by the West Clare Railway, maintained liaison with Slattery's Mounted Fut and generally showed ease and versatility in the French territory he has made his own.

The campaign ended gloriously with a Small Town Parade and finally the national airs of a Shamrock Selection, saluted its triumphant close.

BBC Orchestra at National Stadium

by C. A., *Irish Times* [Charles, or possibly Carol, Acton]

On Thursday night the festival offered its patrons light entertainment at the National Stadium, Dublin, with David Curry's BBC Northern Ireland Light Orchestra and Brendan O'Dowda. I write David Curry's advisedly, since the N.I.L.O. is a fine advertisement for a single conductor having real control of repertoire, arrangement and performance. (Radio Eireann, please note!).

As a result, this orchestra has very great style, polish, finish, slackness, and versatility. It is, indeed, a light orchestra and not a band. It is equally at home in Suppé's "Light Cavalry," in Waldteufel's "Espana" Waltz, "The Vagabond King," and "Chu-Chin-Chow" selections, and "Down South" and "Small Town Parade."

David Curry seems to be a bit of a martinet, but his results justify him entirely. And the Northern Ireland Light Orchestra is an extremely good accompanying instrument, as it showed in Brendan O'Dowda's songs.

Mr. O’Dowda has a small, well-produced, well-managed, and entirely pleasant voice. It is a real joy to find in these days, a popular singer who neither needs, nor uses, a microphone. He also is a first-rate story-teller, as he showed in “McBreens Heifer” in particular.

All the Percy French songs he gave us were excellently done, although I wish he would realise that French spelled “Slattery’s Mounted Fut” thus because he wanted it to rhyme with “cut”; and it is a tenable view that Percy French’s songs should be kept for home consumption and not offered to foreign visitors.

Excelled in Irish Dance Music

by “R” (including the quotation marks. Specific newspaper is uncredited)

Last night’s concert by the BBC Northern Ireland Light Orchestra in the National Stadium was quite an occasion and inevitably posed a comparison with the RELO [Radio Éireann Light Orchestra], the composition and repertoire of both being much the same. En passant, this may also be said of the visit of the Monaco Orchestra vis-à-vis the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra.

Whatever the results of comparison, let it be said that this orchestra from Belfast excels in the presentation and performance of Irish dance music (of which we did not hear enough last night), and we enjoyed the group that included “Garryowen”, “The Dark Women of the Mountain” and, in particular, “Shandon Bells”, the latter two arranged most effectively by their stylish conductor, David Curry.

In the light opera selection, overtures, and other occasional pieces, one felt the need of string augmentation for a public performance in such a large auditorium as this – in spite of the highly professional competence of the ensemble as a whole.

Soloist was the popular Dundalk singer, Brendan O’Dowda, who sang many groups of folk songs and ballads. His most successful, as on his records, were the Percy French songs, although one felt that in this hall more full-blooded and solid accompaniments would have enriched and steadied his light, attractive tenor voice. He was at his best in the whimsically humorous ones (“McBreen’s Heifer”, “Are you right there, Michael”, etc.) which gave full scope to his easy style of presentation. He was also very effective in Hardebeck’s “Song of Glen Dun” – curiously attributed to someone else in the programme.

It was a pleasant evening’s entertainment – and interesting also for the sake of instructive comparisons.

David Curry the “Barbirolli of Belfast”

by J. O’D (specific newspaper uncredited, but this is likely to be John O’Donovan, *Evening Press*)

The “Barbirolli of Belfast” is how I hail David Curry, conductor of the BBC Northern Ireland Light Orchestra, which gave a concert with Brendan O’Dowda at the National Stadium yesterday evening.

The salutation is quite earnest, quite without tongue in cheek. And why not? Could Sir John have turned out a better set of performances, with the same instrumental sources of music ranging from “Light Cavalry” to “Small Town Parade”? I doubt it.

Indeed there is a case to be made for describing Barbirolli as the “Curry of Manchester,” because Mr. Curry is more satisfying in his versatility than Sir John. He achieved a higher all-round standard with his 19 or 20 different composers, than Sir John did with his three the previous evening.

Sir John’s Mozart was a decided flop. Mr Curry didn’t flop with anyone. And his Light Orchestra is as finely trained and responsive to his touch as the Hallé has become to Barbirolli. “The Banana Boat Song” has its pitfalls, no less than the allegretto of Brahms’ Second Symphony; but Mr Curry negotiated these with a skill rivalling that of most symphonic conductors.

As an accompanist, Mr Curry commands even more respect. I here and now declare that when I grow too old for the labour of music criticism and am reduced to writing piano concertos. I shall insist upon the engagement of David Curry to conduct them, knowing that if he serves the soloist as expertly and sympathetically as he served Brendan O’Dowda, complete success will be assured.

Mr O’Dowda contributed a baker’s dozen of songs to the concert. To my shame let me say it: Last night was the first time I had heard him sing, but I hope not my last. For he has a most agreeable voice and style for ballads and can sing you anything from “Angels Guard Thee” to “McBreen’s Heifer” with full artistic assurance and excellent taste.