

The BBC Northern Ireland Orchestra (1961)

On the fifth night of the Festival [of Music and the Arts, Dublin, Thursday 15 June 1961] its patrons will have the opportunity of hearing the music of the BBC Northern Ireland Light Orchestra with Brendan O'Dowda as soloist. The name of this orchestra's conductor, David Curry, will be associated at once with *Irish Rhythms* the unique orchestration of Irish folk music which, broadcast in the General Overseas Service of the BBC, has brought Mr Curry fan mail in recent months from such a widespread world public as is represented by a couple living in the southern tip of New Zealand, a priest in Kenya, a tea planter in Hong Kong and an Irish wife of a Hong Kong businessman.

The BBC Northern Ireland Light was founded in 1949 and consists basically of 21 musicians who are augmented as required. Its repertoire ranges over the whole field of light music, from an aria of Mozart to tunes from the most recent stage or film success. It is, however, *Irish Rhythms* which draws the biggest audience wherever the orchestra is playing – in Home or Overseas programmes which are in turn relayed by most of the European broadcasting networks in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland or in one of its concert tours around the Northern Ireland towns.

It can be said that David Curry has put traditional Irish music on the international map. In his driving passion for the music of his native land he has translated into sparkling orchestrations hundreds of airs from the great collections of Bunting, Petrie, Joyce and O'Neill which had never been heard by worldwide audiences and anyway had only existed mostly in a single line notation of the tune.

It all started some 20 years ago when David, as a violinist in the BBC Northern Ireland Symphony Orchestra, was asked by his conductor to take over a section of the orchestra and train them in some special programmes of Irish dance music. A Belfast man by birth, training and domicile, he has been a professional musician since he was 15 when he won his first post as an orchestral violinist. Four years later he was conducting his own orchestra. He has been with the BBC since the mid-'thirties.

The present leader of this fine orchestra is David Adams, a Yorkshireman who was formerly a sub-principal in the BBC Concert Orchestra (before that he had played for many years as a member of the now defunct Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra under its conductor Maurice Miles).

David Adams has been playing the violin since he was eight years old and his professional career started even earlier than that of his conductor, David Curry – he got an appointment with a cinema orchestra in his home town, Leeds, when he was only 14. By the time he was 16 he had become the leader of a cinema orchestra and a little later he was musical director to a chain of large cinemas in the north of England. When the 'talkies' arrived Mr Adams got an appointment in the orchestra of one of the big film companies and between pictures worked as a freelance with different symphony orchestras around London and the south of England. For a time he was with the Philharmonic Orchestra and he plays in many of this famous orchestra's records, including the historic series in which Schnabel records all the Beethoven piano concertos. While he was with the Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra, Mr Adams formed his own piano quartet which became widely known in the north of England and frequently broadcast.

For over half a dozen years before coming to Northern Ireland, Mr Adams, who is married and has one daughter, a medical student at Leeds University, held the part-time post of violin and viola master at Breton Hall Teachers' Training College, near Wakefield, Yorkshire, and special arrangements were made to enable him to commute between the college and the BBC headquarters in London.