

# Trad Music Review – ‘Music Network - Edges of Light’

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By Paul O’Connor

(If our society wasn’t such a mess in so many other respects, I think we’d all deserve a)

Pat on the back for supporting a culture that enables an organisation like Music Network to commission artists like **Tola Custy** (fiddle), **David Power**(pipes), **Maeve Gilchrist** (harp) and **Colin Dunne** (dance) to develop and tour a “show” like “Edges of Light” – the premier of which was last night in the **Sugar Club**, ahead of dates in Roscommon, Bray, Ennis, Dun Laoghaire, Clifden, Castlebar, Letterkenny, Birr, Portlaoise and Cork. (Just look at that list of places that otherwise would never be able to host a show like this!)

Trad music concert, it isn’t. It has a theatrical quality (though less than, say, Caoimhin Ó Raghallaigh’s and Nic Gareiss’s show from a few years back, ‘Mice Will Play’) and is presented in a series of movements with different moods and modes. The inspiration behind the production – given to the artists by **Music Network**, and explained fully by **Ellen Cranitch** in her programme essay – is Dublin Mean Time (which came to an untimely end in 1916), and you can see various takes on the idea of time being alluded to in the different pieces that make up the 80 minutes or so. But, thankfully, the theme is mostly just that: a thread; the show is really about music above all else.

Simply by force of his physicality, Dunne almost steals the show at times. His pendular movements set everything in motion (and – with whistling chorus – bring it to a close), and he has dug deep to create his amazing sequences (for which at times he uses delays and special microphones to contribute fully on the audio side), but the musicians have done their own digging and Dunne takes plenty of rests to let the instruments be heard.

Their basic music material includes newly composed pieces by Gilchrist and Custy, traditional jigs and reels etc., a powerful rendition of ‘Eibhlín, a Rúin’ by Power (with harp accompaniment coming in), and intros, outros and bridges to connect with the dancing and unify the various ‘movements’ that make up the entire.

Between (to oversimplify!) the pin-point accuracy of Power's playing, the liveliness of Gilchrist's and the immersiveness of Custy's, the music alone is a pure pleasure. It is given a further lift by the particular interactiveness of this show, the way the musicians respond to one another ... as if this tendency in them had been somewhat heightened by how fundamental it is to Dunne's art.

There are surprises too: whistling solos and duets and chorus, a "wireless" playing John McCormack's meltingly beautiful version of 'Dawning of the Day' (- who can resist?), Power playing hurdy gurdy, Gilchrist reading a Tennyson poem ('Be near me when my light is low') and responding musically, and of course Dunne's very personal take on / reinvention of traditional dance moves.

As a show developed in a very short time, it hangs together remarkably well: sections in which the creative collaborative "workshop" material dominates and sections in which the performers interact through their repertoires and the tradition, all framed and fed by the theme. None of the musicians had worked together before, but being such talented artists they could well have "delivered" by just finding some common ground and rehearsing it out. They have, however, been given (and risen to) a bigger challenge by Music Network's enlightened and timely (!) commission, and I think we need to see traditional music being presented in this manner more often. It lifts both audience and performers out of the familiar, and makes us all pay more attention and hear and see and think afresh about the music.

And finally, the audience at the Sugar Club clearly loved it: the performers were begged to play more but obviously didn't want to given that it was a "show", and as an alternative came out for three rounds of bowing by the loud and steady applause.

[http://www.musicnetwork.ie/concerts/details/music\\_network\\_presents\\_colin\\_dunne\\_tola\\_custy\\_maeve\\_gilchrist\\_and\\_david\\_pow#.V9j1SJMrJXg](http://www.musicnetwork.ie/concerts/details/music_network_presents_colin_dunne_tola_custy_maeve_gilchrist_and_david_pow#.V9j1SJMrJXg)