

# ‘These Off-beat “Crazy Kids and Gals”’: Jazz in Ireland, 1918–1960

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## Introduction

The history of jazz in Europe has been written about extensively, albeit not to the same degree as its history in America. Although the emergence of the New Jazz Studies in the late 1990s has broadened the perspectives taken on jazz, it too, until recently, has had limited engagement with jazz outside of American contexts.<sup>1</sup> Luca Cerchiari observed in 2012 that, while books concerning European regional histories and individual musicians add up to ‘more or less a hundred titles’, a ‘comprehensive book on jazz in Europe still doesn’t exist’.<sup>2</sup> This situation has been addressed to some degree with the publication of *The History of European Jazz*, edited by Francesco Martinelli, which contains thirty-nine chapters exploring the history of thirty-three European countries including a chapter on Ireland by journalist and drummer Cormac Larkin.<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford History of Jazz in Europe* (forthcoming), edited by Walter van de Leur, includes chapters on Ireland in its five volumes, each of which deals with a separate historical period.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Ruth Stanley has recently documented the development of jazz during the interwar years in Ireland and Northern Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Whyton, ‘Europe and the New Jazz Studies’, in Luca Cerchiari, Laurent Cugny and Franz Kerschbaumer (eds), *Eurojazzland: Jazz and European Sources, Dynamics, and Contexts* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 2012), 366–80: 367.

<sup>2</sup> Luca Cerchiari, ‘Introduction’, in *Eurojazzland*, vii–xviii, vii.

<sup>3</sup> Francesco Martinelli (ed.), *The History of European Jazz: The Music, Musicians and Audience in Context* (Bristol, CT; Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2018); Cormac Larkin, ‘Ireland’, in *The History of European Jazz*, 83–95.

<sup>4</sup> Walter van de Leur (ed.), *The Oxford History of Jazz in Europe*, 5 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Stanley, ‘“Jazzing the soul of the Nation away”: The Hidden History of Jazz in Ireland and Northern Ireland During the Interwar Years’, in Lorraine Byrne Bodley (ed.), *Music Preferred. Essays in Musicology, Cultural History and Analysis in Honour of Harry White* (Wien: Hollitzer Verlag, 2018), 231–50.

Studies of jazz and Irish culture include Johannah Duffy's 2009 article concerning how early jazz was considered in relation to the Church, dancing, nationalism, radio and sexuality.<sup>6</sup> Eileen Hogan addresses the creation of a national identity in post-independence Ireland through the racialization and sexualization of jazz music and dancing.<sup>7</sup> Both articles draw on newspaper accounts and parliamentary debates to explore the influence on cultural activities exerted by the Catholic Church and state. Barbara O'Connor discusses the 1930s dance hall as a space 'in which national and gendered forms of embodied identities were constructed and mediated', while Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin examines the effect of the Public Dance Halls Act of 1935 on rural communities and their musical culture.<sup>8</sup> A number of recent doctoral dissertations address jazz in Ireland. Ruth Stanley includes jazz in her study of the BBC in Northern Ireland between 1924 and 1939, while Sean Shanagher considers the relationship between jazz and dancing in his ethnographic study of dance in Ireland. The PhD dissertation on which this article is based includes a historical overview of jazz in Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

Interest in the development of a European jazz identity has been increasing steadily since the establishment of 'Rhythm Changes: Jazz Cultures and European Identities', a joint research programme funded by thirteen national funding agencies to 'create collaborative, transnational research opportunities that will address major social, cultural, and political challenges facing Europe'.<sup>10</sup> One of the outcomes was a report detailing historical overviews of five partner countries: Britain, Austria, Norway, the

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<sup>6</sup> Johannah Duffy, 'Jazz, Identity and Sexuality in Ireland during the Interwar Years', *Irish Journal of American Studies Online* (2009), <http://ijas.iaas.ie/index.php/jazz-identity-and-sexuality-in-ireland-during-the-interwar-years/>

<sup>7</sup> Eileen Hogan, "'Earthly, sensual, devilish": Sex, "Race" and Jazz in Post-Independence Ireland', *Jazz Research Journal*, 4/1 (2010), 57–79.

<sup>8</sup> Barbara O'Connor, 'Sexing the Nation: Discourses of the Dancing Body in Ireland in the 1930s', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 14/2 (July 2005), 89–105: 89; Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, 'Dancing on the Hobs of Hell: Rural Communities in Clare and the Dance Halls Act of 1935', *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, 9/4 (Winter, 2005), 9–18.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Stanley, *A Formative Force: The BBC's Role in the Development of Music and its Audiences in Northern Ireland, 1924–39* (PhD dissertation, Queen's University Belfast, 2011). The BBC stands for British Broadcasting Corporation; Sean Shanagher, *Recreational Dance in Ireland 1940–1960* (PhD dissertation, Dublin City University, 2014); Damian Evans, *The Creation of Meaning and Identity in the Dublin Jazz Scene, Past and Present* (PhD dissertation, Dublin Institute of Technology, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> 'About | Rhythm Changes', <http://www.rhythmchanges.net/research/about/>.

Netherlands and Denmark. While not purporting to offer comprehensive histories of jazz, it presents ‘key issues, trends and discursive moments which have served to shape the canonicity of jazz in each participating country’.<sup>11</sup> Each section draws on extensive research already conducted for the country in question. While the history of jazz in many parts of Europe has been researched and documented, Ireland has been the focus of comparatively limited jazz scholarship, either from within or externally.

This article aims to fill that gap and, while it does not attempt to provide a complete history of jazz in Ireland up to 1960, it addresses some of the major trends and developments since the arrival of jazz in Ireland. The rationale for focusing only on the period up to 1960 is twofold. Firstly, a paper of this limited length cannot fully document activity even during this early period, let alone through to the present. Secondly, this period has received minimal scholarly attention, with the history of jazz in Ireland prior to the 1950s being particularly neglected.

On 21 August 2012, Irish jazz musician and educator Ronan Guilfoyle published a blog post demonstrating how many would associate jazz in Ireland with the emergence of Louis Stewart as Ireland’s pre-eminent jazz musician in the mid-1960s.

Jazz had a slow start in Ireland - there were jazz influenced jazz bands in the 40s and 50s, but the first real jazz musicians began to appear at the end of the 50s and into the 60s with players such as the pianist Noel Kelehan and the drummer John Wadham, both of whom were world class. There were other players around the scene who were good also, but the real breakthrough came with the appearance of Louis Stewart, the great guitarist who was the first domiciled Irish musician to get international attention.<sup>12</sup>

The ‘real’ jazz musician, of the type referred to by Guilfoyle in his blog post, is a historically situated concept, born out of a narrative that values jazz as an art form equal in cultural stature to other highly valued forms of cultural capital in today’s society, such as literature or classical music. Its advocates have sought to separate jazz from perceived lesser-valued cultural activities such as popular music. I argue, however, that the evolution of jazz in Ireland, as elsewhere, has always existed side by side with other forms of popular music, often with no clear dividing line. Evaluating early jazz-playing musicians by today’s standards can prevent one from gaining a greater understanding of jazz practice at that time.

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<sup>11</sup> Tony Whyton, ‘Introduction’ in Tony Whyton and Christa Bruckner-Haring (eds), *Rhythm Changes: Historical Overviews of Five Partner Countries* (Institute for Jazz Research, University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz, 2013), 1: 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ronan Guilfoyle, ‘Down with Jazz! Bejayzuz!’, *Mostly Music*, 2012, <http://www.ronanguil.blogspot.ie/2012/08/down-with-jazz-bejayzuz.html>

As will be shown, recent research reveals the continuous presence of jazz practitioners in Ireland from as early as 1918, though most have gone undocumented and unnoticed. I would argue that relegating musicians of the past to an unimportant role in the development of a jazz scene in the country is misleading and fails to recognize the important role that jazz played in many people's lives throughout Irish jazz history. The concept of a 'real' jazz musician, while having currency in the contemporary jazz scene, is a problematic labelling that places contemporary values onto historical actors. While the Irish and Ireland-based musicians featured in this study may not have had some of the musical skills valued by today's musicians, they nonetheless played an important role in the ritual of 'musicking' that had great meaning for many people.<sup>13</sup>

When jazz arrived in Ireland, the country was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. However, the reception of jazz was mediated through the experiences of a nation that was in turmoil. The Easter Rising of 1916 set into motion events that led to the Irish War of Independence (1919–21), which was closely followed by the eleven-month Irish Civil War (1922–3) and the declaration of the Irish Free State on 6 December 1922. Therefore, at the very time when the new nation-state was forming its identity, jazz in Ireland was similarly new and developing, both sonically and conceptually. Crucially, rather than mirroring the development of jazz in Britain, jazz in Ireland had its own unique challenges; it was met with hostility, in large part due to the social, cultural, economic and political ramifications of a new nation-state and the associated struggles of national identity.

### **Black music, minstrelsy and blackface in Ireland**

Like many other European countries, Ireland's first meeting with American and black American music came through touring minstrel shows. The connections between minstrelsy, ragtime and jazz are often downplayed. Howard Rye, drawing on the arguments of Pickering and Lotz, states that the links between these genres are 'traceable in the comings and goings of performers on the music-hall circuits throughout Europe'.<sup>14</sup> According to Douglas C. Riach, minstrelsy in Ireland dates from no later than 1836 when Thomas Dartmouth Rice—often considered the originator of the Minstrel

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988 [revised edition 2011]).

<sup>14</sup> Howard Rye, 'The Southern Syncopated Orchestra', *Black Music Research Journal*, 29/2 (Fall, 2009), 153–228: 153; Michael Pickering, 'A Jet Ornament to Society: Black Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in Paul Oliver (ed.), *Black Music in Britain: Essays on the Afro-Asian Contribution to Popular Music*, (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 16–33; Rainer E. Lotz, *Black People: Entertainers of African Descent in Europe, and Germany* (Bonn: Birgit Lotz Verlag, 1997).

show—enjoyed great success in Dublin and Cork.<sup>15</sup> Riach writes that at least fifteen groups appeared before the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861.<sup>16</sup> Christy’s Minstrels had been visiting Britain since the 1840s and visited Dublin yearly from 1859 through to 1868.<sup>17</sup> Riach mentions the Southern Troupe of Sable Harmonists who appeared in 1852 at the Music Hall, Lower Abbey Street (later known as the Metropolitan Hall), noting that they were a ‘Negro troupe’, not a blackface act.<sup>18</sup> Less than a decade later, in 1861, blackface minstrel shows performed by Irish players were taking place, with concern shown by critics about the ‘good taste’ of these newer shows.<sup>19</sup> Riach reports that Dublin was visited by ‘real African tribesmen’ on at least two occasions: in 1847 by the Bosjesmen from, ‘it was claimed’, South Africa, and later by the ‘Aztec Lilliputians’, again ‘declared to be’ from South Africa.<sup>20</sup> Earlier still, the black actor Ira Aldridge was a frequent visitor to Dublin (from 1829 to 1840), impressing critics by performing excerpts from Shakespeare’s *Othello* to minstrel songs.<sup>21</sup> According to Riach, he gained support from the Archbishop of Tuam and was made a Brother Mason of the Grand Lodge of Ireland. However, he also faced hostility and prejudice.<sup>22</sup>

The Fisk Jubilee Singers was the name given to a group of black singers from Fisk University in Nashville, the first university in America to offer education to ‘young men and women irrespective of color’.<sup>23</sup> While the tradition of having a vocal ensemble consisting of students still continues, the group was originally formed in order to earn

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas C. Riach, ‘Blacks and Blackface on the Irish Stage, 1830–60’, *Journal of American Studies*, 7/3 (December 1973), 231–41: 231.

<sup>16</sup> As note 15.

<sup>17</sup> See Catherine Parsonage, *The Evolution of Jazz in Britain, 1880–1935* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 5. For the Irish visits by Christy’s Minstrels see ‘Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 24 November 1859, 3; ‘Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 6 January 1860, 2; ‘Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 19 January 1861, 3; ‘Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 15 January 1862, 3; ‘Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 2 November 1863, 3; ‘Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 31 October 1864, 3; ‘Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 1 September 1865, 2; ‘The Christy’s Minstrels at the Exhibition Palace’, *The Irish Times*, 2 October 1866, 3; ‘Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 3 September 1867, 3; ‘The Christy’s Minstrels’, *The Irish Times*, 2 November 1868, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Riach, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Riach, 237.

<sup>20</sup> Riach, 231.

<sup>21</sup> Riach, 238–9.

<sup>22</sup> As note 21.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Fisk Jubilee Singers—Our History’, <http://fiskjubileesingers.org/about-the-singers/our-history/>

money for the university. They first performed in America in 1871 and toured Europe for the first time in 1873. The Fisk Jubilee Singers was not a minstrel group and its repertoire consisted mostly of hymns and spirituals. According to the Fisk University archivist, Andrea Jackson, the group's repertoire helped to ensure that 'slave songs' or spirituals, which were disappearing with the emancipation of slaves, became part of the world's musical heritage.<sup>24</sup> The Fisk Jubilee Singers performed in Dublin on 24 and 28 November and 13 and 14 December 1876, as well as throughout Ireland from October through to December of that year.<sup>25</sup> Black minstrel troupes popular in Britain such as Hague's Minstrels and Haverley's Genuine Coloured Minstrels also visited Ireland.<sup>26</sup>

Although there was a presence of black performers in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of portrayals of Africans and African Americans was in the form of blackface minstrelsy, a form of entertainment that depicted 'the Negro as a figure of fun' while also 'a rather pitiable figure who was miserably unhappy as a slave'.<sup>27</sup> Riach argues that although there was a strong Irish abolitionist movement that objected to the racist stereotyping of blacks, it was largely silent concerning blackface minstrel shows and its failure to condemn this inaccurate portrayal contributed to it taking hold in the minds of countless Irish emigrants throughout the period—and I would argue, beyond—as the accepted understanding of the black American.<sup>28</sup> Catherine Tackley (née Parsonage) notes that minstrel shows in Britain appealed 'equally to the philanthropic upper class as to the empathetic lower class' in that they could be considered by Victorian philanthropists to be a source of musical education.<sup>29</sup> The combination of philanthropic interest with abolitionist concern and curiosity regarding the life and culture of the African 'other' ensured the ongoing success of the minstrel show.<sup>30</sup> Minstrel shows in Ireland continued well into the twentieth century as is evident from *The Irish Times* which advertised one in The Olympia Theatre, Dublin, in 1962, while the

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<sup>24</sup> It is possible that the group visited Ireland on an earlier tour. See Andrea Jackson, *A Guide to the Jubilee Singers European Tour Collection, 1873–8* (Fisk University Archives, 2004), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Additional 1876 Irish performances were in Bray, Dundalk, Portadown, Armagh, Lisburn, Belfast, Ballymena, Coleraine, Londonderry, Newry and Belfast. Jackson also lists 'Ireland Concerts, October–December, 1876'. See Jackson, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Parsonage, 5; 'Hague's Minstrels—"The Slave Troupe"', *The Irish Times*, 2 Jan 1878, 5; 'Haverley's Genuine Coloured Minstrels', *The Irish Times*, 26 April 1882, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Riach, 240.

<sup>28</sup> Riach, 241.

<sup>29</sup> Parsonage, 9.

<sup>30</sup> As note 29.



television programme *The Black and White Minstrel Show* had its last broadcast on BBC television in 1978.<sup>31</sup> While the BBC was inaccessible to much of the Irish population, many in Dublin were able to receive it, and its programme schedule was included in the television listings in *The Irish Times*.

Will Marion Cook (1869–1944) produced the live show *In Dahomey: A Negro Musical Comedy* in Dublin in 1904, following its success in London in 1903.<sup>32</sup> Cook was also responsible for the establishment of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, though he was no longer with the orchestra when it was due to begin a residency from 10 October 1921 in Dublin’s La Scala Theatre (later The Capitol Theatre).<sup>33</sup> The Southern Syncopated Orchestra occupies an important place in early jazz history, not least for being the group that brought New Orleans clarinetist Sidney Bechet to Europe. An orchestra with ever-changing members and repertoire, it played a mixture of jazz, ragtime, spirituals, minstrel songs and light classical music. After the sinking of the ship bringing them to Dublin on 9 October 1921, many members of the orchestra found themselves without money, clothes or instruments. Two benefit concerts were held in Glasgow, with musicians who were in Glasgow at the time performing with those from the orchestra well enough to appear.

The Southern Syncopated Orchestra, however, was not the first African-American ensemble to tour Ireland in the early twentieth century. Even before the ill-fated orchestra’s trip to Dublin in 1921, black drummer Louis Mitchell had toured British and Irish music halls from April to November 1917 as part of an act called the 7 Spades (see Illustration 1). Later in his career he would bill himself as ‘The first man to bring jazz to Britain’.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Minstrel Show’, *The Irish Times*, 15 March 1962, 9.

<sup>32</sup> ‘In Dahomey’, *The Evening Herald*, 25 Oct, 1904, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Rye, 189–90. En route to Ireland, the ship on which the orchestra was travelling—the S.S. Rowan—collided first with the *West Camak* and then with the *Clan Malcolm* off Wigtownshire resulting in the death of eight of its members. The survivors began their La Scala residency eight days later. See Rye, 208–9.

<sup>34</sup> Theatre-Royal (Dublin, Ireland), Louis A. Mitchell presents the 7 Spades, (1917), <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000515772>; Rye, 154.

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Illustration 1: A Theatre Royal Hippodrome poster featuring Louis A. Mitchell, printed by David Allen & Sons in 1917. Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland



### Jazz in Ireland, 1918–1935

The extent of academic interest in early jazz performance in Ireland contrasts with the wealth of research concerning early jazz in Britain.<sup>35</sup> Academic writing about pre-1960s Irish jazz has often been concerned with the efforts made by the Irish State and the Catholic Church to contain the perceived threat posed by this foreign music, and to maintain cultural control over the new state coming into more contact with outside forces.<sup>36</sup> Ireland, like many countries dealing with an emerging nationalism, tended toward economic and cultural insularity in the decades following independence.<sup>37</sup> Regular coverage of jazz in Irish media began with a column written by George Desmond 'Hoddy' Hodnett (1918–1990). Hodnett was a composer, trumpeter, and jazz pianist whose largest contribution to jazz, however, may have been his regular contributions as a critic to *The Irish Times* for almost thirty years.<sup>38</sup> In 1963, Hodnett argued for the existence of a jazz scene in Dublin ‘on and off’ since 1921, and summarized jazz performance in Dublin from 1921 up to 1934 as happening ‘when a dance-band chose to play some’.<sup>39</sup> He noted that musicians sometimes ‘held a jam session (though it wasn’t yet called that) for their own amusement’.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the newspapers of this period have many advertisements for various bands playing at jazz dances.

Ruth Stanley indicates that the first written record of a jazz group playing in Ireland and reported as such may have been for New Year’s Eve, 1918 when Petty-Officer

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<sup>35</sup> The literature on the history of jazz in Britain includes Ian Carr, *Music Outside: Contemporary Jazz in Britain*, (London: Northway Publications 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2007); Jim Godbolt, *A History of Jazz in Britain, 1919–50* (London; New York: Quartet Books, 1984); Jim Godbolt, *A History of Jazz in Britain, 1950–70* (London; New York: Quartet Books, 1989); George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005); Parsonage, *The Evolution of Jazz in Britain, 1880–1935*.

<sup>36</sup> See Stanley, “‘Jazzing the soul of the Nation away’”; Duffy; O’Connor; Hogan; Ó hAllmhuráin.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph J. Ryan, ‘Music in Independent Ireland since 1921’, in J. R. Hill (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, VII (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2003), 621–70: 627.

<sup>38</sup> Hodnett wrote the song ‘Monto’, made famous by The Dubliners, and lived a colourful, bohemian life. See ‘Death of Jazz Critic, George D. Hodnett’, *The Irish Times*, 24 September 1990, 2. He appeared on the first edition of *The Late Late Show* in 1962 as a guest and, according to reports, ‘brought a splendid touch of almost baroque eccentricity’ and ‘played extremely good quiet jazz with enormous sang froid’. See ‘Very Late Last Friday Night...’, *The RTÉ Guide*, 13 July 1962, 3.

<sup>39</sup> George Hodnett, ‘Jazz: Setting the Scene’, *The Irish Times*, 18 September 1963, 8.

<sup>40</sup> As note 39.

Gordon and his jazz band played for a Victory Ball held in Dublin Castle.<sup>41</sup> Based at the US Naval Air Station at Wexford, 'Mr. Gordon's "Jazz Band" of 5 U.S.A. Naval men in uniform' was also the 'principle attraction' at the 'Zoo Ball' held on St. Valentine's Night in the Royal College of Surgeons.<sup>42</sup> In attendance were 'many officers of the Army, Navy and Air Force' and 'every alternative dance' of the Zoo Ball dance was played by John Clarke-Barry's band.<sup>43</sup>

Although the first documented performance of jazz in Ireland took place in high society, evidence of the relationship of jazz to race and, in the eyes of some, questionable morality was soon forthcoming. In November of 1919, John Clarke-Barry was involved in a headline-grabbing court case. The case involved a retired cadet and a captain from the British army who had applied for a licence for music and dancing at 35 Dawson Street, Dublin. The application was opposed by two ratepayers and the Irish Vigilance Association.<sup>44</sup> Mr McLoone KC stated that in addition to the applicants, two members of the band had served in the war 'and the fact that these people fought in the war might account for the bitter opposition to the application'.<sup>45</sup> During the case, John Clarke-Barry declared that he 'did not provide jazz in the vulgar sense', adding: 'The distortions introduced by the coloured members make the music vulgar. Exaggerated jazz music by nigger musicians is most decidedly suggestive and indecent'.<sup>46</sup> *The Evening Telegraph* also states that the band 'had two coloured men' brought from London and that the band was already playing in the Café Cairo.<sup>47</sup> While demonstrating the complicated

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<sup>41</sup> *The Irish Independent*, 1 January 1919; See Ruth Stanley, 'Ireland' in Walter van de Leur (ed.), *The Oxford History of Jazz in Europe* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), vol. 1.

<sup>42</sup> 'The "Jazz Band" at the Zoo Ball', *The Irish Independent*, 15 February 1919, 6.

<sup>43</sup> As note 42; John Clarke-Barry was the father of Billie Barry who went on to found the Billie Barry Stage School, which is still in existence.

<sup>44</sup> 'Is the Jazz Immoral?', *The Freeman's Journal*, 25 November 1919, 3; The Irish Vigilance Association had been founded in 1911 by the Dominican Order in Ireland to oppose the importation of foreign literature which they considered offensive. See H. R. Cathcart with Michael Muldoon, 'The Mass Media in Twentieth-Century Ireland', in J. R. Hill (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, VII (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 2003), 671–710: 673–4, 677, 681.

<sup>45</sup> 'What is "Jazz?"', *The Evening Telegraph*, 24 November 1919, 1.

<sup>46</sup> As note 45.

<sup>47</sup> As note 45. The Café Cairo was located at 59 Grafton Street and the name the 'Cairo Gang' was retrospectively given to a group of eleven British Intelligence Officers who reportedly met in the café and who were killed by the IRA on the morning of 21 November 1920 as part of the events of Bloody Sunday. See Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War: The Troubles of 1913–1922* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 53.

relationship between Ireland, Britain and jazz, the newspaper articles accompanying the case, which focused on the potential immorality of the new music, were tempered by an article written two days later by a ‘J.H.C.’, who declared that ‘the dreaded jazz’ is really ‘just the one-step, danced double-quick to the same old music with the simple addition of pandemonium effects’.<sup>48</sup>

It was either good timing or opportunism that, only four days after that controversy over ‘immoral jazz’ had been reported in the *Irish Independent*, an advertisement for ‘Mr. Harry Foy’s Jazz Quartette Band’ appeared in *The Connacht Tribune*.<sup>49</sup> The 1911 census reveals that Henry Foy of Church Street, Athlone, was born in Westmeath and describes him as a professor of Music. At the time of the census, Henry ‘Harry’ Foy was 30 years of age, and so would have been about 38 in 1919. Foy’s innovative musical efforts started before this time, as he also co-founded the Athlone Musical Society, Ireland’s oldest musical society, in 1902 at around the age of 21.<sup>50</sup> Foy’s decision to label his group as a jazz band demonstrates how quickly the concept of jazz spread, not just as a dance style, but as a musical label. Indeed, Foy’s group appears in the *Westmeath Independent* at least four times between 1919 and 1920, and a column from 10 January 1920 not only reported that ‘Mr Harry Foy’s Jazz Band rendered the dance music delightfully’, for a boat club dance but also that ‘Mr Graham Kelly’s Jaz (sic) band, Dublin’ would be providing the music for a forthcoming dance organized by the Social Dance Class.<sup>51</sup> Further early jazz performances in Dublin are recorded in contemporary newspapers and include the Cocktail Syncopators at the Theatre Royal in 1923, the Famous Dixie Minstrels in the Tivoli Theatre in 1925 and Noni and the Golden Serenaders at the Theatre Royal in

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<sup>48</sup> J.H.C., ‘To-day & Yesterday’, *The Irish Independent*, 26 November 1919, 4.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Mr Harry Foy’s Jazz Quartette Band’, *The Connacht Tribune*, 29 November 1919, 8.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Pages from the Past’, *Westmeath Independent*,  
<http://www.westmeathindependent.ie/news/roundup/articles/2012/02/29/4009279-pages-from-the-past>

<sup>51</sup> ‘Athlone District’, *Westmeath Independent*, 10 January 1920; ‘Athlone District’, *Westmeath Independent*, 31 January 1920; ‘Athlone District’, *Westmeath Independent*, 7 February 1920; ‘The Dance of the Season’, *Westmeath Independent*, 3 July 1920.

1927.<sup>52</sup> In addition, American musician Noble Sissle was a regular visitor to Ireland between 1926 to 1930, while The Roy Fox Band played in the Gaiety Theatre in 1935.<sup>53</sup>

Jazz as a construct in early twentieth-century Ireland encompassed both music and dance. To be more specific in terms of dance, most reports claim that the term ‘jazz’ was used to describe all forms of ‘modern’ dance. Confusion was prevalent in both newspaper coverage and among the public concerning the meaning of the term ‘jazz-dancing’ (and therefore ‘jazz’, which was often used to describe dancing without the dancing suffix).<sup>54</sup> Although the distinction could be maintained between ‘modern’ dance (ballroom) and ‘foreign’ dance (jazz), O’Connor points out that ‘whether it was a jazz foxtrot or quickstep was not at issue, the main point of contention being that it involved closed couple dancing (as did ballroom) thereby allowing closer physical contact than céilí dance where minimal body contact was the norm’.<sup>55</sup> Hogan has shown numerous examples of racialized and sexualized constructions of jazz in national and regional print media that demonstrate that, just as in America, the first appearance of jazz in Ireland was inseparable from issues of race: ‘The idea of “jazz” — associated with sexual impropriety, “paganism” and racial impurity—was an ideal construct against which to compare the sanctitude of traditional Irish, Catholic and rural values’.<sup>56</sup> She argues that the construction of Irish identity, ‘similar to many emergent postcolonial, national cultures, involved a fixing of “Irishness” to rural values’.<sup>57</sup>

The 1926 Wireless Telegraphy Act allowed for the establishment of 2RN, Ireland’s first radio station, which initially had only a limited broadcast range. Broadcasts were often accessible, however, ‘more than one hundred miles from Dublin’.<sup>58</sup> With the erection of a new transmitter in Athlone in 1933, a clear signal was achieved

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Theatre Royal Advertisement Cocktail Syncopators’, *The Irish Times*, 1 May 1923, 4; ‘Dixie Minstrels’, *The Irish Independent*, 4 March 1925, 10; ‘Public Amusements’, *The Irish Times*, 11 March 1927, 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 October 1928, 1; *The Evening Herald*, 16 July 1935, 4; Cited in Stanley, “‘Jazzing the soul of the Nation away’”, 242.

<sup>54</sup> ‘What is “Jazz?”’, *The Evening Telegraph*, 24 November 1919, 1.

<sup>55</sup> O’Connor, 103.

<sup>56</sup> Hogan, 76.

<sup>57</sup> Hogan, 63.

<sup>58</sup> Maurice Gorham, *Forty Years of Irish Broadcasting* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1967), 39.



nationwide.<sup>59</sup> The station changed its name to Radio Éireann (RÉ) in 1938 and, according to one historian, ‘propagated the cultural nationalism of Fianna Fáil who favoured the nurturing of a hegemonic Gaelic, Catholic state’.<sup>60</sup>

A debate that occurred in May 1928 demonstrated the confusion surrounding jazz at the time. On 10 May, Thomas Mullins, TD for Cork West, argued that the programmes on 2RN, in contrast with those on English stations Daventry and London, which could sometimes be received in Ireland, were ‘too classical, in other words, too high-brow’, and that ‘wireless, after all, is an amusement’. He proposed that a solution could be found in ‘programmes for the plain people of a little bit more of a jazzy nature, if I may describe it so’.<sup>61</sup> The following day, Seán Goulding, TD for Waterford, put himself forward as someone who knew what jazz really was, and differentiated it from dance music and light music. He felt that Mullins ‘did not mean actual jazz music’ and would be ‘sorry to see relayed the sort of jazz stuff given out from London. It is not music at all. It is simply noise’.<sup>62</sup> He disagreed on the use of English stations as models for programming and claimed that the German stations played ‘much better dance music and light music generally’. Within the context of the debates surrounding jazz at the time, Goulding’s comments can be seen as supporting the view that jazz had the potential to be morally harmful, stating ‘I hope that we are not going to be afflicted in the future with more of that class of music that sometimes the Daventry station sends out’, and that ‘unfortunately they have to cater in England for dancing crowds, and the result is that sometimes we are afflicted with a share of that class of stuff’.<sup>63</sup>

Until recently, the main focus of academic studies involving jazz in Ireland has been the Irish anti-jazz movement. Numerous scholars, including Duffy, Hogan, Mullaney-Dignam, O’Connor, Ó hAllmhuráin and Shanagher have demonstrated that, for the political elite of the newly established Irish Free State, jazz was not a neutral form

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<sup>59</sup> ‘Athlone Station and Transmitter Officially Opened’, <http://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/681-history-of-rte/683-rte-1930s/290028-rte-radios-athlone-station-and-transmitter-officially-opened-6-february-1933/>

<sup>60</sup> Gerard Dooley, ‘Entertainment in Independent Ireland: Evolution of Irish Parochial versus Commercial Dance Hall Culture’, *History Studies*, 13 (Limerick: University of Limerick, 2012), 47–68: 61.

<sup>61</sup> Dáil Éireann, In Committee on Finance. Vote No. 63–Wireless Broadcasting, 10 May 1928, <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1928/05/10/00019.asp>

<sup>62</sup> Dáil Éireann, Vote No. 63–Wireless Broadcasting, Resumed, 11 May 1928, <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1928/05/11/00004.asp>

<sup>63</sup> As note 62.

of ‘foreign’ music but a threat to the new nation state.<sup>64</sup> The topic has also been the subject of two radio documentaries, numerous blog posts and a jazz festival featuring Irish jazz entitled ‘Down with Jazz’.<sup>65</sup> The mediation of jazz music has always provided individuals and groups with ways to identify with particular values and ideologies. For the Catholic Church and its supporters throughout government, jazz stood in opposition to a developing national identity that valued social morality as the bedrock of the new state. In particular, jazz was feared for its potential for the ‘liberalization of sexual mores’ particularly in regard to young Irish women, ‘whose cultural activities became a key concern of the guardians of public morality in the new nation-state in the 1920s and 1930s’.<sup>66</sup>

### Jazz in Dublin, 1930s–1945

Following the anti-jazz movement, the period up to 1945 reflected the conservatism of the new Irish Free State in both official and unofficial circles. The Public Dance Halls Act of 1935 ensured that a license would be required for all public dancing, which could only be acquired from a district judge by persons of good character. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin has discussed the Act in detail and it is important to note that it had a severe impact on music-makers and dancers throughout Ireland. The changes brought about by the Act would shape the landscape of popular music in Ireland.<sup>67</sup> The effects of the anti-jazz movement were also felt in an unofficial ‘ban on jazz’ at 2RN between 1935 and 1945, which has been discussed by many, including Karol Anne Mullaney-Dignam and Joseph Ryan, who maintain that although there was no official ban, policy effectively prohibited the broadcasting of jazz and modern music by the national broadcaster.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Karol Anne Mullaney-Dignam, *State, Nation and Music in Independent Ireland, 1922–51* (PhD dissertation, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2008), 185–90; Duffy; Hogan; O’Connor; Ó hAllmhuráin; Shanagher.

<sup>65</sup> See also Cathal Brennan, ‘The Anti-Jazz Campaign’, *The Irish Story*, 1 July 2011, <http://www.theirishstory.com/2011/07/01/the-anti-jazz-campaign/> - .Uzm2661dWYZ; Jim Smyth, ‘Dancing, Depravity and All That Jazz: The Public Dance Halls Act of 1935’, *History Ireland*, 1:2 (1993); Kieran Sheehy (Producer), ‘Down with Jazz: Anti-jazz Campaign of the 1930s’, Documentary on One, RTÉ Radio 1 (1987), <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/jazz.html>; Ruth Fitzsimons (Producer), ‘Out with Paganism and all that Jazz’, The Lyric Feature, RTÉ lyric fm (2012), <http://presspack.rte.ie/2012/12/07/the-lyric-feature-out-with-paganism-and-all-that-jazz/>

<sup>66</sup> Hogan, 57.

<sup>67</sup> See Ó hAllmhuráin.

<sup>68</sup> Mullaney-Dignam, 266–72; Ryan, 627.

In his 1963 article in *The Irish Times*, Hodnett described jazz in Ireland from 1934 as being characterized by ‘a riff-type of tight orchestral arrangement for big bands, derived from the Kansas City style of jazz’, and being ‘widely marketed under the name of “swing”’.<sup>69</sup> He seems to imply that jazz was primarily experienced through recordings; however, importantly, he states that ‘esoteric jazz clubs sprang up, for serious listening and playing’.<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, an article from 1962 in the British magazine *Jazz News* reports jazz being played in Dublin at a venue known as The 44 Club in Gardiner Street in the 1930s. It states that three musicians were paid to play in a working-class dance hall, and that a jazz group was ‘usually found with Des Hednett [sic] in the trumpet chair’, clearly a reference to George Desmond Hodnett.<sup>71</sup>

Andy Flynn, a Dublin journalist, wrote a weekly jazz column in *The People’s Weekly* for a few months from late 1943. In it is recorded both the establishment of the first Irish rhythm club and the emergence of a narrative of jazz as an art form worthy of serious study and consideration. In one of his columns (January 1944) he discusses the apparent deterioration in Benny Goodman’s playing after 1936: ‘But when we consider his early life we can hardly blame him for seizing commercial success instead of keeping to the path of righteous Jazz’.<sup>72</sup> Flynn subsequently proposed the formation of a rhythm club, stating that ‘the idea of a Rhythm club is to meet to discuss records, to hold record recitals and Jam Sessions, and to exchange views about all things pertaining to Jazz or Swing’.<sup>73</sup>

The concept of rhythm clubs, which started in Britain, denoted gatherings of jazz enthusiasts who would meet to listen to and discuss jazz recordings. Their popularity grew rapidly from 1933 onwards, with ninety-eight clubs having been formed in the London area by the end of 1935.<sup>74</sup> Stuart Nicholson reports on the concept spreading quickly throughout Europe: Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, and notably the Hot Club of France, formed in 1932. He notes how the mediation of jazz through the experience of the listening clubs produced a ‘unique socially and culturally constructed circumstance’ of an audience, ‘completely dislocated from the inductive effect of the cultural and social ritual associated with the creation of jazz in American

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<sup>69</sup> Hodnett, 8.

<sup>70</sup> As note 69.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Dublin Jazz Story’, *Jazz News*, 12 September 1962, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Flynn, ‘This Thing Called “Swing”’, *The Bray Tribune & the People’s Weekly*, January 1944, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Flynn, ‘Rhythm Club for Dublin?’, *The Bray Tribune & the People’s Weekly*, January 1944, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Francis Newton, *The Jazz Scene* (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 238.

clubs, bars and dance halls'.<sup>75</sup> However disconnected from American cultural life the early rhythm clubs may have been, it appears from the archival sources discussed here that at least some of the Irish jazz societies' activities included live performances.

The first meeting of the No. 1 Rhythm Club occurred on 10 February 1944 when nearly a hundred jazz enthusiasts met at The Broadway Café, Lower O'Connell Street, Dublin. Its meetings were held fortnightly and featured both performances by local musicians and 'record recitals', but the club closed 'after some years' due to financial difficulties.<sup>76</sup> It was noted that 'the Honorary Secretary, James C. Butler, well-known in Dublin as a teacher of ballroom dancing, expressed his delight at the formation of the club'.<sup>77</sup> In addition to Butler, Flynn and six others, Ismay Browne was also on the committee.<sup>78</sup> Ismay Browne was one of three Browne siblings who were involved in the formative Irish jazz scene: Ivor, Val and Ismay played trumpet, clarinet and banjo respectively and held jam sessions at their Sandycove home in south Dublin at the time when the 'jazz revival proper hit Dublin in the forties'.<sup>79</sup> The narrative of jazz as a serious art form appears already established at this stage with *The Bray Tribune & The People's Weekly* stating: 'all were supporters of good Jazz and the exclusion of those interested in jitterbugging was explicitly laid down'.<sup>80</sup> In the same month, *The Irish Times* also mentioned the No. 1 Irish Rhythm Club, reporting on more than seventy young people, mostly under the age of twenty, sitting in orderly rows around an electric gramophone while three young men 'presented a series of about ten records each, choosing different themes to illustrate their point'.<sup>81</sup>

Taken together, these articles provide evidence for a scene of enthusiasts involved in the processes of the production of jazz and, importantly, the discourses of authenticity surrounding it. In his newspaper columns Flynn listed the names of black musicians in bold type so readers would be aware of the ethnicity of the various performers, and shunned Goodman for embracing commercialism and rejecting 'the

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<sup>75</sup> Stuart Nicholson, *Jazz and Culture in a Global Age* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 2014), 54.

<sup>76</sup> 'Dublin Jazz Story', 2.

<sup>77</sup> 'No. 1 Rhythm Club Formed', *The Bray Tribune & The People's Weekly*, 26 February 1944, 9.

<sup>78</sup> As note 77.

<sup>79</sup> 'Dublin Jazz Story', 2.

<sup>80</sup> 'No. 1 Rhythm Club Formed'.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew Lang, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 29 February 1944, 3.



righteous path’.<sup>82</sup> For some, authentic jazz was evidence of moral decay, while for proponents of the music, only jazz on ‘the righteous path’ displayed qualities such as the rejection of commercialism and artistic merit.

The increasing ease with which both recordings and performers could travel to and from Ireland has a strong impact on Ireland’s engagement with the wider European and American scenes. Evidence of this is seen in the story of Josephine Mitchell, a singer, saxophonist and bandleader. Born in Dublin in 1903, Mitchell began playing the saxophone from an early age (reportedly the first woman in Ireland to do so) and performed in London with her brother Eddie. She took the stage name ‘Zandra’ and toured Switzerland and Germany in the mid-1920s before settling in Berlin.<sup>83</sup> In a radio documentary about her life, Marc McMenemy states that during this time she met and played with Coleman Hawkins and Django Reinhardt, and led her band Baby Mitchell and her Queens of Jazz.<sup>84</sup> Upon her return to Ireland in the mid-1940s, she remained unknown and lived as a recluse in a family holiday-home in Donegal until her death in 1995.<sup>85</sup> The story of Josephine Mitchell was virtually unknown until the broadcast of this documentary on RTÉ lyric fm on Christmas Day, 2015, and it again demonstrates how stories can easily go undocumented. The issues of women and gender in jazz have been raised most prominently in *Big Ears*, edited by Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker.<sup>86</sup> In 2002 Tucker made an appeal for jazz researchers to ‘listen for gender and race as inextricable, complicated, changing, and profoundly salient to our work if we are seriously interested in historical and cultural significance of jazz production and consumption’.<sup>87</sup> While this summary of jazz in Ireland does little to change the near absence of women in documented Irish jazz history, I do wish to bring attention to the stories of women such as Josephine Mitchell, Ismay Browne and, indeed, Bridie Howitt, who in 1952 and 1953 led a band under her name who were ‘well-known Radio Éireann

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<sup>82</sup> Andrew Flynn, ‘For Jazz Fans’, *The Bray Tribune & The People’s Weekly*, 11 March 1944, 8; Andrew Flynn, ‘This Thing Called “Swing”’, *The Bray Tribune & The People’s Weekly*, 8 January 1944, 8.

<sup>83</sup> Marc McMenemy (Producer), ‘Zandra: A Sentimental Journey’, *The Lyric Feature*, RTÉ lyric fm (2015), <http://soundcloud.com/the-lyric-feature/zandra-a-sentimental-journey>

<sup>84</sup> As note 83.

<sup>85</sup> Órla Ryan, ‘The Fascinating Story of an Irish Jazz Sensation who Witnessed the Nazis come to Power’, *thejournal.ie*, 2015, <http://www.thejournal.ie/zandra-irish-saxophonist-2496617-Dec2015/>

<sup>86</sup> Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker (eds), *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>87</sup> Sherrie Tucker, ‘Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies’, *Current Musicology*, 71–3 (Spring 2001–Spring 2002), 375–408: 400.

stars' and the 'greatest favourite of all time with London, Glasgow and Belfast dance fans'.<sup>88</sup>

The connection between the sexualization of jazz during its global spread and the male domination of the field is not a coincidence. Jazz and dance bands were gendered locales where women typically could not participate unless within particular roles. In some of the ethnographic interviews I have conducted, people have insisted that there were no women musicians to speak of, only to recall later a story that included a woman musician. This perhaps demonstrates that the disclaimer 'to speak of' was the important element here, implying that these women musicians were not considered to be good enough to merit discussion. While the field of Irish jazz studies remains at an early stage, it is important to heed Tucker's 2002 call to consider the wider implication of gender studies throughout jazz studies and historiography.

If Radio Éireann, the Gaelic League, the Catholic Church and certain members of the government had problems with the idea of jazz, a perusal of *The Irish Times* from 1940 onwards demonstrates a decline in the amount of column space dedicated to racialized depictions of jazz as a 'primitive' music and a move towards a more tolerant viewpoint. Patrick Campbell, writing in *The Irish Times* on 23 February 1940, recalls the 'furore' caused 'by a negro girl named Maxine Sullivan, who dared to "swing" or "jazz" "The Bonny Banks of Loch Lomond"', stating 'Scotsmen all over America rose up in their wrath; Burns clubs passed resolutions condemning Miss Sullivan and all her works; certain stations even refused to broadcast her'.<sup>89</sup> In the same article, Campbell also tells a story of listening to a 'negro artist' in the Torch Theatre singing a rendition of 'Come Back, Paddy Reilly, to Ballyjamesduff' in the manner of the famous tenor John McCormack, before taking the chorus in 'real Harlem style, at the same time performing the evolution known as "trucking"'.<sup>90</sup> Campbell went backstage to discover that the singer was a Jamaican named Arthur Bennet, 'who [had] played in bands in the West End of London'.<sup>91</sup> He added that Bennet was looking for more Irish songs suitable for

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<sup>88</sup> 'Mohill and District', *The Leitrim Observer*, 23 May 1953, 5; 'Trim Town Improvements Association Dance', *The Drogheda Independent*, 13 September 1952, 10.

<sup>89</sup> Patrick Campbell wrote in the 1940s under the pseudonym 'Quidnunc' for *The Irish Times* column 'An Irishman's Diary'. See David Pierce (ed.), *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 527–36, 527; Quidnunc, 'An Irishman's Diary', *The Irish Times*, 23 February 1940, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Quidnunc, 3. Trucking is a dance move associated with jazz dance.

<sup>91</sup> As note 90.

‘swinging’, and that the Jamaican ‘hopes that Ireland will not treat him as harshly as Scotland did Maxine Sullivan. I wonder!’<sup>92</sup>

While not a wholehearted endorsement of jazz, it is quite a turnaround from the reporting of the mid-1930s, just a few years earlier. A similar change is seen in another article of 1940 reporting on restrictions that had been imposed on a dancing licence issued by District Justice Goff. Michael McGee, the licensee of the Kilkenny Hall, North Louth, appealed against the conditions that a minimum charge of eight pence be placed on any jazz dancing, an insistence that one of the dances per week would be solely Irish dancing, that people from outside a limit of five miles would not be admitted into the dance hall, and finally that couples should not be allowed to be ‘sitting-out’ in motor cars during the dance.<sup>93</sup> In relation to the Irish dancing, Judge Comyn KC at Dundalk Circuit Court stated that he would have been ‘glad if the hall licensee had accepted the condition, but the condition was one which could not lawfully be imposed’.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, all the other conditions were struck out as being either illegal or unenforceable. District Justice Goff and Judge Comyn had a similar disagreement in rulings a month later: Comyn overturned a refusal to grant a dance hall licence with the words ‘by common law of this country dancing was a lawful pastime. An assembly for the purpose of dancing was not an unlawful assembly’.<sup>95</sup>

Jazz in Ireland in the years following 1940 reveals evidence of a constant group of participants who both played and listened to jazz, and therefore began to contribute to the global discourse on jazz through their participation. The jam sessions that occurred in the Sandyford home of the Brownes, those that took place in The Olympia Theatre and the establishment of rhythm clubs for listening and discussion were all part of a community of practice that differentiated jazz from what was commonly accepted as popular music in Irish society at the time.

A full page in *The Times Pictorial* was devoted to a jazz concert that took place on 18 February 1945 in The Olympia Theatre under the heading ‘This is a “Jam Session”’.

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<sup>92</sup> Quidnunc, 3; Maxine Sullivan’s popular version of ‘Loch Lomond’ of 1937 helped to launch her career and was included in the 1938 film *Going Places*. See Leonard Feather, *The Encyclopedia Of Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1960), 56; *Going Places*, directed by Ray Enright (Warner Bros, 1938). Although Quidnunc’s article states that Scotland treated Maxine Sullivan harshly, no evidence is available to support the claim. It appears Quidnunc may have been referring to the Scottish groups in America who objected to her reworking of the song.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Dance Hall Licenses’, *The Irish Times*, 19 October 1940, 8.

<sup>94</sup> As note 93.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Dancing is Not Unlawful’, *The Irish Times*, 6 November 1940, 6.

Featuring seven photographs and captions, it reports on a Sunday afternoon ‘jam session’ held by the Irish Rhythm Club. It reveals that the musicians were drawn from ‘leading Dublin bands, and are considered to be the best possible combination’. It continues:

The band played several of its own selected jazz arrangements and improvisations, and later they played, impromptu, several pieces which were chosen at random by members of the audience.<sup>96</sup>

In the same edition of *The Irish Pictorial* is an article regarding the same performance, written by Joseph Soape.<sup>97</sup> The fact that it was written in a comical, irreverent style demonstrates the change in feeling towards a music that had, only a decade earlier, been written about as a source of evil. The author states that he declines to use terms such as ‘hot licks’ and ‘in the groove’, as it would obtain the same result as if ‘Walter Winchell, American columnist, were to describe a ceilidh by saying: “Musha, the spalpeens do be battherin’ the flure wid dere crubeens”’.<sup>98</sup> He notes that ‘a Jam Session is a matter of improvisation’ and goes on to describe a typical performance that concludes ‘he plays till his imagination runs out. At the end everybody plays together, in a completely disordered crescendo of sound. It’s lovely’.<sup>99</sup>

Following that description, the author recounts how theatres in New York have been ‘partly dismantled’ by audiences at jam sessions, ‘their emotions have been so deeply stirred that they have taken up the seats and waved them in the air’.<sup>100</sup> He reports that Dublin’s Olympia Theatre was sold out, full of young people. The description of the event revolved around the presence of some Americans: ‘I moved in beside the American visitors. This was going to be something approaching the real stuff’.<sup>101</sup> Again, issues of authenticity are at play. While the music is being performed by Irish musicians, it is the presence and appreciation of the American visitors that reveals that this is going

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<sup>96</sup> ‘This is a “Jam Session”’, *The Irish Pictorial*, 3 March 1945, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Joseph Soape, ‘Jazz Jam Session Jivey’, *The Irish Pictorial*, 3 March 1945, 8. Since there are no other articles attributed to him in *The Irish Times* or *The Irish Pictorial*, nor any record of a Joseph Soape, it is probable that the name is a pseudonym and a play on ‘Joe Soap’, British slang for a hypothetical average man, which, in the 1940s, referred to a gullible person. See John Ayto, *The Oxford History of Slang* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 46, 313.

<sup>98</sup> A loose translation of which could be: ‘Oh my, the rascals are battering the floor with their trotters (feet)’ (translation by author).

<sup>99</sup> Soape, 8.

<sup>100</sup> As note 99.

<sup>101</sup> As note 99.



to be ‘approaching the real stuff’. American performances in theatres in New York are given as examples of where ‘emotions have been so deeply stirred’. Indeed, the 1962 *Jazz News* article states how a series of concerts held by the Irish Federation of Musicians at The Olympia in the early 1950s ceased because of ‘claims of damage to the theatre’.<sup>102</sup> The statement in the *Jazz News* serves to give jazz in Ireland greater claim to authenticity due to its connection to ‘rebelliousness’, while *The Irish Pictorial* article locates authenticity in the American visitors.

*The Irish Pictorial* continues by explaining that, after the band began to play, one of the Americans shouted out ‘Waah–hit it, boy!’, and then

began twitching in his seat, stamping his feet on the floor. I watched him closely, seeing how the whole thing worked. The clarinet took up the theme. The American closed his eyes in ecstasy. He shrugged his shoulders back and forth. Then he called: ‘Yeah! Shake it out, boys!’ He clapped his hands rhythmically for a moment or two. ‘Yeah!’ he shouted: ‘rub it out, boy!’ By now the whole audience was rocking backwards and forwards in time to the music. All down the aisles feet were tapping out the rhythm. All over the theatre were cries of: ‘Yeeah!’ and ‘Shake it out!’ The Irish nation in the Olympia Theatre had, as if born to it, gone all jumbley-jivey.<sup>103</sup>

After an appeal for ‘Sean Sinatra’, an Irish equivalent to Frank Sinatra, who had recently had eggs thrown at him (thereby, according to the author, ‘setting the seal upon the singer’s popularity’), the author ends with this jovial declaration:

All that we need now is our own ‘Voice,’ the Olympia Theatre, a supply of eggs, and we have advanced one stage farther upon the road to complete and irremediable civilisation.<sup>104</sup>

One possible explanation for the thin line between derision and the humour here is that the article could be understood by an older generation as evidence of the advance along ‘the road to complete and irremediable civilisation’, or as expressing the fun and spirit involved in participating in the jam session for a younger generation, thus satisfying both parties. What is clear is the position of authority given to the Americans, their presence having given the event a level of authenticity, at least for that writer. The physicality of the audience’s response to the music is highlighted also. The response to a jazz performance was both embodied and expressed vocally and this, according to the author, was part of the (tongue-in-cheek) ‘progress’ of civilisation.

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<sup>102</sup> ‘Dublin Jazz Story’, 2.

<sup>103</sup> Soape, 8.

<sup>104</sup> As note 106. The ‘supply of eggs’ is a reference to an incident on 12 October 1944 when Frank Sinatra had raw eggs thrown at him at The Paramount Theatre in New York. See Kitty Kelley, *His Way: The Unauthorized Biography of Frank Sinatra* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 96.

### Dublin jazz scene, 1945–1963

The period following 1945 saw an ever-increasing interest in jazz. The 1962 *Jazz News* article reported that the Rhythm Club organized by Andrew Flynn featured performances by local musicians in the mid-1940s. Following that, it states, the South Dublin Rhythm Club presented traditional jazz weekly. The South Dublin Rhythm Club was also reported to have published Ireland's 'only jazz magazine to date', *Hot Notes*, edited by Eric Keartland, which lasted from 1946 to 1948 and consisted of thirteen issues.<sup>105</sup> From Volume II (January 1946) *Hot Notes* was printed in Waterford and issues typically contained around twenty pages though some issues consisted of as little as twelve and as many as thirty-four pages. They included record reviews, articles and matters of interest to record collectors, while the editorials in particular demonstrated the contestation between differing sections of the Irish music community in their appreciation of jazz. *Hot Notes* was distributed in Dublin, Belfast, the USA, Switzerland and Holland and included contributions by Irish writers in addition to more prominent jazz critics of the day including Brian Rust, Charles Fox and Walter C. Allen. Issue 4, from 1946, reports on 'The "South Dublin's" Jam Session', thanking Charlie Parkes, Bert Scully, Joe Coughlan, Paddy Moran, Richie Burroughs, George Nash and Jack Bloom for their support and 'supplying the fine music at their Jam Session on April Fourth last'.<sup>106</sup>

According to the aforementioned *Jazz News* article from 1962, Brian Hopper formed 'his Dixielanders' soon after the Brownes' jam sessions of the 1940s and 'kept jazz going in the city until the advent of the Night Owls' who played together from 1949 until 1957.<sup>107</sup> By the early 1950s, the Irish Rhythm Club and the South Dublin Rhythm Club appear to have been replaced by the Downbeat Club, a group of musicians who gathered to listen to and play jazz. Described in 1952 as 'dispensers of classical jazz in the modern manner', they held a series of Sunday afternoon 'recitals' in the Green Lounge, on St Stephen's Green.<sup>108</sup> The Downbeat Club was also responsible for a series of Jazz Jamborees, which featured bands consisting of 'leading dance-band musicians'

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<sup>105</sup> 'SearchWorks', *stanford.edu*, 2017, <http://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/6666899>

<sup>106</sup> 'The "South Dublin's" Jam Session', *Hot Notes*, 4 (1946).

<sup>107</sup> 'Dublin Jazz Story', 2.

<sup>108</sup> Dancalot, 'Downbeaters Warming up for Jazz-Jamboree', *The Times Pictorial*, 29 March 1952, 12.

under the leadership of Johnny Devlin. The jamborees ran in The Olympia Theatre from 1952 to 1955.<sup>109</sup>

Although reported in 1954 as meeting ‘privately of course’, the Downbeat Club had by 1961 become an open event for live broadcast on Radio Éireann. However, the writer in 1961, ‘G.A. Olden’ (another witty pseudonym), demonstrates that the contemporary understanding of jazz is still far from clear, first describing it as a ‘session of recorded pop music’ but soon after expressing surprise that the show managed to get any airtime due to Radio Éireann’s previous perceived ban on jazz and swing.<sup>110</sup> It was reported in 1955 that Bobby Laurence (probably Bobby Lawless) organized the annual Jazz Jamboree:

Bobby’s big problem is not who’ll play but who to leave out. City bands abound with talent and Bobby has the unenviable job of trying to fit in the different ‘groups’ and, with Johnny Devlin, of trying to select the personnel of the 18-piece ‘Downbeaters’ band which is the highlight of the show.<sup>111</sup>

Pianist Jim Doherty, born in 1939, remembers the late 1950s as a time when ‘there were gigs everywhere, it’s hard to imagine, I used to work four nights a week but that was before I left my day job’.<sup>112</sup> He remembers Johnny Devlin having a big band in 1952–3, almost twenty years before his own in 1971:

... and there were some very good musicians around, Joe Coughlan was a great clarinet player ... he was a band leader in the Metropole Hotel, *don’t forget that every musician played for dancing*. All Ireland danced, all the time, you know.<sup>113</sup>

An examination of *The Irish Times* from 1945 to 1963 reveals an ever-growing enthusiasm for jazz in Dublin. The 1950s saw an increasing number of touring international artists such as Stan Kenton (1953), Woody Herman and his Third Herd

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<sup>109</sup> Dancalot, ‘“Princes and Princesses” in the Olympic Ballroom’, *The Times Pictorial*, 8 March 1952, 12; ‘The Sound Makes this Band’, *The Times Pictorial*, 12 March 1955, 14.

<sup>110</sup> Dancalot, ‘They Stole Notes Right out of this World’, *The Times Pictorial*, 17 April 1954, 10; G.A. Olden, ‘R.E. Digs the Pops’, *The Irish Times*, 3 August 1961, 8.

<sup>111</sup> ‘The Sound Makes this Band’, 14.

<sup>112</sup> Jim Doherty, interview with the present author, 6 October 2014.

<sup>113</sup> As note 112 (italics added by the author).

(1954),<sup>114</sup> Humphrey Lyttelton (1955),<sup>115</sup> Louis Armstrong (1956)<sup>116</sup> and Count Basie (1957).<sup>117</sup> These tours occurred as a consequence of British policies which prevented many American artists from playing in Britain. For many years this was widely considered to be due to a Musicians' Union 'ban' on foreign musicians. However, scholarship by Martin Cloonan and Matt Brennan (2013) challenged that narrative and placed it within a wider context incorporating the fluctuating relationship between the Musicians' Union, the British Ministry of Labour and the American Federation of Musicians, as summarized by Andrew Hodgetts's chapter in *New Jazz Conceptions* (2017).<sup>118</sup> The end result was an increase in touring groups coming to Dublin, with large crowds coming from both Ireland and Britain to see them.

Local bands also played jazz on a more regular basis, and the connection between jazz bands and dance bands was strong. Newspaper columns entitled 'Dancing Times' and 'Dancing News', by an author with the pen name of Dancalot, appeared usually weekly in *The Irish Times* between 1949 and 1958. Dancalot's attitude towards jazz bands seemed ambivalent, as the dancing was his main interest. That said, his articles reveal that there was no strong delineation between members of jazz bands and dance bands at this time. Although it was sometimes explained that a performance would feature 'modern jazz' or 'progressive jazz', the band and musicians were not necessarily considered separate from other 'dance bands'. In a column from 1952, Dancalot writes that with regret he was "'way out of town'" for the last appearance of the Downbeaters Modern Music Club'.<sup>119</sup> The club had been holding 'hops' in the Green Lounge (109 St. Stephen's Green) and were preparing for a jazz jamboree. Dancalot states that the reason for the Sunday afternoon schedule was that the Downbeaters were leading members of the city dance bands. 'Names like Pat Moran, Johnny Devlin, give the outfit the right to

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<sup>114</sup> 'Visitors from Britain for "Jazz" Concert', *The Irish Times*, 3 May 1954, 4.

<sup>115</sup> 'Dublin Jazz Fans to Hear Humphrey Lyttelton's Band', *The Irish Pictorial*, 29 January 1955, 14.

<sup>116</sup> Al Moore, 'Needlepoint: Invasion by "Satchmo" Fans?', *The Irish Times*, 28 April 1956, 11.

<sup>117</sup> "'Count" Basie in Theatre Royal', *The Irish Times*, 26 October 1957, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Martin Cloonan and Matt Brennan, 'Alien Invasions: The British Musicians' Union and Foreign Musicians', *Popular Music*, 32/02 (May 2013), 277–95; Andrew Hodgetts, 'Protection and Internationalism: The British Musicians' Union and Restrictions on Foreign Musicians' in Roger Fagge and Nicolas Pillai (eds), *New Jazz Conceptions: History, Theory, Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2017), 63–85.

<sup>119</sup> "'Princes and Princesses" in Olympic Ballroom', 12.

the claim of the only star-studded outfit in Dublin’. He continues, ‘Maybe I’m not keen on jazz—but in capable hands any kind of music makes pleasant hearing’.<sup>120</sup>

As with the word jazz, ‘bop’ was used in an ambiguous manner to refer to both the style of music and the people who danced to it. In 1953, Dancalot referred to ‘flashy-tied, crêpe-soled Boppers’:

These off-beat ‘crazy kids and gals’ have been reminded that when all is said and done they’re still just plain Maggie or James Murphy, with an Irish upbringing. And glorious thought, we don’t take so easily to all kinds of foreign ‘culture’.<sup>121</sup>

In the same article, bop dancing was equated with jiving, and no reference was made to any specific style of music. Ballroom managers were concerned that bop dancers attending ballrooms would result in business suffering. Dancalot notes that ‘In a tour of Irish ballrooms recently, I found only four without notices forbidding jiving. But even in these four a hefty floor manager sees to it that bopping is kept well within limits’.<sup>122</sup> In the following week, however, the headline led: ‘Bop “Wake” Was Premature—Off-beaters Kick Back’.<sup>123</sup> Dancalot reported that ‘Boppers’ had left their card: ‘A Gigantic Jazz Session—featuring The Eric Delaney Group, Duggie Robinson Group and the Tip-Toppers ... Commencing 11 p.m. till who knows?’. While the first of the two articles specifically targeted dancers as the adversary, the following week saw musicians being associated with the ‘bop’ label. The ‘Dancing Times’ column from December of the same year reports of Pete Roxburgh forming a sixteen-piece band including ‘top-names from the big bands presently playing in Dublin’.<sup>124</sup> Notably, Dancalot mentions that the band also will feature a ‘band within a band’ of—a quintet—‘to give patrons music in the bop manner’.<sup>125</sup>

Dancalot attended the annual Olympia jazz jamboree for the first time in 1954. It was, he wrote, his first introduction to ‘jazz as it should be played’.<sup>126</sup> Although he discussed bands often in his column, this was an extended review, naming the twenty-seven individuals involved. Notably, almost without exception, each of the band members

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<sup>120</sup> As note 119.

<sup>121</sup> Dancalot, ‘Bop Bubble Burst—and Now Everyone is Happier’, *The Irish Times*, 4 July 1953, 12.

<sup>122</sup> As note 121.

<sup>123</sup> Dancalot, ‘Bop “Wake” Was Premature—Off-Beaters Kick Back’, *The Times Pictorial*, 11 July 1953.

<sup>124</sup> Dancalot, ‘More New Dance Bands Come Into the News’, *The Irish Times*, 19 December 1953, 10.

<sup>125</sup> As note 124.

<sup>126</sup> ‘They Stole Notes Right out of this World’, 10.



listed are mentioned by Dancalot in previous or future columns in reference to dance bands. They were professional dance musicians who had come together for a jazz concert. I do not suggest that all of them would call themselves jazz musicians, or that they would be viewed as such today. It is very probable that many of the musicians were extremely proficient in a big band section—that is at reading and interpreting the music—but were not in the habit of improvising jazz solos. The continued popularity of jazz in Dublin in the mid-1950s is evidenced in a 1955 article from *The Irish Times* entitled ‘This is Young Ireland (Part of it)’ that reported on ‘a group of young people’ meeting weekly where “‘jive,” “jazz,” “bop” and all other variants (it needs an expert to sort them out) come into their own’.<sup>127</sup>

In August 1962, J.B.C. Hurley wrote an account of the Dublin jazz scene for the Regional Round Up section of *Jazz News*. In it, he claimed that ‘just over two years ago Traditional Jazz (as we know it) stormed in Ireland ...’.<sup>128</sup> He claimed that Dublin was ‘jazz-starved’ and in a ‘shambles’, before singing the praises of the group Eblana, who play ‘gimmickless Jazz’ weekly at the Dublin Jazz Club. Hurley also mentioned a weekly gig by the Dixieland Rhythm Kings in Howth, Co. Dublin, who also played two gigs weekly in the Green Lounge on St. Stephen’s Green.<sup>129</sup> In another example of the contestation that would become a feature of the Dublin jazz scene, O’Lochlainn criticized Hurley in a reply, suggesting that he should ‘check his facts with his predecessors on the scene before rushing more than somewhat erroneously into print’.<sup>130</sup> O’Lochlainn apologized to ‘all Dublin’s Jazzmen who have helped us keep the Jazz Scene on its feet for so long and to *Jazz News* readers for Mr Hurley’s well meaning (sic) but misguided report’.<sup>131</sup> An accompanying article in the same issue of *Jazz News* (I would argue also written by Dara O’Lochlainn), mounts a defence of the Dublin jazz scene, giving a brief summary of jazz in Dublin and its current health, concluding with ‘it seems that jazz in Dublin is here to stay’.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> ‘This is Young Ireland (Part of it)’, *The Irish Times*, 2 April 1955, 5.

<sup>128</sup> J.B.C. Hurley, ‘Regional Round Up: Dublin—the Green Scene’, *Jazz News*, 22 August 1962, 4.

<sup>129</sup> As note 128. The location of the Dublin Jazz Club is not mentioned but in the 1950s they had regular sessions in the Green Lounge also. See Noel Twamley, ‘Dancing Days in Dublin’, *NewsFour*, June/July 2010, 1–40, 10.

<sup>130</sup> O’Lochlainn, ‘Letter from Dublin’, *Jazz News*, 12 September, 1962, 4.

<sup>131</sup> As note 130.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Dublin Jazz Story’, 2. Dara O’Lochlainn was editor of Ireland’s second jazz magazine *Jazznews: Ireland’s Jazz and Blues Magazine* (Ampersand Publications, Dublin, Ireland), which was published

Writing in *The Irish Times* in 1963, Hodnett argued that the prominence of ‘popular music’, which, up to a few years earlier, had used the same instrumentation as jazz, had drained the scene of ‘promising jazzmen as soon as they could play properly, to a life of commercial playing’.<sup>133</sup> However, Hodnett argued that ‘now the pop scene has been largely taken over by combinations which in their typical form consist almost entirely of guitars, played badly’, there were not as many openings for wind-players in the pop scene, and that ‘those who have served their time in the jazz world will now probably stay in it, helping it to keep going and making it pay’.<sup>134</sup> There is a certain contradiction here, connected with the economic discourse surrounding jazz, that ‘jazzmen’ are ‘drained’ to ‘a life of commercial playing’, the implication being that they are no longer able to earn a living as jazzmen and that the taint of playing commercial music hinders the artists’ ability for self-expression within jazz.<sup>135</sup> While jazz then was, in Hodnett’s opinion, ‘uncommercial’, he still hoped, nevertheless, that they would be able to ‘make it pay’. The connotation with the word ‘commercial’ is that it is a sell-out; the valued qualities of the jazz musician are to do with self-expression and artistry, not with commercial success. Then, as now, the greatest respect within the jazz scene can often be reserved for the ‘artist’ who refuses to sell out. Then, as now, musicians needed to create an existence for themselves that both created meaning and enabled them to survive economically.

The problem with this narrative—of the jazz musician as artist untainted by commerciality—is that it did not, and still does not, reflect the day-to-day lives of the vast majority of those involved in any jazz scene throughout the entire history of jazz, and, particularly relevant for this study, those involved in the Dublin jazz scene. That is not to say that there were no musicians who eschewed commercial work in favour of subsidizing their living through teaching or another form of income. For many musicians, a paying gig was, and still is, a necessity. I argue that the consideration of dance bands and commercial entertainment in general is of vital importance when attempting to gain a fuller understanding of early jazz scenes. Although I have focused on the interaction between the dance-band scene and the jazz scene, the role that amateur musicians played in jazz in Dublin should also be noted. By ‘amateur’ I refer solely to musicians who do not make their entire income from playing and teaching

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bi-monthly in 1986 and 1988. *Jazznews* changed its name to *Jazznews International* in 1988 and ceased publication in 1989.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Setting the Scene’, 8.

<sup>134</sup> As note 133.

<sup>135</sup> As note 133.

music. The distinction between amateur and professional is problematic in itself, failing to account for the many grey areas that musicians inhabit, as discussed by Ruth Finnegan.<sup>136</sup> From the Brownes in the 1940s to highly influential musicians such as Charles Meredith, Ian Henry and Dick Buckley in the 1950s and 1960s, many musicians held careers in other fields while contributing to the jazz scene, sometimes at a musical level equal to or greater than professional musicians.

In conclusion, I argue that jazz played a much more prominent role in Irish society between 1918 and 1960 than previously thought. The Irish writers of the early 1960s cited in this article were in a much closer position than modern historians to assess the position of jazz in Ireland and the relevance of local musicians to the scene at the time. From their writing, it is clear that Dublin, although overshadowed by the jazz scenes of other European capitals, was an important centre for jazz in Ireland. Jazz was central to the musical identity of many in the city, as shown by the importance that was attached to performance, societies and clubs.

While there has been a focus on the Dublin jazz scene, people were participating in jazz throughout the island as demonstrated by newspaper reports. Additionally, early pioneers such as Josephine Mitchell in the 1930s, or later musicians such as Tony McDonald of The Night Owls—who studied for two years in Berklee College of Music in the 1960s and later played in big bands in New York—are virtually unheard of even in jazz circles, and their careers remain undocumented. While jazz in Ireland is often thought of as a recent phenomenon, this article demonstrates the rich history of jazz performance in Ireland that is attracting increased attention from a growing number of researchers. Delineations between jazz and popular music that once served to highlight the uniqueness of jazz, should, I suggest, be re-examined in the light of research that reveals the jazz activity that took place within popular music scenes. Doing so, researchers can continue to contribute to both the depth and breadth of knowledge being generated regarding jazz in Ireland.

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<sup>136</sup> Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*, reprint (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 12–13.