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‘One of the most remarkable cultural phenomena of our century’:

Larkin, Hobsbawm and Amis on Jazz¹

Roger Fagge

We are now beginning to get a better appreciation of the significance of jazz critics and writers, with the latter seen as influential in shaping what we understand jazz to be, and the wider history of the music. As Lincoln Collier has pointed out ‘the music had hardly surfaced before the critics began to appear.’² Overwhelmingly white, male, fans and collectors at the outset, a more intellectual and scholastic approach developed, if somewhat unevenly, as the twentieth century progressed, with critics more influential than in other comparable musical forms. This meant that, as Gennari has noted, ‘of all the great American vernacular musics, only jazz has cultivated intellectual discourse as a core element of its superstructure’.³ Jazz criticism had a problematic relationship with musicians, acting as a mediator between the latter and their audience, but also being viewed with suspicion. It was also influential in creating a canonical view of jazz history, which has been problematized in recent years by academic writers, who have seen categories, criteria and structures as more fluid and interconnected than the canon suggested.⁴

The majority of jazz critics and writers were American, but Europeans were influential within and beyond their own borders, and some like Leonard Feather were influential in the United States.⁵ Among other factors, the restriction on live US jazz performers in Britain and elsewhere, meant that from the late 1930s jazz enthusiasts were more reliant on records and debates and influenced by a small group of jazz critics who shaped the understanding of the music. This was significant, as Eric Hobsbawm pointed out as ‘esoteric jazz scholars allowed Europe to become familiar with elements in the black tradition which a purely commercial revolution would simply not have brought to their attention.’ It would also affect the acceptance of the Blues and Rock’n’Roll especially in Britain.⁶

This chapter will explore three of the most significant British jazz critics and writers in the post war years, Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and Eric Hobsbawm, who in many ways helped create an intellectual beachhead for jazz, opening the way for its

acceptance amongst the wider public and cultural elite. All three were significant as they were not first and foremost professional jazz writers, but jazz informed elements of their writing, and they were also jazz fans who took the opportunity to write about the music they loved. Philip Larkin wrote about jazz for the *Daily Telegraph* in the 1960s, plus reviews for *The Guardian* and other publications, and jazz was an important influence on his poetry.⁷ Kingsley Amis, a friend of Larkin from their Oxford days, was jazz correspondent for *The Observer* in the 1950s, and also wrote about jazz elsewhere including in fiction and reviews. Eric Hobsbawm (as Francis Newton) wrote the influential *The Jazz Scene* (1959) and was jazz critic for the *New Statesman* from 1956-66, and again for other papers. He continued to write about jazz in his later work.

This chapter looks at jazz criticism rather than fiction, and explores why these critic's writings are important for what they say about jazz, especially as they deal with the post war changes in the music, including the role of 'modern' jazz, and the way jazz became less popular, but more respectable, as it was eclipsed by other popular music, particularly rock and roll. They make an interesting contribution to the history of jazz criticism, casting light on the British take on jazz, and the complicated relationship between popular music and society.

There had been a lot written about Philip Larkin, not least because he is considered one of the greatest British poets of his generation. Jazz was central to his artistic vision and has been covered by biographers and others who have written about him. His collected *Daily Telegraph* articles *All What Jazz: A Record Diary* have joined Hobsbawm's *The Jazz Scene* as one of the important texts of British jazz criticism. *All What Jazz* is notable for its wit, good writing and the grumpy, in some ways, 'notorious' introduction which celebrated Larkin's love of 1930s jazz but also attacked modern jazz and modernism more generally. 'Something fundamentally awful had taken place to ensure that there should be no more tunes', he suggested. Singling out two of the most notable modern jazz musicians he commented 'with Miles Davis and John Coltrane a new inhumanity emerged', and that 'jazz started to be ugly on purpose'.⁸ This was linked to Larkin's dislike of Pound, Picasso and other modernists for their 'irresponsible exploitations of technique in contradiction of human life as we know it.'⁹ Nor did Larkin revise this view with the second edition of

the book in 1984, which took the reviews up to 1971, leaving the introduction unchanged and adding a 'footnote': 'In any case, my views haven't changed. If Charlie Parker seems a less filthy racket today it is only because, as I point out, much filthier rackets have succeeded him.'¹⁰

Despite the introduction, Larkin was disappointed that his columns 'seemed to type me as a disliker rather than a liker' and that 'I still insist I love jazz' with its 'great coloured pioneers and their eager white disciples, and the increasingly remote world that surrounded their music, dance halls, derby hats, band buses, tuxedos, monogrammed music-stands, the shabby recording studios they assembled, and the hanging honeycomb microphones that saved us all.'¹¹ This impassioned and in many ways nostalgic view of jazz underlined Larkin's suggestion that he was writing a 'jazz lover' and 'hadn't really any intention of being a jazz critic.' Indeed when the decision was made to publish the reviews in book form, a grateful Larkin told the publisher, 'I think it extraordinarily generous of Faber to grant me the modest wish,' continuing, 'and I think the best line to take is that you are promoting a freak publication: please don't put it forward as a piece of jazz scholarship, or even as any sort of contribution to the field. Treat it like a book by T.S. Eliot on all-in wrestling'.¹²

If Larkin felt that the introduction to *All What Jazz* presented him in a negative light, this was nothing compared to the tide of criticism that would emerge after his death, particularly after the publication of his letters in 1992. For a time this framed the debate around Larkin's life and work, including his use of colourful language, right wing politics, and illiberal comments. In the years that followed however, after an initial defensiveness, a more realistic and nuanced picture of Larkin has emerged. As Martin Amis has argued, Larkin's reputation has been repaired and he is once again 'Britain's best-loved poet since World War II'.¹³ A consideration of Larkin's jazz writings were part of this process, receiving a more careful reading including works by Tolley and Leggett, whilst White and Palmer have edited and collected Larkin's other Jazz Writings which included his book reviews and articles.¹⁴

In fact Larkin's take on modern jazz was always more complicated than it seemed, and indeed he admitted this in the introduction itself. Noting that he was writing in the early 1960s and didn't recognise that much of the music he was asked

to review was actually jazz, he commented 'it was too late in the day' to re-enter the debates of the 1940s, and 'there was nothing for it but to carry on my original plan of indiscriminating praise, and I did so for nearly two years.'¹⁵ Leggett has pointed out that this problematizes Larkin's role as a reviewer, which was supposed to be based on a degree of honesty, and contradicted some of his own ideas about criticism.¹⁶ Larkin's Oxford contemporary John Wain reviewed the book, and suggested that it would have been better to be clear from the start, and 'to listen as one man and to choose as one man.'¹⁷ In fact Larkin's approach to modern jazz was more uneven than his own chronology suggested, and Alan Plater has even argued that Larkin's approach to modern jazz actually 'softened' because 'as a critic he was big enough to change his mind, but also smart enough to smell the crap at a hundred paces.'¹⁸ Rather than softening, or for that matter, hardening, we can see Larkin as being more pragmatic, depending on mood, or more genuinely trying to respond to albums on their merits. Although he denied was a critic, he did try to use a degree of objectivity commensurate with criticism, and Arts critics in general are hardly renowned for suppressing their subjectivity, especially when it comes to popular music. It should also be borne in mind that as Richard Palmer and Clive James have both pointed out, Jazz developed rapidly in the 1960s, especially with artists like Davis and Coltrane and given his mistrust of modern jazz at the outset, this may explain Larkin's more critical response to some of their work.¹⁹

There are a number of examples of Larkin's sometimes inconsistent/pragmatic take on modern jazz, and not surprisingly Miles Davis and John Coltrane figure prominently. Thus in October 1962 he praised 'Miles Davis at Carnegie Hall' noting 'the sombre and magnificent Davis fronts both his Quartet and Gil Evan's orchestra' and produced 'a succession of smoky solos'. As this suggested, Larkin enjoyed the album, even pointing out that the sleeve notes stated that Davis smiled 'twice at the audience.'²⁰ Four years later he also enjoyed the re-issue of 'Birth of the Cool' noting that Davis and Mulligan were only 21 when it was recorded and that 'the music has a relaxed, mature quality, a richness of voicing, the speaks of experience rather than youth.' He suggested that the ensemble pieces contains solos which Miles has 'never surpassed',²¹ although he seemed pretty impressed by the later Carnegie Hall performances.

Larkin made an interesting contribution on Davis the following year when he perhaps surprisingly offered praise for Ornette Coleman's 'Free Jazz'. Modern art was at the forefront of Larkin's misgivings about modernism, and he suggested that the use of a Pollock's 'White Light' on the cover, was apposite with the first thirty minutes of the record approximating to the painting's 'patternless, reiterated jumble'. That having been said, he commented that 'there *is* something lyrical and confident about Coleman that attracts even the most hardened.' In contrast Miles Davis, 'Miles Smiles' received shorter shrift with Larkin suggesting it offered 'his usual snarling staccato disagreeable self'. He went on 'to me this is heartless and uninteresting jazz, and the only pleasure to be had from it is Tony Williams's drumming.'²² More sardonically three months later he noted 'It seems to me ironic to find Cannonball lamenting recently in *Melody Maker* that while we have a generation of kids who are raised on a constant diet of music, they don't listen to jazz, and jazz is dying in consequence. 'Milestones' is a perfect explanation of this'.²³

However this wasn't necessarily the case of Larkin shifting from a more positive to a negative view of Davis, as, for example, he was more positive the following year about 'Miles in the Sky' which was 'beautiful in a melancholy way' although not really jazz but more a 'soundtrack' to a bleak film.²⁴ Even 'Bitches Brew' received faint praise although he noted how its 'Muzak-like chicka-chicka-boom-chick soon palls.'²⁵ Larkin had less time for Coltrane, and Tolley has suggested the latter became the 'antihero' of *All What Jazz*.²⁶ In September 1961 he gave fairly positive reviews to Thelonious Monk, as well as the Modern Jazz Quartet, but had little time for 'Coltrane Jazz', and 'Coltrane Plays the Blues' fared little better with its 'amalgam of bagpipe and squealer.'²⁷ Larkin tried to be more even handed, noting 'I found myself rather liking' 'Coltrane Live at Birdland' although he added that Coltrane 'spends so long rocking backwards and forwards as if in pain between two chords.'²⁸ Similarly he had mixed feelings about 'Ballads' which he suggested left experimentalism to one side, and offered a 'bleak beauty' even though Coltrane's 'tenor still sounds like an alto with sinus trouble.'²⁹ 'A Love Supreme' was one of Larkin's records of the year for 1965 for the *Daily Telegraph*, which may have been as much due to the fact that it had already received strong reviews and was seen as important album.³⁰ Larkin's review of the album suggested he was less impressed. Whilst liking 'Psalm' and seeing some signs of improvement, Larkin was still

bemused by Coltrane's tone and suggesting his choice of musical themes was 'hypnotic, repetitive, monotonous'.³¹

Larkin's strongest criticism of Coltrane came in an article written shortly after the latter's death, in which he told his readers he had been re-listening to some of Coltrane's albums, and concluded that his negative view of the artist had been correct, stating 'I still can't imagine how anyone can listen to a Coltrane record for pleasure', before attacking (again) his tone. Echoing the introduction to *All What Jazz* Larkin argued Coltrane was 'modern' and joyless, like modernist art more generally, and was part of a movement that had taken the pleasure out of jazz. Larkin acknowledged his 'stature' but suggested this meant that 'if he was boring, he was enormously boring. If he was ugly he was massively ugly. To squeak and gibber for 16 bars is nothing; Coltrane could do it for 16 minutes, stunning the listener into a kind of hypnotic state.' He added, 'I regret Coltrane's death, as I regret the death of any man, but I can't conceal the fact that he leaves in jazz a vast, and blessed silence', before a rather flippant start to a more positive and interesting review of Ornette Coleman's 'Cahappaqua Suite'. 'Coltrane is dead. Long Live Coleman!' he wrote.³² Larkin's comments were damning, and as this was effectively an obituary, it seems that the *Daily Telegraph* opted not to publish its due to its controversial content, and it only subsequently appeared in *All What Jazz*.³³ Interestingly Coltrane remained an issue for Larkin, with the latter even mentioning him in critical terms in one of his final letters written shortly before his death in December 1985.³⁴

As we have seen Larkin tried to balance his misgivings about modern jazz, but he was often more critical. In April 1965 he wrote a longer article, 'Requiem for Jazz' which offered a more detailed critique than was possible in the album reviews, and was less inflammatory than the introduction to *All What Jazz*. In a characteristically well written piece, Larkin argued that the modern jazz period started by Charlie Parker had led to an explosion of a more race conscious music displaying 'novelty' and 'experiment', in some ways following in the footsteps of classical music. He disputed that this new complexity really marked 'development' suggesting that the jazz created by Armstrong with its 'excitement', 'release' and 'dancing' had become a global force with jazz becoming 'the emotional language of the century.' In contrast he argued, modern jazz was a 'wilful inversion, not a development at all.' It was 'self-

conscious' and antagonistic instead of joyful, and crucially now a minority interest. He continued 'the composite picture this adds up to is of a folk-music swept by the unique nature of its appeal to the point where it is exhausted by over-exploitation, made self-conscious by political feeling and technical sophistication, and deprived of its natural participating audience in exchange for the concert hall, the subsidised festival, the college circuit'. Significantly Larkin argued that the real 'jazz impulse' had passed to 'beat' music including rhythm and blues and rock and roll, which despite 'its tedious vulgarity' he argued, 'was nearer to jazz than the rebarbative astringencies of Coleman, Coltrane and the late Eric Dolphy.' He concluded that Parker hadn't destroyed jazz, and that the change might have happened anyway, however the music that split in two was now disappearing 'into the vulgarities of popular entertainment' and would soon become 'a historical memory' like ragtime. He concluded 'The world will have lost that incredible argot that in the first half of the twentieth century spoke to all nations and intelligences equally.'³⁵

Larkin wasn't that satisfied with this article, telling Monica Jones he was 'nervous' and that it was 'nothing to be ashamed or proud of' but the paragraph on recent developments was 'ludicrous' and he should have paid more attention to 'the beat craze'.³⁶ However it was one of the best things he wrote on jazz and his argument about 'beat' music, even as put, was interesting as it linked it to the jazz and popular music of the 1930s and 40s. Unlike many jazz fans who saw no redeeming factors in post war popular music, Larkin engaged with popular music including Bob Dylan and the Beatles. In a knowledgeable and intelligent article in the *Observer* in 1983, Larkin explained that he preferred early Beatles to later more produced work, but concluded 'When you get to the top there is nowhere to go but down, but the Beatles could not get down. There they remain unreachable, frozen, fabulous'³⁷ It was modern jazz which had drifted into the wilderness from this standpoint.

Significantly the Beatles use of familiar words and cliché in their songs and in the process of 'defamiliarising' them, apparent more generally in popular music, can also be linked to Larkin's use of the similar processes in his poetry.³⁸ An important part of Larkin's vision included a jazz aesthetic centred on the jazz of his youth (he began collecting records in 1936/7 when he was 14/15) and early adult hood, including his time at Oxford. As we have seen Larkin liked the energy, creativity and

lack of artifice in the jazz of this period and that it was democratic and danceable, participatory and affirmative. He recalled discovering jazz amongst the dance band recordings where the rhythm of the hot numbers caught his interest and it grew from there. This was music outside conventional culture and the exigencies of school life ‘something we found for ourselves’.³⁹

Larkin’s appearance on BBC Radio Four’s ‘Desert Island Discs’ on 19 July 1976 included tracks by Louis Armstrong (who as we have seen he used as a pivotal example in his *Weekend Review* article), Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday, and he wrote warmly about these and numerous others,⁴⁰ including Bix Beiderbecke, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, and of course Sidney Bechet who was the subject of one of his more upbeat and well known poems with its affirmation of jazz as ‘Like an enormous yes’.⁴¹ Larkin and friends, including Amis, were not jazz traditionalists, even when this became more popular in Britain after 1945. Indeed Larkin complained to Amis in the December 1985 letter that a friend had made him some jazz tapes, but these were pre-1930 and ‘a bit early’ for him. The friend was also a fan of Jelly Roll Morton who Larkin suggested was only ‘27th or 28th’ in his list of great Jazz figures. Larkin noted with irony that his friend’s tastes stopped in 1930, where his began and that his own ended in 1945.⁴² Tolley and White have pointed this out in their collection of Larkin’s favourite jazz, that included the Chicago style and revival at the end of the 1930s. They also underline that this was sometimes out of step with some jazz aficionados, with Larkin recommending working back from 1937 with Fletcher Henderson, whilst many jazz fan started in the 1920s.⁴³

Larkin described how he was particularly interested in the drumming when he first encountered jazz, especially when he got see bands at the local Hippodrome. Deciding he wanted to be a drummer himself his parents purchased a basic kit and tuition records. Although nothing much came of this, the cover of the second edition of *All What Jazz* had a photograph of him holding two drum sticks. Larkin would also sometimes be persuaded to play the piano at the ‘Victoria Arms’ in Walton Street whilst a student at Oxford.⁴⁴ It is perhaps surprising therefore that Larkin was a record collector, but was less keen on live performances, and never reviewed them.⁴⁵ In a 1979 letter to Amis, written after reading Steve Race’s autobiography, he wrote ‘I was pleased to see that what finally put him off jazz was

live performance. Couldn't stand the drums solos, and the bass solos, and the FILTHY EXHIBITIONISM. Right eh?'⁴⁶ As mentioned earlier, there was often mistrust between musicians and critics, and Larkin's dislike of live music fits into this category. However it also suggests a distance from the music. Martin Amis, who knew Larkin well, noted the remarkable quality of his poetry stood in contrast to 'the gauntness of Larkin's personal history (with no emotions, no vital essences, worth looking back on)' and that he was 'self starved'.⁴⁷ Not everyone agrees with this view of Larkin, including Booth who talks of Larkin playing different roles in different social settings, but this does illustrate the paradox that Larkin loved the vibrancy and vitality of jazz, but only when mediated through vinyl or radio.⁴⁸

We now have a better idea of the role politics has played in British jazz,⁴⁹ and given Larkin's Conservatism and sometime inappropriate comments on race, it is perhaps surprising that he only occasionally interpreted Jazz through the prism of politics. He was critical of what he believed to be the black nationalist element of modern jazz which he saw 'went from using the music to entertain the white man, the Negro had moved to hating him with it.'⁵⁰ However he was not blind to the degree of racism and disadvantage that African Americans faced. 'The Negro did not have the blues because he was naturally melancholy' he wrote, 'he had them because he was bullied and cheated and starved.'⁵¹ As White, Palmer and Plater have all suggested, Larkin's jazz writings showed a more tolerant and perceptive writer on race than was suggested by the critics who rounded on him after the publication of his letters.⁵²

Larkin once told an interviewer that he 'could live a week without poetry, but not a day without jazz', and his Oxford contemporary and friend, Kingsley Amis clearly felt the same.⁵³ Interviewed for the *Paris Review* in 1975, sitting surrounded by literature and Jazz 78s, Amis told the interviewer that he 'would put music slightly ahead of literature', and that 'if things had been different' he would have chosen to be a musician. Jazz was wrapped up in the fabric of life. Earlier in the interview Amis was asked about the comment of the autobiographical Archer in the collection *My Enemy's Enemy* that his vision of post war Britain was 'full of girls and drink and jazz and books and decent houses and decent jobs and being your own boss.'⁵⁴ Asked whether he shared this view, Amis replied 'Oh, yes, that's very much how I felt. And when I voted Labor by proxy in 1945, this is what I had in mind.' He added 'I didn't

expect the Government to bring me girls, but I did share in the general feeling of optimism and liberty abroad at that time.’⁵⁵ Jazz was an integral part of this.

Amis’ interest in Jazz emerged in the 1930s but took off when he arrived at St. John’s College, Oxford in the spring of 1941, met Larkin for the first time and ‘jazz became part of my life’.⁵⁶ Jazz was best viewed at the pub he suggested, and occasionally the Oxford University Rhythm club, although this didn’t always play music to their taste. Pee Wee Russell, Johnny Hodges and others were at the heart of their discussions, which they approached with more enthusiasm than they had for their academic studies.⁵⁷ Amis was called up in the summer of 1942, and aside from a brief visit in 1943, returned to Cambridge when he was demobbed in 1945. Amis recalled that appropriately Armstrong’s ‘Tight Like This’ was playing as he received his release forms, and jazz continued to play a role on his return to Cambridge. Larkin and others had moved on, but Amis became close to John Wain, now a junior fellow at St. John’s, who encouraged Amis’ academic career, and also his interest in jazz. Amis noted he was ‘a lover of jazz and knew about it’ although the two would later fall out in the 1950s, including an argument at Eddie Condon’s Jazz club in New York in 1958/9.⁵⁸ Amis met Hilary (Hilly) Bardwell in May 1946, and she later became his wife, and jazz was a part of their social life, including dancing, and Amis recalled Bunny Berrigan’s ‘I Can’t Get Started’ could be heard floating ‘out of every window between Beaumont Street and Wellington Square.’⁵⁹

Jazz was central to the meeting and friendship of Amis and Larkin at Oxford, and was the subject of much discussion at the time, and in their letters in later years. Amis and Larkin saw the appeal of jazz as generational, and more specifically it helped define the group of friends in Oxford.⁶⁰ It has been suggested that this linked to Amis’ sense of rebellion against his father, in contrast to Larkin, whose father had encouraged his interest in jazz.⁶¹ As with other jazz fans, records played an important role in discovering and enjoying jazz for the Oxford friends. Larkin was particularly knowledgeable about jazz, and had a good collection of records, and Amis later remembered Larkin bringing records to his room by artists he had never heard of.⁶² These included the so-called ‘Banks sides’ by Billy Banks and his Rhythm Makers, and recorded in four sessions in 1932. The performers included Billy Banks, Harry Allen, Pee Wee Russell, Joe Sullivan, Fats Waller, Jimmy Lord, and Tommy Dorsey,

and they played a mixture of 'blues, standards and oddities'. The strength of the recordings being that so many talented musicians played 'instinctively combining in a common language to generate a hard-hitting, unaffected excitement, not without humour, but utterly without kidding.'⁶³ Amis loved these recordings for their emotional and musical brilliance, and unlike Larkin couldn't get his own copy as it was out of print. Amis recalled that the music meant so much to him that when it became available again he immediately bought his own copy, even though he was in the army and had no way of playing records. He wrote 'I kept it on the table by my camp-bed just to look at, an icon not even to be picked up unnecessarily for fear of scratching it.'⁶⁴

The 'Banks sides' remained an important reference point for jazz fans, and much later, in 1968, Larkin asked in his *Daily Telegraph* column when it and other 'really original' recordings would be re-issued.⁶⁵ Amis wrote to him a week later 'Is there any way we can get a lobby for the Lp pee (sic) reissue of the Banks sides (I saw your plea)?'⁶⁶ The recordings were re-issued the following year and Larkin consequently gave them a glowing review in the *Daily Telegraph* in May 1970.⁶⁷ The importance of these recordings was such that Amis recalled Larkin making a rare excursion to a live gig to see Banks perform in the mid 1950s in Belfast. However his 'unconquerable hope' was soon quashed by a disappointing performance which included a tribute to Al Jolson.⁶⁸

For Amis and Larkin the Banks sides represented authentic jazz, and this became wrapped up with nostalgia about youth, Oxford and the various friendships they found there. Significantly the friendship between Amis and Larkin was often strained after Oxford, and Bradford suggests that Larkin stopped communicating with Amis in 1961 and there is little contact in the following decade, as Larkin became disillusioned with Amis' behaviour. Although contact resumed, there were clearly differences and Martin Amis recalled his father 'defeatedly' commenting after Larkin's funeral that 'It sounds odd, but I wonder If I ever really knew him'. He noted that 'everyone' saw his father held Larkin in great regard, but that although this was reciprocated at Oxford, soon after Larkin's letters to others often mentioned Amis with 'a certain sourness'.⁶⁹ It is apparent a degree of jealousy about Amis' literary successes may have been behind this early on, but Larkin also disliked parts of Amis'

personality including what he saw as Amis' superficiality and willingness to act without thinking of the consequences, and Bradford suggests they both misunderstood each other. It is significant that Larkin only invited Amis to visit him once in his 30 years at Hull, and Amis pulled out at the last minute.⁷⁰ Larkin's 'sour' approach to Amis could also be apparent when it came to jazz which was such an important part of their relationship. For example he wrote to Monica Jones in January 1958 that he had heard a radio show on jazz by Amis, and that 'EVERY SINGLE RECORD he played I had taken up to Oxford, and introduced him to in 1941: well, almost every one....He spoke quite well, but not entirely accurately, and showed rather a denseness, almost an insensitivity, towards his subject. Oh well.'⁷¹

Although these personal differences were apparent, the two men shared a great deal in their approach to jazz, not least in their attitude to modern jazz. Amis was also critical of modernism in general, and used some quite dramatic language to dismiss modern jazz, but he could also be more considered and positive about the latter as well. In his *Memoirs*, in a tone that echoed Larkin, he noted the irony that as his interest in jazz was flourishing, Parker and Gillespie had begun to play modern jazz and bring about 'the slow but sure destruction of the music I had just begun to love.'⁷² Beset by not only modern jazz, but jazz 'concerts', 33 rpm albums instead of the 3 plus minute 78 rpm 'purposely selected...no doubt to fit the average dance hall number', and 'respectability' granted by 'critics, journals and university courses', jazz was in trouble. When he visited the United States in 1958-9 he noted the 'disarray was perceptible'. Having seen Miles Davis live at Birdland, whose playing was 'introverted, gloomy, sour in both senses', he claimed he 'had heard the future, and it sounded horrible.' Amis concluded that Jazz had gone from the Hot Five to Ornette Coleman in 40 years, and his music was gone 'Only the name survives' and 'there is nothing but a bloody great hole where a quite an important part of my life used to be.'⁷³

This last quotation is full of regret and nostalgia for times past, and a frustration that something Amis saw as simple, honest and 'authentic' had become complicated, clever and specialised. And this view was repeated in later letters when Amis and Larkin moaned grumpily about modern jazz. For example in September 1979 Amis moaned to Larkin about the radio 3 show *Jazz Records Requests* playing

too many modern tracks. 'These people have no TASTE, no SENSE. no EAR.' he complained.⁷⁴ However the *Memoirs* were published in 1991 and Amis' take on jazz in some ways compares to Larkin's introduction to *All What Jazz*. Amis' writing in the 1950s when he became jazz critic for the *Observer* tells a slightly different story. If Larkin never saw himself as a critic, then this was even more the case for Amis. His articles were less considered than Larkin's and he had a refreshing lack of pretension about his comments: 'I've always responded to it in an uneducated sort of way' to jazz, he told Michael Barber in 1975.⁷⁵ His first column in April 1956 suggested he wouldn't make any claims of social or political value, and his main point was that as the BBC didn't play much jazz, fans had to buy records, but they could tire of these. He advised anyone interested in jazz should consult their 'natural prudence'.⁷⁶ By December he was voicing his misgivings about modern jazz: 'I should apologise for having an old-fangled ear which, while capable of a grudging tolerance for what appears to be harmonic oddity, swiftly grows fatigued at what it hears as melodic inconsequence.'⁷⁷

In subsequent articles, praise was heaped upon Fats Waller, Armstrong, and others but he was also positive about modern jazz.⁷⁸ He reviewed a JJ Johnson and Kai Winding album in December 1957 and commented 'Nobody unless he thinks that jazz finished about the time electrical recording came in, can fail to enjoy this record.'⁷⁹ The following year in a review of various modern records he gave *Miles Ahead* 'modernist garland of the month', noting that Davis played the flugelhorn, 'I have never heard his strange, spare sombre romanticism come off better.... This is not a record for a party or to fill the odd half hour, but it is one that will abundantly reward repeated listening.'⁸⁰ In a later article, Gerry Mulligan was also seen as 'A Good Modernist.'⁸¹

There is a straightforward approach to jazz in the *Observer* articles that suggests Amis is not trying to be an objective critic in the way that has sometimes been suggested for Larkin. Amis' down to earth style and occasional self-deprecation didn't prevent him from making some perceptive observations in these articles, which revealed a genuine interest in jazz. In June 1956 Amis argued that the assumption that great artists were better than the commercial or less well known was untrue, and he suggested British jazz could sometimes be as good as its American counterpart.⁸² In a

later 1958 article Amis discussed Parker, who became the *bête noire* in some ways for the older Amis, but received a more balanced consideration in a review of *The Immortal Charlie Parker*. Amis wrote that Parker's 'virtues' were on display including 'the personal flavour, the startling exuberance, the daring melodic angularity, the robustness that showed itself equally in moods of gaiety and melancholy.' He added 'Parker's claim as a great modernist innovator stands abundantly justified.' This is then qualified by suggesting that Parker didn't 'swing' enough, could be rhythmically 'dull', repetitive and his tone could decline into 'slithery querulousness', and he suggested that others would take his 'significant' discoveries forward. Interestingly Amis also mentioned that Davis is 'overshadowed' on some these recordings, 'but he 'was to emerge as a far finer and more thoughtful performer.'⁸³

This positive comments on Davis in the review of *Miles Ahead* stands in contrast to the criticisms of the Birdland gig during his 1958-9 visit mentioned in the *Memoirs*. Further evidence of a change of heart in the later work is presented in a letter from Amis to Larkin after his return in July 1959 in which he listed various artists he had seen and enjoyed at Eddie Condon's club and included Davis, Art Farmer, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Art Blakey as well as older artists including Ellington.⁸⁴ Indeed even *Memoirs* itself was not totally consistent in its depiction of modern jazz as a corrosive force as he described seeing Sonny Rollins at the Five Spot 'just then at the height of his powers, and the fact that these were not altogether to my taste-I was already a little too old for him-mattered not at all'.⁸⁵

Not everyone appreciated Amis' *Observer* articles. 'I keep getting abusive letters about my jazz pieces' he told Larkin in June 1956, whilst an exchange with John Dankworth revealed some of the frustrations musicians faced with critics. Dankworth wrote to the *Observer* to complain that Amis was incorrect in his use of musical terminology, and his criticisms of modern jazz including the notion of 'complexity', which Dankworth argued was relative and could apply to earlier jazz. Amis's praised Dankworth in his reply, but said limitations of space and a knowledgeable readership meant he didn't spell everything out in his articles. He also admitted he didn't like all Jazz.⁸⁶ Amis got on well with trumpeter Rex Stewart when he met him in New York 1958, and they discussed Ellington amongst other subjects,

but less so with trumpeter Joe Thomas who was drunk and less friendly.⁸⁷ As we have already seen Amis attended many gigs during his 1958/9 and seemed to have enjoyed most of them, but he also came to share some of Larkin's misgivings about live performance, although he also attended more gigs than his friend. In *Memoirs* he echoed Larkin in his description of jazz concerts as he suggested that enthusiastic audiences 'deform' jazz along with the long drum and bass solos.⁸⁸

Amis also shared Larkin's interest in post war popular music and that it represented a new phase in the development of jazz. He argued that Rhythm and Blues was a directly emerged from jazz and he liked some of this, although rock'n'roll was 'a tasteless exploitation'. Earl Bostic received some praise, but there was more for Chuck Berry who made 'fresh, buoyant music, whose superficial resemblance to rock 'n' roll only highlights the basic differences between the real and the spurious.'⁸⁹ The last comment was rather strange given Berry's role in emerging rock'n'roll. Amis also had some time for the Beatles, although not as much as Larkin. He told Robert Conquest in December 1964 that 'The Beatles are as good as ever'⁹⁰ However he told the keener Larkin in 1969 'Oh Fuck the Beatles. I'd like to push my bum into John L's face for forty eight hours or so, as a protest against all the war and violence in the world.' He did add however 'I like the way they're so much more popular than any kind of modern jazz shag at all, though'.⁹¹ Later still Amis told Larkin, 'You are mad about the Beatles. They're not too bad I suppose, but I feel I could always be listening to Jimmie Launceford instead.' He added that he thought they remained interesting longer than Larkin though, indeed up to *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, but that he wasn't impressed by John Lennon who he had met twice but had been rude to his wife the first time 'the English one not the Nip', then 'just generally offensive' the second. 'No breeding what?' he added.⁹²

Amis clearly shared Larkin's view that post war popular music could have value and in many ways carried the spirit of the jazz that they liked from before the war. In making this point though, the last comments also revealed why Amis's reputation suffered after the publication of his letters in 2000. As with Larkin the language and content of the letters, including Amis' rumbustious style didn't go down well with critics and readers, but there wasn't the same sense of shock about what the letters contained, as Larkin's, including many to Amis, had already been published

and additionally the shock was less in itself as they seemed to fit with what was already known about Amis. Nor has Amis' reputation recovered in the same way that Larkin's has, and he is seldom taught or often read. And his views have remained controversial. In 2007 Over a decade after his death, Terry Eagleton accused Amis of being racist and homophobic, in a critique which also took in Martin Amis; claims which were vigorously denied by various family members and former wife Elizabeth Jane Howard.⁹³ However as the quotation from the 1981 letter revealed, he had since the 1960s moved decisively from the left to right, became a vigorous critic of the left, and sometimes used provocative and inflammatory language. After all this was someone who boasted of having 'fascist' lunches at Bertorelli's Restaurant in Charlotte Street during the late 1960s. As Leader has pointed out, the title may have been used 'humorously', but it illustrates in a small way why Amis has attracted criticism.⁹⁴

That having been said for the purposes of this chapter Amis, like Larkin, didn't see jazz in overtly political terms (or in the latter's case in sociological or historical terms), and he was aware and critical of racism in the United States. When visiting Vanderbilt University for a semester in the autumn of 1967, Amis wrote to Robert Conquest attacking the racism he encountered in Nashville complaining that the 'buggers haven't learned a thing'. He continued 'One can forgive a lefty here, in that "conservative" opinion is so shitty'.⁹⁵ In *Memoirs* he similarly recalled the shocking level of racism he discovered on this visit, including a meal with academic colleagues that 'about the stage of the second highball' participants began making disparaging 'remarks about the mental, moral, social qualities of black people.' He added that whilst in Nashville, bar a couple of exceptions, he 'never sensed, let alone heard, any disagreement from the consensus of irremediable and universal black inferiority, perhaps to be alleviated here and there but never altered, and the important thing was keeping them down.'⁹⁶ In a more focused sense, Amis did show an interest in the 'white' Chicago jazz, but this was a music preference, and he offered fulsome praise for black jazz musicians, and his criticism of modern jazz didn't even extend to criticisms of links to Black Nationalist politics.

Philip Larkin reviewed Francis Newton's *The Jazz Scene* for *The Observer* in 1959, and he praised the book saying 'it is a pleasure to read a jazz writer who can

speak seriously without becoming stilted or absurd.’ Larkin did have some criticisms including ‘lack of charm’ and a tendency at times to see jazz as a ‘social and economic parable’ something which ‘the social historian Mr. Newton, never misses a trick’, however ‘his palpable love of their music convinces the reader of his sincerity, even if some of his contentions start rather than settle arguments.’⁹⁷ This review fits in with Larkin’s wider intellectual engagement with jazz, which took on board historical and sociological factors and he was not put off by the Marxist basis of Newton’s writing. Newton was of course the pen name for Eric Hobsbawm, taken from a communist trumpeter who played with Billie Holiday. Hobsbawm was an academic at Birkbeck, University of London, and *The Jazz Scene* along with *Primitive Rebels* were both published in 1959. Hobsbawm went on to write widely and successfully on social history and the works were at the start of a prolific career that would see him becoming one of the most significant historians of his generation. This obviously marks a contrast with Larkin and Amis who were writers mainly of fiction, as does the fact that Hobsbawm, who died in 2012 didn’t leave the smoking gun of shocking letters which the other two did. Indeed although critics still rumble on about why Hobsbawm didn’t leave the Communist Party in the 1950s and his support for communism, his reputation is still intact.⁹⁸

Hobsbawm had little to say about Larkin or Amis, although he pointed out that both writers were part of a group who ‘advertised’ a taste for jazz in the post war years and ‘did so precisely because it was the badge of the provincial and the outsider’, and that they did so as ‘The intellectual press did not give it house-room until the middle 1950s.’⁹⁹ As we have seen, this accurately captured the position of both writers. In addition, Hobsbawm rather unflatteringly noted that Amis’ articles in the *Observer* were ‘about a subject about which he obviously knew no more and possibly less about than I did’. Hobsbawm had been a confirmed jazz fan since seeing Duke Ellington play a ‘breakfast dance’ at the Streatham Astoria in 1933, shortly after his family had returned to England, and he explained how he had been on the ‘fringes’ of the jazz ‘community of experts’ through his cousin Denis Preston who went on to work in recording and music production. However he became more involved after ‘Kingsley Amis gave me courage’ and he entered the debate through *The Jazz Scene* and after he contacted the *New Statesman*, he talked the editor

Kingsley Martin into allowing him to write a column for the journal beginning in 1960.¹⁰⁰

The Jazz Scene remains a remarkable book, with a powerful introduction, and conventional history in the early part, but also covering business, audience and politics. As Philip Bounds has pointed out, the book can be seen as an important but underrated intervention in debates within the communist movement over their approach to Americanised popular culture.¹⁰¹ The book offered a perceptive and compelling analysis of the role of jazz within the mass society, seeing mass culture as more complex than much Marxist thinking had previously suggested. Jazz, Hobsbawm suggested, was now a global music influential in Britain and elsewhere beyond its American origins. It had ‘changed with startling rapidity’ and had surpassed other subcultural forms having a widespread impact on popular music more generally. This meant Jazz was the most successful example of a folk art form surviving in the mechanised environment of mass culture, and in the process revealing ‘it was never swamped by the cultural standards of the upper classes’.¹⁰²

Hobsbawm argued that Jazz’s vibrancy came in part from the fact that it wasn’t a passive art form, but involved listeners and performers who both had an influence on what constituted jazz and that its appeal had ‘always been due to its capacity to supply the things commercial pop music ironed out of its product’.¹⁰³ As other subcultural musical forms would do later in the twentieth century, Hobsbawm suggested that Jazz became a creative force in the Entertainment industry supplying innovation for the larger companies when they needed new music. Importantly, Hobsbawm didn’t idealise small record companies, suggesting they kept jazz ticking over when it was ignored by the bigger companies, but that they could also be exploitative.¹⁰⁴

The book also described jazz as ‘music of protest and rebellion’, and one that was generally close to the left, although he also suggested that this was often ‘vague’ and sometimes accidental. Jazz’s political angle came from being populist and democratic and at its best Hobsbawm suggested ‘it has come nearer to breaking down class lines than any other art’, bringing together players and audiences from different backgrounds. Race was an important factor in this regard, and Hobsbawm points out

that white audiences were sometimes drawn to black culture, including the Mezz Mezzrow's concept of the 'White negro' ¹⁰⁵ However Hobsbawm suggested that the appeal of jazz was also about more general sense of being outsider, although this didn't always translate into an idea of what jazz was actually 'for'. Sometimes this search for meaning led to interest in official approval with jazz becoming respectable, something which Hobsbawm suggested would be unfortunate.¹⁰⁶

Significantly, although Hobsbawm didn't attack modern jazz in the book, it is notable that he writes about it without much warmth. It is also clear that he saw it as having a more problematic relationship with its audience than earlier jazz. He described the modern jazz movement as 'a musician's revolt', which was 'directed against the public', although he also saw it as a revolt against 'a standardised floods of commercial noise', that reflected a more confident black community which had emerged in 1930s. He also pointed out that it was white and not black critics and fans who made sure that the modern jazz artists were 'speedily recognised' and white record companies soon picked up and marketed 'bop', as well as music schools and the Universities. Even the Government had got in on the act, he pointed out, with Dizzy Gillespie acting as a cultural ambassador overseas.¹⁰⁷ Hobsbawm discovered jazz in the 1930s, so in a similar vein to Larkin and Amis, he was writing about a modern jazz movement that had already been in motion for nearly twenty years, but was also different to the jazz he had grown up with. In terms similar to both Larkin and Amis, Hobsbawm later recalled problems when approaching modern jazz. 'Writing about jazz in the 1950s meant, basically, trying to understand or at least come to terms with bebop' he wrote, adding that 'passionate jazz conservative' Larkin 'eventually felt he had to make a gesture in this direction.' Hobsbawm explained that he 'wasn't sure how far I succeeded', although he liked Monk, and had 'an immediate passion for Dizzy Gillespie, the most dazzling trumpeter in the world.' Interestingly he noted his 'admiration' for Miles Davis was 'based on his records, not any live performances I heard'.¹⁰⁸

Hobsbawm's articles for the *New Statesman*, were less focused on the issue of modern jazz than Larkin and Amis' jazz writings were, and he was also able to be flexible in his choice of subject as he wasn't restricted to record reviews. In January 1960 a rather disillusioned article 'Too Cool' lamented what Hobsbawm saw as the

lacklustre state of jazz during the decade that had just passed, citing the absence of big stars. At this point, he was less convinced by Miles Davis who he saw as characteristic of the 1950s jazz and 'is an altogether lesser man than those who dominated earlier.' Jazz he argued had got too cool, academic and intellectual, and the only good thing happening was that it was looking again to the blues.¹⁰⁹ Later at the start of 1963 Hobsbawm complained that a 'wonderful' year for pop music, was less so for jazz which 'remains where it has long been, scouring the bottom of the Parker barrel, or semi-quarantined in the avantest of avant-gardes.'¹¹⁰

Hobsbawm was interested in what he saw as the avant garde (with which he seems to bracket a lot of post bop modern jazz), but was ambivalent about its significance. Commenting on Charles Mingus, Hobsbawm wrote 'These men have advanced beyond Parker into an empty territory where no old landmarks guide the musician on his way: tonality, the steady beat, improvisation based on chord progressions', yet he pointed out that Ornette Coleman, was different as he had advanced 'without abandoning the deep, tearing feeling of the blues.'¹¹¹ If we recall, Larkin also saw something special in Coleman, despite his greater misgivings about modern jazz. Later Hobsbawm suggested that the avant garde had kept a close relationship between musicians and audience, but he was more confused by Sonny Rollins than Amis had been a few years earlier, writing that he 'continues to experiment, and what he is up to know one knows.'¹¹²

However one of the common themes in Hobsbawm's jazz writing in this period was the impact of post war rock and pop. He was well aware of the cross-fertilisation between jazz and pop, but he now believed the latter was swamping the former.¹¹³ His 'wonderful year' for pop fans in 1963 was meant ironically and Hobsbawm argued that the 'Beat vogue' had overwhelmed other popular music and 'it marks a major breakthrough of mass culture'. He makes the rather unusual point that more fan memorabilia including Beatles wigs were now being sold than had been when Elvis broke through. 'What is even more significant, it bowled over the squares' he added and 'the intellectuals (apart from a sceptical minority) fell for it'. He lamented that even Salvation Army had changed their music due to the pop revolution.¹¹⁴

Although Larkin and Amis had problems with aspects of post war popular music, they both also saw that it had some validity and a connection to pre-war jazz. This explains their liking of the early Beatles, Dylan and others, even if in Amis was less enthusiastic. Hobsbawm was more dismissive of the Beatles in a November 1963 *New Statesman* article suggesting that ‘in 29 years nothing of them will survive’, unlike the Blues music which he celebrated by describing still powerful performers with longevity, including Sonny Boy Williamson.¹¹⁵ This was obviously early in the Beatles career, and he later remarked about his ‘spectacular failure to recognize their potential’ and coming later to ‘rather admire them’.¹¹⁶ However he had little time for the Rolling Stones and he also had mixed feelings about Dylan in whom he only saw in ‘fragments of genius’.¹¹⁷ In a typically considered appraisal in the summer of 1964, he described the singer as a voice for outsiders, ‘a politically conscious Holden Caulfield’, who also ‘sings in an unprofessional raw ramble’; doesn’t have the ‘musicality, nor the fun, nor the anonymous oppression’ of the blues singers. And although there were ‘fairly numerous bad verses....Dylan’s capacity to write unassuming tunes should not be underrated: when performed by technically better musicians their possibilities are evident.’¹¹⁸ Misgivings or praise for individual artists was one thing, but Hobsbawm saw Rock as a commercial force which undermined jazz and reflected an unmediated mass cultural form.¹¹⁹

If Hobsbawm was critical of post war popular music, and had mixed feelings about modern jazz, he was full of praise for various artists including Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and most frequently, Duke Ellington. The latter was ‘a genius’ who ‘burst the limits’ of his 1930s emergence, and remained vibrant and relevant. On Ellington’s death in 1974, Hobsbawm wrote that he was ‘the last and greatest of the jazz musicians’ and he doubted ‘whether jazz as we have known it will survive his death.’¹²⁰ It is interesting that in his obituary for Ellington he remembered seeing him live for the first time at Streatham Astoria in 1933, as well as in San Francisco in 1960, and that this crystallised his memory of the ‘unique’ contribution the musician made to the ‘world of jazz.’ In contrast with Larkin, there is no sense of Hobsbawm having misgivings about live jazz, even when, as in the case of Miles Davis, he was less impressed. Indeed working at Birkbeck and living in the west end, gave Hobsbawm the chance to get involved in the London jazz scene, with easy access to live music where he could also rub shoulders with other fans and local

musicians. He recalled 'my main base was the Downbeat Club in Old Compton Street... which, like so many of London's modern musicians and their hangers on, I used as an off-duty reporting point.' Soho also provided 'after hours joints' for music and 'gossip', whereas Ronnie Scott's, which had recently opened was more about listening than talking. The small clubs made more impression on Hobsbawm than the larger concerts, and he was similarly impressed when in the US he 'was to discover the glory of a jazz scene based primarily on clubs', including hearing the Ellington band. He argued 'I suppose this and meeting the tragic pianist Bud Powell in his Paris hotel room, catatonic except when at the keyboard, are the most vivid memories of my jazz years.'¹²¹

Hobsbawm drew up a special relationship with musicians in the jazz scene, where as an academic he was seen as an 'odddity', but also a source of information. However he was under no illusions about the distance between the musician and critic. As he put it 'could any non-musician understand what creative musicians are really about, however much he socialised with them?' This was even more the case with black artists, and he noted how American jazz and blues artists were used to white questioners and often had 'an informative narrative ready'.¹²² However his involvement in the jazz scene came to an end in the 1960s. He recalled that 'jazz is essentially an anti-social, late-night activity and not really conducive to a family life, so in the end I gave it up.'¹²³ He carried on with jazz articles for a while and of course he continued to write perceptively about jazz in scholarly articles and reviews, and it was significant enough for him to include several articles in the collection *Uncommon People* (1999). However he suggested this wasn't as much fun as being involved in the jazz scene.¹²⁴

Conclusion

From the above it is clear that all three writers discussed had a deep love of jazz and made a significant contribution to developing jazz criticism in Britain. They were part of the process that saw jazz move from being largely the property of small jazz networks to becoming as a serious subject for discussion in the broadsheets and amongst the broader public. The fact that all three writers were critical of the growing

respectability of jazz is somewhat ironic, given their own role in this process, but its not that unusual when fans turned critics convey their enthusiasm to a wider audience. Larkin, Amis and Hobsbawm were all fans first, who then wrote about jazz, largely due to the absence of established critics, and although there were differences between them they all approached the music through the prism of the music and musicians of the 1930s and 40s, and a strong interest in the blues. It is perhaps inevitable that they were influenced by the jazz they first encountered, as its appeal was partly built on its generational impact. Here was a popular music of American origin, that was modern, commercial but also aesthetic which young fans and musicians thought they understood and had ownership of. Larkin and Amis clung to this vision of jazz ‘that incredible argot of the first half of the century’, linking it to time and place, most obviously Oxford in the early 1940s, which made it much harder to accept the way jazz developed within a different post war mass culture. And neither was Hobsbawm immune from this as his discovery of jazz in the 1930s not long after his arrival in Britain, was an important part of his own story.

There were of course differences between these three critics, with Hobsbawm a Marxist historian bringing a broad historical understanding to jazz, whereas Larkin and Amis were moving to the right in this period, and wrote from a more personal perspective, and at times as cultural critics. Larkin did offer a careful reading of jazz, and wrote brilliantly about it, occasionally echoing Hobsbawm’s historical approach, whereas Amis was much less concerned with putting jazz in an intellectual framework – something he was disarmingly honest about. Larkin and Amis were also more concerned with the issue of modern jazz, relating it to their dislike of modernism more generally. This was in many ways a false debate, as all jazz was modernist, and as John Osborne has pointed out the real issue was not modernism but that Larkin believed Parker and others had made modernist jazz less accessible.¹²⁵ Furthermore as we have seen, for whatever reason, both Larkin and Amis didn’t universally dismiss all modern jazz and were at times positive about certain artists. They also saw potential in post war popular music, linking it to the jazz they had grown up with. In contrast, Hobsbawm was less focused on modern jazz as a subject and was also generally less critical. However he was also concerned about the way modern jazz was becoming less accessible, and he also had misgivings about what he saw as the avant garde. Hobsbawm wrote more warmly about Ellington, Basie and others than he

did about Beboppers. Significantly he was also more critical of post war popular music, seeing it as a poor relation of jazz, representing commercialised mass culture.

One intriguing difference between the three writers was their attitude to live jazz. Strangely, Larkin and Amis who made so much of the vigour and energy of jazz, were, other than at Oxford, less keen on watching it live, whereas the academic Hobsbawm was not only part of the London jazz scene in the 1950 and early 1960s, but appreciated live performances. All three appreciated the gap between critic/fan and musician, and indeed held the latter in a certain degree of reverence.

Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and Eric Hobsbawm did much to bring jazz criticism to new audiences, and wrote with intelligence, humour and enthusiasm. Larkin and Hobsbawm's work stands to this day for their perceptive insights into jazz. Amis' writing on jazz is less significant, but was interesting at times, and made some valuable points about jazz. He also demystified the role of the jazz critic to some degree. However, their work opened the way for later professional jazz critics, and helped illuminate the significance of 'one of the most remarkable cultural phenomena of our century' at a key point in its history.

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⁵ For example Feather wrote for *Downbeat* in the 1950s and 60s, Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, 174.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 358-9.

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⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

¹² Larkin to Peter Crawley, 19 June 1969, in Anthony Thwaite (ed.), *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1940-85* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 416-17.

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¹⁵ Larkin, *All What Jazz*, 18-22.

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¹⁸ Alan Plater 'Foreword', in *Larkin: Jazz Writings*, 29-31.

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²⁰ Larkin, *All What Jazz*, 73.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

²² *Ibid.*, 180-2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 190.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 218-9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

²⁶ Tolley, *On Proper Ground*, 140-1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46; 80-81.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁰ Palmer and White, *Larkin: Jazz Writings*, 163.

³¹ Larkin, *All What Jazz*, 142.

³² *Ibid.*, 186-188.

³³ Palmer and White, *Larkin: Jazz Writings*, xxv.

³⁴ Larkin to Amis, 21 Nov 1985. This is the last letter included in *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin*, 757-6.

³⁵ White and Palmer (eds), *Larkin: Jazz Writings*, 131-4. (This was originally published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 23 April 1965.)

³⁶ Larkin to Monica Jones, 23 April 1965 Anthony Thwaite (ed.), *Letters to Monica* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011 edn.), 346-7.

³⁷ *The Observer*, 9 October 1983.

³⁸ Leggett, *Larkin's Blues*, 143-71.

³⁹ Larkin, *All What Jazz*, 15-17.

⁴⁰ James Booth, *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 316-7. The broadcast is currently available for download at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p009n018> (visited 29 October 2015)

⁴¹ Philip Larkin, 'For Sidney Bechet', *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 83.

⁴² Larkin to Amis, 21 Nov 1985, *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin*, 757-9.

⁴³ Introductory notes by John White, pp.6-11 in booklet with 'Larkin's Jazz' 4 CD Boxset (Proper Records, 2010)

⁴⁴ Kingsley Amis, *Memoirs* (London: Vintage, 2004 edn.), 52-3.

⁴⁵ Palmer and White, *Larkin: Jazz Writings*, xi.

⁴⁶ Larkin to Amis, 23 Sept 1979, *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin*, 605.

⁴⁷ Martin Amis, introduction to *Philip Larkin, Poems*, xxi-xxii

⁴⁸ Booth, *Philip Larkin*, 6.

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- ⁴⁹ See for example George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2005) and Duncan Heining, *Trad Dads, Dirty Boppers and Free Fusioneers* (London: Equinox, 2012)
- ⁵⁰ Larkin, *All What Jazz*, 24-5.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.87
- ⁵² Palmer and White, *Larkin: Jazz Writings*, ix-x, xvi-xvii
- ⁵³ Tolley, *On Proper Ground*, 137.
- ⁵⁴ The quote is taken from the short story 'I Spy Strangers', when shortly after Labour's victory in the 1945 election, Labour supporting Lieutenant Archer, looking forward to returning to civilian life, is having a heart to heart with fascist sympathiser Sergeant Doll. They are discussing the future of England, and Archer commented "England". Not your England, Archer said to himself, not the petrol-flogging C.Q.M.S's England, nor the Major's or Cleaver's England, or the Adjutant's or the Colonel's or Jack Rowney's or Tom Thurston's England, but to a certain extent Hargreaves' England and absolutely my England, full of girls and drinks and jazz and books and decent houses and decent jobs and being your own boss.' Kingsley Amis, *My Enemy's Enemy* (London: Penguin, 1965 edn.), 85.
- ⁵⁵ Kingsley Amis, 'Interview: The Art of Fiction, No. 59', *The Paris Review*, 64 (1975) <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3772/the-art-of-fiction-no-59-kingsley-amis> (visited 4 July 2014)
- ⁵⁶ Amis, *Memoirs*, 36-40, 65.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 52-4.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40-2.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-8.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ⁶¹ Richard Bradford, *The Odd Couple: The Curious Friendship Between Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin* (London: The Robson Press, 2012), 33.
- ⁶² Zachary Leader, *The Life of Kingsley Amis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), 113.
- ⁶³ Larkin, *All What Jazz*, 255-6.
- ⁶⁴ Amis, *Memoirs*, 65-6.
- ⁶⁵ Larkin, *All What Jazz*, 203.
- ⁶⁶ Amis to Larkin, 20 April 1968; Zachary Leader (ed.), *The Letters of Kingsley Amis* (London, Harper Collins, 2000), 697.
- ⁶⁷ Larkin, *All What Jazz*, 255-6. See Larkin to Robert Conquest, 7 April 1969, *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin*, 413.
- ⁶⁸ Amis, *Memoirs*, 66.
- ⁶⁹ Martin Amis, introduction to *Philip Larkin, Poems*, p.xix.
- ⁷⁰ Bradford, *The Odd Couple*, 234; Booth, *Philip Larkin*, ix, 224.
- ⁷¹ Larkin to Monica Jones, 29 Jan 1958, *Letters to Monica* 235.
- ⁷² Amis, *Memoirs*, p.66
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 66-69
- ⁷⁴ Amis to Larkin, 29 Sept 1979, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*, 875-6
- ⁷⁵ Interview with Kingsley Amis
- ⁷⁶ *The Observer*, 13 May 1956.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 Dec 1956.
- ⁷⁸ For example, see *The Observer*, 13 May 1956 on Armstrong and Waller; 6 October 1957 on Armstrong and Ellington
- ⁷⁹ *The Observer* 1 Dec 1957.
- ⁸⁰ *The Observer*, 13 Apr 1958.

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- ⁸¹ *The Observer*, 17 August 1958.
- ⁸² Amis believed the Humphrey Lyttelton Band were the ‘best British band’. *The Observer*, 17 June 1956.
- ⁸³ *The Observer*, 15 June 1958
- ⁸⁴ Amis to Larkin, 30 July 1959, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*, 558-9.
- ⁸⁵ Amis, *Memoirs*, 198.
- ⁸⁶ ‘Jazz Discords’ in Letters to the Editor, *The Observer*, 20 Jan 1957.
- ⁸⁷ Amis, *Memoirs*, 69.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.
- ⁸⁹ *The Observer*, 21 Oct 1956.
- ⁹⁰ Amis to Robert Conquest, 31 Dec 1964, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*, 658.
- ⁹¹ Amis to Larkin, 19 April 1969, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*, 713.
- ⁹² Amis to Larkin, 24 June 1981, *ibid.*, 925.
- ⁹³ They were responding to claims made by Terry Eagleton.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1565696/Family-defends-racist-Sir-Kingsley-Amis.html> (visited 9 November 2015). See also John Sutherland, *The Guardian*, 4 Oct 2007
- ⁹⁴ Leader, *The Life of Kingsley Amis*, 565-6.
- ⁹⁵ Amis to Conquest, 1 Nov 1967, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*, 689.
- ⁹⁶ Amis, *Memoirs*, 283.
- ⁹⁷ Palmer and White, *Larkin: Jazz Writings*, 20-24.
- ⁹⁸ Recent critics included the Conservative Michael Gove who attacked Hobsbawm in 2008. Michael Gove MP. "Our greatest living apologist." *Times* [London, England] 27 Oct. 2008: 22. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. (Visited 8 Mar. 2016) The opinion of current historians on Hobsbawm after news of his death, see *Guardian*, 1 October 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/01/eric-hobsbawm-historian> (visited 9 Nov 2015)
- ⁹⁹ Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People*, 361.
- ¹⁰⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Diary*, *London Review of Books*, 27 May 2010
<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n10/eric-hobsbawm/diary> (visited 29 Apr 2015). See also *Guardian*, 23 Dec 2000 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/dec/23/historybooks> (visited 6 June 2015)
- ¹⁰¹ Philip Bounds, ‘From Folk to Jazz: Eric Hobsbawm, British Communism and Cultural Studies’, *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 40, 4 (2012), 575-93.
- ¹⁰² Newton, *The Jazz Scene*, 3-4; .33.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, pp169-90; 220-51. For a perceptive analysis of the book’s take on jazz and the entertainment industry see Bounds, *From Folk to Jazz*, 588-91.
- ¹⁰⁵ Newton, *The Jazz Scene*, 258.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 252-69.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 76-8.
- ¹⁰⁸ Hobsbawm ‘Diary’.
- ¹⁰⁹ *New Statesman*, 16 January 1960
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 January 1963
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1 March 1963
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 22 Jan 1965.
- ¹¹³ Newton, *The Jazz Scene*, 155-68.
- ¹¹⁴ *New Statesman*, 3 Jan 1964
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 November 1963.

¹¹⁶ Hobsbawm. 'Diary'

¹¹⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Abacus, 2003 edn.), 52.

¹¹⁸ *New Statesman*, 22 May 1964.

¹¹⁹ Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People*, 329, 376.

¹²⁰ *New Statesman*, 18 Feb 1966; 'Goodbye to the Duke', *The Observer*, 26 May 1974.

¹²¹ Hobsbawm, 'Diary', *London Review of Books*.

¹²² *Ibid.*,

¹²³ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/dec/23/historybooks>

¹²⁴ Hobsbawm, 'Diary'

¹²⁵ John Osborne, *Larkin, Ideology and Critical Violence: A Case of Wrongful Conviction* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 31.