

I feel like it's quite easy to get views and develop a following on [TikTok]. [O]n Instagram, [...], unless there was an exceptional amount of attention or traction to the video, it would only get shown to my followers. So there's such little room for growth. Any growth on Instagram tended to be from external sources. So the only reason why I've got a few thousand followers on Instagram is because my Instagram is attached to my TikTok. It trickles down followers. [...] I mean, the case in point is that I had zero followers on TikTok when I posted my first video and then overnight I had 10,000 followers and, like, two million views. You know, that doesn't happen on Instagram. (Sam Ambers, interview)

It is noteworthy that other platforms apart from Instagram are only briefly referenced in the interviews. While some of the interviewees do mention Facebook, they seldom discuss other platforms such as YouTube, SoundCloud, Bandcamp, Twitch, or X (formerly Twitter). It is evident that the interviewees' age is a contributing factor. Individuals under the age of twenty-five are currently more inclined to utilize platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Conversely, as previously mentioned, Caity Gyorgy and Erny Nunez have provided insights into their experiences with other platforms, which are at times a cause for concern. It is similarly conceivable that the particular and relatively homogeneous content for which the interviewees became known on TikTok may not be equally popular on all platforms due to the presence of different functional logics and target groups.

6.9 TikTok's Potential Influence on Jazz Culture

It has been demonstrated that certain types of jazz-related content are more visible on TikTok than others. The musicians interviewed are aware of this phenomenon and, as a result, develop specific strategies and occasionally produce videos specifically for the platform with a high degree of precision and according to clearly defined criteria. In light of the considerable influence that musicians wield on TikTok, it is worth examining the extent to which the platform is shaping the public perception of jazz. The interviewees concur that TikTok presents a valuable opportunity to introduce jazz to new audiences, particularly younger individuals. In this context, the musician Laufey is referenced on numerous occasions. She is regarded as one of the most prominent jazz musicians on TikTok and is described in various journalistic articles as teaching

jazz to the “TikTok generation” (Dellisanti 2022) or “Gen Z” (Katel 2022) and as “bringing jazz to a new generation” (Williams 2022). Stella Cole also highlights Laufey’s capacity to expand the reach of jazz to a broader audience, emphasizing that such advancements are inconceivable without the influence of TikTok.

[Laufey] was one of the first creators that I followed and that followed me back. And now she’s obviously, like, blowing up and doing such amazing work. And she’s really been able to bring jazz to the pop charts, which is so incredible. And she started on TikTok, she would not have the same followers if not for TikTok. (Stella Cole, interview)

Due to the viral nature of TikTok, a video that gains traction on the platform can be viewed by a vast number of individuals in a relatively short period of time. This unique ability to reach a vast audience in a short span of time is not available in traditional media channels or other platforms. This indicates that the dissemination of jazz-specific content to young people who may not have had a prior affinity for this musical genre is a viable avenue. The functional logic of TikTok presents a promising opportunity for the propagation of jazz. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees initially questioned whether there was a demand for jazz on TikTok and whether the platform was an appropriate space for this genre. However, according to Caity Gyorgy, the TikTok audience appears to be receptive to a diverse range of music-related content, largely transcending genre boundaries:

I honestly thought, like – do people these days, children essentially – because a lot of these people on the app are under 18 – do these kids want to hear this music? Like, do they even care about this? And it turns out that they actually do. It’s not really a genre difference. If they hear a song they like, if they hear lyrics that they resonate to, if there’s a beat that they find interesting or a melody that catches their ear, they like it and they interact with it. (Caity Gyorgy, interview)

Kellin Hanas posits that the rejection of jazz by younger demographics is not a direct rejection of the genre itself, but rather a consequence of the lack of exposure to it. She further suggests that the challenge lies in the introduction of jazz to a diverse range of listeners: “[T]hey’re not interested in jazz themselves, but when jazz is brought to them, they’re, like, ah, jazz!” Caity Gyorgy also emphasizes that jazz does not often “get to the ears of the average consumer,” and

that TikTok offers the opportunity to change that. As the musicians observe developments in the comments to their videos, they formulate concrete ideas of how to communicate the phenomenon of jazz's appeal to younger demographics. They examine the reasons behind the popularity of specific jazz styles and older jazz songs on TikTok. Stacey Ryan suggests that, based on her experience, a significant proportion of TikTok users may lack prior familiarity with jazz and its various forms before encountering it on the platform, which may potentially lead to an affinity for it. The reasons for jazz's popularity on TikTok are multifaceted, according to Stacey:

I think it's a mix of a couple of things. I think part of it is that no one ever really listens to that. So they never got introduced to it anyway. Like, you know, their parents never listen to that kind of stuff. They never listen to it, they didn't go to music school, so they didn't have to listen to that kind of music. So when they see it on TikTok for the first time, a lot of them like it without even knowing that they do because they're taught or their friends tell them that jazz sucks and it's bad. And if you have that opinion, that's fine. But a lot of them don't even know because they've never heard it. So when they see this young person doing old-style music, a lot of them are intrigued. Some of them are, like, this sounds like actual shit and that's fine. But most of them are, like, wow, I've never heard this kind of music before. Or, oh wow, I like jazz now. I didn't even know. So I feel, like, part of the people just not knowing is what makes it really popular. [...] I mean, for all kinds of music, you know, it takes, like, not all the time, but, like, theory knowledge and practice and everything. But because jazz is more complicated, just in theory to understand, I feel, like, people are also kind of impressed when they see, like, this teenager looking person is executing, like, maybe a more difficult song or, like, with very jazzy chords. For some people that's too much. They're, like, it's too much for me. I like it and that's fine. Like, I've gotten my fair share of comments of that, but a lot of them are, like, wow, I've never heard this before. And I love, like, the super intricate chords and with the notes you're singing on top of them. So I feel like those are a couple of things that definitely make jazz more palatable, I guess, if that makes sense, because they're being fed to it or they're being fed it on a very pop, very mainstream platform. So I feel like they're like, oh, well, TikTok is showing me this, then I probably like it. (Stacey Ryan, interview)

From Stacey's perspective, the prevalence of jazz on TikTok may contribute to a reduction in the hostility directed towards this musical genre. This is due to the fact that a particular and relatively accessible aspect of jazz is currently a

dominant feature of the platform. It is therefore important to ensure that jazz is brought to the attention of its potential audience, as Stella Cole also emphasizes: “I feel, like, there are just a lot of people in the world and on the internet who don’t really know that jazz is still such a big thing. [...] [P]eople aren’t exposed to this music,” Stella assumes, and TikTok could help to “move [jazz] forward to different audiences that wouldn’t have otherwise been exposed to it.” Such arguments are sometimes accompanied by the belief that TikTok might even help preserve jazz. Erny Nunez speculates that by exposing more young people to jazz, the songs from the Great American Songbook that are so popular on TikTok will become part of the consciousness of future generations:

I think this type of music, compared to what, you know, what’s listened to now is very wholesome, I would say. It not sounds old. This type of music – it’s just made to sort of dance. That’s what I would describe this music as. It’s just made to enjoy, have fun, just being happy. And so I guess seeing it blow up on TikTok gives a lot of traction to the type of genre, which I’m very happy for. And I hope it inspires many, many other young musicians to continue. (Erny Nunez, interview)

The musicians interviewed thus attest to the platform’s potential to contribute productively to the preservation and dissemination of jazz, perceiving this as one of TikTok’s key strengths. Kellin Hanas emphasizes that it is necessary to “create jazz fans,” and asserts that TikTok offers an optimal platform for introducing bebop to a broader audience:

I see it as a way to get the general population to become more exposed to jazz music, which is really important, because if we want this music to survive and continue to grow, we need to gain more traction for it. [...] And if this is the way to expose them to bebop and other styles of music that people aren’t really listening to, then, great, let’s do that. (Kellin Hanas, interview)

In order to facilitate such developments, Kellin maintains that it is also essential to refrain from acting as a gatekeeper in the jazz context. Instead, it is crucial to ensure that all individuals have access to this musical genre, including those who may be more inclined to consider the commercially oriented repertoire as falling outside the realm of art music. Rachel Chiu views it as her mission to exemplify this open-minded approach and to make jazz accessible to as many people as possible, particularly younger demographics: “There’s a pretty

big group of people who actually still appreciate jazz which I love. And that's something I'm trying to do. To keep that going, and find ways to incorporate it into my generation, and, you know, jazz isn't for old people, jazz is for everyone."

6.10 Summary of Interview Results

What facets of jazz are most visible on TikTok and why? Who is reaching a particularly large number of users on the platform with what jazz-related content? What do musicians do to be as visible as possible on the platform? What, then, is the image of jazz that emerges on TikTok? Given that the interviewees represent some of the most popular figures in the defined research field of jazz on TikTok, the results of this study are limited in their ability to provide generalizable insights into the practices of musicians in other contexts. However, the statements of the individual musicians on certain topics are occasionally strikingly similar, thus enabling the point of empirical saturation to be quickly reached during the course of the content analysis. This suggests that the findings can be regarded as representative, at least with respect to the selected research area (Strübing 2014, 32). The interview results demonstrate that jazz performances on TikTok are distinguished by particular socio-technical interaction processes between the platform, the musicians, and the TikTok users. These processes are contingent upon the algorithmic moderation of the TikTok platform, the format of the short-form video, the features and interface of the platform, the musicians' interpretations of the platform's logics, their claims to success, and the reactions of the users.

The statements of the musicians interviewed for this study can be related to the central concepts of current research on digital platforms – algorithmic culture, platform affordances, algorithmic imaginaries, and platform vernaculars – introduced in chapter 3.5. It is evident that a distinct algorithmic culture has emerged on TikTok in relation to jazz. This can be defined as a digital space in which platform algorithms and cultural workers interact closely. These interaction processes result in the formation of socio-technical constellations that could not arise in this form without the cooperation of human and non-human actors. It can be argued that the aforementioned phenomena are made possible by the typical platform mechanisms, in particular the processes of datafication and algorithmization. The specific media representation of jazz