

5.2 Undertaking the Corpus Analysis

In line with the key work steps described above, the first step was to explore and observe the field of jazz on TikTok. Once the core idea of investigating the representation of jazz on TikTok had been established, the exploration commenced with preliminary Google searches, exemplified by the search term combination “TikTok jazz.” The results at the top of the list pertained to a number of prominent creators whose usernames included the term “jazz,” yet who were largely not associated with jazz in a musical capacity. However, the most frequently occurring search results invariably included a link to the page in the TikTok desktop view, situated under the heading “#jazz | TikTok.” This page lists videos that have been tagged with the hashtag #jazz, sorted by popularity in terms of views and likes. By visiting this page and viewing a substantial number of the listed videos, we were able to gain insight into the specific aspects of jazz that are particularly popular on the platform. The TikTok application was then downloaded onto a smartphone to facilitate a user-centric examination of the conventional platform. Concurrently, popular jazz creators and popular jazz-specific hashtags were searched for on both Google and the TikTok desktop and mobile applications. The results indicated that the #jazz hashtag was the most prevalent hashtag with a distinct jazz reference on TikTok. At the time of the initial research on this topic in early 2022, videos tagged with this hashtag had been viewed over two billion times in total. Approximately two years later, this number had nearly quadrupled. Other popular hashtags included #jazztok, #jazzsinger, #jazzstandard, and #greatamericansongbook.

In terms of content, it became evident that younger individuals on TikTok tend to achieve notable success by performing relatively old U.S. jazz standards, in alignment with hashtags such as #jazzstandard and #greatamerican-songbook. While improvisation – a hallmark characteristic of jazz – is not a prominent feature in the majority of the videos observed during this phase, a considerable number of videos with a comedic focus were identified. The videos are typically tagged with hashtags such as #jazzmemes and employ a jocular tone with regard to conventional jazz stereotypes. These include the use of specific vocabulary and musical clichés that are pervasive in the jazz genre. Videos featuring the rhythmic-melodic pattern known as *the lick* are particularly prevalent. This pattern occurs frequently in jazz improvisations and has gained recognition within the jazz community due to a compilation of such passages that was posted on YouTube (Judd 2022; see chapter 2). Similarly, in-

terpretations of John Coltrane's "Giant Steps" (Spencer 2023) are also popular, often with an ironic twist. In terms of reach, however, this content is significantly less popular than the most popular videos distributed under the #jazz hashtag, which is why I decided to focus on videos tagged with that hashtag and the musicians associated with it. Focusing on this hashtag also allows for the examination of content that is presented as jazz-specific on TikTok, providing a more objective analysis of the facets of jazz that are the most popular on the platform.

Using a web scraper (Apify 2024), I compiled a list of the one hundred most popular, i.e., most viewed, videos tagged with the hashtag #jazz, including metadata. A total of one hundred videos were subjected to a detailed content analysis, with the aim of providing an interpretative basis for further, more detailed analyses (cf. Eriksson Krutrök 2021). A small number of videos lacked any sonic or visual references to jazz as a musical genre and were therefore excluded from the analysis. In such cases, the next most popular videos were added to the list until the target number of one hundred videos was reached. This approach allowed me to identify some of the most popular jazz-related TikTok videos overall. The primary limitation of this methodology lies in the fact that some musicians do not consistently utilize this specific hashtag, even though their videos potentially have a clear connection to jazz. To ensure that the selected videos and musicians were representative of the broader jazz landscape on TikTok, the top one hundred videos were randomly compared to those shared under other popular hashtags, including #jazztok and #jazzsinger. Given the absence of any significant discrepancies in terms of repertoire, production style, or the (groups of) musicians featured in the videos, an exhaustive examination of other hashtags was deemed unnecessary. Throughout the process, I conducted regular assessments of the top one hundred videos tagged with #jazz to identify any notable shifts over time. My findings revealed that new videos were only sporadically identified within this list and did not diverge substantially from the videos selected for the corpus analysis in terms of content or the musicians' characteristics. The popularity peaks in the field of jazz on TikTok appear to exhibit a certain degree of constancy. Consequently, the corpus analysis was ultimately limited to the one hundred initially selected videos. It is, however, possible that the selection process may have resulted in the exclusion of some videos and musicians that are in fact part of the popularity peaks in the jazz field on TikTok and should therefore be included in this study. However, due to the vast quantity of jazz-related content on TikTok, it is unavoidable that a targeted reduction

of potential examples for analysis will be necessary. It is important to critically reflect on the possible disadvantages of the chosen approach, but this must ultimately be accepted for methodological and practical reasons.

At the outset of the corpus analysis, each video was downloaded and viewed multiple times. Any regularities regarding the sound or visual aesthetics, the musicians, and TikTok-typical features (duet, etc.) were noted in the form of memos as soon as they were identified. These steps were necessary in order to inductively develop a set of categories from the material, on the basis of which the content of the videos could later be systematized. The content analysis was conducted using MAXQDA software, which is designed for the analysis of qualitative data. While this software is often utilized for the analysis of textual data, such as transcripts of interviews and journalistic articles, it can also be used to analyze (audio-)visual data. The first step is to define the analytical categories, after which the data – in this case the videos – is coded, i.e., specific content elements are assigned to particular thematic categories. MAXQDA offers the option of displaying all the videos that have been assigned to a certain category in a list, thus facilitating a comparison of videos assigned to a given category. This allows for the refinement of the category system as needed during the analytical process. The content analysis resulted in a category system comprising approximately 1,700 codes. On the basis of my own observations and the corpus analytical studies on TikTok cultures discussed above, I identified the following main categories, which are themselves comprised of numerous subcategories and sub-subcategories: musical repertoire, gender relations, *race/ethnicity*, setting, video form, musical performance, and verbal elements. It is important to note that categorizations based on social categories such as gender and *race/ethnicity* are not entirely reliable and can only be made in a relatively superficial manner within the context of such an analytical method. For example, the classification of musicians as female or male was based on my own subjective perception, which is influenced by the pervasive logic of binary gender categorization (Minadeo and Pope 2022, 4). It is possible that the actual gender identity of the individuals depicted in the videos may differ from these categorizations.

5.3 Results of the Corpus Analysis

5.3.1 Musical Repertoire

There is a clear tendency toward versions of jazz standards played by the content creators: this phenomenon was observed in forty-six out of one hundred videos. Most of these songs are part of the repertoire contained in the Great American Songbook, a loosely defined canon of popular songs composed and first recorded from the 1920s to the 1950s. These songs mainly stem from Broadway musicals, Hollywood films, and Tin Pan Alley (an early *hit factory*, see Seabrook 2015). A significant number of these compositions have been performed by jazz musicians over the years, and they represent a specific aspect of the jazz canon: these songs are considered *jazz standards* (cf. Michaelsen 2013; Williams 2023). In twenty-one videos, we can hear original compositions by the content creators, albeit not necessarily fully fleshed-out songs, but rather short loops or harmonic progressions. The musicians Stacey Ryan and Laufey are the only ones to perform snippets of original songs. In fifteen videos, the original sound of existing jazz recordings was adopted. While the adoption of pre-existing sounds may be typical for many TikTok videos, especially in the case of dance challenges and lip-synching, it is obviously of less importance for jazz musicians on the platform. Improvisation plays a minor role, as we hear musicians improvising in only eleven videos. Most of the time, these improvisations are only very short segments without instrumental accompaniment, while only one musician, the trumpeter Kellin Hanas, improvises to jazzy instrumentals in a classical sense.

Most of the time, we hear versions played by the content creators or original recordings of songs first recorded from the 1930s to the 1950s: there are ten songs from the 1950s and nine each from the 1940s and 1930s. The oldest song in the corpus is from 1928 (“Makin’ Whoopee,” performed by Laufey). Table 1 provides an overview of the songs that appear in the corpus at least twice.