

superficial volatility that characterizes its current status, TikTok represents a significant potential for musical canon building in the twenty-first century. In this context, established patterns of cultural hierarchization are undergoing a process of recontextualization, shaped by evolving media conditions and the influence of diverse actors, including human creators and users, as well as non-human entities such as algorithms.

7.5 Jazz Research and Platformization

At this point, I would like to return to the statement by Haftor Medbøe and José Dias quoted in the second chapter of this study: “Jazz has been slow to embrace the power of social media and seems to consistently arrive late at the table be it in the examples of MySpace, Facebook and Twitter” (Medbøe and Dias 2014, n.p.). It is evident that this assessment is no longer entirely accurate at the present time. However, if we modify it slightly and apply it to jazz research, it is still valid: “*Jazz research* has been late at the table.” As previously discussed in chapter 2, there is still little research on jazz in the context of online media. Even in a relatively new and comprehensive international publication such as the *Routledge Companion to Jazz Studies* (Gebhardt, Rustin-Paschal, and Whyton 2019), there is a paucity of material exploring the relationship between jazz and digital media, with the exception of the contribution by Barber (2019) in this compendium. However, in the past three decades, jazz research, particularly within the context of New Jazz Studies, has identified a number of core topics that are closely related to the key topics developed in this study. This applies in particular to publications on the topics of gender (e.g., Knauer 2016; Rustin and Tucker 2008; Reddan, Herzog, and Kahr 2023), canon building (e.g., Knauer 2018a; Whyton 2010; Whyton 2013) and mediality (e.g., Heile, Elsdon, and Doctor 2016; McGee 2009). Within this context, the topic of jazz on TikTok, or on digital platforms in general, appears to be quite compatible with jazz research. Jazz is currently integrated into contemporary media cultures in a variety of ways, and the major topics of recent international jazz research, supplemented by approaches from platform studies, provide a solid foundation for further research into these connections.

Furthermore, TikTok provides insights into the production and reception of jazz-related content that reaches a vast audience. The expressions of jazz that are popular on TikTok attract considerable attention from a vast number of individuals, as evidenced by the TikTok videos’ frequently sizeable number

of views. However, these forms of jazz are relatively distant from the established characteristics of jazz that are typically recognized as such or elevated to the status of *good* jazz by gatekeeping authorities within the realms of classical academia. The analysis of jazz on TikTok offers insights into the jazz-related production and reception practices of individuals who do not necessarily have an academic background in jazz and who are not primarily interested in specific niche segments within jazz that are commonly considered particularly artful and therefore culturally valuable. Historically, there has not been much interest among jazz researchers in musical repertoires that are actually popular. Smooth jazz, for example, represents a variant of jazz that enjoyed considerable success in the 1980s and 1990s. It has had a significant and enduring impact on the prevailing conceptions of jazz among a vast number of individuals. It is conceivable that this is the fundamental or sole facet of jazz that the majority of individuals have ever been exposed to, or at the very least, the sole facet that they have deliberately engaged with (Washburne 2004, 134). Hybrid genres such as smooth jazz, situated at the nexus of jazz and popular music, have historically encountered significant challenges in both jazz and popular music studies, with studies of these genres having hitherto been largely overlooked (Ake, Garrett, and Goldmark 2012; Burkhart 2024). In this regard, the prevalence and popularity of jazz on TikTok aligns with the tradition of *light* jazz repertoires, which have been largely disregarded by jazz research thus far. However, contemporary jazz researchers must address such phenomena if they are to gain an understanding of the social relevance of jazz, its multifaceted nature, and its dissemination via diverse media channels. This can only be successful if the canonization of subjects typically associated with jazz is avoided and research subjects are chosen in such a way as to avoid the perpetuation of such canon-building processes.

The results of the present study demonstrate the emergence of jazz-related hierarchizations on TikTok, which appear to be largely independent of the influence of established gatekeepers in the field of jazz studies. At first glance, the platform appears to be operating with a high degree of autonomy. However, this observation only captures half of the story, as the analysis in this chapter has revealed that even within the context of a digital platform, the process of cultural hierarchization is not a radical departure from established patterns. What is certain, however, is that the actors and, to a certain extent, the mechanisms of cultural canon building have changed in the platform age. Reflecting on and understanding these processes and the associated cultural power relations must be the task of contemporary and critical research (not only) on jazz.

The present study, regardless of its specific focus on jazz, demonstrates that the conditions for particular representations of music cultures on TikTok can only be identified through detailed qualitative research. Consequently, there are inevitably some open questions and gaps in the research, given that qualitative research designs entail the analysis of selected individual cases and do not aim to produce results that can be generalized statistically. Qualitative and hypothesis-generating research is, however, a prerequisite for countering speculative attempts to explain the influence of digital platforms on music cultures with an empirical foundation and for fostering a better understanding of the *actual* cultural power of platforms.

Despite the recent increase in publications on the topic of music and platformization, numerous core questions remain unanswered. This is particularly evident with regard to the specific ways in which musicians navigate the novel technological and media conditions offered by digital platforms. It is evident that profound shifts in media have consistently shaped cultural production, including in the domain of music. Consequently, it is reasonable to hypothesize that distinctive platform effects (Morris 2020) may emerge over time (see chapter 3.6). However, the precise manifestation of these platform effects is not dictated by digital platforms in a deterministic manner. Instead, it is contingent upon the creative endeavors of music creators. Digital platforms are unlikely to have a directly comparable impact on musical production processes across genres. While it seems perfectly plausible that songs in the mainstream pop segment are – at least to a certain extent – formally adapted to conform to the popularization logic of platforms such as Spotify and TikTok, this probably applies to a much lesser extent – if at all – to black metal or modern jazz productions, for example. It is therefore highly improbable that the fundamental essence of music itself will undergo a transformation as a consequence of the influence of digital platforms. There is a pressing need for qualitative empirical studies that focus on specific music-related production cultures in the context of digital platforms, with a detailed examination of how musicians respond to the technological and media upheavals that have occurred in recent years. Furthermore, the findings of the present study indicate that popularity on TikTok is not solely contingent on musical elements. Instead, it is also shaped by social categories such as *race*, gender, and specific body norms. Explanatory approaches that prioritize musical aspects and fail to consider the multifaceted cultural contexts of the music under study fall short in this regard.

The present study is unable to provide definitive answers to the question of what, if any, concrete influence the representation of jazz on TikTok has or can have on the perception of this music culture beyond the confines of the platform. In the interviews, some of the musicians indicated that their activities on TikTok are not representative of their musical work outside the platform. Moreover, it is currently unclear to what extent other jazz musicians may be influenced by jazz performances on TikTok. Additionally, while the behavior of TikTok users demonstrably plays a role in the platform-related imaginaries of musicians, the modes of reception of fans have inevitably been excluded from this study due to the chosen focus on the sphere of cultural production. However, to gain a deeper understanding of the intricate socio-technical networks within the platform environment, it is essential to conduct qualitative empirical studies on reception practices, as these can also impact the musicians' production strategies. For instance, it would be valuable to investigate whether the musicians' strategies of action, as empirically reconstructed in this study, align with users' expectations. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to ascertain the degree to which users employ the platform algorithms to influence the content they are shown. By establishing a foundation for reception studies based on platform-related production research, we can gain valuable insights into the role played by digital platforms in shaping contemporary music and media cultures.

The findings of this study indicate that a certain degree of music-historical contextualization is indispensable for the interpretation of the platform-specific representation of jazz on TikTok. This is particularly evident with regard to the cultural hegemonies prevalent on TikTok and, correspondingly, with regard to the jazz repertoires popular on this platform. The logic of cultural hierarchization can be seen to remain remarkably stable over extended periods of time, even when new influential gatekeepers, such as digital platforms, emerge. However, there has been a tendency over recent years to portray music-related phenomena in the context of digital platforms as entirely novel, particularly in journalistic discourse as well as in academic publications that reference these discourses. In doing so, an attitude informed by a general critique of contemporary culture is sometimes adopted, in that platform-related technological innovations and their supposed influence on practices of music production and reception are subjected to harsh criticism (on cultural criticism in general cf. Bollenbeck 2005; Hecken 2016). This phenomenon can be observed, for example, with regard to the chill playlists that are very popular on Spotify and the supposedly light tracks that are compiled on these playlists

and are suitable for background listening. In this context, Spotify is sometimes criticized for encouraging the development of passive music reception practices and prioritizing what is often referred to as *functional music* (for a journalistic perspective on this, see Pelly 2017 and Pelly 2018, and for a critique of this argument and its adoption in academic publications, Hesmondhalgh 2022). Regardless of the questions of why – firstly – certain music-related reception practices are deemed better than others and whether – secondly – Spotify playlists are actually used in the way the authors assume, such critical statements are simply ahistorical. Comparable accusations have been made in recent decades with regard to easy listening, muzak, and smooth jazz, i.e., so-called *light* or *functional* music. The history of these musical genres has been the subject of academic inquiry by numerous scholars (see, for instance, Keightley 2008; Sterne 1997; Jones and Schumacher 1992; West 2008; for an overview, see Hesmondhalgh 2022, 9–11). Consequently, the corresponding criticism of their purported purely *functional* character is also well documented. Thus, while TikTok draws on decades-old Great American Songbook songs, the *mood* and *chill* productions and playlists on Spotify are significantly influenced by musical developments that occurred during the latter half of the twentieth century. The history of what is commonly referred to as functional music, of course, extends much further back in time. The aesthetic debates on autonomous and functional music first peaked during the nineteenth century (de la Motte-Haber 2017). The production of supposedly functional music and the criticism leveled at corresponding music forms are thus not a new phenomenon. And the much-cited platform effects (Morris 2020) must always be interpreted in light of earlier economic, media and technological contexts that influenced music production and recording processes, the results of which have been described by Mark Katz as phonograph effects (Katz 2010).

The insights that can be gained from an ahistorical perspective on platform-specific phenomena are very limited in scope. To reach a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena emerging in the context of platforms, it is essential to consider the historical trajectory of such phenomena. This allows for the identification of instances where a phenomenon has been canonized and perpetuated, as well as instances where there have been shifts in emphasis. The development of platform-related music cultures is shaped by two key factors: the individuals who actively engage with these platforms and the algorithms that drive their functionality. The individuals are influenced by a complex interplay of cultural and historical patterns, while the algorithms rely on data accumulated over centuries.

While platforms themselves indicate their potential for exploration due to specific research affordances (Burgess 2021; see chapter 5.1), certain researchers only consider certain platforms as potential objects of study. Sometimes the reasons for this are mundane; language, for example, plays a crucial role. Given my proficiency in only two languages, namely German and English, at an academic level, I was forced to constrain my research to Western platforms. A comparison with the representation of jazz on TikTok's sister platform Douyin would have been a logical choice but would only be feasible in a research team with the appropriate language skills. Consequently, my study reproduces the specific imbalances of Western or Anglophone platform research, which for the most part focuses on the Western market. Notwithstanding the critical reflection and empirical justifiability of my selection of cases for analysis, it is inevitable that I reproduce specific relations of visibility in the platform context by focusing my research mainly on *white*, predominantly North American content creators. This study will need to be complemented by research that does not concentrate on the popularity peaks in the jazz genre on TikTok. Consequently, it will be necessary to consider the perspectives of those groups of people who were excluded from my work due to the specific research question and the corresponding research design. The results presented here naturally raise new questions that can be examined in the context of further detailed studies. In the long term, the goal must be to research as many music-related spheres as possible in the context of platforms in order to create comparability and to do justice to the heterogeneity of music cultures in digital spaces.

