

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.

Table 1: Songs that appear at least twice in the corpus.

Title	Songwriters	Year	Occurrences
“Fly Me to The Moon”	Bart Howard	1954	5
“It’s Been a Long, Long Time”	Jule Styne/Sammy Cahn	1945	4
“In the Mood”	Wingy Manone/ Andy Razaf/Joe Garland	1939	3
“L-O-V-E”	Bert Kaempfert/ Milt Gabler	1964	2
“La Vie En Rose”	Édith Piaf/Louis Guglielmi	1947	2
“Sing, Sing, Sing (With a Swing)”	Louis Prima	1936	2
“Sway”	Luis Demetrio/ Norman Gimbel	1954	2
“It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got that Swing)”	Duke Ellington/ Irving Mills	1932	2

However, it is not clear whether the musicians are really referring to the first recorded versions of the songs, or rather to the most popular recordings. For example, the song “Fly Me to the Moon” was first recorded in 1954 but was popularized by the version recorded by Frank Sinatra in 1964 – nowadays, it is widely considered a Sinatra song.

5.3.2 Gender Relations

The gender ratio is relatively balanced, with a slight tendency towards male musicians. Videos were coded as “male” or “female” if the musician who uploaded it can be assigned to this gender category. This is also true for duet videos, where two or more videos from different accounts are displayed simultaneously. In forty-seven videos, there are male musicians performing, and women perform in thirty-seven videos. In ten videos, we see mixed groups, and in six videos, the musicians’ gender is not discernible as the musicians themselves are not visible.

The gender ratio might lead one to assume that the most popular jazz musicians on TikTok are male. If we take a closer look at the musicians who

appear in the corpus multiple times and whose musical repertoire is typical with respect to the aforementioned focus on Great American Songbook songs from the first half of the twentieth century, however, the picture is slightly different. The musician featured most frequently in the corpus is Ricky Rosen (@rickyrosen), who appears in seven videos. He performs versions of songs such as "Sway" (originally from 1954) and "It's Been a Long, Long Time" (originally from 1945). Another male musician who performs a comparable repertoire is Erny Nunez (@young_crooner), with two videos in the corpus. Ben Freeman (@ben_makes_names_to_music) has five videos in the top one hundred: he provides humorous content by, for example, playing songs backward and asking the audience to identify the song they hear – this kind of jazz performance is rather unusual with regard to the analysis of the musical repertoire. The most successful female musicians on the list, on the other hand, clearly represent a strong focus on Great American Songbook songs. Stacey Ryan, Laufey, Ebony Loren, and Rachel Chiu each have at least two entries with versions of songs such as "Fly Me to the Moon" (1954) and "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got that Swing)" (1932). This means that the jazz repertoire that is the most popular on TikTok tends to be represented by female musicians who are highly popular on the platform, each with at least 500,000 followers. Although the musicians' age is not displayed on TikTok, all the musicians mentioned here are clearly in their early twenties or even younger.

5.3.3 Race/Ethnicity

The relationships regarding the *race/ethnicity* category are very clear. The coding followed the suggestion of Lucibello et al. and assigned the videos to the categories "Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Middle Eastern, White, Other" (Lucibello et al. 2021, 150), with two additional categories: "mixed groups" and "not discernible." The category "mixed groups" was chosen if the videos featured multiple musicians who could be assigned to different categories. If, for example, only musicians belonging to the category "Black" were shown, no distinction was made between individuals and groups. "Not discernible" was selected if the musicians were not recognizable, e.g., due to costumes. These categorizations, like those of gender, are inevitably superficial. However, in the context of a systematizing rough analysis, such an approach is unavoidable if we are to first reveal any inequality relations with regard to social categories

of difference on a general level and thus lay the foundation for more in-depth analytical steps.

The defined top one hundred list is clearly dominated by *white* musicians; this category was assigned to a total of sixty-eight videos. The categories “Black” (5), “Latinx” (4), “Asian” (3), and “not discernible” (3) play a clearly subordinate role, while the categories “Indigenous,” “Middle Eastern,” and “other” were not assigned at all. Six videos do not show any people. This overview shows that the musicians who can be clearly categorized as *white* are clearly in the majority. Evidently, the domain of jazz popularity peaks on TikTok is predominantly a “white space” (Ile 2021, 68).

5.3.4 Setting

No great variability can be ascertained with regard to the video settings. In the majority of the videos (73), we see the musicians perform in domestic spaces. Only occasionally are they filmed playing on a stage or in a rehearsal room. This is typical for TikTok, as many creators film themselves at home – an aesthetic that was certainly influenced by the coronavirus pandemic, when a large part of the global population was in domestic isolation, and which continues a trend that has already been described as “bedroom culture” (Kennedy 2020, 1070) in social media research, even before the advent of TikTok. On TikTok, however, this type of staging is very common. This may be due to the fact that TikTok experienced its greatest surge in popularity during the first global lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic, when countless people around the world were isolated in their homes and forced to record their videos in such settings.

5.3.5 Video Form

Most of the videos (74) are obviously filmed by the musicians themselves by placing their smartphone in front of them. Most musicians (85) are filmed in selfie mode, i.e., from a relatively close distance, while fifteen musicians are seen from a greater distance, for example performing on a stage. Even though the duet is one of TikTok’s key features, only seven videos in the corpus make use of this feature. The majority of videos (73) are recorded in a single pass, which means that storytelling modes with more than one storyline or perspective do not play a key role for most musicians.

5.3.6 Musical Performance

In eighty-seven videos, we see musicians performing the music themselves, whereas in thirteen videos the music is taken from other sources. There is a clear tendency towards solo performances (62); ensembles are featured in twenty-five videos. This would seem to make sense, as the majority of videos are produced by musicians at home, not in a concert or rehearsal setting. In thirty-seven videos, we see musicians singing, optionally accompanied by an instrumental track (16) or their own instrumental accompaniment (12), a cappella (8), or accompanied by multiple instrumentalists (1). While there is no clear tendency regarding the musical accompaniment, singing along to pre-recorded instrumentals might be one feature that is typical for jazz performances on TikTok, but rather unusual in jazz outside the platform. Instrumental music without vocals occurs in thirty-two videos.

5.3.7 Verbal Elements

The majority of videos use the English language, be it in the song lyrics, the text layers, or spoken language. Spanish (4) and French (2) language elements occur occasionally, while ten videos contain no verbal elements at all. On TikTok, creators can add written text to their videos by using the app's features for text layers, for example to explain the topic of the video or display song lyrics. One reason for doing so might be that there is not enough time for spoken explanations or introductions due to the platform's short-video aesthetic. Furthermore, adding song lyrics can make it easier for other users to apply the duet feature, as they can sing along to the original sound. The text layers might also attract more user attention. In several videos (22), the text layer is used to explain what the video will be about. Song lyrics are displayed in fifteen videos, and in fourteen videos the creators use the text layer for telling stories that are not related to the topic of the video or the song lyrics. Song titles are displayed in twelve videos, and some (11) creators reply to users' comments, which are displayed in a text box on the left of the screen. This feature cannot be regarded as a text layer in the same way as the aforementioned examples, but it does add verbal elements to the videos. These textboxes typically display comments by users and requests for the creators to sing particular songs.

In twenty videos, we can hear spoken announcements by the musicians: the song they are about to sing, for example. In the videos with more humorous

connotations, the announcements sometimes serve to set up the punchline of a joke (12).

5.4 Prototypical Contents and Musicians

Of course, there is no definitive formula for jazz performances on TikTok, although some typical patterns can be identified based on corpus analysis. Particularly popular are versions of jazz standards from the Great American Songbook repertoire, first recorded between the 1930s and 1950s and largely written by *white*, male American songwriters. On TikTok, these songs are usually sung and played by relatively young *white* women in their early twenties, although there are more male musicians in the defined top one hundred. Musicians tend to perform in a domestic setting, filming themselves in selfie mode, and vocal performances are more popular than instrumental music. Almost all musicians sing songs in English, which is obviously their native language. Text layers are regularly used, while verbal announcements are rather atypical, as long as the musical performance and not the humorous connotation is in the foreground.

According to the corpus analysis, the following musicians can be described as prototypical for jazz on TikTok, as they are represented several times in the top one hundred, singing comparatively old jazz standards, and having at least a six-digit number of followers, i.e. a comparatively large reach: Ricky Rosen (@rickyrosen), Stacey Ryan (@staceryanmusic), Laufey (@laufey), Rachel Chiu (@rachelchiu1), Ebony Loren (@ebonylorenmusic), Sam Ambers (@sam_ambers), Stella Cole (@stellakcole) and Erny Nunez (@young_crooner). If we take a closer look at their profile pages, it becomes evident that the focus on singing jazz standards from the Great American Songbook repertoire dating from the early twentieth century to the 1950s is a defining factor for the style of their performances on TikTok. For example, almost all of them have uploaded their own version (sometimes even several versions) of the two songs that, according to the corpus analysis, are the most popular: "Fly Me to the Moon" (1954) and "It's Been a Long, Long Time" (1945). That is to say, the jazz musicians who are the most popular on TikTok also perform the songs that enjoy the greatest popularity on the platform. This is not only true for the two songs mentioned above, but also for "La Vie en Rose" (1947) and "L-O-V-E" (1964), for example. This gives the impression that popularity on TikTok also depends, at least to some extent, on the choice of a specific musical repertoire.