

1920's jazz at one hundred: listening patterns across streaming platforms

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The study investigates listener behaviour of 1920's jazz across streaming platforms. When excluding platforms not available in the UK, the research examined Spotify, YouTube Music, Amazon Music, and Apple Music. The aim of this research was to better understand modern listening patterns and the appeal of 1920's jazz to present day streaming platform users. The study found that century-old jazz is streamed online regularly. The popularity of 1920's jazz varies between specific songs and platforms. In general, 1920's jazz songs are streamed more by users on YouTube Music. The researcher calls for further studies to investigate reasoning behind why streaming of century-old jazz occurs in this way.

Keywords: Streaming, 1920's jazz, traditional jazz, Spotify, YouTube Music.

Cien años del jazz de los años 20: patrones de escucha a través de las plataformas de *streaming*

El estudio investiga el comportamiento de los oyentes del jazz de los años 20 a través de plataformas de *streaming*. Al excluir las plataformas no disponibles en el Reino Unido, la investigación ha examinado Spotify, YouTube Music, Amazon Music y Apple Music. El objetivo de esta investigación es comprender mejor los patrones de escucha modernos y el atractivo del jazz de los años 20 para los usuarios actuales de plataformas de *streaming*. El estudio revela que el jazz centenario se escucha en línea con regularidad. La popularidad del jazz de los años 20 varía según las canciones y las plataformas. En general, las canciones de jazz de los años 20 son más escuchadas por los usuarios de YouTube Music. El investigador demanda más estudios para investigar las razones por las que el *streaming* de jazz centenario se produce de esta manera.

Palabras clave: *Streaming*, jazz de los años 20, jazz tradicional, Spotify, YouTube Music.

1920ko hamarkadako jazzaren ehun urte: *streaming* plataformen bidez entzuteko ereduak

Ikerketak 20ko hamarkadako jazzaren entzuleen portaera ikertzen du *streaming* plataformen bidez. Erresuma Batuan eskuragarri ez dauden plataformak alde batera utzita, ikerketak Spotify, YouTube Music, Amazon Music eta Apple Music aztertu ditu. Ikerketa honen helburua entzuteko eredu modernoak eta egungo *streaming* plataformen erabiltzaileentzat 20ko hamarkadako jazzak duen erakargarritasuna hobeto ulertzea da. Ikerketak agerian uzten du mende bat duen jazzaren erregularitasunez entzuten dela *online*. Lehentasuna berriz aldatu egiten da abestien eta plataformen arabera. Oro har, 20ko hamarkadako jazz abestiak gehiago entzuten dituzte YouTube Musicen erabiltzaileek. Ikerketaileak ikerketa gehiago eskatzen ditu ehun urteko jazz *streaming* horrela zergatik gertatzen den ikertzeko.

Gako-hitzak: *Streaming*, 20ko hamarkadako jazz, jazz tradizionala, Spotify, YouTube Music.

Introduction

The cultural value of 1920's jazz

Jazz has been surrounded by glamour and idealism in the past century, providing a musical symbolism for "American imagination" (Gennari, 1998, p. 226). While jazz's symbolism has taken a wide range of forms, this glamour stems from the raw improvisation that the style is built around. This was first brought to the world through the initial jazz recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, which recorded *Livery Stable Blues* in 1917. By the end of the 1920's, jazz recording had taken place internationally using a wide range of instrumentation and approaches (Gennari, 1998, p. 226). Separating the cultural movement from the music is almost impossible, with Fraterrigo (2022, p. 3) stating that "jazz music is almost synonymous with 1920's America." Many informally named the 1920's the jazz age (McGee, 2015, p. 98).

Around a century after the growth of jazz recording, the industry has grown to a multi-million pound per year business. Jazz, however, is not now the dominant genre of popular music of the present day, as it was in the 1920's. The styles, instrumentation, and interpretation of jazz have varied greatly over the past century, often fusing with other influences. This genre has perhaps adapted more than any other genre in the past century. However, the role that original jazz recordings play in the listening behaviour of current jazz followers is unclear.

Original recordings of 1920's jazz illustrate the experiences of the era. While jazz standards of the time have been recreated and updated by ensembles, the original recordings have important cultural value in representing the era's authentic experience. These recordings are artefacts of jazz, providing a lens to view the

culture of the time through. Furthermore, they offer an understanding of the style's jazz technique which has changed in the subsequent hundred years. These recordings also document the social experiences of the jazz musicians of the time. For example, jazz provides a form of equal opportunity which may not have been available in other genres. Women played an "active and rigorous presence in the jazz world" (McGee, 2015, p. 96). Jazz has also been defined as "one of the greatest innovations by African Americans in history" (Fraterrigo, 2022, p. 3). Despite the fact that racial tensions caused isolation in other areas of society, African Americans were able to shape the direction of jazz, and the music provided artistic freedom for musicians such as King Oliver or Louis Armstrong. The original 1920's recordings illustrate this cultural value and its importance in racial diversity in recording, even when jazz education and performance in later decades provided a more complex picture (Musson, 2023, p. 84). Finally, a deeper understanding of the lasting impact can be gained by investigating the streaming habits of century-old jazz. This may provide insight into how listening behaviours can impact jazz in the coming decades. Understanding how music of the jazz age is listened to may also support a better understanding of listening behaviours to swing, big band, and bebop movements that followed 1920's jazz.

Streaming of music

The streaming of music can be explained as the multimedia transfer of audio through web-based platforms in real time (Sharko & Bashkova, 2023, p. 440). The process is unlimited and completely portable, available in any location however separate from the original cultural identity of the music (Demir, 2022, p. 164).

The online streaming of music provides listeners with a range of possibilities. For example, as a tool to support emotion and mood management. Streaming allows almost instantaneous access to mood-changing music (Demir, 2022, p. 164). This may be used at different levels for different age demographics. Accessing streaming sites has previously been shown to be a barrier to older people which may impact the streaming of older music recordings disproportionately (Court-Jackson, 2011, p. 19). Evidence suggests that this change may have occurred during the 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic. Conroy et al. (2020, p. 262) suggest that accessibility has improved for older generations. The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst for supporting older people in accessing streaming services with the aim of mitigating loneliness and isolation (Conroy et al., 2020). Balki et al. (2023, p. 3) also suggested that technological advancements in this area allowed for greater levels of connectivity, and that streaming could provide an efficient method of social support.

Choice of streaming service

Streaming services have become the dominant method of music consumption in both the global north and south (Sharko & Bashkova, 2023, p. 440). However, streaming service choice depends on location, as many services do not provide access to users in different countries (Sharko & Bashkova, 2023, p. 443).

Consumer behaviour is a factor for streaming services in tailoring the experience to each user and marketing their products (Sharko and Bashkova, 2023, p. 455). Streaming services compete with each other for contrasting user experiences with the aims of attracting different listeners (Ferwerda et al. 2019, p. 20158). The services holding more than 5% of international market share currently are: Spotify, Tencent music, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube Music and NetEase (Duarte, 2024). There are a wide range of other music streaming services that hold smaller percentages of the market share, such as Deezer, with the potential for new streaming services to grow at any time. Services such as Pandora, which as recently as five years ago had been highlighted as one of the most popular in the US market (Saboori-Deilami & Yeo, 2019, p. 31), now hold a small amount of international streaming usage. The picture may be less clear, as there is also no indication of how many users may hold multiple free or subscription-based accounts across different platforms. Users may be excluded from using some streaming services due to 'black outs' in certain countries, though these may be avoided through the use of VPN's (Sharko & Bashkova, 2023, p. 451).

Although the wide range of services available to users is clear, why one is chosen is not. Evidence suggests that cost and community may be crucial factors in choosing a streaming service (Sharko & Bashkova, 2023, p. 455). Even though subscription-based streaming services are the most dominant model in many countries, many are not universally available. Financial means and Internet poverty also isolate some from the full experience of listening to music without advertising or limitations (Kim et al., 2017, p. 264). Offline or download possibilities also vary among platforms, and the costs involved in these extras may be a factor in platform usage (Kim et al., 2017, p. 265). Social inclusivity in a community or shared experience with those in the real world may perhaps be the most powerful factor in streaming service choice, with word-of-mouth being a powerful advertising tool (Sharko & Bashkova, 2023, p. 441). Considering the wide range of factors, many users may be unaware of music that is available or unavailable prior to committing to a subscription.

The popularity of jazz on streaming platforms is lower than that of other genres such as pop or rock. Even within jazz music streaming, 1920's jazz is less popular than big band or bebop subgenres. Therefore, the listener's experience of 1920's

jazz is unlikely to be a priority for streaming services, considering that the number of streams is significantly lower than that of current recording artists. The power of streaming services to tailor the experience and shape user behaviour through the use of algorithms may also be negative for listener freedom, although its impact is unclear. Users may be directed towards a more widely popular or predictable choice through suggested listening. Bands and artists that have streamed less, such as those from a century ago, are therefore at a significant disadvantage when competing on platforms such as Spotify (Webster, 2020, p. 1910).

While streaming services are the dominant force in the music market, there has been a significant movement in the choice of many people to listen to vinyl (Hracs & Jansson, 2020, p. 479). Jazz as a cultural movement is widely available on vinyl with the format created for sales in the pre-digital age. Vinyl listening has emerged as a form of challenging streaming for some consumers (Webster, 2020, p. 1911). It is, however, unclear how this effect may manifest in different age groups. Some older listeners may have held records for a significant period; therefore, they may be less likely to stream older music content.

Methods

Quantitative, focused, online comparative research was undertaken. The research was conducted through online searching methods with the aim of providing insight into how early recordings and 1920's jazz music interact with more modern, digital forms of consumption. The following research questions were posed.

- RQ1- How do 1920's jazz listening behaviours compare between users' interactions on different streaming platforms?
- RQ2- How do 1920's jazz listening behaviours compare between different artists' streamed music on different platforms?
- RQ3- How relevant is 1920's jazz listening to the wider movement of digital music streaming?

Research design

This research was conducted using a comparative study to investigate the relevant documentation and data from streaming services. The criteria was to evaluate streaming behaviour on streaming services that held more than 5% of the international market share. Initially, quantitative data were collected on the market share

of each streaming service. Media Insights & Decisions in Action (MIDiA) highlighted the following platforms as holding more than 5% share of the streaming market: Spotify (31.7%), Tencent Music (14.4%), Apple Music (12.6%), Amazon Music (11.1%), YouTube Music (9.7%), and NetEase (6.7%) (Duarte, 2024). These six streaming services form the data analysis set. Within this set of streaming services, listening behaviours were compared in relation to the behaviour of the user towards specific songs and the artist recording the music. Users' interaction with the artist was discounted, as many artists' careers spanned either post or pre-1920's jazz. Listening to streaming platforms occurs in many ways, such as listening to individual singles or songs included on playlists as well as listening to more traditional albums. User interactions with songs can occur in different ways; therefore, they are logged equally. Adjusted figures were created to consider the relative level of listening when considering the wider popularity of streaming services. Several popular streaming services, such as Apple Music and Amazon Music, do not provide data for streams, so availability was logged where data were not available to illustrate listenership. A Mann-Whitney U test was performed to evaluate whether there was a statistically significant difference (to 0.05) between streaming behaviours on platforms where data were freely available, such as Spotify and YouTube Music.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was conducted to ensure that the research undertaken was efficient and facilitated data collection (Rai & Thapa, 2015, p. 9). The sample group centred on popular jazz songs performed and recorded during the 1920's as there were a large number of songs that could potentially be investigated. An initial scoping search was performed to collect suitable songs or collections of songs for analysis which had been established as popular through physical forms of music listening. A dataset (n=165) of songs was created using the following search terms: *the 1920s jazz hit*, *1920s jazz compilation*, *most popular the 1920s jazz recordings*, *bestselling the 1920s jazz songs*, *1920s jazz CD*, *popular the 1920s jazz album*, and *popular the 1920s jazz records*. Recordings incorrectly flagged as having been recorded in the 1920's were removed from the sample set. Recordings involved in the study were highlighted by the wider music industry as having been successful, at least in physical media sales; therefore, they could be seen as important to digital streaming behaviours.

Results

Research Question One: Comparing Research Platforms

Qualitative analysis was conducted on a set of six streaming services: Spotify, Tencent Music, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube Music, and NetEase. The analysis investigated listening behaviours in detail on two platforms: Spotify and YouTube Music. Apple Music and Amazon music do not provide listening figures, even when songs are available for listeners, while Tencent Music and NetEase are not accessible in the United Kingdom therefore analysis was unable to take place.

Some findings can be drawn from the data provided, although there was no consistent pattern of listening popularity between a song and an individual platform. Access to material across a range of platforms ensures that 1920's jazz music is available to consumers, regardless of their choice of platform. Consumers are not excluded from listening to jazz content by major streaming platforms unless by geographical location, which would likely prevent them from choosing platforms excluded within their locality. This research was conducted in the United Kingdom; therefore, Tencent music and NetEase could not provide findings. However, locations around the world would prevent consumers from accessing the platforms investigated in this study. Further research could be conducted in other areas of the world to build a clear picture of global listening behaviour regarding 1920's jazz.

User behaviour showed established listening populations on both YouTube Music and Spotify. This included more popular 1920's jazz songs on each platform reaching a listenership of hundreds of thousands, such as *Ain't we got fun* by Richard A. Sherman reaching over 250,000 streams on Spotify and over 450,000 streams on YouTube Music. While streaming of 1920's jazz is clearly done on each platform this is only a minor percentage of wider jazz streaming, *Giant Steps* by John Coltrane (1960), for example, was streamed 17 million times on YouTube Music and 36.2 million times on Spotify.

With the majority of songs investigated receiving several thousand streams on each platform, there is a committed listening base for the genre online. This provides evidence that 1920's jazz music holds a place within the streaming of both jazz and century-old music online. On average, 1920's jazz music investigated in the study was listened to more on YouTube Music than on Spotify. Despite Spotify being the market leading streaming service, the average listenership for a song within this study was 17,872, while the average listenership on YouTube Music was 94,896. When adjusted streaming numbers (ASN) (reflecting market share) were used, the average listenership for a song on Spotify was 564, while the average

listenership on YouTube Music was more than 17 times higher, 9,783. Statistics indicate that streaming of 1920's jazz is more likely to take place on YouTube Music than on other streaming platforms. A Mann Whitney U test established that there was a significant difference in streaming behaviour between each platform, with a p value of 0.1468. Even when not accounting for market share, the test shows the strong streaming presence of 1920's jazz on YouTube Music compared to Spotify.

Research Question Two: Comparing Listening of Different 1920's Artists

The popularity of artists' music varies depending on the streaming platform, although popularity is generally comparable between platforms. There is no consistent pattern of listenership on either platform, favouring particular artists or years. However, there are some examples of differences in behaviour towards artists on different platforms.

Variances in popularity can be linked to the prevalence of an artist's work on a playlist. For example, Kentucky Serenaders had strong listenership on Spotify, with their track *Rose of Washington Square* having over 11,000 streams. This track was also part of several user-created playlists, one with over 1,400 saves by users following the playlist. The music also forms part of Spotify's suggested playlists, suggesting it to users with similar listening tastes. While other songs by the Kentucky Serenaders had more streams through YouTube Music, such as *Black Bottom*, which had 60,000 streams, their song *Rose of Washington Square* had significantly fewer listens on YouTube Music, at 1,900. The role of the playlist in promoting songs through YouTube Music was unclear; however, this may be a reason for lower levels of listenership.

While there are some differences between the popularity or listening figures of individual artists, their music is not limited to individual platforms. In contrast to other streaming areas, such as video streaming platforms like Netflix, content is unique to one platform. Popularity is roughly comparable across platforms; therefore, it is clear that listenership is not centred around one specific platform, and understanding of accessibility is clear on both Spotify and YouTube Music.

Research Question Three: Relevancy of 1920's jazz listening

Jazz listenership on streaming platforms illustrates the continued popularity of the genre. This has been demonstrated through the strong listenership of tracks, such as John Coltrane's *Giant Steps* (1960). 1920's jazz, sometimes labelled through

different terms such as Dixieland jazz, hot jazz, or traditional jazz, can be identified as a less popular subgenre of jazz.

The data provided through the study show evidence that there is a population of streaming platform users who listen to 1920's jazz. While these numbers may be less than the more established subgenres of jazz, such as swing or bebop, it is clear that jazz from the 1920's is regularly streamed. For example, tracks such as *Whispering* by Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra have been streamed more than half a million times on YouTube Music despite being more than a century old. These figures involve video views through YouTube's video streaming service, so it is unclear how much music is streamed directly through the platform. Videos linked to the YouTube Music platform for this track centre on non-moving images or records, illustrating the user's intent for audio interaction and the passive role of the video on YouTube's video platform. The enduring ability of tracks, such as *Whispering* to be streamed, provides evidence that 1920's jazz listening continues to be relevant.

Discussion

Popularity of the streaming choices

Findings from the study suggest that while 1920's jazz listening may be less prevalent than other forms of jazz streaming, it plays a role in listening behaviour across all platforms. While age demographics were not investigated, the findings may suggest some level of digital literacy in older age groups as these are more likely to listen to the music, solidifying existing research (Court-Jackson, 2011, p. 19, Conroy et al., 2020, p. 262, Balki et al., 2023, p. 3). Managing and supporting the listenership of music long after it has been recorded is likely to be important for current artists, given the conclusion that music from the past has important profiles in online streaming.

Listening choices may not be possible through analogue means for those that were first introduced to the music. Research has shown that engagement through social media is a driver of listening on streaming platforms with older music that is new to a listener (Radovanović, 2022, p. 52). Existing listenership will be split between analogue and digital means, but streaming clearly plays a part in continuing the popularity of a 1920's artist's music through an online presence.

Streaming on Spotify versus YouTube Music

Spotify is the market leader for streaming and accounts for 31.7% of all streaming platform users (Duarte, 2024). Despite Spotify's market share being three times that of YouTube Music (9.7%), streaming numbers for 1920's music on YouTube Music are much higher. This may include YouTube (the video streaming platform) factoring in music video watching or listening through the video platform. Nevertheless, it is clear that these are choices made to engage with content on one of the two YouTube platforms.

When an Adjusted Streaming Number (ASN) is used as a metric, taking into account the platform's market share, YouTube often scores thousands of times higher than Spotify. For example, *Japanese Sandman* by Nora Bayes had 41,103 streams on Spotify compared with 128,000 streams on YouTube Music. When an ASN was created for the song, YouTube Music (13,196) scores were more than 10 times higher than Spotify (1,297) scores.

Music as part of the playlist

One of the wider-established impacts of streaming is the creation and subsequent popularity of playlists (Duman et al., 2022, p. 3). Playlists can be curated by individual users, companies, artists, or streaming services themselves, sometimes using algorithms to match listeners to existing or predicted listening behaviour (Webster, 2020, p. 1911). Although the study did not specifically investigate the importance of playlists on listenership, it is important to acknowledge the role that these may play in listenership numbers. As many of the artists involved in this study died, they were not curating or promoting their music themselves. Music production companies for many of the songs investigated in this study are also either not currently active or are managing newer music creations. 1920's music is therefore unlikely to be regularly promoted through playlists. Thus, it is fair to conclude that lower listening figures for some of these artists may be impacted by this lack of playlist engagement.

Implications for the future of jazz listening

The age profiles of streamers of the music is unclear. It is fair to assume, however, that listenership will be made up of some users who hold existing relationships with the music and some who have discovered it through the streaming platform.

Evidence of the inclusion of these songs in jazz playlists may have implications for future jazz artists and those in the jazz music industry. Inclusion of 1920's music in playlists with music from subsequent decades can allow for new discoveries to be made by listeners. Social media may also provide opportunities for new listenership to 1920's jazz through the pairing of older audio clips with new video content or the creation of shorter microsongs (Radovanović, 2022, p. 53). This gateway to century-old jazz may provide an educational tool for streamers to develop a wider musical understanding of the stylistic differences in 1920's jazz.

Conclusions

Data from this investigation provides a varied pattern of online listener behaviour towards 1920's jazz. Leading streaming platforms, which are not excluded within the UK, provide accessibility to 1920's jazz listening through both free and subscription means. Listening data suggests that YouTube Music may be more popular for 1920's jazz listening, as shown through the use of a Mann Whitney U test. This could be linked to the popularity of some in accessing 1920's jazz through YouTube's video service. However, this is not true for every song, and several songs and artists have become far more popular through Spotify, the market leader.

While the claim to knowledge from this research provides important information about listening behaviour and engagement with 1920's jazz there are other areas of research that can develop this. The findings from this study could be built on by conducting research across a number of international locations to allow access to all major streaming platforms. The listening behaviour and engagement of users are not immediately understood through a purely quantitative outlook. Further research is needed to better understand why some choose to engage with 1920's jazz through digital means. This would provide clarity and support those in the wider jazz and music industry, as well as informing how consumers can be best supported.

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