Old Clichés or a Transforming Community?

Early Music Interpreters on TikTok: Identity and Communication Strategies

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Abstract: This article investigates how performers of Western early music are musicking and interacting on and through TikTok, with a focus on their communication strategies and how they affirm their identity. This is the first attempt to examine the output on this social media platform of a group of musicians identified on the basis of a musical repertoire from the past. A first part devoted to methodological considerations is followed by the analysis of six case studies that can be considered representativeof the plurality of profile present on TikTok: both individual musician and ensemble, singers as well as instrumentalists have been considered. The last part of the article develops reflections ranging from the TikTokers themselves to their music personae, from the repertoire performed to the specificity of the format of the published videos for the TikTok platform. In addition, TikTokers' interaction with the audience as well as with colleagues specialized in the same field is examined. Far from being exclusively recreational in nature, the videos are often informative or reflect a professional or even commercial intent. In most cases the videos are competently shot, yet the manner of staging oneself remains close to everyday life. The large number of pieces performed by more TikTokers in a deterritorialised and asynchronous fashion reveals that the innovative way of producing music typical of this online musicking platform is also becoming established in the field of cultured music.
This survey highlights that the community of early music performers on TikTok, although still very small, is very diverse within itself and makes use of differentiated communicative strategies. This community is rapidly developing and oriented towards a participatory culture; moreover, it includes the affirmation of ethical and social values that go beyond the strictly musical sphere.

Keywords: multi-media online musicking; historically informed performance; multilocated and asynchronous performances; social media platforms; Western early music; participatory culture; identity; communication strategies; music personae

Introduction

The use of social media apps on (mobile) electronic devices has not only changed our way of communicating: "In the same way the use of digital media and devices transforms our daily lives, these technologies also influences our musical practices" and has "also enabled and reinforced the adaptation and development of (new) forms of musical practices."[1] Clearly, this extensive topic is impossible to explore in its entirety in a single essay. The object of investigation of this study is the multimedia musicking[2] of a group of people clearly identifiable on the basis of the musical repertoire they practice: the performers of early music. Considering that every multimedia or social media platform has its own specificities, the focus is on TikTok, the innovative platform that in the last few years has changed the way people can engage in musicking together, through the possibility of realizing multilocated and asynchronous musical performances independently and free of charge. The results of this survey can constitute an important step toward a deeper understanding of how musicians' mode of making music and their communication strategies are currently developing (see Burkhart in this Issue).

On the one hand, TikTok is nowadays undoubtedly one of the most popular social media platforms and offers an explicit appeal for musicking. On the other hand, the musicians active in historically informed performances are clearly a group that is identified by a specific musical repertoire and consequently represent a distinctly delineated object of investigation. (On the contrary, the repertoire included in the definition of "classical music" is very rich and differentiated and thus would lead to an overly broad basis for investigation.) In addition, it has to be considered that its members can also be regarded as a community (or a subculture) from the point of view of the history of the movement of historically informed performance practice. Nonetheless, bringing the two together in the same sentence raises questions: Do interpreters of early music publish videos on TikTok? If so, how do they communicate on a social media platform that specializes in short-form videos, designed for use on a mobile phone? And according to the nature of TikTok, should we expect videos with young people lip-syncing arias by Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676), or a dance challenge on the *Ballet Royal de la Nuit* by Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687)?

In this article I aim to investigate how early music performers are musicking

on TikTok, how they communicate and interact through the technical features of this audio-visual digital platform for multimedia musicking, and how they affirm their identity in a deterritorialized social space of interaction. The content is structured into three parts: After defining the study field and formulating my research questions, I present six case studies, each representing the typification of a different kind of user and/or posted content. I then present reflections based on an analysis of the case studies as well as other profiles that respond to the characteristics outlined in the first section.

Field of Investigation and Research Questions

As the videos by early music performers uploaded on TikTok are the object of this article, a methodologically indispensable step in establishing a lexical and conceptual basis to define the field of investigation is calling to mind what exactly the term "early music" means as defined by academic musicology. Harry Haskell provides the following definition in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*:

> A term once applied to music of the Baroque and earlier periods, but now commonly used to denote any music for which a historically appropriate style of performance must be reconstructed on the basis of surviving scores, treatises, instruments and other contemporary evidence.[3]

This definition is related to the concept of "historically informed performance practice," which can nowadays be applied not only to so-called early music but also to Beethoven, Brahms, or even Mahler.

When we search for the term "early music" on TikTok, we are confronted with the fact that this definition encompasses a very broad repertoire for TikTok users.[4] Indeed, videos on early computer music are available on this platform, early gabber, early hardcore, early hip-hop, early rap, early techno, early 2000s, early songs by Aussie rappers, and so on, up to the rather bizarre category "early quarantine songs." The existence of such a wide variety of options—all of them outside the realm of "classical music"—raises the question of the differing perceptions of the meaning of the adjective "early" in the time continuum of music history, a topic that cannot be discussed here. It therefore seems necessary to define the field of investigation more precisely. Given that in recent years the definition of "historically informed performance practice" has been applied to music from epochs closer and closer to our own,

and that therefore the term "early music" potentially overlaps with that of "classical music," in this article I focus on performers who specialize in the kind of music that was originally referred to as European or Western early music, namely music composed up to the middle of the eighteenth century.

In order to find early music performers on TikTok, I searched for numerous keywords and hashtags, representing musical styles or musical instruments of the medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque eras, as well as names of famous composers who were active before circa 1750.[5] An initial observation becomes immediately evident: the early music community on TikTok represents a very small—indeed a microscopically tiny—minority of the over 1.5 billion TikTok users all over the world.[6] Despite this, difficulties arise in defining the field of investigation, for two reasons: First, we can find musicians who *also* play early music but who do not specialize in early music or in an instrument of the past such as the recorder or the cornetto. This category is largely comprised of organists, since the musical literature for this instrument also covers the Renaissance and Baroque eras, and guitarists who can play the lute and/or the theorbo as well. Second, the query for the keyword "medieval" or "medieval music" results almost exclusively in videos shot in a pseudo-medieval setting or recorded at costume festivals, which would certainly be an intriguing field for further investigation. However, such musical performances are much closer to cosplay re-enactments than "historically informed performances" in the academic sense. I decided to discard them because they are peculiar in terms of their characteristics and should form a topic for a different body of research.

For the present investigation, I have considered early music interpreters who are professional musicians or musicians on a full-time basis, whether they be singers, instrumentalists, church musicians, music teachers, or music students. Since the distinction between professional musicians and high-level amateur performers can be slippery and is not relevant for this survey, the latter category is not excluded. I have not considered the videos of users who work in the field of early music but exclusively post content about their private lives, nor those posted by people or associations that are active in public musicology but are not musicians.

Through an analysis of the output of early music interpreters (as defined above) on TikTok, I aim to answer questions pertaining to seven different yet interconnected topics. I would like to first observe the social and

geographical provenience of these musicians: Which age group and ethnicity do they belong to? Juan Bermúdez writes that "the performers, so-called TikTokers, try to construct a recognizable musical persona through their performances, so-called TikTok(s)."[7] Drawing on Philip Auslander's concept of "musical personae,"[8] he introduces the definition of "TikTok personae,"[9] which I will examine extensively in the second and third part of the essay. From now on I will use the term "TikToker(s)" for the user and "TikTok(s)" as a synonym for the video. As a second point, I would observe how the early music TikTokers present themselves on this platform: Do they create TikTok personae in a traditional or in an innovative way? How do they assert their identities (or rather the identity of their musical persona)? Third, I will consider the purpose for which early music performers post videos on TikTok: Is it exclusively for entertainment or do they market themselves on and through TikTok? If so, what marketing strategies do they use? As a fourth point, my analysis of the musicking practices of early music performers on TikTok will highlight whether they only upload video with musical content or also content related to other spheres of human life, such as didactics, religion, or politics. The fifth topic shifts the focus from the performers and their videos to the music performed: Which musical repertoires are represented: instrumental, vocal, secular, or sacred music? As a sixth point, we need to investigate the TikToks per se, which means considering whether the videos uploaded by early music performers are conceived and created specifically for this very platform or whether they are short videos that were not originally created as musicking practice on and through TikTok; for example, they could be clips of longer videos, perhaps originally published on other platforms.

According to Cande Sánchez-Olmos and Eduardo Viñuela Suárez, TikTok has contributed to a transformation in the way music is enjoyed. Their analysis reveals

> a new way of consuming music with a high level of consumer engagement. Users listen to music in the knowledge that they can create their own videos with the songs and measure their popularity by sharing them on this social network. Moreover, TikTok has become a new medium for teenagers to discover music.[10]

Last, in this survey I aim to try to understand whether these observations apply in the field of early music and to what extent it is possible to speak of a participatory culture regarding the TikToks posted by early music performers.

Case Studies

I now intend to observe in more detail certain users' profiles that can be considered representative not only of different ways of presenting oneself as a musician but also of divergent conceptions of a profile on TikTok, while offering multiple ways of exploiting the characteristics of this virtual multimedia space for musicking. The six profiles I will present have been chosen for their diversity as case studies for the present investigation.

The first profile I would like to analyze is *Cembalina22*.[11] As the name of the profile suggests, this TikToker is a harpsichordist and, as a TikTok persona, presents herself as a professional musician: the videos show rehearsals, both at home and in the concert hall; some of them may be clips from concerts. An activity as a teacher is referred to in the comments. *Cembalina22* plays harpsichords of different periods and formats. The repertoire is predominantly from the eighteenth century, which includes the spinet and the virginal, and the pieces are from the specific musical repertoire of these keyboard instruments.

Visiting *Cembalina22*'s profile, one gets the distinct impression that her intention is to create an online portfolio to publicize her own professional activity and to establish further business contacts. In some TikToks there are banner references to the existence of the full version of the same video on YouTube or to a concert that will take place in the future. In addition, the YouTube channel of this TikToker is published in the bio. The channel's working intent is confirmed by the environment, which is always neutral and professional (such as a rehearsal room), by banners proclaiming the TikToker's name and surname, and by the lack of personal statements and comments. Furthermore, *Cembalina22* presents herself with very refined, perhaps even sophisticated clothing and style, both in rehearsals and concerts; so even the image she presents of herself conveys a professional and detached impression, because it follows codified performance practice traditions.

Cembalina22 also publishes certain TikToks depicting duets with other harpsichordists. These are not multilocal and asynchronous recordings but rather duets that took place in the same place, playing simultaneously. The videos are formally staged and professionally produced, show exclusively musical content, and always feature banners giving information on the piece

being played; in the majority of these cases, they are excerpts from longer videos (as mentioned above, edited on YouTube). *Cembalina22*'s TikToks also contain references to other social networks. In summary, it is a channel that somewhat resembles a showcase or a portfolio, and while it exploits some of the features of TikTok, it neglects the participatory aspect.

TikTokers posting content related to early music are not exclusively individual musicians. The next profile I would like to analyze is *Thegesualdosix*,[12] a male vocal ensemble consisting of five young members. Their videos mainly show rehearsals in an aesthetic environment or in places designated for concerts, such as churches or concert halls. In one case, they highlight the prosaic necessity of adjusting certain nuances before a concert and the lack of adequate rehearsal space, leading them to use innovative, pragmatic scenery—and so they shoot a TikTok in an underground parking garage. In other cases, they post footage of concerts around the world in which the ensemble has been featured. Even if the repertoire they perform is mainly French-Flemish polyphony, it is not limited to early music because they also feature some re-elaborations of traditional melodies (especially those related to Christmas).

Thegesualdosix's TikToks are definitely originally made for this platform. The videos are very short, with inserted text boxes containing comments on what they are singing, the situation they are experiencing, where they are singing, and so on, which for the great majority are ironic or even self-deprecating. As we observed with *Cembalina22*, *Thegesualdosix* always provide an indication of the piece they are performing. In a few cases they mention the name of the person who shot the video, while all of the others were most likely made by someone accompanying the group (when all the members are singing) or by the group members themselves (when only some of them are involved). The result is not amateurish, and the videos show a cinematic sense of filming and good editing.

This profile can be seen as a kind of portfolio for professional artists, as it contains the work of the ensemble and rarely shows personal comments. At the same time, however, there is a clear desire to share moments of work and life with the public of TikTok while trying to capture its funny aspects. According to the description posted on the profile ("Group of singers sharing stories from the road"), a lot of behind-the-scenes content is shown. The repertoire they sing is usually seen as elitist, and they evidently intend to

make it more approachable, while also showing that it is possible to be both a completely normal person and a professional singer of sixteenth century polyphony. Apart from the classic concert outfit, a black suit and white shirt, *Thegesualdosix* are always dressed in common, everyday clothing. In this way, their TikTok personae come across as laid-back and easygoing. It is worth adding that, despite the young age of the members of *Thegesualdosix,* their interaction with the other TikTokers is largely limited to reactions to the compliments they receive in the comments section: a deeper exchange of information is rarely present.

The profile *Earlymusicseattle*[13] has published a relatively small number of TikToks to date, yet they are all of very high quality. They are certainly professionally made and specifically designed for TikTok. The videos of *Earlymusicseattle* are clearly intended to publicize the ensemble's activities and to advertise concerts. It is therefore a professional profile in which clips of concerts or rehearsals are published with no personal content. Even if the music is in some cases interspersed with talks by the musicians, the comments refer specifically to the music. The ensemble shows its flexibility by not only publishing TikToks of early music, in which they present themselves in concert dress for the evenings or more casually for rehearsals, but also with videos of contemporary music or even remakes of Baroque melodies in a jazz adaptation that are realized in an unusual setting resembling the stage of a small cabaret club. A distinctive element of this collective Tiktoker is the evident multi-ethnicity of the ensemble.

In spite of the name, the profile *Team_recorder*[14] does not belong to an ensemble but is a single musician: a recorder player. This TikToker publishes videos with different content: clips from concerts, home rehearsals, and explanations of many aspects of the work she does and the instruments she owns. This musician makes use of TikTok to show the flexibility of an underestimated and little-known instrument such as the recorder to the general public by demonstrating its potential both for playing virtuoso pieces of different musical styles and ages and for ASMR-type recordings.

Team_recorder does not exclusively publish TikToks with musical content: some are made to share funny experiences, unfortunate situations, or humorous gags that thematize the musical instruments and the repertoire she plays or the life of a concert performer and music teacher. For example, *Team_recorder* is almost always self-deprecating in a funny way, typically

addressing the recurring theme that the recorder is a real musical instrument, used in the past as well as in the present, not just "a torture device for music lessons at primary school." The repertoire is highly eclectic and ranges from Baroque to pop or country songs; in some TikToks, *Team_recorder* plays melodies from famous soundtracks and even the winning song of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2022.

Despite the irony and self-deprecation shown in the videos, *Team_recorder* presents herself as a young and successful professional. The TikToker's real first and last name as well as the reference to her personal channel on YouTube are published in the bio, and she also provides the following piece of information: "Classical musician in Amsterdam." Therefore, although it cannot be exclusively regarded as a work-portfolio channel, as it is too personal and light-hearted, it is clear that *Team_recorder* publishes TikToks not only for fun but also to publicize her own professionality as a musician.

Team_recorder is open to co-participation and interaction with colleagues: this TikToker has published many duets with other musicians playing different instruments, such as the recorder and concert flute, bassoon, or percussion. Moreover, *Team_recorder* utilizes the many potentialities of TikTok, both visual and auditory, and is also present on other social platforms (YouTube and Instagram). However, *Team_recorder* is not very active in chats and does not have videos in which she plays melodies requested by the audience.

The TikToks posted by *Team_recorder* seem very spontaneous and casual, but they are in fact staged and clearly made and designed for TikTok. This TikToker makes great use of captions or comments, which are present in almost all of her videos, the vast majority of which are not music-only TikToks. A relevant aspect is the presence of verbal written communication, which is of paramount importance in conveying the message, since *Team_recorder* does not give any explanations in her videos by speaking. It can rightly be said that without the verbal communication in the boxes, the public would not understand the message—at least not correctly, which means that the ironic aspect would be incomprehensible in many cases.

Verbal communication is of paramount importance for *Violboy*[15] as well, although it is a matter of oral communication in this particular case. *Violboy* is a young musician who initially posted non-music related TikToks and then developed a rich and articulate profile that is very much oriented toward giving explanations about early music as well as sharing the music

they perform on different historical instruments. *Violboy* plays the viola da gamba and the eighteenth-century psaltery and has a real didactic verve for elucidations on the musical instruments and the pieces they play, as well as the technique with which they are performed. *Violboy* also provides explanations on the maintenance of the instruments and plays or sings several voices of a polyphonic piece in certain Tiktoks.

Violboy are highly interactive with their numerous and rather inquisitive followers, answering many questions, predominantly by creating TikToks that explicitly quote a question asked in the chat from a previous post. Apart from this category of TikToks generated as an answer, *Violboy* are also active in written communication: evidently they take great care to respond to the questions sent by their followers. *Violboy* makes frequent use of text boxes in the TikToks, as well as of images from musical sources or other iconographic sources from the past.

The videos are evidently made precisely for TikTok and are characterized by an appearance of immediacy and spontaneity, even when they must clearly have been intended as answers to precise questions, in which *Violboy* sometimes shows images reproducing paintings or illustrations in books, which are chosen specifically to provide an answer to a specific question; in some cases, these pictures are used as a background for the video (and not shown as samples in a book). This shows that *Violboy* even knows how to use the advanced visual features of TikTok.

Violboy seems to post content for the sheer joy of sharing it, just as they seem to play for the absolute pleasure of playing, since this TikToker appears to work mainly as a porcelain artist. This aspect is only shown in a few instances on their TikTok profile, and this also applies to another of this TikToker's passions: jewelry. *Violboy* uses eye-catching and extravagant jewelry in many videos. This is part of a consistent logic with which this user create their TikTok persona and reaffirm their own identity, including their sexual identity, an aspect made even clearer by the use of an explicit nickname: "Early gay."

The last profile I would like to present is *Violadagoomba*.[16] This TikToker is a professional church musician, extremely versatile and a multi-instrumentalist: they sing and play the organ, the harpsichord, various cuts of the viola da gamba, the recorder, and bells; moreover, *Violadagoomba* often records over himself to make polyphony using different instruments with up to five voices. This TikToker has also published numerous multilocal duets,

trios, and quartets with instrumentalists or singers registering at different locations. These multilocated and asynchronous musical performances, made possible by the features of TikTok, are not the only facet of the participatory nature of *Violadagoomba*'s profile. There is much more: they not only give many explanations of music in general but also answers numerous questions from other users and even accepts challenges or plays directly requested pieces.

The musical repertoire offered by *Violadagoomba* is extensive, ranging from Gregorian chants to video game soundtracks played on the harpsichord; the three principal genres are keyboard music, music for the viola da gamba, and religious hymns. The videos are certainly designed for TikTok, and indeed it can be said that *Violadagoomba* really exploits the technical and visual features of the platform. Alongside TikToks that are completely spontaneous and evidently quickly made (which implies, of course, that they are simple and rudimentary), other videos required far more in-depth musical and technical knowledge to produce.

Violadagoomba's TikToks seem to have been created for the genuine pleasure of making music and sharing it with others, as well as providing explanations to those who ask for them. As a TikTok persona, *Violadagoomba* have a very playful and light-hearted attitude that leads them to convey great irony about their work while making inside jokes between musicians. Concerning identity and belonging to a community, *Violadagoomba*'s profile picture is a clear statement: printed over the background of the rainbow flag of the LGBTIQ+ movement are some neumes in square notation, musical signs typical of the late medieval notation of Gregorian chant, clearly recalling (medieval) sacred music. The success of this profile results from its easy-going manner, the space it provides for explanations and questions from the audience, the fact that it covers such diverse musical repertoires, and certainly the intense activity on TikTok as well.

Conclusions

The presence of Western early music on such a popular social media platform as TikTok seems to confirm that this repertoire is gradually outgrowing its status as a niche in concert life and has entered the mainstream. On the other hand, the minuscule number of videos in comparison to other music genres

shows that this is not yet the case for the segment of the population using TikTok. In the following, I would like to reflect on both the early music TikToks and the musicians who created them and answer the questions I formulated in the first part of this article. The comments refer to the six case studies presented above as well as to the rest of the TikToks related to early music. They are grouped by topic.

Individual musicians clearly predominate among the TikTokers who specialize in European early music, while accounts of ensembles or institutions are in the minority. Although information on age is largely unavailable in the profiles and should therefore be derived from the empirical basis of observation, early music TikTokers belong to an age group ranging from average university student age to approximately 40 years. Although it may not be surprising that the majority seem to be younger than 35 years of age, the complete absence of teenagers was rather unexpected. Ethnically and socially, the users are not only from Western countries, although most of them live in Europe or North America.

I would also like to address what we might call "the personality on stage" of the early music TikTokers—in Bermúdez's definition, the "TikTok personae"—and analyze how they display their identity. In general, the early music performers on TikTok explicitly present themselves as professional musicians and seek to underline that while musicking on TikTok may be a playful activity, making music is a serious matter, an art that is learned through practice and dedication. In fact, they convey the message that a musician's work, whether as an interpreter or teacher, is a profession—with its positive and negatives, serious or funny facets—and not a mere pastime.

Many TikTokers work very consciously with authenticity effects. Corinna Herr emphasizes the link between authenticity in the field of musical performance and the authenticity of musical persona, with explicit reference to the performers of early music:

> One may infer that the focus on authenticity also reigns in the world of classical music. The self-presentation of (young) musicians runs between the poles of individual expression as well as virtuosity and staying true to the original music. Authenticity in the last context is per my hypothesis a dominant dogma in music education as can be seen e.g. from the HIPP (historically informed performance practice) movement.[17]

In the following I delve into the aspect of (staged) authenticity.

Only a few TikTok personae are staged traditionally or even conservatively, so to speak, according to the institutionalized model of the public concert of "classical" music. The use of elements of the codified performance practice tradition, like formal dressing, the absence of personal comments, and explanations of the composers' names and the pieces' titles, can be interpreted as a strategy for communicating professionality. But this does not seem to be the dominant tendency. On the contrary, it can be said that the vast majority of TikTokers avoid formality in favor of everyday dress and a more personal style: they present themselves in an innovative way that is suited to the platform, their particular audience, and the short format of the videos. They do not stage themselves as stars or virtuosos and do not accentuate an academic detachment but stage themselves as they might be seen in everyday life, at home, at work, or at a concert, thus creating "TikTok personae" that seem consistent with their own lives. For example, they wear normal, everyday clothes if they are not performing on stage; and when they perform, they usually wear the classic "all black" clothing. These situations do not come across as constructed and artificial but as realistic and authentic, because it could actually be like that in real life. Moreover, the language used in the TikToks can be explicative and didactic, but it is rarely technical or scholarly.

The locations chosen as settings for the TikToks are a key element that contributes to conveying authenticity or artificiality to the situation depicted in the videos and thus to the TikTok personae. The TikToks predominantly show concerts, rehearsals, and recording sessions; to a lesser degree they show daily exercises. This means that the venues chosen represent spaces where musical activity indeed takes place in real life. Preparing this survey, I could not find any videos in which the TikTokers are in an artificially staged and unrealistic situation, as may be seen in numerous YouTube videos. Most of the TikToks are shot in private settings (mainly homes); this is followed by TikToks shot at a conservatory, studio, or rehearsal room, while only a few are set in concert halls or churches. Videos shot outdoors are very rare, most probably for reasons related to technical recording infrastructure (moreover, early music played outdoors is not common in real life and would definitely evoke the effect of an artificial situation). It can therefore be said that the early music performers on TikTok do not attempt to create aestheticized and artificialatmospheres but rather aim to show their musical practice as an everyday activity.

Showing personal preferences, interests, and passions on TikTok is a widespread tendency, which belongs to the (only apparently) immediate communication of this kind of social media. In particular, it should be noted that some TikTokers thematize, or rather reveal, their gender and sexual identities. The strategies adopted for showing personal or even private information include written clues in the text of the profile (not only in the form of personal pronouns) and the use of hashtags in the commentary or within the TikTok, where decorative elements that convey this message, such as rainbow flags, can also be found. One can therefore speak of the presence of an "affirmative culture" of sexual minorities on TikTok. This corroborates Melissa Avdeeff's statement that "some spaces of TikTok have become places of validation, breaking down presumed hegemonic understandings of identity, bodily functions, and relationships."[18] The need felt by some TikTokers to assert a non-heteronormative identity is reminiscent of the formerly subversive pretensions of the early music movement and reveals the intention to show that where the choice of musical repertoire might seem conservative on the surface, it allows scope for existential aspects that are out of the box.

Moreover, this analysis confirms that the shift in communication content from the message to the person of the broadcaster—which has increasingly come to characterize communication on social media—is valid for videos of early music performers as well, as "due to the audio-visual nature of the app and the lack of sharing of pre-existing content … the users inevitably become the content."[19] This is particularly evident in the profiles of TikTokers who share abundant information in their videos on their personal preferences, working lives, and the general and personal difficulties they encounter in their jobs as musicians. In other words, the boundaries between real users and TikTok personae become quite elusive in some cases. However, it can be said that manifestations of political opinions are absent, as are opinions regarding topics such as social or environmental activism.[20] In some cases, the musicians include greetings for Christian religious celebrations, yet it is not possible to speak of a general thematization of religious topics.

Regarding the purpose of posting videos on TikTok, the ludic aspect of musicking on this platform clearly emerges from this survey. A great number of Tiktoks by early music performers are inspired by the explicit intention of creating playful content about music and with music, of having fun with music and making jokes about it in order to amuse the audience and poke fun

at the ungrateful aspects of a performer's work and life—and even of one's own attitude, difficulties, or errors. The ironic comments indeed play a very important role in creating a connection between TikTokers and their public. On the other hand, a didactic intent is evident in many videos, in which the TikTokers give explanations on several topics: organology, musical forms and genres, questions of music theory, medieval or renaissance notation, pitch, and so on. Sometimes they even give practical advice, such as information on how to oil a flute. The TikTokers divulge information using various strategies: verbal explanations, superimposed captions with written information on the video, and portraits of composers or photos of early musical sources.

This survey has revealed that the presence of marketing strategies does not play a relevant role. Certainly, the TikToks have the function in some cases of advertising a concert or a gig, and certain TikTokers explicitly state that they teach or give master classes, or even that they can give online lessons for a fee. However, an explicit commercial offer is definitely not common, and although it can be said that the ensemble profiles are mostly business-oriented, the great majority of the TikToks have no direct or even indirect commercial intent.

The type of repertoire played in TikToks of early music performers merits consideration. In general, it is possible to state that it includes famous pieces yet also many that are little known. There is only a small number of videos of vocal music; rather, instrumental music tends to prevail. The vast majority of the TikToks contain music played by a singular musician or performed by a small ensemble; pieces for orchestra or choir are rare. Both sacred and secular music is performed in the videos, not only from the Baroque period but also from the Renaissance, and even plain chant is represented. On the contrary, TikToks of profane songs from the Middle Ages are very rare.[21]

For the majority of the TikToks of early music performers, it is possible to speak of genuine user-generated content, albeit created at times by TikTokers with obvious technical skills and an affinity for communication on social media. Only in very few cases can the videos be categorized as professionally generated content posted by ensembles or users with a clear aim to show commercial or public relations content. Regarding the live element of the musical performances, it can be said that TikToks documenting rehearsals or practicing at home are clearly marked by their immediacy, although the majority of the videos are specifically staged to show an aspect of the

performer's work, a piece of music, or an instrument.

The question of the specificity of the videos to TikTok as a social medium can be answered in the affirmative: the TikTokers created them in a form best suited for this platform, and they are familiar with its specific characteristics. The TikToks of early music performers are rarely clips of longer videos that may have been made for other social platforms. In general, they represent genuine multimedia musicking, as they were originally created as audiovisual footage of musical performances.

In the community of early music performers, it is very common to share information about the music performed and to accompany the video with explanations. This means that in a great number of TikToks we also find verbal text that can be spoken or presented in written form within text boxes. Therefore, communication takes place at both the visual and auditory levels, while the message is conveyed in both musical and verbal languages.[22] This highlights the competence of users in applying TikTok's functions on the one hand, while underlining the need to contextualize a performance through non-musical content on the other. The presence of verbal comments in music videos is a specificity of the TikTok platform, whereas it is completely absent in other music platforms, such as YouTube. It is comparable to Instagram "stories" and is indispensable for eliciting reactions, in particular those with a humorous element, that the musical performance alone would likely be unable to communicate effectively.

In the context of this research, I could not find parodies of videos either made by other users on TikTok or posted on other platforms or social networks.[23] However, the content of a video sometimes refers to that of previous videos created by the same TikToker or to a question or comment in the chat. It is therefore possible to state that the references are internal to TikTok, and if any references to other platforms are found, they are exclusively to publicize the presence of a longer version of the same video, which, however, rarely occurs. Another aspect I would like to point out is that early music performers' TikToks do not seek to become viral and to generate memes. The complete absence of videos designed to be remade through the addition of choreography or lip-synchronization is noteworthy. This means that for the user group examined in this survey, some of the specific features of TikTok—which have determined its fortune and popularity—are completely negligible. Since this is valid for users who post non-music videos on TikTok as well, which constitutes an

enormous number, it can be said that a surprisingly large proportion of TikTokers do not use certain specific features of this platform.

The question of why both musicians and their followers have not reused videos of other TikTokers in order to create new content on the platform is legitimate and deserves a separate investigation. It would be relevant to ask the users directly why this important aspect of the participatory culture typical of TikTok is completely missing in their videos. The reason is certainly multifaceted. I argue that it can be traced back to at least three elements: traditional reverence for the music composed in the past, which enjoys an aura of superiority; the extensive duration of the original pieces, meaning that there are hardly any TikToks in which a piece of early music is performed in its entirety, a fact that clearly differentiates TikTok from YouTube; and last, respect for real performers who require years of study to perform early and classical music correctly. I would also speculate that the failure to make use of specific features of TikTok is due to a way of enjoying music that is anchored to forms of creating music that take place in the real world. Evidently, what Sánchez-Olmos and Viñuela describe as TikTok's own new way of listening to music does not hold true for performers and listeners of early music: "Users listen to music in the knowledge that they can create their own videos with the songs and measure their popularity by sharing them on this social network."[24] The community revolving around early music uses TikTok with a different approach, either offering their own performance or watching what is published: users either present themselves as performers and thus post TikToks with their performances and explanations of a popularizing nature, or they see themselves as an audience that listens to the performance without any interest in reproducing it in another format. Nevertheless, the early music community is aware of another distinctive aspect of TikTok that distinguishes it from real-life musicking: the direct reaction of the public in the chat, according to the logic of an open and active participatory culture.

While some TikToks are in fact excerpts of longer performances and are traditional both in their presentation in general and in the provision of a passive auditorium,[25] the present investigation reveals the existence of TikTokers who are open to participatory culture and stimulate it by giving answers to questions from the audience, taking into account comments and requests left by other users in the chat, and often creating new posts from this exchange of opinions and requests for explanations. The participatory aspect is evident in the chat and in the reactions of the TikTokers to chat questions.

On the one hand, the users watching the videos do not merely play a passive role as listeners of a concert, as they can write comments and ask questions. On the other hand, many TikTokers publish answers to the questions of their followers in the chat as well as in the form of a new TikTok, explicitly quoting the question or the comment. In this way, a human rapport is created or strengthened, curious listeners are acknowledged, and a participatory culture is stimulated. Frequently, people who ask questions or participate in the chat with comments do not react to one single TikTok but to several videos by the same TikToker. This shows that a community is formed not only through the competitive spirit of a challenge but also through the "simple" dialogue between the performers and their public.[26]

A further form of participation that is a specific feature of TikTok is often used by early music performers, namely the possibility of making music digitally with other musicians. I refer to the duets, trios, and quartets of different musicians recording a piece of music together or new voices or rhythmic elements added to an already existing video by another TikToker. This feature is widely adopted and contributes to the creation of new content on the platform as well as a tighter connection between its users.

Sánchez-Olmos and Viñuela have written that TikTok is "altering the traditional dynamics of production, distribution and consumption [of music] in a context of participatory culture."[27] I think it is possible to extend this statement—at least regarding the first two points, production and distribution—to the TikToks of early music performers as well. Duets and ensemble pieces recorded asynchronously and in a deterritorialized fashion, that is, at different times and in different places, represent a way of musicking that did not previously exist. Early music compositions reach a young audience through TikTok that would otherwise have no contact with this type of repertoire. However, I do not think it is possible to say that the way of musicking on and through TikTok by early music performers is changing the way of listening to music, as their TikToks do not involve listening aimed at "remaking," mimicking, or imitating what is in the video through lip-synching and dance but rather involve the audience listening for enjoyment, to satisfy their curiosity, or even to learn. Early music performers are a community that is evolving and transforming and that is capable of using all the features of TikTok, a community that has changed how music of past eras is produced and distributed but is apparently not transforming the way this type of repertoire is enjoyed.

In conclusion, even if it can be said that a small group of TikToks confirms certain enduring clichés regarding the old-fashioned or even conservative way of presenting one's own work that one might have in mind when imagining musicians who specifically specialize in early music, this survey highlights the fact that early music performers form a community that is transforming and evolving with the times. This is still a tiny community in terms of numbers, and many features of the platform have yet to be explored, but it surely has the potential to expand and grow further, which means that TikTok could become an increasingly important part of the early music ecosystem. For this reason, TikTok should be considered by theatres, producers, and record labels as a possible tool to find new audiences.[28]

Early music TikTokers who have taken the plunge have realized that TikTok is a medium with its own specific characteristics (and not just a narrow version of YouTube). They are creating videos not only to share experiences but also to make their instruments and the repertoire they play known to the public and to publicize or advertise their professional activity. The development of musicking practices of early music performers on and through TikTok is certainly an intriguing field of study. I am confident that we will continue to observe it, as it will undoubtedly continue to evolve.

Notes

1. Juan Bermúdez, *Musicking TikTok: A Musical Ethnography from a Glocal Austrian Context*, New Approaches to Sound, Music, and Media 15 (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025), 15.

2. I refer to the definition of "musicking" as proposed in Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: Univ. Press of New England, 1998), 9.

3. Harry Haskell, art. "early music," in *Grove Music Online.*

4. This also applies to the same term in other languages: "alte Musik," "musica antica," "música antigua."

5. I entered the names of musical periods and musical instruments in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish, with and without hashtag.

6. The number refers to the year 2023; see https://de.statista.com/. All links accessed on April 4, 2024.

7. Bermúdez, *Musicking TikTok*, 25.

8. Philip Auslander, *In Concert: Performing Musical Persona* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), 87–128, especially pp. 88, 95, and 127–28.

9. Bermúdez, *Musicking TikTok*, 61–98; and Juan Bermúdez, "Virtual Musical.ly(ties): Identities, Performances, & Meanings in a Mobile Application; An Ethnomusicological Approach to TikTok's Musicking" (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2022), 74–75.

10. Cande Sánchez-Olmos and Eduardo Viñuela Suárez, "The End of The Amateur Music Video Dream (As We Expected It): From YouTube to TikTok," in *Music in the Disruptive Era*, ed. David Hurwitz and Pedro Ordóñez Eslava, Music, Science & Technology 4 (Turnhout: Brepols 2022), 3–22: 15.

11. *Cembalina22* had 101 followers, had received 1084 likes, and had published 49 TikToks.

12. *Thegesualdosix* had 22.7K followers, had received 181.5K likes, and had published 98 TikToks.

13. *Earlymusicseattle* had 460 followers, had received 787 likes, and had published 75 TikToks.

14. *Team_recorder* had 23.3K followers, had received 716.8K likes, and had published 260 TikToks.

15. *Violboy* had 45.8K followers, had received 452.1K likes, and had published 235 TikToks.

16. On April 16, 2023, *Violadagoomba* had 188.9K followers, had received 7.8M likes, and had published more than 1,400 TikToks.

17. Corinna Herr, "Classical Musicians on YouTube: Online Performance Practices and the Digital Divide," in *Music in the Disruptive Era*, ed. David Hurwitz and Pedro Ordóñez Eslava, Music, Science & Technology 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 46.

18. Melissa K. Avdeeff, "TikTok, Twitter, and Platform-Specific Technocultural Discourse in Response to Taylor Swift's LGBTQ+ Allyship in 'You Need to Calm Down,'" *Contemporary Music Review* 40, no. 1 (2021): 96, https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2021.1945225.

19. Avdeeff, "TikTok, Twitter, and Discourse," 96.

20. In light of the TikToks I watched during my preparation for the present study, it is clearly an over-generalization to assert the existence of a ubiquitous presence of manifestations of political opinion in TikTok videos, as Avdeeff asserts in the sentence directly following the previous quotation: "The users inevitably become the content. Therefore, every TikTok user is a performer who externalises political opinion via an audiovisual act." Avdeeff, "TikTok, Twitter, and Discourse," 96.

21. An example is the TikToker Mediæval Melodies, who plays profane songs from the Middle Ages on reconstructions of medieval instruments.

22. This gives rise to further topics of debate, such as the extent to which music can communicate without text, or whether these videos are possible without text.

23. On the interconnectivity of different social media, see Juan Bermúdez, "Performing Beyond the Platform: Experiencing Musicking on and through YouTube, TikTok and Instagram," in *Remediating Sound: Repeatable Culture, YouTube and Music*, ed. ed. Holly Rogers, Joana

Freitas, and João Francisco Porfírio. New Approaches to Sound, Music, and Media (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023), 187–201.

24. Sánchez-Olmos and Viñuela, "The end of the amateur music video dream," 15.

25. Examples include the videos of the above-mentioned profiles *Cembalina22* and *Earlymusicseattle*.

26. On (dance) challenge on TikTok, see Daniel Klug, "'It Took Me Almost 30 Minutes to Practice This': Performance and Production Practices in Dance Challenge Videos on Tiktok." Preprint, submitted August 26, 2020. https://doi.org/10.33767/osf.io/j8u9v. On their capability of create communities, see pp. 6–7.

27. Sánchez-Olmos and Viñuela, "The end of the amateur music video dream," 3.

28. Experimental trials in this sense were the adaptations made for TikTok by the Opernloft team in Hamburg of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) into "#FREE_Constanze" in 2021 of and Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) into "Carmen by Carmen" in 2022.