

# MEMORISING MUSIC

I am always astonished at how concert pianists can memorise whole concertos. I'm also amazed at pop musicians or people who cannot read music who remember a whole lot of verbal instructions and information about pieces. I have to admit that I have to have things written down or I forget. On the other hand, I do know hundreds of different tunes, mostly standards, so here are some ways you can commit them to memory. When I was at music college in my late teens I was told to learn at least one tune every week. That means after just one year you can learn 50 tunes or so. After 5 years, that works out at 250, and for 10 years if you kept that up it would be 500 tunes. Or 500 different parts other than the tune if that is what you are seeking to do. So how can you do it? Here are some hints.

1. Don't be too ambitious and try and learn too much in a short period or you may forget a lot after a while. However, in the jazz field there are relatively few tunes that are played but these tunes get played over and over again.

2. Some people have very photographic memories and can visualise the music on paper. This works well with 2-stave piano music. Think of the music almost like a painting. In one area of the page there may be lots of black notes, another may be almost clear. If it is handwritten or has been scribbled on, this may help you remember it. Music scores are also very idiosyncratic and you can often see different patterns made by the music. This may even draw your attention to the individual notes.

3. If you have played the piece over a few times you may also remember certain passages where your hand had to adopt certain shapes, particularly in difficult bits or where the music is very high or low. These hand shapes may also help to prompt the memory.

4. I am sure there is an audible memory too. People can often remember a tune they have heard a few times. Then all you have to do is translate that audible memory into playing it on your particular instrument. Some people can do this naturally, others can often follow the contours (where it goes up or down) even if the exact notes may not be played. With practice this should become more accurate.

5. Nothing beats repetition - play the tune/part over and over again. Sing/hum it. You learn by repetition.

6. Analyse the music in the following ways:

a. Does it contain repetitions? A phrase may be repeated immediately afterwards or after a few bars. The first part of a tune (8 bars, say) may be repeated later.

b. A note may be repeated a number of times, eg. One Note Samba is the most extreme example of this but there are other tunes in which certain notes are repeated several times.

c. A phrase may be repeated but starting on another note - ie. a sequence. This may happen a few times, eg. Blue Moon. If this happens, you just have to memorise what other notes the phrase starts on.

d. 2 notes may be repeated, as in the middle eight of Somewhere Over the Rainbow.

e. Are there any unusual intervals? For example an octave, a 7th or a 6th. Again think of Somewhere Over the Rainbow.

f. Does the tune have any scalar runs in it (3 notes or more)?

g. Are there any hidden scalar runs? For example, does the last note of a phrase form a bit of a run with the next one/s. Eg. You Stepped Out of a Dream or Just the Way You Look Tonight.

h. Are there any accents which attract your attention? Make a note of them.

i. Are there any dynamic marking which do the same thing?

j. Most chord sequences of standards are very routine, consisting mainly of 1625s and 251s. If there are any unusual chord progressions, they will stand out.

k. Are there any unusual or striking rhythms - try putting words to them.

You don't have to learn all these things, but a few of them might help.