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Ken Eller

The Captain's Corner

<http://www.thecaptainscorner.com>

thecaptainscorner@gmail.com



MEMORIZATION TECHNIQUES

A Workshop Guide to Understanding Music and Improving our Ability to Memorize Tunes

Memorizing Tunes

Memorizing tunes for players of all levels can be a daunting task. For many, their repertoires suffer greatly because of their concerns in reading, phrasing and pulsing music. Combine this with the lack of knowledge of chords or arpeggios, and the memorization process takes forever. Our fingers and brain just aren't always coordinated.

The memorization process then, involves a working knowledge and application of each of the above.

1. Arpeggios – our fingers must instinctively know where to go
2. Pulsing – an understanding of the words within the sentence
3. Phrasing – an understanding of the sentence structure of the music
4. Rhythm – ability to articulate the fundamental movements instinctively
5. Reading – graphically understanding all the movements without hesitation

TEST TUNE

The Shoals of Herring

Retreat

The musical score consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The music is written in a single melodic line. The second staff continues the melody. The third and fourth staves provide a harmonic accompaniment, with the third staff starting with a double bar line and repeat sign. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat sign at the end of the fourth staff.

Written with PiobMaster (Cool Mior Software Ltd.)

Arpeggios (automating the notes)

Arpeggio Exercises

To be played without music with metronome
Triads in A, G and D

Ken Eller, 2009

The image shows three staves of musical notation for arpeggio exercises. Each staff contains four measures of music. The notes are grouped by stems to indicate arpeggiated triads. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The second and third staves are also in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes in each measure represent the notes of the A, G, and D triads respectively, played in an arpeggiated fashion.

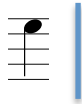
For further exercises, contact the Captain's Corner through the website <http://www.thecaptaincorner.com>

Pulsing (The Words of Music)

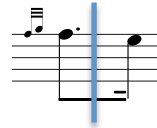
Music is a language much like English. The understanding of a passage is in the words, not the individual letters. In music, pulsing is a method of determining the important “musical words”. This will allow you to put “space” or good pronunciation into your music. Here are some rules to follow for pulsing. Strictly adhere to them and you will play all tunes with the best of them: pulsed, with good phrasing, rhythmic technique and in time.

Rules: Place a pulse line after

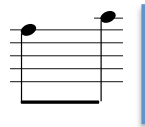
1. Every $\frac{1}{4}$ note



2. Every dotted note (dotted $\frac{1}{8}$ th note)



3. Every pair of $\frac{1}{8}$ th notes



The Shoals of Herring

Retreat

The image shows a musical score for 'The Shoals of Herring' in 3/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff is the melody, and the other three are accompaniment. Vertical blue lines are placed on the first staff to indicate pulse points. The music is written in treble clef and includes various note values and rests.

Written with ProMiser (Cool Mior Software Ltd.)

In the $\frac{3}{4}$ march (as well as in the $\frac{4}{4}$ march) there are just three types of pulses or words as indicated. The time signature and tune type will define the rules for pulsing all your other music.

A pulse, then equates to a word in a sentence. When playing a tune, never take a breath on your practice chanter in the middle of the pulse. This leads to incorrect rhythm; in other words, incorrect pronunciation.

With the pulse lines in place, you can begin to play the tune one pulse at a time, taking a rest on the pulse lines. As a second step, you can play continuous, blowing through the pulse lines; taking as much time as you wish.

Finally, you should shorten the duration over the pulse lines as you become familiar with the tune. This allows you to put [SPACE](#) into your music. These pulses are re-occurring. The time signature and tune type will define the rules for pulsing all your other music.

Phrasing (The Sentences of Music)

You read English in phrases, with punctuation, to form sentences. Phrases in music are often 2 bars in length, satisfying what many call a “question and answer” pattern. Marches follow this consistently. As with pulsing, there are set rules to follow to identify the musical phrases and eventually the sentences.

Rules – place braces around each two bars of the tune.

The phrasing pattern structure should be analyzed. Most often you discover a recurring pattern like

A	B
A	Ending

Having a look at the Shoals of Herring, we get

The Shoals of Herring

Retreat

Written with ProMaster (Cool Mor Software Ltd.)

Notice a few things.

- 1. Bar 1 of each phrase is almost the same (bar 7 differing slightly)**
- 2. From the pulsing, the dominant notes use the A arpeggio, A, C, E and high A. It is not coincidental that the part ends in A (called resolution) and the 4th bar ends in B (the G arpeggio)**
- 3. Each phrase has 2 bars – the question and then the answer**



Rhythm – each pulse becomes a word of the sentence. Words will have one, two or even three notes only. But how you pronounce those words becomes the essential ingredient of our music. Many tutor books lay out the fundamental rhythms or embellishments. They must be mastered correctly and not read in the music. Learn to know the “graphical” nature of each rhythm and execute it without hesitation. For example:



Taorluath



Grip



Throw



Doubling



Triple



GDE triples



Strike



Birl

Some hints:

- 1. Identify the arpeggio for the tune and design exercises to highlight only those notes**
- 2. Examine the phrases for question and answer relationships within the phrase and between phrases**
- 3. Examine the structure for repetitive phrases, especially the ending phrases**
- 4. Scan each pulse to determine what technique is necessary and make each pulse a special drill until it is rhythmically correct**
- 5. Commence rote learning of each phrase – play once with music and then once without. Constantly test your memory to correct where errors may result. This is the single most important aspect of memorizing once an understanding of the music is complete.**
- 6. Abandon the written score as soon as possible. Too much reliance on the music encourages poor memorization habits. if you are “spoon fed”, you become complacent and lazy!**

Now here is a tune to try on your own:

Torosay Castle.

Retreat March.

PM J. Laurie.



Conclusions:

The techniques used here of understanding the chords within the music, pulsing and phrasing are essential to memorizing a tune. Without these fundamentals, the learning process often becomes random in nature – note by note. At the very best, the musical story is obscured by the individual notes and technique. Memorizing music is the piper’s form of literacy. Without this skill, you may play pipe music, but are not necessarily a piper!

Memorization *Made Easy*

by JOHN BOTTOMLEY

I suspect we have all, at one time or another, wished we could play with the music in front of us like our compatriots in the symphony orchestra. How much easier would it be if we didn't have to memorize every tune we play!

On the other hand, it's been said that the tune is not yours until you have memorized it; until then you are only playing from the page and after that you can play from the heart.

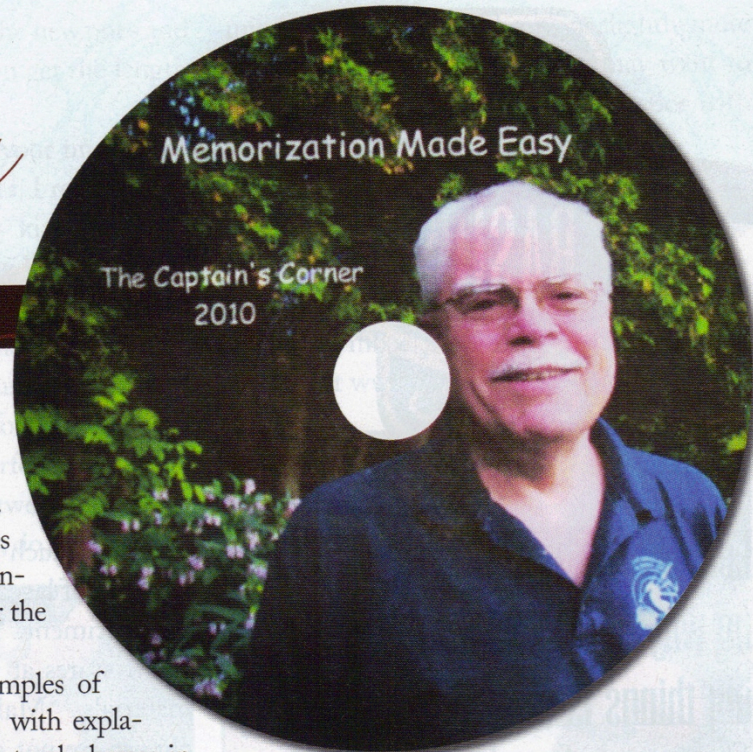
Ken Eller, known as Captain Ken throughout the piping world, has produced a CD course to improve memorization skills for pipers, geared specifically to bagpipe music. Many of us understand and teach tunes by singing in phrases, but the Captain Takes us back a few steps from that.

The course begins with very basic arpeggio exercises in three different piping modalities.

These help train your fingers to hit the right notes of a given tune and avoid the wrong, out of mode ones. The more you do these scales the better condition your fingers will be in, and the clearer the mental habits.

This is followed by examples of tunes being sung in phrases, with explanations of how to find the natural phrases in a tune. Technical exercises (it brought back fond memories to see the Round and Distinct Movement page from Logan's Tutor!) are presented with explanations of how they fit rhythmically and explores the purpose of each movement in enhancing the melody.

There are progressively more complex tunes examined and hints for creating a sound



memorization plan for yourself, including written exercises.

All in all, a well-thought-out and presented tutor for those students/pipers who have difficulty memorizing, and a boon for pipe majors. —The Voice

Available through the Captain's Corner at www.thecaptainscorner.com.