Memorization Psychological Data and Some Practical Tips

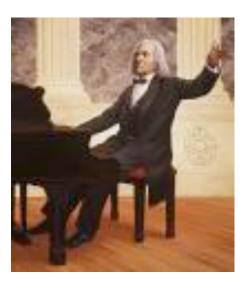
We do not remember days; we remember moments. Cesare Pavese, *The Burning Brand*

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Historical Perspective

- Clara Schumann, 1828
 First to play in public without a score, at age 9
 Critics describe her as "that odious woman" for playing works of other composers from memory
- Franz Liszt, shortly thereafter Turns memorization into "dramatic ritual" (Edwin Hughes)
- Hans von Bülow, 1870
 Responding to critics who thought
 playing from memory was a stunt that
 drew attention away from the music,
 brought music onstage but played
 from memory anyway
- End of 19th century Memorization becomes standard for concert soloists, particularly pianists



Is memorization really a good idea?

Edwin Hughes (1915)

Performing with music inhibits "freedom of expression and the most direct psychological connection with the audience"

Béla Bartók, Raoul Pugno, Dame Myra Hess Perform in public with score open before them

Contemporary Research on Memorization

Does memorization offer "freedom of expression"? Audiences rate memorized performances higher than non-memorized ones This does not seem to be dependent on their angle of vision or having a clear and unobstructed view of the performer

Does memorization provide "most direct psychological connection with the audience"?

Yes; musicians rate memorized performances even higher than nonmusicians

Is the extra effort that it takes to memorize a piece worth it? Yes; both musicians and non-musicians rated performance higher after an extra month of practice in which the piece was memorized

Aaron Williamon, "The value of performing from memory", Psychology of Music, 27 (1999), 84-95.

Interviews with Professional Musicians

Susan Hallum, London, 1995

Diversity of strategies in use Aural, visual and kinesthetic memory all important Analytical strategies paramount, especially in harder works

"The development of memorization strategies in musicians", paper presented at Seventh Conference on Developmental Psychology (Cracow, Poland, 1995)

Rita Aiello, New York, 1999

Wide range of strategies used; aural memory more important than kinesthetic Clear idea of musical structure important Developing improvisational skills crucial

"Strategies for memorizing piano music; pedagogical implications", poster presented at Eastern Division of Music Educators National Conference (New York, NY, 1999)

How do we memorize?

"[A performer is like]...the river pilot who keeps his course by sticking to the channel, but notices only a very few markers along the way."

Constantin Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares

SHORT-TERM MEMORY

Experience first stored here

Visual Information (music on the page, visual layout of keyboard) **CENTRAL EXECUTIVE**

Speech-based information (direction from teacher)

information must be moved to

LONG-TERM MEMORY

PROCEDURAL

knowing how to do something kinesthetic information stored here

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EPISODIC specific personal associations SEMANTIC Understanding causes, results and motivation

SKILLED MEMORY

information is stored in "chunks" retrieval cues are decided and rehearsed

these can exist on several levels

- global—the skeletal image of the piece
- middle level-had significant detail, but not everything
 - local level-every detail included

What do we know about how professionals memorize?

Three types of retrieval cues

Basic

fingerings, places of technical difficulty, units of musical form, big and small (motives, phrases, sections, etc. and their pattern of interrelationship)

Interpretive phrasing, dynamics, tempo, pedaling

Expressive mood, image, story or mental picture

Roger Chaffin, Gabriela Imreh and Mary Crawford., *Practicing Perfection:* Memory and Piano Performance (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002)

Some sort of formal analysis of piece is essential

does not have to be as thorough as traditional theory analysis, but major components have to be in place

Individual strategies vary

audiation crucial to all

Vary practice techniques

several studies show that experienced pianists tend to practice in longer sections than less experienced

all pianists practice in longer sections as learning process continues

however, practicing in short sections remains part of practice and memorization routine up to time of performance

Context is important

altering the performance environment may lead to memory failure

Jennifer Mishra and William Blackin, "The effects of altering environmental context on the performance of memorized music", poster presented at National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy (Oak Brook, IL, 2005)

Scott's Practical Tips for Memorization

1. How piece is initially learned is crucial

start with overview work in musical units from beginning always relate parts to whole place retrieval cues along the way make sure that cues are drawn from all three categories

2. If you can't hear it, you can't play it

3. Practice performing, don't just practice practicing

4. Be creative in inventing games to test memory

memory flashcards hands alone varied tempi "slip" practice "freeze" practice

5. Don't be afraid to throw your gloves into the audience when necessary

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