

Tunes to learn in all 12 keys

The ability to transpose is an often-overlooked, but extremely useful skill. It increases your flexibility on the horn, improves your knowledge of theory, and strengthens your ears. It's also a task you will likely be asked to do on gigs, especially any gig which involves singers. I've gotten and kept gigs when others have not simply because of my flexibility in the so-called "difficult" keys. Some of my students break out in cold sweats when I ask them to transpose a melody, but the task need not be that scary. I have successfully taught fifth graders how to play certain tunes in all keys. If you know all your scales, even in just one octave and even if they're not all perfect, you're ready to start transposing. Budget at least 5-10 minutes a day of your practice time for transposing. Start with an easy tune like "Mary Had a Little Lamb," and go through every key in the order of the circle of fourths. This may take several days or even weeks if you've never done it before. By the time you get through 10 or 20 tunes, you will probably find that it only takes you one day to learn a tune. After about 40-50, you're probably doing several every day. Like any other skill, it gets easier and faster with practice. The ultimate goal is for transposing to simply be a natural skill you possess, so that as soon as you learn a tune you can readily transpose it to any key. Sound impossible? Try practicing it for a few minutes a day over the course of a year and you'll see that it is not.

This following list of tunes is by no means complete. It is only a sample of tunes I think most people may know. By "know" I only mean that you can recognize the melody when you hear it. You don't yet need to be able to play the whole melody on cue, or even sing it all by memory - that's what you're going to practice. You should make your own list. It should be personal to you and should include about 300 tunes. You will probably not know all the tunes on this list, and you will certainly know many tunes not included here. You probably don't even realize how many tunes you can recognize until you start writing them down. Hopefully, the tunes I have listed and the categories they fall under will jog your memory.

There are different methods people use to help them transpose tunes. Some people prefer to assign a scale degree number to every note. For example, Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony would become 1-1-3-3-5-5-3, 4-4-2-2-7-7-5. Others prefer to think of everything intervallically. The same piece would then be "root, root, up M3, unison, up m3, unison, down m3, up m2," etc. Still others are able to extract the bigger harmonic picture and think in shapes. That same piece would then be "Ascending and descending tonic major triad, then descending dominant 7th chord." If these last two methods are over your head, don't worry. Start with the number method, and as you study more music, you'll learn much more about intervals and functional harmony. I hesitate to advocate any single method for learning to transpose, though, because I've found this thought process to be very personal. I actually use a combination of all three of the above methods when I am transposing. The only method I discourage is the trial-and-error, or "hunt and peck" method. By guessing, you'll only waste time and get

frustrated. Think through a tune so that you can play it in the new key perfectly the first time, even if it's at a very slow tempo. You'll learn much faster and your progress will be much swifter. This is not a skill you will develop overnight, which is why your list should be so extensive. Your progress will be measured in months and years, not days. The end result makes all the mental strain worthwhile.

Lullabies/Nursery Rhymes

All the Pretty Horses
All Through the Night
Alouette
Are you Sleeping?
Bingo
Brahms' Lullaby
Eentsy Weentsy Spider
Hey Diddle Diddle
Hickory Dickory Dock
Hot Cross Buns
How Much is that Doggie in the Window?
Hush Little Baby
If You're Happy and You Know It
It's Not Easy Being Green
John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt
Looby Loo
Mary Had a Little Lamb
(The) Mulberry Bush
Oh Where has my Little Dog Gone?
Old King Cole
Old MacDonald Had a Farm
Over in the Meadow
Over the River and Through the Woods
Pat-a-Cake
Polly Put the Kettle On
Pop Goes the Weasel
Ring Around the Rosie
Rain Rain Go Away
Rock-a-bye Baby
Row Row Row Your Boat
Sesame Street Theme
Sing a Song of Sixpence

Six Little Ducks
Ten Little Indians
This Old Man
Twinkle, Twinkle
The More We Get Together (German Cuckoo song)
Where oh Where has my Little Dog Gone?

Patriotic

Air Force Song
America the Beautiful
Anchors Aweigh
Battle Hymn of the Republic
From the Halls of Montezuma
God Bless America
I Love a Parade
My Country 'Tis of Thee
From the Halls of Montezuma
Star-Spangled Banner
Stars and Stripes Forever
There's a Grand Ol' Flag
This is My Country
This Land is My Land
When Johnny Comes Marching Home
Yankee Doodle

Traditional/Folk

All Night, All Day
Bicycle Built for Two
Billy Boy
Clemantine
Down By the Riverside

Down In My Heart
Erie Canal
Happy Birthday
Home on the Range
I've Been Working on the Railroad
Good Night Ladies
Jimmy Crack Corn
Kumbayah
Looby Loo
My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean
Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen
Oh Susanna
On Top of Old Smokey
Over the River and Through the Wood
Scarborough Fair
She'll be Comin' Round the Mountain
Swanee River
Take Me Out to the Ballgame
Wayfaring Stranger

Christmas/Seasonal

Angels We Have Heard On High
Auld Lang's Eyne
Away in the Manger
Carol of the Bells
Deck the Halls
Felilz Navidad
Frosty the Snowman
Good King Wenceslas
Happy Birthday
Hark the Herald Angels Sing
Here Comes Peter Cottontail
Here Comes Santa Claus
Holly Jolly Christmas
I'll Be Home For Christmas
It's Beginning to Look a lot Like
Christmas
Jingle Bells
Jingle Bell Rock
Joy to the World
Let it Snow
Mr. Santa

O Little Town of Bethlehem
Roudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
Santa Claus is Coming to Town
Silent Night
Sleigh Ride
Up on the Housetop
The Twelve Days of Christmas
We Gather Together
We Three Kings
We Wish You a Merry Christmas
What Child is This? (Greensleeves)
Winter Wonderland

Broadway/Movies/TV

Can You Feel the Love Tonight?
Cheers theme
Close Encounters of the 3rd Kind
Do, a Dear (from Sound of Music)
E.T.
The Flintstones
Heigh Ho!
Indiana Jones
Linus and Lucy (Peanuts Theme)
Memory (Cats)
Music of the Night
My Favorite Things
New York, New York
Our Love Will Go On (Titanic)
Over the Rainbow
The Pink Panther
Seventy-Six Trombones
The Simpsons
Spider-Man
Star Wars
Someday My Prince Will Come
Superman
To Dream the Impossible Dream
Under the Sea

Classic Pop/Rock

Hound Dog

Jailhouse Rock
I Wanna Hold Your Hand
La Bamba
Love Potion #9
Mony Mony
Mr. Nowhere Man
Mrs. Robinson
Rock Around the Clock

Hymns/Religious

All Creatures of our God and King
Amazing Grace
(A) Closer Walk with Thee
Go Tell It on the Mountain
He's Got the Whole World In His Hands
Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho
Michael, Row the Boat Ashore
Our God is an Awesome God
Somebody's Knockin' at Your Door
We Gather Together
When the Saints Go Marching In

Classical Themes

Blue Danube Waltz
Bridal March from "Lohengrin"
Bridal March from "Midsummer Night"
Carmen Overture

Sources

Hymn Books
Campfire Songs, ed. Irene Maddox and Rosalyn Cobb
Wee Sing, ed. Pamela Conn Beall and Susan Hagen Nipp
The Real Book, published by Hal Leonard
Various books of Christmas music, Broadway tunes, and Movie music
Classical Themes, published by Mel Bay
Dictionary of Musical Themes by Harold Barlow and Sam Morgenstern

1812 Overture
Beethoven's 5th
Eine Kleine Nachtmusik
Farandole (Bizet)
Habañera from "Carmen"
Haydn Sym. No 94 "Surprise", 2nd mvt.
Hall of the Mountain King (Peer Gynt)
Hungarian Dance (Brahms)
Hungarian Rhapsody (Liszt)
Mozart Sym. No. 40, 1st mvt.
Ode to Joy
Rhapsody in Blue (three famous themes)
Rhapsody on the Theme by Paganini
Romeo & Juliet Love Theme
(Tchaikovsky)
Sabre Dance
Spring from "Four Seasons"
Waltz of the Flowers from "Nutcracker"
William Tell Overture (two famous themes)

Jazz

In the Mood
New York, New York
Take Five
Any tunes from the standard repertoire
(see my recommended jazz tune list)