

## Tunes to learn in all 12 keys

One great way to become more flexible on your instrument which is often overlooked is to learn melodies in all twelve keys. While this may seem like a daunting task for some, I assure you that it is not. 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 about 5-10 minutes a day of your practice time for this endeavor. 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. By the time you learn 40-50, you're probably doing several every day. The ultimate goal is for transposing to simply be a natural skill you possess, that as soon as a melody is learned you can easily transpose it to any key. This ability will do wonders for your ears, your technique in "unfriendly" keys, and your theoretical knowledge. It will put you in the top 5% of instrumentalists, and will make you that much more marketable.

This list is by no means complete. It is only a sample of tunes I think most people may know. By "know" I don't mean you can play the whole melody on cue, or even sing the whole thing by memory. I mean you can recognize it when you hear it. If you can do this, you can learn it. 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 undoubtedly know many tunes not included here. You probably don't even realize how many tunes you can recognize. 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. This 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  
Clemintine  
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  
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)

## **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