

# PROCESS for LEARNING a TUNE

Mike Tracy

1. Select one that **You like, You enjoy**. Maybe something **Familiar** or one that **Challenges You**.
2. **Find Recordings**. YouTube and Spotify are fantastic resources. CDs, LPs, and like media have for years been go to sources and are still highly useful yet likely less accessible. Libraries and streaming sources are also good sources.
3. There is often an **Iconic Version**, one possibly recorded by the composer or a master improviser. Be sure to know that version, or at least be familiar with it.
4. There are likely numerous other versions by master performers and other respected artists. There are likely more **Contemporary Versions** or ones arranged that you enjoy. Compare and contrast all the versions you like and ones you do not, being able to describe in modest detail why.
5. Be able to **Hear** the selection in your head. Can you hear the melody? Can you **Isolate** the harmonic progression? What **Rhythmic Elements** are contained?
6. Be able to **Sing** the melody with and without a recording.
7. Are there **Lyrics**? If so, be sure to be familiar with them. Be able to sing them.
8. Are you able to sing the **Roots** of the progression? Can you hear and sing **Guide Tone** lines?
9. Know the **Length** of the tune. Songs are typically: 12 measures (Blues and Blues based progressions), 16, 24, 32, 36, 64 and the odd numbers.
10. Know the **Form**. The form of most songs are typically: AABA, ABA, ABAC, Blues, Rhythm (AABA) and through composed with no basic form.
11. Knowing the form will greatly assist in **Memorizing**. For example, learning the A sections of an AABA form tune means you know 75% of the material. learning the A sections of an ABAC means you know 50%. That really cuts down on the amount of material you will need to learn.
12. Is there an **Introduction**? What about **Backgrounds** or an **Arrangement** unique to the tune? Is there an **Ending** or **Coda**?
13. Most compositions will go through **Multiple Keys**; however, is there a basic key? Does the progression **Modulate**? Many AABA form tunes will go to the IV on the Bridge (B section).
14. Is the composition mainly **Major**? **Minor**? Or a **Combination**? Is it **Modal** or primarily one tonality?
15. Are you able to **Isolate** a troublesome or unfamiliar section or phrase in order to practice, understand and secure?
16. Is the melody **Song-Like** (most Standards are indeed songs with lyrics) or more abstract, like an **Etude** or **Solo** (BeBop and many Contemporary songs fit this description)? Does the melody have **Singable** phrases, usually 2 and 4 measure phrases?
17. Are there **Leaps**, large intervals, or is the melody more **Scale-like**?

18. Are there parts of the song that are **Repetitive**? Knowing the form will often help one to recognize repetitive phrases. Is there a **Sequence** or with clear **Motivic Development**?
19. Are there parts of the song that are **Similar** to others you know? This will primarily occur when considering the progression. For example, while there are numerous Blues versions, knowing basic ones and some options mean that you can focus on learning the melody.
20. **Harmonic Formula** is very common. The vast majority of compositions will contain **ii V7 I** (Major and Minor) and other like groupings and harmonic movement. Do you recognize harmonic formula from listening? Do you recognize formula when looking at changes? **Knowing, Hearing** and **Recognizing** harmonic formula are key elements in learning a tune, especially the progression.
21. Look for **Recognizable Elements**? Is there anything that is **Unusual** in comparison? Something **Unique**? Melodies and progressions typically have something that **Stands Out**, that makes them interesting, memorable. Pop tunes will often have a **Hook**, a very **Catchy** phrase or section. Is there a recognizable or memorable **Rhythmic** element?
22. What **Scale Degree** does the melody begin on/end on? What about different sections or phrases? What degrees do they start on? Are there pick-ups?
23. What about the **Range** of the melody? How high does it go? How low? Does it stay within a defined range?
24. Can you play all **Scales** associated with the harmony? Can you **Arpeggiate** the chord progression? Can you apply **Diagonal Patterns** throughout the progression? Can you apply all **Descending** as well as **Ascending**, reversing the ideas.
25. Are you able to **Improvise** phrases based on the original melody. Can you improvise melodies and harmonically accurate lines over the progression?