Meaningful Memorization: 
A Holistic Approach to Secure Memory

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History of Memorization – Hayden Coie

History of Memorization Pedagogy
• Memorization not an accepted practice until mid-nineteenth century
• Researchers and teachers sought to understand and develop methods of memorization
• Some historical documents that trace the journey from stage to studio:
  o 1886: Article published in *The Etude*, argued to be one of the first documents for systematic memorization
  o 1899: *Musical Memory and Its Cultivation* by Frederick Shinn*, an early comprehensive look at memorization. Promotes four modes of memory: aural, visual, kinesthetic, analytical.
  o 1958: *The Pianist’s Art* by Powell Everhart* talks about memory as being a standard part of learning and playing piano.

Memorization Pedagogy Today
• Systematic approach and four memory modes still used in modern scholarship
• Music should be memorized to fully internalize it for performance
*For full citation, see bibliography

Science of Memorization – Serenity Fung

Memory Pathways: How your brain collects and stores outside stimuli to create different types of memory. These are not sequential and a combination is often employed to create strong memories.
• Procedural: muscle memory
  o Repeated motion at the keyboard
• Semantic: words on the page and spoken word
  o Score study and instruction from the teacher
• Episodic: context and setting
  o Rehearsing in the performance venue and on actual instrument
• Automatic: conditioned responses
  o Mental rehearsal, practice performing and how to respond to mistakes
• Emotional: strength and type of emotion related to memory
  o Trace emotional relationship to the piece

Memory Recall: Utilizing Memorized Music – Blake Proehl

Performance cues
• Structural cues: movements, sections, sub-sections, and other boundaries
• Basic cues: technical details requiring attention
• Interpretive cues: conceptual ideas applied to specific spots
• Expressive cues: feeling to be conveyed to the audience

Maintenance
• Detailed Reviewing: keep score details fresh in mind and search for new ideas
• Mental Rehearsal: keep vivid memories and cues
• Practice Performance
• Expanding Rehearsal: short, frequent sessions → long, spread out sessions
Focus in Performance
- Pre-performance preparation: mindfulness, breathing techniques, positive thinking, visualization
- Stable intention creates secure concentration – scripting, visualization, audiation
- Always push forward!

**Teaching Strategies** – Kristen Neel
Mindful Memorization: creative strategies to engage students’ minds to memorize in different ways

**Learning Modes – Application to Memorization:**
- Visual: Puzzle Game
- Aural: Singing Recall
  - Three part: Phrasing, dynamics, and notes
  - Memorize melody by shorter, then longer segments
- Kinesthetic: Phrase by Phrase Choreography
  - Observing hand movement and direction, meaningful choreography, mental picture
  - First at keyboard, then away (choreography and audiation)
- Analytical: One Finger Exercise
  - Play RH or LH part with one finger
  - Emphasizes intervallic relationships

**Analysis** – Clara Boyett
Using analysis can strengthen memory
- Analytical memory
- Analyze form, harmonies, scales, patterns, etc.
- Mark starting places in the score
- Streamlines memorization process and aids in memory recall and retrieval
- Should begin early in musical training
- Helpful for young children to draw the phrase shapes, form, etc. in their pieces

**Sources and Further Reading**

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Musical Examples

Early Elementary: Russian Folk Song, from Faber Piano Adventures Primer Level (not shown)

Early Intermediate: Arabesque, Op. 100 No. 2 by Friedrich Burgmüller
Late Intermediate: Sonatina in G Major, Op. 55 No. 2 by Friedrich Kuhlau