

Playing More Tunes by Ear

After you get the basic idea of how to play familiar tunes by ear, you can broaden your horizons and try other melodies you've heard. Below are some suggestions for tunes, as well as some tips for strengthening your skills in playing by ear.

Tune Sources

Rather than include the titles of thousands of tunes, here is a resource list for tunes you probably already know, along with some examples. Add your own tunes for variety and challenge. Remember that you can do this with virtual practice, and you can try melody fragments as well as complete tunes.

- Movie or TV tunes – Rocky, Star Wars, cartoon themes, etc.
- Folk or national tunes – Greensleeves, Frere Jacques, etc.
- Jazz tunes – Round Midnight, All the Things You Are, tunes from fake books
- Pop, classical, Broadway tunes, etc.
- Any tune or part of a tune you have just listened to on a recording

Benefits of Learning Tunes by Ear

When you play tunes by ear, the obvious goal is to learn to play the new tune correctly. But there are deeper, underlying benefits that go along with this:

- *You learn to recognize keys and chords quickly.* Most tunes start on a note other than the root of the key, which means you need to find the key of the tune as quickly as possible. This helps you establish your harmonic base for intervals and hear how the chords function in the tune.
- *You strengthen the way you recognize and play intervals.* You'll start hearing the more challenging intervals in context of a song you know, helping you find them more securely.
- *You strengthen your "number" recognition skills.* See the article in the Insights folder on The Numbers Game for details.
- *Interact better with ideas played by other jazz musicians.* This is a key skill that helps you develop musical ideas in a mature way as a group.

Pick a Tune, Choose a Note

I like to use the following approach when I virtually practice melodies by ear:

1. Pick a tune or melody fragment to try.
2. Quickly choose a starting pitch (try one of the sharps or flats for more of a challenge).
3. Start humming/fingering the tune.
4. As you go, try to find the key of the tune as quickly as possible.
5. If you're unsure of an interval, test it out on your instrument.
6. Once you've virtually played the tune correctly, quickly choose a different pitch and repeat steps 3-5 with the same tune.

With practice, this approach will become a quick and valuable way to strengthen your ability to play-it-by-ear.