

## MEMORIZATION

The most significant and productive way to study is to learn the apparently simple in a way that allows effortless movement towards the advanced. Artistic freedom in performance requires secure memorization. The time to develop that security is the first time you open the music.

Although some people seem to possess the innate ability to memorize music more readily than others, anyone who can memorize one measure can memorize two; if two measures, so also a complete phrase, a section, and an entire piece. One's span of concentration can be increased by working with small amounts of material, learning it securely, and then adding to it. This process can be enhanced through visualization.

Visualization is nothing more than a mental performance. Mental performance means seeing and hearing the piece as though on the guitar without a visionary image of the printed page. Naturally this may not include every detail of fingering, although it is known from previous study. Mental performance may be considered similar to thinking in one's language; the spelling and specific meaning of each word is not thought of although it is well known.

Because one memorizes more easily that which one thoroughly understands, the purpose of the following procedure is to gain a complete grasp of the various elements of a piece and how they are performed. This approach will produce the level of assurance needed to maintain composure and freedom throughout all performance situations, especially during those times when things aren't going as expected.

Memory experts and neurologists tell us that recall (retrieval of information) is a more efficient way of preparing mental material for long term storage than simple repetition or reading through material. This is why visualization works so well: it is mindful work.

During mindless repetition, the smaller details of the larger whole become lost and are irretrievable. This is why students often have the unsettling experience of not being able to play from, say, measure eight: they always have to play from the beginning of the piece or the start of a section. If the spot that needs detailed work lies in the middle of piece, it remains unavailable to change.

The following will be helpful as you work on memory:

- Begin memory work with short, simple pieces. You are learning a new technique here. If you have problems retaining the material it probably means you are trying to work with pieces too complex or too long.

- The best progress will be realized when working with relatively easy material. Begin with short, simple, two-part pieces with a melody and bass accompaniment.
- The slower you go, the faster you'll progress. The part of the brain that deals with conscious control, which you use in initial memory work, likes to take its time. Once you develop habits of clarity, then you can confidently increase the speed gradually.
- Take whatever time necessary to analyze and learn the material thoroughly. If confusion and errors occur, proceed more slowly.

This memorization procedure should be used with flexibility depending upon the texture of a piece or section. Use the guitar freely to reinforce the sound of harmonies and melodies not retained from the earlier reading performance. Eventually, many of these steps will become automatic.

Apply the procedure outlined below to this Kontratanz by Mozart.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Kontratanz' by Mozart. It consists of two staves of music in 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff begins with a treble clef and a dynamic marking of *p*. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above or below notes. The second staff begins with a repeat sign and a dynamic marking of *p p p p*. The melody continues in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above or below notes. The score ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

### Procedure

1. Study and read through the entire piece, section by section. (Please see the handout on Sight Reading.) Then put the guitar aside.
2. Observe the melody. Is it conjunct or disjunct? Diatonic or chromatic? Is your knowledge of scales helping you recognize patterns?
3. Memorize the melody, a short group or phrase at a time, by singing. Solfege can be very helpful here if you have studied it. A neutral syllable may also be used.
4. Analyze the harmony. This may be quite straightforward as in chordal pieces. In many cases the harmony will only be implied. Play the harmony while singing the melody. Use your knowledge of chord forms.

5. Observe the bass. If the bass has a melodic character, memorize and sing the bass while hearing the melody. If the bass is simply an accompaniment, sing the melody while playing the bass.
6. Memorize the left hand fingering by singing the melody (then other voices if necessary) with the appropriate left finger designations: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4.
7. Sing and memorize the right hand fingering (*p, i, m, a*) in passages where a problem may occur. If the melody was entirely on one string the right hand fingering wouldn't matter, but because the melody moves to the first string in measure two, the piece must begin with the index finger to effect a convenient string cross. Note also that the repetition of a right hand finger at slow-to-moderate tempi is not prohibited: it should simply happen by design.
8. Visualize off the guitar two or three times. Clearly visualize the area of the fingerboard where the material will be played. Pay special attention to unusual formations and patterns and strive to hear the piece while visualizing.
9. Visualize while playing on the guitar. Do not look at your left hand. The visualization will allow you to clearly see the fingerboard. Glancing at the fingerboard can actually be a distraction.
10. Build the piece up, phrase by phrase, until you can visualize the entire piece with continuity and assurance.

Use only the steps that make sense. If you're learning an arpeggio study, for example, visualize the chord shapes while hearing the arpeggio and feeling the right hand pattern.

Finally, do not confuse the experience of the advanced artist with the procedure a student must use. In high-level concert playing the performer shouldn't be thinking of the mechanical details. One of the ways to get to this point, though, is to have thought about the details early on and then assimilated them. Then it becomes possible to forget about the mechanics and think only of your artistic ideas