

Memorising repertoire

Here is an example of a strategy for developing and memorising a mental auditory image of a polyphonic piano piece (e.g. a two-part Invention by J.S. Bach)

1. Preparatory analysis

- What is the tonality of this piece?
- Make a structural and harmonic analysis of the piece (as taught in the music theory courses)

2. Learning the voices one by one

Stage 1: getting an overview

- Imagine the sound of the top voice ("notational audiation")
- Play the top voice to check whether you imagined it accurately
- Repeat if necessary
- Do the same for the bottom voice

Stage 2: stepwise memorisation

- Imagine the first phrase of the top voice from memory ("mental imagery rehearsal")
- Imagine the same phrase with the score, for comparison
- Repeat if necessary
- Continue learning the phrases of the top voice, phrase by phrase
- Unite the phrases into larger sections, and train these with the same procedure
- Test: Sing one of the voices from memory. Then play the same voice from the score and compare.

3. Combining the voices

- Play the bottom voice, and imagine (or: sing) the top voice, from the score, the whole piece (create an overview)
- Take the first phrase: play the bottom voice and imagine (or: sing) the top voice. Alternate between playing from the score and playing from memory.
- Repeat this procedure for all phrases
- Practice this same skill in larger sections of the piece
- Swap voices: Play top voice and imagine (or: sing) bottom voice