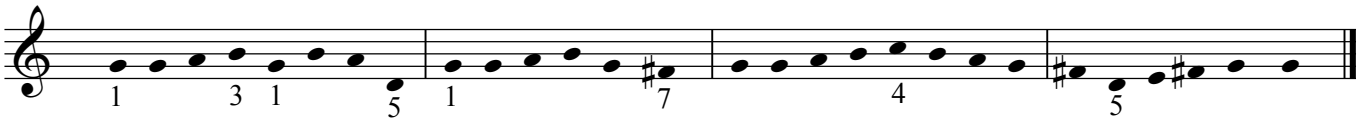
Transcribe and Transpose

A supplement to "Keys by Degrees"

For a period of about four months, I spent a few afternoons a week in New Orleans while working as a cruise line musician. Most of that time was spent in the French Quarter where buskers (people that play songs for tips) are all over the place. The list below is just a few of the tunes I heard them play. Notice how many **very simple melodies** there are. They always played "nursery-rhyme" melodies when kids were around. Of course, in New Orleans style, they usually "jazzed" them up. Occasionally, they would turn something very peppy or happy sounding (like Twinkle, Twinkle) and turn it into a slow durge in a minor key. No matter what, they always played it *their* way and had fun doing it.

The purpose of this page is to provide you with some tune ideas to learn *by ear*, so don't go around trying to find them in a fake book! If you don't know how a tune goes, find a recording of it and learn it that way. Try to hear the melody in your mind (be able to sing it, hum it, or whistle it) before trying to play it on your horn. *Get it in your head then get it in your horn.* For longer tunes it may be helpful to sketch out the melody and add scale degree numbers in a few places, but remember that this part of your practice is about ***connecting your ears to your fingers***, so keep this rule in mind: Don't look at your sketch while you play. Peek at it to remind yourself what's coming, but look away or close your eyes when you start blowing into the horn. *The ultimate goal is to be able to play anything you can hear.*

Example sketch of Yankee Doodle with pitches and scale degrees to help when transposing. As you advance try sketching out the melody without using a musical staff with just a few numbers for reference, (they'll look like exercises from "Keys by Degrees"). Obviously, the less you write down the more you work ***your ears***, ***your mind*** and ***your memory***. That said, if it's too hard it isn't and fun and the music won't ever 'flow', so you decide!



Some Possible Melodies and Categories:

Remember that although most great melodies are relatively simple, many will sneak in at least a few notes from outside the key. Start with the key, but listen for more!

Jazz "Heads":

Summertime
Freddie Freeloader
All Blues
Blue Bossa
Fly Me to the Moon
Now's the Time
Sonnymoon For Two
Lester Leaps In
C-Jam Blues
Little Brown Jug
Pass The Peas
Saints Go Marching In
Bye, Bye Blackbird
On The Trail
ANY Jazz Standard

Non-Melodies:

Horn Parts from songs
Bass Lines and Backgrounds
Short Solo Licks
ANYTHING that catches your ear is fair game!

Nursery Rhyme Melodies:

Mary Had a Little Lamb
Twinkle, Twinkle
Three Blind Mice
Pop! Goes the Weasel
London Bridge
Row, Row, Row
I've Been Workin' on the Railroad
Lullabye (Brahms)
Over the River and Through the Woods
B-I-N-G-O
Frere Jacques
This Old Man
Skip to my Lou
Hot Cross Buns
Hush Little Baby
Rock-a-bye Baby
Alouette
The Mulberry Bush
Amazing Grace
You Are My Sunshine

American Music:

America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)
America, The Beautiful
Yankee Doodle
Star Spangled Banner
On Top of Old Smokey
Red River Valey
Hail to the Chief

Other Categories:

TV Theme Music
Movie Themes
Showtunes
Holiday/Ethnic/Religious
"Top 40" Hits
Beatles, Elvis, Cash, etc.
Commercial Jingles
Wedding Music
Bugle Calls
HS/College Fight Songs
Classical Themes
Excerpts from Jazz Solos

Once you work something out, try it in a few other keys - or ALL other keys. Also try changing it from major to minor, "jazzing up" the rhythm of the melody or adding other embellishments to make it your own.

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