

# MUSICAL IMAGERY REPETITION AND MEMORY

*Sean Bennett*

Cambridge University, UK

## Background/Aims

“Musical Imagery Repetition,” (MIR) describes the universal phenomenon of music getting “stuck in thought.” MIR is precisely defined as previously heard music that, while consciously unintended, repeats uncontrollably and pervasively in thought. While Bennett (2002) has profiled MIR episodes and its “victims,” no serious academic research has investigated the functions of this phenomenon or its relationship to human memory until the present study.

## Main Contribution

A close examination of MIR episodes suggests that this phenomenon challenges contemporary memory theory. Evidence is presented suggesting MIR transcends the definitional boundaries of implicit and explicit memory systems, and of working, episodic, and semantic memory systems. Additionally, the ability of MIR to act as a mnemonic device, similarities between neurophysiology during REM sleep and MIR, and

the ability of MIR to transcend the boundaries of aforementioned memory systems suggest that MIR functions as a memory consolidation device. Humans’ high resolution of memory for music and the ability of MIR to transcend boundaries of traditional memory systems also lead to the conclusion that MIR comprises a newly identified memory system, which I explain and call “audio-eidetic” memory. Additional empirical programs of research are proposed to further determine the validity of hypotheses that are raised in the discussion of MIR and memory.

## Implications

The present study implies that MIR may indeed have a purpose beyond that of a ubiquitous annoyance for all. If the empirical programs of research proposed verify the hypotheses presented, it would be a breakthrough for understanding from an evolutionary point-of-view why all human cultures possess cognitive architecture for the acquisition of musical information.