

Why Do Songs Get Stuck in Your Head? | Curious English

English learning resource · EN

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64 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Julia, the music stopped an hour ago.

Why is that same little tune still playing in my head?

Because your brain has kept a souvenir, Martin.

And you did not choose it.

Welcome to Curious English, from Your English Toolbox.

One interesting question, and three useful expressions.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

Today: why do songs get stuck in your head?

First, make a prediction.

Is it usually a whole song, or a short piece that repeats?

I would choose a short piece.

Mine is about ten seconds long.

It keeps coming back while I make breakfast.

Exactly.

That experience is often called an earworm.

There is no actual worm.

A short section of music appears in your mind without you deliberately choosing to remember it.

So our first expression is stuck in your head.

Something stays in your thoughts, even when you try to think about something else.

This tune is stuck in my head.

Notice the grammar: the tune is stuck.



We do not say that the tune is sticking in this expression.

Can we use it for something other than music?

Yes.

A sentence from a film can be stuck in your head, too.

But an earworm specifically involves music.

Why this tune, though?

I heard several songs yesterday.

Recent and repeated listening can make a song more likely to return.

A word, a picture or a memory can also remind you of a tune.

There is not one simple explanation for every earworm.

And are some songs better at doing this than others?

Researchers have found patterns.

In one study, frequently reported earworm songs tended to have faster tempos and familiar melodic shapes, with some unusual musical changes.

That is a tendency, not a rule for every listener.

That brings us to our second word: catchy.

A catchy tune is easy to remember.

You might say: The advertisement has a catchy little tune.

Catchy does not necessarily mean beautiful, and it does not mean that everybody likes it.

I understand that difference very well this morning.

My tune is catchy, but I would like a different one.

Now our third expression: pop into your head.

It means to appear in your thoughts suddenly.

The tune popped into my head while I was making coffee.

An idea can pop into your head, too.

So popping into your head describes its arrival.

Being stuck in your head describes what happens afterwards.

Exactly.

Let us practise.

A melody is easy to remember.



It is what?

Catchy.

Next: an idea suddenly arrives in your thoughts.

It pops into your head.

Finally: you keep thinking about the same tune.

It is stuck in your head.

Now complete your own sentence: A song that often gets stuck in my head is...

Our answer today: an earworm is a repeating musical memory that appears without deliberate effort.

Recent listening, associations and features of the music can all play a part.

Find the three expressions and their examples on our episode page at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

The link is in the description.

Keep your English curious.

See you next time.

