

Psychologists identify why certain songs get stuck in your head

BY ASHLEY WELCH

A. Read the article below and think of the word which best fits each gap. Use only one word in each gap.

If you ever find yourself singing along to a pop song 1._____ hours on end, you know how difficult 2._____ can be to get a **catchy** tune out of your head.

Now, psychologists believe they have figured 3._____ exactly why certain songs tend to **stick** in our heads more than others. The phenomenon is called **involuntary** musical imagery (INMI) — more commonly known 4._____ “earworms.”

“Earworms are an extremely **common** phenomenon and an example 5._____ spontaneous **cognition**,” the study’s lead author, Kelly Jakubowski, PhD, of Durham University in the U.K., told CBS News. “Psychologists know that humans spend 6._____ to 40 percent of our days engaging in spontaneous cognition and are starting to try to understand *why* our brains spend so much time thinking thoughts unrelated 7._____ our present task and how such thoughts 8._____ be useful.”

The research, published in the academic journal Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Art, found that earworms are usually faster tunes with a **fairly** generic and easy-to-remember melody. They also tend 9._____ have some additional unique characteristics that set them apart from 10._____ songs.

Prime examples of such earworms, the study found, include “Bad Romance” by Lady Gaga, “Don’t Stop Believing” by Journey, and “Can’t Get You Out Of My Head” by Kylie Minogue.

“Our **findings** show that you can 11._____ some extent predict which songs are going to get stuck in people’s heads based 12._____ the song’s melodic content,” Jakubowski said in a statement. “These musically sticky songs seem to have quite a fast tempo along 13._____ a common melodic shape and unusual intervals or repetitions 14._____ we can hear in the opening riff of ‘Smoke On The Water’ by Deep Purple or in the **chorus** of ‘Bad Romance.’”

For the study, the **researchers** surveyed 3,000 people about their 15._____ frequent earworm **tunes**. They arrived at a set of 100 songs and then compared the melodic features of those songs 16._____ 100 other tunes that had not been named but were comparable 17._____ terms of popularity and how recently they had been on music charts.

The analysis showed 18._____ those songs that are most likely to get stuck in people’s heads shared common “melodic contours”, which are mainly found in Western pop music. For example, such songs often follow the **pattern** where 19._____ first phrase rises in **pitch** and the second falls (think “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”). The opening riff of “Moves Like Jagger” by Maroon 5 — 20._____ of the top-named earworm tunes in the study — also follows this common contour pattern.

Additionally, earworms typically have an unusual interval structure, **such as** unexpected leaps or more repeated notes 21._____ you would expect to hear in 22._____ average pop song, the researchers found. Examples of this include “My Sharona” by the Knack and “In The Mood” by Glenn Miller.

Previous research 23._____ shown that a person might be more **prone** to earworms if they are constantly exposed 24._____ music, and certain personality **traits** — such 25._____ obsessive-compulsive or neurotic tendencies — can make people more likely to get songs stuck in their heads.

While 26._____ are no scientifically proven ways to **rid** yourself of earworms, experts have 27._____ tips.

Jakubowski recommends trying to **distract** yourself 28._____ thinking of or listening 29._____ a different song. If that doesn’t work, try engaging with the song, as many people report that actually listening to an earworm song all the way through 30._____ help eliminate having it stuck **on a loop**.

Finally, a study published last year in the Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology suggests a simple 31._____ to **disrupt** the voluntary memory **recollection** that gets songs stuck in your head: **chew** a piece of gum.

B. There are a number of words in the article in bold type. Match the words to the definitions below. There are three extra words in bold which you do not need to use.

32. *v.* to free a person or place of something unwanted or harmful
33. *n.* part of a song that is repeated several times
34. *adv.* quite
35. *v.* bite food several times before swallowing it
36. *n.* particular qualities in someone’s character
37. *adj.* attractive or memorable
38. *n.* information that is discovered by studying something
39. *n.* a regular arrangement of lines, shapes, sounds, words or colours
40. *n.* the process of knowing, understanding, and learning something
41. *v.* take someone’s attention away from something by making them look at or listen to something else
42. *n.* how high or low a note or other sound is
43. *phr.* repeated again and again
44. *adj.* happening often and to many people or in many places; widespread
45. *adv.* also
46. *adj.* likely to do or experience something
47. *n.* something from the past that you remember
48. *adj.* not done intentionally or willingly
49. *v.* prevent sth from continuing
50. *n.* a series of musical notes that are played or sung

C. Answer the questions in your own words (according to the text).

51. What do you call a song that is stuck in your head and is difficult to get rid of?

52. What is typical of these sticky songs?

53. What might help to get rid of the song playing over and over again in your head?