Memory Palace: Building the Instruments

A movement-by-movement guide to assembling the instruments for Memory Palace by Christopher Cerrone. Everything here works, but experimentation is encouraged.

I. Guitar

Heavier gauge strings (.11 or heavier) sound quite a bit better.

II and IV. Wood slats

The wooden instrument is the main challenge of the setup.

Materials

Two large 8-foot slats of red oak from Home Depot, roughly $100 total.

Cutting the slats

Use a band saw to cut individual slats from the boards. Widths by register:

- Highest octave (F♯5 and up): 2 inches wide
- Everything below F♯5: 3 inches wide
- Lowest F♯: 4 inches wide



Cutting the red oak boards into slats

Width does not affect pitch; only length does. Width affects the depth of the sound. Keep in mind that the wood should be as resonant as possible.

Tuning

Cut each slat gradually shorter to raise the pitch. One straightforward method: play a split-mallet roll on the slat with two soft mallets against the piano until the two blend, then trim the length with the band saw and repeat.



Trimming slats to length

Remember that the electronics are tuned to A440.

Mounting

Dampen the slats as little as possible when mounting them.

Other woods

Cedar also sounds nice. The only wood that sounds bad is pine, which is too light and not very pitched.

III. Crotales, glockenspiel bars and suspended pipes

Crotales and glockenspiel bars are self-explanatory. The suspended pipes have been done a few different ways:

- Ian uses temple bowls.
- Tristan uses gongs.
- Owen uses much bigger pipes, suspended rather than mounted.

Whatever you choose, the key is that these instruments are louder than everything else and cut through.

V. Beer bottles

Mark the amount of water needed to tune each bottle in advance.

Electronics

The electronics are available at christophercerrone.com/electronics/ and include customization settings. With questions about the electronics or amplification, contact Christopher Cerrone.