

Ask Mike!

Stressed about an upcoming gig? Work got you singing the blues? Columnist Michael Goode can help!



BY MICHAEL I. GOODE,
LOCAL 10-208 MEMBER

In my last column in July, we talked about pacing yourself, about lifestyle changes and not letting your playing suffer as a result. We also talked about getting into a practicing rut and the value of singing in playing. Today, we are going to talk about volume levels on gigs, how much you should socialize on a gig and keeping your dignity in social situations outside of music.

Q: Michael, if one plays keyboard for an outdoor wedding ceremony, and plays background music for quite awhile as guests arrive and are mingling, and the volume sounds right to that keyboardist and no guest approaches to complain of the music being loud or soft, should the musician feel at all responsible upon learning from the bride after the ceremony

that she could not hear the wedding march as she walks down the aisle?

A: Acoustics on gigs can be problematic, especially when you are outdoors. When you are working for people who are not musicians and have no idea about what to listen for and how to check volume levels before you start playing, you should always ask for a short run-through to check volume levels well before the guests arrive to make sure that the bride, groom and all the guests can hear the music okay. This also goes for testing if the volume is too loud as well. You don't want the music so loud that older guests will be offended and walk out of what should be a happy occasion, whether it is a wedding, bar mitzvah, birthday party or any other special event that you may be playing for.

No matter what gig you may play on, you must take responsibility for your volume levels and whether your audience will be able to hear you adequately. Sometimes the situation can be so chaotic that you cannot get anyone from the employer to communicate with you, this is why you should always put in the "Special Conditions" section of your union contract a line that says "must have sound level check before guests arrive." That way you protect yourself and your musical product.

Q: Mike, I have been going to various gigs as a jobber here in town, and every time I go I always get into conversations about all kinds of subjects

- politics, personal stuff, jokes. I always seem to have a great time, but sometimes people look at me funny. What's going on? Nobody has ever said anything but great things about my playing. Am I being paranoid?

A: No, you are not paranoid. When we play gigs, it's good to socialize with our colleagues, but we also have a job to do, so it's really important to assess the working environment each time you arrive at the first rehearsal. Most people come to a gig expecting to work, and not socialize. Also, many people have difficulty concentrating on the gig when others are spending too much time talking about other things. It is best to save comments outside of music for the break times or dinner or lunch breaks. But even then, some of your colleagues may still wish to go easy on the conversation. Everybody is different, and if some of your colleagues enjoy the kinds of conversations that you do, by all means talk about such things on your dinner or lunch break, but be sensitive to those who want to be less social on gigs and then you won't be getting strange looks from your colleagues.

Q: I play for a living and am working all the time. How do I deal with relatives who always want me to pull out my clarinet and serenade them at family events? I love to play, but I've got to get away from it sometimes!

A: Just like everyone else, we work hard during the week as professional

musicians. For some reason, too many people think that professional musicians will just drop everything and perform like a trained puppet when asked. We are highly trained professionals and should be treated with dignity in social situations, just as those in other professions. When was the last time somebody met a brain surgeon at a party and asked them to "operate for us" on the kitchen table? Or asking an accountant to demonstrate how to do a tax return in front of company? It is ridiculous and is a holdover from medieval times when musicians were the servants of wealthy patrons. On classical and some band gigs, we still wear tuxedos, suits and black and white as a holdover from this period of time when we were considered servants of the wealthy. These days, we are working as professionals, not as servants. Union membership can help us to keep things that way. As union members we are always trying to improve our working conditions and benefits so we can be treated fairly and with dignity as others are who work in differing professions than ours.

Send your questions to: Ask Mike!, Trumpetworks Press, P.O. Box 11574, Marina del Rey, CA 90295 or you can check out my website at www.trumpetworkspress.com and see information on my book, "Stage Fright in Music Performance and Its Relationship to the Unconscious." All names are confidential and will not be published.

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