

Ask Mike!

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



BY MICHAEL I. GOODE,
LOCAL 47 MEMBER

In my last column, in July, we talked about dealing with a difficult band member, playing without a formula, and playing without music. Today, we are going to talk about how to manage when you have yourself overwhelmed and overbooked in your career and your life and why it's OK to listen to music outside of your area of specialization.

Q: Hello Mike. I have had one heck of a past three months. Everything has gone wrong in my personal life; divorce, my teenager had problems, I had to move to a new place, my bandleader died – it's been really crazy. I am somehow still playing all my regular gigs but all of this outside stuff is making me feel like I am about to crack up. How do I cope with this?

A: I am very sorry to hear about your bandleader and your divorce as well as the problems with your teenager and moving! We all go

through tough times but sometimes things really seem to hit all at once like what you are experiencing right now. The trick is to focus on being in the zone just as you feel when you play your best. This will enable you to make good decisions, keep you calm and to manage the major stressors that you are under so that you can keep your balance and get through this tough time. The zone sometimes is a tricky thing; many times when you are in it, it feels as if you have been there forever; but when you slip out of it, it can be difficult to get back into it, like trying to catch one of those white dandelion puffs in the air in the middle of a summer wind. When you get out of the zone is when negative things in life get even worse and we feel helpless at times to do anything about them. When things are calm, it's best to practice staying in the zone then so that when times get tough like now, you have a reference point that you can count on.

Even though that's not where you are now, you can practice getting to the zone even in the middle of all these stressors by taking a minute and writing an anger letter like the kind I have been talking about in previous columns. Writing such a letter will serve to drain the negative emotions that all these stressors are causing and get you in balance so that you can make better decisions and cope much more effectively with your very stressful situa-

tion. Remember, the anger letters are simple: take a blank piece of paper and start with the sentence "I am angry about...." and finish it with whatever is troubling you. These letters should be uncensored, totally private and you should tear them up when you are done. Three things will happen after you write one. Number one, you may feel a great sense of relief as if a great weight has been lifted. Second, you may recall something while writing that you are also angry about; keep writing on this new topic until you feel relieved like the first option. Or third, you may write and feel numb and have no reference point. If this third option happens, write an anger letter that says, "I am numb and have no reference point" and soon you will recall a memory or a feeling. Write an anger letter about that memory or feeling until you get to a place of relief like the first type of anger letter response I gave as an example. If more anger issues come up, continue to write until you get to the place of relief like the first response example. If you write these anger letters daily during this difficult time and try to take care of yourself as best you can under the circumstances – getting more sleep, eating better, drinking more fluids, exercising when at all possible, hanging out with your friends, etc. – you will go a long way to getting through this with some balance. We all go through such times in

our life. The question is not that they come, the question is when they come, how do we deal with them? Do we cave in to the situation, or do we become proactive and find a way to take charge of what is happening and correct it by getting ourselves in balance first rather than letting these negative events take over? We have to protect our life and our careers!

Q: Hi Michael, I am an orchestral musician and I play this kind of music for a living here in L.A. But I also like to listen to all kinds of styles of music: rock, hip hop, jazz, soul/R&B, rap, etc. I take a lot a grief for this from my colleagues in the orchestra. Some don't care but a lot of them really give me a hard time about it – so much so that now I've stopped even telling my colleagues what I listen to outside my orchestral work. Is there something wrong with me? Is this going to impact my ability to play well in my classical repertoire for work?

A: Having spent most of my career playing in professional legit orchestras, I am very aware of this problem. Some of our colleagues tend to get more than a little scared when somebody in their orchestra does something a little different. Although it is important to have a certain uniformity and order to keep our correct focus on the music and the composer's intentions, some of our colleagues can get a lit-

tle carried away and get insulted when we even LISTEN to something different in our lives outside of the orchestra.

If it's any consolation, one of my teachers, the great Arnold Jacobs of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Solti, used to listen to all styles of music on his own and play as much of those styles as he could on outside jobs. Yet he was considered the greatest player, soloist and teacher on the tuba in the world.

As long as you can keep your standards up artistically in your job and you conform to the many unwritten rules and regulations of the orchestral world while on the job, you will be fine. I would not waste my time mentioning my non-orchestral listening preferences to those who are too insecure to hear it. Listening to other styles of music actually can enhance your core sound and put a new energy into it while keeping it within the orchestral parameter of what's acceptable. It's all about keeping that marvelous energy in your playing!

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" and my upcoming book, "Your True Self." All names are confidential and will not be published. © 2008 Michael I. Goode

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