

Ask Mike!

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



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In my last column, in January, we talked about people who have made it big but can't handle their success and how to deal with this. Today, we are going to talk about how to deal with misperceptions in the music business that affect us all.

Q: I tell my students to practice, practice and keep practicing, but they don't seem to be improving. It seems my students that practice consistently every day and put in the time are not winning competitions, and are not improving in their playing at all. Yet, I have this one student who has a terribly lackadaisical attitude towards practicing and he is winning everything! This is completely contrary to all of my training. What is happening? Shouldn't the hard-working students be improving and the one with a more easygoing attitude be doing poorly? Why is this?

A: Certainly, we all need to practice regularly. But the interesting thing is that

daily practice doesn't necessarily make for a better player. Correct practicing makes for a better player. Sometimes, especially when we are professional players, we need to be very cautious about how we practice and not overdo it and get into a rut. This is very important. We can do more damage by simply practicing the same old thing without any inspiration or musicality. Arnold Jacobs used to always tell me, "routine practice makes for routine players." This is certainly true, and we must really teach our students to have musical inspiration when we play rather than just going through the notes for accuracy and simply accumulating so many minutes of total practice time per day.

Musical models at the highest levels of artistry are essential to give us a goal to shoot for in how we sound whenever we practice. So pick somebody that you admire on your instrument and use that as a model of what you should aspire to every time you practice. Just don't go in there to get all the right notes without any musical goal or thought.

Mr. Jacobs used to also always say that there were two instruments, "one in the head and the one in your hand, and they should be the same," meaning that you should hear in your head exactly what you want to sound like and that's what should be coming out of your instrument. Teach all this to your students and they will be happier, play better and will get much better results from their practicing! Encourage them to go for quality in their practicing instead of just quantity of time spent and you will see the difference!

Q: I am about to start working in town on jingles and movie gigs and am very nervous about this. As I get closer to my first job here, I keep hearing my high school band director and my col-

lege band director's voice in my ear saying, "You better be always great. If you screw up or miss a note on the job, you will never get hired back again by anybody." I am terrified of screwing up all of a sudden. I was the top chair in the orchestra and top-ranked player in my department in one of the top musical schools, but all of a sudden I am thinking this stuff. What gives?

A: We always will be most consistent when we play from confidence and joy of music instead of fear. Too many of us play solely out of fear. This destructive attitude comes from well-meaning teachers, conductors and band directors who think that fear and suffering will make us better players. This is a gross misconception. I have been fortunate to study with someone who has been considered by many as the greatest trumpeter and the greatest orchestral player that ever lived, Adolph Herseth, and he never thinks this way and never has. He approaches the music from joy and confidence and always with a positive attitude. And this is why in his 53 years as principal trumpet of the Chicago Symphony he was always incredibly consistent and had the highest artistic standards of all.

If you are playing from fear, which is what both of these band directors' comments are all about, sooner or later you will become a nervous wreck and your playing may collapse. The nervous system cannot handle the sustained tension of a lie. The lie is that music is difficult and that we must suffer to make it, and suffer most of all to make it at the highest artistic standards. This is absolutely not true and our nervous system functions at its optimum when we are not afraid. Although we initially may get anxious about an upcoming musical situation that is new, we don't have to be.

You can always break down any piece that you are working on into its simplest components and then get them at the level you want one by one and then put them all together into an artistic masterpiece no matter what style of music you may play, whether it's jazz, rock, soul, orchestral or anything else. You can use this idea when you are practicing or when you are sight-reading on the job. Simply mentally pace yourself at the gig, try to be as relaxed as possible and focus on the music in the time you have to look it over, not getting overwhelmed by the big picture. Just look at the chart as soon as you get it, measure by measure, sing it in your head, take a huge amount of air and you will be all right. Imagine you are like a big redwood tree that's just there taking it all in as you play, solid but flexible to whatever the music demands.

For many of us it can also be a question of not having the patience or the belief that we can play really great. Talent is all about belief. Too many times we give up when the big breakthrough is just around the corner. Use the positive approach and attitude that I've talked about here on gigs as well as in the practice room and stop believing that things will go badly. Start believing in yourself and stop playing and preparing from fear. You will play better and at a much higher artistic level both in the practice room and on the job. And you will actually enjoy it!

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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