

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 June, we talked about the importance of having sources of inspiration for your music and how to put them into your playing, career advice and age. Today we are going to talk about dealing with a difficult band member, playing without a formula, and playing without music.

Q: Yo Mike. I am in a band and we are doing well and have just gotten a record deal and have been on tour and will come home in August. I love everything about it. But whenever we get in the studio to cut tracks, our drummer drives me crazy. He argues about everything, even if he doesn't know what he is talking about. Plus, most of the time he is so coked up that he can't even stay in reality. He's a fantastic drummer and when we are playing he's amazing, but how do I keep him from driving me and the rest of the band members crazy?

A: Drummers are the heartbeat of the band. Without them, there's no music,

no vibe, no groove. It sounds like your bandmate is struggling with an addiction problem because he has not dealt with his stage fright issues. It's a little scary to dream of having a record deal and going on tour with a major label and actually getting it. It sounds like you and the others are coping well but your bandmate isn't. As much as he is being difficult, imagine what the band would be like without him and try to cut him some slack. Try to hang out with him outside of rehearsals and touring and talk to him and see how he feels about the great success the band is having.

We fear success more than we fear failure. Your band mate is doing drugs and going into addiction most likely to cover over his fear of how well things are going and probably to cover over some other childhood issues that he is struggling with. You should get him to a substance abuse counselor right away but make sure it is someone that works with musicians and understands what we all go through. We all live a different life than the average person so a counselor who understands this is crucial. This should help him get more comfortable with the demands of success and get him to be more relaxed and cooperative in the studio, in concerts and on the road without sacrificing his or the band's artistic integrity.

Q: Dear Mr. Goode. My best friend is telling me that the only way to make it in jazz is to follow a formula. I have been a jazzer all my life and work all the time around town and around the country. He has some kind of belief that unless you have a rigid set of behaviors on and off stage doing everything a certain way, you will never have long-term success. He is terrified of innovation in his improv solos and he is always complaining that he rarely gets work

and I am working all the time. I just play how I play and the phone is always ringing. What do I tell him?

A: If you look at all the great jazzers of the past – Miles, Dizzy, Coltrane, Monk, Armstrong, and there are many more – they all had one thing in common: they played they way they and them alone. Trying to imitate a formula is great for learning when you are a student, but there comes a time when, as Arnold Jacobs told me, "You have to stop being a student and become an artist. You have to make musical statements not ask questions." Making musical statements, which is what all great artists do, involves taking risks. You have to spend enough time on your instrument and with yourself in the practice room and on stage so that you can take risks and truly be yourself and come out in performance so that you are telling the audience a story – your story. If you depend on a formula, the result can be good, but boring and without the energy of somebody who is playing from their soul. Playing from their soul is what all the truly great musicians have done throughout history. They transcend the notes and take us all to another place. That is our ultimate job as musicians; to take the audience to a new place where they become totally focused on what we are doing on stage because we are.

Tell your friend that he needs to listen to whomever great players he admires and start to imitate them so he can get a feel for how they do it, how they transcend the notes and express themselves. Tell him also that he should experiment and try to tell stories when he solos, from his emotions and to not worry about the notes. Miles Davis said, "Do not fear mistakes. There are none." It is all about what you say with the music to

yourself and to the audience. It's never about the notes. A great player can make a clam sound like it's part of the music and the audience doesn't even suspect it. It's all about being in the zone and stopping worrying about getting all the right notes!

Q: Mr. Goode, I wonder why some of the great players in rock and roll can't read music. Wouldn't this hamper them in working eventually?

A: Actually, not being able to read music can be a plus in terms of getting out of your own way and playing with real emotion and being able to tell a musical story. It's very similar to the difference between giving a speech following prepared notes versus giving a speech without notes from the heart. Most of these guys who are truly phenomenal in rock and roll, rap and other areas of popular music never learned to read music because of a lack of music programs in their community or because most guitar teaching at the time if they had lessons at all, never stressed learning how to read music. A lot of them were self-taught which is why it is much easier for them to play from the heart. Since most are in their own bands, it hasn't hampered their careers. Eventually, for studio work or transcriptions and for other reasons, it is helpful to be able to read music. Even Paul McCartney of the Beatles eventually learned to read music.

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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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When contracts are negotiated it's all about the final package. The employer's costs cover wages and benefits in whatever proportions they and the musicians (represented by the AFM) decide. It's up to the musicians to prioritize a Fund contribution rather than take it in cash payment or other benefits. And both sides at the bargaining table will reap the rewards of the Fund: supporting their own activities and

strutting their stuff to the public, providing entertainment and education and cultivating future generations of performers, patrons and music lovers.

It's high time all musicians supported the Fund. Green sheets should once again paper all of North America. Let's put the "fun" in Fund and find the "trust" in each other to do this. I discussed this idea with other Southern California area

Local officers. San Diego Local 325 already raises and disburses its own monies to support public performances. At the end of July I plan on putting this forward at the Regional Orchestra Players Association (ROPA) conference in Houston, Texas.

I'll keep you posted.

In Solidarity,
Leslie Lashinsky