

# 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 June, we talked about diet, instrument repair, and how to deal with a neighbor who complains about your practicing. Today, we are going to talk about pacing yourself, about lifestyle changes and not letting your playing suffer as a result. We are also going to talk about getting into a practicing rut and the value of singing in playing.

**Q: Michael, a couple of years ago, I thought I was Superman. I went and moved to L.A. and had all these gigs booked right when I arrived and was so tired from moving that I almost really screwed up my playing. I could barely concentrate. I just want to warn players to not get over your head with the rest of your life, even if you are a young guy like me – know your limits!**

A: This is very well said. Even though

most of us have crazy schedules and we play lots of jobs, we must know the moments when we are overbooked in our life!

For those of us who work all the time, we get used to being pretty tough and consistent with our playing no matter what the circumstances. The problem is, sometimes things happen in life that drain our energy and take away from our focus and our playing suffers. A good rule of thumb is to be aware of what the best diet and sleep patterns are for you personally that give you maximum energy and focus on gigs, and stick to these as much as possible.

Of course in our business situations come up where we have to go outside of our comfort zone of sleep and diet, so when these happen, be aware and realize that it will take a lot more energy, focus and will power to get your usual high-quality artistic result. Don't go in thinking when your sleep or diet is disrupted that you can just waltz into a very demanding gig and use the usual amount of energy and play great as you usually do; at these times more energy and focus will be required. As long as you keep this in mind, things will go well and you can go back to your usual sleeping pattern and diet after the situation is over.

**Q: For years I have been practicing with the same setup but recently had to practice in an entirely different room with different acoustics. It's really screwing up my playing and I am afraid that I might lose my artistic focus and my groove. What can I do, Mike?**

A: First off, it will be all right. It is, how-

ever, a really great idea that you have told me about this; we can really get locked in one practice location and get stuck musically and dependent on certain acoustics and circumstances. When this happens, our playing can get locked in a rut and we begin to play in a mechanical way and our confidence can suffer as a result.

It is very important to not get stuck in patterns that will make you unable to make artistic changes that you could be asked to do by a contractor, bandleader or conductor. As much as it can be a little nerve-wracking, we do need to challenge ourselves musically and think out of the box as often as possible.

Make sure that your old and new practice area enabled and will enable you to get a great beautiful free-blowing sound. Such a sound will always help you sell yourself and help your reputation with those who hire you.

A key factor in maintaining such a sound is to listen daily to a great musical model on your instrument and imitate that. I listen to my teacher Bud Herseth's recordings; many trombonists listen to Tommy Dorsey. Great musical models give you a goal for your unconscious to shoot for that will stick with you whenever you play.

A great sound always is very resonant and free-blowing and in your practice room, whether old or new, it is very important to have the correct acoustical environment to be able to make such a sound. You should have enough carpet or wallpaper to soak up the sound so the room isn't too "live," but it is also important to not have too many carpets or wallpaper on the walls, otherwise the room will be so stuffy that you will start to force to make a sound. So keep this

in mind as you practice in your new surroundings and make the adjustments in your practice room to make your playing easier.

**Q: Hello Michael, somebody told me that singing lessons might be good for my playing. I am a saxophone player. What do you think?**

A: Singing lessons are a fantastic idea! Do some shopping and asking around to get the best teacher you possibly can. I have been taking singing lessons for a number of years and they have made a major difference in my playing.

As my teacher Adolph Herseth said, all we are trying to do when we play an instrument is imitate the human voice. When we try to imitate a singer rather than just bang out the notes, it becomes much easier for the body to make great music and for the nervous system to function and perform to its greatest ability.

Singing and singing in our head while we play sends a direct message to our unconscious, and at that point our body will know exactly what it is to do and we don't have to worry about the result as long as what we are singing is musically perfect; like a finished perfect painting of sound.

*Send your questions to: Ask Mike!, Trumpetworks Press, 715 Lake Street #269, Oak Park, IL 60301, or you can check out my website at [www.trumpetworkspress.com](http://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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