

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 May, we talked about the importance of waiting, forgiving yourself when you screw up, and being proactive about injuries that could affect your playing. Today, we are going to talk about how important it is to have sources of inspiration for your music and how to put them into your playing, career advice and age.

Q: Hi Mike. I really want to get to the next level in my playing; how do these great guys do it? I am playing lots of jobs but just don't seem to get that spark or inspiration lately. Besides practicing a lot, how do they sound so great?

A: As we all know, it is important to practice as much as you can. But practicing is not enough; we always have to practice with a high artistic goal in mind. If we don't have that we will never realize our highest potential as musicians. When a truly great player plays, they are thinking about an emotion, a storyline they are trying to convey, not just a bunch of notes either in their head or on the page. The effortlessness comes from trying to reach an artistic goal like trying to make an improv solo con-

vey a personal memory to the audience.

I remember a solo in a contemporary piece that I had trouble getting a groove on. The notes were there, but it just wasn't a "wow" experience yet. Then I did some research on the composer and the piece and what he intended the music to say. And all of a sudden I remembered a childhood feeling from a personal memory that was just like the "once upon a time" feeling that the composer wanted for that particular solo in that section, and I got a standing ovation at the concert for it. Just turning the crank and getting all the right notes won't do it. That's just a starting point!

So, no matter what you play, always find out the story behind the piece and find an emotion from your own life that matches what the composer intended. Your nervous system will kick in and tell your body exactly what it needs to do to sound great. You'll even get to the point that you will completely forget that you have an instrument in your hand and you and the music will become one, you'll be in the "zone." That's when you get inspired, and this inspiration automatically inspires the audience, too. That's what it's all about. There's nothing like it.

Q: Dear Mr. Goode. I have been playing music all of my life. It all has just come pretty natural to me. My parents were both musicians so there was always music around me so I never really thought about how I got here. A dear friend of mine who is not a musician has a child who is really talented but he has no idea how to encourage his child and doesn't know what advice to give him regarding making it in the classical music field. The child is 10 and is an instrumentalist. Any advice?

A: First off, always be positive to your friend about music and tell him to be that way with his child as well.

Also, disregard all the negativity about how tough it is to make it in the music business, that we all hear constantly. The child needs positive reinforcement, not negative. Tell him to get his son the finest teacher on his instrument as soon as possible and get him started on weekly or biweekly private lessons. It's the best investment a parent can ever make; in classical music the teacher is key.

If your friend doesn't know where to start, ask some of your colleagues who the absolute best teacher is. Also make certain that this teacher has the temperament to work with a 10-year old. Sometimes, fine teachers can be great players but old-school in their approach and be so discouraging that a very talented and promising young student will give up because of abusive comments and teaching practices. Tell your friend to talk to his child constantly about what is going on and ask his son what the lesson assignments are and if there are any special materials, equipment or music requested by the teacher after each lesson. Make sure that his child brings a notebook or a lesson record book with him for the teacher to record assignments in. Tell him to enter his child in whatever contests the teacher may feel his son is ready for. And always make sure that your friend asks his son when chair auditions are coming up in band and orchestra so that the teacher can fully prepare the child so that audition or contest time can be fun and successful instead of a miserable and unhappy experience.

The parent should discuss with the teacher a reasonable realistic practice schedule; enough to have the student fully prepared for whatever is coming up, but not over-prepared so that the child gets bored and discouraged. When the time comes, at the teacher's direction, begin preparation for summer music camp or a music high school if that is appropriate. The teacher for your friend's child should also prepare

him for an audition to a major music school, the finest one possible when he is ready and help the child with the application process. Such ideas, with a positive and fun approach while thoroughly covering all the fundamentals, will go a long way to ensuring that your friend's child will have a real chance of having a real musical career when they finish their undergraduate degree in music.

Q: Mr. Goode, I am getting older and approaching 55 years of age. I play in a major symphony orchestra. Somebody told me that at 55 it's time to hang it up. What do you think?

A: In 1969, a trend started towards hiring younger musicians in symphony orchestras; management somehow thinking that this was advantageous. Many conductors were following this trend. When Georg Solti first came to the Chicago Symphony orchestra he was of the same opinion and began suggesting that the older players should retire and be replaced with new ones simply on the basis of age. The orchestra members all protested, and voluntarily went to Solti and played privately for him and told him that they could play as well as or better than any younger player. Solti was astonished and impressed, he backed off, and he went on to win the most Grammy awards of anyone in history with those same older players. So keep your standards up, and keep 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." All names are confidential and will not be published.

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