

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 February, we talked about how to deal with misperceptions in the music business that affect us all. Today, we are going to talk about changing a stage demeanor you don't like, and why legal things matter.

Q: Dear Mike, I'm a jazz musician. I don't sing, but am a great soloist. People always tell me I should smile more when I'm on stage. They say my playing's great but that I always look like I'm mad. I'm really not, though. In fact, I'm happiest when I'm playing. It just doesn't show on my face. I tend to get in a "zone," staring off at something (on the floor usually) and get myself in a trance. Not very audience-friendly, I know. Once a friend suggested looking at each audience member in the eye, so I tried that (without success). It's just hard for me to fake a smile when I don't feel it – on or off stage. This has nothing to do with stage fright. I've been performing for audiences since I was a

child and I've played for thousands – never an ounce of fear. I feel like this is holding back my career. How can I look happy when I play and appear more entertaining?

A: Thank you for your question. I am glad that you have connected into "the zone" and know what it feels like. This is extremely important and gives you a reference point for what I am about to tell you regarding not smiling.

My suspicion is that the not smiling part is simply a self-protective mechanism that you use in order to keep psychic space around yourself when you play so that you can concentrate better. You are trying to protect yourself from the audience so that you can concentrate and stay "in the zone" while on stage. This is fine and you should not put yourself down that you do this at this time.

As musicians, we all tend to be perfectionists if we are not careful, so we become sensitive to everything that is said to us both about our playing and about our onstage demeanor. That's OK, too. We don't ever want to lose or shut off our sensitivity; that's what makes each of us great artists. If you really want to change from a frown to a smile on stage, such a change can be very risky for your career as it will take much focus away from your playing, which is the most important thing. This is why you are not changing to a smile even though you've tried; you want to protect your playing at all costs, and I don't blame you one bit!

With all that said, if you still want to change from frown to smile on stage, understand that it will take time to integrate it into your playing without disturbing your level of concentration and the musical quality and standards of what you do. Remember the anger let-

ters that I have talked about in previous columns? If you decide to change from a frown to a smile on stage, you must write a private anger letter about this and tear it up when you are done. The letter should start with something like, "I am angry that whenever I play on stage I frown instead of smile, and I'd rather smile," and keep writing. You will then begin to get ideas on how to discipline yourself to change from a frown to a smile.

A word of warning: first try changing from a frown to a smile in front of a mirror, at home in the practice room; do not try to do it on stage until you have practiced at home taping your performance to make sure your musical standards are still high while smiling. Have a friend with good jazz ears who is honest listen to you so that you do not ever lower your standards of performance while you are trying this. If that works out OK at home after a period of time, then try it on a gig. At the gig you should try to smile and play on one song, whose changes you know the best, and do this at a gig that is not of major importance. Also, have your friend with good jazz ears attend the gig and give you feedback. If everything went musically well on the song that you smiled on, on the next less important gig, try two songs smiling and so on until over time you can do one set of songs, then two sets, working up to an entire night of songs on the gig while smiling and keeping your standards as high as they were before and eventually you will be able to smile and play at the highest artistic level at any time under any circumstances.

Q: Hey Mike, my band has been approached by an independent record label and they want to sign us. We were looking at do-it-yourself stuff

on the Internet and we figured that if we need any legal advice we can save money by getting advice from this website we were all looking at. What do you think?

A: The union has a lot of excellent free legal resources that are available as part of your membership; give them a call first and see what they can do for you to help. It's one of the benefits of being a member. I know that it always seems like saving money is a good idea but it is very important to find a great entertainment attorney to help your band and give you some sound advice. Even though looking up information on the Internet sounds cool, you will save yourself a lot of time and heartache. It's worth the phone call and could save you a lot of heartache later!

I know that as musicians we don't want to deal with the business end of things and just want to make music, but the paperwork and contract part is a reality we do have to deal with in order to get the most pay for what we do. This is where the union can help. Give them a call. There are too many horror stories of bands who didn't take the business-end seriously and lost a lot of money and opportunities as a result. Don't let that happen to your band. You've made it this far; don't spoil it by letting the business-end of things not get taken care of properly on your behalf!

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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