

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 September, we talked about how to get your playing back after a vacation or long absence due to illness and how important it is to keep yourself in great physical shape. Today we are going to talk about how to keep going when the going gets tough and the importance of playing with heart.

Q: Michael, I love your column and have never written before. I am having a difficult time. My mother is very sick, and I am working gigs as usual, but it is getting very difficult going back and forth between the hospital without much sleep as well as playing jobs. I can't afford to take too much time off of gigs – you know how it is – but I am afraid I'll lose my edge and play badly. I am getting worried. What do I do? I feel trapped and stuck.

A: I am really sorry to hear about your mother, I hope she gets better as

quickly as possible. My heart goes out to you and your family. Sometimes in life we are faced with some very tough situations that we have to deal with and what you are facing is one of them. Divorce, illness in a family member, financial problems – sometimes these things happen all at once. Even things like moving can be stressful when added on top of some of these other things that I have mentioned. What do these stressors do to our musical work situation? They can sometimes make it a lot harder to get the same musical result we are used to getting, and we all know that we need to keep delivering in order to keep working.

If you are in one of these stressful situations in life, there are things you must do at all costs to keep going and succeed in spite of the difficult circumstances. One: take care of yourself as much as possible in spite of the demands of the situation. If you are sleeping in the guest lounge or your mother's room on the couch at the hospital, make sure you get some sleep; make sure you eat, make sure you take care of yourself in whatever other ways you can. Do little things that will make you feel better whatever they are for you. You will be able to help your mom out a lot more that way.

Two: you should write an anger letter using pen and paper about the situation; something like, "I am angry that my mom is sick and I feel helpless to do anything about it." This will help to drain the negative emotion and keep you balanced during a very stressful time. Make sure to keep these letters private and uncensored and destroy them when you are done. If you feel like continuing to write anger letters after start-

ing one letter, by all means keep writing. If you feel numb and overwhelmed write an anger letter about that. These letters will help keep you more centered during a difficult time.

Most hospitals have a free chaplain or counseling service. Take advantage of this or call your regular therapist if you have one. You do need to talk about the situation with others. Call a professional therapist if you need to. Don't tough it out alone; as musicians we are used to figuring out most of our problems by ourselves, but in this case you need support from others, even if it is just a phone call or your buddy visits your mom with you in the hospital and brings you lunch.

Musically, if you can get time off with pay, take as much as you think won't jeopardize your work situation with your conductor or contractor. On the job, make sure that you are reminding yourself in your head before and as you play exactly what you sounded like at some time before when you felt great and you played your absolute best and let that sound flood your imagination as you play. We all need to practice, but remember our minds are the greatest instrument of all. Arnold Jacobs, one of my teachers from the Chicago Symphony, told me a story of how he was able to play a major concert with a important tuba solo while he was terribly sick with the flu. It can be done when you have to do it. Hang in there.

Q: Dear Mr. Goode, I just heard the most amazing orchestra. I think the guy conducting is going to be the new conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. How does he get those 16-year-old kids to sound like

that? It was a BBC proms concert I heard on the Internet.

A: Yes, he is going to be the new conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. What you heard was Gustavo Dudamel and the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra at the BBC Proms. I think that Maestro Dudamel is phenomenal and I think we are going to be the luckiest city in the world to have him. There is a strong tendency today in the orchestral world to get all the right notes, to concentrate only on technique and not put emotion or storytelling into orchestral music as much as there used to be in the past. Maestro Dudamel, from what I can tell, puts his entire heart and soul into his music and his conducting like no one else I've seen in a long time. When you put that kind of sincere emotion and storytelling ability into music, coupled with amazing talent, the technique practically takes care of itself and the result is amazing. Coupled with a music system in Venezuela for young people that is completely supported by the government, the kids play their hearts out and have been well trained from a young age. They are mostly from poor backgrounds and the level of artistry is inspiring. Put all those elements together and they sound phenomenal!

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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