

Ask Mike!

Stressed about an upcoming gig? Work got you singing the blues? Local 47 member Michael I. Goode can help!



BY MICHAEL I. GOODE, LOCAL 47 MEMBER

In my last column, in September, we talked about positive thinking and your nervous system, the value of using intuition in playing and imparting this skill to your students through sight-reading. Today, we are going to talk about some of the concepts that I learned from one of my two teachers and why these concepts matter in your playing today.

Q: Michael, in many of your columns you have talked about Arnold Jacobs and some of the interesting ideas that he had regarding playing and singing. Could you recap some of those ideas and why they might be important for all of us who play?

A: The most important ideas from Mr. Jacobs are taking a huge amount of air and singing in your head while

you are playing. Without air, the body starves physiologically and can tense up, leading to stage fright and causing you to have to do very strange things with your body that can stress it out a great deal in order to make a beautiful sound from your instrument. This applies not just to wind and all other instruments but also to singers as well.

We get tension from not taking a big enough breath because we don't get enough oxygen to our tissues because the blood cells that carry the oxygen won't be moving as fast if they are compressed. It is very easy to compress and slow down the speed at which the blood cells travel to deliver oxygen to the body because at the final delivery point, the blood vessels that carry the blood cells are only one blood cell wide. When this compression happens, the muscles tense up because they become oxygen-starved and the situation goes into a vicious cycle where we get even more tension from this starvation making it harder and harder to play with ease and relaxation. Under these circumstances it becomes even harder to stay focused.

This is exactly why Mr. Jacobs wanted us to take huge amounts of air whenever we play so we could avoid such consequences. He always said, "Air is free, take enough of it so that you can

waste it." Once we take enough air, the body and the mind relaxes and we can think clearly. It then becomes easy to focus. When we think clearly, we can then think of whatever musical message that we want to deliver to our audience and let that message come out to the audience through our playing.

As long as the brain is being given direct instruction on what to do, the body will follow. Take a huge breath and sing in your head whatever you are playing whenever you play! This concept comes right from Mr. Jacobs. It is a question of trusting our body. Playing is not difficult. It is simple. Children understand this concept very well. As we get to be adults, we make it very difficult and thus make our musical lives and jobs harder than they need to be! Thanks for writing!

Q: Dear Mr. Goode, I have had a nagging backache for the past week. I am a guitar player and I play a Les Paul which I have played for years. Could this be contributing to my back woes?

A: Yes, it's possible but see your doctor first to be sure. We all love our instruments. I hope by this time you have had your back checked out by the doctor to make sure it's nothing serious. I also play guitar and although I

never have owned a Les Paul, I have played them. They are fantastic instruments but like one of my guitarist friends said, "it's like having a dresser around your neck." They are heavy. There's nothing wrong with having or playing this amazing, legendary guitar; however if your back is acting up, you might want to switch to another Gibson, like an SG, which is pretty light, until you get your back checked out and healed.

The problem for a guitarist is that we depend on our back a lot for support of the axe while we play so you've got to make sure that your back is OK before you go back to the Les Paul. I know, you may not get the same feel or resonance with an SG, but if you can limp along with that until you get your back healed you will be happier than if you keep playing on your Les Paul and you throw your back out completely and you are down for the count for six months, which has been known to happen! Another compromise is maybe you can play your Les Paul either sitting down or with a guitar support, but I know the visuals for the audience aren't the same. A final option is to go all acoustic instead, but I don't know what kind of gigs you are playing.

Get to the doctor and whatever physical therapist he or she recommends first

and then come up with a playing instrument that will be lighter than the Les Paul if the doc says it's okay. If he or she says yes, the lighter guitar will give your back a break and allow you to keep working during this healing period unless your doctor says absolutely not; it's up to him or her whether the condition of your back allows you to play at all. If the doctor says your back is in too bad of shape to play guitar unless it is completely healed then you have to abide by his or her decision. If that happens then you might be able to play pedal steel guitar which is horizontal and just requires you to sit down but not hold anything up with your back, but ask the doctor about doing even that to be sure. It's your doctor's call; the back is too important to permanently screw up. Tell then the truth at the appointment and see what they recommend. Let me know what happens!

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.

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If your adjustable rate mortgage (ARM) payments have increased or you are facing other challenges in being able to afford your mortgage, the Union Plus Save My Home Hotline may be able to help.

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1. Don't ignore the problem
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Call the MAP office at
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Informal: A simple phone call starts the process – there's no red tape
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