

Embouchure change and kindness

“Any advise for getting through major embouchure issues?”

Sorry, I would love to help you with that but that's way too vague of a question, and way too large and long of a response. *But*, I will offer you this: no matter what your embouchure issues are - it's a technical thing, or it's just a physical thing - it's a code you've yet to crack. It's a feeling of comfort that is yet to be developed. It's something *extremely* achievable, that you've yet to achieve on a consistent basis.

Maybe there have been flashes of inspiration that led you to feel like it was the right thing for you to change your embouchure, or whatever. It's something physical, that can be worked on with a very thoughtful process of self-awareness and a determined and focused, structured path to fixing those things. Practice routine, whatever, *practice* - the word just doesn't have enough weight.

You gotta figure out what it is that you need to change - that you want to change about your playing - and go about changing it, but all the while, here's the advice: Be *kind* to yourself. Be kind to yourself.

Embouchure problems make people absolutely fucking neurotic; turns perfectly good, reasonable, happy people into miserable shadows of themselves. Because, a lot of times our ego is afforded too much weight; it gets too big of a say; it gets a seat at the table that it does not deserve.

And when the ego feels bad about what's going on; feels bad about the playing, feels bad about not being able to make it through the concerto, feels bad about not being able to hit that “ta-da!” note, feels bad about not really expressing themselves fluently through the whole set

of [chord] changes, or just physical things - any kind of - anything that makes the ego feel threatened, or feel bad - any of those things...

When the ego is in that type of situation, if you've attached your sense of self; your self-image; if your ego identifies as a trumpet player - and of course your ego wants to be known as a great trumpet player- but what you're feeling or what you're hearing doesn't match up, then your ego is... Unless you've done a good amount of work; unless you were raised in a healthy way; and, or, have done a whole bunch of other emotional work- you're gonna be miserable because having embouchure problems means *you* have a problem. There's not just something wrong with your technique at this moment; there's something wrong with *you*.

And if that's what you feel like your ego is experiencing, or telling you, then that's a really big, that's a *really* big problem. And it's really hard to make the physical changes. It's hard to be a scientist and gather data, gather valuable information about the cause and effect of what you've just done; and formulate a new plan about how to move forward. It's very difficult to actually make the changes that bring that feeling that you so desperately want, when you're in the middle of experiencing an emotional response that's overwhelming and that's masochistic.

When your ego is saying "You're a failure, *because* of your embouchure problems." The whole time you're playing if you're like [starts playing trumpet] "Agh, fuck" [puts down trumpet] "Ugh I knew it was gonna suck again! God it just keeps sucking! Fuck!". If you're having these emotional responses, then you are not thinking clearly. You're not *feeling* clearly; you're not gonna be open for the information about what you're doing; what are you actually physically doing,

"And why isn't it working?" Well you don't know because you're not even aware of what you're physically doing. You're just involved in an emotional response. "My chops are failing,

fuck! Wait, why are my chops failing?" You can't just stop and ask yourself that, if you're in the middle of an emotional response.

So the first thing you gotta do is just, [deep breath] get control of your emotional state. And remind yourself, I -*I*- do not define myself as a trumpet player, that's not it. I am a person, a being of love, a son, an uncle, a boyfriend, a girlfriend. I am a person with dreams and aspirations, *and I* play the trumpet. And right now I'm having a problem with my embouchure. And I'm gonna systematically do what I can to fix those things. I'm gonna just-I'm gonna take lots of notes, and I'm gonna try to find patterns, and I'm gonna try to see where the more obvious things pop out as things that I should probably take a look at in my technique; things that I should change, or experiment with.

It starts with taking a breath, being kind to yourself, and not just succumbing to the emotional response of failure, not letting your ego torture you because it's not satisfied with where you're at. That's really, really huge. That is a really big, *really* important piece of advice; that you have got to detach your self-worth from the current state of your playing. I'm gonna repeat that. You have to *detach* your sense of self-worth from this performance, from this gig, from this song, from this note, from this *period*, from this school year, from whatever it may be. Detach your sense of self-worth from your ability to play the trumpet; completely!

Focus on being happy with how you are developing yourself. And then you can be a perfectly happy person, who maybe isn't playing the trumpet very well right now. But you can work on that; and a person who has control of their emotional state can do lots of great work, on the technical side of things. That's what's up.

Eventually, the day will come when your best days are behind you. I don't know exactly when it was for Dizzy, but you know, Dizzy went from being the baddest trumpet player on the planet, to at some point; he became an old man, where you gotta kinda listen through -

you gotta listen to hear the thought, hear the idea, listen through the cracks and the nooks to hear the idea. But he still went on stage every night, and still was a being of love and light for so many people. And lifted up so many careers, kept a band on the road, kept being there, front and centre, as an old-ass man standing on stage, *waaay* past his prime.

And I would have loved - I wish I could have, I would like to have conversations, sensitive as they are, with trumpet players who *are* past their prime, and see how they deal with the emotional responses that come up with not being able to achieve something that they were once able to achieve. You might as well start practicing for it now, basically, is what I'm saying. If you feel like your worth as a human being depends on your ability to play the trumpet, then one day you're gonna fucking crash and burn.

But if you have a different metric for your self-worth, then you can be kind to yourself during the, of course, the potentially very stressful process of changing your technique. But at least if you can do it with some compassion for yourself and some understanding that, obviously, lots of people say this is not an easy instrument so I guess I should cut myself some slack. Then you'll be able to make improvements, a lot better.