

THE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

JUPITER-WORKSHOP FOR LOW BRASS

The concert starts in an hour. I'm taking some time to check my euphonium, my microphone, my effects pedals, my cables. Yanni Balmelle (guitar) gets a few beers (free alcohol is the musician's privilege) and Stéphane Ranaldi (drum and bandleader) tells me with a glowing smile that it will be a great concert. It's a beautiful summer evening, tables are all booked, and Oléum Camino (literally: "oil on the fire") is about to play its three sets full of energy, which will certainly shock the regulars of the Peristyle of the Opera of Lyon.

Yes, I thought, it's going to be a great concert.

I hope...

I hope so anyway. I hope that I don't get lost in the form of "Loop On". I hope that my AutoWah works on "Steckborn." And that I remember "Près d'ici" correctly. My thoughts keep on racing, and the doubts are piling up.

The last sunrays touch gently the roof of the city hall, the Place de la Comédie empties slowly and the audience starts to take their seats.

The concert starts soon, but I can't get these negative thoughts out of my head. What if my microphone didn't work? What if there was a bad contact? What if I had a memory slip? And then suddenly, a small voice adds itself to the others: you are not made for



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this, it is not your place! You are a classically trained musician, you can't improvise! This trio needs a double bass, not a euphonium! Yanni and Stéphane play much better than you, you're not good enough!

Stage fright

And so on... Stage fright, usually productive, turned into an absurd spiral that reduced my confidence to nothing. Not only did I feel like I was lacking skills to perform that night, but I felt like I *didn't have the right* to be there. I felt like I was taking someone else's place, that I was an impostor. I did my best to ignore my doubts and forget them so that I could concentrate on the music.

Dialogue and feedback

It took me a long time to talk about it. That's the problem with feeling like an impostor, I'm afraid of being discovered, so I keep everything to myself!

As the concerts went on, the positive feedbacks from Stéphane and Yanni allowed me to get rid of my doubts. Yes, I was not a jazz "purist", but I brought a precious energy to the trio. No, mistakes were not a problem, and in fact, everyone makes mistakes.

Gradually, my uncertainty disappeared and I

learned to be more confident.

Where did this feeling of imposture come from? What could justify that? Was it because I was a classically trained musician?

Finally

It was one of our best concerts, full of beautiful moments, with solid grooves and generous choruses. The three of us were delighted and the audience was thrilled, although our music was unusual to the "Péristyle" (after all maybe we should say péri-style, in ancient Greek "around the style").

There was no reason to worry at all.

Impostor syndrome

In a business environment, it describes the doubts of an employee about his or her own competence, the feeling of having taken the place of a more competent person, of being an "impostor".

I had been part of the trio for more than a year, Stéphane had told me many times that he liked my playing and having a euphonium in the band. I was investing time on it, learning the pieces by heart, preparing my solos, composing for the band... In spite of all these efforts, I was still having doubts. So why did I hear this voice in my head telling me that I don't belong there?

Impostor syndrome is said to occur more frequently among introverts, because they base their opinion of themselves on their feelings. So, the solution would be to talk about it, to get the opinion of others.

The classical musician who didn't play classical

But, even more absurd, I felt even less comfortable in a classical context.

I had, of course, during my 3 years of classical study explored the -small - repertoire featuring the euphonium, practiced my studies and my "Clarke" and "Pichaureau" in all 12 keys. At the end of this "classical" training, I had a good technique and I hated euphonium concertos; I had a reggae band and a street band where I had much more fun than at the concerts from the Conservatory. I had no classical projects, no duets, no chamber music, no brass band, nothing related to my classical training.

It's quite strange to be a classical musician who doesn't play classical music! Not only does the euphonium, a modern instrument, have little written music, but the few pieces and concerti that do exist are composed for virtuosos who can play over five octaves, double-tongue at 200 bpm and perform all of this with flexibility and endurance.

I loved classical music, but I didn't play it because the pieces for euphonium were too difficult. The negative, discouraging thoughts kept coming back: "I don't have the level to play classical music", "classical music is for musicians who studied at the CNSM", "anyway, there are almost no works for euphonium". The feeling of imposture had crushed my taste for classical music and the music sheets were sleeping in my drawers. Fortunately, a simple question allowed me to get out of this sad situation.

Questioning my prejudices

"But who said that classical music means euphonium concerto only?" Dominique Clément, who my mentor during my training at the Cefedem (school for music teachers), destroyed in a few words my prejudices about classical music and about euphonium. And with his support, I started arranging, transcribing and playing works by composers I loved, putting them within the reach of my modest technique, taking into account the specificity of my instrument.

Thus was born the duo "Innere Stimme", with which I played many concerts and recorded an album of Robert Schumann's lieder in Berlin.

Once again, the dialogue with an open-minded musician allowed me to take a step forward.

The feeling of imposture did not disappear in the blink of an eye, far from it. The years I spent performing the works of Berlioz, Schumann, Chopin and Mendelssohn were filled with doubts and questions. At every concert, I imagined that someone would stand up and protest: "What the hell is this? He can't play!" If I had to rehearse with a new pianist, I would tell myself, "He will hear that I play badly, he will not want to work with me! After a concert, I would answer the compliments with a guilty look: "you know, I didn't study at the CNSM (national conservatory for music in France)".

Looking back, I realize how ridiculous these thoughts are. Sometimes self-doubt has its good side and it's important to know how to question oneself. But they were mostly negative thoughts that terrified me and kept me from moving forward.

Think about it

As you read this article, maybe you thought "I've been there too!". Maybe it's something you're feeling right now, maybe you just haven't put it into words yet. Maybe you feel like you don't belong. That you don't deserve the compliments. That you're not doing "good enough".

If so, think about that the next time you go on stage:

The warm welcome from the stage manager, you earned it. That applause, you earned it. Those compliments after the show, you earned them.

You are in the right place, because you rehearsed, because you worked on your instrument for hours, because you wrote an arrangement, because you love music and you share it with your friends and your audience.