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After last week’s arcane episode (Arcane means *understood only by a few*) about [Cost in Healthcare](#), here’s something lighter and more familiar – plying a craft as a dedicated amateur, in my case, as a musician.

[I’m as good as I am 00:28](#)

I left for the gig determined and fearful. I’ve spent six to ten hours a week playing my horn since I got the new baritone sax stand. I hadn’t played for eight weeks with my back pain and inability to carry the weight of the fifteen-pound horn on my shoulders and neck. The new stand holds the sax independently so I can play sitting or standing. Working with my long-time teacher, Jeff, I’ve made considerable progress on feeling the form of the tunes, keeping my place with decent phrasing for my solos. I’ve made it a point to solo on three tunes each session the band plays, a stretch for me. Our alto player couldn’t make the gig; I would be one of two horn players. I was determined to solo on six tunes to fill the gap, I felt the fear about my ability or lack thereof. I’d be as good as I am – sweaty hubris, to be sure.

[Hiding, confidence, woodshedding 02:27](#)

My usual practice at gigs and rehearsals is to hide behind the other horn players for the melodies and choruses, reflecting my lack of confidence. I play softly; I stop when they stop. I don’t always understand the form – the arrangement. It changes frequently with our democratic style of arranging. I briefly led an effort to create a spreadsheet to keep track of the decisions about how the tunes begin, solo order, what happens between solos, how we end. Some reluctance among my bandmates to do that and some eagerness. I advocated with “At least we’ll have something to change.” But we didn’t keep it up, and I didn’t study it and keep it up for myself. A couple of tunes had a small bari sax part critical to the song. I worked on those for hours (woodshedding) to come in at the right place, with the correct number of repeats. Today, I was only fair at it. Arghh!

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Gigging, a dose of reality 04:42

Well, the good news first. My solos were decent, one even good – to me. I’m my harshest critic – usually. I enjoyed myself for the first set. Our four percussionists killed. However, I misremembered the form with one tune and stopped soloing too soon, annoying a bandmate – “keep playing!” A percussionist cut off a horn solo too soon, causing a break in the playing. We recovered. Without the alto sax, I couldn’t remember where I was supposed to play and where I was supposed to lay off, so I stopped when I shouldn’t have and played when I should have stopped. However, all my endings were tight. We don’t have that many gigs. We play at farmers’ markets, porchfests, and other community events. This was only my third gig with the band. In my professional life, I’m full of myself; not so much music.

Peaks and valleys 05:52

My bandmates, lovely, supportive people, ended the gig with relief at making it through and realizing that we needed more horns. I felt the same, yet acutely aware that I wasn’t the sharpest knife in the musician drawer. Disheartening. I wish I were better. If wishes made me play better... But they can’t. Sigh, all I can do? Keep at it. I suppose wishes have lit my fire to make the considerable progress I’ve made in the last two years. I’ve gone from “I can’t do this, I’m quitting” to “I need to be better.” One foot in front of the other. If this were health, I’d advise that you never get better in a straight line- always many dips and valleys. No dip, no rise. I do like the rise. Gotta live with the dips.



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