

March 17, 2026

This refers to a specific experience I had as Mr. Adam's "AI" (associate instructor) back in the day at IU. However, this lesson speaks to me constantly to this day, and I also suggest that as vitally important as this is, we tend to emphasize other things over and above what I'll share here, and that is not a good idea...In fact, I'd argue that is missing the boat as to what Mr. Adam tried to teach us.

As an AI with Mr. Adam, it was very much like being an apprentice to the master teacher. You can only imagine what a gift that was to those of us fortunate enough to occupy one of those positions.

My short story is, I was sitting there with Mr. Adam in someone else's lesson, and that person had some kind of "oops," and Mr. Adam asked me to diagnose the problem. My answer was something to do with air or chops or whatever, and Mr. Adam said, "No, that's not it. He's not hearing it."

You may have read this story from me before, but there is another wrinkle to bring into the light.

As we try to learn and adopt Mr. Adam's playing philosophies, it is very seductive to evaluate what we are doing according to whatever we think is indicative of "chops." How high can I play? How's my endurance? Is my air correct? Is my position what it should be?

Those are perfectly fine things, but they are not the highest on my priority list.

Basically, sounding really good is my goal, which means a great sound in tune on time but supremely musical as well.

When we have an oops, or when those high notes are not there, or anything else that happens that is short of our intent, THE NUMBER ONE "go to" needs to be, are you hearing it? Are you REALLY hearing it?? Which means, in great detail (!) and so strongly that there is no room for any other awareness in your mind. Nothing less than that will do. Period.

When I achieve that, it is as if the desired result is already there! It's not "confidence," it's more like certainty.

So when I miss, do I evaluate my embouchure or air or equipment? The better path is to reinforce the mental "hearing it" as Mr. Adam advised.

The science of kinesthetic response validates this notion. Applied consistently, continually refined, over time it becomes 2nd nature. Limits fall away. Consistency becomes one of your trademarks. Good things happen.