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A Transitional Interpretation:

American Roots Music by Five Photographers

As the curator for the exhibition “A Transitional Interpretation: American Roots Music by Five Photographers,” on view September through December 2015, at the Folklife Gallery of the Crandall Public Library, I considered how best to describe this eclectic exhibition for Voices. What follows are the five stories behind five photographs on exhibit, each one by its photographer: Lawrence White, Enid Farber, Joe Deuel, Bryan Laskey, and myself, Andrzej “Andre” Pilarczyk.

LYLE LOVETT

By Andre Pilarczyk

It was one of those in-between seasonal time frames, either winter to summer or fall to winter. I was rushing down from Saratoga Springs to shoot the great Texas troubadour, Lyle Lovett at The Egg on The Empire State Plaza in Albany. In my business of concert and event photography, the more prestigious or popular the artist, the more restrictions you encounter trying to practice your craft as

a photographer. The simple norm tends to be in most situations, “The first three songs, no flash, and don’t block patrons enjoying the show.” However, if you happen to be late for those first three songs allowed by the artist or his management, you are out of luck in getting a shot for the media source you are working for or contributing to.

Having shot Lyle Lovett before, photographing him again wasn’t the issue. What was important was getting a “great” photo of him. I was dissatisfied with what I

had shot in the past and wanted a definitive shot—not something just good or acceptable by professional standards. (If you’re not a fan, like I am, you may only know him as the singer-songwriter who was once married to actress Julia Roberts. But if you’re a fan, that’s small potatoes compared to his enormous talent and the emotional depth of his songwriting).

This time out there wasn’t mention of an opening act in print or on the radio for Lovett’s concert. It looked like it was only he



Lyle Lovett. Photo by Andrzej “Andre” Pilarczyk.

and his band from the git-go. I meticulously calculated my drive time to get to the concert early and watched the time, minute by minute; but when I arrived in downtown Albany, there was more congested traffic than usual. Parking became a huge problem, as I was eyeing my watch and driving farther away in ever-increasing street circles from The Egg.

I finally parked a mile and a half away from The Egg and flew out the door of my car. I was at a full trot down Madison Avenue, glancing at my watch every few seconds, as I pulled out my camera from my bag. I was adjusting camera settings on the fly, as I made my way down to the Plaza. I was late when I finally reached the elevator and frantically pushed the button to go up. At that very moment a voice in back of me politely asked if he could see my camera and ask me a few questions. I spun around to see who it was. Holy cow—it was Lyle Lovett standing there and looking straight at me. I thought to myself, wow, the man was late for his own concert.

Far from it.

There was an unscheduled opener, and unbelievably, I was there standing engrossed

in a conversation about cameras, lenses, and photography with *the* Lyle Lovett. With childlike curiosity, Lovett asked me photography questions, one after another, including the settings and my approach that I would use inside the theater to shoot a (*his*) concert. (It turned out that he was a photography buff and had earlier taken out his camera to visually document The Egg, The Empire State Plaza, and the surrounding city of Albany, including the Capitol building.) During our discussion, his road manager, standing nearby, had waved on the elevator operator several times to come back for us.

At that moment in time with Lyle Lovett, it was like talking to a photographer colleague and friend, not a performer or artist. We eventually wrapped it up and got onto the elevator, but when the doors opened, the space was filled with fans that were very surprised to see him standing there. Up to that point, they must have thought that they were late, too, but Lovett graciously shook their hands and bantered with all of them until he got out at the floor with the dressing rooms. With a smile and a warm farewell handshake to me, he exited the elevator. I thought to myself that he was so down to

earth throughout his meeting with me, and then with his fans. I will always love him for it.

To wrap up the story, this time out, I got the “portrait in performance” shot I wanted all along! ▼

Andrzej “Andre” Pilarczyk (pilarphotog@yahoo.com) is an award-winning regional fine arts photographer who has specialized in shooting musicians and music events for almost 30 years.



His distinctive photographs have been exhibited in several regional galleries and are included in a number of private collections. His images have also appeared in numerous national and regional publications, including *The New York Times*, *Dirty Linen*, *The Times Union*, *The Daily Gazette*, *The Chronicle*, *Saratoga Living*, and on the web at nippertown.com and albanyjazz.com. Over the past 15 years, Pilarczyk’s curatorial exhibits have included several duo and trio shows in the Capital Region and the attendance record-breaking “Impasses & Motion” at the Saratoga Arts Center, voted as one of the top 5 exhibits of 2011 by the arts critics at the *Albany Times Union*. Photo of Andrzej “Andre” Pilarczyk by Sirin Sangchanintra.

“One of the most important cultural gifts America has given the world is its unique musical heritage and its ongoing evolution across the entire musical spectrum. Like the quintessential worldview of the United States as a ‘melting pot,’ its national musical character is filled with the cross-pollination of musical styles and genres brewed to perfection by time and modernity.

Roots-Americana, jazz, rhythm & blues, pop music, Tin Pan Alley, the blues, modern singer-songwriter folk, soul, Cajun, bluegrass, country & western, rock & roll, gospel, zydeco, doo-wop, Tejano, and many other uniquely American forms of music have their roots in the tribal beats and chants of Native Americans; the historical folk, troubadour, and classical idioms of European Americans; the Klezmer and Sephardic musical textures of Jewish Americans; the rhythmic forms of Latin and Caribbean Americans; the simple or complex repetitive-structures of Asian, Indian-Pakistani, Arab, and Persian Americans.

My intent in assembling and presenting *A Transitional Interpretation: American Roots Music By Five Photographers* is to show a sampling of the many innovators, stylists, and practitioners who are an ongoing and integral part of our national musical heritage. The world-class photographers participating in this exhibit are cultural ambassadors with a camera who have been visually documenting and preserving the legacy of what is American roots music for present and future generations.”

—Andrzej Pilarczyk

A TRANSITIONAL INTERPRETATION



AMERICAN ROOTS MUSIC BY FIVE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Joseph Deuel Enid Farber Bryan Lasky
Andrzej Pilarczyk Lawrence White

Folklife Gallery • Crandall Public Library
September to December 2015

FRANK ZAPPA

By Lawrence White

In early 1979, I was assigned to photograph Frank Zappa in New York City for a European media outlet. Mr. Zappa had just returned from a European tour where recitals and performances of his classical scores had received a very positive response.

This moment was truly the flowering of an already great artist. Mr. Zappa was a man who had evolved well beyond his Mothers of Invention band and solo career into the career of a composer. He was an established artist who had new things to say in an age-old medium. Fascinating really.

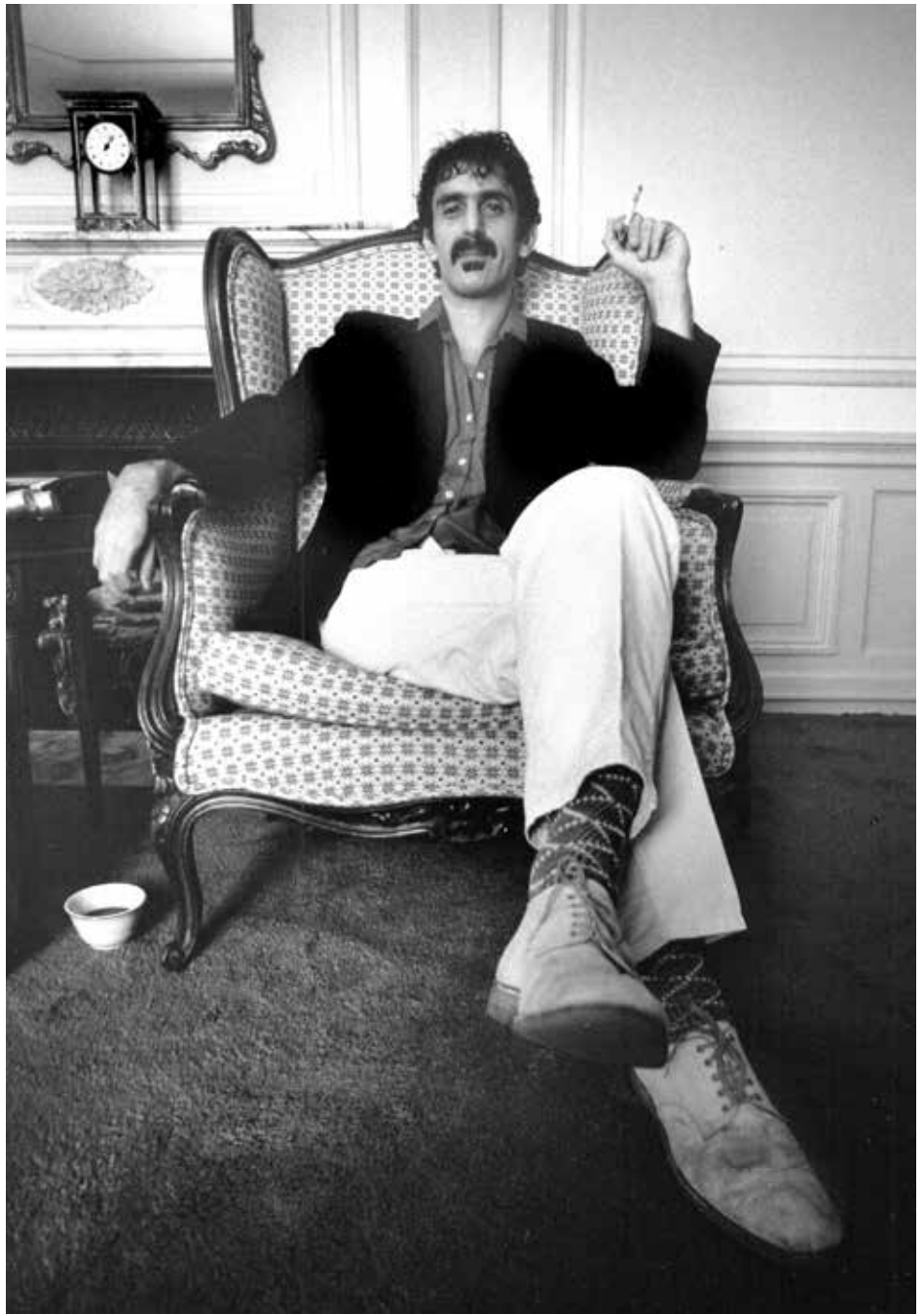
Our photo session was to be in the St. Moritz Hotel in Manhattan. I was to meet the writer in the lobby beforehand. Unfortunately, the writer, an intense and nervous person, was far more interested in portraying Mr. Zappa as totally avant-garde and goofy. The bad news for the writer was that Mr. Zappa was not looking backward. In fact, the writer left rather quickly when his lame inquiries were not met with enthusiasm. He later said he assumed Mr. Zappa was “washed up.”

Fortunately, I was able to make a much better connection with Mr. Zappa by asking him questions about his recent experiences and where he was going with his art, before even mentioning photography. I had seen him perform with the Mothers and was able to discuss stage logistics and traveling with a “carnival” of musicians.

Frank Zappa was a vividly sober, highly focused artistic genius who was also a really nice man. I had no intentions of portraying him in any other manner.

Therefore when the time and light were right, I was able to pose Mr. Zappa easily and comfortably, as he discussed his future and his art. I feel this image represents the artist at this moment in his life very well.

In the end the writer blamed me for his inability to get Mr. Zappa to pose with a bowl of spaghetti on his head. My image was rejected, and I never worked for that media group again.



Frank Zappa at the St. Moritz Hotel, New York, 1979. Photo by Lawrence White.

However, *Musician Magazine* published this image as the keynote photo in their extensive retrospective of Mr. Zappa's

career upon his passing. I am very honored by how it all worked out with this image. I believe Mr. Zappa would approve. ▼

Lawrence White's (www.lawrencewhiteimages.com) images have been seen worldwide, over a career lasting over four decades. This includes publications such as *Time*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Le Monde*, *Der Spiegel*, *The New York Times*, and *The Boston Globe*, to name only a few. In 2001, his images of the terrorist attacks in New York City won a New York Press Association Award for journalistic photography. Lawrence White is currently the chief photographer for *Saratoga Living*. He also photographs for Saratoga Performing Arts Center (SPAC) and teaches workshops through Saratoga Arts. He has also taught photography at SUNY Adirondack.



MAL WALDRON

By Enid Farber

I barely recall the details, but I remember with great fondness the gentle giant, the respectful and cooperative spirit of the former pianist of Billie Holiday, John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, and others—Mr. Mal Waldron. I was a young, intrepid, and eager photographer and did not hesitate to ask legends for a sliver of their time, even if I had no official assignment. Mal was in town from overseas, where he resided like so many of the greatest of our jazz refugees. Many knew that the opportunities for respect and greater gigs were on the other side of the Atlantic and left their homeland to thrive abroad.

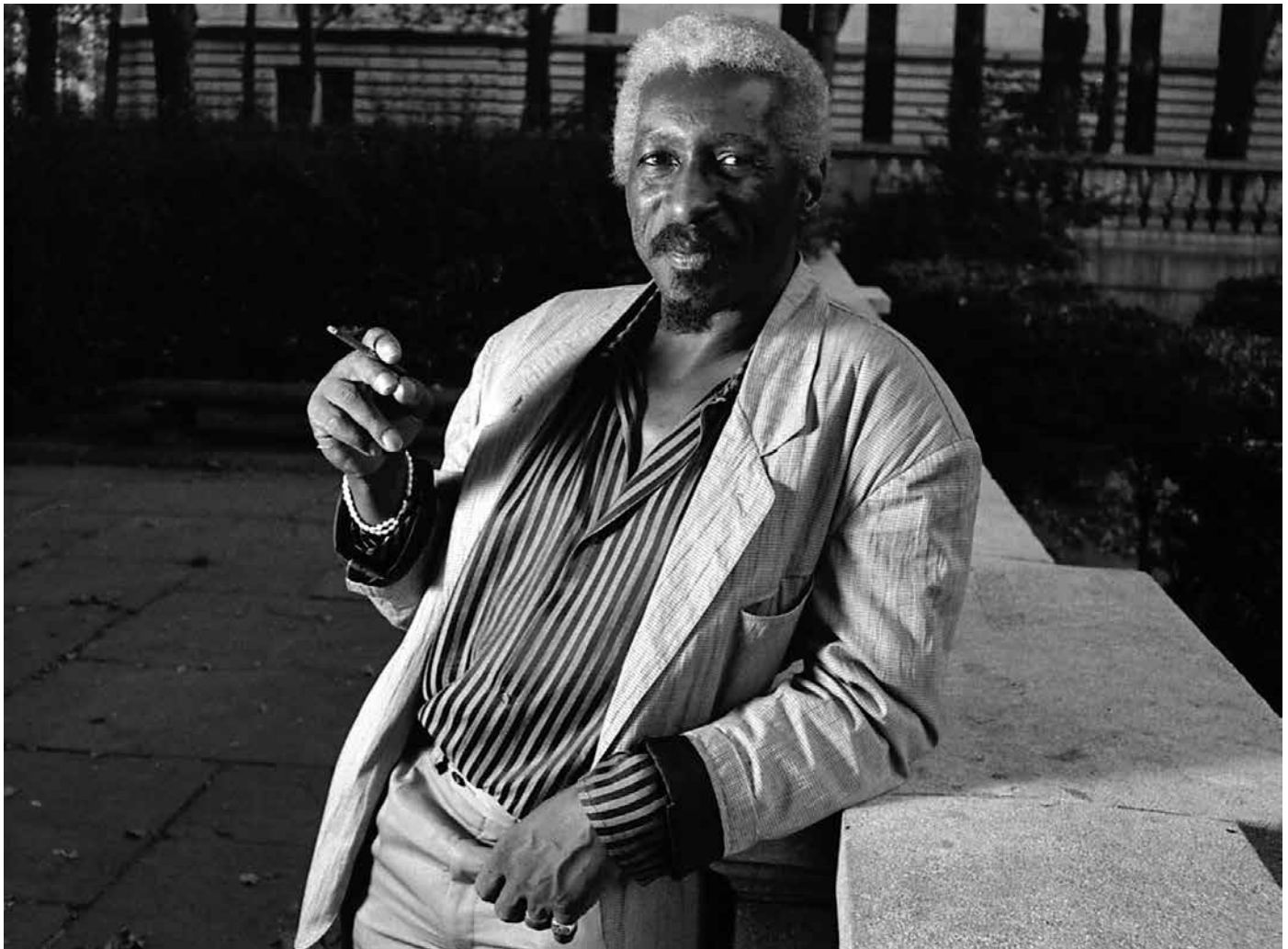
I don't exactly recall where Mal was playing or where I approached him. At

the time, in 1987, I had also recently transplanted myself, from Atlanta, where I began my journey as a photographer of mostly jazz musicians, to New York City. Just as Mal realized leaving his country for opportunities was the antidote, I, too, left

the comfort of home in the South to pursue my passion and for the abundance of music in the greatest jazz city in the world. Mal agreed to meet me the following day after I contacted him, and I chose the back of the

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Enid Farber (www.enidfarber.com) has been the main New York City photographer for JAZZIZ magazine for 20 years. Farber began her career in Atlanta in 1979, before moving to New York in 1985. By 1997, *The New York Times* spotlighted her as "one of the young generation of talented photographers documenting the current jazz scene," and she was called a "master of jazz photography" by *Jazztimes* magazine. Feature articles followed in the *Photo Insider* magazine (2000) and JAZZIZ magazine (2001). In 2002, she received "Excellence in Jazz Photography" and "Best Photo of the Year" awards from the Jazz Journalist's Association. Filmmaker Ken Burns acknowledges Farber, the sole female of 14 legendary photographers of his 20-hour documentary, *Jazz*, as one of "an extraordinary group of the finest jazz art photographers in the country." Photo of the author by Felix Telles.



Mal Waldron, Bryant Park, New York City, 1987. Photo by Enid Farber.

New York Public Library in Bryant Park. The library was undergoing restoration and provided a beautiful palette for black and white film as a backdrop. Mal's eyes and hair glistened in the late afternoon light, and his elegance was fully realized, as he smoked his cigarette at a time when it was not yet unfashionable to do so.

This photo is one of many I have chosen for a book that I hope to publish

one day, not in the too distant future, entitled *Legends Who Have Passed Through My Lens*. It is a tribute to all the many special souls that I was lucky enough to photograph in my early days and onward, some who figuratively passed through my lens and then, literally, to the beyond—many too young, and others such as Mal, having lived through the golden age of jazz history.

Although the details remain fuzzy, I'll always remember and cherish the most important part of meeting Mal—the way he treated me with the respect that not all have before or since, as well as his big radiant smile and kind, gentlemanly soul. ▼

DAVE VAN RONK

By Joseph Deuel

This is one of my most published photos, appearing in the booklet for the Smithsonian/Folkways recording of Dave Van Ronk's final concert: *The Tin Pan Bended and the Story Ended*. It also appeared in the book, *Caffè Lena: Inside America's Legendary Folk Music Coffeehouse*, and on Rosalie Sorrells' CD *My Last Go Round*.

The photo was shot in 1989, in Saratoga Springs, NY, the evening after the memorial service of Lena Spencer, owner of the famed Caffè Lena coffeehouse for almost 30 years at the time of her death. I was the sound engineer and Lena's manager at the time. Many musicians were in town for the service. A film crew was making

a documentary about Caffè Lena that weekend and had imported many musicians as well. The town was overflowing with many of the folk music luminaries of the day. Later in the evening, a friend called me and said he was hanging out at The Executive bar with a table of musicians, including Dave Van Ronk, Utah Phillips,



Dave Van Ronk, *The Parting Glass*, Saratoga Springs, 1989. Photo by Joseph Deuel.

The McGarrigle Sisters, Paul Geremia, Roy Bookbinder, Don and Victoria Armstrong, Rosalie Sorrells, and others. Earlier days at the “Exec,” as it was usually called, had been very Caffè Lena-centric. The long wall was plastered with framed promo photos of Caffè performers. Sandwiches were named after the performers and staff at Lena’s. Lena would often dispatch me there to find the wayward performer who had disappeared for too long during their intermission.

When I arrived, a guitar was being passed around, songs were sung, and stories of Lena and her Caffè flowed as fast as the beer and liquor. Nostalgia for the old days at the Exec came crashing to a halt when a young bar patron put \$5 in the rather loud jukebox. That sharply underscored the feeling of transition in the room. Saratoga Springs was in the middle of a transformation from a threadbare town full of old-timers, characters, artists, and many

musicians to a gleaming upscale city of well-to-do strangers. The Exec was about to transition into a sports bar, and Caffè Lena was about to strike out on its own—for the first time without Lena—as a brand-new nonprofit.

The group moved on to The Parting Glass, a popular bar a couple blocks away. Although it appeared to be on the verge of closing for the night, the gracious and generous owner, Bob Cohan, made everyone feel welcome and at home.

As the evening was winding down, Van Ronk walked over to Utah Phillips, who by now was wearing the red-rubber clown nose that he always seemed to carry with him. Dave plucked the clown nose off of a surprised Phillips and stuck it on his own nose. At the end of the table, he belted out a verse of his song “Last Call,” a song about such evenings, and he snapped his arms out just long enough for me to take his photo. ▼

Joseph Deuel (www.josephdeuel.com) has been an avid photographer since grade school. A dedicated self-employed photographer and web designer living and working in the Saratoga Springs area,



Deuel has worked for several regional/monthly publications, including *Eye on Saratoga*, *The Source*, *Buzz*, and *Saratoga Living*. Currently the sound engineer at Caffè Lena, he has been taking photos there since high school in the early 1970s. His work has appeared in nationally distributed CDs by Dave Van Ronk, Rosalie Sorrells, Dan Hicks, The Highwaymen, The Figgs, Chandler Travis, and many others. He has exhibited in various invitational shows, including Saratoga Visual Arts, High Rock Review, the juried Albany/Troy Photo Regional, and “Impasses & Motion: Ten Photographers’ Journeys Through Instants in Music” at the Saratoga Arts Center. Photo of the author by Laura Sterling.

LUCIUS

By Bryan Lasky

Since about 1997 or 1998, I have been seeing live music on a regular basis. Sometimes I’d go with my parents, sometimes with my brothers, sometimes with my friends, or sometimes by myself, but it has been a constant thing in my life since then. I eventually started bringing small cameras into shows to capture moments that were happening, so I could look back at the photos to remember the feelings I would get at the shows. In the winter of 2013, I was trying to figure out what to do with my life going forward, and a friend put me in touch with a website that wanted people to cover shows with both a photo gallery and a written review. I realized this was for me, and I went to my first show, which was Lucius at BSP Kingston.

I was in awe of the show that I was witnessing. The two leading ladies, Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig, were wearing matching clothing and singing beautiful

harmonies. The three men backing them up, Dan Molad, Peter Lalish, and Andrew Burri, were giving the band all of the sonic structure it needed. These five musicians were giving it their all in this tiny, not overly crowded room in Kingston, NY, and I got in for free to take some photos and write a review. I had never heard of them before and just went because I could. Needless to say, it was a great experience for my first time to officially cover a show.

Looking back on the pictures I took that night, 99 percent of them were terrible. It was my first time taking official pictures at a show, so I was nervous. I have gotten much better at calming those nerves and shooting as if it was just for me. Luckily, I have had many more opportunities to see them, as they always pop up at festivals and area shows by chance. I have since seen them at Governors Ball, Boston Calling, opening for other bands, and headlining their show at

The Hollow Bar and Kitchen in Albany, NY.

This photo is from that night in Albany. As a tradition, since I love seeing live music, I try to see it on my birthday every year, and by chance last December, Lucius was booked for The Hollow on my day. I knew the stars were aligning for me that night—a home town venue I knew like the back of my hand to get the shots I wanted, a band whose routine I knew to get the shots I wanted, and it was my birthday! What couldn’t go right?

The show was great, and I got some friends out to it, to make some new fans for the band. I was thinking of the first time I saw them that night and how not much had changed, except for how confidently the band was now playing to a packed audience and how they didn’t let up for one minute of the show. A grueling year of touring had turned the band into a sonic machine.

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Lucius, The Hollow Bar and Kitchen, Albany, NY, 2014. Photo by Bryan Lasky.

Seeing them progress so much, as I had been progressing with photography, made me happy. As I had expected they were going to, the show ended with some of the band in the middle of the audience. I love when bands make you feel as if you are part of the show, and Lucius do a great job of that. I was up in the balcony of The Hollow, as I wanted a shot from above of everyone around the band when they ended their show.

As you can see, I got the shot I was looking for, and I knew it right away. With a smile, I had another drink to celebrate my birthday and let the photo sit on my camera until the following morning. It's rare, because there are so many factors in shooting a show, but when you get the shot you had thought of all day and then see it right there in front of you, there is nothing better in the world at that moment. ▼

Bryan Lasky (*boney.Diego.Photography@Gmail.com*) is a concert photographer based in Albany, NY, who has been shooting live music professionally for over three years. Growing up, he attended many concerts with his parents, including The Who, Bruce Springsteen, and Cream. For over 10 years, he brought a camera to visually document the audience and the musicians. Moving to China for two years sparked his love affair with the camera; he not only snapped travel pictures, but also got involved in the local music scene, shooting many shows for himself, the performers, and his friends. Returning to America, he has primarily focused on shooting concerts, usually attending three to four events per week, year round. He is a regular contributor to many online music and arts publications. Self-portrait of Bryan Lasky, 2015, courtesy of the author.



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