

I've noticed that my energy is not quite as great as it once was (thank God!), and so I'm using my brain more to find ways to be more efficient. Lighting on location is a perfect example; I love working with mixed light, I mean what an incredible bonus – I can capitalise on the existing light to save time and money. Image 001 is a good example of a perfect marriage of magic-hour light and off-camera flash.

Here's the story behind this image: A while back I was approached by the agent of harpist and recording artist, Helen Siemens, to shoot her upcoming album cover. Since Helen's music is very soothing, she wanted to reflect this in an image by including her great love of nature and so it was decided that she should be photographed in a wooded area. I thought that the warm bitter-sweet emotion one often feels at sunset due to the beautiful light at that time would lend itself to expressing her music pictorially and so decided that the location must be a forested area in and around magic hour. I found the perfect location that was really quite spectacular just before sunset – a spot near my home where the forest ends at the ocean. At this location, if you point your camera to the north, the frame provides a beautiful backdrop of trees and tall grass, while allowing the setting sun to stream in on the scene from a low angle from the west (end of July just above the 49th parallel); and since it was coming across the ocean, nothing to impede its warm rays.

I knew that I had to do some lighting but since the budget for the shoot was not like that of an advertising assignment for an advertising agency – it was client direct – I needed to refrain from extravagance. With that in mind I chose, as mentioned earlier, an easily accessible location and figured out a lighting scenario that would entail minimal equipment and minimal personnel so that I would not have to spring for a Vancouver City Parks Board shooting permit. When taking the shot, to allow the lighting to create depth and drama in the photo, I wanted to shoot at the perfect moment so that the light from the sun (free of charge my friend) would skim across the subject, harp, foreground and background rather than front-lighting the set – a flat look at best. I waited until the sun was positioned so that its light would spill onto the back camera-left-edge of Helen. To spend as little time as possible at the site for the shoot – having no permit, I didn't want to attract the attention of the park warden by staying too long – I checked it out during my evening walk the night before to select the perfect time to arrive and shoot. I had Helen's agent hold a Speedlite over her head to the camera-left-side of Helen, some 2–3 metres from Helen's



side. The positioning of this off-camera flash would make it look like the sun wrapped around a little further than it really would so I could light up the front of Helen's face which would otherwise be in shadow, compare A & B of Image 002. It's cheating a little – it's as if you are bending the sun around to hit the face – but it ensures that the beautiful back-lit 'shadows forward' look is maintained throughout the scene. I really dislike the alternative – on-camera flash gives a flat cutout look and looks fake. Adding a lighting modifier, like a soft-box or octabox, to the flash-unit would have created softer, more forgiving light on Helen's face, but the smaller flash source was more realistic to sunlight and it would attract less attention from the authorities, besides I do own Photoshop so a little more retouching than usual would be a fair tradeoff. On my walk the night before, I brought my Sekonic light meter along to help me figure out what ratio of sunlight to Speedlite I would use. My thought process was thus: first step is to figure out what aperture to shoot at for DoF, then create all else around that. I

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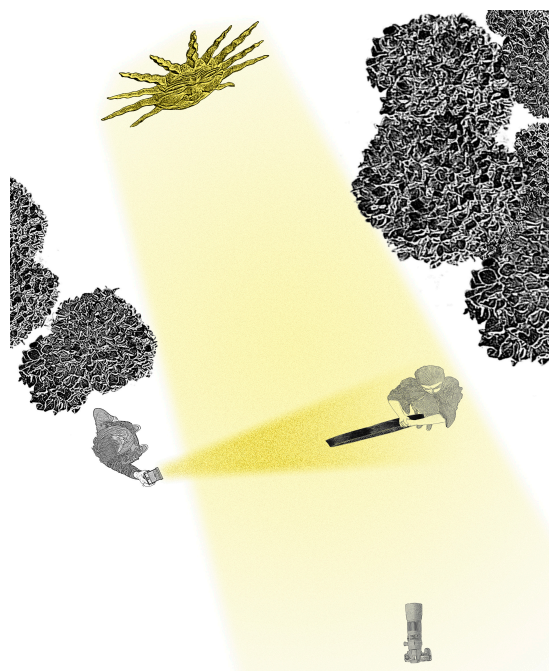






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calculated that f5.6 would be enough to keep Helen and her harp sharp while letting the background and foreground fall into soft focus, hence adding to the feeling of depth – her sharpness would separate her from the soft environment she was standing in. I stood where Helen would stand and with the white dome of the incident meter pointed, for the first reading, at the sun, then for the second reading, at the open sky which was partially blocked by trees. The meter read f5.6 at 1/500th and f5.6 at 1/8th respectively, a 6-stop range. After a little talk with myself, I decided that if I shot at f5.6 at 1/60th the sunlight would backlight Helen and forest to a dramatic three stops over the camera setting while the partial open-sky source would act as a low-intensity fill-light at three stops below the camera setting. Not bad, all I would have to do on the 'night-of' is set the PocketWizard triggered off-camera flash to strike Helen with f5.6 amount of light for a correct exposure on her face. As you can see looking at the final image 001, this sunlight greatly overexposes the back edges of Helen, in fact it burns the affected pixels to white with no detail! These burned out areas are okay with me since they add more tonal range to the image which intensifies the sunny feeling. Why am I okay with these burned out pixels? Simple, since the sunlight comes from a back angle, it only creates a thin line of burned out light on Helen, not large areas lacking in detail.



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So mixing it up a little with flash lighting added to sun-powered back-lighting is pretty easy to do; the main thing is to break it down just like a studio shoot – main, fill, backlighting, etc. – and beforehand visualise what ratios you would like relative to the aperture you want for DoF. In up-coming articles I'm planning to look at my latest addiction, HyperSync – studio lighting outdoors on location using high shutter-speeds (well in excess of X-Sync) to overpower the sun.

**Dave Montizambert** lectures internationally on lighting, digital photography, and Adobe Photoshop. He is also a published author, having written two books on lighting and digital photography ([www.montizambert.com](http://www.montizambert.com)) plus numerous magazine articles on these topics in North America, Europe, Russia and Asia. Dave also creates Lighting and Photoshop tutorial DVDs for [www.software-cinema.com](http://www.software-cinema.com) and [www.photoshopcafe.com](http://www.photoshopcafe.com). Dave is available for lectures and workshops in your area and can be reached through [www.montizambert.com](http://www.montizambert.com).

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**Image**maker Part 36: Mixing It Up

