

I love contrasty dramatic B&Ws and I love photographing performers, especially musicians with instruments. So, what could be better than combining the two? ... And that is just what I did when I was asked to create an image (see Image 001) for the Jazz duo, *Sinistrio* (for any trolls out there the band was originally a trio – pre-COVID). They gave me free creative rein since they didn't really know what they wanted other than an image of themselves together. After having a preliminary conversation to get my creative juices flowing and having seen the duo perform before, I decided that this image should imbue a sense of whimsy with a very relaxed down-home country feel – this is how they came across when performing. To that end I put Jeff Drummond the guitarist and John May the vocalist/drummer in an old home setting on a chaise longue. To push the relaxed feel I had Jeff remove his shoes and recline a little on the chaise longue, the rest would come from coaxing out their personalities during the shoot.

The imagery needs of the duo were for some straight shots in addition to performing shots that would capture their performance persona. I decided that to get the best images for the performing images, which would be the most important, that I should do the boring straight shots first as a warm-up, then tackle the fun ones once I felt like we had all loosened up. I find that performers are good performing in front of people but not so much in front of still cameras, hence the need for lots of warm-up.

The framing of this image is almost square – alas full-frame format wastes so many pixels when cropping this way. In advertising and promotion we are often called upon to frame our subjects with multiple crop options in mind. The meat of this image is cropped as you see it in Image 001, this was my favourite crop. But, for future band promotion where text will most likely be added above and below the subjects – not unlike what we see on magazine covers – I shot the image vertically. So really the upper and lower cropped pixels in Image 001 are not altogether wasted, they will get used in other promotions. Having to 'shoot loose' like this, means that you have to use a little imagination to realise other crops when creating your composition. Also, when shooting people who are not totally comfortable in front of the camera, you really do need this pre-visualisation of framing to limit some of the variables; you don't want to have to shoot the same thing multiple times with different crops; nothing is worse than having the best expressions with one crop that can't be used for others.

To help with this visualisation, I almost always shoot tethered so I can port test images to a large screen to place overlays of text and different cropping's for an approximation – art directors and designers love this! If I can, I like to rough in the set long before anyone arrives so I can shoot a preliminary image using stand-ins (see Image 002). It is always best to have as much of the shoot complete before subjects, art directors, designers, or clients arrive. This really removes most of Shoot-Day-PTSD (P stands for Pre or Present in this case) and is usually the only way to do a photo session when shooting celebrities – you usually get just a few minutes with them. Unfortunately, on this shoot, my lighting breakdown tutorial images (see Image 003) had to be done with stand-ins (be it two of the best in the industry) and a surrogate 'guitar' since Jeff and John could not hang around to pose for these.

So, it is all about taking a little time to plan things out when you have to create images with multiple uses. I also think that having to frame with lots of space creates a really good argument for higher resolution captures; you will invariably have a need and/or will be asked for some tight crops which use a smaller portion of the image.

As for scheduling the shoot, I chose a time of day when there would be no chance of direct sunlight coming through the windows, just open-sky or overcast-sky lighting, both of which stay constant most of the day.

And finally, the backlighting from the big windows in the background really creates a lovely mood for this image. To my eye the best part of its effect on the set were the beautiful specular highlights (shine) on the floor in front and behind the subjects. Unfortunately, if I set the brightness of this source for nice backlighting on the subjects, the beautiful reflections on the floor would burn out horribly, much like what we see in Image 003A. My solution was to set the brightness of this source for the shine on the floor and light the backs of the subjects with the two separation lights as in Image 003F. It is a simple matter of shooting a few bracketed exposures without any artificial lighting to see what the floor looks like. I do this by first setting the aperture to what I need for DoF for my subjects (f 3.5 in this case), then capture a number of images bracketing the exposure with just the shutter speed. Next, I view the images and pick the exposure for the floor that I like, that shutter speed (1/125 in this case) will be my shutter speed for the shoot. With the camera exposure setting figured out, I move on to measuring the light striking the subjects from the window; in this case it read 3½ stops darker than the camera exposure (read with an incident meter). This was too dark for my taste since I more often than not like separation lights to read 1½ stops under the camera setting. To this end and as mentioned above, two separation lights were added to bring the backlight brightness up to this level.



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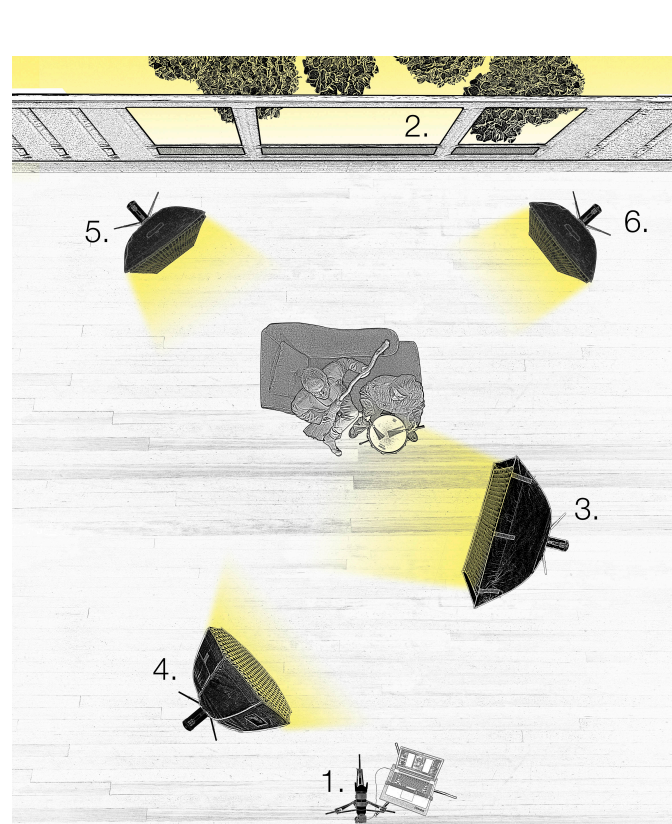
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Lighting Set-up Data

(Numbers Correspond To Image 004 Diagram)

1. Camera: full-frame mirrorless with 70–200mm lens set to 70 mm mounted on tripod at 6.3 metres from subjects and was 50.7cm from floor to centre of imaging sensor. Exposure was set to f3.5, $\frac{1}{125}$, at 100 ISO. Camera was tethered to MacBook Pro using a Tether Tools rig.
2. Available Light/Background Window Light – outdoor overcast sky through background windows: subjects placed 8 feet or 2.5 metres in front of windows. Incident meter reading of light striking subjects from this wall of windows read 3 ⅓ stops under camera exposure setting. Lighting Ratio: -3 ⅓ incident (minus three and five-tenths). See Image 003B.
3. Main-Light: a 1200-watt strobe fitted with a 90 x 120 cm (3' x 4') soft-box with 40° soft-grid was placed 2.54 metres from subjects. Height of this light source from floor to strobe tube measured 2.13 metres. Exposure reading via incident meter put this light's brightness (metered next to subjects) equal with camera exposure setting. This expressed as a Lighting Ratio is a '+0 Incident' value – plus zero means a hypothetical mid-grey card would record as mid-grey if placed against subjects. See Image 003C.
4. Fill-Light: a 700-watt mono-block strobe fitted with a 90 cm (3') octa-box with 40° soft-grid was placed 4.6 metres from subjects. Height of this light source from floor to strobe tube measured 2.1 metres. Exposure via incident meter put this light three stops darker than camera setting. Lighting Ratio: -3 Incident (minus three). See Image 003D.
5. Left Rim-light: a 1200-watt mono-block strobe fitted with a 70 x 180 cm (27" x 70") strip-light-bank and 20/50° soft-grid was placed 3.2 metres from subjects. Height of this light source from floor to strobe tube measured 2.2 metres. Exposure via incident meter put this light 1 ⅓ stops under camera exposure setting. Lighting Ratio: -1 ⅓ incident (minus one and five tenths). See Image 003E.
6. Right Rim-light: a 1200-watt mono-block strobe fitted with a 70 x 180 cm (27" x 70") strip-light-bank and 20/50° soft-grid was placed 3.2 metres from subjects. Height of this light source from floor to strobe tube measured 2.2 metres. Exposure via incident meter put this light 1 ⅓ stops under camera exposure setting. Lighting Ratio: -1 ⅓ Incident (minus one and five tenths). See Image 003F.



Bio

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] 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 & www.PhotoshopCAFE.com/video and authors 'Dave On Demand' (www.montizambert.com) lighting tutorial based photo-training. Dave is available for lectures and workshops in your area and can be reached through www.montizambert.com.

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