Building Your Portfolio

Once you've mastered your first concert, it´s time to get your work seen by others. The only thing you should concentrate on in the beginning is building a portfolio. A portfolio is an overview of your best work. This has to be kick-ass! Your photos have to shine and keep people mesmerized. You definitely only want to show your "keepers" or shots you're really proud of.

Go out and shoot 5-10 concerts with your 50mm f1.8 lens. This will help you establish a working routine as a concert photographer. After 2-3 concerts, you'll be able to manage all the camera settings and you won't be as nervous anymore. You can concentrate on the band's stage performance, which leads to better photos. By following this advice, you'll be able to build up a portfolio with a variety of bands to show people. It can take two weeks, one month or longer. You decide your working speed, but the more often you practice in front of a stage, the better you'll get.

Let´s talk about the 5 most common mistakes when building your portfolio and how to avoid them

Mistake 1: Mixture of different types of photos. Imagine you get in contact with a band manager and email him a link to your portfolio site. Because you don't only shoot concerts, but also senior portraits, weddings, some cats and newborns, you've packed it all onto one portfolio page. What do you think will happen when your contact visits your page? He'll leave immediately! Why? People want to work with specialists. They're searching for people who've found a niche in which they're successful. I assume you would also rather go to a car mechanic if your car's broken down than to a carpenter who repairs cars as a hobby. I often see people who mix their concert photos with their private family pictures. This is definitely a no-go! You might make a living as a wedding photographer and take concert photos for fun in the evenings. This isn't a problem at all, but you should separate your work, based on subject. Have one webpage for your wedding business and one for concerts, enabling you to send people to the appropriate specialised website, which will make them see you as an expert.

Mistake 2: Too many photos. I often see portfolios that contain 100's of photos. Sometimes, they'll show 5 photos of the same singer in the same pose! I don´t know why, but people tend to show way too many photos in

their portfolios. If you wanted to check out a new photographer's homepage, would you want to see his best work or would you want to click 100 times to see his work? People on the internet are busy and don´t have the time to stay on a site for a long time, searching for photos. Ask yourself, do you want to see 10 awesome and spectacular concert pictures or 100 average shots of one concert? I promise you, you'll get bored after you've seen the lead singer in the same pose for the fifth time in a row. Your best photos should reflect the atmosphere of the concert and give the observer the feeling that he or she was there, standing in the first row next to you. Therefore, I urge you to be a strict editor. This might sound hard in the beginning, but you need to learn to recognise your best work. I would suggest displaying only 20-30 of your best photos in your Portfolio. If you want to show three pictures from the same concert, don't. Choose one, not more. Showing two or more photos from the same performance gives the impression that you don´t have enough good ones to show and have just chosen these ones to fill up your portfolio.

Mistake 3: Portfolio on social media sites. Some people don´t have their own homepage or portfolio site but use social media sites such as Facebook Fan pages, Flickr, 500px, Behance and so on instead. This might be the easiest way to show your work when you're just starting out. But there's a big downside to this. You don´t have any control over these sites. Facebook might change their policies and you'll have to pay a monthly fee for your fan page or, even worse, they just delete your profile. Flickr might change the user agreement and sell your photos without your knowledge. You want to make sure that you are in full control (at least as far as that's possible on the internet!). Therefore, the best option is to set up your own homepage. This also looks more professional than sending a music manager to your social media sites.

Mistake 4: Portfolio is not responsive. iPhones, tablets, 13" laptops or 27" iMacs - you name it, nowadays there's a huge variety of different ways to surf the internet. The key for your portfolio is to be "responsive". Responsive means that your homepage always looks great whether you view it on a phone or a gigantic cinema screen. As mobile devices are becoming more popular to browse the internet with, it´s a must-have. If we go back to the example of the music manager, you can imagine that if he's using his iPhone but just sees cropped photos and menu buttons which

don't work on your homepage, he'll leave and you won´t get any response from him.

Mistake 5: Forget to name your photos. People tend to forget to show a caption on the photos they show in their portfolio. If I click through a portfolio, I want to know which band I'm looking at. It´s like hearing a great song in the radio, but the DJ doesn´t tell you who it is. The feeling of "The name of the band's on the tip of my tongue, but I can´t remember it!", freaks me out. So, make sure your Portfolio photos are named properly. This also makes it easier for people to communicate with you and say, "I love that shot of <BAND NAME>!", instead of, "I like the 5th photo on the third row."

Your portfolio will become your work permit. If you can't show people good photos, you won´t be hired. It's as simple as that. Concentrate on building the best portfolio you can.

A portfolio page is also different from a blog post covering a concert. The portfolio page is often the first page that appears on a website. This is the entry door for people into your world. I would suggest to show no more than 20-30 of your best concert photos on your portfolio page.

This is how my Portfolio page looks like. This portfolio page here has a simple design and the aim of it is to show my best work in the shortest time possible. It´s easy to navigate and the pictures are named properly.

If you write your own blog and want to show an overview of a concert, I would suggest posting 10-15 of your best shots there. Here is my blog post about a Metallica show in Vienna.

Make sure to show different poses and band members. The same rule as mentioned above applies again - no-one is interested in 50 photos of one concert with 10 pics of the singer in the same pose. And honestly saying, it´s really hard to get 50 awesome shots of one concert. I mostly end up with about 15-20 good ones including 1-2 keepers.

Once you have your own website, you can easily send the link to magazines and blogs if you´re applying to work for them. You can send your portfolio as a PDF too, but I think a link works better as the editor is usually a busy person and doesn´t want the hassle of downloading your

PDF and saving it to his overcrowded desktop, only to lose it in the chaos.

Homepage

I won´t get into detail here, but I'd like to say a few words about getting your own homepage.

I believe that nowadays you're screwed without an online presence. In the past (which I've heard from stories of older photographers) it seems the world was spinning at another speed. You took your analog camera with you to gigs, there were no restrictions like the 3 songs rule and you got the right exposure by using a manual light meter. In the past, concert photography was only really done by a few professional photographers. Today, the digital revolution has brought photography into everyone's home and the internet is the medium of our generation.

I want to briefly touch the topic of why having your own homepage is key to being seen as a professional photographer. The most important point for me is having control over your work. You decide what gets uploaded, when it goes online and who should see it. As discussed before, uploading your photos to your Facebook page might be easier, but you never know what the guys at Facebook headquarters will come up with next and maybe they'll decide to delete your profile tomorrow. So, an independent homepage to show your work is what you need and want.

Basically you need a web domain and a web space. The web domains for my project are www.matthiashombauer.com and *www.howtobecomearockstarphotographer.com*. The best way is to use your own name, as it´s not likely that someone has already taken that URL or domain name. If you want to use shootingtherockstars. com, you'll see that I purchased this for my premium course and the domain is not available to anyone else anymore. I´ll discuss the topic about branding your business in the marketing module in more detail. For now, <yourname>.com might be the easiest option. A web space is the server you upload your photos and content to. You can get one for as little as $1 per month and a shared server option is probably the best choice when you're just starting out. This means that you share the server space with other people. There are a few drawbacks to it, but, for your purposes, it's absolutely fine.

There are different options regarding the software to run on the server

space you've purchased. If you don't want to spend too much money, you can set up a Wordpress (*www.wordpress.org*) site, which is free. There are a ton of different "themes" you can choose from. You´ll find good ones at http://market.envato.com/. Wordpress is what I use, but there are also others, such as Squarespace (http://www.squarespace.com/).

To be honest, setting up a homepage and building it is not easy and has already cost me quite a few years of frustration. For example, once you've installed a theme, you might decide that you don´t want to have two photos at a certain position as defined by the template but only one. If you don´t know how to code, things can now start getting tricky. Therefore, I strongly suggest hiring someone who can help you set everything up. If you´re on a budget you can hire people from Fiverr (https://www.fiverr.com/) or upwork (known as oDesk) (https://www.upwork.com/). Let´s have a quick look at Fiverr. We are searching for wordpress and you'll find creatives who offer their work for a low price. I have good and bad experiences using both services, so sometimes what you get is what you pay for (don´t expect too much from a $5 logo). If you have the budget, pay a professional graphic designer and developer. My logo and homepage was designed by a graphic designer and cost me $2500 just for the design, so not including building the site. These costs can add up quickly, but remember it´s an investment in your career.

Coming back to my portfolio page on *http://music.matthiashombauer.com*

Keep your homepage simple and clean and let your photos speak for themselves. Add an about page, where you tell people about yourself in a few words, and a contact page where people can get in direct email contact with you.

My concert portfolio homepage looks like this:

The main reason in having this homepage is to be able to show it to editors of music magazines, band management and concert organizers. They are all busy people and have no time to click through 10 pages, trying to find what they're looking for.

One additional hint: Don't use any advertisements on your page screaming BLING "Click here and get a burger for free!" BLING. Believe me, it's not a good strategy and won't earn you any money. You want to build your showcase with your best photos. That's all!

In the next lecture I want to show you some reviews of real world portfolios.

So you can learn form it and use your new knowledge for building up your own homepage.