

During And After The Concert

You've dialed in the correct camera settings, the band is playing and you've started taking photos.

Be nice to the audience. As you're standing in front of the stage in the crowd, be nice to other people. They've paid to be at this gig and want to have a good time. Tell them that you're just there for the first few songs. This should help to avoid any arguments with the audience, especially in front of the pit. I also heard of a tip whereby you offer some of your photos to the "problem guys". You tell them they'll get some great shots if they let you work up front.

Switch your position. It's important to switch your position from time to time and try to get other viewpoints too. Not only are you blocking the view for the audience if you stay in one spot for the whole concert, but your photos will also lack variation. Switching position is essential if you are a tall girl or guy. As I'm not that tall, I don't have this problem, but I guess you know the feeling when you're at a concert and then, all of a sudden, the tallest guy in the venue stands directly in front of you for the next one and a half hours. You can switch from the left side of the stage to the right side or move back a little bit, further away from the stage and cover the audience too, for instance.

Don't use flash. Don't use a flash when you're in front of the stage. I know it's dark and a flash seems to make sense in this situation. However, flash, in general, is not allowed when shooting concerts. As I'll discuss in the next module, use of a flash is forbidden at 99.9% of the concerts that I'm photographing. The only time you can use a flash is when you're friends with the band or you have permission from the band's manager. As we're just starting out and don't want to deal with these issues, I suggest sticking to the camera settings we discussed earlier and don't worry about your flash anymore. If you decide to use your flash without permission, you risk getting kicked out.

Wear your ear protection. To avoid ear damage, it's crucial you wear your ear protection. You'll often operate and work in front of speakers which are situated on either side of the stage. I agree that rock music sounds best if

it's played loud, but don't risk your health just because you think using ear protection is not „Rock N Roll“ enough.

Take 100's of photos. Don't be shy and press the shutter release often. Firstly, no-one will notice and it's quite normal to take hundreds of photos at a gig as a concert photographer. Since you can't control anything that's happening on-stage, you need to have a big pool of photos at the end from which to make a selection. There are no rules about how many photos you should take at a gig, but more photos probably means more keepers.

All of a sudden, the band leaves the stage and the concert's over, although it feels like they only played for 10 minutes. When you're shooting concerts, time flies by and the only recollection you'll have of the last hour will be the photos on your memory card. The audience will start to move towards the merchandise desk and the band will have disappeared into the backstage area. But not for long, because they'll reappear a couple of minutes later and hang out, talking to their fans and signing their albums. This is the beauty of shooting in small clubs. The more famous the band gets, the less they'll connect on a direct level with their fans. You won't see AC/DC at the merchandise table after their concert. But, you're in a small club and this'll give you the opportunity to connect with the band directly. Wait until the band is back in the venue and ask them for an email address to which you can send your photos (don't forget to tell them the credits they should use. Normally this is your name, in my case it would be © Matthias Hombauer.) The aim of this strategy is to get you foot into the door and to build a relationship with the band.

So there is no management, no club owner, no organizer involved. Just a direct wire to the band. That's what you want.

Congrats, you've completed your first concert shoot! You can be proud of yourself, but unfortunately, you're not done yet!

What should you do next?

Once you get home, copy the files to your computer and open them in an application which can easily manage the huge amount of photos you'll have. I use Adobe Lightroom (I will talk about my post-processing workflow in module 2). Now, here's the hard part. Only select 60 of your best photos. I know this can be tough, but you have to learn how to find the throat punchers! Skip through your photos and once you feel you've found a good one, mark it and carry on. After the first editing round, do a second run where you select only 20-30 out of those 60 photos. The aim of this method is to build a strong selection of the concert. Try not to lose too much time going through this process. With practice, you'll get faster and the selection will take just a couple of minutes. "Nope, No, Negative, Uh, Nope, YES, No, No way, What the f***, Nope, ..."

A useful tip when choosing the final images: Go with your gut feeling. It's hard to explain, but if you see a photo for the first time and you think, "Wow, this one's great", it's often a keeper shot. I normally find 2-3 real keepers and 10-20 photos that reflect the concert in a good way. You want to send the band a selection of your best shots and it doesn't make sense to send them 150 photos. 20-30 shots gives them a good overview and have more of a chance of being chosen to be used for merchandise, etc..

Because I advised you to only shoot in JPEG format at your first concert, you don't have to deal with the RAW format. The easiest way to get your concert photos developed in post-production is to install my Lightroom presets and use them (they will be available as a download). One click and you're ready to go. "But the guys in my photos look like blue, red or green creatures from another galaxy!", you might say. Yes, this can happen in small clubs and depends on the lighting equipment and the light technician at the venue. So, here's the secret. Have you ever wondered why a lot of concert pictures are converted into black-and-white? Bingo! That's the reason. Not only do you get rid of the awful color cast, but the noise from your high ISO setting is a lot less distracting, and adds a "raw, sweaty and sexy" look to your photos. So, use my black & white presets to convert your photos and the musicians will look awesome again!

Export them at 72dpi and 950 pixels on the longest side, put your logo on them (watermark), and email them to the band. Say thank you again for the great opportunity to take photos at their awesome gig and explain that they can share your photos on social networks for free as long as they credit you. If they like your photos, they will also mention you in the comments and voila, you have your first concert shot with free advertising out on the web!

The aim of this module is to get you started and run you through the different steps of shooting concerts in small clubs. Take it as a guideline and not rules to follow. Other things can always happen too, of course. Maybe there's almost no light and you can't get cool shots, maybe you visit a hardcore concert and it's impossible to shoot in front of the stage without being in the middle of the moshpit, maybe the band doesn't reappear from backstage after the concert. Or maybe they don't answer your emails anymore and don't share your photos. Therefore, it's important to shoot and practice often. If you only shoot one concert per month in the beginning, you'll probably need a long time to get your portfolio together, because you won't get great shots from every concert. So, concentrate on the learning process. Everything is new to you and you have to get used to your new job. After some concerts, it will feel natural and you'll know what works best for you.

Even if the circumstances are hard to manage, I would highly suggest starting out in these small clubs. You have no photos to show, you have no experience as a concert photographer and therefore no-one will hire you. This might sound rude, but I am being painfully honest. If you want to become a Rockstar Concert Photographer, you have to start somewhere and small clubs are a great playground in which to learn.