

## Your First Concert

Congratulations! You're now the proud owner of a crop sensor camera with a 50mm prime lens<sup>2</sup>, waiting to get to your first concert!

When you're new to concert photography, it can all be a bit overwhelming. Which clubs and concerts should I choose? What about my camera settings? Will I be allowed to be in front of the stage for the whole concert? Do I need a flash? Should I ask the band beforehand? That's normal and I think every novice concert photographer was nervous and anxious. So let's do this together. Follow the next steps and you'll be able to get your first awesome concert photos. But be careful, once you start doing this crazy job, you'll easily get addicted to it. Just a small warning :-)

### Start In Small Clubs

The first advice to start out with is to start taking photos of concerts in small, local clubs. At these venues, you can almost always get in with your DSLR camera without any limitations. For larger venues, you'll need press accreditation, but don't worry too much about this right now. Starting in small venues is the best way for you to get some experience as a Concert Photographer. In my opinion, it's also the only route when you're starting out, learning all the basics that will help you nail the shots when you get to shoot the big Rockstars later on. This photo shows the Norwegian band making marks playing in a small club in Vienna. I took this photo outside of the venue to get an interesting angle of view.

Check out which clubs allow you to get in with your camera equipment first. Go to concerts at these clubs beforehand. If there are security guards at the entrance and they check your bags, then you obviously can't just arrive and start taking photos with your digital SLR camera. (Almost all venues allow small pocket cameras, but you want to become a concert photographer, right?). So, your first step is to make sure there are no restrictions on taking photos in the club.

Once you've found suitable venues, you want to search for cool concerts. The best way is to check out the following sources:

- Club/venue homepages
- Local newspapers

- Local blogs/magazines
- Event webpages
- Print music magazines

Once you've found a concert you'd like to attend, buy a ticket. Believe me, it doesn't matter where you live, there will always be a club with some bands playing.

Before you head to your first concert, here are 5 tips I always use to make sure my equipment is working properly and I don't forget any gear I need at the concert.

- Make sure your battery is inserted into your camera and it's fully charged.
- Make sure you have your memory card correctly inserted into your camera.
- Format your memory card. Go to the camera menu and format your memory card first. It's happened to me more than once that I was shooting with a half full memory card. What will happen is that you'll start shooting the concert and after one song realise that your memory card is already full. You won't have time to delete your old photos manually then. So make sure you start with a freshly formatted memory card.
- Before I leave for a photo shoot, I grab my camera with a lens attached and shoot 1-2 frames of anything. This will ensure that everything is working properly and you can double check if the battery and memory card are working too.
- Never forget to pack ear protection in your bag!

Once you've checked your equipment, you're good to go.

Ok, let's move to the venue.

Make sure you're there on time. Being late to your first concert can give you a nervous breakdown if you have to push through to the first row and fiddle around with your camera settings whilst the band is already halfway through their set. Not good. If it happens, and the club is already crowded when you enter from the back, being extremely friendly is the only way to go. Once you arrive in front of the stage, make it clear that you will just be there for a couple of songs. Sometimes, people can react badly if you push past them

or block their way. So, to avoid these situations, be there at least 1-2 hours before the show. If you recognize the band, either whilst they're doing their sound check or hanging around in the club, ask them politely if they mind you taking photos of them tonight. Most of the bands will be glad that there's someone who's thrilled with their music and will see it as an honor to be photographed by you.

Position yourself to the left or right of centre, in front of the stage. If you stay dead centre, the microphone stand can block the singer's face, which will make it much harder to capture a good photo. Respect other people who also want to enjoy the band and have paid for the concert.

Then the concert starts! All of a sudden, the club lights go out, the only light is coming from some blue and red spotlights flickering away, the band enters the stage and a wall of sound smashes into your face. You grab your camera with your 50mm lens f1.8, set the camera to automatic mode and — BAM — the little flash monster sitting on top of your camera pops up and throws the ugliest light you can think of onto the singer's face. Not only is the poor guy half-blinded and irritated, but your photo will also look like sh\*t. At this point, a lot of frustrated beginners just take their cameras home and never shoot a concert again. But not you!

So, what's going on? Let me explain the situation in a small club and why starting out as concert photographer is a lot harder than shooting the Red Hot Chili Peppers on a big stadium stage.

### **No Photo pit, Low-light and Crowds**

To be honest, shooting small clubs is tough. You don't have a dedicated workspace (a photo pit), the stage lighting is often the most challenging you'll ever get and the crowd dancing around you doesn't make it any easier to get awesome shots of the artists on stage. However, the good news is that it gets easier as you work your way up as concert photographer. Having to deal with challenging conditions straight away will definitely make you a better concert photographer. Most of the concerts I started at only had a blue and red spotlight on stage (two of the worst colors for digital sensors to handle!).

As shown in the previous scenario, putting your camera into automatic mode means it will be guaranteed to fire its pop-up flash because it's too dark. So you have to suppress the flash. Chances are, your photos will be blurred because the camera can't deal with low-light conditions when using

the automatic setting. A camera in automatic mode doesn't know what kind of photo you want to take and tries to figure out the best settings for you. You have no control of aperture, shutter speed or ISO, so you're a slave to your equipment. As we want to be cool Rockstar Photographers, we have to let the camera know what it should do. You want to get awesome concert shots and not the ones you'll find in a school newspaper. Hopefully, you'll have learnt your lesson and you'll never use the automatic mode when shooting a concert ever again!

Getting back to the light. You'll notice that there's no fancy lighting equipment on stage. Clubs often have their own lighting technicians who aren't familiar with the artist's music, so don't expect some freaking awesome lighting effects matching the band's sound.

You'll also notice that the lighting is mostly colored purple, yellow, red and blue. All these beautiful colors get smashed onto the blurred musicians in your photos. Awesome, if you like the artsy side of photography, but that's not my, or probably your, style.

How can you take better photos than the other photographers who are all have their cameras set to automatic? Watch the next lecture.