

Artist Minigrant Outcome Report
Proposed to Fund Equipment for Research
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May 1, 2016

Theatre Through the Camera

I initially proposed research into how stage lighting interacts with the camera when shooting production photos. I planned to do this by purchasing a Canon Rebel T6i camera and shooting two of my own productions, the four productions I worked while at Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma City, and documenting my first road trip and time living outside Virginia. While not everything went according to plan, I have come away with more knowledge than I expected about not only photography but also myself as an artist.

First to address the largest problem I faced in executing my proposed research. Before working for Lyric Theatre, as an electrician I had always been given nearly free reign of the theater space. This meant that after my shift for the day ended I could remain in the space on my own time to work on my own projects. However what I found out after arriving in OKC was that Lyric Theatre only rents out the Civic Center Music Hall for its summer season, and as such Lyric employees are not allowed to remain in the building after work hours. This meant I was unable to shoot the productions there as I had intended which, while unfortunate and frustrating, in the end I believe did not greatly hurt the amount I was able to learn from this research.

I did shoot my lighting designs for the 4th Year Play Festival and the Spring Musical Theatre Review, and photos from those productions can be viewed on my website here <http://johnsonsteven501.wixsite.com/stevendjohnson/theatre>. As you would expect shooting RAW files at a higher resolution produced much better quality photos than I could have obtained shooting from my iPhone, even with how advanced phone cameras have become.



Unprocessed

Processed RAW

Processed JPG

Above are examples comparing the difference in quality between JPG and RAW, first with the unprocessed image, then with the processed image, and then the same processing settings applied to a JPG version of the image (different crops a result of different image sizes).



Processed RAW

Processed JPG

JPG images are compressed versions of the data captured by the camera's sensor, and therefore lose gentle gradients in tone and hue as well as introducing what are known as digital artifacts into photo. Just from reading online about the differences between them I was expecting this; what I wasn't expecting was the impact that image processing would have on my work.

Now that I was shooting RAW I felt it was finally worth it to purchase an Adobe Cloud subscription, specifically Lightroom and Photoshop. I knew they were powerful applications, able to do insane feats such as transforming a magazine female model into a fully bearded Santa Clause. However I didn't realize just how friendly these tools would be to a novice, and how quickly just a few small adjustments could change an image from unusable to presentable, and how image manipulation can be an art form all on its own. I have even found that the more comfortable I become with these tools, the more it changes the way in which I will try to shoot an image; such as framing, underexposing, and ISO limits.

In addition to shooting my lighting designs, I wanted to document my first road trip and first time living outside of Virginia. I thought it would be a good way to preserve such a significant part of my life, as well as give me more time to familiarize myself with my camera and push to utilize its full potential. As I was shooting though I had to come to terms with the one challenge nearly all photographers face in documenting the world as it happens, DSLRs are heavy and bulky; so it was impossible to keep my DSLR on me at all times. So I finally caved and started an Instagram account for the first time, which you can visit here <https://www.instagram.com/alightindarkness/>. I didn't want to use it just as yet another social media app to post selfies or meals to, I wanted to use it as another expression of my artistic vision and a way for people to see the world through my eyes. This made me very selective of what I would actually post, but after some growing pains as a photographer I was able to post daily. Working with my iPhone and Instagram has essentially been practice in sharpening my artistic eye for composition, color, focus, etc. So that when I can pull out my DSLR, I am able to make the right choices and capture the image I want to create.



Photos selected from my Instagram Feed

Through this research into capturing theatre in photographs I not only learned more than I expected to, but have also found a passion for photography that I did not know resided inside me. I now plan on not only using my camera as a means to archive my work in theatre, but to pursue more of my artistic expression in photography. In light of this pursuit, I am taking ARCH 5710 Photography and Digital Media with Kirk Martin, after which I want to create a website designated just for my photography outside the theatre.



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