

November 2010

David Bergman

By Louisa J. Curtis



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This month my conversation is with photographer and video producer, [David Bergman](#). In June of last year, David approached me for a consulting session, mainly to talk about his new Web site, as well as some branding and marketing ideas. One such “branding” idea we talked about was to identify what about his work was unique to him? There are plenty of photographers out there, shooting the same or similar subjects, so how do you separate yourself from the crowd? And the one clear unifying thread throughout his work was, and still is, “action” — so that became a specific way for him to define his unique style, what it is he does, what he clearly loves to do, and therefore what he does best. *“I’ve always enjoyed shooting live sports and have worked for Sports Illustrated magazine for years. My favorite photos are the ones that are filled with action and energy and I try to apply that aesthetic to all of my work – whether it is a concert, portrait, or sporting event. I want my images to bust right off of the page or screen.”*

Besides “action,” I also asked him to give me three more words that sum up his creative style, and they were, “energetic, fun and unique” and when you take a look at David’s work, it certainly is all of the above. Now when I asked him if he had to choose one, music or sports, could he, and if so, which one would it be, his answer was, *“I like doing both, but right now I’m really enjoying the music world. Even shooting for a publication like Sports Illustrated, I rarely have access beyond the sidelines with all the other photographers. When I’m working with a band, I’m afforded an extra level of access that makes the job more enjoyable.”*

Recently David had emailed me to tell me that Fstoppers had produced a video on him shooting behind the scenes with Bon Jovi, <http://bit.ly/bcpgYH>. What is very cool about this is not only is it a really terrific video but it cleverly presents David as the “rock star” shooting the “rock star!” and now he also has a wonderful promotional piece. He said, *“The video has proven to be very popular both in the photo community and with Bon Jovi’s fans. It’s also a great way to introduce myself to a potential new client since it shows my work and my personality. There are a lot of talented photographers out there so this video helps me to separate myself from the pack just a bit.”* I asked him more about how this video piece had come about and he told me, *Patrick and Lee from Fstoppers.com approached me about shooting a behind-the-scenes video before their site had even launched. But I was very busy at the time and it wasn’t going to be easy to bring a video crew with me on a shoot. We stayed in touch and I saw the quality of their work after the site went online. We all wanted to do a shoot with Bon Jovi and it literally took me months to get permission from the band’s management to do it. But I finally got the guys out to a show at the Meadowlands over the summer. The edit took a couple of months and Jon Bon Jovi personally gave his blessing when he saw the final piece. Working with Bon Jovi has been one of the highlights of my career. Jon has granted me rare access to shoot backstage and on the stage during the show. It’s a dream gig and I love every minute of it.”*

I asked David to tell me more about how one gains access the way he has been able to in order to shoot behind the scenes and he said, *“Trust is very important. Of course, the images have to be good, but bands in particular are like a very tight knit family. Everyone wants to get to the “inner circle,” but they don’t let outsiders in very often. It took me years to get a shot with Bon Jovi. Once I got “in,” then I concentrated on making sure that they knew I was a professional, took my craft very seriously, and that they could trust me. That has led to more access, which allows me to make more unique photos.”*

With everyone talking “video” these days and because David is an accomplished videographer as well as photographer, I asked him if he feels he has an advantage over everyone else or are they chasing his heels, and how have his skills in video helped him advance his career? *“I look at video as just another tool in my bag of skills. With the declining economy, clients want to hire photographers who can do more than just be a photographer. When they come to me, I can provide a number of different services (for a price!) including video.”*

I was also curious to know if he is shooting video and stills on the same shoot, at a live concert, for instance. *“Bon Jovi has a full video crew with them so I don’t shoot video at all on that tour. In general, shooting stills and video are two completely different things and I rarely shoot both at the same time. But I was hired by the band Taddy Porter, for example, to direct the music video for their song “Shake Me” and also to produce a series of new promo stills for them. We set aside some time to make traditional portraits while I was on the road with them and kept it separate from the video shoot.”*

Whether he is shooting Presidents, rock stars or athletes, David travels a lot. So I asked him what he likes about life on the road and what he doesn’t like. *“I love the challenge of going to a foreign place, navigating all the logistics, and getting the job done against all odds. Of course, being away from my family is the toughest part, but I make sure to video chat with my wife and daughter as often as I can.”*

One of the reasons that Fstoppers originally contacted David was not because of his concert imagery, but for his famous GigaPan of the Inauguration of President Obama, <http://www.davidbergman.net/gigapan>. I asked him to tell me more about how that came about and if that was a particular highlight in his career? *“I’ve been fortunate to cover some amazing events over the years and the inauguration was one of the biggest. As soon as President Obama won the election, I told my agency Corbis that I’d be happy to cover his inauguration if they happened to get credentials. It didn’t come through until the week before, but they received two passes and I was cleared for one of them. I was there to simply shoot traditional still photos, but I decided to make a GigaPan image at the same time. It turned out to be a really good idea since that image has had over 12 million views online. Since then I’ve been hired by commercial clients to produce GigaPans for them as well.”*



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In closing, here are my **ChatterDozen** quickfire questions with David's responses:

- 1) Who is your favorite photographer? *"I'm a big fan of Walter looss, Joe McNally, and Frank Okenfels. Also, my friend Robert Caplin is currently doing some awesome work on tour with Justin Bieber."*
- 2) What would you do if you weren't a photographer? *"I studied music production at the Berklee College of Music in Boston and, if I wasn't in photography, I would probably be a music producer."*
- 3) Where do you get your inspiration and ideas? *"I'm inspired by the people I photograph. I learn every day from their professionalism, work ethic, and creativity."*
- 4) If you could be born in another period of history, when would that be and why? *"I would want to be born in the future! It would be amazing to see the technological advances that will take place over the next hundred years."*
- 5) If you could get on a plane tomorrow, and go anywhere you wanted to, instead of where someone is sending you, where would you fly to and why? *"My favorite city in the world is Sydney, Australia. I spent three weeks there covering the Olympics in 2000 and fell in love with the city and the people. I'm looking for an excuse to get back there on assignment one day soon."*
- 6) What is your favorite TV show? *"Favorites of all time include 30 Rock, West Wing, and Battlestar Galactica (the new version, not the cheesy one from the 70's!)."*
- 7) What was the last movie you saw? *"I watched Iron Man 2 on my iPad as I flew cross-country last week."*
- 8) What is your favorite food? *"I can eat breakfast foods anytime of the day or night – scrambled eggs, French toast, and pancakes." (Me too!)*
- 9) What is your favorite animal? *"I have two cats and they'd scratch me if I didn't say that they were my favorite. I do like dogs, but could never have one with my travel schedule. Cats are lower maintenance."*
- 10) What is your favorite color? *"Red, I suppose."*
- 11) Who (dead or alive) do you admire? *"I admire great entrepreneurs and businessmen like Richard Branson, Donald Trump, and Steve Jobs. They know what they want and push the people around them to excel."*
- 12) If I handed you an Oscar for photography, whom would you be thanking in your acceptance speech? *"My first "thank you" would be to my wife, who has put up with my crazy hours and ridiculous travel schedule for more than 12 years. Then I would thank the editors who gave me a shot over the years. Along the way, people like Phil Sandlin (Associated Press), Dennis Copeland (Miami Herald), and Steve Fine (Sports Illustrated) took a chance on a young kid who just kept badgering them until they finally relented."*

See more of David Bergman at: www.davidbergman.net and at www.TourPhotographer.com

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