



PICTURED ABOVE:

**JIMMY PAGE • INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 1975** Jimmy went through a period where he always had a bottle of Jack Daniels with him. He happened to take a swig just as I put the camera to my eye. It was completely unplanned, and I had no idea it would become such a well-known image.

# ECHOES OF SOUND AND FURY

## THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF NEAL PRESTON

INTRO BY CAMERON CROWE • WORDS AND PHOTOS BY NEAL PRESTON

Neal Preston and I have been covering music for a while, a few decades in fact. We were both kids when we met, but looking back on our adventure in the world of rock, I felt like I was in the presence of a seasoned adventurer from the first moment I met him. Neal had come from New York City, he had experience, had shot concerts in venues I'd only dreamed about visiting. And I knew instantly, watching him work—Neal's sheer knowledge and enthusiasm for the music brings out the magic in any musician lucky enough to be in front of his camera.

You can see it in his photographs of rock's greatest figures. From Jimmy Page to Pete Townshend, from Bob Dylan to David Bowie to Stevie Nicks, from Springsteen to Pearl Jam. He understands the reckless drive and merciless energy of a true artist. He's one himself.

As Robert Plant once said, "whenever I see Neal shooting from the pit (the area in front of the stage), I know his eye, I know he'll be in the right place and when I see the photo later, it will often feel just like it felt to me onstage... except larger, with an echo of sound and fury."

As a journalist for Rolling Stone, Playboy and many other publications, I always asked for Neal to join me on assignment. Together we dubbed ourselves "Team City," and it was always electric when we covered an artist together. We'd spend hours discussing, listening, dissecting, and just enjoying the pure elixir of the music. And always, whether shooting an interview in a hotel room, or flying aboard Zeppelin's customized Starship, we

knew when either one of us had seized an iconic photo, or quote. With just a look, we'd say to each other, without words—that's it. That's rock. When I made a film about the world of rock in the early '70s, "Almost Famous," much of it was based on our Team City experiences. Neal was also the set photographer on the movie, and we often analyzed and tweaked the scenes for accuracy as we were filming. Every ruffle on a coat, and every dial on every amp—we ran it all through our filters of experience, truth, and sheer rock pleasure. I couldn't have lived it, much less made a movie about it, without Neal.

Little has changed over the years. The other night I went over to Neal's house, on our way to an Eagles concert. He'd been combing through his archive, selecting certain prints for an exhibition while singling out others for this story. They covered every square inch of his dining room table. Even though most of the images were familiar to me, as always, there were some amazing ones I'd never seen before. Each one rang out with authenticity and the pure fun of what it is to love music. I stood there looking at the prints. If you don't shoot with your whole heart and soul, I thought, you couldn't create images like these.

"Come on," he said, grabbing his keys. "We're late for the show..."

For a moment, the quiet room was filled with that sound and fury.

I was already at a great show.

—Cameron Crowe April, 2010





“YOU HAVE THE WORLD’S GREATEST JOB.”

I’ve heard that said a lot and the older I get, the more I hear it. For a long time I never believed it—I was too busy working. But “running around shooting rock stars” is both a gross simplification and an exact description of how I’ve spent the lion’s share of my past 35 to 40 years.

I have a room in my house with nothing in it but file cabinets—31 of them, in fact. Each cabinet has four drawers; each drawer is crammed with Pendaflex folders holding proof sheets, negatives, and transparencies. That’s 124 file cabinet drawers, every one of them bursting at the seams. I have come to

realize that it’s not only my body of work; it’s physical proof that I do have “the world’s greatest job.”

ON THE ROAD

I’m not sure if it’s still around, but there used to be a motel in Salina, Kansas that was adjacent to the railroad tracks. During one summer in the late 1970s I rolled into Salina as a passenger on REO Speedwagon’s tour bus after God-knows how many hours of being awake—chemically induced awake time, of course—with eye-blazing, head pounding pain, and a Fort Knox-level sinus blockage being the maraschino cherry on the hangover sundae special.

Time to off-load the bus, roll into my room, grab whatever tiny little piece of “drapery” that’s left in the room (I never understood why all the world’s cheap motels have the thinnest material that they use for drapes, and this stuff rips and shreds as if the atmosphere was made up of oxygen and x-acto knife blades) and try to cover up every square inch of the “window” (an ancient piece of filthy glass in a frame) before turning on the air conditioner (which hasn’t had a can of Freon, or any servicing at all, since its installation) in a hopeless attempt to cool the room down to at least 90 degrees. And just when I manage to get to the point (a half-dozen

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE TOP LEFT:

STEVIE NICKS • VENICE, CALIFORNIA 1982 • This was shot on the roof of Stevie’s condo in Venice Beach. The wind was blowing hard—I had an assistant sit just out of frame and hold one of her boots so she didn’t fly away.

JOHN LEE HOOKER • MILL VALLEY, CALIFORNIA 1984 Look at that face—it just tells so many stories. If you were trying to cast an actor to play an old blues musician, you couldn’t find a better face than John Lee Hooker’s.

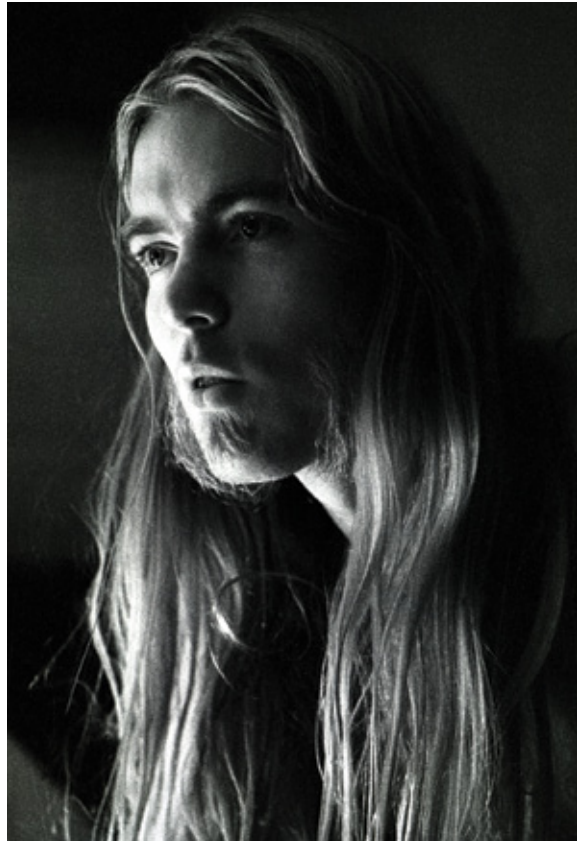
LED ZEPPELIN • USA (VENUE UNKNOWN) 1977 The first time I looked closely at this shot under a lupe I was amazed that Jimmy didn’t break his ankles that night. There is a truly amazing Led Zeppelin bootleg (can’t remember the name) that used this shot on its cover and in a strange way I felt honored.

LEONARD COHEN • MT. BALDY, CALIFORNIA 1995 At the time, Leonard Cohen was living quietly as a monk at a Zen Center way up in the mountains outside of Los Angeles. Spending the afternoon with him and the other monks pretty much sucked the “Type-A” right out of me.

THE RAT PACK • OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 1988 That’s one of last times they were ever together onstage and probably the last time that Sinatra goosed Dean Martin. You can’t prepare for happy accidents like this shot, but if you keep your eye on the ball and your finger on the trigger you can jack one right out of the park.

LYNYRD SKYNYRD • ATLANTA, GEORGIA 1976 This was shot one afternoon at the Fox Theatre during rehearsals for Skynyrd’s live album. Look closely—you may see a shiner or two.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

**ROBERT PLANT • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 1973** At Led Zeppelin's Kezar Stadium gig there were some white doves behind the amps, that were to be released at the end of "Stairway to Heaven." When the time came, out they flew—but one circled the crowd for a moment, then took a U-turn and landed right in Robert's hand. I guess the Zeppelin crowd freaked the bird out.

**GREGG ALLMAN • PHOENIX, ARIZONA 1973** This shot was done during a Cameron Crowe interview with Gregg for his first Rolling Stone cover story (just like the kid in "Almost Famous"). All during the interview Cameron politely declined Gregg's offer of various drugs, while I politely accepted.

**PETE TOWNSHEND • SOMEWHERE OVER THE USA, 1979** You've gotta love it when your subject shows up for a plane flight with bowler hat and spats (I'm more used to bad hangovers and no showers, from the guys, at least). Pete has always had a very personal sense of style—always unlike anyone else on the planet.

**FREDDIE MERCURY • U.S. TOUR, 1980** I truly loved working with Queen. The band and their road crew became really good friends of mine over the years. Freddie sort of primped, preened and strutted his way through tours and he loved having his picture taken no matter what was going on. He made my job very easy.

**DAVID BOWIE • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 1973** This was shot at Radio City Music Hall during David's "Ziggy Stardust" period. I still feel the same way today about him that I did back then: an interesting looking guy with great bone structure, fun to photograph, and thanks, but I'll pass on ever playing any of his records.

**AXL ROSE • LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 1990** After I photographed Axl and his wife Erin, I went with him down to the Record Plant in Hollywood and shot some portraits there. Recording studios are my favorite places to shoot musicians.

**MARVIN GAYE • LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 1982** It was the last major photo shoot that he did before he died. He was almost apologetic about his appearance, and he stressed that he needed to look "handsome for all the ladies."

aspirins later) where MAYBE I can get some sleep, here comes the Super Chief, 30 shiny railroad cars long, rolling down the tracks with a roar so deafening that my ears want to hemorrhage, and close enough to my room that I can physically spit on it as it streaks by—at least, I could if the window would actually open.

Not all traveling I've done with bands has been as difficult—sometimes it's five-star hotels with a private jet. And sometimes you can go on the road and never have to check out of your hotel.

With Led Zeppelin we'd "base" out of one city for a week or two, since our gigs would be either in the base city, or cities nearby. We'd stay in the Plaza Hotel in New York City, and if our gig one night was

in, let's say, Montreal, the whole tour party would meet in the Oyster Bar at about 5 p.m., then get into the limos that would take us, with full police escort in tow, to our tour plane (the Starship in '75, the Caesar's Chariot in '77) which would fly us to Montreal. After arriving in Montreal about 7:15 p.m., we'd limo to the gig, and when the show was over, do the reverse. We'd be back at the Oyster Bar by 1:00 a.m.—but unlike the band, my work for the night was not finished.

There was usually about an hour of free time between when we'd get back to the hotel and when the band would need the limos to take them wherever they wanted to hang for the evening. During this hour I would be given the use of one

limo for one purpose only: to run me to the photo lab that was processing my film. All of my shot film would have to be put in bags along with processing instructions for the lab guys. I'd prepare the bags as quickly as possible, jump in the limo, dump the film into the lab's night-drop slot, and go right back to the hotel.

The next morning at about 11:00 a.m. I'd get a huge package back from the lab containing all my developed film, and six copies of every black and white contact sheet. One copy was for each band member, one was copy for Peter Grant (Zeppelin's manager) and one for me. I'd personally leave an envelope with each recipient's personal security guard—and always wondered (even to this day) if





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

**LED ZEPPELIN, THE WHO, PEARL JAM** Shooting live music is something that few photographers do really well. I just discovered one day I was good at it because it felt natural to me. You can't teach it, you can't learn it, you just do it. The recipe is as follows: one part photography, one part a love of music, one part a love of theatre and theatrical lighting, one part hero worship, one part timing, and 95 parts instinct.

One of the fringe benefits of having "the world's greatest job" has been the great concerts. Many, many great concerts—so many that in my brain they tend to merge into one huge-nonstop-gangbang-mega-show. Think if Live Aid had gone on for eight days, instead of eight hours.

MY SHORT LIST OF THE BEST I'VE EVER SEEN

(in no particular order, except for the first two):

1. **THE WHO**, WINTERLAND, SAN FRANCISCO 1976
2. **THE MC5**, UNGANO'S, NEW YORK CITY 1970
3. **THE ALLMAN BROTHERS**, PHOENIX 1973
4. **THE WHO**, LOS ANGELES 1973
5. **LED ZEPPELIN**, LOS ANGELES 1975, 1977
6. **BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**, LEEDS, UK 1985
7. **QUEEN**, SAO PAULO, BRAZIL 1981
8. **ROLLING STONES**, HOLLYWOOD PALLADIUM, LOS ANGELES 1972
9. **THE EAGLES**, CHICAGO 1975
10. **ELTON JOHN**, LOS ANGELES 1974

any band members ever looked at the damn things. At this point I'd attempt to get a bit of rest, while drowning in a virtual sea of yellow Kodak boxes, Nikon cameras, lab receipts and slide projector trays. Then there were the dozens, if not hundreds, of old hotel phone messages: "call Rosemary! I met you at the hotel in Chicago! I was the girl with the platform sneakers," and the, "you don't know me, but my name's Kristin and is there any way that you can give something to Jimmy for me", and of course, the "call Joe at Rolling Stone. We don't like the photos you sent—need to see more." It never ended. I probably averaged 60 minutes of sleep per night.

Touring can also be highly stressful. Every tour I've ever been on has had its own distinct personality. Sometimes it's all peace and love, but

gig, limo, backstage, hotel, gig, hotel, plane, gig, gig, gig. Everything looks the same. All the dressing rooms in all the hockey rinks and sports arenas that have ever been built in the entire world look the same. The groupies, and the insides of their cars, all look the same. The security guys at gigs all look the same and act the same. All the catered gig food looks the same, tastes the same and is even colored the same (a sort of lifeless burnt sienna, charred gray)—and that's the edible food. I have eaten enough over-cooked hamburgers and day-old pizza to last a hundred lifetimes. I've also probably spent more on hotel room service than all my home mortgages put together.

Touring can also be highly stressful. Every tour I've ever been on has had its own distinct personality. Sometimes it's all peace and love, but

in a flash it can turn dark and nasty. The drama can be palpable, exacerbated by lack of sleep, bad audiences, and bad drugs. There's more drama on one Rolling Stones tour than in a dozen Martin Scorsese films. And it doesn't matter if it's a Stones tour or a Bay City Rollers tour—they're all stressful. Trust me on this one: three weeks on the road with Wham! was the most depressing 21 days of my life.

ACCESS IS EVERYTHING

Access is the hard currency of my job. It is as essential a tool as any camera or lens. Once you have access, you must nurture it and treat it with utmost respect or you can kiss it—along with your ass—goodbye.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

QUEEN • SOMEWHERE OVER THE USA, LATE '70S Sometimes you get a jet, sometimes a propeller plane. Either way, it beats airports.

IGGY POP • LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 1974 Iggy came up to the studio to shoot a Creem Magazine cover, and this shot was one of the first of the day. The art director wanted some pictures of Iggy destroying a bunch of vinyl records. By the end of the shoot he had almost destroyed the entire place while virtually tying himself into a knot.

BOB MARLEY • SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA 1979 I've never been a reggae fan at all, and only photographed Bob Marley once. This picture originally had a female singer deep in the background. Burning her out of the photograph (which I rarely do) changed the entire vibe for the better.

MICHAEL JACKSON • ENCINO, CALIFORNIA EARLY '70S I was looking over some old proofs last summer, and I saw some frames at the end of a roll I'd forgotten about. Even at that age, Michael was a pro in front of the camera, and it wasn't easy getting a shot of him as a "normal" kid.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN • KYOTO, JAPAN 1985 Although I'd photographed Bruce before, this was the first time I'd toured with him, and I spent some time trying to gauge how comfortable he was with a camera around when he wasn't onstage. This particular shot was done during the band's sound check in what I seem to recall was a school gymnasium.

There's no question that back in the day, access to the people I photographed was much more freely given (and in fact taken for granted). Cameron Crowe and I spent pretty much as long as we wanted on tour with bands such as the Allman Brothers and the Eagles just to complete one piece for Rolling Stone. After the first couple of gigs the publicity person from the record label went right back to Macon, or Los Angeles; there was no earthly reason for him to stay on the road with us. It was a complete 180 from what goes on now.

I'm very fortunate that since I have a couple of years under my belt, I'm one of a select few that usually do an end run around the rules. These days, if you need to take a leak backstage they slap a non-disclosure agreement in front of you—oh and by the way, leave your camera in the car!

THE UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS

Sometimes those unforgettable moments happen when you least expect them to. Jimmy Page swigging the Jack Daniels bottle, Elton John fainting on stage at his piano and being carried off by his crew. Sinatra goosing Dean Martin on stage in Oakland. Marvin Gaye literally tearing his living room apart before my shoot because he was positive there was half a joint somewhere in the couch... or under the rug?

Sometimes the "moment" is more of a mini-movie in my brain.

ONE OF MY FAVORITES

I watched Burt Bacharach stroll into Capitol Records' Studio A in Hollywood. He looked like he had just stepped out of the pages of People Magazine in 1983—suntanned, sweater tied around

his neck, gleaming white teeth and fresh off the tennis court—the whole faux deal. All that was missing was Angie Dickinson on his arm. Burt beelined it to the control room and hugged and kissed every single person like he was on the receiving line at his own Bar Mitzvah. In my estimation Burt was one-hundred-percent bogus.

And then something happened. He strode out into the main room where his musicians were seated, rolled up his sleeves, looked at the sheet music and became a entirely different guy—the uber-professional conductor/arranger, effortlessly leading the orchestra and re-writing what the strings were playing while gently cajoling the vocalist (Ron Isley) into killer take after killer take. The "People Magazine Burt" was nowhere in sight. The spirit of Leonard Bernstein and Toscanini had invaded his body. It was

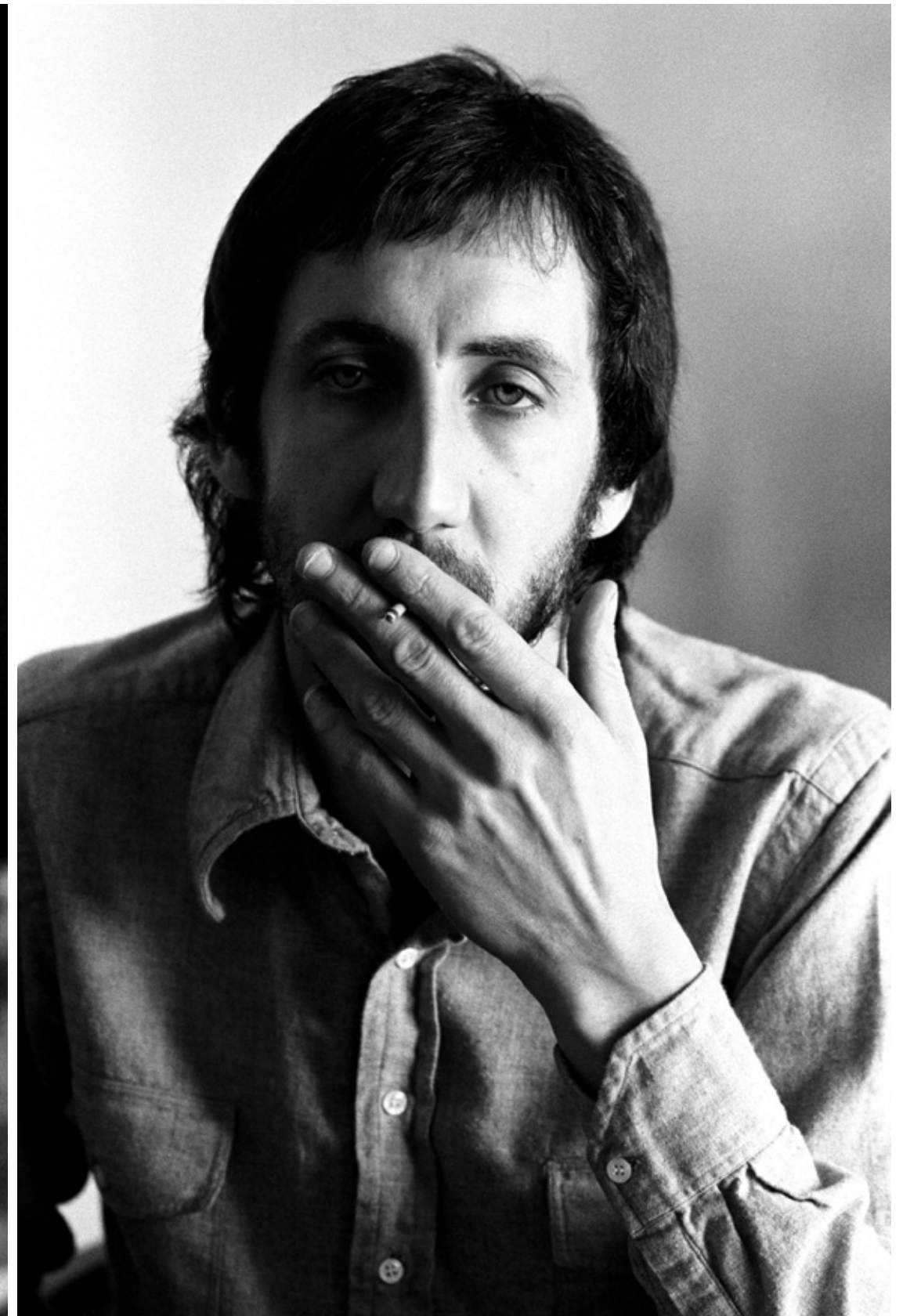




**LEFT TO RIGHT:**

**KEITH RICHARDS • HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA 1972** The Stones played the Hollywood Palladium on the 1972 tour. The venue was pretty small for a tour that size and they rocked the place. This photo of Keith has that soft-yet-dramatic quality that I love.

**PETE TOWNSHEND • LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 1973** I sat in on one of Pete's interviews around the time of *Quadraphenia*. He used to smoke these little Indian mini-cigars called "bidis" (bee-deez). I remember that the interview was fascinating and the bidis stunk to high hell.



an unbelievable thing to witness.

By nature I'm a photojournalist. That's the way my photographic DNA is wired. I've done countless portraits and set-up shots in photo studios, and in every kind of "controlled" location imaginable, but my real love is photojournalism. Grab a camera and just shoot. Don't augment the light, don't pose the subject, and in fact don't even acknowledge that I'm in the room. Just let me remain invisible and be a fly on the wall so I can blend into the background and lay in wait for the magic to happen.

Of course, the real payoff for me is to have been able to observe some of the most talented musicians the world has ever known just create. Watching Lindsey Buckingham work the mixing board in his

control room for two-straight days, or Stevie Nicks writing song lyrics by her fireplace at 3:00 am, or Pete Townshend rehearsing with a blood-soaked towel wrapped around his right hand, or Bruce Springsteen sing to a group of the Chilean "Mothers of the Disappeared" at an Amnesty International show in Mendoza, Argentina—those moments and a thousand others were exhilarating to see. It doesn't get any better than that.