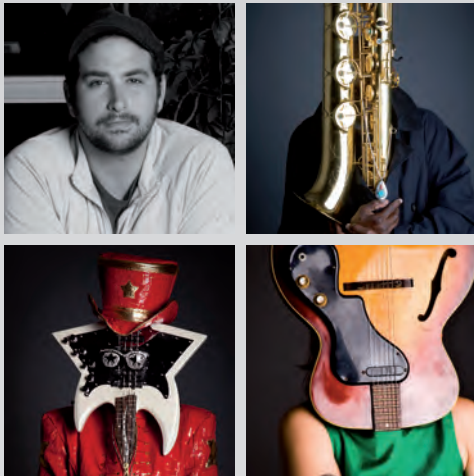


MICHAEL WEINTROB



Specializing in shooting live concerts, portraits, events and world culture for over a decade, Michael Weintrob's clients benefit from his ability to consistently produce emotion-evoking photographs under any conditions while keeping the drama inside the frame.

Some of Michael Weintrob's clients in the entertainment industry include corporations such as ABC, Sony, Epitech and Bluenote/EMI. His expertise and conceptual style create powerful visuals capturing the complete brand experience for the client, agency, promoter and/or sponsor.

Michael Weintrob's images have appeared in publications such as Rolling Stone, Spin, Mojo, Billboard, Relix and Outside. His work has graced the album covers of renowned artists Bootsy Collins, Burning Spear, Taj Majal, Karl Denson, the Doobie Brothers, Gov't Mule, Charlie Hunter and The Dirty Dozen Brass Band among others.

Michael's studio is located in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

The Instrument Head Series has been shown at the Gathering of the Vibes Music Festival in 2010, Mountain Jam Music Festival in 2010, Bembe in fall of 2010 and winter of 2011. None of the images are circulating on the web and the series is yet to be released in editions.

Lauren Haimelin: How did you make your way to NY from Birmingham Alabama where you are originally from?

Michael Weintrob: I went to Colorado State University and then moved to Boulder Colorado afterwards. I would go to all the different music venues in the towns I lived in and photograph all the performances and bands that were playing around town. When I moved to Boulder, I became the house photographer for the Red Rocks Amphitheater there and started to travel to different music festivals all over the country to shoot the performances. I then met someone in my travels who had an apartment for rent in Brooklyn, NY. I took it without even having been to Brooklyn before.

LH: And your career has really skyrocketed here in NY...

MW: It has, I am really lucky, it is going really well. I have traveled all over to photograph festivals, shows, and performances, but I have always worked photographing musicians for over 15 years now.

LH: Was it always your goal to photograph musicians or did that develop over time?

MW: Yes it was always my goal. When I was in college I would go out and hear every band that came to town and photograph them, and people told me I was really good at it, and I stuck with it since I also really loved it.

LH: Did you study photography formally in school?

MW: No, I have never taken a formal photography class.

LH: What did you study in college?

MW: Public Relations and Journalism.

LH: Wow, so you are totally self-taught.

MW: Yes. I have had mentors and I ask a lot of questions, but no formal training at all.

LH: Can you name some of your mentors?

MW: First was Tim Benko, who was a commercial photographer in Boulder who taught me the business of photography. Then when I moved to NY, I met and have been surrounded by a lot of photographers living in my building in Brooklyn who happen to be the assistants to famous photographers such as Mark Seliger, Annie Liebovitz, and Steven Klein. We are all really supportive of each other and we have learned a lot from each other which is great. I also have to credit Craig Edsinger who taught me how to be a portrait photographer, and Kirk Edwards who has taught me a lot too. When I first moved to NY, I went to talk with photo editors of different magazines such as Rolling Stone, Newsweek, and Time, and they told me that I took excellent live photos, but I needed to work more on developing my portrait photography if I wanted to compete with the photographers here in New York. I have been taking a lot of portraits since then.

LH: And would you say that portraiture is your favorite part of photography?

MW: Yes, I love it. I love doing the live stuff, like capturing the moment at performances, but I like to have the control of the studio as well. With the portraits I get to create something, I am not just there to document what is going on, I am creating an experience and capturing what I am creating. It's a different angle. There are a lot of people out there capturing moments and doing portraits, so I have worked hard to distinguish myself by using special lighting, stylized techniques and by keeping a consistent look in my work. When I look at photography I want to feel some sort of emotion, so in everything I do I am working not only to put out images that are strong but images that make the viewer feel something as well.



Horizontal image man with red guitar holding hair (John Forte)



Horizontal image with Gong (Matt Abts)

LH: So evoking some kind of emotion is definitely one of your main goals when you shoot in general, in portraits, and in the live photography too.

MW: Yes, in everything. If I was going to take a picture of an empty parking lot I would try to take it in a way that would evoke an emotion.

LH: Do you admire any particular photographers?

MW: Yes, Jay Blakesberg of San Francisco is a photographer in the music scene that I came up in, but he also started his own publishing company and has really branched out. I have always looked up to him for the way he runs his business since I have always been a one-man show. I also admire Jim Marshall, Henry Diltz, Annie Liebovitz, Dick Waterman, Herman Leonard, Lee Friedlander, Steve McCurry and artists like this, some of whom have started by photographing live bands in the music scene and then transitioned into fine art photography the way I have. They have become more commercial which is what I would like to do as well. I would like to work in advertising, so I have created a particular style that is clear and recognizable. I want my work to be seen and for people to be able to recognize that I am the one behind the lens.

LH: How did the idea for Instrument Head evolve? You have already said that you were working very hard on portraits, was it part of that transition? It is such a unique idea, and you create such rich and beautiful images in this series.

MW: I was interested in working on something different. So when I started doing portraits of musicians, I would say “hey, put your guitar down your shirt” to loosen them up at the beginning of a shoot to get them into it instead of having the person just stand there. After a while I started doing it with everyone I shot-I was actually building the series without even knowing it. I was always working on other creative projects as well, but while I was considering the direction I wanted to take with my work I realized that the portraits with the instruments covering the faces was actually a series in itself. I then became more focused on the idea and developed it a bit further. I decided to use the same background, lighting, and look for the portraits and to ask “how are we going to tell the story of the artist through this photograph?” as the driving question behind the work. I also started taking short videos of the musicians playing their instruments with their faces covered and doing a series of photos with and without the instruments over their faces, which adds depth to the series. I also focus on what the musician can bring into the image that gives the viewer a clue to who the artist is. The rubber bands and the star bass guitar for Bootsy Collins are examples. The end product becomes a sort of guessing game. I also like that the work has a sort of surrealistic edge to it too. Part of what makes it work is that the instruments in the images are really recognizable and are often quite famous themselves. The catch phrase for the series is “Where Their Head’s Really At” because the artists became famous due to the time and energy they devoted to playing, studying and thinking about their instruments.

LH: This work is also really powerful because you as a photographer/artist are connecting personally to the musician-you connect directly with your tool (the camera) to their tool (the instrument), and the end result is so wonderfully creative.

MW: Yes, it is great! We do normal portraits and then also do some for the Instrument Head series. The feedback I get is great too.

Often times when the shoot is over the artists will tell me that the shoot was the best one they have ever done, even in their whole career. We both have a lot of fun.

LH: When I look at the images, I really see the seriousness with which you shoot and with which the musicians take the shoot. The portraits are filled with a sense of mutual respect and dignity and it is very clear how much you and the musicians bond, share, and also play and have fun during the shoots. I find your work to be strikingly beautiful; you are really capturing a strong essence in these images.

MW: Thanks, I have been very lucky to shoot all these amazing musicians.

LH: Do you have a favorite musician that you have worked with in the Instrument Head Series?

MW: I would have to say Bootsy Collins was one of my favorites, and so was Micky Hart from the Grateful Dead. There are a lot of stories behind these photographs that no one really gets to know just by looking at them that make them special too. I grew up as a big fan of the Grateful Dead, and when I went to San Francisco last fall I was intent on shooting one of the band members. I was really excited when someone in my network who was Mickey Hart’s manager was able to get me a shoot with him. It was a really incredible experience to shoot someone I respect so much as a musician, and we really bonded during that session. It was an amazing experience. I shot him, his wife and daughter, and his instruments, and we played the drums together and talked for quite some time. He also told me that this was the best photo shoot he had ever done in his entire career, which was just awesome for me-such an incredible and memorable highlight of my career so far as a photographer. The real and open human connections that I have made along the way have helped me grow so much as a person and as an artist, and I am so grateful for them.

LH: What is your favorite part of what you do?

MW: I love the exchange of energy. I love working with the people and I love the ability to create while I work. I get lost in it-it is like a high for me and it gives me energy. I get to showcase the musicians, and I have them showcase their instruments, talents and culture as well. They often wear traditional clothing of their country if they are international artists. This series is also a great way to introduce musicians who are not always very well known and presents an opportunity to teach about the unique instruments that they play. But it is really all about the connections with the people for me, and that is probably my favorite part of working in this series.

■ Lauren Haimelin



From top to bottom and from left to right: Female with dog (Sasha Dobson), Man in trenchcoat with big baritone saxophone (Roger Lewis), Tattooed man with drum (Bebo), Bass head holding rubber bands (Bootsy Collins), Female with Indian String Instrument (Falu).