

The Harper in Business

By Anne Roos

How to Get that Perfect Photographic Image

I got lucky. About ten years ago, a tall, soft-spoken gentleman named Ciprian introduced himself to me at a local mixer and offered to do a photo shoot of me with my harp. He simply wanted me to share the photos and recommend him to my wedding and corporate clients. The idea for this trade was powerful—I didn't have the funds to invest in a collection of much needed publicity photos. And Ciprian needed the referrals because he was new to my town. After all, this was the recession, and we could each benefit by helping one another.

I previewed some of Ciprian's earlier work, and I was impressed even before the shoot. He did not disappoint—his work is magazine worthy, and his understanding of light gave my photos a quality often reserved for fine paintings. Ciprian has a gift, and I was, and still am, more than happy to recommend him to anyone, near or far. (See his work at his blog at ciprianphotographyblog.com)

But my luck could have turned sour. What if this photo shoot didn't have such a happy ending? What if I was disappointed with the proofs? As nice as Ciprian is, I would have a hard time sharing his photos and recommending him after all his kind efforts.

Sadly, you don't often get that lucky. I ask photographers at weddings and events to send me any shots they may take of me. If I use any of their photos online, I promise to post a link to their website. But rarely can I use the photos because they are not flattering or need a lot of fixing.

Anyone with a camera can call himself or herself a photographer, but equipment alone does not make the photographer. The pro photographer uses the right equipment—a cell phone or iPad won't do. Your selfies won't do, either. Not for timeless, multipurpose images. A photographer is an artist behind the camera, just as a painter can turn the right colors into magic.

As working musicians, harpers in business, we know the importance of great photography. The ideal images land us jobs: agents use them to recommend us, concert promoters use them to fill seats, and album distributors use them for one-sheets to sell our recordings. We insert them into our websites, social network profiles, business cards, concert posters, and chamber of commerce brochures. In short, great photography helps us earn a living. Bad photography can be damaging.

So what *is* good photography? I can't answer this question. I only know what I like and what I don't like. How do you find good photographers to help your career image? I've only found them through a stroke of good luck.

For the solution to obtaining fantastic publicity photos specifically for our line of work, I turned to the only expert I know—Harrison Funk. He was the personal photographer to Michael Jackson, the King of Pop. He continues to photograph music talent A-listers, musicians who are just getting started, and everyone in between. Harrison shares his secrets and sage advice below from a recent interview.

Use this as your litmus test to recognize useful photographs, find the best photographer for your specific needs, and get your money's worth out of your investment in publicity stills.

ANNE: Are there different types of headshots?

HARRISON: Yes, for performing musicians a competent, truly professional photographer will look at a person to understand what is engaging about them, so that they will be able to make a headshot that will make them stand out from their competition. What will sell that person's talents, based solely from their picture?

If a harpist came to me and asked me to do a headshot, the first thing I would ask is, "What's the headshot for? How are you going to use it? Do you plan to use it on your website to make people look at you twice and say, 'Oooh, she's an interesting person. I know that person, and I've heard her play, and I love her music!'"

A good photographer understands marketing and can determine what's needed in the shot. For instance, a harpist should probably include her instrument in the shoot, unless the photo is used for a purpose other than selling her musical talents. But with or without the harp, the photographer's job is to let the personality shine through.

An essential element of a good headshot is that the harpist is instantly recognizable to his or her fans.

What we're creating is a sales portrait. But which kind of portrait depends on how the photos will be used. If I were shooting you for a magazine, I might make it an environmental portrait, using the setting to enhance an idea of what kinds of music you play. Is the harp music serene? Then maybe I'd photograph you in an open field, above a valley overlooking trees, or at the ocean. If you play rock and you're edgy, the photograph should tell that story. To publicize an upcoming event, say in an elegant restaurant or theater, then you need a photograph that will be a good match for that setting.

The artist needs to decide the goal for the photograph, in addition to deciding what kind of personality they want to display to describe their music. And, even if you want the photo to describe your music as tough or gritty, you still need to look approachable, or no one will want to hire you. A good photographer knows how to make a person look fascinating.

How do you ensure the musician looks their best at the photo shoot, and the time they spent at the shoot hasn't gone to waste? If a harper really knows what she's doing could she skirt by without hiring a makeup artist, hair stylist, or fashion stylist?

She needs to understand the different services these people provide. For example, there is a huge difference between makeup for stage and makeup for photo shoots. For example, you would never use a cosmetic esthetician instead of a make-up artist for professional still photography. I would highly recommend hiring a qualified makeup artist—get recommendations from your photographer.

I try to include a fashion stylist at most of my promotional photo shoots. A fashion stylist makes sure clothes convey the right statement. Hair and makeup needs to be right. And keep in mind, photo grooming for men is as important as photo grooming for women.

Michael Jackson always had makeup people at a photo shoot. But he was an expert at doing makeup and many times he did the application himself.



Hire a photographer you can trust.
Look forward to the process and
welcome a proactive collaboration.

What if a musician is just starting out, needs decent all-purpose photos, and doesn't have a lot of money to invest in a professional photo session? Should that person wait until they can afford a professional photographer, along with the makeup and stylist team?

To be a professional harpist, you spend thousands of dollars on harps and harp equipment, hundreds or thousands on iPads, foot switches, and technology, thousands on creating quality recordings and physical CDs, buying online and print ads, business cards, and other promotional literature. So, why would you spend all of that money on everything else except for the one tool you need to market yourself visually? This is the visual representation of who you are and what your music is about. This is critical.

Ask how much the photographer of your choice charges. Discuss your budget with him. If it doesn't fit, then save up the money for the shoot or look for another photographer. Most of the time, you get what you pay for. Professional photographers are not just taking photos as a hobby and like you, we don't work for free. Our artistry has value.

Why not just have a friend use an iPhone?

An iPhone is just not the same as a camera. Look at the sheer size of the lens and the sensor on an any smartphone. Smartphones don't respond as quickly as cameras. A portrait looks okay on the screen of a phone, but when you download the photo and try to enlarge it, you're losing a lot of detail and resolution, the image will look pixilated and become unusable. And when you use those iPhone photo apps, the filters you use will look unnatural on enlarged photos. Some think iPhone pictures are good enough for social media, but not all of your advertising will be on social media. Your publicity photos must be all-purpose. When a client tries to download your picture from social media to use in ads that they are running in a newspaper, magazine, or for flyers and posters, the resolution will be all wrong.

Compression is a tool that photographers use to enhance photos in a way that you cannot do on a smartphone. To make the photos truly magic, I need to start with a sharp photograph in focus. Focusing is not as accurate with a smartphone as it is with a camera. Most photographers will take the raw photographs from their camera into Lightroom, then Photoshop for fine tuning. One cardinal rule of photography that I learned many years ago is: When you can see the subject's eyes, and they are sharp, the entire image will appear sharp.

Many wedding photographers take photos of me at ceremonies, while I am playing. Most of the time, these photos are awful. How can I get good shots of me performing at weddings and other gigs that I can use for publicity purposes?

If you want to be photographed at a wedding, you're better off hiring your own photographer and getting permission from the bride to bring your photographer to take some publicity photos just of you. You can understand why a bride may refuse—but you can always ask. You could explain to her that her wedding photographer is focused on capturing her at her wedding, and your own photographer will only be focused on your performance. Reassure her that your photographer will not get in the way of your wedding photographer's job, and also agree to share your photos with her. I don't think bringing your own photographer would be an issue at a corporate event or concert, but you'll always want to ask your client first.

When is it time to get new photos taken? How often should we sit for a new photo shoot? In other words, do my old photos have an "expiration date"?

Definitely. The day you discover a change in the way you look is the day you need to take new head shots. If you change your hairstyle, hair color, glasses, or anything else when you perform, it is time to get new photos taken. The only time I'd suggest repurposing a past photo is when you are telling a specific story about who you were. This image might appear on your website or within an album booklet, showing you performing at past concerts. But keep in mind that those old photos don't describe who you are right now.

The headshots you took twenty years ago are not who you are today.

Photo trends also change over time. How do we find photographers that we like and can produce timeless photos, so that we don't waste our money on useless photo shoots?

Gorgeous photos are timeless and don't adhere to trends—Think about the photos on some of your favorite album covers, like Queen on Bohemian Rhapsody.

To find these kinds of photographers that create photos to withstand the test of time, start by asking your peers—other professional musicians. You could also search online for photographers in your city, using keywords like "entertainment photographer," "music photographers," etc. Review their website photo gallery to make sure they display a consistent output of timeless and captivating photos. Not just one lucky shot. You may need to travel to their city or pay for them to come to you for a photo shoot.



Guitarist Payton Keller Photo © Harrison Funk ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The photographer you choose should be able to put you at ease. Think about whether this is a person you'd like to have lunch with. You and your photographer should "click" (bad pun intended!), and that's the person you want to shoot with.

You are hiring a professional so they will know what equipment, lenses, and lighting to use to get the best photos. Photography might be your hobby but this is their area of expertise so treat them as you want to be treated—one creative professional to another. Trust the photographer to do their job.

Beyond getting to know me, should my photographer also try to understand my music and what I actually do when I perform?

Yes. Getting to know my subjects is about getting to know their music, too. Whether they are seasoned musicians or just getting out there, I want to know who they are, what they're playing, and where they are in their career. I ask a series of questions at an initial meeting or consultation. I'll ask, "Why are you coming to me to shoot you? What do you want to get out of this photo session? Why do you want pictures? Where will the pictures be used?" If they need help we'll explore their goals so that I have a better idea of how to create portraits that make us all happy.

Is there one secret to making sure I've hired an experienced publicity still photographer?

Naturally, you might see a photo on another musician's website that you really love. Maybe you'd like to hire the photographer who took that gorgeous picture for your photo shoot, but first go to the photographer's website to look at their other photos.

When you view their website photo gallery you should see an assortment of other photos you also like. The other photos on their website should measure up and leave you with no doubts about trusting that photographer.

Choose and hire your photographer based on their consistent output of timeless and captivating photos.

Many thanks to Harrison Funk for taking time to answer questions for our FHJ readership. You can hire Harrison for your photo shoot! Visit his website at HarrisonFunk.com, where his complete bio, contact info, and online gallery live.



Anne Roos

Anne resides in South Lake Tahoe, California and has over 30 years of performance experience. She continues to perform as a soloist, offering seminars, focused workshops, and private lessons in person and via the internet. She is also available for private consultation and public business workshops.

Anne performed on the 2015 GRAMMY® Award Winning Album, *Winds of Samsara* (Best New Age Album). Her music flew around the world on United Airlines Inflight Music Service, and you'll often hear her tracks on the NPR radio show, *How to Do Everything*. She is the author of two books published by Hal Leonard Books.

Visit Anne's music website at HarpistAnneRoos.com, and check out her gallery of photos while there. Connect with her on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, and LinkedIn.

Anne Roos Photo credit: CiprianPhotography.com"

Anne Roos' lucky shot of Harrison Funk (left)

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