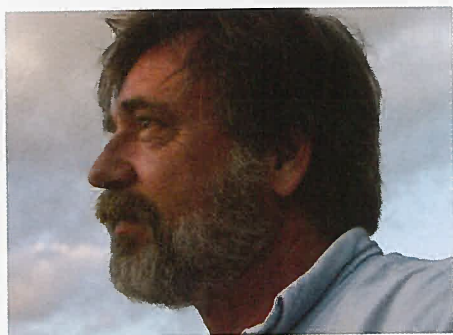


COOL CAREERS



BY CATHY
CASSINOS-CARR



Scott Newton

Music Photographer

Scott Newton didn't plan on becoming a music photographer—it just kind of happened. After graduating from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in English, Newton began snapping pictures of musicians in the local scene and quickly found it to be “easy and fun.” Soon, he found himself in one of the coolest jobs in town as the photographer for Austin City Limits (ACL), a PBS music show that began in 1976 and continues today as the longest-running music series in American television history. In his nearly 40 years at ACL, Newton has focused his lens on some of the most prominent musicians of our time, from legends such as country superstar Willie Nelson and bluesman B.B. King to newer artists such as Kendrick Lamar, Ed Sheeran, and Arcade Fire.

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“I don't care about the money. I care about the art.”

MA: How did you get started in music photography?

SN: In early 1970s Austin, the local music scene was really starting to take off. Soon after I graduated from college I picked up a camera, and [photography] turned out to be something I was good at. I took photos of all kinds of people, but found it especially fun to photograph musicians. I would take pictures at night, and during the day I'd develop the film and print out a few shots. I found I could make a living by carrying around my little briefcase and selling photos.

MA: How did you land a job at Austin City Limits?

SN: I'd been shooting photos around town, including at the Austin Opera House, when a friend told me they were hiring at ACL. I said, “I'll never get a job over there.” But my friend knew the producer, Terry Lickona, and I agreed to meet with him. Initially I was hired to be a photographer's assistant, but eventually they hired me in his spot. I just fell into it, really.

MA: What does it take to be a good photographer?

SN: It's not just one thing. You have to be able to see the truth in the moment, totally [dispose of] your preconceptions and see what's actually there now. To be a good photographer, you have to be able to [capture] the essence of what you see there. You have to be a blank slate.

MA: You've seen camera technology change radically through the decades, from film to digital. What can you tell us about that?

SN: I got to see the revolution and was there for it. I still have my old-school equipment, but that art form is dead and it's not as good as what we have now with digital photography. We can make better images now. I'm a big fan of progress.

MA: What have been the keys to your success?

SN: I don't care about the money. I care about the art I'm putting out. I'm not rich, but I'm comfortable, and I'm successful in the world of photography, I suppose. You don't need money pouring [in]. Do what you love. That rush you get, that creative charge, that's what it's about for me.

MA: Any advice for those who are interested in becoming a music photographer?

SN: These days, access is the most important thing. You have to be able to get close enough [to performers] to get a good shot. Start with small venues where your presence will be less of a disruption. Learn to make the most of onstage lighting, which can allow you to get uniquely sharp, dramatic images. Having said all that, the reward is great. When people are making music, you see their spirit better. To be a music photographer, you take what they give you and you play with that. Don't complain about what you don't have. It will unfold for you. 📷

PHOTO: SCOTT NEWTON