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Performance Artist

Tomasz Rossa catches the big Vegas acts



Who are your clients?

I've worked for Cirque du Soleil, on shows such as *Mystère* and *Criss Angel's Believe*, and the musical *Spamalot*, in Las Vegas, Belgium and Paris. I take pictures of live shows, backstage photos, and portraits. I'm coaching and shooting a show, *The House of Dancing Water*, opening in China this summer.

How did you get your start?

I was a gymnast and diver grow-

ing up in Poland. In 1988 I was on Poland's Olympic diving team, and then I performed for Cirque du Soleil for five years. But in 2001 I began teaching myself digital photography, reading books, taking courses, and attending a workshop. People I worked with knew my interest, so when I was injured in 2002 rehearsing for a show, the marketing director for Celine Dion's "A New Day" invited me to photograph the tour.

Tomasz Rossa, 42, lives in Las Vegas. See his performance photography at www.rossa-photo.com.

What are the photos used for?

For marketing and publicity, souvenir programs, and books. I'm hired by shows directly—for big ones in Vegas there will be two or three other photographers as well.

What gear do you use?

These days, I shoot with a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III. Theater lighting isn't bright, so I use fast lenses: a 50mm f/1.2, an 85mm f/2, and a 70–200mm f/2.8 IS. I shoot at a high ISO, with my aperture wide open. During a show, I can't use a tripod or flash or lights—I work handheld with the stage lighting. For posed shots, I bring my own lights or have the show's lighting director help with a setup.

Where do you shoot from?

The shows are created for the audience, so that's where the best performance shots are going to be. Before I do any shooting I like to see a show a couple of times, seated in different places, to get an idea of how it looks, then take my camera and lenses to four or five performances and shoot from a different place each time.

Do you do a lot of image-editing?

I do a lot of noise reduction. I'll adjust the saturation and contrast to bring out detail. Shooting handheld with shallow depth of field, many photos are blurred—I fix this later with Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 2 and Photoshop CS4.

How do you choose final images?

I prefer the intimate, artistic, slightly out-of-focus images, but clients like graphic, detailed, and sharp images of the big scenes to sell the performance.

Do you do any other photography?

Some portraits, some photos of bands. I gravitate towards action, though—movement is my passion. —Interview by Kathleen Davis