PHOTOGRAPHING SHADOW AND LIGHT

INSIDE THE DRAMATIC LIGHTING TECHNIQUES AND CREATIVE VISION OF PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHER JOEY L.

JOEY L.

FOREWORD BY DAVID HOBBY
This was one of my first real professional jobs with a band, which I did when I was sixteen. I’d been photographing some local bands in Lindsay, Ontario, and building an online portfolio of images. Protest the Hero’s manager found me and hit me up to do this shoot. They were going on tour in Japan and needed images to promote that tour. We produced photographs for a full press kit, which included pieces for editorial submissions, posters, promos, and social network updates.

We staged the shoot in my dad’s paint shop in Lindsay, and the band traveled to me to conduct the project. Back then I did it all—makeup, setup, cleanup, and everything in between. It was a very, very different situation from my current working methodology, which typically involves hopping all over the planet to shoot on location per my clients’ requests.

After I did this shoot, Protest the Hero’s manager took me on as a client and served as my first photo agent. He sent me all over North America photographing metal bands. I worked with him for about a year and then signed on with an agent who works full time with photographers. I mention this because I felt it was a highly productive experience for my career. I like the idea of working with people who can push you toward interesting clients, maybe in nontraditional ways. Whether or not they are proper photo agents doesn’t always matter. Yes, it helps to know the ins and outs of the photography industry, and a good photo agent is a valuable asset. But the most important thing is the collaborative spirit involved when you work with someone who believes in your work.

For this group portrait, I used the same one light setup as for the group fight shot on page 90, but I held a longer exposure to soak up more ambient light. That gave the image a slightly brighter appearance, though still dark and moody overall. I asked the guys to stand in front of me in a group formation, and then turned the outside guys’ shoulders slightly inward to draw the viewer’s eye toward the center of the composition.

1/200 sec. at f/9, ISO 200
MAKING IT HAPPEN

This was a concept I’d wanted to do for a long time—several guys beating the hell out of each other in a dark, moody setting. Protest the Hero’s music is aggressive, a thrash metal style, so the theme fit well.

The subjects needed to have a sweaty, greasy look, so I applied sunflower oil to their skin and had them rub it in lightly. When you sprinkle a little water on top of the sunflower-oiled skin, it beads up like raindrops on the hood of a freshly waxed car. This method works great for creating the look of sweaty skin. It also adds shine and allure to nude models or swimsuit models posing in beach or pool scenes.

To re-create the look of blood, I made a concoction out of food coloring, water, glucose syrup, and sugar. When you mix this solution to a thicker consistency, it works well on people’s skin, since it won’t run as much. A thinner consistency works better when spattering it on walls or other objects. As an added bonus, it doesn’t taste half bad.

In this staged action shot, the guy getting punched leaned back while a fan (set up just out of frame to camera right) blew in his face to flutter his hair and accentuate the sense that he is in motion. We staged a slow-motion swing like in the group fight shot on page 90, cueing the puncher to swing and then the punch recipient to spit out a mouthful of fake blood. The combination of these movements, careful posing, and the fan provide the illusion of impact from the punch.

To light the scene, I placed a studio flash in a softbox to camera right. The shadow sides of their faces are toward the camera. Another flash with a zoom reflector shines from behind and above to illuminate their hair.

CAMERA BAG

- Camera: Canon EOS 5D
- Lenses: 85mm F1.8 lens and 28–135mm F3.5–5.6 lens
- Lights: Two Speedotron flash heads
- Light modifiers: Softbox and Speedotron zoom reflector
- Power source: Speedotron generator plugged into a wall outlet
I created this image to run on the cover packaging for a single called "Blood Meat." I lit the scene by placing a flash head modified by a zoom reflector high and to camera left, pointing down toward the band to produce harsh shadows. The single bulb that’s visible in the picture only provides ambience; there’s no noticeable light that significantly impacts the image. To produce the look of a fight, I asked one guy to swing slowly above the other’s face, and at the right moment, the guy on the ground would spit out a mouthful of fake blood. I cued my subjects in this action, instructing one to start swinging slowly and then telling the other to spit as I hit the shutter button.

1/200 sec. at f/9, ISO 200

After the group and staged action shots, I made individual portraits of all the band members. This is my favorite of the bunch. I lit the scene with one studio flash in a softbox, positioned high and to camera left, aimed down at the subject at roughly a 45-degree angle. After applying makeup and fake blood, I posed him to look serious.

1/200 sec. at f/11, ISO 50