

Book 2

22 Years of Music Photography

Jared Polin



I decided to do a very 2024 thing. Ask AI for help writing a paragraph explaining why I created audio commentary for every photo in the book. What it came back with was so on point, that I had to use it.

Here's the prompt I gave Claude.ai.

"I am looking to write a paragraph for my Photography book that explains why I created audio commentary for every photo in the book. People always want to know more about an image. Please add a line directing people to scan the QR Code or head on over to FroKnowsPhoto.com/book2 to access the audiobook and other content."

The Results

"Photography captures a moment, but behind every image lies a deeper story waiting to be told. By including audio commentary with each photograph in this book, I invite you into the complete narrative—sharing the subtle details that might otherwise go unnoticed, revealing the emotional resonance that moved me to press the shutter, and offering insights into the technical choices that shaped each composition.

Just as a docent enriches your museum experience by sharing the context behind artworks, these audio narratives transform each photograph from a silent moment into a rich, multi-sensory experience. They bridge the gap between what the eye perceives and what the heart understands.

To access the audio commentary and exclusive bonus content that brings these images to life, simply scan the QR code or visit FroKnowsPhoto.com/book2."

I couldn't have said it better myself...

Foreword Robert Costa



Robert Costa with John Mayer at 2004 Pennsbury High School prom.

People often say they have big dreams. Jared Polin, however, has always seen them.

For over two decades, I've been honored to witness the development of one of the great photographers of our time. I've seen him grow from being a skinny kid with big dreams to being a skilled (and still skinny) craftsman.

On every project, he brings the same fiery, independent spirit I first saw long ago as he roamed grungy concert venues in Philadelphia. It's a sort of magic, this genuine curiosity about people and the world. He doesn't just take assignments. Instead, he takes opportunities to see dreams unfold before him, be they musical or political, and capture them.

This book is a compendium of his excellence and with Jared, it's always the work that tells the true story. While he has become a high-profile character with his 'fro and wit at shoots, at his core he is the man behind the lens, helping all of us better see our world by seeing it from his perspective.

Paging through this collection, it's stunning to see the breadth of his work. So many topics, shows, issues, and people. The running thread is that Jared seems to have been everywhere. Backstage here, backstage there. In the dressing rooms, the waiting rooms, the loading docks, on the stages.

Jared has been there because people trust him. They trust him to see them for who they really are, beyond the headlines and the album covers. If he's there, there is an immediate sense of trust that he's there for you, not him.

I know because he shot a seminal moment in my own life: the 2004 Pennsbury High School prom, where John Mayer surprised my class with a short acoustic set. Looking back at those images today, it's so evident that Jared caught both the innocence and electricity of that special night.

For Jared, it was one of many such nights in that period. He'd often only be allowed to shoot three songs at the beginning of a concert, crouching beneath the stage, and make the most of it. There is urgency in these photographs that brings you right back to these shows, many of them taking place in a time before social media took over. Before we all became amateur photographers with our phones, Jared was the one in the pit trying to get as many photos as possible before being ushered out.

When you see these images, you might think, "This is unlike anything I've seen before." Well, you'd be right. Jared always went left when others went right. When people were told to not go backstage, he'd find a way to go there. When he was told "no access," he found a way in.

All access, all heart, all dreams.

Robert Costa is a journalist and author based in Washington, D.C. He currently serves as the chief election and campaign correspondent for CBS News. Previously, he was a longtime reporter at *The Washington Post*, moderator and managing editor of "Washington Week" on PBS, and a political analyst for NBC News and MSNBC. He also co-wrote *Peril* (2021) with Bob Woodward, which was a # 1 *New York Times* bestseller.

The first section of the book is dedicated to my early work in concert photography. Professional digital cameras were available in the early 2000's, but there was no way I could afford one. That's why many of the following images you're about to see were shot on film. Some are good, some are not so good, but we all had to start somewhere.

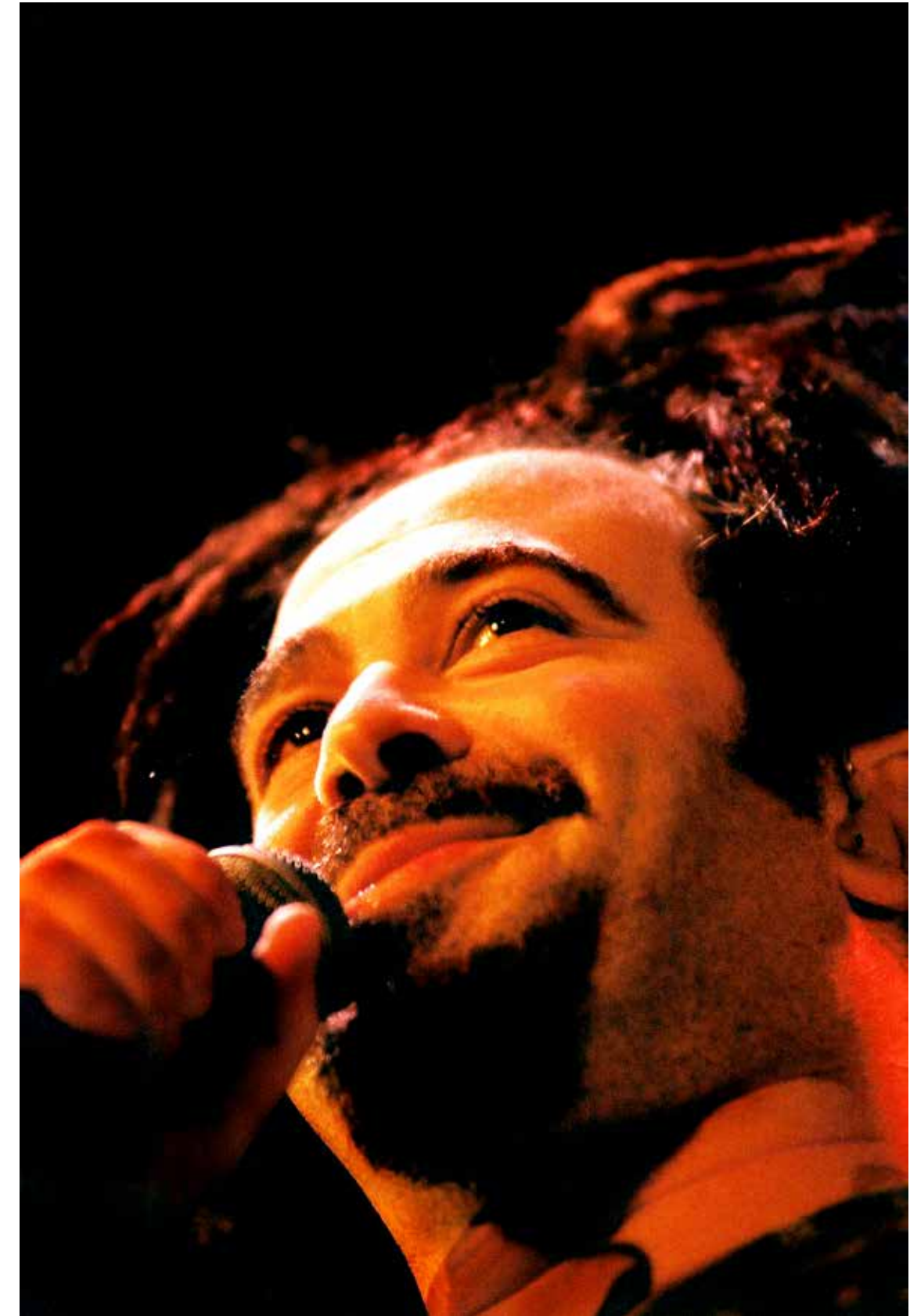
Before we jump into my early work, I want to give you some background into how I got into concert photography. From my early days of shooting, through high school and college, my focus was sports photography. All I wanted to do was shoot sports. I had a season credential to shoot every Flyers home game, and I was even able to shoot some Phillies and Sixers games.

But in 2000, while still in college, *Almost Famous* was released. And before I left the theater, my direction in photography had been shifted. I no longer cared about shooting that next Flyers game. All I wanted to do was tour with a band...and so the journey began.

The First Show: October 12, 2002, Counting Crows, Liacouras Center, Philadelphia PA. This first show was a memorable show for so many reasons. One, it was my first time in the pit. Two, it was the first time I encountered the "3-song rule." And three, I had no idea what I was doing.

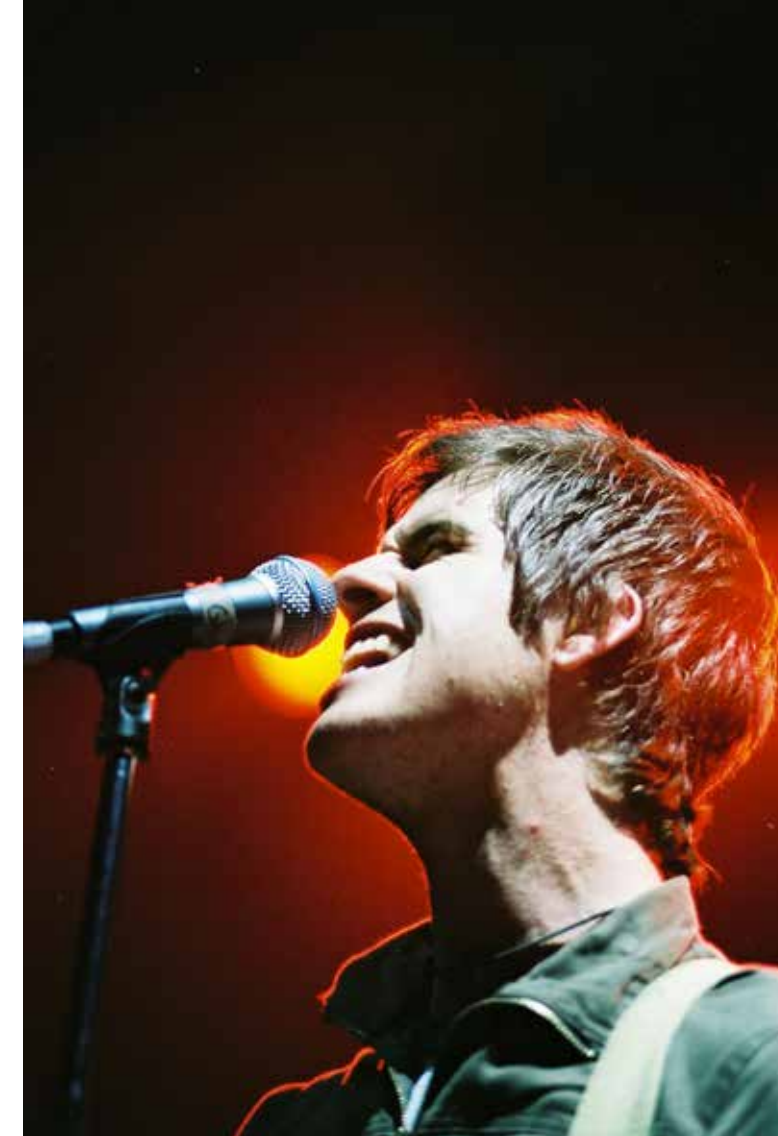
The good news? I got one photo I liked. The bad news? I shot something like 8 rolls of film to get it. Remember when I mentioned the 3-song rule? For those that don't know what that is, you get to shoot the first three songs and then you're out. I had always thought a photo pass would get you access to shoot the entire show, boy was I wrong. But as fate would have it, the first song they played was Mrs Potter's Lullaby, which so happens to be almost 8 minutes long! It turns out, on this particular night, three songs was plenty.

Here's a little secret: the Counting Crows were not the first band I shot. That distinction goes to their opener that night, the Graham Colton Band, as seen on the next page.



There's a reason these images of the Graham Colton Band are smaller, they just aren't very good, but they are important to my journey. We all have to start somewhere, and my concert photography journey started that night.

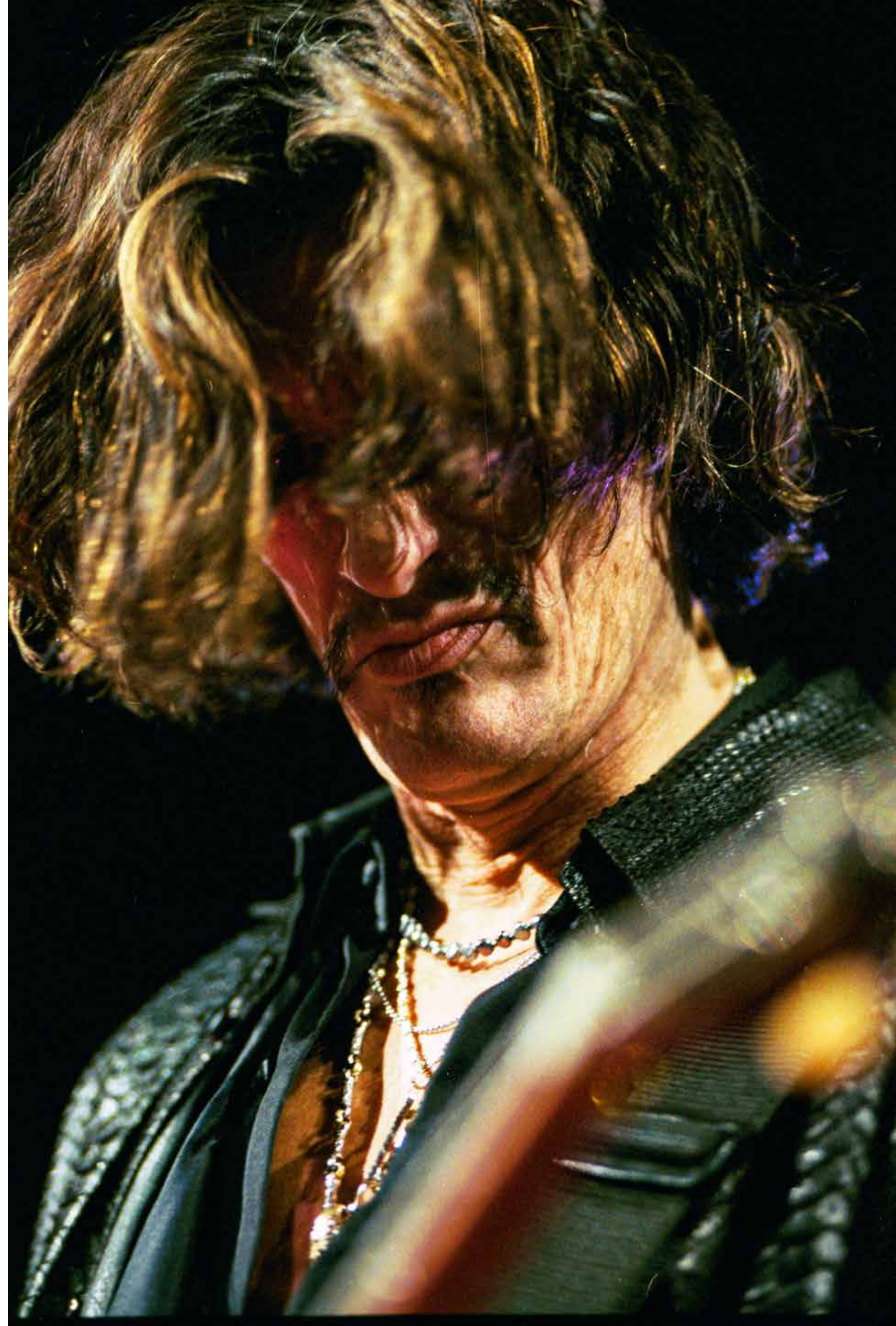
Something funny happened after Graham's set. I walked backstage without being stopped, approached their dressing room door, and knocked. Graham answered, and I told him who I was and that I wanted to leave that night to go on the road with them. Did I know what I was doing, no, but as my parents taught me, what's the worst they can say? No. But what if they say yes. This time around, Graham let me know the van was full, but I should stay in touch. And any time they made a stop near Philly, a photo pass with my name was always waiting.

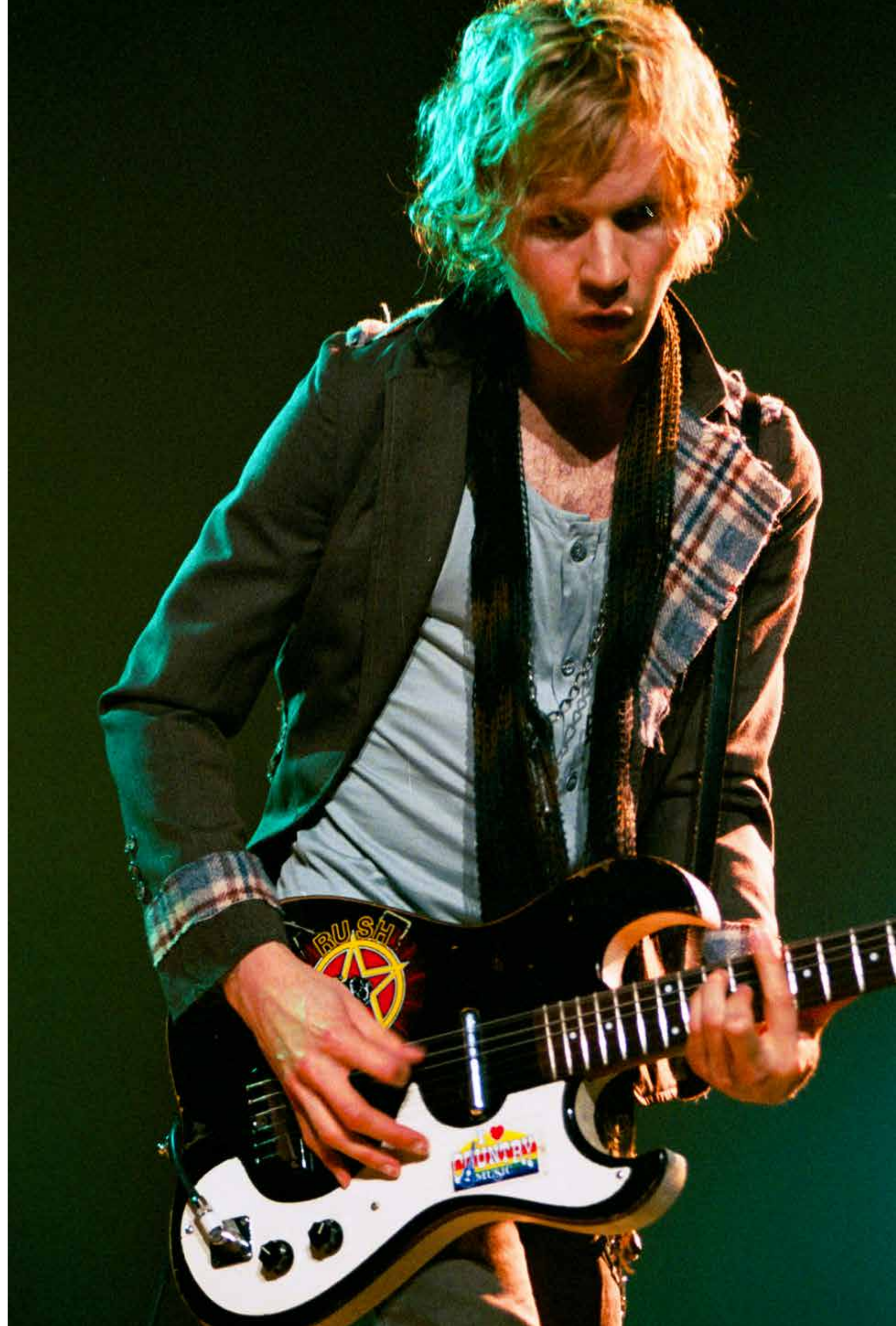


The Early Work: Starting in 2002, if there was a show coming through Philly, I requested a photo pass. You see, back in the early 2000's, there weren't a billion music blogs or people with cameras taking up space in the pit. You needed some sort of affiliation and I used a local community college newspaper as mine. Nevermind that I didn't actually go to that community college. Later, when I was freelancing for *Rolling Stone Magazine*, passes were easier to come by, but I'll get to that shortly. For now, enjoy some of my early concert photos.









Rolling Stone Magazine: "I'll call you if I need you."

In sports photography, the ultimate goal was to get your photos in *Sports Illustrated*. In the music world, it was *Rolling Stone* or bust. So how would I find my way into *Rolling Stone*? Well, that started at Barnes and Noble in the magazine section. Back in the early 2000's it was much easier to drive to the book store to find the information I was looking for, then attempt to look it up online, or whatever online consisted of in 2000. I was searching for a few things: the photo editor's name, and the magazine's phone number. I found both.

Now I can't remember if I used the house phone or a cell phone, but that's not important. What matters is that I dialed up *Rolling Stone* and asked for the photo editor...I don't recall if I got her on the first try or not, but at some point we connected. I told her who I was, where I am, what I shoot and that I would like to shoot for *Rolling Stone*. "I'll call you if I need you!" she replied. After I hung up, I realized I never gave her my information. I'd been blown off by *Rolling Stone*, but I didn't give up. Nope, I kept shooting as many shows that came to town. About 6 months later I picked up the phone, called *Rolling Stone*, asked for the Photo Editor...again...and this time I was met with a cheery hello....IT WAS A NEW PHOTO EDITOR! She asked me to email over some photos and said if something was coming through Philly that she needed coverage on, she'd let me know.

Months later, my AOL chimed- You've got mail!- and I saw an email from the photo editor. Norah Jones was coming to play in Philly, and I was tasked with photographing the show. I had an assignment- my first assignment with *Rolling Stone*.

The venue was the Mann Center in Philadelphia, and it's not the most photographer-friendly venue, as I would come to find out. Most venues have a pit area between the stage and the fans, not at the Mann Center. I was forced to stand at a distance many rows back, off to the left-hand side, with a view of Norah's back. Not ideal for making a good first impression.

So how did I end up getting the shot? Prior to the show, I was tasked with interviewing and taking headshots of a few fans. I spoke with one of the fans

about the difficult position I was put in to get the shot. He let me know he had an amazing seat, and if I wanted to shoot in it for a song, he would let me.

The show starts, I'm getting nothing from my position. The fan from earlier came over, handed me his ticket and I sit in his seat and start shooting. After a minute or two, I head back out the row where I was met by the media handler who says, "you know you're not supposed to be there." All I know, is I needed to get the shot, and I got the shot.

But wait, there's more. A few days before the show, I'd asked the editor if it would be possible to get a backstage pass to get some candid images after the show. She told me it wouldn't be possible. Fast forward to after the show, I dialed up the tour manager. I was given their number just in case I ran into an issue with my pass. I figured: I've got nothing to lose, lets call him up. He answered. I told him it's Jared from *Rolling Stone* and I would like to know if I can come back stage to capture candid images of Norah. What he said next shocked me: "I'll send you a pass up, and you can come down and ask her." Back stage is downstairs at the Mann center. So I was taken downstairs into a room with a lot of people and the tour manager brings Norah over. I introduced myself and said I'd love to capture some candid images, to which she said "I really don't like photos"....and I followed up with, "all I need is a few, you wont even know I'm here." She agreed and we ended up in a small room off to the side where Gillian Welch, the opening act, and a few others were hanging out. There they went on to jam and sing some folk songs. I fired off a little less than one full roll before thanking Norah and letting her know I was done. I recall her saying something about being done already, and I reminded her I said I would be quick. I grabbed my bag and found my way to the back stage exit. I remember feeling accomplished as I walked past the idling tour buses on the way to my car.

After having the negatives processed, scanned and if I recall correctly, mailing a CD of images to my editor, she called. She said, "how did you get back stage?" My answer was simple: I asked. She was blown away I was able to get the access, since she wasn't able to get it approved initially. It always comes back to: "what's the worst they can say?" Always try.

