

WETHERBY CAMERA CLUB

Photographing Musical Theatre & Performers

A Practical Guide for Tonight's Session

TONIGHT'S OPPORTUNITY

Tonight gives us two quite different photographic opportunities.

For those with more experience, it is a chance to **use and develop skills we have previously learned**, perhaps trying a different approach or pushing ourselves a little further.

For anyone less experienced, or photographing performers for the first time, it is an opportunity to **try things out, experiment and see what works**. You don't need to master everything tonight — simply pick a few ideas from the sections below and have a go.

We will be working in two very different situations:

LIVE ACTION ON STAGE

Here, the performers and the lighting are largely outside our control. The stage lighting has been designed primarily **for the benefit of the audience and the performance** — creating atmosphere, mood and drama — rather than to make photography easy.

CONTROLLED PORTRAITS

Here, we have much more control. The performer can be posed, the lighting can be adjusted and we have time to consider the photograph before pressing the shutter.

The challenge is to make the most of both situations.

1. LIVE PERFORMANCE

LOOK FOR THE STORY

Don't simply photograph someone standing on stage.

Look for:

- Expression and emotion
- Interaction between performers
- Reactions and body language
- Interesting gestures
- Movement
- Moments of drama or humour
- The relationship between characters
- Interesting light and shadow

Sometimes the **reaction of the person listening** can make a better photograph than the person speaking.

WATCH — ANTICIPATE — CAPTURE

Watch what the performers are doing rather than simply reacting to it.

Look for the sequence:

Turn → Pause → Line → Reaction → Movement

The strongest photograph may occur during the brief pause or reaction.

Take short bursts when appropriate, but don't simply hold the shutter down. **Watch the performance and anticipate the moment.**

CAMERA SETTINGS — KEEP IT SIMPLE

As a starting point:

Shutter: around **1/250 sec**

Aperture: as wide as practical, around **f/2.8–f/4**

ISO: Auto ISO is a useful option

Focus: Continuous AF / AF-C where appropriate

File: RAW if available

Adjust according to the situation:

- Slower movement — 1/125–1/200 sec
- Normal movement — around 1/250 sec
- Fast movement — 1/320–1/500 sec

Don't be afraid of high ISO.

A little noise is usually preferable to a blurred photograph.

COMPOSITION

Try more than simply putting the performer in the centre.

Experiment with:

- Tight portraits
- Three-quarter views
- Full-length images
- Wider shots showing the stage
- Groups of performers
- Vertical and horizontal formats
- Details such as hands, costumes and props

Leave space where a performer is **looking or moving** when it helps the composition.

WATCH THE EDGES

Before pressing the shutter, quickly check for:

Cables • Bags • Lights • Stray limbs • Distracting objects

And remember:

FLASH MUST NOT BE USED DURING THE LIVE PERFORMANCE.

2. CONTROLLED PORTRAITS

A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PHOTOGRAPHIC CHALLENGE

Here we have the opportunity to slow down and think about the photograph.

Unlike the stage lighting, which is designed to create the atmosphere of the performance, our lighting is being used **specifically to photograph the performer.**

We can control:

- The position of the performer
- The lighting
- The background
- Our camera position
- The composition
- How many photographs we take

THINK CHARACTER — NOT JUST ACTOR

Try to capture something about the character or personality.

Consider:

- Expression

- Eyes
- Pose
- Costume
- Props
- Light and shadow

Rather than simply asking the performer to smile, give them something to think about or a character to portray.

TRY DIFFERENT PORTRAITS

- Head and shoulders
- Three-quarter length
- Full length
- Looking towards the camera
- Looking away
- More relaxed
- More dramatic

Try changing your position and focal length rather than taking everything from exactly the same viewpoint.

Above all, make sure the eyes are sharp.

3. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO TRY

You don't need to try everything.

Pick three or four ideas and experiment.

LIVE STAGE

- ☐ A strong expression
- ☐ A performer interacting with another
- ☐ A reaction rather than the main action

- ☐ A wider image showing the stage
- ☐ A tight character portrait
- ☐ Movement deliberately frozen
- ☐ Movement deliberately blurred
- ☐ An unusual viewpoint or composition

CONTROLLED PORTRAIT

- ☐ A traditional portrait
- ☐ A dramatic portrait using light and shadow
- ☐ A full-length character photograph
- ☐ A portrait using costume or props
- ☐ A different angle or viewpoint
- ☐ A photograph with strong background separation
- ☐ A group portrait

THE GOLDEN RULES

LOOK

Don't just photograph what is in front of you. **Look for the moment.**

EXPRESSION

A powerful expression can make an ordinary photograph memorable.

LIGHT

Work with the light. On stage, it is part of the performance; in the portrait session, we can control it.

COMPOSITION

Don't automatically put your subject in the middle.

TIMING

Anticipate what is about to happen.

SHARPNESS

Get the important part of the photograph sharp.

EXPERIMENT

Try something different. You may surprise yourself.

AND FINALLY...

Don't spend the whole evening looking at the back of your camera!

Take the photograph → **Check briefly** → Adjust → **Try again.**

There is no single "correct" setting or approach.

The evening is about **experimenting, trying something different, comparing results and, most importantly, enjoying photographing people.**