

AN INTERVIEW WITH

RICHARD CALMES

LET US BEGIN BY SAYING “THANK YOU, RICHARD” FOR ALLOWING US THIS INTRUSION INTO YOUR BUSY LIFE AND FOR TAKING THE TIME TO ANSWER OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR WONDERFULLY CRAFTED IMAGES.

*F*ather, husband, architect, businessman and photographer, Richard Calmes is a man who has passions that run deep for his family, his work and for the world of dance. When these passions found a purpose through his photographs, they took on a life of their own that did not exist before. Richard captures the essence of the art of dance but more importantly, through his photography, he creates works of art that inspire us and provides us with a greater appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the dancers. We applaud Richard and the selfless work he does for the dance troupes of his home state of Georgia, and we hope you will to.

PC: What inspired you to pick up your first camera?

Calmes: When I was in Vietnam in 1968-69, I became friends with our “combat photographer”. I was fascinated by the darkroom process. I bought my first camera, a Canon FTQL at the PX and the combat photographer taught me the fundamentals. I then started going out with him on trips into town and on missions in the country to photograph construction work. Six months later I took over his Combat Engineer job after he went home.

I am a registered Architect and I am very much a visual person. I spend many hours on the drawing board doing detailed work in ink. The technology and process of photography has always been fascinating to me and remains so today with computers. It does not bother me to spend all day in CS3 working on images.

PC: Who has influenced your photography over the years? That could be other notable photographers, it could be family or friends. It could be other artists.

Calmes: As an Architect, I had a great appreciation for Architectural Photography. I was never very good at it and never had a large format camera with swings and tilts. But I seemed to know my way around buildings. As far as mentors goes, Ansel Adams had a great effect on me. He was another practitioner in the technology of photography. He invented the ZONE system and he perfected darkroom techniques to produce prints of unmatched tonality and beauty. He would spend a day or more on just one print. Were he alive, he would be pushing CS3 to its limits because that is what he did!



CAROLINE LAUBACHER - BY RICHARD CALMES

My most prized photo possession is a signed print “Clearing Winter Storm”. He took the image in 1944, the year I was born and printed it in 1959 for his portfolio.

As for Ballet Photographers, Lois Greenfield

<http://loisgreenfield.com/galleries/index.html>

is an inspiration for her studio work. And Marty Sohl

<http://www.martysohlphoto.com>

is an inspiration for her performance work.



FROM THE "BALLET CLASS" - BY RICHARD CALMES

PC: Are you a formally trained photographer or are you a product of self-education?

Calmes: I am a formally trained Architect and a self-taught photographer. Frank Lloyd Wright called architecture, "the mother art" and there is a lot to this. It is a way of seeing and creating and I guess I automatically apply this to photography. I have always hungered for knowledge on any subject I was interested in and so I have always read magazines and own many coffee table picture books. I have attended several photoshop classes but never a class on photography.

PC: When looking through your collection of images, one can't help but notice you have quite a number of galleries dedicated to ballet and dance. How did you get involved with photographing dancers?

Calmes: My daughter danced! From the age of 7 to the age of 19 after she had danced professional for one year she quit and went to college. Having a child that is making dance her life involves the whole family. I would take her to class and sit and wait and watch...for years. Soon I got into video and started taping her. Turns out the artistic director liked my videography and soon I became a regular fixture. Shooting rehearsals for review by the dancers and choreographers. And shooting performances. I began to learn a lot about dance and to anticipate choreography

and follow a dancer close-up. During this period, I took very few still photographs.

I learned a lot about the dance world and how difficult a profession dance is. Anyone may be able to sing (opera aside) and become a hit, but to dance requires daily training and work...hard, painful, injury prone work over a lifetime. If you look at my galleries on dance, you will see a lot of space devoted to the work of dance: Class and rehearsals and backstage. This is kind of my mission to show the world, the 90% of the iceberg of dance that no one ever sees. The work behind the graceful position.

PC: Your dance photos are often in the studio but you also photograph dancers in the theatre or on location, such as, a farm. What challenges have you had to overcome at these locations & what advice would you give to others attempting to follow in your footsteps?

Calmes: My studio photography is "studio" in the sense that I set up at the ballet studio. This is home to the dancers and they feel comfortable there. The studios are large with a good floor for jumping and mirrors so they can see themselves. Also this is where the costumes are!



FROM "CHOREOGRAPHING A NEW PIECE" - BY RICHARD CALMES



FROM "BABY BALLERINA CLASS - BY RICHARD CALMES

We constantly change costumes and mix and match parts and pieces. Challenges are transporting all of the stuff and setting up. It usually takes 1 or 1 1/2 hours to set up and test everything. Nowadays, I connect my camera to a laptop with a 17" true black screen. Images go directly to the hard drive and are reviewed in Adobe RAW about 5 seconds after shooting. Outdoor shoots require permission. The farm shoot required dealing with the county officials and everyone involved signed releases to the county. The Kings Plow shoot required renting the space for a day. They were so pleased that they allowed me to shoot again free.

Outdoor shoots by their very nature are challenging because of the weather and lighting. For the farm shoot, I scouted the place at all times of day to determine when I would shoot where and in which direction. It takes lots of planning. Planning is my thing so I do not mind it at all. Then there is staying on schedule as the shoot progresses. I totally forgot to go to one setting that would have been great. Also for an outdoor shoot, you need assistants. I had reflectors and skrimms that had to be held. I also used some flash when things got desperate. So I had several assistants. Dancers needed a place to change so SUV's became changing vehicles and costume vehicles. I can easily see why a trailer would be useful!

I have had many PBasers ask my advice on shooting dance. I have tried to help each one. Usually, there is a recital or performance coming up. I have seen the results of many and they have done well! Shooting dance is a challenge for me each time. That challenge is what drives me. As long as I can continue to challenge myself, I will push it as far as I can.

PC: Are there any particular camera settings you typically use in each of the three location types? For example, what shutter speed do you try to aim for in each lighting situation?

Calmes: My main lens is the Canon 70-200 f2.8L IS (and I use a Canon 5D). I use it for 95% of my dance work. For class and rehearsals, it allows me to use DOF to separate and define subjects. It is a great lens for performance shooting as well. For class and rehearsals, I usually set shutter speed no slower than 1/160 at ISO 1600. I shoot only RAW. If a shot is

"I have not taken any money for all of the dance images I have shot. I do it for the incredible challenge and to help get their story in front of the world"

underexposed, I can usually save it in CS3. Same goes for performance. I shot 80 different ballet companies in one week and I shot all at these settings. I would only change the shutter speed as the stage lighting changed.

See http://www.pbase.com/rcalmes/rda_festival and my best performance shots http://www.pbase.com/rcalmes/festival_highlights.

For studio work, I set set camera on manual at ISO 100-200. Light is varied with my strobes. I still use the 70-200 lens because I like the perspective I get... and it is easier to keep the dancers in the backdrop when you re not right on top of them.



FROM "MY FAVORITES" - BY RICHARD CALMES



FROM "BALLET CLASS" - BY RICHARD CALMES

PC: Are there any challenges you'd like to pursue and have not yet had the opportunity? In other words, are there aspects of photography that you have wanted to try and have not yet done so?

Calmes: I am planning a trip to the west coast to shoot LA professional dancers. I want to shoot on the beach at sunset. The dancers will be in the water and jumping out of the water. I hope to have several evenings but the good light will not last long so we will have to work fast. I want to use reflectors/flash so they are not totally in silhouette but then I will do some silhouettes as well. This will require permits and other as yet unknown challenges.

PC: Where do you think your future lies in photography? Where do you hope your career in photography will take you?

Calmes: I want to shoot more professional dancers, not just students. This requires slowly building a reputation and not stepping on the toes of established photographers. I would like to shoot American Ballet Theatre dancers someday.

PC: Finally, is there anything else you like to say to the readers?

Calmes: Yes, the only money is to shoot students and recitals and there the parents are the purchasers. And there is no challenge to me in this. There is very little or no money in shooting dancers the way I do. Ballet companies, even the very best, struggle to survive. I have not taken any money for all of the dance images I have shot. I do it for the incredible challenge and to help get their story in front of the world.

WE HOPE THAT THIS INTERVIEW HELPS RICHARD GET THE STORY OUT THERE THAT NEEDS TO BE TOLD. THESE DANCERS DESERVE OUR ADMIRATION AND SUPPORT. THEY WORK HARD AND HAVE EARNED IT.

To view more of Richard Calmes's work, visit his gallery at: <http://www.pbase.com/rcalmes>