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Famous Photographer Presentation: Evan Mattingly

Music is an inherently important part of human society. Details about the progression of the world is held within the confines of melodies and notes. A song can define a whole era, or movement, or conjure a youthful memory.

Photographs of the performers who share music are equally important. The imagery, much like the music, documents the current culture.

Evan Mattingly's experience documenting musicians gives him the opportunity to be a part of history. He works with high-profile clients like the Universal Music Group and the country music duo The Brothers Osborne. The freelance photographer's journey has also given him opportunities to work in a variety of other industries. Mattingly's wide range of experience and industrious attitude made him an excellent candidate for the famous photographer interview project.

Although I am most familiar with Mattingly's concert photography, his experience expands into different genres. His portfolio includes portraits, commercial work, and videography. The attitude of not limiting himself to one type of photography was something he adopted in college.

Ultimately, Mattingly enjoys documentary visual journalism the most. He says that "...short docs are my bread and butter."

"Whether I'm shooting concerts or weddings that's what my style always falls back on," Mattingly stated.

The greatest joy Mattingly finds in documentary work is being a “fly on the wall”. When he shows a client a video or photographs, Mattingly thinks the highest compliment is to be told “...they didn’t even see him there.”

In addition to being familiar with a wide range of photography styles, Mattingly also worked in a variety of environments. Some of his previous experience includes time at news organizations and advertising agencies.

Mattingly believes that “...there’s good things to every industry and every nook and cranny about photography.” For example, feature finding is one of his favorite aspects of working at a newspaper.

However, freelancing is special to Mattingly. “Freelance is more fulfilling because it feels more like your own,” he said.

Mattingly’s last formal position was at Welling Media. He knew that he was going to leave that job. Mattingly tried to learn everything he could about getting clients while he was still employed at the advertising agency.

Mattingly is now fulling into his free-lancing venture. He admits that some weeks are scary, but he adopts the mentality that this is the only possibility for him. Mattingly says he trusts the process and the network he built.

“I’m going to take a leap and trust the people who are my clients now will get me clients and keep giving me work,” is how Mattingly described his mantra.

Mattingly emphasized that a huge part of maintaining his client base in his freelance career is following up. He says if he is not editing or shooting, he is sending out emails or texts or scheduling meetings to get coffee. Similarly, Mattingly advised that a photographer can expand their client base by being open to odd jobs.

“Sometimes the paycheck at the end of the day is worth less than the relationships that you can keep after that,” Mattingly stated.

This ideology helped Mattingly get a foothold in the music industry. Mattingly expressed that a lot of his connections started in college. The president of his fraternity’s girlfriend had ties to the Country Music Television Network. That connection led him to one of his first clients American Idol contestant Lauren Alaina. Mattingly said that maintaining that relationship and good timing eventually lead to a collaboration with the Grammy award-winning country music duo The Brothers Osborne.

Mattingly documented the brothers’ 2022 tour. He describes photographing concerts as “exhilarating”. One of the most memorable experiences in Mattingly’s career was being flown out to the Michigan music festival Faster Horses. He expressed his awe at photographing The Brothers Osborne in front of a crowd of 40,000 people. “It was a pinch myself moment that my camera brought me here,” Mattingly explained.

Mattingly expressed that it is important to set the camera down in moments like the Faster Horses. “We love to run into rooms at take a million photos,” he said, but the best photos and connection come from patience and knowing when not to shoot.

Mattingly’s journey with photography and The Brothers Osborne would not have happened if he stuck to his original plan in college. His intention was to pursue a major in architecture, but he quickly determined the math involved in that degree was not for him. He investigated the potential possibility of becoming an English teacher. But that avenue also did not satisfy Mattingly.

“I was going through this phase of what do I want to do with my life,” Mattingly stated.

Mattingly began experimenting with photography during this time. His first camera was a GoPro. He documented his life as a college student

Over winter break, Mattingly decided to pursue his love of documentary photography. He searched for programs containing the words “photo” at Western Kentucky University, the school he attended. Photojournalism was the only degree to show up.

His love of art and storytelling encouraged him to pursue the major. Mattingly entered the program of “no Plan B”. He expressed that the only other option was to go home, and he was not ready to give up on college. He would “figure it out.”

Mattingly began registering for classes. There was only one seat available in the introduction to photojournalism class.

“After I learned that there was one spot left, I knew this was meant to be,” Mattingly said.

At the beginning of his time in the WKU photojournalism program, Mattingly admitted he felt intimidated. He felt behind in experience and thought his gear was inadequate. Mattingly was willing to rise to the challenges he encountered in the program. Eventually, he saw the situation as a learning opportunity. “You’re never going to have the opportunity again to have all those photographers and liked minded people in the same room.”

His original struggle with determining a path ultimately Mattingly to the beginnings of an exciting career. Mattingly hopes that his work brings joy to others, especially to the fans of the artists that he documents.

Mattingly also hopes that his work shares different perspectives and awareness. One of the organizations that Mattingly works for is the American Heart Association. He helps create the organization gala’s videos for fundraising. Mattingly said that the American Heart Association raised over a half a million dollars last year.

“It’s odd to think that videos that we edit on our laptops that are put out into the world bring back so much,” Mattingly said. “Where else can we make this much of an impact?”

Evan Mattingly has an expansive and successful photojournalism career. Interviewing him provided insight into his journey. Mattingly’s unique experience of getting close to famous musicians highlights the importance of maintaining relationships. Learning Mattingly’s history also showed me that a photographer can start anywhere as long as they are determined.

Mattingly’s drive, talent, and ability to make connections will undoubtedly place his work in history.