

***Lots of Images, But What Now?***  
**by**  
***Bill Black***

I am reasonably sure that all of us have an abundance of photos that we have in our possession, be they in slide trays, file cabinets, still in their processing boxes or somewhere on our computers and associated storage mediums. These images can run into the hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands. So, what should we do with them? One thing we can do, especially if they are of vacations and field trips, is to create a show.

As a preface I will state that there are no right or wrong ways to prepare a projection show. However, there might be better or worse ways. Your personal writing and speaking styles largely will dictate the qualities and character of your show together with your photographic style. A guiding principle very well might be *inform and entertain your audience*.

If you do a good job of putting a show together, the whole show will be greater than the simple sum of its parts, that is, the individual images. Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen. The flashing images on the screen may be exciting by themselves, but when put together they often put people to sleep or at least cause them to lose interest.

Putting images together effectively requires that you think visually. You must be able to see all of a sequence at once. Too many shows are simply arranged by moving images from box to tray or digital image medium from camera to

computer in the same order. This leads to dull shows.

### **Prelude**

A method I have found extremely useful, saving time and aggravation, is to plan a show *before* going on a trip. First I research the subject by studying maps and reading articles, brochures and books. Nowadays the Internet is an excellent way to research a subject. Then I plan the itinerary to *generally* determine where and when I want to go, what I want to see, why I want to see it, and how to get there. The next step is to outline a script followed by planning general shots such as overviews of locations and signs; sequences; and local color, for example, people, animals, crafts. These steps are called "story boarding" and will minimize your having to say after you get home, "If I had only taken a picture of (fill in the blanks)." This planning also might help you to determine equipment, film, storage devices, etc. you will want to take with you, especially if you are weight-sensitive such as when traveling in foreign lands.

When making your journey keep a log of your shots (especially where they were taken and names of people you photograph - it adds a more personal touch to your show), take notes or use a small tape recorder. Pick up local literature, and, finally, be observant of local costumes and customs.

### **The Beginning**

Again, a method I find useful is to mark my images, or at least the boxes in the case of film, as soon as

I have them processed. Alternatively, for digital images I place specific subject matter in individual folders using a program such as iPhoto®. Then I begin to write the first cut of the script. To see all the images in a sequence after your trip, you need a slide sorter or a software program such as Adobe's Photoshop Lightroom® and Apple's Aperture®. A large sorter allows me to view all my images for a normal full-length show at one time.

Once you have a sorting device set up, you can really go to work. Lay all your images out on it. Look the pictures over but don't try to put them into categories yet. Let the images sink into your mind before trying to squeeze them into predetermined patterns. If you have trouble doing this, mix them up so they are no longer in their original order.

Get rid of poor images, even if you spent a whole afternoon trying to capture some of them. A few bad images can drag down a good show no matter how much work you put into them.

Also, I have found over the years that audiences like to know where they are visually being taken. Hence, a simple map near the beginning of the show is helpful, and supplemental maps are useful if the location changes.

### **The Theme**

Now start to think about what you want the show to do. It is important to have a clear idea of where you want the presentation to go, or more specifically, where do you want to take your audience. A brief outline or

a simple statement of purpose will keep you on track; this will be your *theme*.

Certain images almost beg to be put next to others. Do it. Don't worry if the photographs are in chronological order or even from the same location. Look for images that complement each other and say something special because they are next to each other. As long as you are honest (exceptions being for fantasy or humor), what works visually is more important than anything else. Don't be bound by when, where or how you actually took the photos. You are putting together a show, not a chronological history of your last photographic adventure.

### **The Structure**

Now you can begin to work on the structure of the show. Structure is a great word for this, for you are building something visual that holds the show together and gives it a direction. Your brief outline or theme statement is important to keep the structure strong and coherent. Structure cannot be built simply by stringing together a lot of super photographs. Your audience will view photographs as being good or bad in relation to the others. Use average photos as counterpoints to stronger images. In other words, every image should not be an award winner, but should be supportive of the theme thereby adding to the story.

Rearrange photos and groups of photos so that there is a definite relationship between them. Look for an attention-building beginning and a definite ending. These are important.

A good beginning can really stimulate interest. A good ending doesn't leave the audience hanging. In fact, one of the adages of speech-giving is to tell your audience what you're going to say, say it, then summarize what you said. The same can be applied to show-giving.

Think about how you will get from the beginning to end. Look for natural transitions - bridges or links that allow a smooth change or make sense of a sharp change. If your audience has to struggle to know why the projections are changing, you've lost them.

Short sequences are important, too. How these sequences are tied together affects the overall structure, but how each sequence is put together affects audience interest. Variety is important if you want to keep the attention of your audience. Different camera angles, lighting techniques and shooting distances (from long shot to close-up for example) all help to create variety. If neighboring images look similar, be careful how you use them.

To be able to use variety, however, you must have it with the camera. Too many photographers shoot everything at a middle distance from the subject and at eye level. Make sure the variety you use makes sense, though. Variety that doesn't is disruptive and makes the show choppy. Too much variety can even be distracting.

Contrast also is quite effective. Variety and contrast are not the same things. Contrast is a big difference in neighboring images and can really jolt the viewer. For this

reason, it must be used cautiously and sparingly or the show will become very uneven. Use contrast any time you want the audience to really notice a change - in mood, pace, subject or time. Contrasts that work well include dull to bright colors, warm to cold colors, light to dark images, super close-up to long shot and sharp changes in subject.

By this time your show should be really shaping up. Images will now be working together, producing a whole that's greater than the sum of its parts. Don't feel you have to use all the photos you had left after getting rid of the poor ones. No matter how good they are, don't use any images that don't work with the others.

### **Rhythm and Pace**

As all these images fit together, the show begins to develop a rhythm and pace. All shows have these elements, whether planned or not. If you don't consider them, they can distract greatly from the show.

As a general guide, it is usually advisable to have an image on the screen for 5 to 10 seconds with 7 seconds being a reasonable average. Exceptions to this are when you are trying to make a specific point that requires a longer time or a rapid sequence (commonly called "cuts") when you might be trying to achieve a dramatic feeling.

Rhythm is hard to describe, but it is easy to see on a light table and computer monitor, and eventually feel in a show. Just as a song has a beat, so does the flow of images in a show. Rhythm is established by

changes and when and how they occur. Changes in color, in distance from camera to subject, vertical to horizontal format and in subject matter all affect the tempo. Look at the images on the light box or computer monitor and try to discover their rhythm. If you don't like what you see, try softening or strengthening contrasts or increasing or decreasing variety. Both contribute to the mood of the show.

Rhythm greatly affects pacing. Too many projection shows are paced in one way - slow. The pace at which images change can greatly influence how people in your audience see the show. Rhythms can change to give an interesting variety to the pace.

### **Rehearsal**

Once your show is all together, don't forget to run through it several times. Note how the speed of projection affects pacing. Practicing lets you correct projection positioning, check on details (so you don't have to argue with anyone about what kind of bird that is for example) and make other last-minute changes.

During the rehearsal you will also see how long your show is. You have to decide how much your audience can tolerate, but generally 40 to 50 minutes is about as long as you can hold an audience. I would rather have people wanting more than people snoring when the lights come on.

Finally, after your last image place an ending image. Some presenters simply use "The End." I find this too abrupt and prefer to use "A Bill Black Creation," or perhaps a modification

of the title or something similar, then fade to black. That tells the audience the show is over without subjecting them to a glaring white screen.

### **Live or Recorded?**

There are many presenters who prefer "live" shows. Generally they believe a recorded show deprives them of intimacy with the audience. However, there are many times when one's voice is lost, notes dropped or thoughts are lost. Additionally, it is difficult to read, change images and control music at the same time. Then, in the case of slides, there is the problem of changing trays. My particular approach is to leave as few things to chance as possible. That does not mean things will not go awry. Bulbs burn out, projectors jam, tapes break, signals are missed, etc. But in spite of these potential peccadilloes, a good show entertains, and a complete package requires narration, synchronized projections and background music, all blended together.

### **Finale**

Now the big moment finally arrives. Your audience is seated. A hush fills the room. The lights dim. Your heart races. (It always does, you know.) The show starts. Everyone is paying attention. The show really sparkles! It has a nice rhythm and pace, contrasts are effective, variety keeps interest and the program has a good, solid structure. At the end your friends ask, "Is it over already?" What more could a photographer want?