

Led Zeppelin, Queen, The Who, The Rolling Stones: Famed Rock Photographer Neal Preston Talks Music, Memories and Christina Aguilera

JANUARY 22, 2019 – 2:04 PM – 0 COMMENTS

14



By **STEPHANIE STEPHENS** @StephStephens



Neal Preston is a "rock-star" photographer in more ways than one. (Bertelsmann_Kai Uew Oesterhelweg)

For someone who's "hung with" and photographed as many famous people as **Neal Preston** has, his self-deprecating demeanor and infectious sense of humor belie the fact that he could name-drop a list of rock stars that would make your head spin. No doubt his likability made it just that much easier to get those once-in-a-lifetime shots of some of the world's most famous musical artists, sports figures and movie stars, captured in a moment they may have never even realized was happening—but thankfully, he did.

"All things equal, I have the least amount of ego to spread around of anyone I know," Neal says. "I never dreamed that anyone would know who I was. It's really just about the photographs."

It's also about the photographs at the upcoming 2019 **NAMM Show** (National Association of Music Merchants), held in Anaheim, California, January 23-27. It's appropriately billed as "the global crossroads of music, sound and event technology." For anyone involved in music on any level,

this is the place to be—and to hear and be heard. Last year, more than 115,000 registrants and 7,000-plus brands made the NAMM scene.

And where does icon Neal Preston figure in? This famed rock ‘n’ roll photographer—who taught himself—and author will be accompanying his exhibit, courtesy of the **Lightpower Collection**, in two separate spaces: NAMM Member Center and also Hall A.

First, I would like to drop a few names of rock icons photographed by Neal: **Led**

Zeppelin, The Who, Queen, Fleetwood Mac, Bruce

Springsteen, Billy Joel, Madonna, Michael Jackson, The Rolling Stones, Wham! and so many more. He shot Live Aid in 1985, and logged more than 700 shoot days with *People Magazine*. Let’s learn more from Neal.



Robert Plant in San Francisco, 1973, by Neal Preston (Neal Preston)

Your photo collection has been featured all over the world and now it’s coming to NAMM. How does it feel, being you, the photographer?

The first time we did an exhibition at Lightpower in Germany, I walked in and asked, “Are you telling me one person shot all of these?” It was an out-of-body experience. People tell me, “I can hear the music when I look at these,” and it’s mind-blowing. I know I’ve done my job well.



The Who, shot by Neal Preston in San Francisco, 1971

You’ve said you’re proud of your most recent book,

***Neal Preston: Exhilarated and Exhausted*, but what does the work really mean to you?**

It’s different from any other rock ‘n’ roll picture book. It’s got my personality on the page in pictures and in words. I wrote the text and I’m proud of it. I worked with **Cameron Crowe**, writer, director, screenwriter and actor, who wrote the forward. He’s my brother from another mother. I wanted the reader to experience as much as possible, like what it’s like to be on the road with Led Zeppelin. I made the book about the job—not about me.

Your most recent book and *In the Eye of the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hurricane* will be on sale at NAMM, as well as some of your fan-favorite prints, right? And NAMM says that sales proceeds from the show will go to support The NAMM Foundation and Behind the Scenes, a charity that offers grants to seriously ill or injured entertainment industry technology professionals.

I’ll be signing books and prints, and I like this cause that we are benefiting: Behind the Scenes helps out people on road crews, among others, who



The Boss in Kyoto, Japan, 1985 by Neal Preston (Neal Preston)

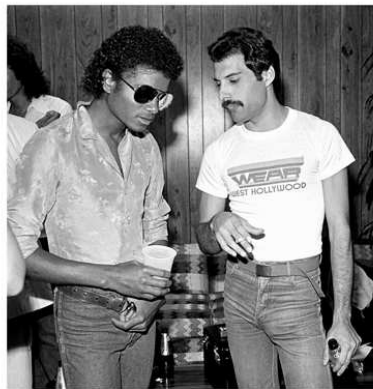
might have no health insurance. My dad would have loved it!

OK, let's get real. Any shoots that particularly stand out in your memory—out of so many?

I shot **Vanilla Ice** as one of *People's* "Most Beautiful" and when I saw him that morning, he'd been stung in the eyelid by a bee and his eye was completely shut. I remember having a crush on **Jennifer Beals**, who was doing her second movie, and she said to me, "Don't ask me to smile." And there are more. There was one band that used to hire me, but I was

never allowed into their dressing room, and I mean, you name them, I've been in their dressing rooms. Someone finally told me, "There's cocaine back there," and I wouldn't have raised my eyebrow in the slightest.

You got started shooting seriously in high school and you were on your way. What would you have been if not a photographer?



Michael Jackson and Freddie Mercury, Los Angeles, 1980 by Neal Preston (Neal Preston)

I always knew I would have been involved in music somehow, as a musician or producer, although my musical talent wasn't that great. My dad was a well-known Broadway stage manager who took me to so many concerts, and I was drawn to music.

Is there anyone still on your "I want to shoot them" list?

I finally shot **Courtney Love**, with her genius-level IQ and all her pizzazz. **Christina Aguilera** is on my list, for sure.



Stevie Nicks on a rooftop in 1981, by Neal Preston (Neal Preston)

How's your health now, Neal, and what have you learned about it?

I have the sweet tooth of all time, and I changed my life health-wise when I found out I was diabetic. I don't have to use insulin, but I definitely don't eat much sugar. And I do read labels.

Your moods—we all have them. How do you manage?

If I'm having a really bad day, I think about how I'll see

my dog, Bailey, again in heaven. He died eight years ago.

What would you say about the power of music, especially as we get ready for another NAMM?

As far as I'm concerned, the power of music in our lives remains the same as it always has been and always will be.

My best friend once wrote, "Music can get you through anything".....and I agree.

I believe it can make you happy, allow you to forgive, enlighten you, empower you, calm you and uncover truths you never noticed. It does what no drug in the world can do without having to find that delicate chemical balance, if you just let it.

Any closing thoughts? I mean, "people" might imagine that things could get crazy around rock stars...Do tell.

You mean, was it as crazy as—wink, wink—"crazy" as a metaphor for sex and drugs? Sometimes, it was a lot crazier. I don't know how many celebrity stories some could tell. I've got better but I don't have the need to share them. They're not for international consumption.

Mind Your Body with Stephanie Stephens features celebrities and high achievers age 45+ who share their latest projects, healthy living secrets and more...