

Taking Chances

BY JOHN D. ADAMS

*Marc Serota's fearless
zeal for new challenges
has made him one
of the most successful
photographers in the country.*

*i*f you've never heard about a young man landing his first professional photography gig thanks to a spot of petty theft and deception, then you've never spoken with Marc Serota. Just two quarters into his career at the Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale, Serota was already longing for the real-world excitement of his pre-college days when he would slip into concert halls and arenas to photograph bands like *Styx*, *Boston*, and *Aerosmith*. "My first real feel for photography came when I was shooting *REO Speedwagon* with my 110 instamatic from the front row," remembers Serota. "We're talking 15,000 people, no air conditioning... pretty much a death trap. And it was probably the most exciting time of my career." In school, Serota immediately gravitated towards the older students. "I was not interested in waiting two years to get out in the real world. I talked with a buddy who was interning at the *Miami Herald*. He managed to get me an interview with the paper's photo editor, Joe Elbert [Elbert would later become assistant managing editor for *The Washington Post*]. I told him, 'I don't have a portfolio, I just started art school.' He laughed and said that I reminded him of himself, 'Because you believe in yourself but you haven't done anything yet.' He said, 'I'll give you an assignment. Tonight there is a wrestling match at the James L. Knight Center. We've never run a wrestling picture and probably never will. But if you can get there, get in by yourself and bring me back a picture that I could publish, all by 9 p.m., I'll give you an internship.'"



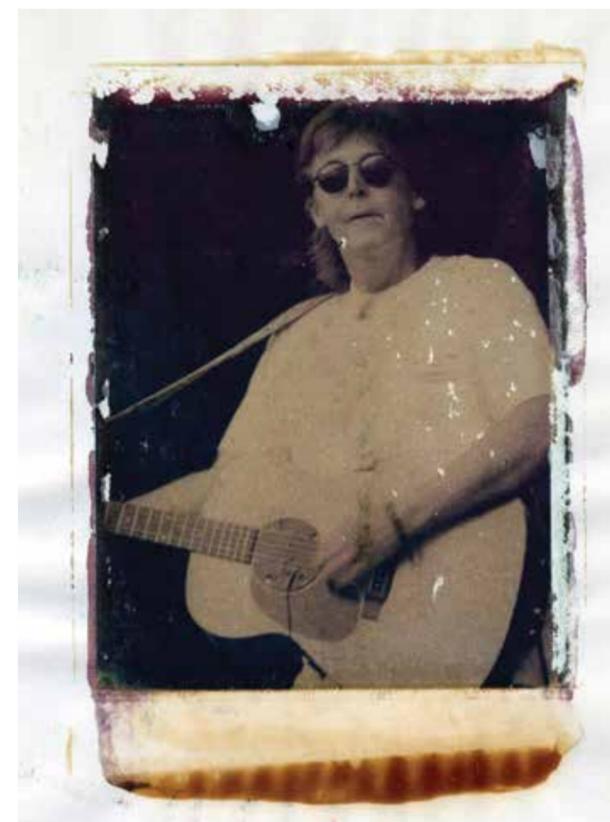
Gloria Estefan

"On my way out, I noticed a row of Motorola radios that said *Miami Herald*. I grabbed one and went to the Center. I marched up to security and said I'm here from the *Miami Herald* to shoot this event. They asked for my pass, which I didn't have, so they wouldn't let me in." Unfazed, Serota showed the radio, told the guard he would call his boss at the *Herald* to let him know he wasn't allowed in, and make an early night of it. Remarkably, the guard let him pass. Serota got the shot, made it back to the paper, developed the print, and delivered an incredible action shot of Randy "Macho Man" Savage leaping from the top rope. Elbert was impressed, said it was an awesome shot, perfect for the paper. One big problem though. It was 9:02 p.m. "You blew your deadline," said Elbert. "Thanks for coming in."

Serota drove home in tears. He'd taken a chance and blown it. "The next morning I got a call from Joe Elbert. I thought I was going to be in trouble for taking the radio. He asked if I'd seen the Sunday paper yet... I picked it up, and there was my picture on the front page of the sports section. I did back to back winter and spring internships and my career took off. After that I was on AFP, Reuters, and every major wire service since then." And Serota hasn't shied away from taking chances the entire time and embracing whatever the latest photographic technology comes his way. It's this willingness to take a leap, to "fake it til you make it" that has allowed him to cover everything from the Elian Gonzalez saga to being in Guantanamo with the Al Qaeda prisoners after 9/11.



Paul & Linda McCartney



Paul McCartney

*"I've never been afraid
to move on with the times
and that's why I've been
more successful than
many of my peers,"
reflects Serota.*

FROM LIVE ACTION TO PORTRAITURE

But after his storied career filled up with four Olympic games, a dozen Superbowls, NBA finals, World Series, Stanley Cups, MTV Awards, and even shooting inside the Superdome the day after Katrina hit New Orleans, Serota was ready to take another dramatic chance. "I had come across Michael Jordan's coffee table book 'Rare Air.' I immediately got the idea to do something similar with Dan Marino, who at the time was on his way to breaking four NFL records as a quarterback. I wrote a letter to the Marino Foundation and included a picture of him running in a touchdown, which was rare for him. His father called me and arranged for me to meet Dan and do a family portrait at a Marino reunion. I went to their home, shot the portrait, which was really my first try at this kind of portraiture. While there, I brought up my coffee table book idea, and Dan said, 'yeah, let's do the book.'" *Marino: On The Record* would go on to sell 100,000 copies and open a new chapter in Serota's career. He became a portrait photographer, collaborating on books for Troy Aikman, Britney Spears, Brett Favre, and others.



Fashion shoot

STILL TAKING CHANCES

Now living with his wife and two children in Islamorada, Serota continues to push the envelope. With the proliferation of iPhone photographic technology, he is now involved with the new Polaroid Fotobar labs. "It is a modern one-hour photo lab," he says. "You walk in with your smart phone or tablet, transfer your images, and they are immediately on a screen and available to print, edit, and create photo products on the spot. I'll teach workshops, do instruction videos. But the coolest thing I'm involved in with them is their Las Vegas opening in September. Their Fotobar is on the first floor, and the new Andy Warhol Polaroid Museum is located on the second, which will feature Warhol's amazing original Polaroids as well as works by Ansel Adams, Timothy Greenfield, Edward Land, and me! They will have some of my early Polaroid image transfers I did when I was touring with Paul and Linda McCartney."

Serota is also working with PhotoXpedition.com offering exclusive photographic workshops. The next will be held in Turks &



Kenny Rogers

Caicos November 2-8, offering one-on-one time with Serota to learn about lighting, working with subjects, editing time, and giving portfolio reviews.

"I've never been afraid to move on with the times and that's why I've been more successful than many of my peers," reflects Serota. "I was recently testing out the latest Canon cameras in London at the Olympics, and I met with probably 50 photographers and asked what they thought of the new video functions. Not one of them had even tried it. That was astonishing. I've never shied away from something new, and I can't imagine I ever will." ●

See more of Marc Serota's work by visiting his website at: www.marcserota.com

Learn more about Photo Expeditions at: www.photoxpeditions.com

And to see more about Polaroid's new Fotobar establishments, visit: www.polaroidfotobar.com



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