

How to Get the Shot

Revealing the secrets behind
unforgettable photography

Blog #105: Millennium Dancers



"On Three. One-Two-Three."

At the count of three, six dancers lifted skyward. It was magical. Sometimes being a photographer put you in the right place at the right time when it's totally unexpected. I was visiting Chicago's Millennium Park with my sister, who was in town for a visit. After spending time enjoying "The Bean" (or *Cloud Gate*, its official name) by British artist Sir Anish Kapoor, we strolled to the side section of the park to see the Crown Fountain. It's great fun. Designed by Spanish artist Jaume Plensa, the Crown Fountain consists of two 50-foot glass block towers at each end of a shallow reflecting pool.

The two large glass blocks display huge images of everyday people. I learned later that they were chosen to represent the ethnic diversity of Chicago. Each image stares out, looking at us for about 10 minutes, and at the end of the ten minute, their face contorts into a "pucker" shape with their mouth. At the same time a fountain in the same position as their mouth shoot a waterfall out to a crowd of delighted children who stand under its spill, getting drenched. Between these two towering figures, the reflecting pool is covered with a quarter-inch of water where visitors of all ages can play. That's where the magic happened.

The six dancers were students at Chi-Art, the public high school for the performing arts, and After School Matters, a city-wide arts programs that includes dance as well as art forms. The were having fun as a fellow student was filming them. One of the dancers had the idea for them to all leap on the same cue, and that's when I heard the One-Two-Three. Standing beside the student filming the fun, I lifted my camera and watched as their various moves created a fantastic image. Each independent, each expressive in their own way, all passionate, with hands raised in unison, I just hoped that my camera captured what my eyes witnessed. I don't think I ever moved as quickly to download images as I did that day. It's still one of my favorite photos.



It's always a great idea to have a photo agenda and a good knowledge of what is going on in the area where you are shooting, but great shots often come from following someone else's agenda. The photo on the left was taken at the same fountain at another time. The figure in the fountain represent Chicago's diverse population. Every 10 minutes, the figure bring their lips together every ten minutes to spray water on children playing in the fountain.

In Cusco, a small town in Peru near Machu Picchu, I was planning to photograph historic churches, when a religious procession passed by, and my next hour's schedule was gone. The resulting photos were among the most memorable of the trip, and ones I could have never planned on. So by all means, have a plan. Do your research. Understand the opportunities and the favorite sites. But when a unexpected turn presents itself, be curious, embrace the unexpected, and have your camera ready!



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1. Be curious. See who's around. Watch the locals. If someone is shooting video, find out what they're capturing.
2. Follow creative subjects. Artists and people playing together often are great subjects for photography.