

Rock in rolls

by GREG ARCHER

She came, she saw, she shot photos.
Thirty years later, Michèle Benson's vivid rock
portraits ignite the walls of the mighty Catalyst

if

a picture is really worth a thousand words then, so, too, must a profile be on a person who takes pictures. That's 22 words. Well, technically you've just read nine more ... Actually, let's add

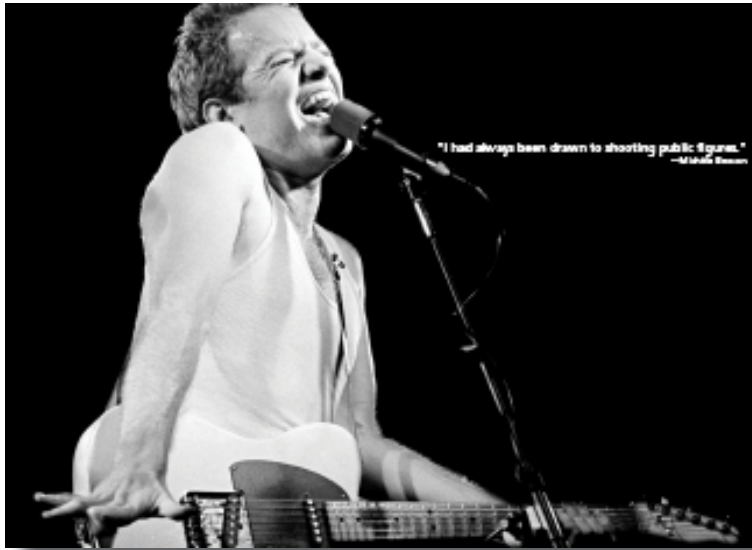
three more to that list, but there's this stickler about AP style, which prefers you spell out any number under 10 and then use figures for anything over 10 and in the explaining of all this we must have eaten a total of 85 words—or perhaps 80, because numbers really aren't words and there have been about five numbers thus far and if you really want to go über editor on yourself, whenever you use ellipses, in some circles it's considered a word, a word whose definition in the Random House Dictionary suggests that it is the “omission from a grammatical construction from a word or phrase understandable from the context.” I prefer the first six words in the second definition of ellipses, which reads, “a mark or series of marks,” which brings us to the very subject of this profile about a local woman whose significant “marks” captured the delicious history of rock music in a titular Santa Cruz music palace—a music palace now showcasing more than 40 life-sized portraits of the very music titans that have fueled her work.

I'm talking about Michèle Benson and, much like dabbling in counting words in paragraphs, her photography career smacks of a sort of free-flowing affair whose journey is as unpredictable as its final destination. To understand how an award-winning photographer like Benson



found the right groove at The Catalyst, which has been like Viagra on the popular music scene over the last three decades, it's best to go by way of Crosby Stills & Nash because that's where it all began, more or less, for Benson. It's the early '70s in Miami, Fla., and in a crazy-cool-sort-of-cosmic blending of CSN's “Where Will I Be?” track—Where will I be when I go

back home? Who will I see when I'm all alone? And what'll I do?—and the vernacular of, say, “Southern Cross”—Spirits are using me ... larger voices callin'. ... What heaven brought you and me ... Cannot be forgotten—a teenage Benson pulls out of a parking lot and, literally, runs into



David Crosby. “It was my first concert,” Benson notes. “The band was coming down the sidewalk going to the gig and I bumped into them— David Crosby. That was before the concert.

Then I realized who I was talking to and I asked if I could take their picture and they said yes and that was the beginning. There are no accidents, are there?” Only ones with mixed blessings apparently. It was at the Miami concert that Benson, armed with a “little, itty bitty Minox Camera,” began to really experiment with a photography interest actually married her love of music with her passion for photography.

While the decision firmly planted Benson’s feet in some fertile soil—was there a better place to be to experience live music in the ’70s than Santa Cruz?—it actually married her love of music with her passion for photography.



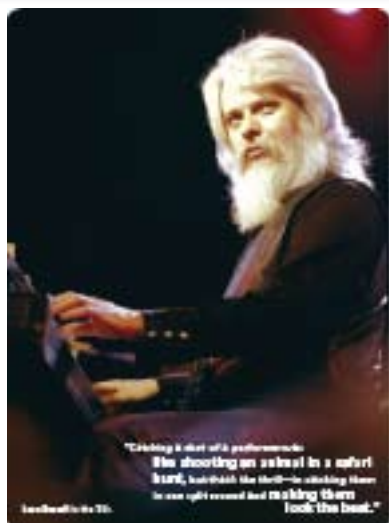
Clayton Kopp is in The Grateful Dead in 1980 (top). Other acts to grace the stage: Neil Young and his Band (late-'70s, lower left), and The Police (early '80s, lower right).



Larry Hoarford embraces the music in 1970. "I've been a fixture on the California Central Coast music scene since 1961," Hoarford has said. His hometown is Salinas and the man has been part of many memorable '70s bands: The Outsiders, G-Type, Seal and Fly By Night.



Garson snapped the rassy Courtney Love last year. Flashback to The Catalyst, circa 1969 and Iggy Pop takes hold of the groove—among other things. (Far right) Huey Lewis and the News in 1981. Huey was a Goo Goo Dolls Halloween Ball headliner in the early-'90s as well.





Michèle Benson (top) in cozy digs at The Catalyst underneath her life-sized shot of Stevie Ray Vaughn and Lou Ann Barton taken at The Catalyst in 1977. Vaughn and Barton were part of the group Double Trouble at the time.



Patrick Simmons, once a diehard member of the Doobie Brothers, is spotlighted in a shot Benson took for Simmons' solo album *Arcade* in 1983. The album cover won her a first place award. (Left) How most clubgoers see Benson—with her back to the crowd and her camera armed and ready. Benson's life-sized portraits of music's standout performers will be on permanent display in The Catalyst. Also on her agenda: The Catalyst Film Project, a documentary film that chronicles 30 years of music and rock 'n' roll history as it happened inside the doors of the area's most successful music club, which was gloriously dubbed "The Palace of Delights."

(Below) Stevie Ray Vaughn and Lou Ann Barton.

