



Jimi Hendrix



Robert Plant



Jeff Beck

# EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY —

Photographer Carl Dunn publishes *This Is Rock And Roll*

In 1965, when photographer Carl Dunn was just a teenager growing up in Oklahoma, he shot his very first picture of a rock star — Keith Moon. “The only camera in my house was a Polaroid that my mother kept hidden from me in the closet,” Dunn said. “I used to sneak it out and take pictures with it. Then one day I was watching this television show, and Keith Moon was on there wearing a shirt with a bull’s-eye on it. So I snapped a picture of him... on the television.”

Dunn had attended numerous live shows, however it never occurred to him to take a camera to an event, until he heard that The Rolling Stones were planning a stop in nearby Tulsa. “I decided to sneak my mother’s camera out. I took a bus from home to see the show. So I get there, and I take two or three photos and get thrown out of the place.”

It would be years before he would pick up a camera again, settling into a technical-school routine and a planned career in industrial consulting. “I never really considered doing any more photography, because there was so very little [music] that interested me.” However, that would change when he moved to Dallas, which had become a regular concert stop for major recording acts. Dunn purchased his first 35mm camera. “Nikon cameras back then were \$535, which was what I made in a month. So I called a friend who was over in Guam, and he picked one up for me for \$206.”

Over the course of the 1970s, Dunn would go on to snap pictures of nearly every concert that came through Texas and Oklahoma. While most venues forbid concertgoers to sneak in a camera, Dunn’s exclusive, all-access pass came as an outcome of a meeting with Terry Bassett, the founder of Concerts West, one of the largest concert promoters of the time. “I had been going out and shooting almost everyone I could get in to see,” he said. “I showed my stuff to Terry, and with his approval that gave me a platform to go to concerts and have the run of the place.”

As a result, Dunn captured what are considered by many as some of the most important rock photographs of the era. Although several of his pictures were published in various music magazines and

included on 30 album covers and box sets (including *Early Days: The Best Of Led Zeppelin — Volume I* (1999) and MCA’s *The Jimi Hendrix Experience* box set (2002), most of his estimated 40,000 photographs have never seen the light of day, until now. *This Is Rock And Roll* is a collection of 538 photos taken of 170 rock acts, taken between 1968-79, bound in a large coffee-table book. The book is a collaboration between Dunn and publisher (and former Bloodrock lead singer) Jim Rutledge.

“I met Carl in 1969. He was shooting a Grand Funk show, and we were the opening act,” said Rutledge. He ended up shooting pictures for our second album [*Bloodrock II*] and did some publicity shots for us for *Billboard*, and he later did shots for my solo album.” One day Rutledge received a call from Dunn, who was contemplating what to do with his archive of photographs. “I considered selling them, but one day I was in a truck stop and I saw a *Guitar World* and saw these pictures I took of Led Zeppelin,” Dunn said. “I had never been paid for any of these, and that got me interested in making a book.”

Over the course of several years Rutledge and Dunn worked on the book, painstakingly selecting each and every photo from his archive. “What he [Dunn] would do is, he would print out these photos on printer, larger than what you see in the book, for me to look at — I was blown away.”

Included are not only the big-name arena performers such as The Rolling Stones, Rod Stewart, Led Zeppelin, Elvis Presley, and Jethro Tull, but Dunn makes sure to give equal attention to the likes of ZZ Top (long before the days of chest-length beards and MTV), Alvin Lee, John Hammond Jr., and Cheech And Chong. “They were always kinda frustrated musicians,” he defended his inclusion of the comedy duo. “Deep in their heart I know they are rock ‘n’ roll.”

While the process of selecting every photo might have been time consuming, Dunn didn’t think twice about who would grace the cover. “The Jeff Beck photo was one I shot in 1972 (Dallas, Majestic Theatre),” he said. “That photo was one that I was always enamored

with. There were many that I could have selected, but I always liked that one.”

In the often chaotic theater known as arena rock, Dunn admitted that the free-roaming access allowed him to capture virtually every subtle expression and over-the-top moment most performers displayed to an audience in the thousands.

“When I took pictures, I looked at it from the perspective of what most of the audience didn’t get to see,” he said. “I mean you never saw these people’s faces unless you were in the first 10 rows. I wanted to show these artists in moments of artistic expression. There’s a brief window to experience photographic immortality.”

On the other hand, because of his exclusive access, Dunn was also given permission to capture a side of the artist no ticket holder could ever imagine. Included in the book are numerous candid, backstage moments from Led Zeppelin, The Moody Blues, Peter Frampton, and Rod Argent. “I wanted to be non-obtrusive. I knew when to take a picture and when not to. I mean these are private people,” he said. “If I was backstage and someone didn’t want their picture taken, I would respect their wishes.”

Dunn put away his camera, for the most part, throughout the last two decades. “The music had changed, and a lot of these old rockers had lost members and were never going out again,” he said. “And then you had these hair bands, and there were only like two or three artists that I was actually interested in.” He occasionally still picks up his camera (he recently shot a Ted Nugent concert in Oklahoma), but for the most part, rock’s visual historian has begun to do something he was never allowed to do — enjoy a concert. “I never got to sit and listen to the music,” he said. “You never know when something dramatic will happen.”

(A limited-edition of 10,000 copies of *This Is Rock And Roll* are being made available signed and numbered by Carl Dunn at [www.thisisrockandroll.com](http://www.thisisrockandroll.com).)

— Lisa Wheeler

(photos courtesy of the Carl Dunn collection)