

Interview



Through the Photographer's Lens

John and Chris O'Halloran*

Working with photographers is an essential skill for costumers. This is the first in a series of articles by experienced masquerade photographers aimed at helping you look your best in front of the lens.

Q: What do you like about photographing masquerade costumes? What drives you to want to do it?

Editor's Note

John O'Halloran was the official masquerade photographer at [Silicon 2009](#) earlier this year. Because the masquerade was small, John had time to work with each entry.

In this article, Chris talks with John about the photographer's perspective on working with costumers, and his candid comments and suggestions for each of the masquerade entries, from his view through the photographer's lens.

John: Taking photos helps me remember the costumes. I have a bad memory and the act of working with costumers and photographing them makes their costumes more memorable to me.

Also, by being a photographer, I get to see the details people put into costumes - things you can't see from the audience.

Q: What do you expect viewers to get from your photos?

John: I don't "direct" viewers on what I expect them to see. My photography style is very documentary: I don't create the art, I just record it. If the moment, the feeling, and/or the action is not blindly obvious, then I failed.

Q: What can costumers do to make it easier for photographers to take great photos of their costumes?

John: It really helps when a costumer really knows the character of the person or critter they are portraying - not only knowing who they are, but also knowing



Silicon 2009 Masquerade Entrants Mariellen Cottman, Charlene Hess, Krystal Gordon, Carole Parker, and Krys Taylor

how they would move and interact with others.

Point out details of your costume that you would like the photographer to focus on in certain shots. Listen to the photographer's direction, but don't be afraid to interrupt him. Point out things you think he is missing and do suggest your own ideas for poses.

Q: How do you work with costumers?

John: I try to direct the subject to create the moment. Working with someone who knows their character, knows how the character acts, moves and poses, makes it very easy (almost too easy) for me to get the shot. Working with someone without a

character, who I can't guide to find their character and poses, is very frustrating.

The middle ground is where I can be creative. Give me a costumer who knows their character but doesn't know how to pose, or someone who has a hazy idea of the character and either knows how to or can be directed to a pose. Then I go into full talkative photographer mode: always talking, asking questions, directing poses, and putting ideas and emotions into the model's head.

Q: What sorts of costumes (think of the costume itself, not the costumer) make the best photos?

John: It's not really the costume: it's the artist. It's the person that brings the character to life, no matter how elaborate or simple the costume.

Q: What makes a costume 'best in show' to a photographer?

John: Staying in character after the presentation is most important thing, but construction and workmanship do count, since the camera sees these details.

John Comments on the Photos

Here are John's comments and suggestions from the photo shoots. He'd like to thank each of the costumers for posing for him!

Wizomania by Mariellen Cottman

Mariellen deserved her best in show presentation award. Not only was the costume beautiful, she knew her character and stayed in character throughout the photo shoot.



Presentation - Best in Show

One thing Mariellen did that I especially liked was to tell me about the details she'd like me to focus on. She also had poses in mind to show off details like her hat and ruffle.



Ghost Waltz by Krys Taylor

Krys also knew how to pose to portray her character, so photographing her was easy. Her costume was beautiful and she showed it off well.

This was Krys' first masquerade entry and first full costume. I suspect she has a performing background, as she was in

character and needed very little guidance on posing.



Workmanship - Best Novice

Her body posture, the tilt of her head, her eyes, and a hand to her mouth conveyed a flirtatious attitude. The little kiss may have been out of the character she portrayed on stage, but it demonstrates a character very well.

Bryon the Dyslexic Dragon by Krystal Gordon

Krystal was very sure of her character. She knew how to pose to show off her

costume at it's best. She had a set of fun poses ready, and ran through them for me. Very little direction was needed.

Here, the poetic dragon declaims his works.



Presentation - Best Novice

One difficulty costumers need to keep in mind is the communications issue due to a full head mask. Krystal had a handler, but the handler was only there as a guide, and to make sure her face was not visible.

Toy Soldier by Charlene Hess

Charlene had a very nice costume, but, except for being stoic, I wasn't clear about the character. I wish she could have told me something about the costume and who she was. I posed her in a classic "heroic pose" and told her to look into the distance.



Knowing and communicating who you are portraying, and working with the photographer to capture your character are among the most essential skills that costumers can learn.

***Silk Moth* by Carole Parker**

Carol's costume was colorful and showed excellent dye work. In fact, she was so proud of her beautiful costume that she forgot to tell me about her character. I only learned later that she did a very fun presentation that I wish I could have captured in this photo shoot.

Costumers need to remember that the photographer has probably not seen their presentations. If your character does something interesting in your presentation, do it again for the camera. I could have given Carole much better photos if I had known about her character and her presentation.

Chris O'Halloran enjoys Cons and being active in the local costume community. She is usually backstage at masquerades, but was recently seen on party floors as "Delores Umbridge". She appeared in "Trumps of Amber", a large group presentation at the 2003 Worldcon in Toronto. She occasionally costumes shows for her local community theater.

John O'Halloran is an avid photographer who has done photo shoots of masquerade contestants and attendees at many Cons. Although he usually works backstage and behind the camera, he occasionally dons a costume himself. He was also in "Trumps of Amber" with Chris, where he played "Gerard".



Workmanship - Excellence in Dye Technique