

The Production Assistant Actions series includes the iTones, Jazz, Portrait and Wedding action sets that add excitement and variety to your photographs and speed your workflow.

BY SHAWN SONI

# Transformers

CRAIG'S ACTIONS

The Craig's Actions Production Assistant series of Photoshop actions is designed to help photographers speed their workflow and produce consistent output. Canadian photographer Craig Minielly's experience as a professional photographer affords him excellent insight into the arcana of the digital workflow, the need to produce accurate, consistent products, and above all, come up with creative results for his clients.

The relatively straightforward initial

instructions and download include links to QuickTime movies created by Minielly that take you step-by-step through setting up the proper folders for saving your work.

On a Mac, the setup is simple and needs to be done only once. Windows users have to do the save steps for each action, due to the structure of the Windows File System rather than the workings of the actions themselves.

The videos do an excellent job of

explaining how to install the components and make modifications to each of the Save actions (or Dump files) to match your desktop environment. The actions are essentially recorded Macros in Photoshop, so editing them is simple, and the videos show you how to customize so you'll always know where your files are. You can even edit things like the JPEG quality in the RGB Web folder to change the Craig's Actions default setting. In all, you create three sets of Dump files, one containing Photoshop PSD files that have all the information you need to go back and rework the image, one Dump file that's the RGB/Web image, and one that's a sharpened TIFF for print output.

Additional links cover the initial use of the actions, and how to begin using them as workflow enhancers. Not covered in the documentation is that once you set up everything, you need to exit Photoshop via the Quit command or you'll lose all the work you just did. I learned this the hard

Figure 1: A simple touch-up to the raw file looks okay (left); right, the image makes a much bolder statement after applying the iTones action Neuport Soft +2.



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way when CS3 and Lightroom collided and crashed before I did a regular exit.

The Production Assistant sets are similarly structured. Each contains five exposure values, with five levels of softness each. The ultra-soft level really isn't as soft as you'd expect, nor is the least-soft setting razor-sharp. Instead, there are degrees of softness spanning a mid zone; you'll appreciate not having extremes when you're working with the actions.

The iTones collection is the most visually interesting of the actions in the PA set. These actions infuse heightened color and highlight, which gets you into some interesting effects. Like all the PA actions, everything is essentially undoable, so you're free to experiment until you find exactly the right look.

I experimented with the various iTones actions on some of my wedding images. I got attached to the Newport and GenX actions, but your preferences will vary with the kind of work you do, and how you apply the actions to your workflow. In **Figure 1**, you can see the difference between applying a basic touch-up on the raw file and sending the file through the iTones Newport action.

The change is substantial, and the process of getting from one to the other is 3 to 4 seconds. If you choose an image and go back to the basic image in the History palette, you can return to your starting point and choose another action in the same family (for instance, an iTones Newport with more or less exposure and perhaps softer) and run the action, which will place the final files into your pre-built Dump folders and overwrite what you didn't like—no saves of multiple copies of huge, unwanted multi-layered images.

The Portrait/Wedding actions perform a more classic set of effects, allowing you to



**Figure 2:** An unexceptional image taken under less than ideal circumstances gets a new life with the Portrait Warm UltraSoft +1 action.

add tonality to pictures that otherwise might not garner much consideration in your workflow. At a recent rehearsal dinner, I was in a large room and had little freedom to move around to shoot, so I turned to the Portrait Actions to see what I could do.

After applying a Portrait Action to an image that was essentially a snapshot, I got the excellent results you see in **Figure 2**.

It took just 3 seconds' work to get the skin tones and the golden look of the late afternoon sun, which wasn't available at the time.

The other side of Portrait Actions holds a set of cool-tone actions that also create images that pop (**Figure 3**).

Your images will realize additional benefits from the enhanced tones and sharpness if you spend a few minutes exploring to see what works in each

collection to make what's on your desktop match your conceptualization.

The Jazz Actions are more like toners, which is the best reference to film capture I can come up with. Each of the Jazz Actions has a nice feature called a Taster, another way to get a non-destructive preview of the effects. To get rid of an unwanted Taster, just drag its layer to the trash on the Layers palette and it's gone. Your original image returns to your desktop. Simple.

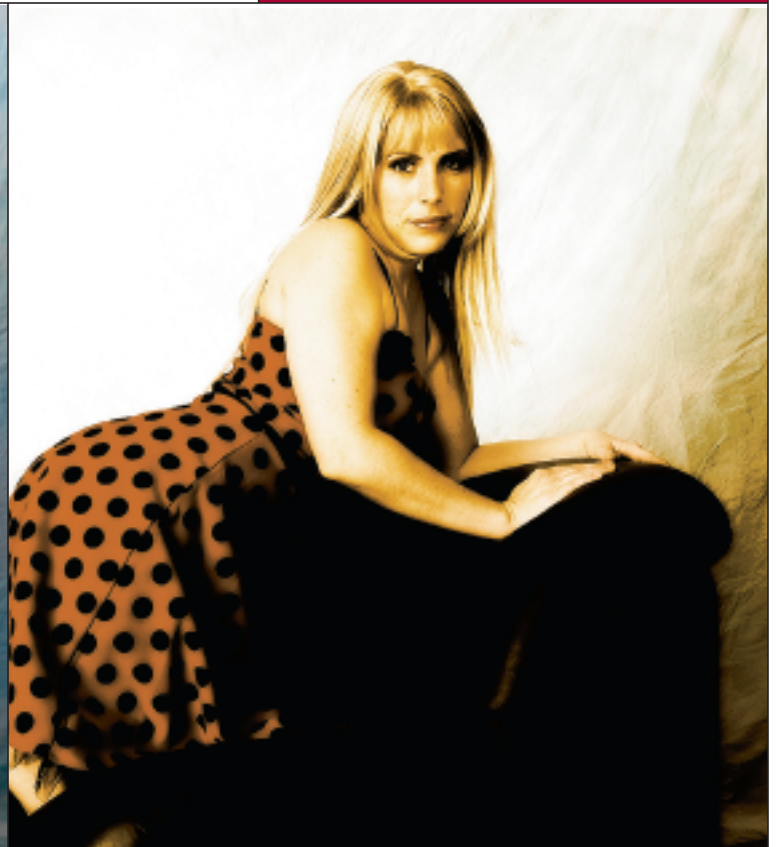
Any toner effect has always been my least favorite part of the creative process, so I avoided them in the days of wet processing. Maybe it's time to reexamine those effects. Of all the actions I examined, I think the Jazz Actions are probably the least comfortable fit for my style. **Figure 4** is a before and after processed using the PA Jazz Hi Bronzer.

## THE GOODS: ACTIONS



Figure 3: Here the Portrait Cool "N" action cools down flat, overly warm light and brings out contrast and vibrancy.

Figure 4: The PA Jazz Hi Bronzer UltraSoft +2 is one of the toner style actions.



Overall, with the other add-ins that Minielly discusses, such as building desktop shortcuts to an action set (called Droplets) to further automate the batch processing of the actions, this product does nothing but help streamline the workflow. The biggest investment after the \$247-per-set cost, is the time it will take to figure out which actions suit your style, and how to incorporate them with your workflow. Then the Droplet feature will allow you to drop an entire folder of images onto the pre-built droplet to achieve consistent images in minutes, which can be used as-is or further tweaked to suit you or your clients. ■

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Get a 10 percent discount on Craig's Actions at the online checkout with the discount code PPAG ([www.craigsactions.com](http://www.craigsactions.com)).