

Pointers on color correction

Cameras are set up to give you an average exposure and an average color rendition. When taking pictures that are not in average conditions, the camera can often be fooled and give an improperly exposed or incorrectly colored picture. This has been true with film cameras and is still the case with digital. The advantage now is with digital files, fixing the color is a lot easier.

Our eyes have the tremendous ability to compensate for different intensities of light and to compensate for color under many different light sources. Items do change color based upon what type of lighting they are being viewed under, but because our eyes adapt so quickly, we seldom give it thought. The camera, being a mechanical device, can only go so far in this adaptation and often needs a little help. If the camera does get the correct color, with a little effort, you can often make corrections in photo editing software to bring it back to what you saw when the shutter button was depressed.

In my last article, I showed you how to use the Levels command to adjust the brightness and contrast of images. In this article, we will explore how to color correct an image using the same tool. Photo editing programs often offer a bevy of options for correcting colors, but Levels may be all you need.

Remember, the Levels command in addition to including tools to adjust the blacks, midtones and whites, also includes a histogram, a graph showing how the brightness information is distributed. The tool goes even further with showing the same information in each of the three red, green and blue channels that make up an image. Before you are confused with those terms, think back to the Pink Floyd album cover of Dark Side of the Moon, which depicts a white light beam being broken up into a color rainbow as it passes through a prism. This is similar to how devices "see" color. White light is broken down into the three primary colors of red, green and blue. It is the combination of Red Green and Blue light that allow us to see different colors. An equal combination of all the colors can give us neutral gray or a pure white. The absence of all three gives us black.

The photo used for this discussion was taken through a heavily tinted glass hotel room window in Las Vegas. When taking the picture, I visualized normal color, but unfortunately the camera

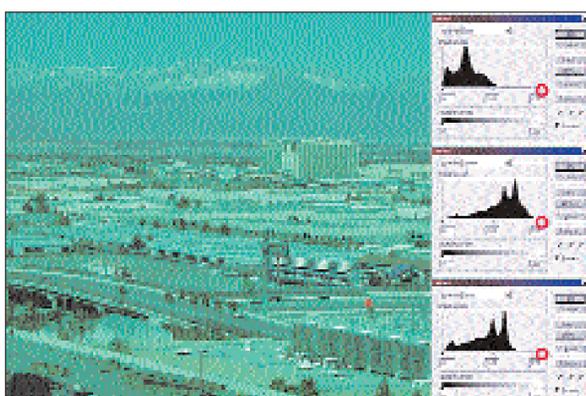


PHOTO PROVIDED
 This image shows how a camera got fooled by a tinted window. Inset in the image is the Levels dialog box showing the histogram for the red, green and blue channels.

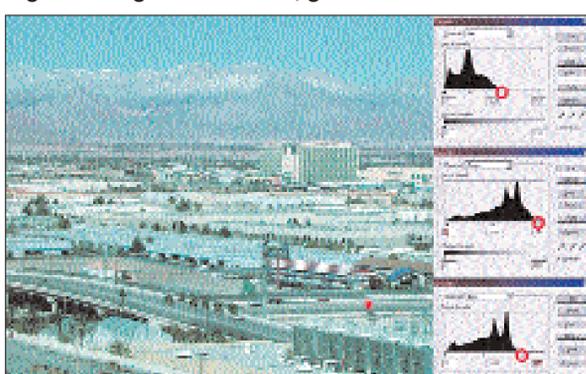


PHOTO PROVIDED
 Making slight adjustments, noted in red, the color is returned to normal.

couldn't.

Bringing the color back to what it should be is not too difficult and the Levels command offers at least three ways to correct color. Let's examine them.

Auto - Just as the picture was taken in the gambling capital of the world, using an Auto option is also a gamble. Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. And the only thing you lose is your time, if you are not sure where to start in color correction.

Eyedropper - The Levels tool comes with three different eyedroppers. One is designated for white, while the others for gray and black. If you can locate an area in the picture that should be a neutral gray, using the gray eyedropper and clicking on that gray area will cause the colors to shift and will often neutralize a color cast. The black and white eyedroppers are used for establishing the brightest and darkest points in the picture.

Individual Channel Adjustment - A little more

complex method, but allowing for more flexibility and control is to adjust the individual red, green, blue channels separately using the same technique as used in adjusting the overall brightness. The tool has a drop down menu that allows you to inspect the histogram for each of the three primary colors. Using the sliders in each separate color channel, and sliding the brightness slider to the left until it is under information displayed in the graph, brings the color back to normal.

Whichever method you choose, you can see how versatile this tool is whether it is in adjusting brightness or adjusting color.



Hallmark launches recordable greeting card

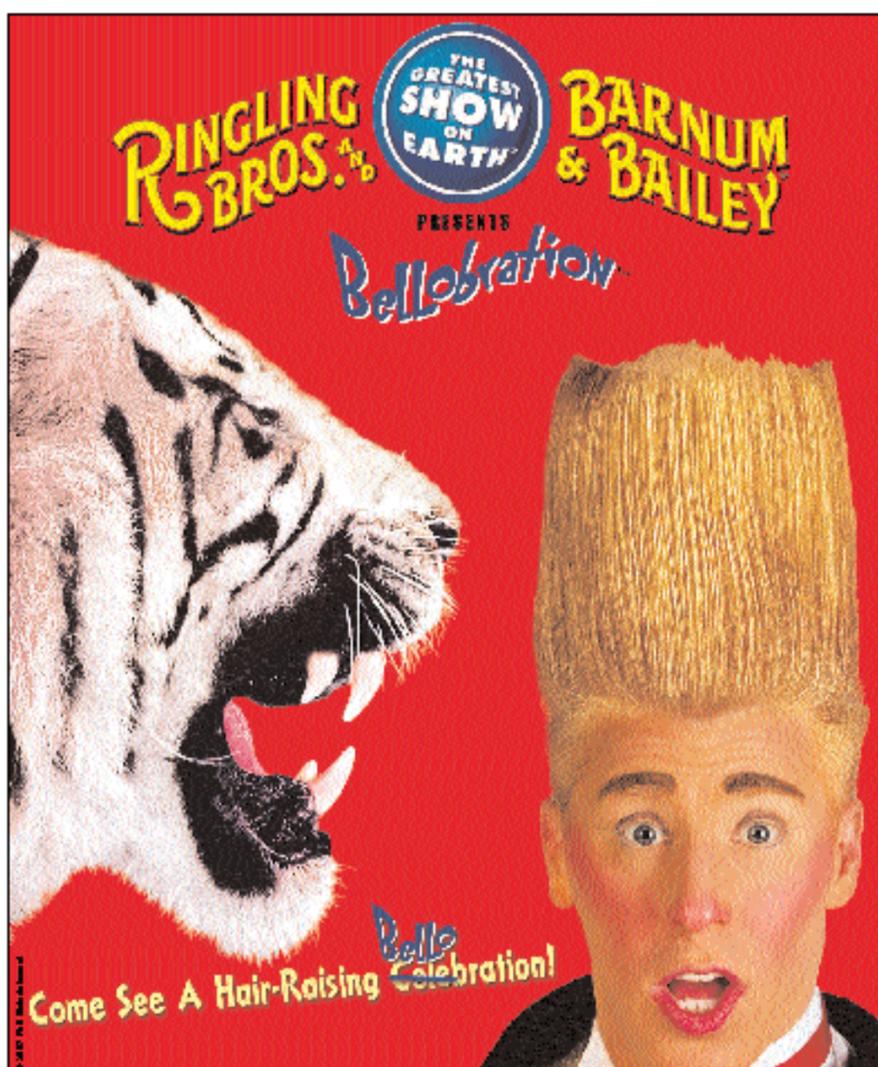
KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Looking to follow up on the success of its greeting cards that play music and sound clips, Hallmark Cards Inc., is letting customers get into the act.

On Monday, the nation's largest greeting card seller is releasing a line of recordable cards that allow the sender to save a 10-second message on a computer chip embedded in

the card, followed by a 15-second snippet of music.

The company plans to travel to five U.S. military bases — the first visit was held Tuesday at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas — and allow the children of military personnel to record greeting cards, which Hallmark will then mail overseas in time for Mother's Day and Father's Day. "It's an emotional value,"

said Sarah Gronberg, publicity manager for the Kansas City, Mo.-based company. "We found the strongest reaction from parents. When they see this sort of thing exists, it (resonates) because if you can capture your kid's voice when they're little or when they're not around you, that's when you see the largest emotional connection."



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Photoshop Express — Beta

Adobe has for years been the world leader in graphics applications with PhotoShop being the industry standard for photo editing. Realizing that the program is beyond the needs and budget of many, Adobe has over the years made a number of different entry-level products to fill in the need for those who have very basic photo editing needs. I have often recommended Photoshop Elements, which comes with a modest price tag. But Adobe has also offered a ground-level editing programs, which are free or next to free.

Their newest entry is a Web-based application called Photoshop Express. By being Web-based, you don't have to install any software in your computer and can access the software on any computer that has an Internet connection. Photoshop Express is currently in Beta testing which simply means the program is not finalized and some features may be added, modified or removed depending upon how smoothly they run.

To use the program you have to create an account, in which you are given 2 GB of online storage of your JPEG files. This amount of space will allow you to store quite a few images considering most cameras create files in range

of 1-2 MB size. Of course if you have dialup service, you may want to try this on a computer that has a high-speed connection. You will need the latest version of Adobe Flash Player, which will automatically install. (I have to admit I had troubles with Internet Explorer, but it worked flawlessly in Firefox.)

Here is a list of tools in this free application: Crop and Rotate, Auto Correct, Exposure, Red Eye Removal, Touchup, Saturation, White Balance, Highlight, Fill Light, Sharpen, Soft Focus, Pop Color, Hue, Black and White, Tint, Sketch and Distort. Overall this is not a bad array of options for a free program.

The program is set up to share your files with other online users. You can email your images or set up private or public viewing galleries. You can also tie in with other on line applications like Facebook, Photo Bucket, and Picassa.

For me, the weak point of this program is that there is no option for image resizing or printing, but you can download your edited image back to your computer and print from there. I hope some printing option will be added in the final or a future version. But for a program that is free, who can complain? Give it a try.

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