



The Limerick Milk Market

by Gerry Andrews



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Commentary

A photograph's most fundamental attribute is, of course, it's incredibly powerful ability to stop time. It captures an instant, the proverbial 60th of a second. Photographic materials, however, exist *in time*. For example, how easily it would have been for Gerry Andrews to discard these negatives that he made in the 1970s at the Limerick Milk Market in Ireland — and if he had done so, this moment of time would never have found its way to the cover of *LensWork* #120, or for that matter these comments in this book.

What responsibilities do we photographers have to preserve history? What responsibility do we photographers have to the individuals that we photograph and their story? It's a complex question that denies simplistic answers. Perhaps these are issues that can only be properly viewed with the perspective of time. To me, our only response to this unknowable future seems perfectly logical: such future perspectives can only be considered if we do our job, today, to preserve our archives and recognize the possibility that our images have some historic importance that we will likely never fully understand. Our work *may* be destined for the eventual trash heap, but maybe not. Clearly, if we don't do everything we can to preserve it and recognize its possible importance to the future, that question about the trash heap is irreversibly answered — without future viewers even having the chance to decide for themselves.

I presume that most of you are aware of the theory in facial recognition studies that our visage presents to different personalities. Take any portrait at random and cover the left half of the individual's face and look solely at the remaining visible eye. What expression, what emotion, what soul do you see? Next, cover the right half of the face and look at that other eye. What expression, what emotion, what soul do you see? Fascinating how the two sides of a person's face can present such different emotions!

Having suggested the above exercise, I'm assuming that you've done that with this portrait of the penny flute player. If you haven't, try it now. His right eye (the one on our left) seems stern, almost angry, hard, determined. His left eye (the one on our right) seems pleading, abstracted, emotionless, almost vacant. Now, remove the card and look at his expression in total. Is it safe to characterize this as stern but pleading, hard yet almost vacant, the combination of intensity overshadowed by resignation? It's as though he blows his flute in the hopes that we might toss a coin or two his way, but knowing in his heart that we probably won't.

All that from an expression caught in 1/60 of a second. It's amazingly consistent how the two halves of any face present a different range of emotions.