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# Enhanced Open-Circuit Voltage in High Performance Polymer/Fullerene Bulk-Heterojunction Solar Cells by Cathode Modification with a C<sub>60</sub> Surfactant

Kevin M. O'Malley, Chang-Zhi Li, Hin-Lap Yip, and Alex K.-Y. Jen\*

Polymer solar cells (PSCs) represent a unique alternative renewable energy source combining the potential benefits of comparatively low-cost fabrication, solution processing, and wide application through the versatility of device design.<sup>[1,2]</sup> The advantages demonstrated by PSCs over their inorganic counterparts have generated extensive research efforts over the past decade, which have resulted in an impressive body of literature detailing vast improvements in device performance made through molecular design<sup>[3–7]</sup> and process and device engineering.<sup>[3,8–10]</sup> Power conversion efficiencies (PCEs) over 7% have recently been reported for bulk-heterojunction (BHJ) type PSCs due to significant strides in polymer design and morphological control of the photoactive blend.<sup>[7]</sup> Despite these promising advances, there remain a variety of technical issues to be addressed in order for PSCs to mature.

The most obvious of these issues is the significantly lower photovoltaic performance as compared to traditional silicon-based and dye-sensitized solar cells. One of the most critical factors determining device performance is the nature of the active layer/electrode interface, which has particularly important implications for the open-circuit voltage ( $V_{OC}$ ).<sup>[11]</sup> In contrast to bilayer solar cells, the photoactive layer of BHJ PSCs typically consists of intimately mixed domains of *p*-type semiconducting polymer donor and *n*-type fullerene acceptor such that a bicontinuous pathway for charge transport through the layer to the electrodes is achieved. In the ideal case, the polymer and fullerene domains are sufficiently phase-segregated along the vertical charge-carrier transport axis which results in having only electron-(hole)-transporting material at the cathode (anode).<sup>[12]</sup> Due to the inherently complicated drying dynamics of the photoactive blend layer upon spin-coating, this is often not the case,<sup>[13,14]</sup> and the device performance suffers accordingly via charge recombination at the electrode interfaces.

In addition, proper energy level alignment at these interfaces is critical to reduce contact resistance and ensure a maximum  $V_{OC}$  and optimized device performance. To this end, several

approaches have been employed to modify the organic/electrode interface. One method involves deliberate inclusion and/or tuning of a dipole layer to improve alignment between the Fermi level ( $E_F$ ) of the contact and the appropriate frontier molecular orbital level of the organic, while another entails insertion of a thin layer of polymer surfactant to reduce contact resistance.<sup>[15–18]</sup> In conventional BHJ-based PSCs, the conducting polymer poly(ethylenedioxythiophene):poly(styrenesulfonate) (PEDOT:PSS) is used to modify the surface of the hole-collecting anode. With a work function (WF) closely matching the hole-transport level of a wide range of donor polymers, of the order of 5 eV below vacuum, PEDOT:PSS is capable of forming excellent electrical contact with the organic active layer of the device at the anode. Therefore, much attention has been paid to engineering the energy level alignment at the organic/cathode interface in efforts to improve device performance.

Recently, it has been reported that the performance of conventional PSC devices was increased due to spontaneous phase segregation of a polymer–fullerene blend by addition of fluorocarbon modified [6,6]-phenyl-C<sub>60</sub>-butyric acid methyl ester (F-PCBM).<sup>[15]</sup> Upon spin-coating the blend, the fluorocarbon chain of the F-PCBM aligned at the organic/air interface creating a fullerene rich buffer layer for subsequent deposition of the cathode metal. Similar buffer layer formation via self-assembly has been achieved by adding fullerene-end-capped poly(ethylene glycol) (PEG-C<sub>60</sub>) to the BHJ layer of PCBM and poly(3-hexylthiophene) (P3HT).<sup>[19,20]</sup>

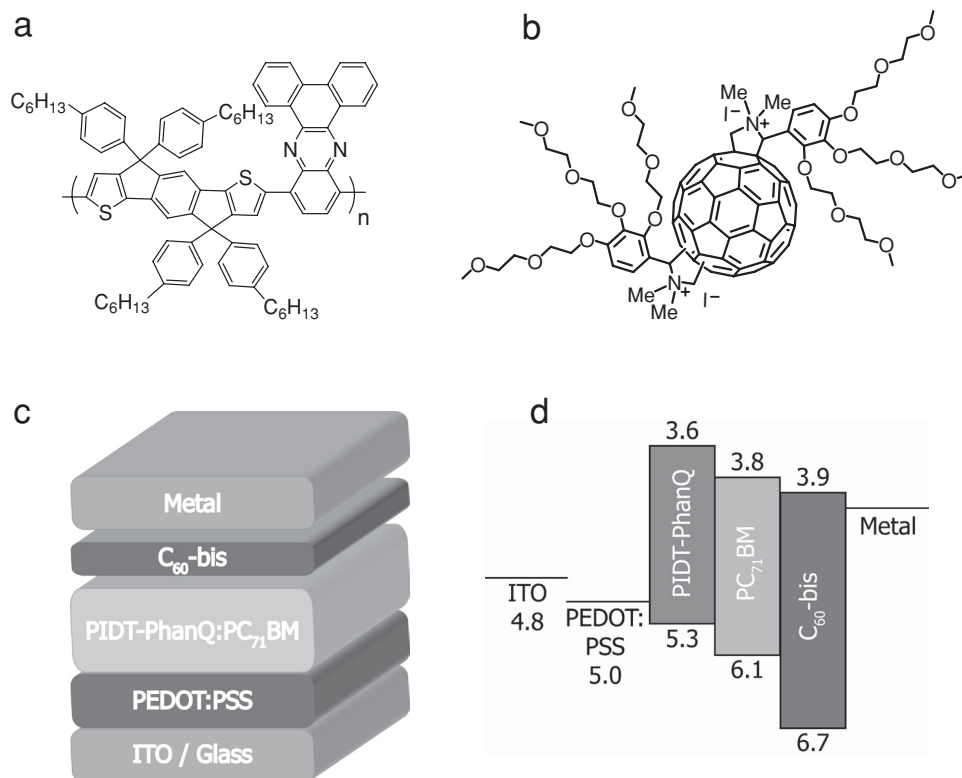
We have recently synthesized a new bis-adduct fullerene surfactant (C<sub>60</sub>-bis) that functions as an efficient electron selective material when inserted between various BHJ layers and an Al cathode, which led to improved performance in organic photovoltaic devices.<sup>[21]</sup> To better understand the origin of efficiency enhancement when C<sub>60</sub>-bis is incorporated into PSCs, we have studied the electronic properties at the BHJ/C<sub>60</sub>-bis/metal interface. We have performed the study based on a higher performance, low-bandgap polymer poly(indacenodithiophene-cophanthrene-quinoxaline) (PIDT-PhanQ)<sup>[22]</sup> (Figure 1a) and [6,6]-phenyl-C<sub>71</sub>-butyric acid methyl ester (PC<sub>71</sub>BM) BHJ system and have investigated the effect of different cathode metals (Al, Ag, and Cu) on the PCE and stability of the PSCs. Because C<sub>60</sub>-bis (Figure 1b) is processed from a methanol solution, there is no degradation of the underlying PIDT-PhanQ:PC<sub>71</sub>BM active layer. This device architecture (Figure 1c) effectively achieves the aforementioned desired phase-segregation (i.e., no polymer is in contact with the electron collecting electrode). Figure 1d shows the energy level diagram for the completed device. The highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) level of the surfactant is sufficiently deeper than that of the polymer, effectively

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**Figure 1.** a) Chemical structures of PIDT-PhanQ and b) C<sub>60</sub>-bis; and the conventional device architecture (c) with corresponding energy level diagram (d).

blocking holes generated in the photoactive layer from reaching the cathode and potentially recombining with electrons before they can be collected. This is evidenced by an increase in short-circuit current density ( $J_{SC}$ ).

In addition, it has been proposed that the difference between the HOMO of the donor polymer and the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) of the acceptor fullerene in the photoactive layer, or more accurately the difference between the hole and electron quasi-Fermi levels, represents an estimate of the upper bound for the device  $V_{OC}$ .<sup>[23]</sup> In reality, the  $V_{OC}$  is usually smaller than this and is at best, assuming Ohmic contact at both electrodes, dictated by the difference between electrode WFs. Consequently, it is desirable to use a low-WF metal such as Al as the cathode material; however, such metals are easily oxidized in air eventually leading to degradation of device performance.<sup>[24]</sup> To circumvent this issue, we have fabricated devices with higher WF metals less prone to oxidation, which are shown to perform better than Al devices over time. Remarkably, the  $V_{OC}$  appears to be independent of the choice of cathode metal when C<sub>60</sub>-bis is used as a buffer layer.

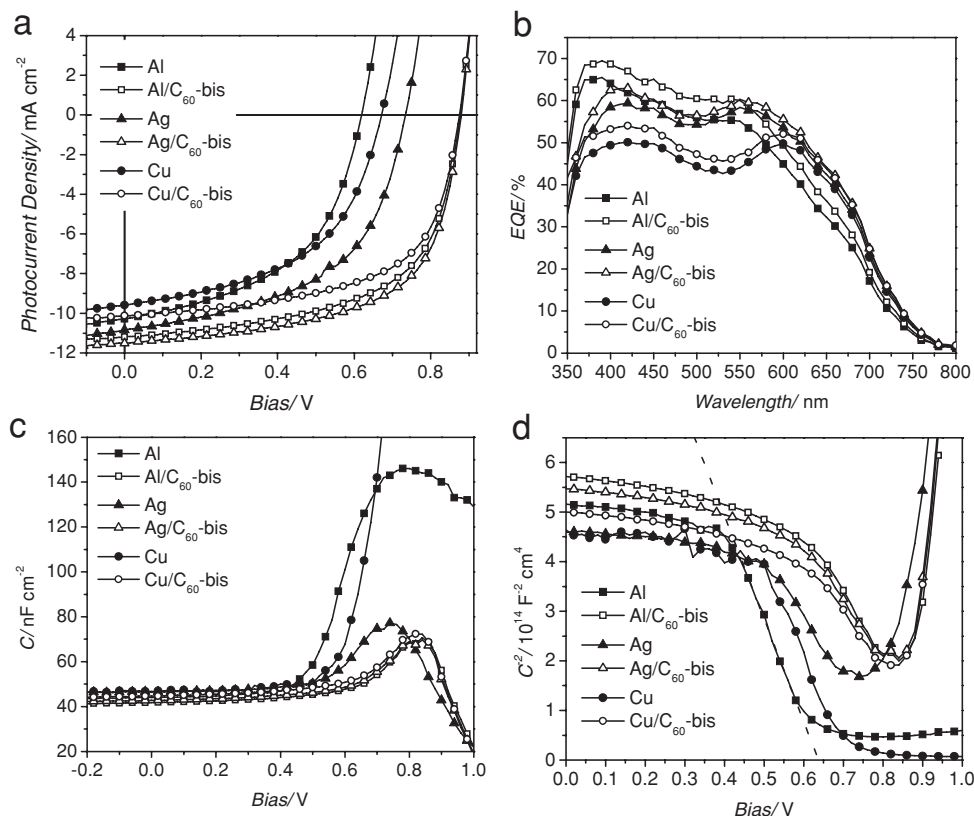
Figure 2a shows the  $J$ - $V$  characteristics for devices fabricated with different cathode metals both with and without a C<sub>60</sub>-bis buffer layer. The  $V_{OC}$  for devices with an Al cathode is consistently lower than that of Cu and Ag devices, which can be attributed to the rapid oxidation of Al in air. The nonideal nature of this interface also manifests in a modest fill factor (FF) of 0.51 and an overall PCE of 3.22%. In contrast, when a layer of C<sub>60</sub>-bis is used, the PCE increases to 5.87% as a result of an increase in

$J_{SC}$ , FF, and most notably  $V_{OC}$ . In addition, the shunt resistance is shown to increase for all metals in the case of C<sub>60</sub>-bis, which provides evidence of lower leakage current under illumination. Performance data for all devices are summarized in Table 1.

To investigate the improvement in  $J_{SC}$ , external quantum efficiency (EQE) spectra (Figure 2b) were obtained for Al, Ag, and Cu devices. The spectra exhibit an almost constant increase across the entire wavelength range for each case when the surfactant layer was inserted. This indicates the improvement in  $J_{SC}$  is due entirely to the inclusion of the surfactant and a concurrent decrease in recombination at the organic/electrode interface, rather than a change in bulk morphology.

To further demonstrate the utility of C<sub>60</sub>-bis as an interfacial layer, the PCE of devices with different cathode metals were tracked over a period of time under exposure to ambient conditions. Figure 3 shows the normalized PCE for unencapsulated devices with and without C<sub>60</sub>-bis over 100 h in air. As expected, the performance of Al devices drops off rapidly, even with the inclusion of the fullerene surfactant, which is likely due to the uptake of oxygen and water molecules and their subsequent diffusion to the metal/organic interface. The Ag and Cu devices remain very stable, however, with the Cu/C<sub>60</sub>-bis retaining nearly 90% of its original PCE after the entire period of ambient exposure.

By far, the most obvious benefit of C<sub>60</sub>-bis is a strongly enhanced  $V_{OC}$ . To further investigate the dramatic increase in  $V_{OC}$  when C<sub>60</sub>-bis is used, capacitance-voltage characteristics ( $C$ - $V$ ) were obtained and devices were analyzed via



**Figure 2.** Performance data for PIDT-PhanQ:PC<sub>71</sub>BM devices fabricated with different choice of cathode metal with and without a C<sub>60</sub>-bis interlayer. The current density–voltage curves a) and external quantum efficiency spectra b) show increases in V<sub>OC</sub> and J<sub>SC</sub>, respectively. c) Capacitance–voltage and d) Mott–Schottky analysis explain increased V<sub>OC</sub> in terms of the V<sub>BI</sub> of the Schottky contact.

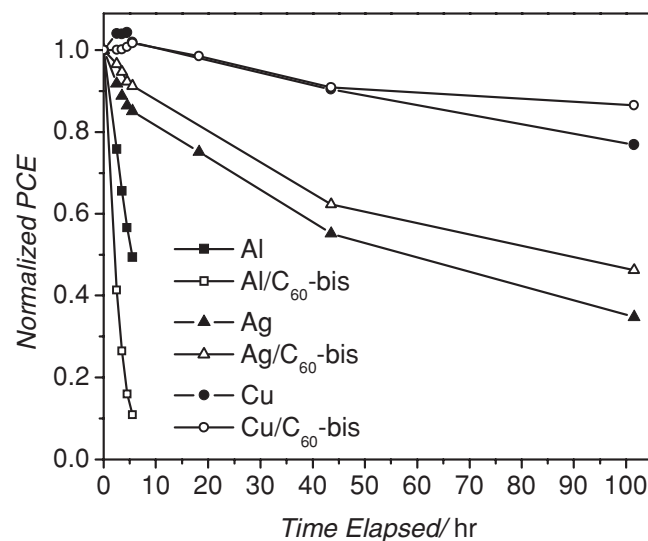
Mott–Schottky (MS) analysis. It has previously been shown that, due to the intrinsic *p*-doped nature of semiconducting polymers, a Schottky contact is formed upon deposition of the cathode onto the photoactive layer.<sup>[25]</sup> The depletion zone formed at this interface is modulated by the applied voltage under reverse and low (<1.5 V) forward bias. Boix et al.<sup>[26]</sup> showed that band-bending results in the vicinity of the cathode, allowing extraction of the built-in potential (V<sub>BI</sub>) and impurity concentration (*N*) of the region by application of  $C^{-2} = (2/q\epsilon N)$  (V<sub>BI</sub> – V) to the appropriate bias voltage range.

Figure 2c shows the capacitance behavior of all devices as a function of bias voltage. The low-capacitance region up to about

0.5 V has been attributed to the capacitance of the depletion layer, whereas a further increase in forward bias voltage yields a peak in the capacitance related to the storage of minority carriers in the bulk.<sup>[27]</sup> Figure 2d shows the MS plot for all fabricated

**Table 1.** Summary of performance data for PIDT-PhanQ:PC<sub>71</sub>BM devices with different cathode metals, with and without C<sub>60</sub>-bis.

Device	V <sub>OC</sub> [V]	J <sub>SC</sub> [mA cm <sup>-2</sup> ]	FF	PCE [%]	R <sub>SH</sub> [Ω cm <sup>-2</sup> ]
Al	0.62	10.28	0.51	3.22	309.33
Al/C <sub>60</sub> -bis	0.88	11.19	0.60	5.87	773.33
Ag	0.73	10.83	0.53	4.22	351.63
Ag/C <sub>60</sub> -bis	0.88	11.50	0.61	6.22	662.86
Cu	0.67	9.58	0.51	3.32	386.67
Cu/C <sub>60</sub> -bis	0.87	10.13	0.61	5.37	795.43



**Figure 3.** Normalized PCE for Al, Ag, and Cu devices with and without C<sub>60</sub>-bis under ambient conditions.

**Table 2.** Summary of the built-in potential  $V_{\text{BI}}$ , dopant concentration  $N$ , and depletion width  $w$  of the organic/cathode Schottky contact from Mott – Schottky analysis. The work functions and relative shifts in  $V_{\text{OC}}$  and  $V_{\text{BI}}$  for all devices are also included.

Device	$V_{\text{OC}}$ [V]	$V_{\text{BI}}$ [V]	$(\Delta V_{\text{OC}}, \Delta V_{\text{BI}})$ [V]	$N$ [ $10^{16} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ ]	$w$ [nm]	$\Phi_{\text{cathode}}$ [eV]
Al	0.619	0.636	–	2.25	97	4.25
Al/ $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis	0.877	0.940	(0.26, 0.30)	3.32	97	3.66
Ag	0.734	0.808	–	3.39	89	4.57
Ag/ $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis	0.879	0.959	(0.15, 0.15)	3.77	92	3.97
Cu	0.672	0.712	–	2.51	97	4.70
Cu/ $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis	0.875	0.957	(0.20, 0.25)	4.02	89	3.96

devices. At moderate to high reverse bias,  $C^{-2}$  tends to reach a steady value related to the geometric capacitance of the organic material which has become fully depleted of majority carriers and can be viewed as a classical dielectric. As previously mentioned, the linear region under low forward bias is related to the formation of a Schottky contact and can be fitted to a plot of  $C^{-2}$  versus bias voltage. Extrapolation of the linear fit line to the intercept on the bias axis directly yields  $V_{\text{BI}}$  for the device. Once a value for  $V_{\text{BI}}$  has been obtained, an impurity concentration  $N$  and depletion width  $w = (2\varepsilon V_{\text{BI}}/qN)^{1/2}$  corresponding to zero applied bias can be extracted.<sup>[26,28]</sup> A dielectric permittivity of 3 has been assumed for calculations involving these equations.<sup>[28]</sup> MS analysis data, along with the relative shifts in  $V_{\text{OC}}$  and  $V_{\text{BI}}$ , are summarized in Table 2.

Interestingly, the depletion width extracted from the capacitance–voltage data extends over almost the entire thickness of the active layer. When taken with the values of  $N$  obtained from the same data, this indicates a consistent doping profile across the entire layer that changes negligibly by inclusion of  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis. Since the change in the Fermi level of the active layer ( $E_{\text{F}}^{\text{p}}$ ) can be approximated by  $\Delta E_{\text{F}}^{\text{p}} = k_{\text{B}}T \ln(N_{\text{b}}/N_{\text{a}})$ ,<sup>[28]</sup> where  $N_{\text{b}}$  and  $N_{\text{a}}$  are the dopant concentrations of the device with and without  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis, respectively, it is reasonable to conclude that  $E_{\text{F}}^{\text{p}}$  does not change more than  $\approx 10$  meV. When a semiconductor is placed in intimate contact with a metal, their respective  $E_{\text{F}}$  come into equilibrium by electrons being transferred “downhill” in energy.<sup>[29,30]</sup> If we reference  $V_{\text{BI}}$  to  $E_{\text{F}}^{\text{p}}$  by  $V_{\text{BI}} = (E_{\text{F}}^{\text{p}} - \Phi_{\text{cathode}})$ , where  $\Phi_{\text{cathode}}$  is the cathode WF, then the difference in  $V_{\text{BI}}$  with and without  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis can be attributed to a modification of  $\Phi_{\text{cathode}}$  by the surfactant.<sup>[31]</sup> Furthermore, because the relative shifts in  $V_{\text{BI}}$  closely follow those of  $V_{\text{OC}}$  for all three metals, we can conclude that the observed increase in  $V_{\text{OC}}$  upon inclusion of  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis is due to a dipole-induced shift in  $\Phi_{\text{cathode}}$  at the interface.

To further investigate the energetics at the interface, WFs were obtained for Al, Ag, and Cu with and without  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis spin-coated on top and are summarized in Table 2. WFs of in situ, sputter-cleaned Al, Ag, and Cu films were measured to be 4.25, 4.57, and 4.70 eV, respectively (Figure S2, Supporting Information). Interestingly, the WFs of Ag and Cu with  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis yield nearly the same value. Since sampling of the substrate at normal emission is highly surface sensitive, it is reasonable to assume these WF values correspond to the  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis. As

the material is an  $n$ -type semiconductor, one would expect  $E_{\text{F}}$  to be closer to the LUMO level than midgap, which matches well with our findings. It should be noted that the WFs of the organic overlayer may not be measured in the flat-band condition, but are rather subject to any band bending occurring at the metal/organic interface as a result of  $E_{\text{F}}$  equilibration. In addition, it is likely that an unavoidable thin oxide layer formed on the Al sample when it was removed from the glovebox for  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis deposition, as evidenced by a comparison of oxygen 1s peak intensity in X-ray photoelectron survey spectra for bare Al before and after sputter-cleaning with  $\text{Ar}^{+}$  ions. These considerations might explain the lower WF of the modified Al cathode compared to Ag and Cu.

It should be stressed that these conditions do not prevail for regular device fabrication because the cathode is deposited under high vacuum after spin-coating the  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis layer outside the glovebox. Regardless, at a distance sufficiently far into the bulk of the photoactive layer only the effective WF of the  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis modified cathode can be “seen” by the rest of the device. This ensures a constant difference between  $E_{\text{F}}^{\text{p}}$  and  $\Phi_{\text{cathode}}$ , and explains why  $V_{\text{BI}}$ , and consequently  $V_{\text{OC}}$ , is nearly the same for all three metals when  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis is employed.

In conclusion, a  $\text{C}_{60}$  bis-adduct surfactant was used to modify the energy level alignment at the organic/cathode interface in conventional structure, BHJ PSC devices. A well-defined interface between the photoactive layer and the surfactant was ensured by virtue of process solvent orthogonality. The large increase in device  $V_{\text{OC}}$  is independent of the choice of cathode metal due to pinning of the metal  $E_{\text{F}}$  to that of  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis upon equilibration. MS analysis of the interface formed between the photoactive layer and the cathode yields a built-in potential defined by the difference between the Fermi level of the BHJ  $E_{\text{F}}^{\text{p}}$  and the effective cathode WF  $\Phi_{\text{cathode}}$ . The observed changes in  $V_{\text{BI}}$  are reflected in the magnitude of the change in  $V_{\text{OC}}$ . Further, EQE data reveal the overall device performance enhancement to be due entirely to the inclusion of the surfactant, rather than a beneficial change in photoactive layer morphology.

## Experimental Section

**Fabrication of Photovoltaic Devices:** Indium tin oxide (ITO)-coated glass substrates ( $15 \Omega \text{ sq}^{-1}$ ) were cleaned sequentially by sonication in detergent and deionized water, acetone, and isopropanol. After drying under a  $\text{N}_2$  stream, substrates were air-plasma treated for 30 s. A  $\approx 35$  nm layer of PEDOT:PSS (Baytron P VP Al 4083, filtered through a  $0.45 \mu\text{m}$  nylon filter) was spin-coated onto the clean substrates at 5 k rpm and annealed at  $140^\circ\text{C}$  for 10 min. The substrates were transferred to a  $\text{N}_2$ -filled glovebox where a homogeneously blended solution of PIDTPhanQ:PC<sub>71</sub>BM (40 mg  $\text{mL}^{-1}$  in *o*-dichlorobenzene stirred overnight in glovebox, 1:3 polymer:fullerene by weight) was spin-coated at 2 k rpm, producing an active layer  $\approx 100$  nm thick, and annealed at  $110^\circ\text{C}$  for 10 min. Substrates requiring a layer of fullerene surfactant were briefly transferred out of the glovebox (total ambient exposure  $< 10$  min) and a  $\approx 2$ –5 nm thick film of  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis surfactant (1 mg  $\text{mL}^{-1}$  in methanol) was spin-coated at 5 k rpm. The substrates were then transferred back into the glovebox and annealed at  $110^\circ\text{C}$  for 5 min to drive off any remaining solvent prior to metal deposition. Metal electrodes were deposited at a base pressure  $< 1 \times 10^{-6}$  Torr through a shadow mask, defining an active device area of  $4.64 \text{ mm}^2$ . Ag and Cu were deposited at a rate of  $1 \text{ \AA s}^{-1}$  and Al was deposited at a rate of  $4 \text{ \AA s}^{-1}$ .



**Preparation of XPS Samples:** ITO-coated glass substrates were prepared as above sans air-plasma treatment. Al, Ag, and Cu were deposited over the entire substrate surface at a rate of  $1 \text{ \AA s}^{-1}$ . Substrates requiring a thin layer of fullerene surfactant were transferred out of the glovebox and a solution of  $\text{C}_{60}$ -bis surfactant was spin-coated from methanol using the same conditions as above. After transfer back into the glovebox, all substrates were heated at  $70^\circ\text{C}$  for 5 min to evaporate any remaining methanol prior to being sealed with parafilm in 20 mL glass vials under  $\text{N}_2$  for transport to the XPS.

**Measurement and Characterization:**  $J$ - $V$  characteristics of the unencapsulated devices were measured in ambient conditions using a Keithley 2400 source meter under AM 1.5 G ( $100 \text{ mW cm}^{-2}$ ) irradiation simulated by an Oriel xenon lamp (450 W). AM 1.5 G illumination was confirmed by means of calibration to a standard silicon photodiode (Hammamatsu) which can be traced to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. EQE spectra were obtained by measuring the photocurrent response of the device using chopped, monochromated light from the same xenon lamp in conjunction with a Stanford Research Systems SR830 lock-in amplifier under ambient conditions. MS analysis was performed in a  $\text{N}_2$ -filled glovebox in the dark using a Signatone probe station interfaced with an Agilent HP4284A precision LCR meter. The 1 kHz AC signal applied during measurement was kept at an amplitude of 25 mV to maintain response linearity. Capacitance-voltage characteristics measured thusly were obtained using devices prepared as above with an active area of  $10.08 \text{ mm}^2$ . WF determination via XPS is described in detail in the Supporting Information. Briefly, the secondary electron cutoff (SEC) spectrum of each sample was measured under ultra-high vacuum ( $<5 \times 10^{-9}$  Torr) using a PHI 5000 VersaProbe (Ulvac-Phi, Inc.) employing a focused, monochromated Al  $K\alpha$  X-ray source and a hemispherical analyzer. Proper referencing of the SEC edge to that of  $\text{Ar}^+$  ion sputter-cleaned, polycrystalline gold allowed for accurate determination of the sample WFs with a reproducibility of about 0.05 eV.

## Supporting Information

Supporting Information is available from the Wiley Online Library or from the author.

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