

Fantasy

in focus

Alex Preston discusses musicians, nicknames and the search for a perfect bathtub with an imaginative Yorkshire photographer



Top: Hollywood Housewives
Above: Milkshake Memoirs

Right: Down the Rabbit Hole

If you happen to have a very large bathroom that might be suitable for – wait for it – a mermaid photoshoot, Scarborough photographer Sarah would like to hear from you.

It might sound bizarre, but it's this kind of sideways thinking that has put Sarah – known in the business as Sarahphotogirl – at the top of her game. Best known for her portraits of musicians from The Darkness to Paul Weller, she has more recently delved into a form of fantastical photography she calls 'Dark Arts'. Many are based on children's story scenarios including Alice (of Wonderland fame) falling down the rabbit hole and Dorothy caught up in the cyclone en route to Oz, and are described by their maker as 'an eclectic mix of photography and art.'

Which brings us back to the bathroom search. 'I want to do a modern-day mermaid, and I need a large bathroom with a Victorian-style bath – but I can't for the life of me find one,' she laughs. 'If there is anyone out there who has a large bathroom with a roll top bath which I can borrow for a day it would be brilliant.'

Sarah herself is the model for the Dark Arts photographs, which were exhibited at Castle Howard last year. 'It's feeding

my imagination really,' she says. 'I love dressing up - and I don't have to deal with models this way which keeps things very simple!

'The most difficult bit is photographing myself, but luckily my boyfriend is fantastic and really helps with taking the shots of me,' she explains. A complicated process ensues, as she photographs props and sews the scenes together on a computer.

'The Wizard of Oz photograph has more than 100 different items all pasted together on the computer,' she says. 'It's literally a labour of love. It involves shooting object after object, cutting them all out perfectly and lighting them from the right direction to make sure they look real.'

Sarah's interest in photography stems from a young age. 'My wonderful grandparents bought me my first camera and lighting kit,' she says. 'My granddad first taught me to develop my own prints too.' It wasn't until she went to university though, that she uncovered a craving to photograph musicians - thanks in particular to a love for rock band Blur.

'My room was covered in posters of Blur,' she says. 'I used to look at the photographs and think of ways I could improve them.'

She persistently contacted Blur's fan club, who eventually 'cracked' and invited her to do a shoot of the band. 'The first time was nerve-wracking,' she says. 'I think I needed a very fast shutter speed because I was pretty much quaking when I was sitting backstage.'

Since then, her reputation has flourished. Her list of subjects includes The Kaiser Chiefs, Morrissey and The Cure, and her work has featured in magazines such as 'NME', 'Q' and 'Mojo'. One of her most memorable clients was Paul Weller - 'mainly because I've grown up on his music, with my Dad being a fan,' she says. 'It was quite exciting to send my Dad a text from backstage saying: "I'm sitting with ►



Paul Weller". I can almost imagine him at home with a little grin on his face thinking: "That's my girl".

She became Sarahphotogirl after an affectionate nickname stuck. 'I think I used to call up record companies and say "It's Sarah the photographer,"' she says. "Then one day a band cut it down to Sarah the Photo Girl - and that's where it came from.'

Needless to say, Sarah's a busy girl. She has held exhibitions in the UK and abroad, with the next one due to take place in The Living Room, York, between November 14th and January 17th. As well as photographing select weddings and commercial work, she also writes children's novels under the pseudonym Emmaline Austere - which causes problems for the postman.

'On my post box I have a note saying if there is any post for Sarahphotogirl or Emmaline Austere please leave it here,' she says. 'Some people think I have a flatmate!'

For the time being, Sarah is busy working on new 'Dark Arts' material for her next exhibition, and is even considering a shoot involving lying in a freezing cold river - now that's dedication. But as Sarah points out, photography is more than a job for her. She says, happily: 'It's a labour of love'. ■

www.sarahphotogirl.com



Above: Dorothy in the Cyclone

Above left: Paul Weller

Left: Thom Yorke of Radiohead

She is famous for her photographs of musicians such as Paul Weller and The Darkness

