

features

Bob Kerlake

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Left: Blur's Damon Albarn and Dave Rowntree in Leeds in 2003. "It's always a real buzz to work with a band you've admired for so many years," says Sarah. Centre: Ricky Wilson from Kaiser Chiefs, London, 2005. "They could be comedians. They are a naturally witty and clever band and a pleasure to work with." Right: Paul Weller. Sarah has photographed him on four occasions. "He's always been really nice to me, and my Dad's a big fan."

Portraits of an artist with stars in her eyes



Photographer Sarahphotogirl talks to Stephanie Smith about capturing music history in the making.

SHE'S been there, seen it, and got the picture. Many many times. Remarkable pictures they are, too. Sarah Robinson's subjects are high profile, much in demand, endlessly chased, sought after, protected by minders and PRs.

These are rock musicians at the top of their game. To some they are gods, surrounded by entourages and screaming fans, yet somehow she captures a moment of calm, creating images that make the subjects appear both other-worldly and vulnerably human - Blur's Damon Albarn and Dave Rowntree eating their lunch on purple grass in Leeds, Radiohead's Thom Yorke emerging pensively from the heather on Fylingdales Moor.

Scarborough-based photographer Sarahphotogirl has lived much of the past decade right at the heart of modern rock history in the making, snapping and recording it as it happens. She spent a year on tour with The Darkness, was there at the early beginnings of Leeds phenomenon the Kaiser Chiefs, has hung out with her heroes Blur and Paul "The Modfather" Weller.

"I try to really capture the essence of what they're about," she says. "The idea is to blend in backstage, so they forget you're there."

She prefers not to use her full real name, and has instead adopted the handle Sarahphotogirl, cannily the same name as her email and website. It seems appropriate for the official house photographer of internet service provider AOL, taking pictures of acts to accompany exclusive music sessions for online customers. It's a role that brings her regularly into contact with all the major names of



Radiohead's Thom Yorke: "I photographed him at Fylingdales in North Yorkshire, in the Star Wars protest about a year ago. He was really nice. It's fantastic he's supporting important things. He's clearly an intelligent man, which is appealing in the rock industry because many aren't."

the current music scene - she did Charlotte Church a couple of weeks ago. "A bit nondescript, actually," she says.

Now 28, Sarahphotogirl was brought up in Belton, near Doncaster, where her dad was a fireman and her mum stayed at home to look after her and sister Lucy, now 27, and brother Keith, 23. After the John Leggott School in Scunthorpe, Sarah went to St John's University in York, to study Film, Television and Literature.

As a child, her bedroom wall was covered with photos from teen music magazines, especially Blur and The Rolling Stones, and it was this passion for music that drew her to photography. She wanted to meet Blur so asked if she could take pictures of them. "It was amazing as I had no portfolio," she says. "I think I annoyed them so much. I wrote to them, to their fan club, and to anyone who'd listen. I told

them they couldn't possibly manage without my photographic skills. The fan club got back to me and said, 'God, you're a cheeky one', and gave me a photo pass."

Unfortunately, it was a disaster, with the fledgling Sarahphotogirl not loading her film properly (this was back in the days before digital cameras became ubiquitous). She was devastated, and confessed all to the fan club, who decided to give her another go - and a backstage pass. This time it went well, and Sarahphotogirl was born. "My grandad had tried to teach me how to print photos when I was 12 or 13. He was a headteacher - his last school was Ridgewood near Pontefract - and he was a keen photographer."

Now it's all gone digital, much of the romance has gone out of the photography process, she says. "I prefer black and white, but I do

more colour because of digital. People want colour and although you can convert it, it's not quite the same somehow."

Eight years ago, she bumped into a band called Runston Parva at a 1960s club night called Brighton Beach at The Cockpit in Leeds. "They saw I was taking photos and tried to see if I could blag them in for free. They were confident and gobby, telling me how good they were." They became friends, with Sarahphotogirl regularly snapping them as they progressed, and changed their name along the way to Kaiser Chiefs.

Now Sarahphotogirl will also be changing her name - at least for part of the time - as she adopts an alter ego to become a writer. Ennamine Austere will be her pen name, she has found herself an agent, and her first book will be called *Angelica Eccelestine Bartholomew's Book of Ugly*, a dark and funny tale of a spoilt little girl in Victorian London - the adventure begins when she is given a camera for Christmas. She will also be working with fellow Scarborough-dweller, children's writer GP Taylor, co-authoring a comic book for children with him.

She has become his photographer, and this week took the pictures for his upcoming autobiography.

"He liked my Darkness photographs," she says. "He saw them in a local paper." Much as she enjoys being a rock photographer, an alternative life as an author would provide much-needed respite from the backstage noise, not to mention from one or two of the rock stars themselves.

"You have to deal with a lot of egos," Sarahphotogirl says, with a sigh.

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Sarah, above, has fond memories of working with Justin Hawkins of The Darkness, above right. She spent a year with the band: "That was lots of fun. There were some definite comedy moments."



Pete Doherty of The Libertines and Babyshambles: "He was my least favourite person I've ever worked with," says Sarah.

Rock Portraits - Photography by Sarahphotogirl is on display at the Lucius Gallery, 50 Fossgate, York until January 7. Open Tuesday - Saturday 10am to 6pm. 01904 640111. Prints are also on sale through www.sarahphotogirl.com.