

# Facing *Case Study* THE MUSIC

The pressure to move over to digital methods eventually proved irresistible to music and portrait photographer Andy Fallon, but the Hasselblad CFV back helped the process to run smoothly

**Words:** Terry Hope **Pictures:** Andy Fallon

**BELOW**  
Beth Ditto  
from The  
Gossip  
**RIGHT**  
My Chemi-  
cal Romance  
pose for the  
camera



**E**VEN THE staunchest advocate of film is facing pressure these days to make the move across to digital, with client demand being one of the strongest incentives. Professionals who have stuck to their silver halide guns have to work ever harder these days to stay competitive and, although it is still possible to resist the lure of new technology, the arguments in favour of moving across are becoming stronger all the time.

Music and portrait photographer Andy Fallon found himself progressively being pushed towards a move to digital gear that he wasn't particularly keen to make. A self-confessed photo enthusiast who has been shooting pictures commercially since he started taking on commissions for his local newspaper at the age of fourteen Fallon has grown to appreciate and respect the gear that he's worked with over the years, and the idea of being forced to change an approach that had been honed over a considerable time simply didn't appeal.

"I have worked with medium format cameras ever since I turned professional," he says. "I started out with a TTL Rolleiflex which was great, and it was a camera that people loved to be photographed with. The problem was that it couldn't accept a Polaroid back and, as there was a requirement to show art directors what was going on, I needed to move to another camera that

did offer this facility and I switched to a Bronica 645 which was all I could afford at the time. Although the lens for this eventually fell to pieces after a couple of years it did a sterling job and kept me going until I could move to something that was more suited to the rigours of professional use.

"I had a few options, but decided against a camera like the Mamiya RZ since, although it was well suited to the studio it was too heavy to put in a backpack and take on location. I didn't like the feel of 35mm SLRs and so I moved to a Hasselblad kit, which suited me perfectly. I loved the square format it offered and over the next few years I became very used to composing with this in mind."

Meanwhile Fallon found himself climbing the ladder in his chosen field of music photography. "I always loved music," he says, "and I found myself drawn to this area even more after landing what was meant to be a week's work release with a fashion photographer called Robert Fairer while I was at Newcastle University studying for a degree in Contemporary Photography. I had an amazing time, and Robert was backstage at fashion shows capturing the girls as they went through make up and came off the catwalk. There was such a buzz going on and I ended up staying with him for over three weeks and getting into quite a bit of trouble





with the university as a result! The experience had introduced me to a lot of other photographers who were working in this area, however, and once I had completed my degree I moved down to London and began to assist, and I already knew a lot of the people who could give me work."

One of those Fallon found himself assisting was Robert Fairer himself, and his generosity in handing over a number of the smaller assignments allowed the burgeoning photographer the opportunity to start to build his reputation. He also took on a number of commissions to photograph members of the London art scene, working closely with them to produce a collection of very individual portraits. "They would art direct their own shoot and decide on how they wanted to be shown," says Fallon. "This led to a number of interesting assignments: one artist wanted a picture that made him look like Ian Curtis out of Joy Division, for example, and this is what we worked on together to set up."

Acting on advice from Robert Fairer, Fallon only showed prospective clients images in his portfolio that related to the area that he wanted to move into. This meant that even if he was pitching for a job that involved reportage photography, he still showed the portraits and the music images, and gradually these were the areas where his reputation began to grow as clients started to associate him

with that style of work.

The Hasselblad imposed its own style on his work and, as the requirement for digital files started to increase, Fallon took to digitising his film using a Nikon scanner and supplying an end product that would perform every bit as well as a direct digital file from a camera. "One of the reasons that I held out against digital for so long was because I had never warmed to 35mm SLRs

**ABOVE** Matthew Goode  
**RIGHT** Andy Sirkis of King Kong and Gollum fame, in an irreverent portrait

and I didn't like the digital version either," says Fallon. "So many other photographers I knew switched over to the Canon EOS 1Ds when it arrived since it was the best quality digital model this side of £10,000, but I knew that it wasn't the camera for me. I also tried digital backs on my Hasselblad but was disappointed with the results, since they looked really ugly on the camera and the viewing screens were difficult to use.

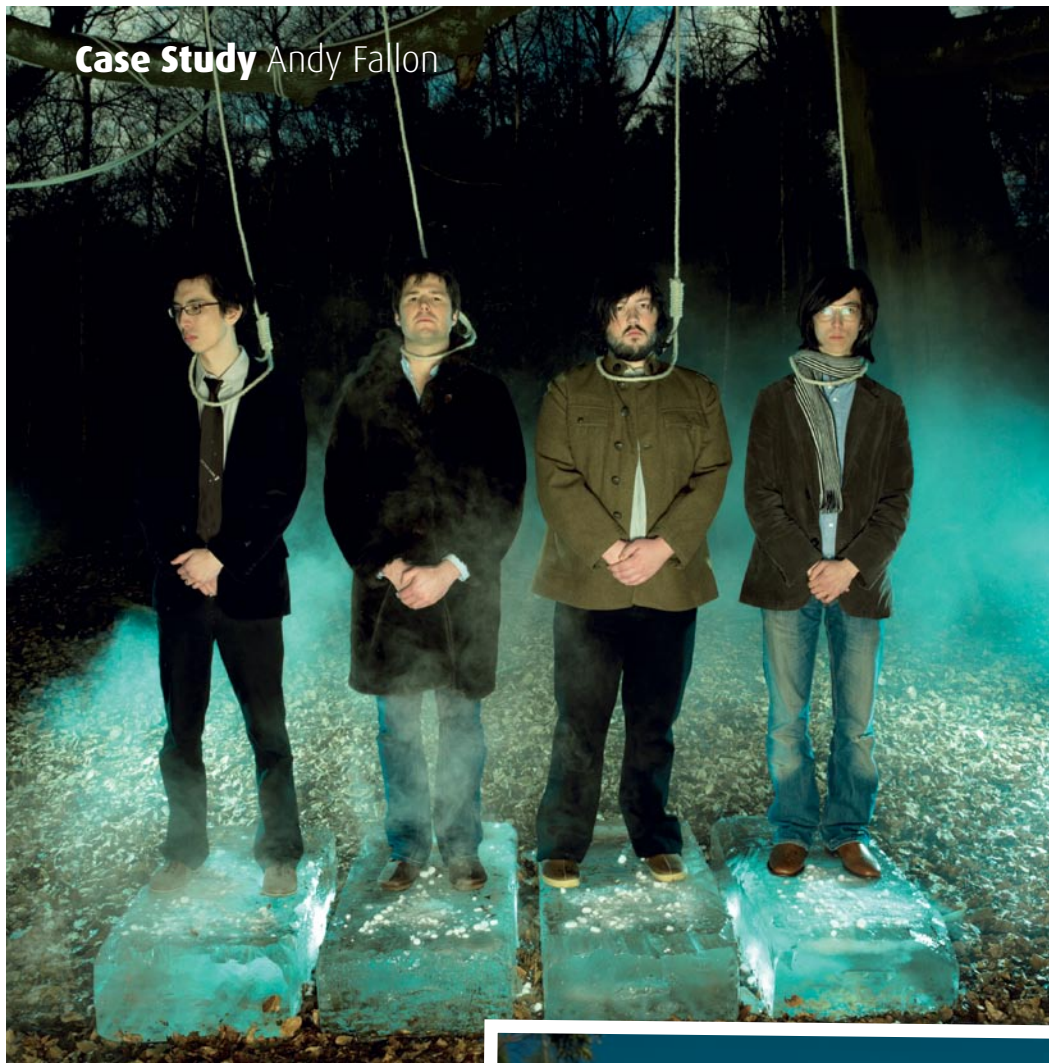
"Everything changed, however, when Hasselblad announced the 503CWD kit last year, and I thought that it looked really interesting. Here at last was a back that had been designed to suit the traditional lines of the camera, and it just looked exactly like a film back,



"I knew I had found the back that could move me seamlessly into digital, and it was clear that the time had come for me to move on"



**Case Study** Andy Fallon



even down to the touches of chrome it featured. I know that the appearance of a product shouldn't really influence a professional, but I've always admired great workmanship and the aesthetics of good kit, and I thought the new back looked beautiful.

"Hasselblad was very generous and lent me the kit for a week so that I could try it out. My test was simple: I have a very distinctive feel to my pictures, which is created by using Quantum Q-Flash lighting and softboxes in combination with the ambient light in virtually every shot I do, wherever in the world I might happen to be shooting. What I wanted to see was whether the digital combination could deliver exactly the same look that I had been achieving with film, and the results were perfect. I knew I had found the back that could move me seamlessly into digital, and it was clear that the time had come for me to move on."

From Fallon's perspective there were a lot of good reasons to move on. For a start he could retain his Hasselblad 503CW camera and so there was no steep learning curve involved in terms of having to deal with new kit, and the body was sent away to Hasselblad for around five days so that it could be



**"One of the reasons that I held out against digital for so long was because I had never warmed to 35mm SLRs and I didn't like the digital version either"**

precisely calibrated to work with its digital back. The back itself has been designed to fit snugly in the same way as a film back, and it can be used untethered with a CF card or tethered to a laptop so that images can go directly into the system. Fallon prefers to work with the former and to hand hold his camera for ultimate flexibility, and the use of a 4GB card allows around 180 Raw 47MB images to be shot (there is no facility to shoot JPEG) before the memory runs out. Four 4GB cards are carried, allowing approximately 720 images to be produced.

"Just to show how seamless everything was, I went for broke on my first shoot with the set up, which was a massive job in LA that involved a crew of 25, and saw me shooting over 1000 frames. I had received the camera just three days before the shoot, but felt confident that it would do everything I required of it: I made a call back to Hasselblad in the UK on the morning of the shoot just to clarify a couple of technical issues but otherwise it all

worked perfectly."

Fallon has very quickly come to terms with his digital set up, although he has had to make one adjustment to his approach to take account of the fact that his digital back doesn't quite provide full frame coverage. "I have used masking tape in the viewfinder to indicate the image that I am going to get," he says, "and once I had done this I simply worked in exactly the same way as I did before. The other thing I needed to think about was the lens I was using: with film I used the 50mm on the CW almost exclusively, but now this has effectively become a slightly longer lens I roughly split everything between a 40mm and the 50mm. The 40mm is simply not suitable for extreme close ups, because there would be a risk of distorting faces."

What, to Fallon, was a far bigger deal was not a technical issue at all. "It concerns the relationship that I used to have with my printer Darren Catlin from the Bayeux lab," he says. "I had worked with Darren for at least eight years, ever since I was assisting, and


**ABOVE & LEFT** Making the change to digital was made easier because Fallon was able to retain his Hasselblad 503CW

had even followed him from one lab to another. It's one of those things that never seems to be discussed when people are talking about switching to digital: photography itself is a very lonely profession at times because the buck stops with you and the pressure is on to produce a good job, and it was a real help to have someone to talk to at times.

"I respected what Darren did and would take his advice, but obviously that has all changed with my move to digital and young photographers coming through will never benefit from that kind of working relationship in the future."

Despite some reservations, Fallon is delighted to be working in very much the same way as he always did, while still enjoying all the benefits of a digital approach. It's a sign of the way that photography is developing, with all tastes and approaches being catered for as the digital revolution rolls on, and the blend of tradition alongside new technology may well persuade some of the remaining film stalwarts that now is the time to come across. 

**Contact details**

 **ANDY FALLON**  
www.andyfallon.co.uk