

Moore, Moore, Moore

Meet the musically minded photographer who's known for landscapes but also shoots the stars



Images by © John G. Moore

John G Moore is better known for his landscape photography but it was music that started it all. He now works alongside MITA Media shooting the stars, and having been in bands himself knows exactly how to get the best shots for the artists he works with (as well as contributing a bit of keyboard wizardry here and there!). Here he shares his advice and working philosophy.

You're known for both your landscape and music photography, do you find having variety in your portfolio has hindered your opportunity to get work?

I was given advice in the past where I was told I needed to concentrate on one thing, but that's not me; I do everything. I can see where people are coming from but it's a nice problem to have, although it is difficult to sell yourself to people that way. I mean, I love doing landscape stuff, it's a release for me, but I don't know if you could be, in this day and age, a full-time landscape photographer; I don't think there's the money in it. I get a lot of interest at the fine-art level and I probably could make a decent living if I concentrated, but I want variety. Agents will tell you 'you should do this, you should do that', but I'm always like 'why should I do this? I'm me'. If I'm just true to my ideals and what I do, people will like my work for the right reasons.

How did you first get into music photography?

When I was younger I was always quite creative and was in bands myself, in fact we did quite well.

JIM STAPLEY

"I wanted these shots to give a wee nod to classic shots from the late-Sixties... but still have a timeless, yet contemporary feel about them," Moore explains

“I enjoy company, talking to people and sharing passions and creativity. When I’m behind a camera that’s me, I’m away with it, I’m Zen”

Actually we were almost on the verge of signing and then I lost my dad in a road traffic accident, I was only 26. It kind of changed my perspective in life and I walked away from it...

In the early Seventies I was really lucky, because at that time there was a brilliant venue called the Glasgow Apollo and going to the gigs there was brilliant. It was so cheap to get into and you could also meet bands really easily. I used to sneak my camera in to take shots of them. Music is something that I’ve always done and then through that I started shooting fashion and commercial work. But landscapes have always been a labour of love, it was something I always did. I’ve had a camera since I was five and was very lucky that both my parents and grandparents nurtured my creativity, but at the same time they were always very pragmatic, so I was always quite grounded.

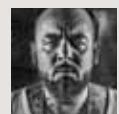
I’ve never been driven by ego, I just want to be creative and work with other people where I can bring my skills to them to help improve or take their stuff to a new level. I’ve been very lucky, because I’ve got a lot of work through word of mouth.

Working with John G Moore

The musicians that work with Moore explain how his images impact on their art



“I’ll go to John with an idea for a shoot and then he goes ten better, because he has the experience to know what’s possible. He’s always so good at the start of a shoot; I think ‘well that’s great, done!’ But by the end of a shoot it’s like wow, it starts good and ends up incredible. John knows what he wants and he gets it very, very quickly, it really amazes me.” — **Jim Stapley** (singer-songwriter)



“John’s just got this knack because he’s been doing it so long and he’s been doing it with real big-profile people that nothing really fazes him and so it kind of rubs off on you and so nothing really fazes you. It’s as if you’re just hanging out with your mate and they’re the best kind of photographers but they’re very few and far between. The best thing about John is he can back it up with his talent.” — **Frank Benbini** (drummer, Fun Lovin’ Criminals)



“We’ve shot some video and photos with John and he makes it easy. We’ve met a lot of douchebag photographers in the past and so he’s definitely more on our level. He’s so skilled, the shots he does of music and outside with landscapes are pretty impressive.” — **Brian Leiser** (aka Fast, bassist, Fun Lovin’ Criminals)

Do you think being in bands yourself has helped?

Of course! I understand everything that’s going on for a start. There’s a funny story actually, I was shooting with Billy Boyd [actor; best known for his role as Pippin in *The Lord of the Rings*] and the band Beecake in the studio and none of them played keyboard but they had a synthesizer and they were trying to get a low-bass sound. I was sat watching them when Billy said: ‘You used to do this didn’t you?’ So I did it for them and then they asked if I played keyboard and so I ended up playing it. So not only did I take the photography and design the CD cover, I also played keyboard on one of the tracks. It was quite funny.

I’ve always been quite a gregarious person; I enjoy company, talking to people and sharing passions and creativity. When I’m behind a camera that’s me, I’m away with it, I’m Zen. I was once told I’ve got a laid-back professionalism.

How did you get involved with working with MITA Media and what does your role involve?

I’ve known David (Rogers) for years and he was looking for someone to do photographs for one of the artists at the label, Paul Rose. A mutual friend talked to us about each other and Paul was shooting a video in Glasgow at the time. They needed someone to shoot stills, so I turned up and took some. We got on really well and he loved the shots. I think because I know music and I’ve played, musicians get really comfortable with me. They asked me to do more and then MITA began to grow as a label and expanded. They then asked me if I would be interested in coming on board with a sister media company, so I agreed. I now do all of the back-end web development, the stills, the video, it’s a lot of work for me but I love doing it.

I always try to keep things really intimate and personal with people because I think that’s when your best work comes. I think when you start looking at things in pounds, shillings and pence it takes the creative side away. Which I know sounds strange as I’m now part of a company, but David is the same, it’s a brilliant vibe here. It’s great to be valued that way and he lets me go with it and do what I do

What’s your process when working with a band?

Every artist is different. Jim (Stapley) and I clicked very quickly. The first shoot we did here we went wondering and got some brilliant shots, it was just him and I so it was really intimate but it really suited that particular song. Other artists like Alexander (Wolfe), who I’ve just started working with, has got

SWEET PEA ATKINSON

The lead singer of American electric pop group Was (Not Was) photographed by Moore for use on CD cover art





a lot of involvement with musical theatre so he has very strong ideas visually, so I'll bring my skills to bear in that but I may not be directly involved with the conceptual side of things, I'll be more involved in the technical and production, really polishing things up a bit. I guess it really depends on the artist.

What's your favourite aspect to shoot when working with a musician or band?

I find live music easy, I've always shot live music since I was a kid, so it's like toffee. I enjoy shooting portraits, a few people have said my portraits are always kind of environmental portraiture and there is that aspect to it but it's always very off-the-cuff. A few months ago David and I were at the gym and we passed by a doorway, I clocked it right away and said 'that would be brilliant', so subliminally I'm always taking that stuff in. We then took Alexander round and took some portrait shots of him at the location smoking. I do like shooting cover shots, though, working on the concept for something and shooting it right through. There's probably more involved with that, as it's a process.

Do you ever have to adapt the way you shoot and your style to suit the particular artist or music you're working with?

To a degree yes, but it's kind of organic. I'll look at an artist like Jim (Stapley), who when I first met him reminded me of Paul Rodgers, Steve Marriott, early Seventies vibe, although he's very crossover and can sometimes remind me of Neil Finn from Crowded House or even Michael Jackson with his vocals. So when I looked at him I thought we should do something in that vein with black and white and then it all came together.

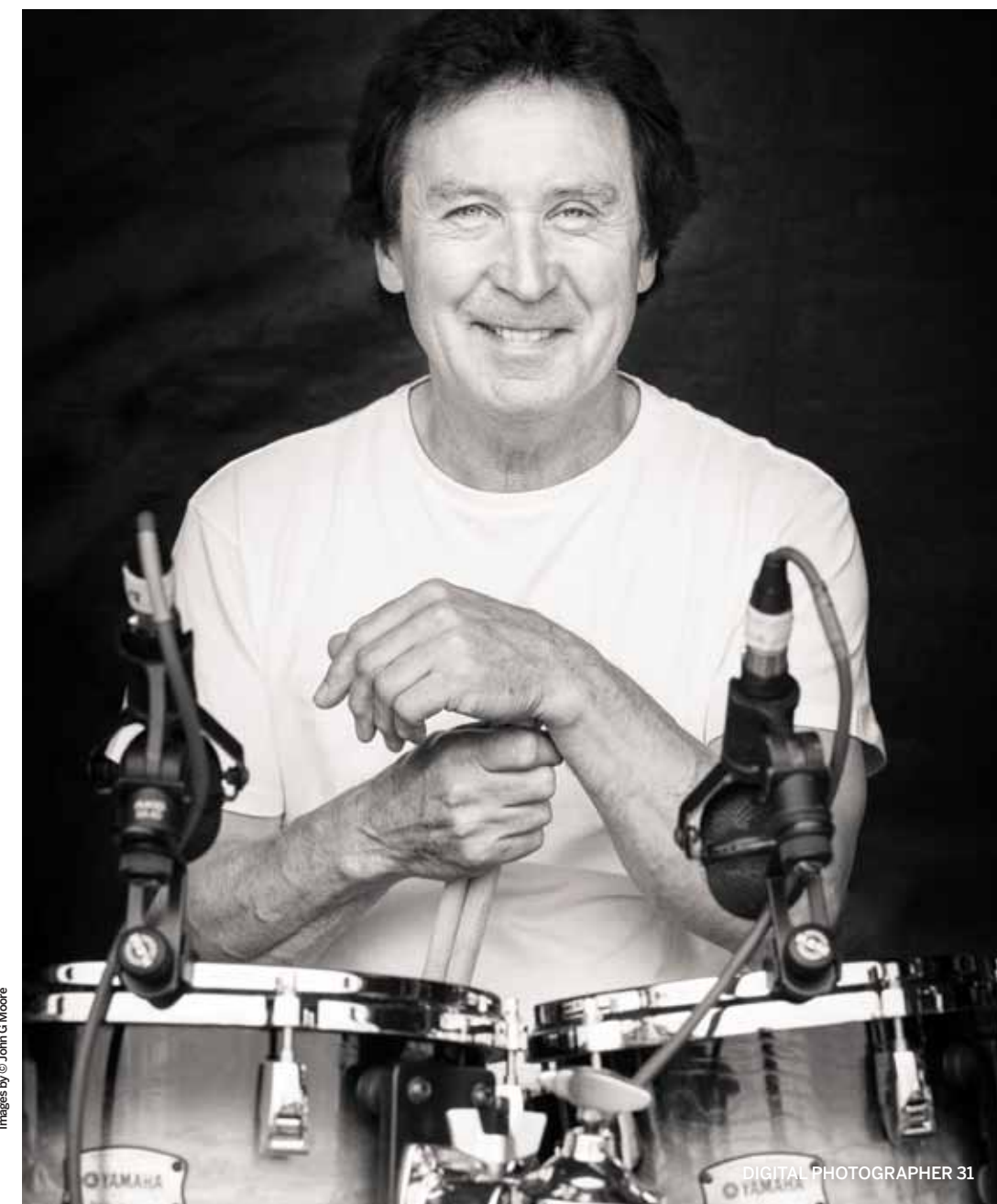
The album sleeve is slightly different, it's probably a nod to Bourdin stylistically but it could be a Roxy Music CD cover. There's a saying that goes something like, 'every poet and every artist is a thief' and it may not be a direct thing but I think subliminal imagery you grow up with can influence you. I grew up in the early Seventies and there was so much going on in the music industry at that time. The Roxy covers were always very stylish and I liked them and although you're never aware of this yourself, your perception is totally different to someone else's, but stuff like that can influence your work.

You now shoot music videos alongside the stills. Do you use the same camera to shoot both?

I'm using the same camera at the moment, but I had a big shift in gear recently. I used to shoot Hasselblad medium format and Canon kit but I changed last year. I liked shooting medium format, it was great in certain situations, but it wasn't great at high ISOs although the resolution was amazing. Then Nikon brought out the D800 and D800E and I was offered one but I didn't have any Nikon lenses so I borrowed some from a friend of mine and I was really impressed with the camera. Once I started using the D800E, I actually found it was better than other cameras I had been shooting with and I could use it in more circumstances, so I started getting a lot more Nikon kit.

▶▶ AUDIBLE IMAGERY

Clockwise from left: Fun Lovin' Criminals, Alexander Wolfe, Tony Visconti, Holly Ruddick (CD art) and Kenny Jones (CD art)



How did you adapt to shooting video? Was it a steep learning curve?

I already had video experience with film back in the Eighties and I grew out of it, as it was a hassle. However, the great thing about shooting digital is the immediacy of it, the fact you can shoot and edit really quickly. It's instant gratification. I am always very conscious that everything through the chain should be done at the best possible level, so if I can do the editing I will and I do.

We looked at RED and Black Magic cameras but we thought it might be better to wait for 4Ke (resolution). The first video I shot was Jim's (Stapley). We went down to the studio, set up and he buried a basic track, which we recorded and he then played along to. It was very difficult because it's piano and vocals, so it's hard to replicate an emotive performance like that over and over. So Jim basically went in and played the track on the piano and then he did a vocal, which was mixed and then played back through a speaker, which he played along to. We recorded it ten times and then I edited, which, for a first effort, hasn't had a bad response. When I was editing I sat down with Jim and said 'look I think we should do it like this' (I was going for an Elton John-Tiny Dancer-type video) and Jim went 'let's go with that'. It's good to be influenced by things, everybody is, but you don't want it to be a derivative, as long as you can bring your own skills and creativity to it.

What has been your favourite music shoot to-date? Does your personal relationship with the subject make a big difference?

I guess it's really been the recent stuff as I'm so involved from the conception, through the shooting, to editing and the final delivery. It's brilliant to see something that's been in my head and see it as a finished package. That's what it's all about for me. It can be very different though, because it's a very personal thing with people, some people you might not have a particularly close personal relationship with, you just turn up and that's that, you do the job. But it's always better when you do, it's not that you give more for that, but I think because you do have that close personal relationship, it's more symbiotic. People have asked me before what's my favourite photograph and I say it's like having kids, you can't have a favourite kid, I love them all.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: John G Moore

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Professional biography: John G Moore is a professional photographer based in Glasgow, Scotland. Creative from his early years, Moore started his photography with a Kodak Brownie at the age of five and has since progressed to become one of the UK's formative photographic talents. Published regularly in national photography magazines, he is an accomplished, multi-faceted photographer and a known expert in digital imaging techniques. Moore has also worked as a consultant for both Adobe UK and Hasselblad UK.

INTERVIEW



FRANK BENBINI

© John G Moore
"Frank is probably one of the most talented and creative drummers I've come across. He not only drums but plays guitar, piano and sings," says Moore

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