PHOTO INSIGHT

CHRIS FLOYD

Chris Floyd is a British photographer and filmmaker. His work has appeared in some of the world's most highly respected publications, including *The New Yorker*, *Harpers Bazaar*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, *Wallpaper** and *Lula*. He has shot advertising campaigns for British Airways, Sony, Toyota and Philips, and has been selected several times for the National Portrait Gallery's Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize and the annual publication *American Photography*.

To see more of Chris's images, visit **www.chrisfloyd.com**

Portrait photographer Chris Floyd discusses his shot of writer and broadcaster Charlie Brooker and reveals what makes a successful portrait image

WHEN I'm shooting a portrait, I'm looking for the 'moment between the moments'. It may only last 5secs or even 1sec, but it's the period where the subject kind of forgets who they are and why they're there. I like to get my subjects to a point where they let themselves go – where they lose themselves in the moment. These little windows can be constructed, but more often than not they just happen and you have to be ready with your finger on the trigger. The subject enters into this gravity-free moment. Their feet come off the ground and they're floating.

The road to shooting the image here actually began with another commission. I had recently shot a cover image for the book *How to be a Woman* by Caitlin Moran. It was a portrait that seemed to go down well and it resulted in me later receiving an email from an art director at the book publisher Faber & Faber. He asked if we could meet and talk about me doing something for them. We had a meeting, and he and his colleagues told me that they were in the process of reissuing Charlie Brooker's books to coincide with the release of his latest volume. They asked me to shoot new covers for each of them.

They had a few concepts in mind, but as the budgets were quite tight (as they tend to be in the publishing industry these days), we had to shoot in the boardroom at the Faber & Faber offices. The image here is actually an outtake and was one of the last things we did on the day. I was asked to shoot a standard portrait – something the publisher could use for publicity. I shot it using a Hasselblad H1 with an 80mm lens and a Phase One digital back.

The lighting for this shot is quite simple. It's one softbox to the right and there's another light behind Charlie, which I have covered with a red gel. That was a hangover from the previous shot where one of the books was *The Hell of it All*. I thought I would leave it in for this shot to add a bit of colour to his hair. It's a nice detail, I think.

This image was taken when something went wrong with a piece of equipment and my assistant was fixing it. Charlie just sat there, staring into space, while he waited. It was a beautiful moment where he was completely zoned out. I made a few adjustments in Photoshop, such as Levels, just to give the image a bit of punch and mood, but otherwise it's as it was shot.

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I tend to be quite open about how I use Photoshop because I think honesty helps to demystify the process and enables people to understand that there's nothing wrong with a bit of tweaking here and there. I'm not talking about tweaking on a cosmetic level (something I don't do), but it's important to look at post-processing as another form of the darkroom process. You can use it to add a bit of weight and atmosphere to your images.

I entered my image of Charlie into the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize, and while it didn't win it was shortlisted. I completely get that a lot of people aren't so fond of this competition and I think that's to do with a few things. The prize has developed a reputation recently where the only way you can win is by producing a portrait of a red-haired teenager staring into space, although of course this year we've seen that isn't the case. In my opinion, the prize isn't so concerned with equipment and intricately produced, technically accomplished images – two things I think a lot of people can get hung up on. The images are constructed from a more conceptual level.

Taylor Wessing images are about ideas inherent within simply produced shots. It's not about the camera – that's not important at all. A portrait must be about the moment, not how that moment was captured. Perhaps a lot of the aversion to the prize also comes from people associating it with the intellectualisation of photography, this thing where people feel that everything about an image needs to be justified and explained. While I think it's great being able to talk about an image and the ideas behind it, there's such a thing as talking about it *too* much.

When the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize was sponsored by Schweppes, you'd see a lot more editorial work entered. These days, we're seeing a lot of students and people who don't do photography as a job – it's more of a hobby. I think that's great because it opens up the field and means that anyone can enter. It levels the playing field in a way.

You could argue that this image would not be so powerful if no one knew who Charlie was, but I'm not sure if that's right. I think the power is inherent within the moment, not necessarily within the fact that it's an image of a public figure. It's a natural portrait and uncontrived. It's a raw moment that for me distils what it is that I try to do with portraiture. **AP**

Chris Floyd was talking to Oliver Atwell

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