

Marquee

Peter Eastway interviews advertising photographer Daniel Linnet about his latest award-winning project.

Daniel Linnet is an advertising photographer who works in Sydney and, along with his wife Wendy, also runs the Sydney Photographic Workshops (www.spw.net.au). So it was no surprise to see him once again in the winners' circle at the NSW AIPP Professional Photographer of the Year Awards where he won the 2008 Portrait Photographer of the Year Award and the 2008 Open Category Award to boot. Two of the winning images are presented here.

The idea started with a sketch made by a good friend of Daniel's, James Browne, who also happens to be a set and costume designer. James had a few bits and pieces left over from a play he had worked on and thought they could

be worked into a photo. As it turns out, Daniel worked them into a series of images.

"But it all started from that sketch which we modified and expanded, creating our characters and giving each a persona."

None of the models were experienced, although the



Photography by Daniel Linnet

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dancer was a professional. And each model agreed to help the project in return for a copy of the print, which is a great way to work on personal projects.

Although heavily stylised, at the heart of these images is the portrait itself. These are photographs of people, some in unusual poses and positions, so I asked Daniel how he works with his subjects.

"I normally start off slowly, spending a bit of time and letting my subjects ease themselves into the shoot. Initially I don't give them much direction, but I make mental notes about what works as they gain confidence. Only when I feel they have reached a level of familiarity with me and the camera do I give them more precise direction, often revisiting the steps I noted mentally before.

"For this shoot, our subjects had to fall into character and this involved an extensive chat before the shoot, explaining the characteristics of each person and the mood we were trying to create."

The shoot comprised a series of photos based on an underground nightclub in the 1930s, each image reminiscent of what might be seen in a peep show. The characters would be engrossed in their 'own little tortures'; for instance, the dancer's torture is standing in her impossibly high heel shoes.

It turned out to be difficult to get all the characters together at the one time, so Daniel shot a series of portraits, but with the camera locked off on a camera stand for the entire shoot. This required working out exactly what the final composition was to be well before the models turned up.

"The main character is a real dancer – we needed someone who could stand 'on point'. We had to work in bursts of one or two minutes and then she needed to have a rest! I think the pain of standing like this came through in the shot and this is exactly what we wanted.

"The man with the gramophone wasn't really sure of what we expected of him at first. I was after the slightly crazed look of someone whose whole life centred around the gramophone."

For both these shots, Daniel attached a Pocket Wizard remote control to his camera so he could walk around the set, dancing and talking to his subjects, getting them to move to the music. When he felt the subject was well positioned, he'd fire the shutter.

The main photo was taken on a Canon 1Ds Mark II with a 50mm f1.4 standard lens. "I was worried that if I used a zoom lens I'd bump it during the shoot, changing the focal length, so I chose the 50mm fixed focal length lens instead. The camera was tethered to my Mac, allowing me and the models to see the images as we worked." The photos were shot at f11 to ensure good depth-of-field throughout the set.

"I also had a second camera, an EOS 1Ds Mark III, which I used hand-held for the 'behind the scenes' photographs. We did these in between the main shots while the models were made up and in costume."

While the main shots used studio flash, lighting for the other images came from constant Arri heads. This saved re-arranging the studio flash for the secondary shots, and re-aligning them for the main shot. "I wanted to capture the feeling of the ambient lighting that might have been part of the nightclub and the Arri's worked really well for this."

Another friend of Daniel's had just leased premises up the road



(Opposite page) The four main elements which were composited into the main image (above) before Daniel applied his final treatment.

from his studio and so there was a vacant space in a satisfactory state of disrepair, ideal for the shoot. "We were able to build the set and light it the day before, which was really helpful. As it was, we spent 18 hours on the shoot day itself."

Still, some of the props were found on the morning of the shoot in the loading dock, others were brought in from Daniel's studios, plus of course there were the series of treasures brought along by the James, the costume and set designer.

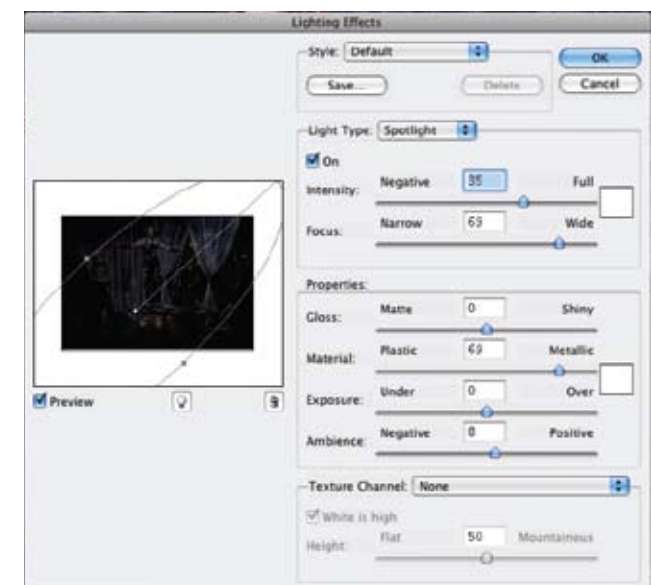
"We had a really good team and it was great working together. There were two make-up artists, two assistants and the models, so it was a pretty full-on day."

Daniel normally brings his images directly into Lightroom.

"I love Lightroom. I have my own set of presets which I've developed over the past couple of years and these serve as the basis for my mood treatments. And by saving an image as a virtual copy, I can compare variations side by side. It's a rough guide, but very useful when defining the mood direction."

From Lightroom the image is taken into Photoshop. Daniel applies Noise Ninja to clean up the file, then applies a tone map over it using an HDR plug-in called Photomatix. "I don't actually take a series of exposures, rather I just import my file in 16-bit and Photomatix can use this to produce a tone map, allowing me to readjust the tonal range and bring out fine details in the image."

From here Daniel uses a series of adjustment layers with their layer masks. For instance, he may apply a levels adjustment layer, set to Screen blending mode, then fill the mask with black (so



Part of Daniel's final treatment is to use the Lighting Effects filter in Photoshop. He then applies a mask and brings the underlying image through with light brushstrokes.

no effect is visible). Then with a brush he brings up details by painting on the mask, working very gradually with his brush set between 10 and 20% opacity. In comparison, to darken areas of

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(Above left) The original capture. (Above right) The file after a Lightroom preset has been applied. (Opposite) Final image.

the image he will make a copy layer and work with the Burn tool.

Often Daniel is working at large magnifications so the quality of the brushwork can be very precise. His technique is freehand, almost 'artistic' in terms of how he is using the brush on the image. "I use Wacom tablets and the Intuous 3 is just great for this type of work", Daniel added. "The trick is to continuously switch back to viewing the full image because you can lose track with what you're doing when working at 100% or 300% all the time."

Once happy with his handiwork, Daniel creates a final copy layer of the image (at the top of the layer stack), and then applies a Render Lighting filter effect (the dialogue is shown on the previous page). "I generally use the spotlight, but stretched out off the edge of the frame so the feather is darkening much of the image. Then I start the whole process again, brushing the underlying image up into the picture using a mask. The process gives me a nice glow at the end."

Once again, Daniel uses very soft brushes with the opacity dialled down to just 5 or 10%.

Daniel does most of his own Photoshop retouching and he sees this as a valuable skill for a professional photographer to have, especially when it comes to creating an image which is full of your own style and personality.

"On this project, I looked at working with a professional retoucher, hoping they would be able to do the comping and final treatment for me.

"The comping [compositing] the several exposures together into a single file] was great, but they didn't get my treatment process. In fact I found my assistant Emmanuel, also a good retoucher, was better able to interpret what I wanted, but he had the advantage of having worked with me on the shoot and so understood what was needed. He was able to finish the skin retouching, but it was really down to me to apply the final treatment and pull the photos together.

"What I learnt is that this isn't a bad thing. If photographers can learn retouching, then it's something they can charge the clients for, rather than having the client send it out to someone else. And retouching fees can be very worthwhile for this type of work."

Daniel is represented by Network Agency & Management, (02) 9690 2299. For more of Daniel's work, visit www.linnphoto.com.

Set / Costume Designer

James Browne

Make Up Artists

Sophia Lee and Renee De Bono

Photography Assistants

Emmanuel Giraud and Ben Lee

Models

Dancer: Tara Lester @ Grayboy Agency

Gramophone Player: Terrence Priester

Sailor: Nathan Carter & Sailor's Girl: Janis Lander

