

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

It's difficult to be unobtrusive using a conventional DSLR because the noise of the mirror flipping up gives you away. Music photographer Sisi Burn, however, has discovered the OM-D E-M1 is as quiet as a mouse...

Traditional SLRs and, latterly, DSLRs have always been saddled with more than their fair share of operational noise, and it's made them difficult to use in situations where absolute silence is required. The issue is inextricably tied in to camera design: with an SLR the photographer has the advantage of looking directly through the lens, but the pay-off is that this is only possible through the use of an internal mirror, which then has to flip up out of the way before the picture is taken. It's impossible to do this without making a noise, and this in turn can be hugely distracting.

One of those areas where noise of any kind is strictly ruled out is theatre photography, since this would obviously disturb the performers and spoil the audience's enjoyment. In the past some photographers have had to adopt extreme methods, such as encasing their camera inside a soundproof blimp, but now that CSCs such as the latest Olympus OM-D E-M1 have reached such a level of professional excellence, there's an alternative.

With no mirror involved and composing carried out using a high-quality and much-lauded electronic viewfinder (EVF) the photographer has the best of both worlds.

They can benefit from seeing exactly the view that the sensor will see, in super high quality that's almost indistinguishable from a conventional DSLR display, and yet because it's an electronic display there's no mirror involved and therefore no danger of noise. Furthermore the use of a pro-spec EVF brings other important benefits: the brightness level is automatically adjusted, for example, to take account of the lighting conditions you're shooting in, while EVF preview options in the E-M1 include Aspect control, Magnified view, Tone (Highlight/Shadow Tone control) and Colour Creator (a new feature that lets you alter hue and colour saturation). To switch between these you simply hold the Fn2 button and scroll using the rear control dial. There's also a 0.74x magnification of the image built in, so what you see in the viewfinder is a gloriously large and detailed view of what you're intending to shoot.

The perfect theatre camera

One of those who has discovered first-hand how useful the near-silent operation of the E-M1 can be is classical and jazz music photographer Sisi Burn. Having started out photographing friends who played instruments while studying at Richmond-upon-Thames College, she moved into this area full-time 20 years ago. It's an area that continues to inspire and excite her: "My teachers always encouraged me and said I should specialise in photographing musicians," she says. "So, really it's about having a passion for your subject and I've just practised and practised ever since! I continued to specialise while studying on the documentary photography course in Newport, and I've been freelance since 1994."

Initially Sisi started out using Leica R SLR film cameras, but she graduated to Olympus when she went digital, attracted by the compact nature of the products and their ease



IMAGES For music photographer Sisi Burn, the Olympus OM-D E-M1 is undoubtedly the best camera she's ever used in her business.



of use. Her first Olympus DSLR was the E-510, and she then moved on to the E-3, the E-5 and now the OM-D E-M1. Given this progression she's in a good position to judge the merits of each model and, for her, there is no doubt that the latest Olympus flagship, packed with high-end features and unashamedly aimed at the professional market, has been the best camera she's ever used in her specialist business.

That opinion was strengthened by the recent opportunity she had to try the camera out on a shoot for the press at the legendary Glyndebourne Festival. "I've visited Glyndebourne many times as a punter," she says, "but had never been to a photocall there until last summer. I asked if I could be on their photographer list and after they had looked at my website and had checked out my other credentials, which included me being a regular photographer at the BBC Proms, they invited me to come along."

Sisi had been introduced to the Olympus OM-D system when she hired an E-M5 to use during the Proms season. She immediately realised how the system's advantages perfectly complemented the requirements of her job.

"Not only was it easy to use, but I was also struck by the amazing quality of the images it was capable of producing," she says, "which, to my eyes, were better even than those I had

“I can photograph during quiet passages without disturbing the performers”

been producing with the top-of-the-range E-5. The problem that I faced, however, was that the E-M5, even with an adaptor, wasn't particularly compatible with my existing set of Olympus lenses. I was aware that the E-M1 was in the pipeline, however, and I'd heard this camera had the potential to perform better in this respect, so I was determined to try it out."

On the day of the Glyndebourne photocall the OM-D E-M1 performed faultlessly, and the whisper-quiet shutter ideally suited the occasion. "It was one of the reasons why I was so attracted to the camera in the first place," says Sisi. "A feature such as this is a dream for me since it means I can photograph during very quiet passages of music without disturbing the performers or the audience."

"The camera behaved extremely well, and I had no issues using my lenses with it via the adaptor. All of the images I took on that day were shot with the Olympus Pro 35-100mm f/2 lens, and I was achieving perfectly smooth focusing throughout. The EVF also came into its own during the performance, enabling me to see exactly what I was getting even though I was working under difficult stage lighting."

Another plus point was the strong ISO performance of the camera. "I was very impressed by this," says Sisi, "and it's crucial for me because I'm always working in situations where the light is low. I can now contemplate working at higher ISOs and using faster shutter speeds, which will make life a lot easier!"

The Olympus OM-D E-M1 passed its festival audition with flying colours, producing a set of images so strong that after Sisi subsequently sent a selection of them across to Glyndebourne to thank them for her press call invitation she received a commission from them to take photographs of their Touring Opera.

It was a no-brainer: she went out and bought the camera. The OM-D E-M1 is now the camera she uses regularly in her business.

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