

It was a shock to see Rowland Howard come on stage. The album launch of *Pop Crimes* would be his final gig. I knew he was sick – I'd heard that he might not have long to live – but to actually see him so ill was confronting. Watching him stagger around the stage, I didn't think it was possible he could actually play a whole gig.

But once he started to play, it was as though the Fender Jaguar gave him strength, leading him on his customary prowling around the stage. He was transformed back into an avant-garde guitar hero, playing incredibly loud rock music.

His first words to the audience were: 'Excuse me if I vomit, I feel queasy.' Feeling queasy isn't like drinking a bottle of tequila on stage and projectile vomiting. It was not shocking to our bourgeois sensibilities; it was shocking because our guitar hero was so vulnerable.

Towards the end of the gig, Rowland asked the audience for a tissue. We were now linked together by something as banal yet delicate as a tissue. Blood had appeared, seemingly from his mouth. I believe his lip had cracked; it was not his liver bleeding.

With his pale skin, lean form and black clothes he had a vampiric quality. Vampires live forever but they are frozen at the age they were made. Photography freezes people in the age that they were photographed, and it was this vampiric moment that made me think that I must photograph Rowland Howard.

Even though the gig was incredibly visceral, with Rowland's mortality on show, I was struck by the other-worldly quality he possessed. It was not a deathly quality – it was elfin. He was still strangely boyish at the same time as he was distressingly frail. I wished to capture this incredible transitory quality.