

FFOTO

HERMAN LEONARD

Herman Leonard's love of jazz started at an early age, when he borrowed a camera from his brother and started hanging out in the jazz clubs in New York City. It was there, within the smokey rooms and poorly lit stages of Birdland and the Royal Roost, that Leonard honed his craft, practicing and perfecting his backlit lighting that makes his photographs so recognizable.

After earning his BFA in photography in 1947 from Ohio University (interrupted by a two and a half year stint in the U.S. Army), Leonard sought out Yousuf Karsh, the famous portrait photographer from Canada, who offered him a one year internship – a turning point in Leonard's career. Working with Karsh, Leonard learned the tools of the trade, meeting such distinguished people as Albert Einstein, Harry Truman and Clark Gable.

Soon after his time with Karsh, Leonard moved to New York City and opened a studio in Greenwich Village, photographing aspiring actors, singers and dancers, while working for Life, Esquire, Look, Cosmopolitan and Playboy, among others. But jazz was his passion, and a camera around his neck became his ticket into night clubs and dressing rooms of some of the most well known musicians of the time. At age 25, Herman Leonard took on the world of jazz, starting a personal journey which became a life-long project.

Photographing such notables as Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk and Miles Davis, Leonard became a fixture of the jazz scene, his photographs gracing the covers of more than 200 albums. In 1989, after spending time in New York City, Paris, Ibiza and England, Leonard settled in New Orleans, immersing himself in a city known for its lively jazz and blues scene. With two monographs dedicated to his jazz work, Leonard is currently photographing in the local clubs, focusing his lens on young talent and seasoned pros who pass through New Orleans, including Lenny Kravitz, Dr. John and Cassandra Wilson.

All pieces from his second book, *Images of Jazz*, are housed in a permanent archive at the American Musical History Department of The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. He received numerous awards and accolades and is considered to be one of the finest jazz photographers to date. Herman Leonard passed away at the age of 87 in August of 2010.