

# In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard

National  
Portrait  
Gallery



Ella Fitzgerald, Miles Davis, and Billie Holiday. These are but a few of the greats captured in smoke-filled clubs and music studios as Herman Leonard (1923–2010) devoured and documented the New York City jazz scene beginning in the late 1940s. His images of jazz musicians are widely regarded as the definitive portraits of many of the twentieth century's greatest jazz artists. This exhibition of thirty black-and-white photographs from the collection of the National Portrait Gallery showcases iconic pictures of those noted above, as well as Louis Armstrong, Chet Baker, Nat "King" Cole, Duke Ellington, Frank Sinatra,

Sarah Vaughan, and Dinah Washington, and others whose styles and stories have fascinated aficionados and novices alike.

Herman Leonard began his career as an apprentice to famed portrait photographer Yousuf Karsh. Building on the lessons learned as a darkroom assistant and those gleaned from accompanying Karsh to portrait sessions with famous sitters such as Albert Einstein and Martha Graham, Leonard launched his first studio in New York City's Greenwich Village in 1948.



Smithsonian  
*National Portrait Gallery*

## In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard

His infatuation with jazz led him to clubs and performance venues all over the city, where he captured iconic images that soon made their way to album covers and the pages of *DownBeat* and *Metronome*. In 2008, Leonard received the prestigious Lucie Award in recognition of his achievement in portraiture.

In addition to highlighting Leonard's career, *In the Groove* will tell the stories of some of the most accomplished and fascinating performers who shaped New York City jazz culture. The exhibition provides an opportunity to explore a genre that some consider to be the only true American art form. *In the Groove* debuted at the Portrait Gallery from August 26, 2016, to February 20, 2017.

The tour of *In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard* has been made possible by a grant from the Smithsonian Women's Committee.



### EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

#### Content

- 30 black-and-white photographs
- Digital files for all exhibition texts, title graphic design, organizer credits, and logo
- Sample ideas of Portrait Gallery educational programming

#### Support Services

- Installation and display guidelines
- Portrait Gallery courier to oversee unpacking/packing and installation/deinstallation
- Press kit, including sample press release, press images, and captions with credits

#### Space Required

Approximately 160 linear feet

#### Security and Special Requirements:

- High security
- 5 to 7 footcandles required
- 70°F ±2; RH 50% ±5%

#### Availability

Limited to 3 venues, see **Tour Itinerary**

#### Participation Fee

\$14,200 for a 12-week booking period plus one-way shipping within contiguous US, international venues incur additional shipping charges

#### Domestic Shipping

One-way shipping via pre-approved fine art shipper with dual driver, air-ride transit

#### Contact:

If you would like to be considered as a host museum, please contact the Department of Exhibitions at the National Portrait Gallery expressing your interest and include an AAM Standard Facility Report. Please address inquiries to either:

**Marlene Rothacker Harrison**  
Traveling Exhibitions Specialist  
harrisonmr@si.edu | (202) 633-8287

**Claire Kelly**  
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National Portrait Gallery  
P.O. Box 37012, MRC 973  
Washington, DC 20013-7012



Smithsonian  
National Portrait Gallery

## In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard



### Tour Itinerary

#### **November 8, 2018 to January 27, 2019**

The Museum of National History  
Hillerød, Denmark  
CONFIRMED

#### **Mid-May 2020 to early August 2020**

OPEN

#### **September 2020 to December 2020**

Fisk University Galleries  
Nashville, TN  
HOLD

HOLD - Tentative

RESERVED - Contract sent

CONFIRMED - Contract signed

**Shipping:** One-way outgoing shipping to next venue within the contiguous U.S. or to port of U.S. exit.

Venues outside the contiguous U.S. pay incoming shipping from port of U.S. exit plus outgoing shipping to next destination as specified by the Portrait Gallery.





National Portrait Gallery  
**In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard**  
**Final Script**  
**Friday, August 5, 2016 - Monday, February 20, 2017**

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**1. EXHIBITION**



*Ray Brown*

**HL01**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1948 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39.4 × 30.4cm (15 1/2 × 11 15/16")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.5cm (19 13/16 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.5**



*Buddy Rich*

**HL02**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1954 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39.6 × 32.2cm (15 9/16 × 12 11/16")  
Sheet: 50.6 × 40.6cm (19 15/16 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.23**



*Louis Armstrong*

**HL03**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1960 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 30.7 × 40cm (12 1/16 × 15 3/4")  
Sheet: 40.5 × 50.5cm (15 15/16 × 19 7/8")  
Frame: 56.5 × 71.8 × 3.8 cm (22 1/4 × 28 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.1**



*Fats Navarro*

**HL04**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1948 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 37.6 × 30.5cm (14 13/16 × 12")  
Sheet: 50.5 × 40.6cm (19 7/8 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.20**

## In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard (Continued)



*Billy Eckstine*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1948 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39 × 31.5cm (15 3/8 × 12 3/8")  
Sheet: 50.3 × 40.5cm (19 13/16 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.8**

**HL05**



*Max Roach*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1950 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 36.5 × 30.2cm (14 3/8 × 11 7/8")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.5cm (19 13/16 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.24**

**HL06**



*Stan Getz*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1949 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 37.6 × 30.4cm (14 13/16 × 11 15/16")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.6cm (19 13/16 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.11**

**HL07**



*Sonny Stitt*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1953 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 30.5 × 40cm (12 × 15 3/4")  
Sheet: 40.5 × 50.5cm (15 15/16 × 19 7/8")  
Frame: 56.5 × 71.8 × 3.8 cm (22 1/4 × 28 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.26**

**HL08**



*Dinah Washington*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1955 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39.8 × 30cm (15 11/16 × 11 13/16")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.6cm (19 13/16 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.29**

**HL09**

## In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard (Continued)



*Dizzy Gillespie*

**HL10**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1948 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39.5 × 30.5cm (15 9/16 × 12")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.6cm (19 13/16 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.12**



*Lester Young*

**HL11**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1948 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 32 × 30.5cm (12 5/8 × 12")  
Sheet: 50.5 × 40.6cm (19 7/8 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.30**



*Art Tatum*

**HL12**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1955 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39.9 × 31.5cm (15 11/16 × 12 3/8")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.6cm (19 13/16 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.27**



*Gerry Mulligan and Zoot Sims*

**HL13**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1955 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 31.7 × 30.5cm (12 1/2 × 12")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.6cm (19 13/16 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.19**



*Art Blakey*

**HL14**

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1958 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 31.2 × 37.6cm (12 5/16 × 14 13/16")  
Sheet: 40.6 × 50.6cm (16 × 19 15/16")  
Frame: 56.5 × 71.8 × 3.8 cm (22 1/4 × 28 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.3**

## In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard (Continued)



*Duke Ellington*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1956 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 40.6 × 32cm (16 × 12 5/8")  
Sheet: 50.6 × 40.5cm (19 15/16 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.9**

**HL15**



*Sarah Vaughan*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1949 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 40 × 30.9cm (15 3/4 × 12 3/16")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.5cm (19 13/16 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.28**

**HL16**



*Thelonious Monk*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1949 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 38 × 30.3cm (14 15/16 × 11 15/16")  
Sheet: 50.5 × 40.5cm (19 7/8 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.17**

**HL17**



*Charlie Parker*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1949 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 38.7 × 30.2cm (15 1/4 × 11 7/8")  
Sheet: 40.6 × 50.3cm (16 × 19 13/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.21**

**HL18**



*Ella Fitzgerald*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1949 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 30.1 × 41.2cm (11 7/8 × 16 1/4")  
Sheet: 40.6 × 50.5cm (16 × 19 7/8")  
Frame: 56.5 × 71.8 × 3.8 cm (22 1/4 × 28 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.10**

**HL19**

## In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard (Continued)



*Dexter Gordon*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1948 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 40.8 × 32.7cm (16 1/16 × 12 7/8")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.5cm (19 13/16 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.13**

**HL20**



*Chet Baker*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1956 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 35.2 × 31.3cm (13 7/8 × 12 5/16")  
Sheet: 50.2 × 40.5cm (19 3/4 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.2**

**HL21**



*Billie Holiday*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1949 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 41.2 × 31.7cm (16 1/4 × 12 1/2")  
Sheet: 50.3 × 40.5cm (19 13/16 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.15**

**HL22**



*Clifford Brown*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1954 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 38.5 × 31.5cm (15 3/16 × 12 3/8")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.7cm (19 13/16 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.4**

**HL23**



*Nat King Cole*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1949 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 38 × 30.5cm (14 15/16 × 12")  
Sheet: 50.5 × 40.5cm (19 7/8 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.6**

**HL24**



## In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard (Continued)



*Bud Powell*

HL25

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1949 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 32 × 30.3cm (12 5/8 × 11 15/16")  
Sheet: 50.5 × 40.4cm (19 7/8 × 15 7/8")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.22**



*Quincy Jones*

HL27

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1955 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 35.6 × 30.6cm (14 × 12 1/16")  
Sheet: 50.5 × 40.5cm (19 7/8 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.16**



*Johnny Hodges*

HL28

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1958 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39.6 × 30.1cm (15 9/16 × 11 7/8")  
Sheet: 50.5 × 40.5cm (19 7/8 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.14**



*Frank Sinatra*

HL29

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1958 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39.5 × 30.4cm (15 9/16 × 11 15/16")  
Sheet: 50.5 × 40.5cm (19 7/8 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.25**

## 2. TOUR ONLY



*James Moody*

HL26

Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1951 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 40.2 × 31.7cm (15 13/16 × 12 1/2")  
Sheet: 50.6 × 40.5cm (19 15/16 × 15 15/16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.18**

## In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard (Continued)

HL30



*Miles Davis*  
Herman Leonard (1923 - 2010)  
1991 (printed 1998)  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print  
Image: 39.7 × 30.9cm (15 5/8 × 12 3/16")  
Sheet: 50.4 × 40.6cm (19 13/16 × 16")  
Frame: 71.8 × 56.5 × 3.8 cm (28 1/4 × 22 1/4 × 1 1/2")  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution  
**NPG.2014.111.7**

NOTE UPDATE: 5/12/16

HL01 through HL30 to go on tour

28 pieces to be displayed here

HL01 through HL25 and HL27 through HL29 to be displayed at NPG  
(HL26 and HL30 are tour only)

All 30 being matted in passepartout sealed packages with Artsorb (Archival Art Services)

### Planning Notes

CURATOR: Ann Shumard

OBJECT MEDIA: 30 b&w photographs (28 at NPG; 30 on tour)

#### TEXTS

- Exhibition Title
- Introductory text (NTE 240 words)
- Object labels (NTE 140 words)

#### FURNITURE

- Stands for: Label packets in large-print English, large-print Spanish, Braille

NOTE: This exhibition is being promoted for a tour. Three venues have been authorized.

#### SPONSORS (NPG Exhibition):

In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard has been made possible by a grant from the Smithsonian Women's Committee.

This exhibition is presented in celebration of the 2016 Grand Opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

[NMAAHC logo]

#### SPONSORS (Tour):

In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard has been made possible by a grant from the Smithsonian Women's Committee.

# National Portrait Gallery





# In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard

On view August 5, 2016 to February 20, 2017





# IN THE GROOVE

JAZZ PORTRAITS BY HERMAN LEONARD



# Herman Leonard's intimate portraits of jazz greats draw viewers into smoky clubs

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By **Matt Schudel** August 6

When Herman Leonard began taking pictures at New York jazz clubs in the 1940s, he used two strobe lights because that's all he could afford. He had a bulky 4-by-5 Speed Graphic camera, the same model used by newspaper photographers of the era.

Then he waited for the lights to go down and for the musicians to take the stage. It's tempting to call the resulting portraits accidental masterpieces, since they were made with such ordinary tools.

Whether by happenstance, luck or design, Leonard captured indelible images of the greatest jazz artists of his or any other time: Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and many more.

An exhibit of Leonard's jazz photography, "In the Groove," which opened Friday at the National Portrait Gallery and was organized by photography curator Ann Shumard, is presented in conjunction with the September debut of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. It portrays an era from 1948 to 1960 when musicians — most of them African American — were developing new forms of jazz that embodied the exuberance and artistic freedom of postwar America.

Much of Leonard's later career was spent in Europe, where he did fashion shoots and commercial projects. His jazz portraits were forgotten for decades. Except for an occasional album cover, they were not seen in public until 1988, when Leonard — "flat broke," in his words — pulled them out of a box for display at a gallery in London. Thousands of people attended the exhibit, and his reputation was secure.

After settling in New Orleans in the early 1990s, Leonard published several books and had many shows at galleries and museums. (The Smithsonian National Museum of American History has more than 130 of his pictures, and the current Portrait Gallery exhibition is drawn from a recently acquired collection.)

In 2005, Leonard, then 82, almost lost everything when his studio and as many as 8,000 of his prints were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Hours before the storm struck, his negatives were taken to a vault at a New Orleans museum and saved.

Despite their relatively recent rediscovery, Leonard’s jazz photos seem to have been with us forever, as if conjured from smoke, nighttime and a saxophone’s wail. His 1948 portrait of a young Dexter Gordon, wreathed in smoke, his face framed by the curve of his tenor saxophone, has come to be recognized as the quintessential picture of jazz.

Leonard, who was born in Allentown, Pa., in 1923, spent a year of apprenticeship in Ottawa with portrait photographer Yousuf Karsh, learning about lighting techniques and printing. (All 28 “In the Groove” images were printed by Leonard in 1998, 12 years before his death.)

There were other notable photographers of midcentury jazz, including William Gottlieb, William Claxton and Francis Wolff, but Leonard’s vision somehow probes more deeply. His black and white portraits are beautifully composed and remarkable for their clarity, yet they have an animated quality that captures the feeling of jazz at the moment of creation.

We see the joy in the faces of singers Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, but Leonard shows us that jazz was not just bouncy fun. The mound of sheet music on Bud Powell’s piano implicitly depicts the hours of preparation required to create the inspired moment. The usually buoyant Louis Armstrong is seen backstage, looking tired and sad.

The intimacy Leonard achieves in his photographs is almost reverential. Many of his subjects have their eyes closed: Powell, Parker, drummer Art Blakey, trumpeters Fats Navarro and Clifford Brown, saxophonists Stan Getz and Sonny Stitt all search within themselves for the perfect phrase. We’re so close to the bandstand — and Leonard’s lighting is so sharp — that we can see the beads of sweat on Parker’s forehead and the vibrating strings of Ray Brown’s bass.

Early in his career, when one of his strobe lights did not fire, Leonard discovered the mysterious glow imparted by cigarette smoke, which filled the nightclubs in those days. It became his visual signature.

In one of Leonard’s most striking images, Lester Young’s cigarette smolders on the lip of a Coke bottle, next to sheet music, his saxophone case and his porkpie hat. It is a complete portrait, even without a person. Frank Sinatra, viewed from behind and in silhouette, is instantly recognizable from the wave of his hand, with a cigarette in his fingertips.

In another photo, smoke rises from Navarro’s trumpet, as it were in the act of spontaneous combustion. And in a way, many of these musicians did fly too close to the flame. Navarro was dead at 26, and others portrayed in the exhibition, including Parker, Holiday, Powell and Chet Baker, struggled with drugs and other demons.

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But those were not the stories that Leonard wanted to tell. His goal was to reveal the radiance inside the music and the character of the people who made it. He recalled the advice of his mentor, Karsh, who said, “Always tell the truth, but in terms of beauty.”

Leonard often claimed his pictures were the happy byproduct of being in the right place at the right time. After all, he was a jazz fan, and when he was in his 20s, his camera gave him free entree to the clubs. He hung out at afternoon rehearsals with the musicians, earning their trust.

But that makes it sound too easy. Quincy Jones, the subject of one of the photos in the Portrait Gallery exhibition, has noted that the musicians realized Leonard approached photography the way they prepared for a performance. Instead of practicing scales and chords, Leonard's rehearsals were with lights, shutter speeds and printing methods.

Then, when sound and smoke swirled into one, Leonard was ready with his camera, part of the rhythm of the moment. It was art, not an accident.

*"In the Groove: Jazz Portraits by Herman Leonard" is on view at the National Portrait Gallery, at Eighth and F streets NW, through Feb. 20, 2017.*

Matt Schudel has been an obituary writer at The Washington Post since 2004.