

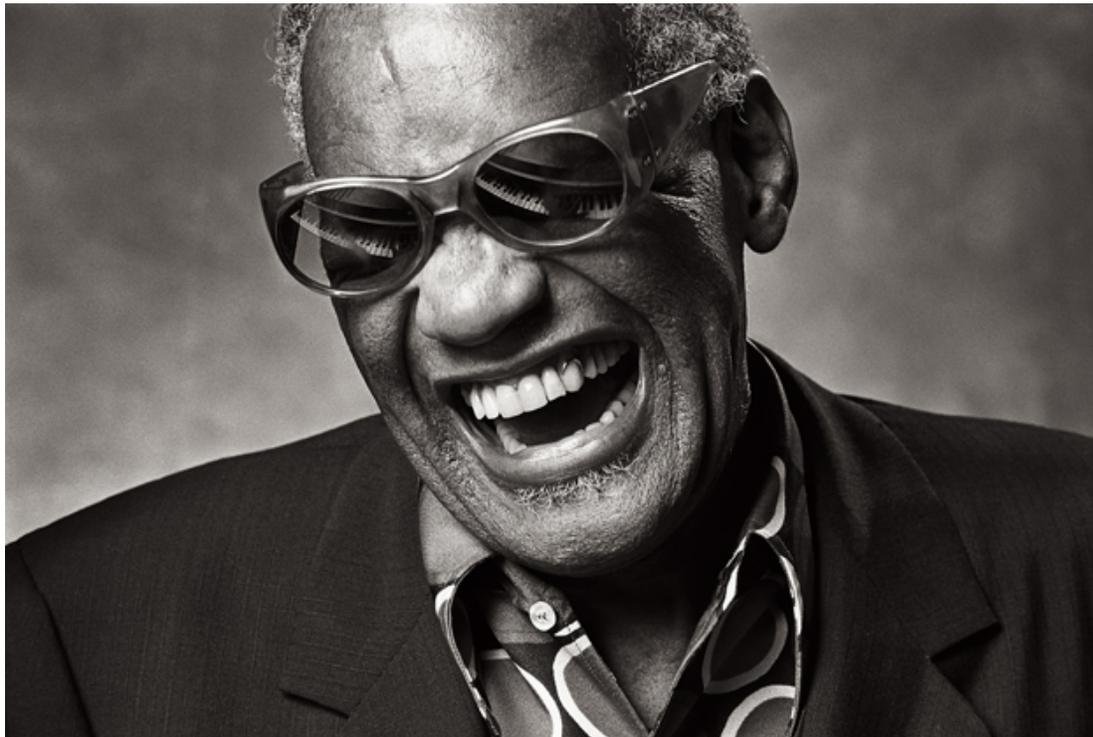


Norman Seeff Shares Stories Behind His Iconic Rock Photos

Inside tales about the Band, Patti Smith, Andy Warhol and more

May 16, 2013

By Pat Pemberton



Photographer Norman Seeff isn't into researching his subjects or setting up props; he'd rather place his famous models in front of a plain screen and chat. "My whole thing was, 'It's not about photography – it's about communication,'" he tells Rolling Stone.

A former medical doctor from South Africa, Seeff arrived in New York in the late 1960s, looking for a more creative line of work. After shooting interesting-looking people on the streets for a year, he met graphic designer Bob Cato, who introduced him to rock photography. Inspired by his subjects' creativity, Seeff's photo sessions featured live performances and interviews. "The experience was so profound that I started having audiences come to my sessions," Seeff says. "Anywhere from 40 to 250 people would come and watch."



Joni Mitchell

While Seeff preferred spontaneity, Mitchell – who also created art for album covers – was more into planning. "Joni would often come in with conceptual ideas, so we would generally argue for the first half hour," he says. In this case, he adds, "It was just a moment of Joni looking gorgeous, as she is. And she came in wearing that kind of stuff."



Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe

After arriving in New York, Seeff began hanging out at Max's Kansas City, where he befriended Smith and Mapplethorpe, then a couple and both unknown. "We were just hanging in my kitchen when we did that," Seeff says. "When I photographed them, who knew where they would go?" In 1969, Mapplethorpe considered himself an airbrush artist and demonstrated his work on some of Seeff's photos. "Then he said, 'Would you mind if I come and watch your sessions, because I want to learn about photography?'"