



THE NEW YORKER

PHOTO BOOTH

The view from The New Yorker's photo department.



Madonna, New York City, 1982

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Laura Levine: New York Rocker

Posted by Caroline Hirsch

"I'd always been into music—printing up fake press passes and sneaking my camera into concerts since the day I first picked up a camera," the photographer Laura Levine told me. "Typical New York City kid. I worked for all of the usual suspects—Rolling Stone, Creem, Trouser Press, Spin, Sounds, the New York Times—and, later, the record labels. But the publication I ended up working most closely with in the early eighties, during its brief but crucial existence, was the New York Rocker. The Rocker was way ahead of the game as far as knowing who was up and coming. I was their chief photographer and photo editor. We were a very tight-knit group who went to see gigs together, threw parties, and pulled all-nighters pasting up the issues for press. I probably did close to five hundred photo shoots by the time I stopped shooting, in 1994, and started painting."

Levine's show "Musicians," currently on view at the Steven Kasher Gallery, includes many vintage gelatin silver prints which have never been shown before. Here are some of my favorites.

Read more <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/photobooth/2011/08/laura-levine.html#ixzzITtZ2RFWS>



Madonna, New York City, 1982

In 1982 I was assigned to photograph Madonna for *Interview* magazine. Her very first single (“Everybody”) was about to be released and no one really knew what she looked like. She (like most of my photo subjects back then) arrived alone, climbing the four flights to my small Chinatown apartment. She was very professional and easy to work with. Even when I asked her to do seemingly ridiculous things, like wrap herself in my curtains and pretend to scream.



R.E.M., Walter's Bar-B-Que, Athens, Georgia, 1984

I've worked with R.E.M. more than any other band. They're wonderful guys and became good friends. In 1984 I flew down to Athens, Georgia, to visit my friends, make a film (“Just Like a Movie”), and shoot rolls and rolls of photos just as they were about to release their second album, “Reckoning.” We'd been taking photos all morning around Athens and stopped at Walter's for a lunch break. I stepped behind the counter and quickly took a few shots. (By the way, that's my plate of food in front of Michael Stipe.)



Joan Jett, New York City, 1981

She arrived with a bottle of champagne, her manager and a few others in tow. We relocated her mini-entourage into my tiny bedroom so they could watch some TV and we could take our photos without any distractions. By the end of the shoot the champagne was gone, Joan's hands were scratched to bits, my cat Tchatchke was exhausted (but happy), and I had some wonderful portraits of a very cool girl.



The B-52's, Kaaterskill Clove, NY, 1988

Kate Pierson and Keith Strickland of The B-52's and I were cooling off at one of our favorite swimming holes in the Catskills one summer. I'd just gotten an underwater point-and-shoot camera and couldn't wait get it wet and try it out. Normally when you see photos of the B's they're in full makeup, wigs and stage attire. I like that this shows them just being the Kate and Keith I know, having a blast chilling out in the creek.



Grace Jones, New York City, 1982

I honestly can't recall where I took this. It's a performance photo, so all credit for the lighting and propping goes to her stage designer (who—and I could be wrong—was probably Jean-Paul Goude, who was responsible for much of her amazing visuals at that time). I went through a period of hand-coloring my photographs back then, applying Marshall's Photo Oils directly to the emulsion of my silver gelatin prints. I felt that this black-and-white image could use a shock of color.



Michael Stipe, New York City, 1983

Michael and I often spent entire days experimenting with photography, learning as we went along. Our sessions together were collaborations in the purest sense of the word. In this case we took our inspiration from a famous photo of Elvis Presley I'd seen in a book. A single light source and a spray bottle of water added just the right amount of atmosphere.



Tina Weymouth and Grandmaster Flash, New York City, 1981

I shot this for the cover of the *New York Rocker*. There was a great deal of cross-pollination starting to take place between the hip-hop scene and the downtown scene. Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz's new band, Tom Tom Club, had just released its first album, which incorporated rap and hip-hop beats. Tina and Flash had never met, and they got along like a house on fire. I'd asked them to bring their boom boxes along for the session. They danced, sang, traded records—the energy on the shoot was wonderful. In fact, Tina recently told me that after the shoot she brought Grandmaster Flash back to the studio where the Talking Heads were working on their new record to play him some tracks, and later on Flash used the Tom Tom Club's "Genius of Love" in his song "It's Nasty." I love the fact that a musical connection came out of the shoot.



Henry Rollins, New York City, 1993

At the time I took this portrait, Rollins rarely allowed himself to be photographed showing all of his tattoos. The fact that he allowed me to do so meant a lot to me.



Hope Sandoval, Los Angeles, 1993

I spent several days shooting photos of Hope and David Roback of Mazzy Star out in L.A.; I think their album was about to come out. She's simply gorgeous. Even underwater, she's gorgeous. (Funny L.A. side-note: from what I can recall, this was shot in Mr. Spock—aka Leonard Nimoy's—swimming pool).



Beastie Boys, New York City, 1987

This is one of my favorite frames from a shoot I did with the Beastie Boys, who were about to go on the Together Forever tour with Run DMC.



Sinead O'Connor, New York City, 1988

When word got out that O'Connor was coming to the States for the first time, I called her record label to request a portrait sitting with her. What struck me most was her shyness. Although I took many portraits of her looking directly into the camera, this is probably my favorite image from our session together. You don't need to see her face to know it's Sinead O'Connor—a simple, raw portrait of an incredible talent.