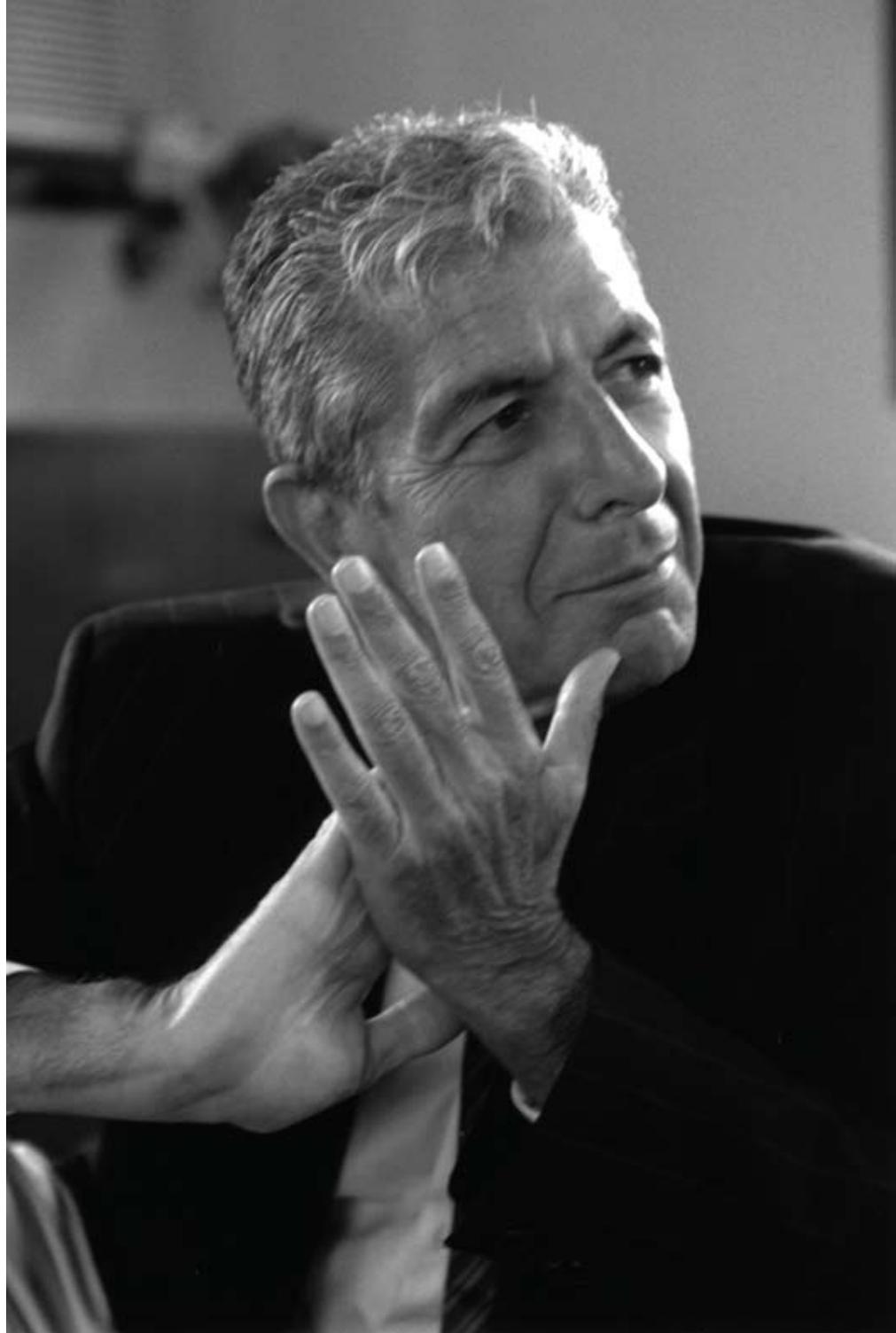


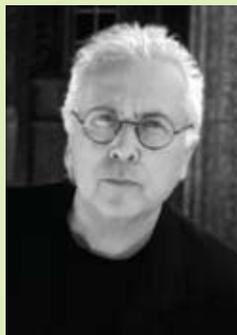


MODERN  
*Laszlo of Montreal*  
CLASSICS

BY CLAUDE JODOIN



Back in the late 1990s, I had the pleasure of hosting Joseph and Louise Simone the first time they spoke in Detroit. They are a charming couple from Montreal (my birthplace) and I enjoyed their informative program outlining their incredible work. They produce some of the finest classical portraits I have ever seen, but like all of us, they didn't start out that way. During one of their programs at WPPI (a must see), they made a point of mentioning one of the gentlemen in the audience as having been their mentor. His clients and friends know him simply as Laszlo. Over the years, he developed a reputation for excellence among corporate titans, wealthy socialites and famous artists in Canada, the United States and Europe.



**Opposite:** André Kertész. **Above:** Leonard Cohen (poet, singer, songwriter). *What can be simpler than daylight and the Canon EOS-1vH with a 28-70mm lens?* **Left:** Laszlo

Born in Budapest, Hungary, Laszlo Mezei immigrated to Canada after the 1956 Hungarian uprising. He studied photography and art history in both his adopted country and New York City. He has recently published a large format book, *Laszlo: Portraits* (Les Editions Rogers, Montreal), which features stunning photographs of 55 distinguished Canadians.

I had the pleasure of speaking with this charming gentleman on the phone. This man knows everyone who is anyone in our industry and makes anyone feel at ease in about 30 seconds. After

**Below:** Yousuf Karsh (Master Photographer). Illuminated by mid-afternoon diffused daylight; Hasselblad 500ELX with 150mm lens.

**Right:** Christopher Plummer (actor). Illuminated with two battery powered Lumedyne strobes and a white cardboard reflector; Hasselblad 500ELX with 150mm lens.

**Bottom:** Richard Harris (actor). Illuminated by one Dyna-Lite strobe through a 27-inch Westcott softbox and a silver reflector. Hasselblad 500 ELX with 150mm lens.



### On Photographing Yousuf Karsh:

"It was a fun session for me. I met up with the great old Master in Ottawa. [I] drove there from Montreal with a van full of photo gear and I ended up using the mid-afternoon daylight under an overhead structure, which gave direction to the otherwise dull cloudy daylight. I used a Hasselblad 553 ELX camera with 150mm lens. Karsh was quite an interesting and charming man. Easy to converse with. And he let me do my thing, without showing any sign of distrust. To my delight, he spoke to me about some of his experiences in great detail. At the end he thanked me for an easy and enjoyable photo session and wished me good luck with my book project. We hugged and parted. I spoke with him a couple of times in the following months, but I never saw him again. My memorable session with Mr. Karsh happened during the summer of 1999 at the Château Laurier hotel in Ottawa, where he had a studio for many years."

a while, we were both amazed that we had never met before because we knew so many of the same people and their work.

Like all photographers who began their career in the last millennium, Laszlo learned to master the nuance of light and film in all of the formats—large, medium and small. Beginning with newspaper work, he eventually honed his skills as a portrait photographer and built a high-end studio business with classical large format portraiture in the traditions of Dutch master painters.

In the last few years, he has managed to retire his beloved Hasselblads in favor of the Canon EOS 5D with 580 flashes and a Mac PowerBook. His lenses of choice are an EF 24–70mmL f/2.8 zoom, an EF 50mm f/1.2L USM and an EF 85mm f/1.2L II USM. He loves his newfound freedom with the fast lenses and zooms and is thrilled with the ability to create portraits without a tripod that are of the same quality that required larger, more cumbersome formats in the film world of the last millennium.

Instead of dragging around tons of lighting equipment, he enjoys the freedom of Canon Speedlites and a small umbrella or Larson Soff box, all lightweight gear yielding quality results.

His high-end studio rent used to be



### On Photographing Christopher Plummer:

"When I called him to nail down a date for us to get together, he asked me how the book project was coming along. I told him that I was going to photograph Yousuf Karsh the next week, and he laughed. 'I hope you will make him suffer like he made me suffer,' he said. Apparently his session with Karsh lasted almost four hours, and the Master made Plummer hold his poses for painfully long periods. But Chris never told me if he liked the results!"





\$10,000 Canadian dollars per month, which, as you can imagine, put a lot of pressure on him. The building was eventually taken over by the Museum of Fine Arts with the intent to build an annex. That said, Laszlo was compelled to move to another location and evolve his methods to more location-oriented work. He now enjoys the freedom of not having to pay a large rent bill every month.

With his years of experience in lighting, posing and putting people at ease, Laszlo is free to travel and create fine portraits for distinguished clients in remote locations.

He says, "With just a few battery operated flashes, the 5D, and a small umbrella or softbox, I'm able to do work, which rivals

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**This page:** Paul Anka (singer/songwriter). Hasselblad with 60mm lens, one Lumedyne strobe light in a 27-inch Westcott softbox and a white cardboard reflector. **Opposite:** Pierre E. Trudeau, former Canadian Prime Minister.

my fine studio portraits of the past without all the cumbersome equipment. I am free to concentrate on my subjects, and give them the full attention they deserve, rather than worry about more elaborate lighting setups.” He continues, “I can integrate my flash with available light in ways that I never could before. I can’t tell you how much I enjoy this newfound freedom of working.”

In my own work, I can certainly attest to the freedoms provided by high ISOs and manual shutter speeds, which allow us to create images that were not possible before the advance of today’s technology. As an early digital adopter, it’s nice for me to share the joy of this with someone whose work I admire. Laszlo’s way with people and their varied personalities has as much to do with the quality of his images as the technical side.

“Early in my career, I had the opportunity to work with some of the biggest names in North American photography,” says Laszlo.



**This page:** Johanne Martineau. One of Laszlo's earlier portraits. Illuminated by two Dyna-Lite strobes with umbrellas; 4x5-inch Linhof Technika.

**Opposite:** Phil Fontaine (Canadian National Chief of First Nations). On a drizzling rainy afternoon, I shot this on the top of a high-rise to avoid the distracting background. I used two battery-powered Lumedynes, one, to backlight the feathers and the other, his profile.

"I was fortunate to have been introduced to Al Gilbert, one of Canada's most decorated photographers at the time. I assisted him on many of his location shoots for the elite of Toronto, and I traveled with him to many conventions. All over the continent, he introduced me to his friends who were leaders in the industry. The rest is history. My dear friend Monte Zucker, may he rest in peace, sent me, along with Gary Bernstein to Joe Zeltzman [Laszlo's mentor] to learn classic studio portraiture. Monte also introduced me to Philip Stewart Charis, arguably one of the finest portrait artists of his time anywhere. I also befriended Leon Kennamer after Monte introduced us."

Laszlo made a special point of paying homage to history's greatest photographers. He said that he had learned a great deal from them, and all succeeding generations of photographers could not find better teachers. Some of the names he mentioned are: Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz,



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Ansel Adams, Yousuf Karsh, Arnold Newman, Halsman, Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, Victor Skrebneski, Robert Frank, Ernst Haas, Brassai, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Jacques-Henri Lartigue, R. Doisneau, Robert Capa, W. Eugene Smith, Cecil Beaton, Scavullo, Helmut Newton, Ralph Gibson, Gordon Parks, Peter Lindbergh, Patrick Desmarchelier, Norman Sieff and Herb Ritts.

When I ask Laszlo to share a bit of advice, he says, "All that happens to you in the past, along with the choices you make, accumulate to make you what you are today. There is a reason for everything that happens to you in life."

Visit Laszlo's site: [www.laszlo-montreal.com](http://www.laszlo-montreal.com).



*Claude Jodoin has been involved in digital imaging since 1986 and has not used film since 1999. Email him at [claudelj1@aol.com](mailto:claudelj1@aol.com).*