

BOBBY FISCHER:

# Icon Among Icons

*Photographs by Harry Benson CBE*



==== MARCH 9 - AUGUST 12, 2012 ====



## BOBBY FISCHER: Icon Among Icons

*Photographs by Harry Benson*

World-renowned photographer Harry Benson was the only person to have private access to Bobby Fischer during the entire 1972 World Chess Championship match in Reykjavík, Iceland. Benson captured intimate images of this time with Fischer and was the first person to deliver the news to Fischer that he had won the match.

Benson began photographing Fischer when on assignment for *LIFE* magazine in 1971. Sent to Buenos Aires, Argentina to cover the 1971 Candidates Tournament, Benson began to cultivate a relationship with Bobby, who was known for being notoriously camera-averse, guarded, and socially awkward. Being skeptical of journalists, Fischer would request late night meetings with Benson which generally consisted of quiet walks broken up by Fischer pulling out a pocket chess set to play under lampposts from time to time. Throughout the assignment, Benson and Fischer began to form a friendship and Benson noticed that Fischer seemed most comfortable in the company of animals and children, who also seemed exceedingly drawn to him. Fischer exuded a sense of patience and understanding with these groups that he did not possess with his peers, who he generally dismissed. Fischer defeated Tigran Petrosian at the Candidates Tournament, qualifying him for the World Chess Championship match. With this victory, he not only continued his rise among chess players, but also became a pop-culture sensation. At the height of the Cold War, the media played up the impending battle between the American and the Russian Boris Spassky, the defending World Chess Champion. News outlets referred to the upcoming match as the “Match of the Century” and used headlines such as “Fischer vs. Spassky: A Major Struggle in the Cold War.”

In an uncharacteristic twist, Fischer exclusively invited Benson and *LIFE* reporter Brad Darrach to visit him as he trained for the championship at Grossinger’s Resort in upstate New York. Considering himself an athlete, Fischer noted that playing chess required an enormous amount of stamina. He chose this resort complex in the Catskill Mountains due to its reputation as a popular training facility for sports legends such as Rocky Marciano and Jackie Robinson. In addition to his scrupulous chess study, Fischer followed a strict regimen of physical training including running, tennis, swimming, biking, jump rope, and hand strengthening exercises—the latter in an effort to “crush” the Russians and their dominance of the chess world.

The tales of the World Chess Championship in Reykjavík, Iceland in the summer of 1972 are numerous and fantastic. Fischer arrived late to the first game, forfeited Game 2, inspected television cameras and lights, insisting that they were making too much noise or contained devices that were intended to distract him, and had special chessboards created for the match. He made outrageous demands—requesting more money than the agreed-upon prize fund of \$125,000 (to be split  $\frac{5}{8}$  for the winner and  $\frac{3}{8}$  for the loser), and requiring that Game 3 be played in a “back room” away from the agreed-upon setting. Much speculation surrounded this behavior and it was debated if this was “normal” Fischer conduct or if he was intentionally attempting to cause a psychological breakdown of his opponent.

The match was organized as the best of 24 games—wins would count as one point and draws as a half point, with the winner being the first to reach 12  $\frac{1}{2}$  points. The first game took place on July 11<sup>th</sup> and the last game began on August 31<sup>st</sup> and was adjourned after 40 moves. Spassky resigned the next day without resuming play and the 29-year-old Fischer won the match 12  $\frac{1}{2}$ -8  $\frac{1}{2}$ , becoming the 11<sup>th</sup> World Chess Champion and the first American-born player to do so—ending 24 years of Soviet domination of the World Chess Championship.

Benson continued to cultivate a journalistic friendship with Fischer. The two spent many hours together during the nearly two months in Iceland, walking and talking night after night through the hills of the Icelandic countryside. Benson noted that the pressure on Fischer was enormous—it is known that Fischer received several phone calls from Henry Kissinger encouraging him to play the match when he threatened not to. Noticing Fischer’s lack of social skills and recognizing his loneliness and isolation, Benson stated, “Bobby regarded the press as enemies, yet there had to be one friendly face in the enemy camp, and I figured it might as well be me.”

As the images in this exhibition show, Benson’s photography captures a side of the elusive and controversial chess genius that is rarely seen, and offers a window into the private world of the man Benson calls “the most eccentric and most fascinating person I have ever photographed.”



# BOBBY FISCHER WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP TIMELINE

## CANDIDATES MATCH

*Sept. - Oct., 1971*  
Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Bobby Fischer (USA) vs. Tigran Petrosian (USSR)

Fischer's USCF rating was at its peak of 2825.

The match was held in the Teatro General San Martín and was to consist of 12 games. 9 games were played.

**GAME 1**  
Fischer vs. Petrosian  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 1  
Petrosian - 0

This game marks the 20th victory in a row for Fischer as he competed for a place in the World Chess Championship.

**GAME 2**  
Petrosian vs. Fischer  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Result:** Petrosian wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 1  
Petrosian - 1

This is Fischer's first loss in over a year and the end of Fischer's 20 game winning streak. The game was replayed in Moscow on the evening's television and radio news programs.

**GAME 3**  
Fischer vs. Petrosian  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 1 ½  
Petrosian - 1 ½

**GAME 4**  
Petrosian vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 2  
Petrosian - 2

**GAME 5**  
Fischer vs. Petrosian  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 2 ½  
Petrosian - 2 ½

**GAME 6**  
Petrosian vs. Fischer  
**Nimzovich Opening**  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 3 ½  
Petrosian - 2 ½

**GAME 7**  
Fischer vs. Petrosian  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 4 ½  
Petrosian - 2 ½

**GAME 8**  
Petrosian vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 5 ½  
Petrosian - 2 ½

**GAME 9**  
Fischer vs. Petrosian  
**French Defense**  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 6 ½  
Petrosian - 2 ½  
Fischer qualifies for the World Championship.

**OUTCOME:**  
Bobby Fischer won 6 ½ - 2 ½ and received a \$7,500 prize plus an honorarium from the U.S. Chess Federation for \$3,000.

## WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH

*July 11 - Sept. 1, 1972*  
Reykjavik, Iceland  
Bobby Fischer (USA) vs. Boris Spassky (USSR)

The match was to consist of 24 games. 21 games were played.

**GAME 1 July 11, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Nimzo-Indian Defense**  
**Moves:** 56  
**Result:** Spassky wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 0  
Spassky - 1

Fischer arrived 7 minutes late to the board and played a risky pawn-grab in a drawn endgame that resulted in a loss.

**GAME 2 July 13, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Moves:** 0  
**Result:** Spassky wins by default  
**Score:** Fischer - 0  
Spassky - 2

Fischer refused to play the game in a dispute over playing conditions.

**GAME 3 July 16, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Benoni Defense**  
**Moves:** 41  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 1  
Spassky - 2

Fischer continued his camera protest and play was moved to a private room out of view of the audience. It is believed that this was the best-played game of the match.

**GAME 4 July 18, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Moves:** 45  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 1 ½  
Spassky - 2 ½

**GAME 5 July 20, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Nimzo-Indian Defense**  
**Moves:** 27  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 2 ½  
Spassky - 2 ½

**GAME 6 July 23, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Queen's Gambit Declined**  
**Moves:** 41  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 3 ½  
Spassky - 2 ½

This game is known as "Placid Beauty."

**GAME 7 July 25, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Moves:** 29  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 4  
Spassky - 3

**GAME 8 July 27, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**English Defense**  
**Moves:** 37  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 5  
Spassky - 3

**GAME 9 August 1, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Queen's Gambit Declined**  
**Moves:** 29  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 5 ½  
Spassky - 3 ½

**GAME 10 August 3, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Ruy Lopez Defense**  
**Moves:** 56  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 6 ½  
Spassky - 3 ½

**GAME 11 August 6, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Moves:** 31  
**Result:** Spassky wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 6 ½  
Spassky - 4 ½

**GAME 12 August 8, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Queen's Gambit Declined**  
**Moves:** 55  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 7  
Spassky - 5

**GAME 13 August 10, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Alekhine's Defense**  
**Moves:** 74  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 8  
Spassky - 5

Alekhine's Defense had only been played by Fischer on five previous occasions.

**GAME 14 August 15, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Queen's Gambit Declined**  
**Moves:** 40  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 8 ½  
Spassky - 5 ½

**GAME 15 August 17, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Moves:** 43  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 9  
Spassky - 6

**GAME 16 August 20, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Ruy Lopez Defense**  
**Moves:** 60  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 9 ½  
Spassky - 6 ½

**GAME 17 August 22, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Pirc Defense**  
**Moves:** 45  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 10  
Spassky - 7

**GAME 18 August 24, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Moves:** 47  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 10 ½  
Spassky - 7 ½

**GAME 19 August 27, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Alekhine's Defense**  
**Moves:** 40  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 11  
Spassky - 8

**GAME 20 August 29, 1972**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Moves:** 54  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 11 ½  
Spassky - 8 ½

**GAME 21 August 31, 1972**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Sicilian Defense**  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 12 ½  
Spassky - 8 ½

**OUTCOME:**  
Bobby Fischer won 12 ½ - 8 ½ and was named World Chess Champion. He received \$78,125 for his efforts and another \$40,000 in royalties.

Fischer's last published USCF rating was 2810. His FIDE rating was 2785.

*September 1, 1972*  
Bobby Fischer was named World Chess Champion.

*Oct. 1972 - Sept. 1973*  
Bobby Fischer refuses commercial sponsorships that would have paid him upwards of \$10 million dollars and turns down a \$1 million offer to play a match in Las Vegas.

*April 3, 1975*  
Fischer forfeited his title when he refused to play Anatoly Karpov in a dispute over match conditions.

## UNOFFICIAL 1972 WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP REMATCH

*September 1992*  
After disappearing from public view for nearly 20 years, Bobby Fischer returned to chess to play Boris Spassky in the town of Sveti Stefan, a resort off the coast of Montenegro in Yugoslavia. Fischer played despite United Nations sanctions against Yugoslavia and a warning from the United States Treasury Department, which threatened him with severe penalties for playing.

The prize fund was \$5,000,000, of which the winner—the first player to win ten games—would receive \$3,350,000. Jездimir Vasiljevic, President of Jugoskandic Bank and an affiliate of Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic, served as the match sponsor. Spassky was 55, ranked 101st in the world, and had a rating of 2560. The match was the first chess event to use the "Bobby Fischer chess clock." The

clock had been patented by Fischer in the U.S. in 1989, but a working model had never been constructed until the match in Sveti Stefan.

Games 1 - 11 were played at the Hotel Maestral in Sveti Stefan.

**GAME 1**  
*September 2, 1992*  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 1  
Spassky - 0

**GAME 2**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 1 ½  
Spassky - ½

Following Game 2, Fischer threatened to bar journalists and to turn off television monitors unless the event was reported as a "World Championship" match. The match organizers installed an overhead banner with "World Chess Championship" on it.

**GAME 3**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 2  
Spassky - 1

**GAME 4**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Spassky wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 2  
Spassky - 2

**GAME 5**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Spassky wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 2  
Spassky - 3

**GAME 6**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 2 ½  
Spassky - 3 ½

**GAME 7**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 3 ½  
Spassky - 3 ½

**GAME 8**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 4 ½  
Spassky - 3 ½

**GAME 9**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 5 ½  
Spassky - 3 ½

**GAME 10**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 6  
Spassky - 4

**GAME 11**  
*September 19, 1992*  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 7  
Spassky - 4

Games 12 - 30 were played in Belgrade at the Sava Business Center.

**GAME 12**  
*September 30, 1992*  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Spassky wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 7  
Spassky - 5

**GAME 13**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 7 ½  
Spassky - 5 ½

**GAME 14**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 8  
Spassky - 6

**GAME 15**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 8 ½  
Spassky - 6 ½

**GAME 16**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 9 ½  
Spassky - 6 ½

**GAME 17**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 10 ½  
Spassky - 6 ½

**GAME 18**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 11  
Spassky - 7

**GAME 19**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 11 ½  
Spassky - 7 ½

**GAME 20**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Spassky wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 11 ½  
Spassky - 8 ½

**GAME 21**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 12 ½  
Spassky - 8 ½

**GAME 22**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 13  
Spassky - 9

**GAME 23**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 13 ½  
Spassky - 9 ½

**GAME 24**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 14  
Spassky - 10

**GAME 25**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 15  
Spassky - 10

**GAME 26**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Spassky wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 15  
Spassky - 11

**GAME 27**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 15 ½  
Spassky - 11 ½

**GAME 28**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 16  
Spassky - 12

**GAME 29**  
Fischer vs. Spassky  
**Result:** Draw  
**Score:** Fischer - 16 ½  
Spassky - 12 ½

**GAME 30**  
Spassky vs. Fischer  
**Result:** Fischer wins  
**Score:** Fischer - 17 ½  
Spassky - 12 ½

**OUTCOME:**  
Bobby Fischer won 17 ½ - 12 ½. Fischer received \$3,350,000 for his win.

In addition to the photographs of Bobby Fischer, this exhibition explores the concept of the icon and Harry Benson's impact on American culture with his choice of celebrity subjects. Fischer was initially known only in the chess world. As he became a representative symbol of the Cold War, these then-new photographs made this once-unfamiliar recluse readily recognizable to the general public. Fischer is shown in context with other celebrities photographed by Benson allowing today's contemporary viewer to see his cultural significance as virtually equal to that of presidents, movie stars, artists, designers, and leaders, whose impact has made them objects of great attention and devotion in society.

This exhibition evolved out of a collaboration between the World Chess Hall of Fame, Moxie Firecracker Films, and HBO surrounding the release of the documentary *Bobby Fischer Against The World*. The World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) produced an exhibition of Harry Benson's photographs featured in director Liz Garbus's film about the World Chess Championship at the Sundance Film Festival in 2011. The WCHOF went on to host the Saint Louis premiere and co-host the New York premiere. The photographs are also featured in Benson's *Bobby Fischer*.

**HARRY BENSON CBE**

Photo by Gigi Benson



Scottish-born photojournalist Harry Benson arrived in America on assignment to photograph the Beatles during their 1964 tour and knew immediately that he wanted to stay. He has been a witness to many of the major political and social events in modern history. His work ranges from photographs of world leaders to pop stars, all portrayed with an immediacy and naturalness that speaks of a confidence and rapport between sitter and photographer.

Harry has photographed every United States president from Eisenhower to Obama; was feet away from Bobby Kennedy the night he was assassinated; in the room with Richard Nixon when he resigned; on the Meredith March with Martin Luther King, Jr.; next to Coretta Scott King at her husband's funeral; on clandestine maneuvers with the IRA; present when the Berlin Wall went up and when it came

down; covered the Gulf War in Saudi Arabia as well as wars in Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia, Cyprus, and the Falkland Islands; and photographed the aftermath of Katrina in New Orleans.

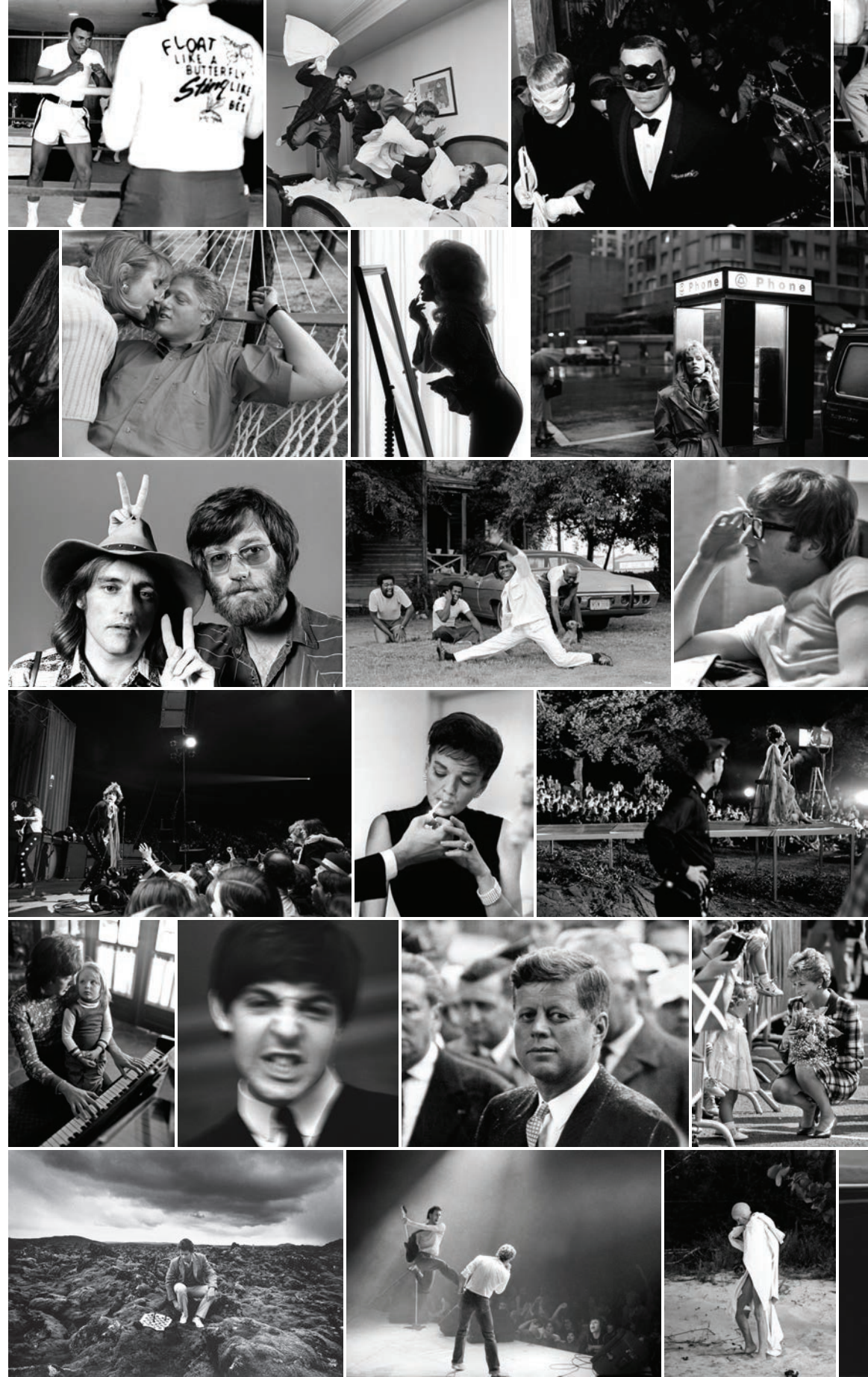
On January 1, 2009, Harry was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, receiving his honor at Buckingham Palace in March, 2009. Harry was honored with a Doctor of Letters from the Glasgow School of Art and Glasgow University in 2007. Benson has been twice named the National Press Photographers Association's "Magazine Photographer of the Year," received the 2005 LUCIE Award for Lifetime Achievement in Portrait Photography, the 2005 *American Photo Magazine* Award for Achievement in Photography, the 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Scottish Press Photographers Association; has twice received the Leica Medal of Excellence; and was also twice named "Magazine Photographer of the Year" by the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Harry was under contract to *LIFE* magazine from 1970 until it closed in 2000. In addition, he has worked for *The Sunday Times*, *Vanity Fair*,

*Time*, *Newsweek*, *Architectural Digest*, and *People* magazine—impressively shooting over 100 covers for the magazine. Harry continues photographing today for *Forbes*, *Town & Country*, *Quest*, *Vice* and many other major magazines.

His photographs are in the permanent collections of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh and the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.; both museums hosted *Harry Benson: Being There* in 2006 and 2007. A major retrospective of his photographs was shown at the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow in 2008. He has had over 40 museum and gallery solo exhibitions and 16 books of his photographs have been published, including the recent *Bobby Fischer* (2011) and the upcoming *The Beatles On The Road 1964-1966* celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Beatles coming to America. The latter will be published by Taschen in the spring of 2012.

Harry lives in New York with his wife Gigi, who works with him on his books and exhibitions. Their two daughters, Wendy and Tessa, live and work in Los Angeles.





**BOBBY FISCHER: Icon Among Icons**

*Photographs by Harry Benson*

March 9 – August 12, 2012

Special thanks to Gigi and Harry Benson,  
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*Bobby Fischer: Icons Among Icons, Photographs  
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Harry Benson. Related programming and  
a downloadable pdf of this brochure can be  
found at [www.worldchesshof.org](http://www.worldchesshof.org).

**WORLD CHESS HALL OF FAME**

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*All photos by Harry Benson.*

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**HALL OF FAME**