

CLASSICALITE

BLOGARRHEA: In 'Playboy Swings' by Patty Farmer (Beaufort Books)
Hugh Hefner is a Jazz Hero

There's a story in the new book, *Playboy Swings: How Hugh Hefner and Playboy Changed the Face of Music*, (Beaufort Books) by Patty Farmer from 1963. The New York City Playboy club had just opened. Tony Bennett would go there almost every night and, invariably, he'd bring his famous friends with him including Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Curtis, Dean Martin, Eddie Fisher, Elizabeth Taylor and Sammy Davis, Jr. Bunny Teddy was working the night Sinatra showed up...

Bunny Teddy is Elaine Trebek-Kares (the former First Lady of TV's *Jeopardy* host, Alex Trebek). She went on to own Gallery Go, a West Hollywood art gallery, after being news co-host of *Canada AM*, starting her own ad agency and even inventing Scent Seal, a high-tech fragrance company with offices in New York, Los Angeles and Paris.

It was 3:00 a.m. Work was over. She was hanging out at the nearby Sixties East, a popular all-night deli where she could kid around with a few co-workers and enjoy a bite. After perfecting her "Bunny Dip" while serving drinks, her feet were aching. Bunnies worked hard. Just ask Blondie's Deborah Harry who, for a brief period, worked at the New York City Playboy club as a Bunny. Bunny Teddy just wanted to relax after "being a glorified waitress in a screaming-tight outfit and high heels."

Picture eight such Bunnies at a long table eating eggs when Sinatra walks in with his friend, restaurateur Jilly Rizzo [1917-1992]. The pair of high-rollers were drunk. Their loud Bunny comments were certainly not appreciated. Sinatra tries to buy them drinks. Still, the Bunnies ignore him. Not used to being ignored, Sinatra, according to Bunny Teddy, lobbed a lit cherry bomb under their table, creating a huge explosion and burning the legs of various Bunnies. Playboy Enterprises sued Sinatra and won an out-of-court settlement for those who received third-degree burns causing them to miss work.

There's plenty of other stories in Farmer's easy-to-read tale that incorporates Hugh Hefner's love of jazz, and his willingness to book black jazz musicians at his various Playboy Clubs despite anachronistic Jim Crow laws still on the books

in the Deep South. That said, you could call Hef a civil rights pioneer and it wouldn't be stretching it that far.

The magazine started in 1953 Chicago, took off like nobody believed it would and by 1957, had rolled out the first of the annual Playboy Jazz Polls where readers were invited to vote. Two years after that, in 1959, came what one chapter calls "The Greatest Three Days In The History Of Jazz." Farmer is referring to the first Playboy Jazz Festival where Chicago's Soldier Field would have been the venue had not Catholic Church officials lobbied city fathers to not let them perform in a stadium owned by the city. Breasts were still a print sin in the 1950s.

After a quick change to the indoor Chicago Stadium, host to the city's hockey and basketball teams, the three-day event saw Dizzy Gillespie, Dave Brubeck, Dakota Staton, Kai Winding, Miles Davis (with Cannonball Adderley), Count Basie (with Big Joe Williams), Lambert Hendricks & Ross, Jimmy Giuffre, Oscar Peterson, Louis Armstrong, Cab Callaway, Duke Ellington and a young rising star nobody knew at the time named Sonny Rollins. It would be 20 years before Playboy would host another such fest.

With the opening of the first Playboy Club in 1960, Hef gave employment to so many great jazz artists who, with the advent of clubs sprouting up throughout the country and abroad, had a circuit in which a built-in audience--many such crowds festooned with celebrities--that would automatically love what they do.

The Playboy Interview started two years later in 1962 with the notoriously anti-white, tight-lipped Miles Davis. Jazz became such a watchword for Playboy that the company enjoyed a brief run owning its own jazz record label. In fact, there was a period of time when Playboy, in the '60s, was the largest employer of talent of any kind in the country. In the 1970s, though, it all went south and Farmer, to her credit, explains the reasons behind the collapse of the clubs.

Add to this the two groundbreaking television programs--*Playboy After Dark* and *Playboy's Penthouse*--where celebrities from music, film, stage, literature and comedy hung out, smoked, drank and tried to appear as if there were no cameras, and you've got an empire that many thought would live forever. That's why some of the best passages come in the 1970s and 1980s as the company has to reinvent itself. The resurrection continues to today abroad as the London Playboy Club, complete with casino, is still in operation.

Another great story has comedian Gallagher who, for the climax of his opening act for suave singer Vic Damone, hatchets a watermelon. Damone, infamous for his attention-to-detail about his sartorial splendor, was waiting in the wings to

go on when the force of the hammered watermelon hit him square. Vic being Vic, he fumes all the way to his dressing room, refusing to go on.

Story after story makes the historical parts, musical interviews, great celebrity photos and biographical interludes speed by in a torrent of juiciness to the point where you will not want this book to end.