



## Talk Ain't Cheap

By - Jeremy Marc Delaporta - January 23, 2016

**W**e're all aware by now that *Playboy* will no longer feature models in the nude. But, are you aware Playboy Swings? So, put on your dancing shoes, for author of *Playboy Swings: How Hugh Hefner and Playboy Changed the Face of Music*, Patty Farmer, swung by Film Takeout and set the tone...and I took note.

Jeremy: What inspired you, Patty, to write this book?

Patty: As an entertainment historian, I kept hearing performers mention working at the Playboy Clubs, or the Playboy Jazz Festival, or appearing on one of the TV shows (*Playboy's Penthouse*, *Playboy After Dark*.) This encouraged me to do more research and I was surprised to learn that, for almost two decades, *Playboy* was the largest employer of entertainment in the country. I wasn't aware of this and found that most people I spoke to weren't conscious of it either. I thought that this would make a great topic for my readers because many things have been written about the Playboy organization, the Bunnies, the magazine, and even the ultimate playboy himself, Hugh Hefner, but not about their help in the advancement of jazz.

Jeremy: How long did it take to write? Were there any obstacles in taking on such a daunting feat?

Patty: Writing *Playboy Swings* took me three years. It, as you can imagine, took a ton of research. Plus, my style is to go directly to the source, to the performers who were actually there, to get the story. This entailed hundreds of interviews.

Jeremy: Hugh Hefner opened the first Playboy Club in downtown Chicago in 1960. Who played that club? How many Playboy Clubs are there in the US and worldwide?

Patty: At the heyday, there were 36 clubs worldwide. It would be easier to list the entertainers who didn't perform at the clubs! A few include a young Aretha Franklin, who was 18 when she played piano and sang at the Chicago

club, Ramsey Lewis, Professor Irvin Corey, Dick Gregory (who credits HH with breaking the color barrier on stage), and Bobby Short are just the tip of the list.

Jeremy: What happened the night Nat King Cole performed and what did Hugh Hefner do?

Patty: Nat King Cole made an appearance on the Playboy TV show, *Playboy's Penthouse*, in 1959. On this particular appearance, he just hung out with everyone else. He didn't perform, but instead chatted about his career, and upcoming albums, He also sat down and discussed Rona Jatte's new book with her. This doesn't seem like anything now, but in 1959, for a black man to discuss literature with a white woman was shocking. Hef had to contend with many sponsors cancelling their advertising as well as southern stations declining to carry the show.

Jeremy: What performers started out in the Playboy clubs? Tell us one story regarding one performer.

Patty: Many, many performers worked at the Playboy clubs during the early days of their careers, including Jerry Van Dyke, Al Jarreau, Joan Rivers, Lily Tomlin, and George Carlin. Many Playboy Bunnies also went on to fame: Debbie Harry, Gloria Steinem, and Lauren Hutton to name a few. As for stories, you'll have to read the book.

Jeremy: Tell our readers how Hugh Hefner advanced civil rights.

Patty: Hugh Hefner is one of the few totally color blind people. He didn't believe in segregation and allowed black performers to entertain in the clubs, at the jazz festivals and on the TV shows. Dick Gregory, to this day, credits Hef with helping to break the color barriers on stage. Dick told me, "Hef didn't care if you were black, white or purple, only if you could swing an instrument, sing a song or tell a joke!"

Jeremy: What are the preconceived notions from some on Hugh Hefner?

Patty: I asked Joan Rivers if she had any preconceived ideas about working at the Playboy clubs that changed after she was there. She told me –forgive me for quoting exactly, “the Bunnies weren't sluts. They were lovely wholesome young women and many became my friends.”

Jeremy: How do you define Playboy's philosophy to a young adult, in today's politically correct world?

Patty: The Playboy philosophy was about lifestyle. Really living the good life with style. His magazine focused on, other than beautiful women of course, issues such as furnishing the perfect apartment, great books to read, music to play, fashion and even cooking and wine.

Jeremy: How was Ian Fleming influenced by Hugh Hefner?

Patty: I don't think he was really influenced by Hef. They were contemporaries and, I believe, admired each other. Hef published seven of Ian's short stories in the magazine. These were later made into the Bond movies we all know, including *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. In one scene in *Diamonds Are Forever*, we see James Bond pull out his wallet. Right next to his 'license to kill' is his Playboy Club card. I'd say that was a huge compliment from Mr. Fleming!

Jeremy: I admire Dick Gregory. What did he have to say about Hugh Hefner?

Patty: I wrote almost a full chapter on how one night at the Chicago club totally changed Dick's life. The exposure he received from appearing there catapulted him onto the Jack Parr show and stardom.

Jeremy: How is Hefner today and when did you last visit the mansion? The announcement Playboy made over the fall we knew eventually would come to be because of the internet. Your thoughts?

Patty: Wow, I didn't see that announcement coming! But Hugh Hefner's enormous success has come from his forward thinking and I think we'll just have to see if it's on target once again. The magazine was always known for their superior inclusion of quality stories and editorials. The jury is still out.

Jeremy: Name one jazz hit Patty Farmer likes to swing to.

Patty: Anything by Al Jarreau!

Jeremy: Regarding your 2013 book, *The Persian Room Presents*, how did you come to find the Persian Room? What legendary film stars patronized the Persian Room?

Patty: The Persian Room is the legendary nightclub, that was open in New York's Plaza Hotel, from 1934-1975. It was an amazing achievement to appear there. A few of the stars I was privileged to speak to about their experiences there were: Jack Jones, Diahann Carroll, Andy Williams, Patti Page, Celeste Holm, Polly Bergen, Marge Champion, Lesley Uggams, Lesley Gore and many others. It was a wonderful club to research.

Jeremy: Patty, any advice for inspiring writers?

Patty: Write! This might sound simplistic, but I meet so many people who have trouble with it. They wait for an idea to hit before they write. I advise them to treat it as the job it is. Sit down every day and get to work. Don't make excuses.