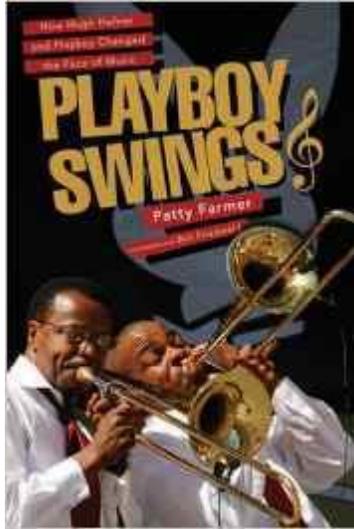


THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MUSIC

Book Review: “Playboy Swings: How Hugh Hefner and Playboy Changed the Face of Music” by Patty Farmer (Beaufort Books)



Patty Farmer’s insightful book, *Playboy Swings: How Hugh Hefner and Playboy Changed the Face of Music*, tells the story of how Hugh Hefner changed the way jazz and American music were perceived and accepted by an ever changing culture. The intellectual male “jet setters” were Hefner’s initial target audience but “Hef” attracted much more than horny, rich, cocktail swilling, college educated male liberals. He was able to connect with people of all social and economic backgrounds who were seekers of both knowledge and culture.

Farmer takes us back to a young and ambitious Hugh Hefner from Chicago. His image, carefully constructed by “Hef’s” marketing savvy, helped create one of the most lucrative enterprises in the world.

It’s fascinating to learn how hard Hefner had to work to get *Playboy* magazine off the ground. He initially wanted to name the magazine “Stage Party,” He could not have gotten the magazine published

in 1954 without the help of Victor Lowmes of HMH Publishing Company. (Lowmes contributes a heartfelt forward to the book.) Chicago jazz clubs were among the first to promote it.

The very first issue of *Playboy* magazine featured an illustrated article of the Dorsey Brothers. "Hef's" first "Sweetheart of the Month" was none other than Marilyn Monroe. We get plenty of the same glitz, glamour, girls, and movie stars in *Playboy Swings*, but the core focus of the book is on the music.

The initial *Playboy Jazz Festival* took place at Chicago Stadium on August 7th-9th in 1959. Yes, it was a 3 day festival then. The original choice for the event was rejected by Soldier Field and Stockyards Arena, reportedly due to pressures from the Catholic Church.

The lineup was a who's who of jazz It included such pioneers as Count Basie And His Orchestra, The Dave Brubeck Quartet, Dizzy Gillespie, Kai Winding, Julian "Cannonball" Adderley's Quintet, Miles Davis, Jim Hall, Oscar Peterson and His Trio featuring Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen, Louis Armstrong with Ella Fitzgerald, Coleman Hawkins, Cab Calloway, Sonny Rollins, Red Nichols, Duke Ellington, and Jack Teagarden.

One of the most poignant moments of the book is a humble Sonny Rollins' loving account of *Playboy's* first Jazz Festival. George Wein, Founder of The *Newport Jazz Festival*, contributes a fascinating introduction to the book. He helped to organize the second *Playboy Jazz Festival* at The Hollywood Bowl along with Darlene Chan. There was a twenty year lapse between the first and second *Playboy Jazz Festivals* when it moved to The Hollywood

What makes this book so wonderful is the way Farmer's vividly descriptive language takes the reader back on a journey through a time and place populated by the rich and the famous. It brings to life not just the original *Playboy Jazz Festivals*, but the whole scene: The *Playboy Clubs*, "Lanie's Room" (Lanie Kazan's designated *Playboy Room* at The Los

Angeles Club), *Playboy After Dark*, and through all of Hefner's passionate business ventures and relationships.



Hugh Hefner and Ella Fitzgerald

There are terrific photos of “Hef” with Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald, plus one of Sarah Vaughan surrounded by two *Playboy* Bunnies in 1961. Many of the frequent patrons of the *Playboy Clubs* were movie stars who truly cared about the music and the culture. Hugh Hefner was at the helm, steering the ship as the times changed, having a blast and sometimes struggling through it all.

Playboy Swings: How Hugh Hefner and Playboy Changed the Face Of Music is not only informative and thought provoking, but it's also a true labor of love by Patty Farmer. It's essential reading for jazz and history buffs alike.

The book is available for purchase as of September 15, 2015.

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