

# SIR AND SPORT

FOR THE  
**COLORADO**  
GENTLEMAN

THE WILDEST  
NFL SHOW ON TV

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WHERE  
*THE HELL IS*  
JACK NICHOLSON?

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SURF PHOTOGRAPHER  
ZAK NOYLE

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*DRESSING*  
THE BALLERS  
OF HBO

[ ALSO ]

WINING  
AND DINING

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*WITH*

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**THE DENVER  
BRONCOS**





# HUGH HEFNER

Words by Kevin Marr

## ALL THAT JAZZ...

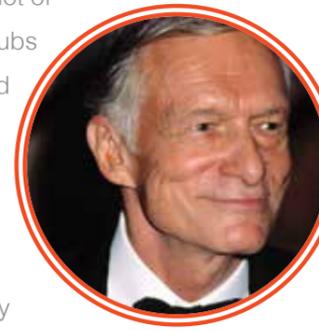
Hugh Hefner has received thousands of "offers" from beautiful women over his illustrious lifetime, but this one was different. The proposal was in regards to the *other* four-letter word that he cherishes and treasures so much – *jazz*.



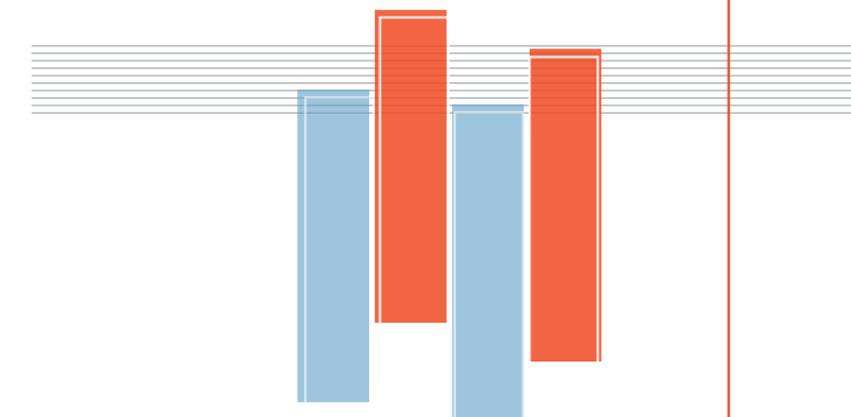
**P**atty Farmer, author of *Playboy Swings: How Hugh Hefner and Playboy Changed the Face of Music*, wanted the legendary Lothario's help in shedding some light on how truly revolutionary he and his platforms were in transforming the jazz industry in the 1950s and 1960s. *Playboy* was understandably synonymous with gorgeous females and that accompanying lifestyle, however Hef's role in knocking down racial barriers while tirelessly celebrating the works of jazz artists throughout the country was just as groundbreaking as the bunnies and the centerfolds.

Admittedly, it was a discovery that Farmer initially uncovered by happenstance. "My niche is the entertainment history," she begins. "Through various interviews with celebrities regarding my previous book, *The Persian Room Presents*, there were lots of accounts of artists getting their start at *The Playboy Club*, *The Playboy Jazz Festival* or the television show *Playboy's Penthouse*. This got me curious, leading to more research, and you could have knocked me over with a feather when I learned that Playboy was the country's largest employer of entertainment – singers, musicians and comedians – for almost two decades in the 50s and 60s."

The more Farmer dug into things, the more fascinating the revelations became. When he started the magazine in Chicago back in 1953, the Windy City had a lot of small, intimate jazz clubs that Hef loved. He and his right hand man, Victor Lowmes, would meet the artists and become fast friends. For instance, if Johnny Mathis was in town for a gig, where better to hang out during the day than with Hef at the *Playboy* offices? He was a virtual pied piper who was tremendously instrumental in giving artists a platform to get started with on the *Playboy* circuit, providing jobs for performers 40 weeks out of the year. Hef was responsible for discovering entertainment legends like Al Jarreau, Jerry Van Dyke and Joan Rivers. So in 1959, *Playboy's* 5th anniversary, he wanted to throw a party which ultimately became the conception of *The Playboy Jazz Festival*. Hef put together a list of friends and musicians, soon becoming a who's who from Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong and Count Basie to Cy Coleman, Duke Ellington and Miles Davis. Farmer explains, "Hef promoted jazz across all of his platforms – print, television, his



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**Opening Page:** Hugh Hefner and Tony Bennett share the stage on an episode of the Chicago-based show, *Playboy's Penthouse*, circa 1960  
**Opposite Page, Top:** Hefner and jazz great Louis Armstrong  
**Opposite Page, Center:** Bunnies perform at the London Playboy Club, circa 1972  
**Opposite Page, Bottom:** The legendary Miles Davis was a mainstay at Hefner's clubs

“Hef promoted jazz across all of his platforms – print, television, his clubs and festivals – and influenced its progression from primarily music that people danced to, to a concert setting where people paid for a ticket and listened for hours.”

clubs and festivals – and influenced its progression from primarily music that people danced to, to a concert setting where people paid for a ticket and listened for hours.”

A significant finding that Farmer extends thoroughly in *Playboy Swings* is Hef's imperviousness to racism and segregation. “Hef was color blind,” Farmer says matter-of-factly. “Even before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he didn't care. He integrated his clubs and his TV show and took a lot of heat for it, but he never backed down. There was one incident on *Playboy's Penthouse* when Nat King Cole came on the show and then stayed on the set when author Rona Jaffe, a white woman, was featured. The next day, the network and sponsors went crazy, threatening to pull the show. Hef didn't blink. That's just who he was. He opened up *Playboy* clubs places like Miami and New Orleans that still had segregation laws, which he fought against and won. He did it all very quietly with no publicity because it wasn't about that for him. He was a great liberal who fought for freedom of speech and he changed the way things were done with his brand.”

So with all of this history at her disposal for the book, how did Farmer attract Hef's attention for his participation? “It was challenging,” she says with a laugh. “I thought *Playboy* was going to welcome this proposal with open arms and, while they were polite, they weren't initially very receptive. You have to remember that they receive thousands of requests a week, so I had to go through a process. One of my happiest days was getting a phone call from Hef's



full-time archivist, Steve Martinez, saying, ‘Mr. Hefner asked me to give you a call and invite you to come to his personal archive at the mansion.’ I had been working on the book for a year while Hef decided whether he wanted to be involved in this or not but, from that point on, I was in and allowed to go through his personal archives.” What was working with Hef like? In a word, “abbreviated,” but exhilarating all the same. Farmer relates, “Meetings were short periods of time and not a real 1-on-1 partnership. We talked about how he started the company and why he loved jazz. It was amazing to be able to pick his brain.” Having said this, any information that Hef didn't reveal to Farmer, others within *Playboy* were very accommodating in helping fill in the blanks for her book. Now in bookstores nationwide including Barnes & Noble as well as available on Amazon, *Playboy Swings* has received rave reviews from the likes of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. In addition to the love story between jazz and *Playboy*, there are page turning accounts of celebrities, sex, love and loss that pepper Farmer's one-of-a-kind review – and the photos included are exceptional markers depicting the style and substance from an exciting time in entertainment history.

It's *Playboy*. Hef wouldn't have it any other way – nothing but the naked truth.



At Left: Hefner with *Playboy Swings* author, Patty Farmer  
 Above, Top: Hugh Hefner with Soupy Sales on the set of *Playboy After Dark*, circa 1970  
 Above, Center: Duke Ellington was one of the many greats that Hef included in his *Playboy Jazz Festival*  
 Above, Bottom: Hugh Hefner with the incomparable Ella Fitzgerald

Images throughout courtesy of Beaufort Books