

ARTS

New Book Recounts Hugh Hefner's Jazz, Civil Rights History

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS SEPT. 11, 2015, 2:46 P.M. E.D.T.

LOS ANGELES — Hugh Hefner, centerfolds and Playboy bunnies are an obvious match. But writer Patty Farmer wants to stretch Hefner's legacy to include his devotion to music, especially jazz, and colorblind entertainment.

"Playboy Swings," Farmer's nonfiction book out Monday, makes the case by recounting Hefner's efforts to popularize jazz and help its African-American artists get a place on the national stage despite mid-20th-century discrimination.

"You mention Hugh Hefner and you get snickers," said Farmer, but "he was a big proponent of civil rights, human rights, gay rights and, yes, women's rights."

Incorporating nearly three years of interviews and research, including access to Hefner's personal archive, Farmer's detail-rich book focuses on the music that's long been part of Hefner's life. It was a topic of choice when he wrote for his Chicago high school newspaper.

"His whole life, he loved jazz," Farmer said. "His main contribution, and it may sound corny, but he made jazz cool."

Hefner's respect for the art form was on prominent display in Playboy magazine, at the Playboy jazz festivals and at his nightclubs in America and around the world.

The inaugural 1953 issue of the magazine, graced by Marilyn Monroe on the cover, included a telling editorial.