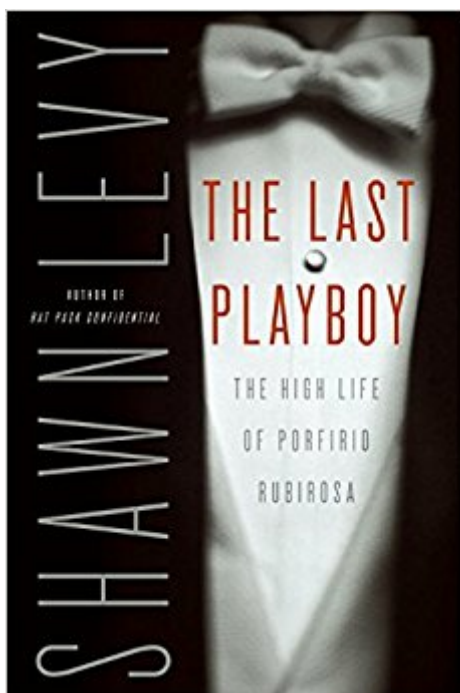


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The Last Playboy : The High Life Of Porfirio Rubirosa



Synopsis

At one gilded moment, his fame was so great that he was recognized all over the world simply by his nickname: Rubi. Pop songs were written about him. Women whom he had never met offered to leave their husbands for him. The gigantic peppermills brandished in Parisian restaurants became known, for reasons people at the time could only hint at, as "Rubirosas." Porfirio Rubirosa was the last great playboy: the roué par excellence, a symbol of powerful masculinity, ubiquity, and easy-come-easy-go money. "Work?" he shot back at an interviewer, scandalized at being asked what he did with his days. "It's impossible for me to work. I just don't have the time." His natural habitat was the polo field, the nightclub, the Formula One racecourse, the bedroom. He had an eye for beautiful women, particularly when they came with great wealth: He managed to marry in turn two of the richest women on the planet. Rumor had him bedding hundreds of famous and infamous women, including Christina Onassis, Eva Perón, and Zsa Zsa Gabor, who gleefully posed for paparazzi after he had blacked her eye in a fit of jealousy on the eve of his marriage to another woman. But he was a man's man, too, a notable polo player and race-car driver with a gift for friendship, chumming around with the likes of Joe Kennedy, Frank Sinatra, Oleg Cassini, Aly Khan, and King Farouk. When above-board, heiress-type income was scarce, he diverted himself with jewel-thievery, shadowy diplomatic errands, and any other illicit scam that came his way. Whatever legitimate power he wielded came to him from the hands of Rafael Trujillo, one of the most bloodthirstily power-mad dictators the New World has ever seen. A nation quivered at Trujillo's name for decades, yet Rubi flouted his strictures without concern, as if Trujillo's iron grip could never crush him. And he was right. When Rubi died at the age of fifty-six, wrapping his sports car around a tree in the Bois de Boulogne, an era went with him -- of white dinner jackets at El Morocco; of celebrity for its own sake when this was still a novelty; of glamour before it was available to the masses. In *The Last Playboy*, Shawn Levy brings Rubi's giddy, hedonistic story to Technicolor life.

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Customer Reviews

Even readers who find the idea of a "playboy" somewhat questionable won't be able to put down Levy's biography of Porfirio Rubirosa (1909–1965). For one thing, there's delicious gossip: the women he courted (Eartha Kitt, Zsa Zsa Gabor), the men he prowled with (Prince Aly Khan, Sinatra, the Kennedys) and the fabulously wealthy women he married (Barbara Hutton, Doris Duke). There's also the story of his infamous penis—Doris Duke described it as "six inches in circumference... much like the last foot of a Louisville Slugger baseball bat with the consistency of a not completely inflated volleyball." Plus, there's sports-car racing, polo ponies and nonstop nightclubbing. But Levy, film critic for the Portland Oregonian, goes beyond the glitz to see Rubirosa as a product of a particular time and place: dictator Trujillo's Dominican Republic. Like many Trujillo intimates, Rubirosa was well paid for his loyalty, not his labor. By the 1960s, when Rubirosa crashed his Ferrari in Paris's Bois de Boulogne, he was an anachronism—at that point, even wealthy men were trying to have careers of some sort. All Rubi knew was how to enjoy himself, so this bubbly bio is a perfect tribute. Photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Porfirio Rubirosa is a name likely to be unfamiliar to anyone born after 1960, but he certainly made a name for himself in the 1950s--as a playboy par excellence--and his life story proves well worth the telling. Written in a breezy style perfectly suitable for conjuring Rubirosa's seductive personality and the steamy atmospheres that he created and in which he flourished, Levy's complete reconstruction of his life starts with his childhood in the Dominican Republic as the son of a military man turned diplomat. Rubirosa married a daughter of Dominican strongman Raphael Trujillo, later married a French actress, and then wed two fabulously wealthy American heiresses. He died (at age 56, in 1965) as he lived--zooming in a fast car; unfortunately, on this occasion, his car crashed, and he died before reaching a hospital. By the author of *Rat Pack Confidential* (1998), this biography is both an anatomy of shallowness and a compelling piece of social history. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Worth reading for its surprisingly enjoyable and historically textured first half describing the rise of a probably now mostly forgotten Porfirio Rubirosa, the most professional and best known playboy from the small island nation of the Dominican Republic during the US's age of glamor post WWII. The most interesting aspect of this story is Rubirosa's early status as son-in-law to one of the most dreadful dictators of the 20th century, Rafael Trujillo. Shawn Levy does a masterful job of drawing rich but succinct character portraits, including that of the much chronicled Trujillo, to create an ensemble drama around this earlier period of Rubirosa's life that is necessary when one's primary subject is too shallow to hold the stage on his own for the book's duration. While Rubirosa comes across as a more refined and much less ruthless person than one would imagine given that he was an aggressive social climber gigolo, his charm can only come across so much whatever Levy's literary skills. Furthermore, while he seemed to have struck a fair bargain for his attentions with a stronger character like the heiress Doris Duke, his marriage to the vulnerable Barbara Hutton during a waning financial period in his life is mostly a simple episode of sleazy exploitation one comes into the book expecting. By the time Rubi leaves dies at the end, we've had enough of him. Levy deserves the highest praise not only for paying careful attention to rendering the times a person lives in as a key to their character and life, but also for the elan and subtle humor he demonstrates in confronting salacious details, e.g. Rubi's famously large endowment, without being crass. Another of his books on swinging 60s London is also very good but uneven due to the subject matter being of varying degrees of interest for me, but a truly great writer with the right material as with Frank and the boys in the Ratpack.

How do you get interested in a current day unknown, Rubirosa, Playboy of the 40s/50s, namesake of large pepper shakers in Paris? Mine started with a short story from the legendary Robert Evans 2nd biography: The Fat Lady Sings. Always liked his style so if he knew and admired Rubirosa given his ego, there must be something here. Reading a book and using the web to look at old photos peaked my interest that this book satisfied. This is a well written autobiography with massive info, particularly impressive given most people with knowledge were dead and rumors, not truth, dominated. I wouldn't call it a fast read although it didn't take long, but I would call it incredibly informative about a life and culture that has past with the times. As said at the end of the book, how would a man of impeccable taste and clothing have enjoyed the hippie movement of the late 60s? He wouldn't. A Playboy's death was the appropriate route: win an important polo tournament, drink till dawn, and leave a young corpse. Not groundbreaking but an important part of pop culture from

the 40s/50s and worth the read.

I am a former foreign student in the Dominican Republic where I got to learn the name "Rubirosa", linked to large peppermills in chique restaurants on the Malecon and the pubs of the then (80's) newly renovated Colonial Center. I also heard his name in equestrian circles with acclaim for his introduction of the sport of Polo to the now largest Polo playing country in the Caribbean. Curiously the new generation in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere know little of him but when an older generation is asked about him, a smile is the first thing to appear on their lips before an anecdote or a recall of one of his memorable deeds (or scandal) is to be told. Most of the time these stories are connected to fast times, headlines and the high life, despite lacking a fortune, commercial enterprise of significance or a scientific mind. Nevertheless making headlines by his own merits and decisions (marriages) and of those around him. This book is an improvement over previous biographies made in the 70's and 80's, among others Palbo Clase Hijo's book, that I bought 20 years ago as a present for an uncle who was a contemporary and admirer of Rubi. This book is great fun to read and brings very well into perspective the details of Dominican political life under Trujillo's dictatorship and the international impact that it brought upon the region and Rubi's pivotal role in the softening of the ugly face of the regime. Reason for his love-hate relationship with the Trujillo family and the political 'intelligentsia' around them, such as Joaquin Balaguer (6-time president). In this aspect Rubi had historical impact and records do not offer much reliable evidence to give credit to it, but in high stakes of international politics, personal relations, phone calls and small favors to key persons (intermediaries) can change history. I recommend this book to anyone who admires celebrities and light subjects for entertaining reading. They can make comparisons on the life of celebrities between today and yesteryear (not much has changed!). Many a bachelor would like to have, at least for a some time, the kind of life experience that Rubi got out of his relatively short stay on this earth and a hell of a time it was! The book does justice, historically, to a man that lived life intensively and with great love and loyalty to his friends, a great party companion, which made him an important and long-time confidant, intimate friend and acquaintance of many of those with economic and political power on both sides of the Atlantic and also the Magreb. These characteristics are not highlighted too much in the book but can be interpreted through the lines and is part of the things to be learned from the book and the life of Rubirosa. This is what makes the great difference between Rubirosa and many other born-rich playboys that bought most of their goodies and many a 'friend' with the funds of their pockets. On the contrary, most socialites and even wives had Rubi's company at their expense! I definitely recommend reading and keeping or as a gift. Randall Croes

inspirational perspective of an alternative life style plus interesting historical sidelights of that era .
he my man!!!

Surprisingly this book includes a lot of history of the Dominican Republic and it's association with the US during the 50's and 60's. I was a young teenager during Rubi's gallops and at the time, didn't know of him. There were more exciting things in my life at the time like horses and turning up the hi-fi but I really enjoyed the book. It was easy to read and included fun facts about the women he pursued.

Fine book about a contemptible character. Nice overview of history of the period.

purchased for a friend who said it was a good book about Porfirio.

A legend of my country the Dominican Republic, he knew how to approach every opportunity he was given in the best way. Well written book with even history of the Dominican island, would recommend to everyone who wants to learn a thing or two about history and tiguismo.

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