



## American Swing

Directors: Mathew Kaufman and Jon Hart, USA, 2008, 81 minutes

In 1970s New York, it simply didn't get any hotter than Plato's Retreat. Founded by impresario Larry Levenson, the infamous heterosexual swingers club opened its doors in 1977 and launched a most unlikely sexual revolution. It even spawned a disco hit from Joe Thomas who sang "Gettin' hot and bothered/ loosen up your collar/ let's all do the freak/ at Plato's Retreat."

Born and raised in the Bronx, Levenson fell into the swinging lifestyle while working at McDonald's and raising a family. He found his calling selling sex to the suburbs. And soon enough, married couples and singles were commuting from the boroughs to swim, eat, and swing at Plato's. Directors Mathew Kaufman and Jon Hart combine interviews with some of the club's most loyal and famous patrons (writer Buck Henry, former-mayor Ed Koch). They include jaw-dropping footage, such as scenes of the legendary mattress room, likened by one club-goer to a can of worms. At Plato's, sex came in all shapes and sizes: a veritable cornucopia of concupiscence, with a touch of polyester leisure suit and extra-hold hairspray. The club embodied a type of horny democracy where all bodies were welcome and embraced. But by the mid-80s, the toll wrought by AIDS and the IRS (charges of tax evasion landed Larry in prison) began to take effect. As Levenson's empire crumbled, the club went to greater lengths to maintain its dominance. But while the flesh was willing, the spirit was gone. Plato's closed its doors forever on New Year's Eve, 1985.

The film has the wisdom to simply let the people who were there recall, often in graphic detail, the glory days of glory holes and sexual smorgasbords. (The image of a certain swimming pool may take up residence in your brain and never leave.) But for all the genitals on screen, *American Swing* is possessed of a certain loopy innocence, most of which comes from the people who made

the club what it was. An elegiac and loving portrait of a period in American sexual history when anything went, and mom and dad got down and dirty. Vintage raunch at its finest!

### DIRECTORS BIOGRAPHIES

Mathew Kaufman's previous productions include *The Messengers*, a two-show special edition of ABC News' Nightline, which followed three teenage boys competing to be named the best young evangelical preacher in America; and the award-winning feature *Domestic Differences*, which chronicled South Africa's first democratic presidential election, and the intimately intertwined lives of two families, one black, one white, as history sprung up around them. Kaufman's short, *Swap Meat*, which traces the journey of meat from farm to plate, played both international and domestic festivals, and was featured on the PBS series "Short Cuts." Mathew currently runs Zip Dog Productions, where he directs original short-form documentaries. His latest non-fiction work is *American Swing*.

Jon Hart, co-director and co-producer of *American Swing*, is a veteran journalist. He has been published in dozens of newspapers and magazines, including The New York Times, The New York Post, Time Out New York, Maxim, Details and The Village Voice. Hart's specialty is guerilla journalism, first-person participatory pieces. In the television realm, Hart has written for MTV and ESPN. A native of New York City, Hart graduated from the University of Vermont with a BA in Political Science.

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