

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW:

WENDY/WALTER CARLOS

a candid conversation with the "switched-on bach" composer who, for the first time, reveals her sex-change operation and her secret life as a woman

In the past decade, practically every sexual taboo has fallen; if not legally, at least as a subject of discussion. Homosexuality, bisexuality, transvestism, S/M and public sex are now part of our public consciousness. Amidst all these changes, though, there is one thing that never changes: A man is a man and a woman, a woman. Correct that: seldom changes.

Christine Jorgensen was the first to shake the gender-identity status quo when, back in 1950, she left the United States a George and returned from Copenhagen a full-skirted, full-busted, almost fully equipped Christine. News accounts made hay with the new blonde in town and night-club comics had a field day. Christine persevered, kind of settled down to a life of middle-class domesticity, playing maiden aunt in Southern California, occasionally making TV appearances or showing up on the college lecture circuit. But, actually, little was heard from the sex-change field until a couple of years ago, when Renee Richards, a male ophthalmologist who had switched sexes in mid-life, suddenly challenged the tennis world with her backhand and was, in turn, challenged because her equipment was that of a

woman but her genes and her strength that of a man.

Renee, Christine and Jan Morris (formerly a rugged reporter for the London Times, married, the father of four before his sex change) were relatively obscure folk until transsexual surgery flashed them into the spotlight. That was not the case with Walter Carlos, who is coming out of the transsexual closet with this interview.

Carlos was born on November 14, 1939, in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. He took up the piano at six, went on to study music and physics at Brown University and earned a masters in music at Columbia. One of his teachers there was the pioneer electronic composer Vladimir Ussachevsky. A year before graduation, Carlos began collaborating with engineer Robert Moog. Their vision was to produce an instrument whose sound was as expressive as the piano's: It was to be an instrument that grew out of what had gone before, much as the piano grew out of the clavichord. The synthesizer was the result. Unlike the piano or the electric organ, one had to perform a single note at a time on the synthesizer, searching for the right timbre and its right adjustment, then combine many

performances of the individual colors and musical lines, using multitrack studio practices. To work it most effectively, one had to be a conductor, performer, composer, acoustician and instrument builder. Carlos was all of those.

Designer Moog, who manufactured the synthesizer, gives Carlos all the credit. "Walter used techniques that had been available for years—but used them better."

In 1967, Carlos met Rachel Elkind, a former singer and secretary to the late Goddard Lieberson, head of Columbia Records. Elkind was a kind of Gertrude Stein to talented musicians, an Earth Mother, a constructive force. Columbia had just launched a "Bach to Rock" campaign without having a single recording of Bach with a contemporary sound in its library. So Elkind and Carlos put together their "virtuoso electronic performances" of the best of Bach. Rachel took the master cut to Columbia. Shortly after, an artist designed a record jacket with a slapstick portrait of the great composer, foppishly clad, a pair of earphones in one hand. Behind Bach was Carlos' synthesizer.

The album was called "Switched-On



"I remember being convinced I was a little girl, not knowing why my parents didn't see it clearly. I didn't understand why they insisted on treating me like a little boy."



"Being a transsexual makes me a barometer of other people's comfort with themselves. People who aren't sexually at peace with themselves tend to be uptight around me."



PHOTOGRAPHY BY VERNON L. SMITH

"Stanley Kubrick didn't know about me when I did the score for 'A Clockwork Orange.' He was so intense on the project that if I'd come in stark-naked, he'd probably just have asked if I were cold."

Bach" and it became a commercial success. Over 1,000,000 copies were sold, making it the largest-selling classical album of the decade. Newsweek devoted a full page to Carlos, running a photograph of him at his instrument and captioning it, "Plugging into the Steinway of the future."

"SOB," as the album came to be known, was followed in 1969 by "The Well-Tempered Synthesizer," containing more Bach, plus commentary by Elkind, "engineered" by Carlos. By 1971, Carlos had abandoned his tiny Moog-dominated apartment on New York's West End Avenue and moved into Elkind's roomy West Side brownstone. The house had been almost completely renovated, with an entire floor transformed into a superb recording studio containing perhaps the most elaborate and sophisticated electronic-music laboratory in the country. Carlos could produce his albums at home. All he had to do was walk down two flights of stairs from his bedroom to the basement. And his producer—Rachel Elkind—was always there, though their friendship was—and continues to be—strictly Platonic.

Columbia, meanwhile, signed them both to an exclusive record contract. On "Walter Carlos by Request," Carlos tackled Lennon, McCartney, Tchaikovsky and Bacharach. His rendition of "What's New, Pussycat?" meowed and screeched: The synthesizer, it seemed, could emulate almost any sound, including the whimperings of an alley cat. With each record, the popularity of the synthesizer increased. Gradually, it was replacing the electric guitar as the most widely used electronic instrument in recording studios.

The next logical step was films.

In 1971, Elkind heard that Stanley Kubrick was planning to direct "A Clockwork Orange," based on Anthony Burgess' bizarre, violent, futuristic novel. She called Kubrick's attorney and suggested that Kubrick consider the synthesizer as a novel way of scoring his movie. "The attorney said he'd get our stuff to Kubrick via air freight," recalls Elkind. "I sent him 'Switched-On Bach' and 'The Well-Tempered Synthesizer.' Kubrick's assistant called a few days later. He asked if we could come to England immediately. Two days later, we were on a flight."

What eventually resulted was a sound track that The New York Times lauded. "As sheer music," its critic wrote, "it is a giant step past the banalities of most contemporary film tracks."

If real life were to follow a 1940 movie musical, Walter Carlos and Rachel Elkind would have had the world at their feet. They'd have fallen in love, married, produced babies and records and lived happily ever after. But the problems in Carlos' personal life reached a climax just about the time that "A Clockwork

Orange" was shocking moviegoers around the country. In a drama that could easily have been written into "Clockwork's" surrealistic scenario, Walter Carlos underwent a sex-change operation.

He dropped out of sight. He became a phantom figure, living in his own version of the opera house, Rachel's brownstone-cum-recording studio. He diversified his interests: building a computer, becoming a member of a club that chased eclipses, photographing the cosmos with a professionalism that astounded astronomers. Although he continued to record, as well as compose, Carlos had little contact with those in the business of synthesizing music, the business that he had pioneered.

All kinds of excuses were made to keep his new identity under wraps. After all, transsexuality may be the last of the



Walter Carlos, before his transsexual operation, poses for a 1969 publicity photograph.

sexual taboos and is not a topic one discusses at the breakfast table, especially if the transsexual's music is being played on the radio.

Walter is now Wendy. The name change became official this year on Valentine's Day, February 14. This is the first interview the former Walter Carlos has given in seven years. The conversations were conducted for PLAYBOY by author and columnist **Arthur Bell** during December 1978 and January 1979. Bell's report:

"It was Elly Stone who put me on to Wendy. Elly is best known for her work in 'Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris.' She's an 'art' singer, a meticulous musician with a wide variety of acquaintances in the business.

"Two winters ago, Elly phoned to ask a bit of journalistic advice. She had this

friend, a well-known figure who had undergone a sex-change operation. The friend, she said, was thinking of spilling the beans, of quietly stepping out of the closet. 'She is toying with the idea of a feature interview somewhere,' Stone said, 'but wants someone who is simpatico to do it. Would you be interested?'

"I said I'd be interested if Elly's transsexual friend were interesting. Could she set up a meeting?"

"A year passed. No meeting. Last fall, however, I received a phone call from Rachel Elkind. 'I'm a friend of Elly Stone's,' she began, 'and Wendy and I would very much like to meet you and discuss an article we have in mind.' Although Rachel didn't identify Wendy, I knew by then that Wendy Carlos was the former Walter Carlos, Elly's still-in-the-closet transsexual friend.

"We began in the late fall of 1978. Our first session took place in the living room of their brownstone. Wendy perched on the edge of a chair. She bit at her cuticles. Rachel sat to my left. She, too, was edgy. This was not to be a movie-star type of profile. I was privy to a confidence, and how I presented this confidence to millions of readers was bound to affect both of their lives. Eventually, because Wendy and I felt inhibited, Rachel stayed away.

"The sessions continued at their house. Inadvertently, there were little power plays between Wendy and me. When she was in the driver's seat, she thought the sessions were wonderful. The few times when I acted tough reporter were the sessions she didn't like at all. Sure, she knew all the answers, but to nail Wendy down was a problem. I'd often have to listen to cosmic ramblings before she'd come up with specifics. The ramblings were relevant to Wendy but irrelevant to the interview.

"On Christmas Eve, I was hit by a cab. In New York, that isn't big news, but to survive with only a sprained knee and bruises is. The doctor insisted that I stay in bed for a few days. So, instead of my visiting Wendy, Wendy came to me.

"She showed up at my apartment wearing a skirt (the first time I'd seen her in one), a silk blouse and a peasant coat, the kind you see in the windows of Henri Bendel. Absolutely stunning. Any subliminal thoughts I previously had about Wendy's being a man in a woman's body went the way of all flesh.

"My wretched condition brought out the maternal in her. She was a veritable Florence Nightingale, propping pillows, boiling water, giving sage advice and issuing stern warnings. I was to take care of myself, you see, and not move from the apartment until my leg was better. In the meantime, she would come to me.

"We bounced off each other's vulnerability that afternoon. I took advantage

and asked her to describe the transsexual operation, which she'd resisted in earlier sessions.

"This time, she described the tucking away of male-genitalia skin, the disposal of testicles, utterly without emotion, as if she were lecturing on the best way to prune an avocado tree. Her descriptions were concise, too, without the weighty explanations that usually surrounded her theories on music.

"The last time I saw Wendy Carlos was in late January. The tapes had been transcribed. Eight hundred pages of manuscript sat in two folders on a table in my living room, waiting to be edited. She looked at the transcripts. Her face turned white.

"*'It's real,' she whispered. 'It's no joke anymore.'*"

PLAYBOY: Let's set the scene for our readers. As Walter Carlos, you were a well-known composer and a pioneer in the field of electronic music. In 1972, after cross-dressing for a number of years, you underwent a transsexual operation and became a female—Wendy Carlos. Since that date, you've kept the operation a secret from all but a few close friends and, through a variety of subterfuges, have kept alive the idea that a male Walter Carlos still exists. Why have you chosen this time and place to come out?

CARLOS: Well, I'm scared, I'm very frightened. I don't know what effect this is going to have. I fear for my friends; we're going to become targets for the wrath of those who judge what I've done as, in moral terms, evil, in medical terms, sick—an assault on the human body. I'm also afraid from the musical standpoint. It may prevent me from being taken seriously again.

But I've gotten tired of lying. I think that in the past couple of years, the dangers of allowing the public to know about me have lessened. The climate has changed and the time is ripe. With the appearance of this interview, my friends won't have to lie and dissemble for me anymore.

PLAYBOY: Why speak out in this forum?

CARLOS: I've been looking for the right forum and have considered all the options. **PLAYBOY** is ideal. The magazine has always been concerned with liberation, and I'm anxious to liberate myself.

PLAYBOY: How many people know about your situation?

CARLOS: Aside from Rachel—she's my closest friend and the woman with whom I live—there were five or six people at first. More now. When I told one of them I was doing this, he suggested I might become **PLAYBOY**'s first transsexual centerfold. [*Laughs*]

PLAYBOY: Do your parents know about it?

CARLOS: They know about the operation, though they haven't accepted it. We

haven't seen one another for ten years. They still call me Walter. Obviously, I'll be telling them about this before the interview appears. We're not close, but I don't wish to hurt them.

PLAYBOY: Let's start with a basic question: What is a transsexual?

CARLOS: By most definitions, it's a person who is born with the physical characteristics of one gender but who identifies in every way with the opposite gender and may seek an operation to complete that identification. Although I was born male, from my earliest days I've felt female, and the conflict finally became so terrible I had to take the ultimate step—to become a female in body as well as in mind. Incidentally, I wish the word transsexual hadn't become current. Transgender is a better description, because sexuality per se is only one factor in the spectrum of feelings and needs that led me to this step.

PLAYBOY: So transsexuals aren't necessarily former homosexuals?

CARLOS: No. There are as many straights as gays. It's important to differentiate between choices of sexual preference—which could be hetero, bi or homo—and transsexuality, which is a matter of gender identification.

PLAYBOY: How many transsexuals are there?

CARLOS: In my conservative estimate, between 10,000 and 20,000 in the United States. Probably one third of those are in New York City, because of the medical facilities. There may be 30,000 or more world-wide.

PLAYBOY: This may be an odd way of putting it, but . . . when you were a little boy, when did you first feel like a little girl?

CARLOS: Not odd at all. This *can* become a bit confusing. My awareness of it happens to be one of my first memories—when I was about five or six and didn't even know there was a real difference between boys and girls. It seemed to me the only differences were the length of hair and, to some extent, the kind of clothing kids wore. And I remember being *convinced* I was a little girl, much preferring long hair and girls' clothes, and not knowing why my parents didn't see it clearly. I didn't understand why they insisted on treating me like a little boy. But I wanted them to love me and I felt that if I behaved the way I wanted to, I would lose their love—so I began hiding my feelings at a very early age. When you think about it, that's a pretty astute observation for a youngster to make.

I remember, when I was five, staring out my window at a little girl who was staying with her foster family next door. She wasn't dressed like a little girl, but she had long hair. The family was poorer than mine, but I envied her. I thought it would be bliss, having long hair.

PLAYBOY: Did you play with dolls and wear girls' clothing?

CARLOS: Yes. Today, of course, children are urged to play with all sorts of toys, but back then, it was very stratified. I always had more than my share of stuffed animals—rabbits and Teddy bears—and those were my surrogate dolls, which I kept much longer than I should have. I also remember stealing my mother's clothes, going to bed in them when I was about six. Little jokes would be made about how much I loved my parents because I'd go to bed in their clothes, but the fact that it was my mother's clothes—never my father's—passed without comment.

By the time I was ten, it became harder to do it, but occasionally, I'd still sneak a piece of my mother's clothing down to the cellar when no one was home and wear it. Eventually, I found other ways of expressing my need. I'd draw pictures of myself—very accurate portraits of my face—then erase the short hair and draw longer hair, along with a

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touch of lipstick, to see how I'd look as a woman.

PLAYBOY: Did your parents ever catch you dressing in your mother's clothes?

CARLOS: A few times. They'd make up excuses, such as, “Walter's practicing for Halloween.”

PLAYBOY: Did they ever reprimand you?

CARLOS: I'm sure they did. It was such an emotional time, whenever I was discovered. I remember very well my heart pounding and my throat muscles tightening and the dryness in my mouth. I would think, Oh, God, they're going to find out I'm one of those *weird* kids and they're going to withhold their love from me. I was very guilt-ridden.

PLAYBOY: How did other children treat you?

CARLOS: I preferred playing with little girls, so I'd get plenty of raspberries from some of the more tight-assed boys. The boys in the playground would yell, “Carlos is a sissy!” in that singsong minor key that children always use. I always preferred art and music to rough-and-tumble play, and I wasn't any good at

boys' sports. Boys would lie in wait and then jump me. I never fought if I could avoid it—only to put my hands over my head when kids would throw stones at me, or punch me, or stuff like that. I remember cradling my schoolbooks in my arms and getting teased about it, so I learned to balance the books on my hip, the way boys were supposed to.

Later on, in high school, the problem reached a peak. I was feared, because the kids knew I didn't go to school dances, and was completely stigmatized. I remember that they'd goose me. Sometimes I'd be walking up the stairs and I'd feel a finger up my ass. They started using terms like pansy and fairy. Naïve me, I didn't quite know what those terms meant, but I knew what they implied.

Actually, there were two sides to it. Some of the boys who would put me down and say I was really odd would nevertheless value me as someone special, because I could play the piano well. They became protective, and proved their *machismo*, as if I were a fragile piece of porcelain.

PLAYBOY: Do you remember having any fantasies that were specifically sexual?

CARLOS: No, my fantasies were more sensual than sexual. Like cuddling. Or the love of silk or satin rubbing against my skin. But as far as sex goes, it's amazing how little I thought—or knew—about sexual matters of any kind.

PLAYBOY: What were your interests at school?

CARLOS: I was a bright kid and absorbed a lot. I loved numbers and arithmetic, all the sciences. Music and art, too. I fancied myself becoming an astronomer. Because I had some talents, things weren't always terrible for me at school. There were other kids who were equally uncomfortable around their classmates, and I was able to entertain children with little comedy routines, writing little plays, that sort of thing.

PLAYBOY: Did the conflict in your mind increase as you grew older?

CARLOS: Yes. By puberty, it became harder to suppress. I was no longer a youngster and was beginning to look more masculine. One of my biggest traumas was having to shave, though I was fortunate that I matured late. Putting on boys' trousers was hard for me, because I always had a big ass. I ended up wearing baggy clothes.

PLAYBOY: Was there a period when you tried to deny your feelings?

CARLOS: Yes. At some point during my teenage years, I tried to pretend they didn't exist. I told myself I *didn't* have all those inclinations, that I was straight, normal, that I was going to date and get married. I put up a great battle. But by the time I got through high school, the feelings were there, stronger than ever.

PLAYBOY: What was college like?

CARLOS: Academically, it was stimulating, because I pursued my interest in music, which would eventually become my career. But otherwise, it was anguish. It became more and more difficult to block my feelings. I was at Brown University and I remember going out on a date with a girl. I was so jealous of her I was really beside myself. I became alienated from my college peers—both men and women—and it became a kind of mental torture. I felt set apart. I felt that nature had made a cruel mistake. That's a cliché, but it's how I felt. *Extreme* confusion. From time to time, I was able to repress it and—I don't know, maybe I thought I'd close my eyes one day and then suddenly wake up and find I was a woman.

PLAYBOY: So by the time you were in college, you were definitely—

CARLOS: Here's what it was: After puberty, my condition became more and more hellish, and by late adolescence, as I started to become more masculine, I began to *hate* my body, my corpus. . . . It sounds so mad, doesn't it? I feel myself to be a somewhat bright, fairly introspective person, normal in many ways, yet as I say these words, I sound like a madwoman to myself!

PLAYBOY: When you dated in college, how did you handle sex?

CARLOS: I had no sex life at all. Any friends I had were totally Platonic friends. People knew I had no interest in hetero- or homo- or any other kind of sex. They just accepted that in me. I'm embarrassed to admit I wasn't even able to bring myself to explore masturbation. I first masturbated as a woman, many years later, in 1974.

PLAYBOY: Were you conscious of your appearance?

CARLOS: I hated the way I looked. I tried never to look in a mirror. I wouldn't look at my body when I bathed. Oh, I'd check in a mirror occasionally to make sure my tie was on straight, or that the haircut I'd gotten wouldn't give away my aberration. I was always having slight paranoid fears that I could be too easily spotted as some kind of sexual subdeviate.

PLAYBOY: Did you go out of your way to look invisible, or even unattractive?

CARLOS: Yes. I always wore formless, inconspicuous clothes. My mother, bless her heart, unconsciously picked out wardrobes for me that would conceal my body. I stuck to an extremely conservative line. Very often I wore bow ties—that was my one act of personality and individuality.

PLAYBOY: Were your college days *all* anguish?

CARLOS: No, not at all. I've got to be careful that I don't attack my background as being wholly destructive. Certainly, those years devastated me as far as interpersonal relationships were concerned.

But they might have encouraged my work—my escape into the world of thought and music and science and technology. By the time I got into work involving the Moog synthesizer in my early 20s, my efforts were really quite polished. So maybe that is why I finally became successful.

PLAYBOY: Can you pinpoint a time when you decided to *do* something about your feelings?

CARLOS: It was in the fall of 1962, when I came to New York as a graduate student at Columbia. I had become extremely despondent, and the idea of suicide was becoming stronger and stronger in me. There was a period, perhaps a little later than that, when I was daily taking a razor to my wrists and wondering. . . . Anyway, that first year at Columbia, I made a list of the things I needed to do with my life if I were going to survive. And at the top of the list was to find some doctor, someplace, who would help me change my sex. Whatever that meant. At the time, I was just putting pieces together, only dimly becoming aware

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that I might not be the only person in the world who felt the way I did.

PLAYBOY: How did you become aware of that?

CARLOS: I remember seeing books and articles on the Christine Jorgensen case. And at Columbia, I would occasionally run across books, or book chapters, about early cases of transsexuals. It was a very lonely period of my life. Some nights I'd just jump on a subway and get out at Fifth Avenue and walk up and down the streets. I began to know, and to love, New York City. I began to widen my horizons gradually, meeting a few more people. It didn't exactly take my mind off my transsexuality, but my growing interest in electronic music took a real leap in that period. I got particularly close to one person, one of my music professors at Columbia, Vladimir Ussachevsky. He is really the pioneer of American electronic music.

PLAYBOY: Did he encourage you?

CARLOS: Yes. I'd been experimenting with taped music, multiple tracks, that sort of thing, and he made the suggestion that

I get a job in a recording studio. I was already beginning to compose, but it was he who suggested I support myself by working on the technical, engineering side of music. A year or two later, I made some demos of some of the electronic stuff I was composing and even moved into the area of pop music, jingles.

PLAYBOY: Is that when you began to work with the Moog synthesizer?

CARLOS: Yes. By 1966, I was working with my own small Moog. There were several companies that did sound effects and music for TV commercials, and I was helping them on a free-lance basis, earning anywhere from \$100 to \$1000 a job. It wasn't until I met my friend Rachel that someone had the courage to tell me I should be doing more than fooling around with pop songs and commercials.

PLAYBOY: Was Rachel the one who urged you to apply your electronic skills to serious music?

CARLOS: Yes. I'm afraid pop music lost some really bad potential hits. But it was the beginning of the best period of pop music in America—I'm talking about '65 through '67. Even though I worked on electronic versions of classical music, I collected a lot of albums from that period—the Beatles, the Mamas and the Papas, the Association, Simon and Garfunkel. In those creative times, the synthesizer was a rare thing. To my knowledge, there were only three practitioners of the Moog synthesizer when I began. People couldn't even pronounce the word—synthesizer. I remember when we were putting together my *Switched-On Bach* album, some of the producers didn't want us to use the word.

PLAYBOY: We've moved to the middle Sixties, when your career was rising, but you were beginning to pick up the pieces of what you needed to do personally—get a sex change. What steps led up to that?

CARLOS: I finally read a book by Dr. Harry Benjamin called *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. I was still in bad shape personally, still feeling suicidal. Dr. Benjamin's book was the first to give adequate coverage to the psychical needs, the emotionality, the personal descriptions of other people who shared my strange condition. I realized from the book that transsexualism was fairly rare but that at least there were others like me. It gave me a little more courage to accept myself and stop suppressing my feelings, and, indeed, it provided an explanation for all the alienated feelings I'd had since my earliest memories. I'd been to some psychiatrists, but without much in the way of results. So at some point in the fall of 1967, I summoned the courage to call the Benjamin Foundation and make an appointment.

PLAYBOY: What happened next?

CARLOS: I began consultations with the

doctors there and had to face the fact that at least some people were going to have to know my deep, dark secret. By early 1968, the doctors began to prescribe estrogen, progesterone and pituitary hormones as a possible way of "curing" me of the syndrome. I didn't go in demanding an immediate sex-change operation. There was a lot of talking first about alternative methods of dealing with one's condition, a lot of looking at the evidence.

PLAYBOY: How did you assess the evidence in your case?

CARLOS: At first, I was confused. I thought I had to come up with physical proof. But then I realized the proof was within myself. The only evidence I had was the history of my feelings. Certainly, I'd never seen any lines of people at Radio City Music Hall waiting to become members of the opposite sex. Specifically, though, the realization was that I felt myself to be a woman whenever I saw a woman of similar build or looks. It had created a psychic pain within me that stopped me from being able to think or function in any fashion for very long periods. The overwhelming need I had was to resolve the conflict and become the person I had to be. *That* was my evidence.

PLAYBOY: Did you also begin to meet people who were transsexuals or who were knowledgeable about the subject?

CARLOS: Yes. There's a kind of transsexual underground, people who know about other people who've undergone the operation, or who want to do so. Also, who the doctors are, how good they are, that sort of thing. Nowadays, transsexuals advertise in the personal columns of gay newspapers. The ads usually read, "Female transsexual, age such and such, wishes to meet person in similar circumstances." But as little as five years ago, the only place you'd get to know other transsexuals, and learn about the underground, was at the doctor's office.

It was pretty clear, as I got to know more about it, that you could find out what was going on with a particular person at that stage of treatment. You'd occasionally talk in quiet little murmurs in the waiting room, exchanging information, depending on how social you were. I discovered that there were transsexuals who were almost like members of a club, a fraternity or a sorority.

PLAYBOY: Are there such clubs?

CARLOS: There was one in New York that's ceased to exist; I don't know. Mostly it's an informal thing, a clique. It's a word-of-mouth pipeline, and it consists of information that may be helpful, such as where to get clothing. But I'm a little bored by that aspect. Once I'd begun consulting my own doctors, I was never really part of the pipeline; I wanted to protect my career.

PLAYBOY: Are there transsexual bars?

CARLOS: Not in New York, though I've heard there's one on the West Coast. I can't remember the name. I don't *wish* to remember the name. Part of me wants to block the fact that I ever went through the procedure; I'd prefer to assume I'm just a normal woman. It's ridiculous, I guess, but it's a matter of growth. I'm uncomfortable being reminded of who I am, because now I tend to blend into society very well, and memories are kind of painful things.

PLAYBOY: Not to harp on painful memories, but during the period when you were preparing for the operation, were your spirits improving, was your social life expanding?

CARLOS: Somewhat. I even had one of my few sexual experiences, prior to the operation. It was a relationship with a woman. We'd been friends for a while, we were *simpatico*. She said that if I were going through with the sex change, I should at least have an idea what a man felt like. That was a couple of months after I started getting hormone treatments, and we made a couple of feeble attempts at it.

She satisfied my curiosity as to how it is done: how one really does it, what the positions are, what it feels like. But there was no orgasm for me as a man, and little pleasure, aside from the warm recollection that this was a nice person.

PLAYBOY: Did you feel as if you were performing a duty?

CARLOS: No. I felt like I was satisfying my curiosity. It was as if I were somewhat detached, as if were I to do *too* much, it would bring me back to my self-loathing. It was information, dehumanized data, rather than experiencing and letting go. But we did it off and on for a month, maybe six times.

PLAYBOY: Did you experience anything with a man before the operation?

CARLOS: I'm sorry to say no. It would have been nice to play with *all* the combinations.

PLAYBOY: You said you'd already started hormone treatments in early 1968. What came next?

CARLOS: They gave me a hormone that stimulates the pituitary. It's supposed to make all your glands react in a totally adult way, so that if I were just suffering from a late puberty, I would start producing the right hormones. Something was supposed to happen. Nothing happened.

PLAYBOY: How long did that go on?

CARLOS: For a few months. They also had me go to a laboratory and have an assay done on my urine. It was a 24-hour specimen, and the results showed that I had an unusually high count of androgen and of estrogen. Either result would have been abnormally high for a female or a male. It's fascinating, in that it means

I had a chemical battle going on; I was both a man *and* a woman hormonally. After the pituitary hormone, they had me checked for a few other things and nothing had changed. I told Dr. Benjamin I was getting extremely nervous. It was getting worse and worse and I felt that I was going to reach for the razor I had on my eight-track machine—the one I use for splicing tape—and just go pft! . . . That seemed to be the easiest way, and I was going to run into the bathroom so I wouldn't get blood all over the rug. Stupid things like that went through my head.

PLAYBOY: What did the doctor do?

CARLOS: He said he had another way to deal with it and he gave me some purple pills. I was to take one a day and report anything that happened. Two weeks later, I saw him and told him I didn't appreciate being given tranquilizers. I had been very nervous and hysterical, but I did not want to be relaxed artificially. Then he told me they were estrogen pills, not tranquilizers, that there was no tranquilizer in them. So I took

"I had one of my few sexual experiences with a woman. . . . She said that if I were going through with the sex change, I should at least have an idea what a man felt like."

them and the result was that I felt peaceful and relaxed for the first time in my life, as far as I can remember. And no side effects. I kept on taking the pills for a few months. It was at that point that I began having the hormones injected. These were much larger doses than I was getting with the pills, and inside a month I began to have a noticeable increase in sensitivity around my breasts.

PLAYBOY: Is that the normal thing at that point?

CARLOS: The experience I had has been corroborated by others, and that is that for about two months, your breasts become extremely sensitive to everything. Going out in the cold becomes painful. They are not particularly large, and you have to look carefully to see what is happening. But if you do, you see you are getting a little bulging and there is a little hot pot of Atlantis beginning to form beneath the nipple. The areola gets darker and larger. The nipple begins to get erect. The fat and the gland itself

expand and you begin to get a true breast. That takes about a year or two, just as it would with an adolescent girl.

PLAYBOY: Were there any other effects from taking female hormones?

CARLOS: Well, about the same time, there was a slight shrinkage of the testicles. But hardly anything else. Body hair is affected very slowly, so at the beginning you don't notice anything. But what is happening is that the secondary sex characteristics are being changed from those of the sex you have to those of the sex to which you'll be altering. So the hormones simply go in that direction, with the exception that they would never cause the genitalia to change to those of the other sex. Also, they would never totally eliminate the beard. It would get lighter, but you would still have to shave.

PLAYBOY: Do you have to continue to shave?

CARLOS: You have to go through electrolysis, which involves shooting a needle into each hair. Each time you treat a small area, you eliminate about half the hairs. You never reach the bottom with this sort of process, you just get half each time. You go for years and years and years. Some areas, such as over the upper lip, don't go away so quickly. You just keep going and going and it seems like nothing is happening. After about two years, you begin to see some results. There is a new method that involves cutting nerve endings that gets it all done in one throw, but it kind of gives me the willies to think about it. They just cut open the inside of your mouth and scrape the roots of the hair follicles on the inside. But then, a lot of what I did gives other people the willies, so who am I to judge?

PLAYBOY: What happens to body hair? Does that require electrolysis, too?

CARLOS: No, that just seems to go away on its own. Mine just got blonder and lighter. The top of your pubic hair becomes female shaped, rather than extending upward on the abdomen. You're left with just a teeny bit of chest fuzz near the nipple.

PLAYBOY: Is that the same with most transsexuals?

CARLOS: One transsexual I know didn't have much body hair at all, even less than I did, and not much of a beard, so inside of two months, it was possible to eliminate almost all of it. There are other cases where they actually have to use electrolysis on the face, arms, chest and everywhere else to get rid of it.

PLAYBOY: Does changing your sex affect your facial features, too?

CARLOS: Apparently it does. I can't say I was aware of it, because it goes so goddamn slowly that you really can't see it. You have to have a stop-action motion picture and I guess part of me almost wishes—knowing what I do

about photography—that I had set up such a camera.

But it is such an unpleasant thing to plan while you are going through it that you never do it. So the effect is that fat redistributes like crazy. When you are a very skinny person like me, there isn't a whole lot of fat to go around. So your thighs get a little fatter at the top and your ass certainly gets more fleshed out, and your waistline seems to contract to some extent, and, if you have a body build as I was lucky enough to have, which is fairly androgynous, I think the path is rather easy. If you have one that is severely one sex or the other, it is very hard ever to be totally convincing if you change.

PLAYBOY: What about muscles and muscle tone? How do they change?

CARLOS: Muscle bulk comes from androgen, which both sexes have. It's just that men have more of it. Women can tone their muscles but can never have the same bulk. So that when men are becoming women and taking female hormones, the bulk of their muscle tends to metabolize away. And women becoming men have a tendency to build up more bulk. They eat more and it builds up muscle. I began eating more and got more fat around my ass and breasts. But to answer your earlier question, the shape of my face was obviously inherited, but I have been told that my features have become softer.

PLAYBOY: Do you have to keep taking female hormones all your life?

CARLOS: Yes. You see, once you're done with the operation, you have no gonads at all. No ovaries or testicles. Until they figure out how to implant little ampules of hormones that would secrete into the body the way those organs do, I'll have to take a small amount of hormones via pills. If you skip them too many days, you get what they call female menopause. You get hot flashes and other problems, because your body doesn't have any sex hormones at all.

PLAYBOY: If you started taking female hormones in 1968, at what point did you begin living as a woman? Was it before or after the operation?

CARLOS: I began living permanently as a woman in the middle of May 1969, nearly three and a half years before the operation. After that, I made only a few appearances as a male for the sake of my business, such as a concert with the St. Louis Symphony. Otherwise, I would have made none at all.

PLAYBOY: Were you psychologically prepared by the time the operation took place?

CARLOS: Yes. Don't forget, the operation, though it's the thing that may be the most important in the public's mind, is really the *least* important or least interesting thing to me. By that time, you

usually made the adjustment and you are living in your new role. Certainly *I* was. I had hormones in my body. My secondary characteristics had largely been altered. The operation was just to make the genitals match. It allows you to get your legal status straightened out, so it is kind of the final step.

PLAYBOY: That sounds awfully casual. Surely you must have been nervous, even though you thought you were mentally ready for it.

CARLOS: Immediately before the operation, I *was* a bit hysterical, as though I required that hysteria to give me the courage to go through with it. But I checked into the hospital the day before surgery, and I remember then feeling happy, though somewhat cool and detached. Not as much fear as I expected to have.

PLAYBOY: What, precisely, happens during surgery?

CARLOS: Well, the penis itself is tucked into an opening that the doctors create. A friend of mine joked that it is rather funny, because they make it as though you are having perpetual coitus with yourself. What happens is that the male genitalia skin is tucked way back, where it would have been if I had been born a female. The only part you throw away is the erectile tissue, plus, of course, the testicles and the gonads. The rest of the penis flesh is all kept. I mean, it has got the nerve endings, and that is what allows you to be orgasmic. In the hands of a good surgeon, everything else is put back so that it is essentially in the place where the female would have it. In embryos, you find that males and females are really very similar. It is sort of a question of reorganizing the structure.

PLAYBOY: So they leave the areas of sensitivity for sexual response and construct a vagina. Is there a loss of sensitivity?

CARLOS: I was luckier than most. The doctor did quite a good job. He maintained an incredible amount of sensitivity, whereas another doctor might not have. Some doctors are better cosmetological surgeons than others. I mean, I don't know if you want to hear this, but some transsexuals sit down and they can't even urinate. The stream comes out, sort of, forward. But they *look* good. Whenever skin is cut, nerve endings are cut, and you know, we are dealing with parts of the body where nerves are highly important. There are a lot of people who go through this operation with surgeons who don't have good techniques. They end up having fine cosmetic results but absolutely no functionality. They become numb, almost literally, and that's a pretty gross thing. Whether or not sex is the first thing on your mind, I assume you are thinking about it at least a little,

and you wouldn't want to be so numb that it ruled out any degree of pleasure or orgasm. I was lucky. I lost maybe ten percent here and there, and I have a pretty good idea where those locations are.

PLAYBOY: Have you had *any* problems as a result of the surgery?

CARLOS: I have got a couple of tiny physical things that I think probably in a few months I will go and have handled. Sometimes there are little complications that are not really severe that you can live with for years, and then after a while you say, Oh, there is this funny little scar tissue in there that causes a little discomfort and I think I'm willing to spend a day in the hospital and have it trimmed away. But it's not much different from an average person's having little problems with his body. I'm not trying to make light of the procedure; I'm just explaining how I feel about it.

PLAYBOY: What do they do with the breasts? Do they operate on them or use hormones?

CARLOS: In cases like mine, male to female, if you want a larger breast than

*"I was luckier than most.
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what the hormones give you, you have to have implants the way many small-breasted women do.

PLAYBOY: Of silicone?

CARLOS: Yes. It depends on what you have inherited. If your mother had large breasts, you are likely to have them, too. The same with smaller breasts.

PLAYBOY: What is done with your Adam's apple?

CARLOS: Well, this certainly isn't very pleasant to discuss, but if you want, I can tell you. If you have a very large Adam's apple, you can have it reduced by shaving. That is, they rip back the skin that covers it in your neck—it isn't a real incision—and actually plane it down with a small tool. They have to be very careful to take only the cartilage, the nonusable part of the Adam's apple. The result is a smaller size that doesn't affect the pitch of your voice at all. Now, if they *aren't* careful, you can wind up with a very strange-sounding voice, a bit husky. I have heard of instances where that happened. Some people considered

it sexy and didn't mind. I certainly have never done that. My voice never changed. It was high to begin with and just never cracked. I always sounded like an adolescent and I sound like one now. But at least I never have to worry about phonying up my voice to keep it in the highest part of its range.

PLAYBOY: How long did you stay in the hospital after the operation?

CARLOS: Eight days. The hospitalization time was the least problematic. The anesthesia was the best I've ever received. I had no sickness, no stomach distress. I woke up feeling absolutely fine. The doctor had administered an effective painkiller and I had no pain at all. Five days after the operation, when he had to check the dressings; that was painful. I was supersensitive and, of course, the painkiller had worn off. Nevertheless, I had a trembling, happy feeling knowing that the new sensations I was feeling would be mine for the rest of my life. Knowing that I had gotten over the hurdle tended to blind me to any of the negative things.

But the following week I spent in a hotel down the street from the hospital and the doctor's office, so that he could check on me every day. Then I did begin to get complications. I wasn't healing quickly, because I have a body that wants to form scar tissue immediately. The doctor had to give me special medicine.

PLAYBOY: What kind?

CARLOS: Everything. Would you believe that the last thing I was given was gentian violet? That's a horrible staining substance that has a property of helping the body slow down its need to form scar tissue quickly. The gentian violet wrecked several sheets and clothes and underwear.

I'd go to the doctor's office and he'd change dressings and insert that stuff into me, and it would keep my system from forming scar tissue. For a couple of months, I was in discomfort, halfway between an itch and a bit of pain.

PLAYBOY: Do they tell you to have sex regularly after the operation?

CARLOS: Yeah, they actually recommend it. They used to have cases in male-to-female operations where the new vagina would close up, even to the point of preventing intercourse. It would require another operation and it would be pretty messy to go back and do that again. So it is helpful to keep shrinkage to a minimum. When that happens, you have to resort to dilating it with a small metal dilator that you can buy in a drugstore. It is used by most transsexuals postoperatively for the first few months. Also, whenever you fear that something may be going wrong and you are starting to shrink, you can use it for a while. I guess if you masturbated, too, you could do it

with your fingers. Oh, hell, I mean, we're not children, any of us can fantasize what to do in cases like this.

PLAYBOY: You said you had your first masturbatory experience postoperatively.

CARLOS: That's right. I had assumed that would be one way of preventing shrinking and I chose to use that method. The dilator, which might just as well be called a dildo, is just a small plastic rod that is effectively smooth. It's not made to look like anything else.

PLAYBOY: How soon after the operation did you have your first sexual experience with another person?

CARLOS: At first I was afraid to. I must have been kidding myself or lying to myself not to take the plunge. I think I used the old Roman Catholic excuse that it was dirty and wrong. I talked with my doctor and he told me not to be afraid of sex, to open myself up. Then I decided, OK, why not? Let's see what it's like. Experiment. A couple of tries and it turned out to be fairly easy. A couple of more tries and it worked, and then I wanted to go along and have multiple orgasms, like women do.

PLAYBOY: Can you describe any differences between sex as a man and sex as a woman?

CARLOS: It's just conjecture on my part, but I suspect that women can have multiple orgasms because the physical mechanism of having an orgasm doesn't have to be erect like a penis does. The sensitivity of the clitoris can simply be maintained and you continuously receive stimulation. Of course, you can go on for a half hour or so, carrying it to the mountain peak and down again and up again, until you're a writhing mass of sweat and exhaustion. But the male loses his erection and it's hard to get started again. He loses his capacity for multiple orgasms, mainly for mechanical reasons. So, yes, I have the capacity now for multiple orgasms. I don't know if I had it before. I suspect not.

PLAYBOY: Besides the differences in sexual response, what can you say about how it feels to be a woman instead of a man?

CARLOS: I feel that some innermost part of me was always a woman, so that all I have really done is change my suit of bone and skin. It is hard for me to know what a normal man would have felt like. I know many of the feelings of a man, since I was brought up as a little boy, but I can't really answer for the male view. I always felt, spiritually and psychologically and intellectually, that I functioned as a woman. I am functioning hormonally that way now. That is what is in my blood stream. And sexually, that is how I function. My build, skin texture, things like that have all shifted. For all practical purposes, I have become the sex of my choice.

PLAYBOY: Was there ever any thought of turning back?

CARLOS: No, never.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any idea what would have happened if you *hadn't* had the operation?

CARLOS: Yes. I'd be dead.

PLAYBOY: You make the whole process sound necessary and right. Yet for many, if not most, of the males who will read this interview, thoughts of castration will go through their heads. Why do you think that fear is so deeply rooted in the minds of men?

CARLOS: [*Angrily*] Why would you ask me that? I never felt it was castration. It was corrective surgery. Inevitable and comfortable. It's something I had to do. I do know that I was very saddened when a great many of my male friends candidly told me after the operation that they had felt a pain in their own groin at the thought of what I went through. One friend said that every time he passed the hospital where the operation had taken place, he'd just kind of reach for his crotch.

"I never felt it was castration. It was corrective surgery. Inevitable and comfortable. It's something I had to do."

PLAYBOY: Have you lost any friends as a result of the operation?

CARLOS: Truthfully, no. I've obviously not confronted some people whom I used to know or who may or may not decide to continue seeing me as a friend when they find out. One acquaintance did say, "Gee, I used to like Walter a whole lot, but I really don't like Wendy." But generally, if they liked me to begin with, there isn't any problem now.

PLAYBOY: Do you remember how it felt the first time you told somebody other than Rachel that you had had or were having the operation?

CARLOS: The operation I kept pretty secret. I was frightened, probably in the same way I was frightened in childhood. I was convinced I would lose the love of people who cared about me. Rachel very stoically informed friends in advance for me, so the preliminary expectation was already established and I didn't have to tell people myself. More recently, I've confided to some who had known me as Wendy for a year or two that I used to be Walter Carlos, and that usually gets incredible reactions. Some

people don't react at all, they go into shock. Others say, "Gee, isn't that nice?" They're so casual. No problem at all. Then they go home and sort of go Brrrrrr. Oh, my God! Other times I just act casual about it and people tend to accept it.

PLAYBOY: Have you been surprised by some of the reactions?

CARLOS: Yes, very often. Sometimes those who I think will be the coolest are the most uptight, and vice versa. Some are very silent when I tell them. You can see you're not necessarily doing anyone a favor, particularly if you say, "Now, please keep this a secret." As I said before, being a transsexual makes me a barometer of other people's own comfort with themselves. Those who aren't sexually at peace with themselves tend to be the most uptight around me. Others who are really relaxed think it's no big deal.

PLAYBOY: What kind of reaction pleases you the most?

CARLOS: When people are not thrown by it at all. They just go on and say, "Gee, that's fascinating. As I was saying. . . ." That's the nicest experience. I remember that one friend announced to me when I told him on the phone that I had begun living full time as a woman, "Well, if I come over, is it all right if I laugh?" It was such a sweet thing. Such an honest response. It would be wonderful if we could evolve to a point where people won't have trouble dealing with problems like this at all.

PLAYBOY: What about your own problems dealing with the change? Does the fact that you used to be a male and are now a female affect the way you are attracted to people? For example, once you've had your sex changed, does it change your sexual orientation?

CARLOS: I don't see how that could happen. I basically feel that we are capable of being stimulated by both sexes—in addition to animals and inanimate objects, for that matter. My own orientation has been pretty much bisexual and by my late 20s, I knew that I was flexible. Of course, until I felt at peace with my own body, the thought of sexual contact was pretty abhorrent. As soon as it was resolved, the doctors helped me relax and I started to have little affairs. I'd been cut off from the whole area of sex for most of my life and I think I'm still coming to grips with my sexuality in a way an adolescent would.

PLAYBOY: Do both men and women come on to you?

CARLOS: Yes, but not all that often. The last thing in the world I expected from all this was a good body, but you know, ectomorphs are in fashion these days, so I've got a desirable body shape. I suppose I should have expected that they would come on to me, but I'm getting

older now and certainly losing some of my youthful rosy-cheekedness.

PLAYBOY: Have you tried on a bikini since the operation?

CARLOS: Yes. It was great.

PLAYBOY: What was the reaction on the beach?

CARLOS: It was in the Caribbean in January of 1974. My body was pretty neat and I was proud of it, kind of a peacock feeling. I strutted my stuff, as it were, and I got a few wolf whistles. Before the operation, I had not worn a bikini, because I wanted to hide myself, and I went out into the sun in an almost mantronly bathing suit.

PLAYBOY: Since you've begun getting wolf whistles, do you respond to come-ons?

CARLOS: Very seldom. And when I do, it's mostly for curiosity's sake. One of my female friends always calls me the new twat in town, you know, as if I had a new toy. Eventually, you learn what it feels like to have orgasms and stuff.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever become interested in any of the men who've dated you?

CARLOS: Right now, the idea of letting my secret out is so important to me that I've inhibited any real feelings on that matter. I've had crushes on both men and women, but I'll have to ask you to come back in two years to see if I've managed to grow up. It may turn out that hiding a secret for ten years, as I've done, causes your habits to become permanent and I

may never be able to let go emotionally.

PLAYBOY: Do you tell your sex partners that you have had a sex-change operation?

CARLOS: It depends. I don't have any set rules. I used to have a large need to confess—to be totally honest. Now I feel sometimes that discretion is the better part of valor. The percentages are probably about equal and I suspect that many people whom I didn't tell are going to be mightily put off by this interview.

PLAYBOY: It certainly will be the end of Walter Carlos forever. It would seem that killing him off was one of your toughest chores. How were you able to keep him breathing but never visible?

CARLOS: Rachel was the buffer. She was a brick. I don't know how she could keep herself from hating me and throwing rocks after having to answer the phone and lie on my behalf, making up those incredible inventions.

PLAYBOY: What inventions?

CARLOS: Oh, lame excuses. If someone called the house, Rachel would say, "He's in Providence, visiting with his family." Think of that one! What an ironic excuse to be giving. If I were within hearing distance, I'd quietly snort, "Oh, yes, he really loves Rhode Island and he's very close to his parents." Or Rachel would say that this ubiquitous Walter Carlos was on tour, out of the country, anywhere, everywhere. The few friends

who knew covered for me, too. They are honest people who hate to lie but were forever lying to cover up the leaks and the gossip that went on about me during that time.

PLAYBOY: What was the gossip?

CARLOS: Some of the speculation hit it right on the button. After all, transsexuality wasn't completely unknown. But some loudmouths thought I had turned into a drag queen, while others guessed that I had been a woman all along—one who was pretending to be a man.

It got as far as Europe. An audio engineer friend who was visiting England claimed that he ran into a guy who said, "Hey, I hear you're close to that musician, Wilhemina Carlos." Wanda was another name that was thrown at me. People catch on to the fact that you try to keep the same initials.

PLAYBOY: Did Columbia Records catch on?

CARLOS: I doubt it, though some people there obviously did.

PLAYBOY: Did they just figure you were an eccentric genius?

CARLOS: Eccentric genius was the term they used as an explanation. What they really meant was, "Hey, there's something strange here." Actually, I don't know how eccentric I am and I'm scarcely a genius. Just a bright kid.

PLAYBOY: But you never blew your cover.

CARLOS: It was close. I'll never forget

appearing on the *Today* show in 1969 with Hugh Downs, and the brouhaha that erupted backstage. Rachel heard a couple argue: "Well, come on, that's a girl." "No, it isn't. It's a boy." "No, it's a girl pretending to be a boy."

I also made a TV appearance with someone whose name eludes me—he had a very proud-peacock aura, always preening himself—and I went to great lengths to distract his eye from focusing on my facial features. The make-up woman for the show was suspicious. It was during the estrogen period, and I had hardly any beard left, and she was aware of the false sideburns. Usually, I would take care of the make-up in the hotel and go to the studio ready for camera. That time I didn't.

Then there was Dick Cavett, in 1970, which was my last TV appearance. Peter Ustinov was the only other guest that night. Cavett was tense, because the synthesizer was not a subject he was familiar with. He was hoping Ustinov would ask interesting questions—Peter is literate in music. Ustinov gave me this funny look. He backed away, and his eyes went up and down. In all honesty, he was impressed by my music. He did ask questions. But there was a great deal of discomfort all around, with too much stimuli coming into me for me to react to any of it. My memory of the experience was one of suffering. I've no idea how much of it came across to the viewers.

I guess my best TV appearance was with George Carlin when he was subbing for Mike Douglas. He could enhance the discussion with questions he knew well enough to ask and the pressure wasn't bad. There wasn't any uptightness or hostility.

PLAYBOY: Then you didn't make any TV appearances in conjunction with the release of *A Clockwork Orange*, for which you created the musical score?

CARLOS: We were asked to. *Camera Three* ran a special on *Clockwork*. They had Anthony Burgess at the studio and I was invited to go in. Rachel thought that would be dull and suggested instead that they film in our studio. They claimed they didn't have any film but would send a still photographer instead.

So this fellow came and set up his strobe and took tons of slides of the equipment and lights and dials, and of Rachel and me at work. The photographs were shown on the program while, in the background, they played some of the music from *Clockwork*.

PLAYBOY: In other words, they faked it.

CARLOS: Exactly. Anthony Burgess set it up, mentioning that "You all know Walter Carlos' music," and Malcolm McDowell, who starred in the movie, said that he had been to the recording studio with his old lady, and how fascinating it all was.

PLAYBOY: Did McDowell know?

CARLOS: If he did, he was too much of a gentleman to say so.

PLAYBOY: During that period, what sorts of reactions were you getting while you maintained your false identity?

CARLOS: Strange stares. The one real scene was at Chock Full O'Nuts on Fifth Avenue when I was about 18 months into hormones. Here I was, dressed in a man's coat, a man's jacket, a man's hat, and this woman stormed up to me and shrieked, "Are you a man or a woman? What are you?" She was really frightened. I saw horror and terror in her eyes. I was beside myself. I didn't know what to say.

Less traumatic was the time I went into my bank, still dressed as a man, to close the account under the Walter Carlos name. The clerk looked at this middle-aged woman and asked, "Who is this Walter Carlos?" I replied, "Me." There was a double take. I said, "Is there a problem?" She gave me the once-over and mumbled skeptically, "Well, you just

"As Walter, I pasted on false sideburns and simulated a five-o'clock shadow. I tried to lower my voice and be macho. It couldn't have mattered less."

don't look like a Walter to me." That was a very interesting way of putting it.

PLAYBOY: During the estrogen years, how strange was your appearance? Was your hair long?

CARLOS: Moderately long. In those days, hair length didn't matter. Don't forget, it was the hippie era.

PLAYBOY: But hippies weren't necessarily feminine-looking. Or effeminate.

CARLOS: I looked androgynous, and always have. I was fashionable the minute androgyny became fashionable. It's a look that maybe screaming teenage girls would get off on. Even without the hormones.

PLAYBOY: If there hadn't been the need to stay in the closet, do you feel you would have affected the world of music? Would music have changed if you had remained Walter Carlos?

CARLOS: Absolutely. I'm convinced of that.

PLAYBOY: How?

CARLOS: The fact that I couldn't perform publicly stifled me. I lost a decade as an artist. I was unable to communicate with other musicians. There was no feedback. I would have loved to have gone onstage playing electronic-music concerts, as well

as writing for more conventional media, such as the orchestra.

PLAYBOY: But your performance onstage in 1969 with the St. Louis Symphony was a disaster, was it not?

CARLOS: Personally, yes. Professionally, no. They invited me to perform a special concert of electronic synthesized music. Following the orchestral part, the conductor and I talked about the new ways that music would be done, ad-libbed about the synthesizer, cracking little jokes, keeping it light and informative at the same time. The audience was enthusiastic: There was great feedback both for me as an artist and for the medium. My angst was high, though. Rachel said I was getting so close to the edge I could have had a nervous breakdown had I continued performing. I hated the feeling of working as Walter Carlos. I kept saying silly things like "Let *Walter* go and do it."

PLAYBOY: Were you anxious because of the concert or because of the double identity?

CARLOS: Mostly because of the forced secrecy, which I wasn't good at. I insisted to Rachel that I would not fly to St. Louis dressed as a man, and didn't. I went dressed as I normally would have, as a woman. We checked into the Holiday Inn, and they didn't know who the hell this woman was. When we got into the suite, I ceased being a woman and suddenly became this Walter Carlos person. And I began crying hysterically. I couldn't do it. Rachel cajoled me. Eventually, I pasted on my sideburns and put on a wig to hide my hair, which was pretty long at the time and streaky. I filled my pores with dirt from an eyebrow pencil to simulate five-o'clock shadow. I tried to lower my voice as bottom-heavy as it could get. Tried to be *macho*. It couldn't have mattered less.

When I went down to eat that night, some hotel guests thought they recognized me. A timid person said he had seen my sister earlier.

PLAYBOY: When you were working with Stanley Kubrick on the *Clockwork Orange* score, you were already three years into hormones. What did Kubrick know about your condition?

CARLOS: Kubrick was so intense on the project that if I'd come in stark-naked, he'd probably just have asked if I were cold. It was no big deal in the beginning. Later on, he started to notice it a little more, and he'd talk about somebody he knew who was gay, trying to feel out if I were gay. I'd give him an enigmatic answer suggesting I wasn't, and he'd be even more disturbed. On the last couple of days, he shot a lot of photos of me with his little Minox camera. He must have found me an interesting-looking person, to say the least.

PLAYBOY: And Kubrick still doesn't know?

CARLOS: He lives in England, never travels; we talk by phone about what's been happening with his new film, *The Shining*, which I may score. If it happens, I'll just have to bite my lower lip. He'll have to be told about me. There's no other way.

PLAYBOY: Stevie Wonder once visited your house and played the synthesizer. Did he know?

CARLOS: I didn't speak to him. He'd have picked up on the sound of my voice and immediately spotted that something wasn't right.

PLAYBOY: The secrecy of your life this past decade, you claim, has affected the progress of the synthesizer; but has your transsexuality personally affected your own music?

CARLOS: I would think not at all. Can you imagine writing *The Transsexual Symphony*? [Laughs]

PLAYBOY: Is there an analogy between your music and your transsexuality?

CARLOS: A simple one would be that *Switched-On Bach* in 1969 was a good musical barometer, while transsexuality in 1979 is a fairly good sexual and attitudinal social barometer. When *Switched-On Bach* was new, it stimulated strong reactions. Those who were comfortable in all forms of music, those who were open to novel variations, loved it. Transsexuality, too, is an emotional, action-prone

situation, in that it tends to polarize people, depending on the attitudes one brings to sexuality and human rights. In both cases, there's no middle ground.

PLAYBOY: You imitated human voices with the synthesizer in your score of *A Clockwork Orange*. Was that the first time it was done?

CARLOS: We did some vocal electronic music back in 1970—for the choral parts of the Beethoven *Ninth Symphony*—and, again, we got a lot of uncomfortable reactions. People looked at us and said, "Oh, my goodness, what is this?" They were scared by it. They were scared hearing a chorus of artificial voices. We were using a thing called a vocoder. It's an instrument that takes apart speech and then allows you to reassemble, using, in that case, the synthesizer as the original source.

PLAYBOY: Are vocoders still in use?

CARLOS: All over the place. They're becoming clichés. You hear the *Star Wars* sounds, the *Battlestar Galactica* music: The aliens usually talk with a vocoder. So, once again, I think we were a little too early.

Bert Whyte, who was a great pioneer of audio, said to Rachel and me, "Do you know what pioneers get? They get arrows in the ass." I've gotten my share of arrows, maybe rightly deserved. But it's still fun to know you were there first

and you've got the trophies.

PLAYBOY: You've also shot off some arrows yourself. You've been very critical of the way the synthesizer is used on disco records. But hasn't disco popularized the instrument?

CARLOS: The synthesizer became well known when advertisers used it to sell products on TV, such as the commercials for ailing cars and the cat sounds to advertise cat food. Pop artists such as Keith Emerson used it rather flamboyantly. Emerson, Lake & Palmer were among the first pop groups to play with it. In *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the sounds came from a synthesizer. And it's the background on almost every Donna Summer record. But to get back to your question, it's nice to know that it's used on disco, but it would have been healthier for the industry had it not been.

PLAYBOY: Why?

CARLOS: If you're asking me to name the hit disco singles, I can't, since I generally flee from anything that repeats the same sequence more than 16 times. I mean, if somebody wants to say, "Once upon a time, once upon a time," I've got it after the fourth time. Let us not confuse it with music. But now I sound scholarly and tight-assed and pompous and—fuck it all. This may sound like sour grapes, but I'm putting down almost

all of the records that have used the synthesizer this past decade.

PLAYBOY: Would you like the instrument to be used less?

CARLOS: I don't want to stop them. I'm only saddened to see that it isn't further advanced. I've got a right to my opinion and I'm going to continue to be angry. If not an angry young man, at least an angry middle-aged woman.

PLAYBOY: What are *you* doing to advance the use of the instrument?

CARLOS: I'm in the process of designing and having a new machine refined. It is to have a minicomputer, with special controlling devices and lots of knobs and dials and keyboards of various kinds. It'll be a digital synthesizer and it'll be a one-note instrument.

PLAYBOY: What will it do that other synthesizers can't?

CARLOS: I feel almost embarrassed to say that this will truthfully be the first time that an instrument will be able to imitate *any* sound that the mind of man can conceive and that the ear is able to hear.

PLAYBOY: Can you see yourself marketing this instrument?

CARLOS: Certainly not. I've never thought of myself as having a whole lot of business acumen.

PLAYBOY: How does what you're doing compare with what other musicians are doing?

CARLOS: A better comparison would be the way I make electronic music and the way the Walt Disney studio made its animated motion pictures. I construct in sound what Disney did in visuals. He worked frame by frame, drawing by drawing. The synthesizer is a one-note instrument and, consequently, I work note by note, color by color. Disney used special optical processes to give depth and perspective to his drawings. I also work with foreground elements overlaying background elements.

PLAYBOY: Was there music in your family when you were growing up?

CARLOS: My mother plays the piano and sings. I have an uncle who plays trombone and another who plays trumpet and drums.

PLAYBOY: Were you an only child?

CARLOS: I have a brother 22 months younger than I. We never see each other. I had a sister, also younger than I, who died within the first week or two after birth. It is hard for me to remember back that far now. Only recently, my mother mentioned it to me. She had also given birth to a hermaphrodite who died a couple of weeks after birth.

PLAYBOY: Isn't it rare, if not bizarre, that a set of parents produce a child who is to become a transsexual and one who is a hermaphrodite?

CARLOS: Perhaps. Apparently, the sexual organs had not differentiated it completely into a male or a female, though

my parents decided that it was a girl. It's possible that the clitoris might have been large enough almost to have become the penis. The truth of the matter is that within the embryo, in the beginning, you are both sexes. You have a full set of cells that evolve into either the female apparatus or the male apparatus. When I mention this to some of my friends, they get nervous and uptight, thinking, Gee, I am a woman and I have a potential for having male organs down there, or I am a man and I have a potential vagina down there.

PLAYBOY: In your opinion, are there reasons to believe that parents are responsible for transsexuality?

CARLOS: Not necessarily. Not at all. There are probably several factors. I kind of want to scoff and say, "Well, then what causes homosexuality, or bisexuality—or heterosexuality, for that matter?" Only an extremely arrogant, queer person would come out with an answer, because we have only suppositions. There's the whole question of chromosomes. Remember when Renee Richards had to take a chromosome test to enter a tournament as a woman?

Here's an example: If a child is born with its testes up, so that they essentially act as ovaries, and its body then develops female characteristics, you'd eventually call it female. In my case, I was born chromosomally male, so I must be a man. Yet this other person, who has developed as a female, has male XY chromosomes. If you took tests and compared the two of us, you'd find very little difference. She is sterile and so am I. You know, it has become difficult to separate, to draw the line. We have to be very careful what we call anything. A man, a woman, a heterosexual, a homosexual. It's like—it's the last stronghold.

PLAYBOY: We were talking about parents. Just as some parents fear having their children taught by a homosexual, do you think some parents fear the effect someone like you might have on their children?

CARLOS: Why?

PLAYBOY: In the case of homosexuality, there's probably some kind of fear of contagion.

CARLOS: Contagion? I won't breathe on them.

PLAYBOY: What about children in your own life? Does it make you feel unfulfilled as a woman to know you can't have kids?

CARLOS: A lot of people can't have children. I guess in a way it saddens me, but in another sense I know I'm a career monster. So many ideas are so much more important to me than children. I probably would have chosen not to have children, anyway, so I don't mind particularly.

PLAYBOY: Would you consider marriage?

CARLOS: I would consider anything. But

do I think seriously about marriage? No. Do I think it would be easy to find someone who could marry me? Absolutely not. He would have to be a very strange person to be able to tolerate someone who, as of this interview, is going to be a publicly acknowledged transsexual.

PLAYBOY: What if your closest friend, Rachel, got married?

CARLOS: I try not to think about it. Rachel and I have lived very closely together for many years and, to some degree, that will come to a stop. And that saddens me, frightens me. She has a man, and they're talking about getting married. So it may well happen. But it won't be because I've gone public. Rachel is about the only person I can name in this interview, because she is not frightened. There is nothing I can say here that can scare her. So it's not as if I fear rejection by her.

PLAYBOY: But fear of rejection *was* one of the shaping influences of your life?

CARLOS: Transsexuality is a crash course in dealing with the fear of rejection. I was raised as a boy. I wanted love. I wanted people to like me. So I was not going to say something that, in my infant mind, could cause people to get upset with me. There is nothing particularly striking about my background, except that in my head I had this obsession that is among my earliest memories. So, in a way, it's all so boring. I think I would feel happy if a reaction to this interview were a yawn. I mean, who cares? I've gone through a procedure. It's done with. Just let me live my goddamn life and I will let you live yours.

PLAYBOY: It's certainly not boring. And by doing this interview, you're showing that you do care.

CARLOS: I don't want to become a proselytizer. I don't want this interview to champion the cause. I think it's very important that my condition be acknowledged as very rare, so that it's seen as a highly unlikely solution for other people with an unhappy life, or suicidal impulses, as I had. The fact that there were some "successful" transformations doesn't erase the many tragic cases in which an operation was not the full solution for particular individuals. No one should follow this hellish path if an alternative exists. Try other options first.

Sure, it was necessary for me. But I don't think it's been positive at all. I feel that what I achieved is the removal of one very large negative in my life. Now that I've solved my gender crisis, I've still got to come to grips with the other parts of life that go into making a happy individual: living a productive existence; having time for other human beings; having time for passion and compassion; having the time to create and shape the multifaceted diamond that a fine life can be.

