

# Billboard



## THE *PLAYBOY* GAMBLE

*The professional wisdom (or lack thereof) of posing nude for print*

**N**aked pop stars aren't unusual in an age of oversharing. Miley Cyrus, FKA Twigs, Lady Gaga and Selena Gomez have all stripped for high-end glossy *V Magazine*. But what's rare about Azealia Banks' *Playboy* shoot is that she's an artist, presumably at a career peak, who posed completely nude without the pretext of fashion, but in the name of good old-fashioned sex.

Before leaked images regularly turned up online or companies peddled stolen sex tapes, celebrity nudes were a vestige of a pre-fame modeling past (see Madonna's art-school photos in the September 1985 issue of *Playboy*) or part of a calculated reinvention. In 1995, country-pop singer Nancy Sinatra graced the magazine's cover at the age of 54, nearly 30 years after "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'" topped the charts. La Toya Jackson went topless for *Playboy* in 1989, ostensibly to distance herself from her family. In

2002, former teen-pop star Tiffany posed totally nude in Hugh Hefner's monthly as a bid for a second act. "More than about being naked, it was about being [seen as] a woman," says Tiffany, now 43, who in her 30s was still defined by her adolescent mall concerts. "As soon as I posed, we couldn't stop the phone from ringing — it worked." (So well that in 2005, her youth-pop contemporary Debbie Gibson also posed for *Playboy*.)

Banks' star isn't waning, but *Playboy* editorial director James Jellinek sees her move as a huge crossover coup. "Before this, she was confined to the niche music-enthusiast world," he says. "This got people talking about Azealia Banks."

But were they talking about the *right* things? "She looks great, and she's a provocative artist, but frankly, I don't want to see anyone's p—y," says one veteran (female) publicity executive. "Do you want to be remembered for your music career, or for your *Playboy* cover?" —SHARON STEEL