



INTERVIEW

KEVIN HART

Kevin Hart is poised to become the biggest stand-up comedian that ever was. Not that he's kicking back to celebrate: His movies, including Ride Along, Get Hard and Central Intelligence, have raked in more than a billion dollars globally, and yet he works like an unknown still angling for an NCIS callback. Since last January, Hart appeared in half a dozen films, including this month's What Now?, a genre-hopper about his recent record-breaking global comedy tour. That movie, which mixes stand-up footage with a fictional James Bond-style backstory, is expected to smash box-office records too. Hart is also producing TV shows, building a video-on-demand network, partnering on tech deals and signing endorsement contracts.

In other words, his life is as dazzling as that gold mike he wields on stage. No wonder he calls himself the "comedic rock star."

At 37, Hart is at the peak of his popularity, and all signs point to continued domination on screens both large and handheld. He has a keen sense that comedy today is an *everywhere* experience, whether you're spending an evening with him at the megaplex, buying his new Nike "Hustle Hart" sneakers or letting him guide you on the Waze app. Wherever you go, Hart's lightning-fast voice and contagious energy are with you.

He was born on July 6, 1979 in Philadelphia, the younger of two boys. His mother, Nancy Hart, raised them; father Henry Hart was a heavy drinker and coke addict who spent time in jail on drug charges. Being funny saved Kevin well before he was getting laughs professionally. At the shoe store in Philly where he worked, his pratfalls and snappy observations made him the star salesman on the floor. But "regional manager" wasn't going to cut it.

After high school, Hart played small comedy clubs under the stage name Lil' Kev the Bastard. People urged him to quit, but he followed the paths blazed by heroes like Chris Tucker, J.B. Smoove and Eddie Murphy, eventually willing his way to Hollywood.

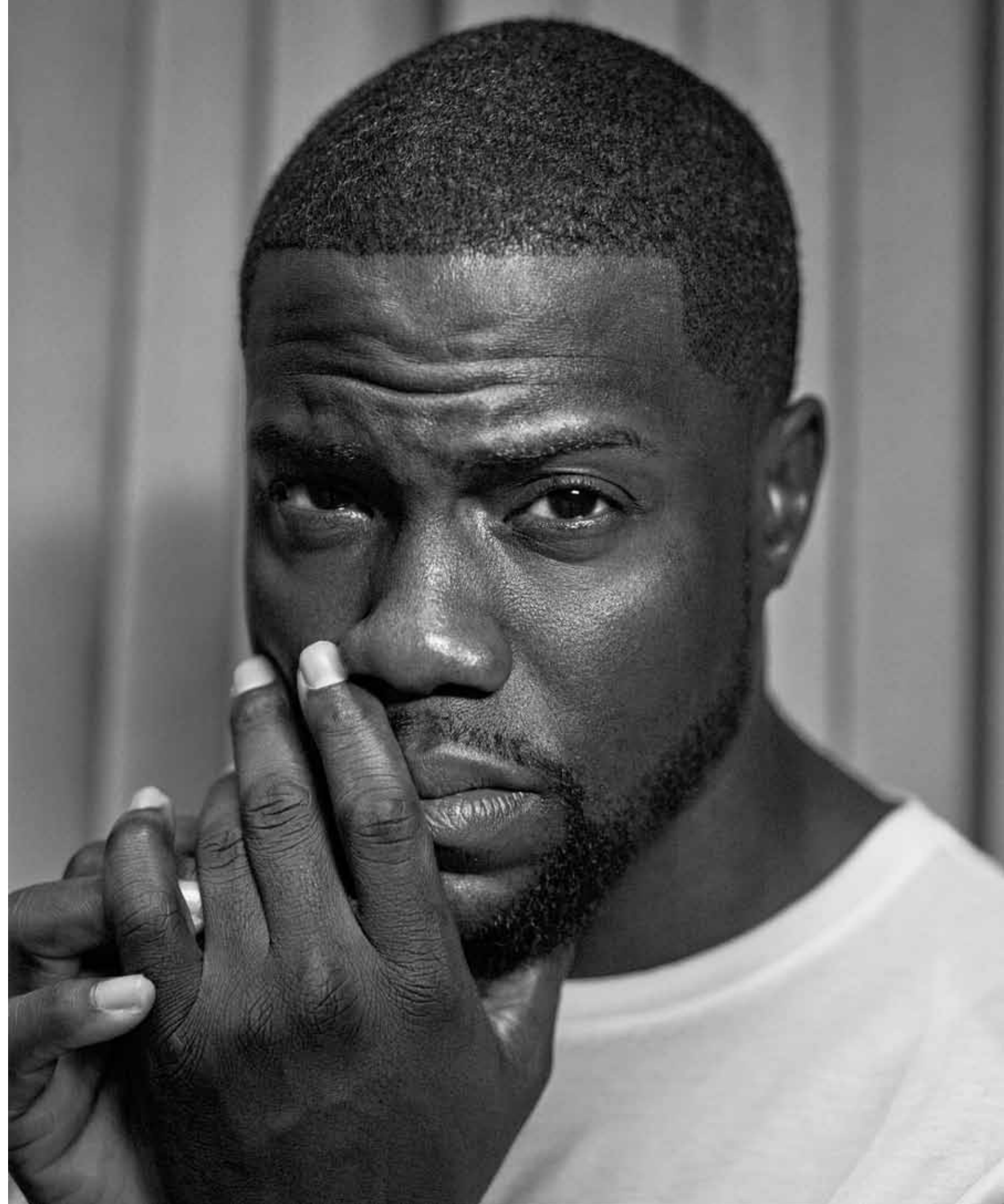
For years Hart struggled. Sitcom after sitcom tanked. *SNL* rejected him. His marriage collapsed. But he turned heartache, and even his mother's death from cancer in 2007, into gold. His 2011 *Laugh at My Pain* stand-up tour and subsequent concert film became his first real hit. In the five years since, it has been a rocket ride: He hosted the MTV Music Awards, had a recurring role on *Modern Family*, guest starred and produced the *Real Husbands of Hollywood* series and made a handful of movies each year (*The Wedding Ringer*, *The Secret Life of Pets* and *Think Like a Man* and its sequel, to name a few), all but one of which went to number one. He has two young kids, Heaven Leigh and Hendrix, from his first marriage, and this year Hart married model Eniko Parrish. Along

the way he became a living counterargument to an ugly show-business assumption: that African American actors can't sell movie tickets in the global market.

Contributing writer **David Hochman**, who last interviewed Trevor Noah for *PLAYBOY*, spent several days with Hart on both coasts over the past year. "Kevin's got this massive, hyperactive energy that makes you forget he's a really small guy," Hochman says. The two of them hung out most recently in the ultra-luxurious Baccarat Hotel in Manhattan, where Hart was tailoring the menu to his dramatically fitness-conscious tastes: "I'll have a burger but no cheese, no lettuce, no tomato, no onion, no sauce and definitely no bun," he told the amused waiter. "Do the same thing with a chicken patty." Says Hochman, "Kevin knows what he wants in every situation. It's not Oscars. It's beyond mere money and fame. Kevin Hart wants to be the Genghis Khan of comedy."

PLAYBOY: Your new stand-up concert film follows you on the biggest comedy tour of all

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CATHERINE SERVEL**





time: 156 shows, 112 cities, 13 countries and five continents. That's a lot of airport body-cavity searches.

HART: You get used to it. The good thing is, flying private takes a lot of the hustle and bustle off it, makes the ins and outs a little more convenient. But the whole goal behind the tour was not only to make history but to go beyond what people would expect a comedian to do. To be able to play so many venues in so many cities and countries, to sell out multiple shows and arenas, to do stadiums—it blows up the idea of “You're just a guy telling jokes,” right? You show the global importance of laughter.

PLAYBOY: How does your material change when you're playing to a crowd in Singapore versus an audience in, say, Brooklyn or Cape Town?

HART: I change nothing nowhere. Nothing. That's the beauty of it. To become a universal comedian and really stay true to the meaning of *universal*, you come up with comedy that appeals to everyone. We set so many records. We sold 100,000 seats in New York alone, with three sold-out shows at Madison Square Garden and two more shows at Barclays in Brooklyn. It's completely crazy. And it's not just crazy here. My international shows sold out in three days, all with the same material and the same level of laughter. California, Cape Town—the people are amazing, and they respond. Durban, Qatar, Dubai, Singapore. Same thing everywhere. Funny is funny.

PLAYBOY: What was the toughest crowd?

HART: Well, Abu Dhabi was definitely the scariest before I got there. I was so afraid to go because I didn't want to offend anybody. I heard you could rub the culture in the wrong way. My fear was, you know, because of the language and sexual content, I wondered, How far can I push it? What can I do? But I talked to people, and they said, “Kevin, these are your fans. They want you over there.”

PLAYBOY: Did you really think something would happen to you?

HART: I didn't want to have a problem with a sheikh or the royal family and then not be able to get out of the country. But then I got there and it was the complete opposite. All these people dressed head to toe in the sheiky garb, and they're roaring with fucking laughter. It

was mind-blowing. *Mind-blowing*. The shit they're laughing at in Abu Dhabi is the same shit they're laughing at in Australia is the same shit they're laughing at in Philadelphia.

PLAYBOY: You sold out Lincoln Financial Field stadium, where the Eagles play in Philly. Doing stand-up for 53,000-plus people in your hometown must have been wild.

HART: That was some wildass shit. First time a comedian ever sold out an NFL stadium. We knew Philadelphia was going to be massive, so we turned it into a huge production. We had 84 cameras on me and a gigantic wall of screens behind me. So my backdrop was a video wall that acted as a visual point of view that matched

There's this idea that actors of color don't sell movies outside the U.S. Look at me and Cube.

whatever I was saying throughout my show. As I'm joking about my house, the screens change into the set of my house. Now I'm talking about my backyard. It flips. It switches. As I'm walking out, the cameras walk with me. I wanted to transform my stand-up comedy show into something with a movie dynamic that's never been seen. And then shit starts to explode. We go all James Bond *Casino Royale* with the biggest fight scenes. Fire on the stage. A whole backstory about what happened to me leading up to the show. People say, “What the hell are you doing, Kevin?” But with a movie like this, it can't just be me coming out and telling jokes. We're too big for that. The production has to be big. I paid too much not to go huge. I'm in with finances for about \$13.8 million on this one.

PLAYBOY: You personally financed all this?

HART: Out of my damn pocket. Every cent. This is all me. I fully financed a movie, and Universal distributed it. They act as a partner. I know me. I know my value. When you're dealing with other people's money, you can't control it. But when you invest in yourself, you're in charge and the rewards come to you.

PLAYBOY: Some have predicted this could be the highest-grossing stand-up concert film of all time.

HART: That is the plan. I'm going for the win on this one, you know? Eddie Murphy still holds the record for stand-up concert film for *Raw*, at \$50 million in gross. My last concert film, *Let Me Explain*, did \$32 million, but that was on only 900 screens or something like that. This one is on screens everywhere. All signs are pointing that this could be the big one. This could achieve the highest level of success ever. It's all part of the progression.

PLAYBOY: But does bigger equal funnier?

HART: I grow with my fan base, man. I grow and I change. If you look at my stand-up specials—if you look at *Grown Little Man* and then at *Seriously Funny* and *Laugh at My Pain*, you see it. So *What Now?* shows my progression not only as a comedian but just as a man. You see me going through things. You've seen me married. You've seen me go through a divorce. You've seen the consequences of divorce. You've seen my kids grow up, and as they've grown, how I've changed. Now that I've changed, how do I feel? How do I feel about where I

am, people treating me, the places I put myself in, my relationship with my family?

PLAYBOY: What's it like when you come across one of your old stand-up routines now?

HART: It can be weird. I was watching *Grown Little Man* recently, and the way I'm touching the mike, you can see my nervous energy. I'm not comfortable, at least not at the level I'm at now. I'm also rushing. You'd think somebody was chasing me with a machete. The speed is off the hook. There's no break. Now I see a guy who's full of fear. You're out there on stage and you look up, you see all the people, and there's real tension: *All right, I don't want to lose these people*. Now I feel like I'm much more in command. It's all about growing and improving. I want to continue to get better as a stand-up.



PLAYBOY: Not that your movie career is hurting. In the past year alone, your credits have included *What Now?*, *Ride Along 2*, *Central Intelligence* and *The Secret Life of Pets*.

HART: [Laughs] Yeah, I feel like a slacker if I don't have a movie coming out every two months.

PLAYBOY: Chris Rock joked at the Oscars this year that he can't afford to lose another role to you. What do you make of the complaint that African American actors don't get the same opportunities in Hollywood as white actors?

HART: First of all, Chris is a great friend. I thought it was a great joke. Here's my opinion: When people speak on the diversity issue in Hollywood or the lack of actors or actresses of color, I'm not going to sit up here and play dumb to it and act like it isn't an issue. But at the same time, when you bring more attention to an issue, it becomes a bigger issue. Whereas if you try to figure out a solution and do things to help position yourself or people of different races, shapes and sizes to have more options, that's where you can be a service. If you're not making shit happen, you just become a part of the problem. You know what I mean?

PLAYBOY: But how does the problem get fixed?

HART: For me, I'm actually doing some of the stuff that people are saying black performers aren't getting the opportunity to do. That includes taking my movies international. You know there's this idea that actors of color don't sell movies outside the U.S., but look at what me and Cube did. The first two *Ride Alongs*, you're looking at something like \$400 million in worldwide box office revenue with two African Americans as your leads. And yet no attention was thrown to the fact that we were breaking major ground, because so many people were focusing on what wasn't happening in the industry. I can't get stuck on the negative. Let's keep grinding. Let's go to 25 countries and promote the hell out of it. Then let's come back and do another one. Now, whether we do a *Ride Along 3* or not, what Cube and I have is special, and we know it can work here and around the world. Same thing we saw with *Straight Outta Compton*, a major success domestically and internationally. Universal Studios saw it. They got it.

PLAYBOY: You almost always share the screen

with a major co-star, whether it's Ice Cube, the Rock or Will Ferrell. Is there any reason you don't do a straight-up Kevin Hart movie? Where's your *Beverly Hills Cop*?

HART: I'm just slowly building up to it. It's not like you can walk in and tell the studio, “All right, give me all your money. I'm ready to do the \$100 million movie.” I mean, I can go in and say that, but here's the thing. I've had one number-two movie. Every other movie I've done has been number one at the box office. My fans love what I'm doing. I'm also switching it up,



you know? I've been lucky enough to be part of two franchises. I got *Think Like a Man 1*, *Think Like a Man Too*, *Ride Along 1*, *Ride Along 2* and possibly *Ride Along 3*. And it's not like I haven't done any Kevin Hart movies. My stand-up concert films are my movies. *The Wedding Ringer* was like a Kevin Hart movie, and it was a good movie. It did well, did great business. That's Kevin Hart's name in the lights, nobody else's.

But there's a reason I'll go do *Central Intelligence* with the Rock. It still makes sense to do that, because to become that international star, you want to get with somebody who can help you achieve that. The Rock is that guy.

So for us to team up and have that pairing was amazing. I also broke into the animation space with *The Secret Life of Pets* and now *Captain Underpants*, which is a great new area of business.

PLAYBOY: Would you ever do a drama?

HART: It's in the works. I'm going to do *The Untouchables* with Bryan Cranston. It's a re-make of the French movie *The Intouchables*. That'll be my first and I'm looking at another one, but I'm slow walking into these things. To be honest, I'm not looking for the artsy stuff, the stuff that's going to go under the radar for a group of intellectual people to watch and say [*in highfalutin voice*], “Oh, this is one of the most marvelous films.” I'm about box office success. But sure, after I'm done having fun and achieving the box office successes, then I'll go and take the risk of doing the more serious, more dramatic. But if I'm trying to break international waters and show the world that comedies do play overseas with lead actors of color, you don't just try to do it all by yourself—then people start saying you can't do it. But my numbers add up. No matter what anybody says, Kevin Hart is bankable. Kevin Hart is box office revenue.

PLAYBOY: You have more than 20 million followers on Facebook, 30 million on Twitter and nearly 40 million on Instagram and Snapchat. Does that ever freak you out?

HART: Are you kidding me? Anything that gives you the opportunity to test out material and get an instant reaction from a population as big as a country? It's a godsend. If I want to test out a joke, I put it out to my followers and see in five seconds

what works and what doesn't. That's changing comedy. For people coming up, not only can you test out your material, but you build that fan base. You get 100,000 or 500,000 followers and now you can say, “Hey, you should invest in me and my idea because they love me on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram or whatever.” Periscope? I love that shit too.

When you look at what a guy like, say, Mark Zuckerberg has done, it's amazing. I haven't met him yet, but I can't wait to. I'll probably have 5,000 questions for the guy. I just love the fact that he's creative and what he's done with that company. I also really love Snapchat



right now. You see somebody like DJ Khaled on there. You got to take your hat off to him for recreating himself. He's found a niche. The Rock is funny as hell on Snapchat too. If you're a comedian in 2016 and you're not jumping into the tech space, you're going to get left behind. Me? I'm not being left behind. You know why? I've got Kevmojis.

PLAYBOY: Kevmojis?

HART: That's right, Kevmojis! Everybody uses animated emojis, but Kevmojis are real photos of my face doing a million different twists and turns. How many people have the ability to really change up their face that many times? Not many, that's who. So I went and did a bunch of different facial expressions, and now you can use them instead of that little yellow smiley-face shit people use. I'm always thinking, always building, always moving to whatever's new and exciting. That's why I hashtag ComedicRockStarShit. I know people are looking at their phones and seeing me surpass just being a comedian.

PLAYBOY: For someone who loves his devices, you're unusually strict about audiences not using phones at your live shows. A woman in Iowa City was arrested after she called a friend during one of your gigs.

HART: I told you there's a lot of money invested in my shows, and I don't want to see that money go down the drain because everybody's filming me and putting that shit on YouTube. More than that, you want people to watch. Enjoy it, people. Put yourself in a position where you can laugh. As much as I love social media, at these live shows, it distracts people from actually seeing and enjoying the show, because everybody is worried about getting that great piece of footage to show to their Twitter friends or on Facebook Live or whatever. I can't stand it in my own house. My kids love their screens. I don't remember the last time my kids went outside and kicked a stick or something. So at my shows, I don't want your mind on footage. I want your mind on me on the stage. Again, I'm taking entertainment to a level it's never been before, and I want people right there with me.

PLAYBOY: Did you always have this level of ambition?

HART: No. Actually, here's the crazy part. As a kid in school, I had no real desire to reach

the highest levels of education. I was not that guy. But I've always been a person who pushed to the ultimate realm of things that I loved. If I had a passion for something, I figured out a way to be the best at it. That started with video games. *Tecmo Bowl*, *Double Dribble*, remember those? These are the games of the past, but it was me trying to figure out everything I possibly could to have an edge. Then basketball became the passion. I wanted to go to the NBA. I said, "Mom, I want trainers. I want to take private lessons. I want to be in the gym all day." And I would spend all day in the gym.

PLAYBOY: Your mother was a computer analyst at the University of Pennsylvania. Clearly

I have the ability to light your day up. I take pride in that. I don't take it for granted.

she was smart enough to see that you weren't NBA material.

HART: Hell no! My mom was the opposite of a dream killer. She was the person who told me I could do anything I put my mind to. Her thing was: Anything you start, you have to finish. You start a book, you finish the book. You start a sport, you finish the season. It's still the major rule we live by in my household. We don't quit. I don't care if you don't like it. My kids get into some new project, it's got to get done. I went as far as I could in basketball, but then, yeah, you go, Okay, maybe somebody like me could excel even more in another line of business.

PLAYBOY: Your dad was in and out of jail, and you've joked on stage about him showing up at your school spelling bee on a cocaine

high, shouting, "All right, all right, *all right!* My son's spellin' the shit out of these motherfuckin' words!" How much of that is true?

HART: Shit's not funny unless it's true to life, and nothing was funnier to me growing up than my mom and dad's relationship.

PLAYBOY: But he was actually stealing money from you to buy drugs, right? Where's the comedy in that?

HART: He was stealing, 100 percent. From me, from other people. But honestly, this is the beauty of who I am. I've always had the ability to find a positive in any negative. Coming up, of course, what kid doesn't want his parents to be happily married? You want to wake up every day and see Mom and Dad in the morning, being all snuggly with you and lovey-dovey, and then good night. Every kid wants that. For me, I didn't have it, so I had to deal with what was there. My parents weren't fond of each other. They were hot and cold and frozen cold, and my dad could be crazy. So my mom would let him have it. He'd come home with stuff he bought. "That's probably stolen!" she'd say. "That stuff can't come in this house." I'd be thinking, But look how cool these toys are. She'd go, "You ain't touching that stuff. Set it down. We're going to give it back in the morning." Then my dad would be, "Ain't nobody stole that stuff!" Mom would go, "You did steal it." "No I didn't." "Then bring a receipt. You got a receipt? Then he can keep it." I'm like, What? Why am I the butt of this stuff? Even if he did steal it, it's sitting right here waiting for me to play with. But my mom would always win.

PLAYBOY: Is it true she died before she ever saw you perform?

HART: She died in 2007, so she saw my success. But she never saw me do stand-up because, you know, she was a churchgoing woman. The language and all that was not something she was going to enjoy. But I know she's watching over me now. She's seeing it all. That's my angel. I definitely believe in heaven. I believe that when you pass away there is a place where these positive spirits go, and I feel like I have one. Them days you feel are your toughest days, you're okay, because you've got somebody pushing you in the direction to smile.

PLAYBOY: You had it pretty tough coming up

as a comedian. Didn't someone once throw a chicken wing at you?

HART: Yeah, yeah. [*laughs*] Somebody was that frustrated with my material that they decided to throw a half-eaten buffalo wing at me. Sloppy sauce and all. And you hear the worst stuff when you're starting out and nobody knows you. "Brother, this ain't for you. You need to fucking do something else." That wasn't just the audience; it was friends, family, peers, whoever. All that stuff is nothing to me but ammunition. People say, "No, you can't." Well, here I am, motherfucker. But even so, you look around and you're playing at some shitty-ass places. In the early days in Philly I was doing bowling alleys and nightclubs, strip clubs, people's living rooms, places that weren't conducive to comedy at all.

PLAYBOY: You were turned down by *Saturday Night Live* too.

HART: Lorne Michaels and I joke about that now. He's been doing this so long and he knows comedy. He lives it. You can only admire a person who's given his life and devoted himself at the highest levels of entertainment for more than 40 years. I was probably just having an off day. That wasn't my only rejection. I was the death of every sitcom I was on for a while. You struggle, but you keep going. It's the only way. I think that's why you have certain stars and why some people can't make it in show business. I think the ones who made it are the ones who heard the word *no* and didn't let it affect them and were strong enough to hear the word *no* again and still continue. I'm actually glad I struggled, because I can look back and connect yesterday's lows to the highs I'm experiencing now.

PLAYBOY: By the way, how's your relationship with your father these days?

HART: Oh, he saw the mistakes he was making and the people he was hurting. He's 68 years old and clean as a whistle. My dad is a man's man. His pride is heavy, but he got to a point where he wanted to be a father and make up for a lot of the mistakes he made with my brother and apologize, and same thing to me. My brother held more of a grudge, but I'm different. I'm just a forgiving person. I take care of him now.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever worry about those addiction genes passing down to you? What's your history with drugs and booze?



HART: I'll tell you what. Having the knowledge about what drugs and alcohol did to him was the greatest gift he gave me. Now I can tell you 100 percent, "Hey, man, don't do drugs. That shit will fuck you up." My dad got fucked-up bad. I mean, I'm human. I've done things in the past, but I'm not a drug guy. I drink. I'm not abusive with drinking. I'm very much in control of what's going on, but that's a combination of my mom and my dad. My dad's mistakes became beams of light to me. My mom's strict rules of behavior are the reason I'm in line.



PLAYBOY: Who were the people who made you want to get into comedy?

HART: Redd Foxx. Eddie Murphy. I had to sneak around to listen to Richard Pryor. George Carlin, Sam Kinison. Andrew Dice Clay, Chris Rock. My mom wouldn't allow that in the house. She let me watch Sinbad because he was clean. Seinfeld. Martin Lawrence. There were others, of course.

PLAYBOY: Did you purposely leave Bill Cosby off the list?

HART: No. Bill Cosby was a huge influence. He's still a comedic legend, and his impact on me remains massive. What he has done in his

personal life, I obviously don't support. If all arrows point to him doing what all these women say he did, then I hope he'll be dealt with accordingly. But I still have his picture up in my house. He's one of my comedy heroes.

PLAYBOY: So often we hear about the private troubles of our favorite icons. Prince was supposed to be a clean-living Jehovah's Witness. Then he dies of a drug overdose.

HART: Yeah, you don't know what goes on behind those closed doors. But Prince lived his life the way that he wanted to live it. He was one of the most intimidating men to meet, I'll tell you. Somebody like Prince, you don't want to go and talk and be stupid. The one time I met him, I didn't even want to make eye contact as he was walking by. You're like, Shit, here he comes. Okay, look down. All right, wait a minute. He smells good. Is he gone? What? He wants to say hi. Hey, P-P-P...do you even call him Prince? I'm confused. So you go, "Hey, man," and that sounds stupid. The man was such a talent. You don't want to tarnish his legacy. Digging up and finding speculations about people—it won't bring him back, so why bother?

PLAYBOY: What about the next generation of entertainers? Who are you watching?

HART: In comedy, if I had to put together a quick list, there's Lil Rel—I think he's very funny. William "Spank" Horton, Na'im Lynn, Joey Wells. Those are guys who've been with me for a long time and I think are very talented comedians. Keith Robinson. I mean, tons of comedians in New York I came up with that I would love to see get a shot. David Arnold, who I was produc-

ing something for. Corey Holcomb. These are guys I think have an amazing comedic perspective and point of view and could become huge names. A lot of these guys will be featured on a new network I'm launching this fall called Laugh Out Loud. I'm the CEO. It's a new video-on-demand network in partnership with Lionsgate. They're investing in me, and we just shot 52 comedy specials over the summer. I want this to be a multicultural platform for comedy, stand-up comedy, miniseries, viral content. I want this to be a hub where people will go. I love Netflix and Hulu. I love what those guys are doing. But I'm a businessman as



well, and I know there's a lane for me. Television has been great for us. We're doing our fifth season of *Real Husbands of Hollywood* on BET. We've got a lot going on.

PLAYBOY: What motivates you to do so much? Didn't you also sign a big sneaker endorsement deal this year?

HART: First-ever sneaker endorsement for a comedian, that's right. Why stop, you know? The Nike deal grew out of my love for physical fitness, and I love the fact that I now have a platform for that. I was out of shape. Well, I thought I was in shape, but I wasn't, so I decided to get into shape. I started doing 800 to 1,000 sit-ups throughout the day. I bench about 260, 265. Being in shape motivates me to do other things too. You have to look at yourself and go, What am I doing? I want to do action movies? I want to be an action-comedy star? I can't be an action-comedy star looking like this [*slouches and blows out gut*]. So now that I'm getting my act together, let me see if I can get other people who want to get it together. So I started doing 5Ks, putting the call out on Instagram and whatnot, and people started joining us. Thousands of people. We've gotten 5,000, 7,000—literally crowds of people of all shapes, sizes and ethnicities, and they come out to challenge themselves for that day. You hear the stories: "Hey, Kevin, thank you for getting me out of my bed to come run." "Hey, I had triple-bypass surgery and I was just laying around not doing anything, but you made me want to get up and get myself together." "Hey, man, I'm a cancer survivor." When you start to see the effect you have on people and you start to see the faces and hear the stories, you know you're doing something right. It's the satisfaction of knowing that I motivated people. That's another effect I'm having on the world. You have your window of time here on earth, and you want to try everything.

PLAYBOY: Don't you ever just want to take a vacation?

HART: We go and do stuff, sure. I'm very much a family man. When Dad goes to work, he's working for a couple weeks, but then I'll be back for a couple weeks, and we want to do something fun. We'll go to Orlando. It's not about Disney World or anything like that. It's us, house, nice little barbecue setting, the family doing three

meals a day. I'll tell you, the best party is just me and my wife with my kids. Nerf gun fights with the babies, movie night, taco night, game night. We love to play [Ellen Degeneres's app] Heads Up. My kids make me smile. No matter how bad it gets out here, knowing that they're okay, that calms me down.

PLAYBOY: You got married this summer. What did you learn from your first marriage, which ended in divorce?

HART: I was 22 years old. What happened happened when it was supposed to. I'm where I am now in my relationship for a reason, and I'm happy. At some point, you're not going to keep searching. What else are you trying to find?

When people go, "Man, you're short," I'm like, Oh, good job, sir. You cracked that case.

You eventually go, All right, this is it. I'm going to die with this one.

PLAYBOY: Tell us about a recent splurge. You like cars and watches, judging from your Instagram.

HART: I bought the new Benz truck. I love it. The G65 is a major upgrade from the G63. I also recently had my Shelby rebuilt from the ground up. It's a beautiful 1966 hatchback Eleanor, black with silver streaks. I get something big for myself every time I do a big movie or project. The Shelby was from the first *Ride Along*. I got a Mercedes SLS AMG for *Laugh at My Pain*. My Ferrari 458 Italia is from *Let Me Explain*. I bought my house from *Think Like a Man*. Other than that, I'll buy myself a watch. Those are definitely my weakness. I like

Cartier, Rolex, Richard Mille, Patek Philippe. That's my guilty pleasure right there. It's a little bit of an addiction.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever worry about losing it all, going MC Hammer and blowing through the cash?

HART: No worries there, man. Can't do that when you're doing the right thing. If you spend more than what you're making, that's your fault. If you're in for \$15 million on something, and all you've got is \$8.5 million, that choice is going to crush you. The hard thing with money is I try not to let it change or affect who I am or who I'm shaping up to be. I don't want the money to play a major factor in it. You don't want to become one of these guys who can't zip up his own pants or put on socks or open a door for himself. People get like that. They get so rich they forget how to be a normal human. The trick is to stay close to people, to get out there in the public, to run in Central Park, to talk to people, to observe, to be real. It's easy at a certain success level to isolate yourself and disappear into a castle of your own making.

PLAYBOY: Let's move on. Do you have any thoughts on the race for the White House?

HART: I'm not a major political guy. It's not my cup of tea. I don't put my foot in that stuff. But I'm definitely going to miss Barack Obama. Amazing man. Michelle Obama, amazing woman. The fact that I got to have dinner at a White House Christmas gathering with the first black president of the United States, that's one for the lifetime highlights reel.

PLAYBOY: What do you make of Donald Trump?

HART: What I can say is that I have no ill will toward him or his campaign, but I'm a people person. I love people. I love the idea of people coming closer together. My whole job is to unite people. You go to my shows, there's all races there. So the idea of separating and segregating and dividing because of what someone believes in, that's not something I could ever get behind. I try to understand people and accept them, but it can be difficult sometimes. Then again, I have entertainer friends who are widely misunderstood, and if you get to know them, you see what's really going on.

PLAYBOY: Who comes to mind?

HART: Kanye is probably number one in that category. He's a good friend. You can say what

you want about Kanye and his approach, but the passion behind what he's fighting for is real, and I really believe he's misunderstood because of his passion. He's a monumental talent. His last album, *The Life of Pablo*, is incredible. Best line of all time: "Name one genius that ain't crazy." There you go. That's Kanye in a sentence. He's admitting that he's crazy but also calling himself a genius at the same time. Same respect goes out to Justin Bieber. The Biebs is my man. His last album also is fucking amazing, and he's a guy who does whatever he needs to do to be himself, no matter how much shit he gets for it.

PLAYBOY: You spend time with Jay Z too. What's that like?

HART: He's the king. It's like being with the king. To be honest, I'm a sponge when I'm around that guy. You just sit there and soak up information on how he does what he does, man. You see a guy who is not content and constantly pushing and stretching. I mean, look at Tidal and the flak people gave Tidal when it first came out. "What is this shit? It's gonna fail." Everybody wanted it to fail. Nobody saw potential. Now look at it. Tidal has over 3 million subscribers. He's doing something right. When you think about Jay Z, you're looking at a guy who has so much success in music, but he took that music, and took the money from music, and turned himself into a business and created X, Y and Z, and now sits at the top of Roc Nation as a mogul. You can't fight what people are destined to be.

PLAYBOY: What about your destiny? What's on the horizon for Kevin Hart?

HART: There's definitely an exit plan. I'm not going to give away too much about it, but it's a retirement plan. I'm not going to be 50 years old and grinding at the level I'm doing it now. The reason I'm building these things and putting all these pieces together is because, at a certain age, I want to say, Okay, I did it, and now it's time to enjoy myself, and enjoy myself doesn't mean partying it up, and being on a yacht and dancing and stuff like that. It means enjoying my home, enjoying my kids, enjoying the foundation that I built.

PLAYBOY: Is there anybody you envy?

HART: I wouldn't say envy, but I certainly admire what Eddie Murphy has been able to do.

I think he's very happy. I know him well. He's very happy in his relationship. He just had a baby and already has tons of kids. He doesn't seem to be bothered by any piece of negativity. He plays his music. He has his hobbies. I mean, at a certain age, you have to understand, it's about being at ease. It's about doing what you want to do and not what people want you to do. And when you look at the people who really get that and understand that, I guess you could say I am envious of that. Dave Chappelle—again, people can say what they want. Dave Chap-



pelle, he's all right, man. He's a guy who is very much in control of his life. He has a farm with tons of animals on it, and he has his kids and his wife, and he has his wonderful life. He's set up, he's not answering to anybody, and I'm very proud to call that guy a friend. I want to be like that one day.

PLAYBOY: If that's what you want, why not just buy the farm now and call it a day?

HART: All in good time. I'm doing what I want to do. I'm doing it at the level that I want to do it, but what people have to understand is that there's a difference in entertainment between working because you have to work and work-

ing because you love to work. I love to work. I love entertainment. I love stand-up comedy. I love making people laugh. I love embracing my fans. I love giving my fans content. I love the fact that I can make a movie and people watch the movie and say, "That guy makes my day." I'm in love with that.

For me, stand-up comedy is bigger than the title "stand-up comedy." Stand-up comedy is an effect. I have an effect on people. I have the ability to change your day in a positive way. I have the ability to light your day up. I take pride in that. I don't take that for granted. If you feel like you're just going through the motions in life, you can turn on a Kevin Hart movie or Kevin Hart stand-up, and you know what? You laugh, and it takes your mind off whatever that may be. Give me your stress and I'll take it away. That's the true art of comedy. That's why, regardless of whatever negativity I've taken from critics or even other comedians, I'm true to my fraternity of comics, because very few people can do what we do. I got chosen as one of the guys who are funny. Thank you, God. I get it. Now my goal is to be the best at it. I'm going to do what I can to be the best and the biggest.

PLAYBOY: You talk about being the biggest. Be honest: Does it offend you when people make fun of your height?

HART: When people go, "Man, you're short," I'm like, Oh, good job, sir. You cracked that case. What a genius! It's the thing that people have known for the last how many years I've been in entertainment? But you just figured it out. It doesn't bother me, no. I'm good either way. You can't offend me.

PLAYBOY: Great. In that case, one last question. Are you sure you're not driving so hard to overcompensate for, you know, some other physical shortcoming?

HART: [*Cocks head and lets eyes go wide*] All right, brother, all right. I don't know what to tell you, man. I'm happy. I'm very happy. I'm happy over here and I'm happy down there. Definitely happy. That's the best way to put it. That's my nicest way. I'm not overcompensating for anything. I am in a great space. A great space. I'm living it! Things are flying! Life is good! It's great being Kevin Hart! ■