

The Incredible Crosby
BY BARRY ULANOV
Whittlesey House, 1948
SECOND PRINTING

PREFACE

MY FIRST personal contacts with Bing Crosby, on the Paramount lot and at the NBC studios in Hollywood, in May,

1944, were brief but stimulating. Restricted to a couple of question-and-answer periods and corollary exchanges of dialogue, they were all that was necessary to fill in the lacunae in a story on Bing that I was writing for my magazine, and to provoke much more interest on my part in the subject of the story. As no other Hollywood luminary, Bing's person was elusive. Arresting as his personality was, its existence was almost entirely on celluloid, on shellac, and through the ether. I determined to bring the figure to earth, if it could be done. A serious, full-length biography seemed the logical means of investiture for the disembodied screen, record, and radio spirit, if the spirit were willing.

Typically, Bing answered a question with a query. "So many fan magazines and newspapers have combed over my drab background," he wrote me, "that the subject seems to me to be exhausted. Lots of things have happened during the last fifteen years which would be interesting if I could remember them, and if they weren't censorable." That was in the fall of

1945. When I next saw Bing, in January, 1946, upon his return to the Kraft Music Hall program in Hollywood, his interest was considerably enlarged and more positive. From then on, his cooperation was tacit; he suffered my hovering motions around sound stages and radio studios, dressing rooms at Paramount, NBC and ABC, his Sunset Boulevard offices, and at recording sessions. A man of singular reticence where his own life and times are concerned, a startlingly but genuinely modest person, Bing was most voluble about music and musicians, increasingly silent as discussions grew closer to himself.

Fortunately, Bing's friends and associates were anything but silent about him. His impact upon their lives, in so many of which he was a central figure, was intense, apparently never to be forgotten, and thus memories of people, places, and events connected with Bing Crosby were easily stirred. No matter how easily stirred these memories were, no matter how stimulating their subject, Bing's friends, teachers, and business associates extended such willing and able cooperation that acknowledgment here can only suggest my indebtedness to them.

In the preparation of the early chapters, Bing's brother Larry was most helpful, and I was given every assistance in Spokane by Bing's grade-school teachers, the Misses Nell and Agnes Finnegan, and his Gonzaga classmates, Ed Gowanlock, Dr. Joseph Lynch, and Fathers Francis E. Corkery, S.J., and Arthur L. Dussault, S.J., who took valuable time away from

their administrative duties as president and athletic director of Gonzaga to reminisce about Bing and to show me about his old school.

Al Rinker gave many hours to recalling his boyhood association with Bing, their dual start as singers, and the years of the Rhythm Boys, And Al's brother Miles and sister Mildred Bailey added anecdotes and other information. Jack Mass, for many years close to Bing and to the Crosby organization, was a valuable source of documentary material and was available at any time of Hollywood day or night. Les Raddatz and Baldwin Sullivan of the NBC press department ransacked their Crosby file for me, providing me with rare photos and stories.

Bob Hope, Phil Silvers, and Frank Sinatra were eager contributors of story and opinion, all wonderfully helpful. So was make-up man Harry Ray ? who proved an invaluable source of material

Finally, there were the members of the Circle, direct and indirect, who gave so freely of their time and energies: Jack Clark, Barney Dean, Jimmy Van Heusen, and the Burkes, Bessie and Johnny, none of whom ever indicated how much they must have minded my impositions upon them, and all of whom, but especially Johnny and Jimmy, are in effect contributing editors of this book.

There were many others who offered assistance along the way, too numerous to mention by name, but they must be credited and thanked. I want to thank Father George Ford for looking at the manuscript and Dr. J. T. H. Mize for making available his vast store of Crosbyana. And I should like to add my great appreciation for the tireless efforts of Barbara Hodgkins and my wife Joan in putting the manuscript in finished order.

BARRY ULANOV

I am indebted to the following for their generosity in permitting me to make large quotations from their copyright works: to the University of North Carolina Press, for the quotation from Richard Hertz's *Man on a Rock*; to Irving Berlin, for *A Couple of Song and Dance Men*; to Mills Music, Inc., for *I Surrender Dear*; to Sidney Kornheiser and Burke and Van Heusen, Inc., for *Going My Way*, *Swinging On A Star*, and *Personality*; to John Gassner and Crown Publishers, for the excerpt from the introduction to the *Best Film Plays of 1943-44*; to James T. Farrell and the Vanguard Press, Inc., for *Observations on The Bells of St. Mary's* from *Literature and Morality*; to the editors of *The Screen Writer*, for Harold J. Sdemson's article; to the editors of *Salute*, for George Frazier's article; and to Al Delacorte and *Modern Screen*, for Billy Rose's article.

CONTENTS

Preface vii

Part One: HARRY LILLIS 1

Part Two: BING 97

Part Three: DER BINGLE 203

A Crosby Discography 297

Index 3 2 3

The Incredible Crosby

Part One: HARRY LILLIS

FEW MEN have so completely captured the American imagination as Bing Crosby has. And just as few have had their imaginations so completely captured by America and its people as Bing Crosby has. Without waving a flag, with a noticeable avoidance of the Fourth of July oration, he has gone right to the heart of twentieth-century America. In his language and his looks, his dress, in his sports, his ambling gait, his shifting weight, Bing Crosby bespeaks his country. In his voice he sings America, and most of America sings with him.

To the public that has made the voice the most popular and far-reaching and the biggest money earner ever, there isn't much missing in the picture of the most open and the least puzzling of its heroes, Bing. One knows, after all, that he is devoted to horses, that he races them and loses races with desperate regularity. One knows that he is Bob Hope's dearest friend and the other end of a charm-

2 The Incredible Crosby

ing feud organized by the two men -for radio and screen purposes, -with records lately added. One knows, doesn't one, that he is a happy-go-lucky man who whistles while he works and makes a wonderful work of this whistling, that between the horses and Hope, between his amiable singing and casual acting, there is just

about time enough to count the dollars rolling in.

To his intimates, Bing is the Enigma. They regard him with love and respect and an undying curiosity. For though they know that Bob Hope and Bing Crosby have time for other friends and are not so close to each other as they are to perhaps half a dozen others, and though they also know that horses and singing and making money are not all of Sing's life, they are well aware, too, that the legend of Crosby is a magnificent one and doesn't bear much tampering with. The point is to discover just where the legend ends and the man begins or to learn that they are inseparable.

Now he always sang. . . .

I ALWAYS KNEW when Bing was going to school. When he was seven and eight and nine and going to Webster, the elementary school a block away from his home in Spokane, he would whistle his way to class. When he was thirteen and fourteen and fifteen and more and going to Gonzaga, the Jesuit high school and college one block behind his house, he would sing his way over the fence of his backyard, down the alley, across the street, and into class.

"Bing's coming," Miss Nell Finnegan would say to Miss Agnes Finnegan, as they heard the little boy's whistling up the length of a Sharp Street block. Miss Nell taught Bing in the seventh grade; Miss Agnes had him in the fifth. They were more than teachers. They were neighbors who lived just one block away from the Crosbys. And all the Crosby neighbors

4 The Incredible Crosby

knew about Bing, though they never thought in those days, from 1906 to 1925, that anything very special would happen to him. They just knew that he was a soft-spoken little child, with a ready smile, a remarkable memory for the names and faces of his elders as well as his contemporaries, and a sometimes terrible, sometimes delightful tendency to burst into song or whistle at any time or place.

Bing didn't do much singing in Tacoma, Washington, where he was born, Harry Lillis Crosby, on May 2, 1901, and where he lived the first five years of his life. His father, Harry Lowe Crosby, who worked as a bookkeeper for the Tacoma county treasurer, was an accomplished tenor. His mother, Catherine Helen Harrigan Crosby, was a distinguished member of her church choir, and his brothers, Larry, six years older than he, Everett, his elder by five years, and Ted, born the year before Bing, did their share of juvenile chortling. But it wasn't until the Crosbys moved from Tacoma to Spokane in 1906 that a family singing circle was officially established, with sisters Catherine, born in 1904, and Mary Rose, born just before they left Tacoma, adding a professional touch: they took piano

lessons.

Bing's ancestors were among the Northwest's pioneers. His paternal great-grandfather was Captain Nathaniel Crosby II, who left Worcester, Massachusetts, to become one of the founding fathers of Portland, Oregon, after sailing around Cape Horn in 1849 and winning renown in the China trade*. His mother's family was a more recent arrival: Kate's father, a plumber, brought his children, his pipe fittings, and his Irish culture to Tacoma from Minnesota. No sooner were they established as a Tacoma institution than Harry Lowe and Kate Crosby moved their brood all the way across the state of Washington. By the time the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, Tacoma was no longer the glamorous city it had once

Harry Lillis 5

been. The gold rush had slowed to a stroll; the railroads, which had made the city a major terminus, had consolidated, and the timber, though still tall, was no longer in the hands of local millmen. Papa Crosby, along with many other Coast dwellers, decided it was time to move.

The pioneers of the twentieth century reversed nineteenth-century tracks and moved inland from the West Coast. The great inland empire was a-borning, and a slow migration was making its way from Seattle and Tacoma to the center of Washington's imperial country, Spokane. Some went farther, to Idaho and Montana, those who had lost all feeling for urban life, even in its relaxed Northwest version, those who had no families to worry about. Harry Lowe and Katherine Crosby had a lot of family to worry about in July, 1906, when they made their sweating Hegira from Tacoma to Spokane four boys and two girls.

The Crosby family moved into a little yellow house on Sinto Avenue, just east of Division Street, which divided East from West in Spokane. They were on the north side of town, across the river from the business buildings, from the library, the hotels, and the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes in the rapidly growing town. But they had their own church, that of St. Aloysius, the same saint whose surname graced the University next door, Gonzaga, and they had that distinguished institution and a grade school, Webster, all within easy walking distance. The city's program of paving and intensive planting of shade trees was beginning to reach their precincts; there were stores close by, and trolleys to take them across the river to the business section. It was a tidy community, a very comfortable and comforting one to a growing Catholic family.

Bing's father went to work as bookkeeper again, first for a brewery and then for a pickle factory, and with some of the proceeds bought a phonograph and cylinders to spin on it, as

6 The Incredible Crosby

well as a mandolin, a guitar, and a piano. The Crosby singfests began in earnest.

"I know what that record is," Bing yelled when he heard the first scratches of the Crosbys' favorite waxing. "It's The Merry Widow Waltz!"

Bing took the strains of The Merry Widow with him on his first jobs, selling eggs, mowing lawns, caddying at the public golf course, cleaning out the locker rooms at the Mission swimming pool, and counting pickles at the factory where his father counted money. As other songs replaced The Widow, Bing added them to his whistling and singing repertory.

During those first few years in Spokane, the boys and girls of the Crosby family spent much time together as a unit. They made family raids on their own and others' iceboxes, notably that of a German family, the Sholderers, whose four daughters could be added quickly to the six Crosby kids to make an imposing facade of chewing, drinking, grinning children. They listened together to their mother's religious counsel, hearing again and again of her warm faith, her admonishments to attend services regularly, and of the need to retain and enlarge a firm respect for the strictures and structure of their church. They knew they could expect tears and comfort from Kate when they cut or bruised themselves in a baseball game or a street fight, laughs and delightful stories from Harry, Sr., a jovial, portly man who talked easily, amusingly, and often.

As they reached high-school age, the serious Larry, the raucous Everett were dispatched to Gonzaga. Edward, who was called Ted, and Harry Lillis, soon to be called Bing, were sent to Webster, and the two girls waited their turn,

Bing made his theatrical debut as a Webster student. It was in the school's annual entertainment, given in 1909 at the North Central High School Auditorium, rented for the occasion. Everybody in school took part, a mammoth cast of 400.

Each teacher was assigned one block of time to fill. Agnes Finnegan made her fifth-grade class into blocks, blocks that jumped up and down. For no reason that anyone can remember now, twelve children jumped up and down on pogo sticks to illustrate a story called Beebee. The story is forgotten, the meaning of the title lost, even its exact spelling is hazy in the minds of all concerned, but its historical importance is quite clear. In Beebee, one night in 1909, gaily dressed as a Jumping Jack, Bing Crosby jumped up and down the stage of a Spokane high-school auditorium in his theatrical debut. It was also the first public appearance of Francis Corkery, later president of Gonzaga, but in those years a jumping colleague of Bing Crosby. He stayed close to Bing all through elementary and secondary school, leaving him at the entrance to college to go off and take his orders as a Jesuit.

It was at Webster that Harry Lillis Crosby changed Christian names. There are two stories to explain the change. No one knows which is correct.

Harry Crosby, Jr., was a dogged devotee of a comic strip that ranked high in Spokane. It was called The Bingville Bugle. As the children of later years, and their parents, followed the perils of Dick Tracy and B. O. Plenty and Pruneface and Influence, of Terry and the Pirates, of Superman, the youngest of the male Crosbys was wild about The Bingville Bugle, the equivalent terror-fraught comic, where the terrors were less pathological than those which beset Tracy and Terry and closer to the lives of the Bugle's followers. Bing was so eager for the latest doings in Bingville, so knowing of their latest adventures, that his school friends just naturally called him "Bingo from Bingville." The shortening to "Bing" followed just as naturally.

There is another story advanced for the nickname, one just as convincing as the comic-strip addiction. Especially in the early years at Webster, Harry Crosby, Jr., was a great soldier.

Turn your back, and "Bang, bang, I've got you!" was your likeliest greeting from the boy as he pointed finger or improvised wooden gun at you. It was "Bang, bang" very often; even more often it was "Bing, bing." One of his early teachers, Miss Gertrude Kroetch, caught him "binging" away. He was leaning over his desk to "bing" a classmate a few rows away.

"Bing, bing!" Miss Kroetch hollered at Harry, Jr. She pointed her right index finger at him. "Bing, bing!" she yelled again. "That takes care of you," she said. "Bing, bing!" She smiled. "Now get to work."

Bing lowered his head, reached inside his desk for a book, and got to work. He was chastised. He was also named,

Bing was not noticeable in his class at every moment. Most of the time he sat in his little seat and worked quietly or didn't work, quietly. Essentially, he was lazy. The learning processes came easily to him. Where other children had to have the requisite arithmetic, geography, and history dinned into them by a vigorous system of rote, Bing would look once, maybe twice, and learn. So a natural laziness was easily indulged, and sometimes he didn't even bother to open the book to look. In this he was noticeable. All his grade-school teachers remember Bing's laziness. "Bing? How that boy hated to exert himself!"

One memorable exertion was the Christmas play his seventh-grade class gave.

"Please, Miss Finnegan," the boys and girls in the seventh grade asked Miss Nell, "can we do our own Christmas play?"

"How? With what?"

"You won't have to do a thing," they assured her, "not a thing. We've selected our own play."

"What is it?"

"It's from the Ladies' Home Journal."

"All right."

The seventh graders prepared their own costumes, a few props, and an interesting transformation of Bing. When the day of the play came, a large party was organized, favors wrapped, and presents prepared by the boys for the girls and by the girls for the boys. But all that had to wait until after the presentation of the Ladies' Home Journal Christmas play.

On the play went, and it went very well. But there was one curious lapse.

"Where's Bing?" Miss Agnes asked Miss Nell.

"Harry? I don't know. Where is he?"

"There he is," Miss Agnes told Miss Nell.

"Where?"

"There, in the pink-and-white checked dress."

They both laughed, loudly. Bing, preoccupied with his acting, didn't know why. He hadn't bothered to argue much about playing a girl. If there weren't enough girls to go around, it was just as easy for him to play the part. And he was a great success. His career was under way.

After the play came the exchange of presents. Bing brought a mince pie over to the girl he had drawn as his. He was very happy to help her eat it. He was very happy to help anybody eat anything. His appetite was not one bit smaller than his eyes for food. He in turn got pencils, and though he did no heavy thinking about the gift it was certainly a proper one for him and an additional salve to his appetite. Bing was a pencil chewer. In fifteen or twenty minutes he could chew any pencil down to its eraser.

School days, if they weren't "Golden Rule days," were a good deal more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. They were the classes, in which Bing shone in exact proportion to the number of times he opened his books. They were Christmas parties and annual plays.

"Classes, like people," the Misses Finnegan were fond of saying, "have personalities of their own." Such a class was Sing's grade-school group. Right through the years of elementary school the personnel remained pretty much the same. This class was really notable. It was a smart bunch of youngsters which passed through the Misses Finnegan's hands, distinguished for

high marks, easily maintained discipline, and its chief characters. There was Francis Corkery, Hank to most of the kids and the teachers. He went on to become one of the best known Jesuits in his province, which included Spokane, and president of Gonzaga, just two blocks away from Webster. There was Lucille Brandt, who was the spark of the class, its major personality, both as a student and a leader of extracurricular activities. There was Jack Davis, who was killed some years after college. There was Rachel Davis, an important part of Spokane's school system herself, in later years. Somehow one of these attractive and impressive children remained really firmly in the mind of Margaret Cox, a teacher at Webster, who left one year to be married. She came back on her honeymoon.

"How lovely you look, Margaret" the other teachers complimented her.

"Thank you," she acknowledged with a kind of distracted look in her eye.

"Shall we walk around the school?" the other teachers suggested.

"Indeed, indeed," Margaret Cox accepted.

"Is there anyone you want to see?" one of the other teachers asked her. "Anyone in particular?"

"Yes, there is," she nodded. "There's one kid in this school I've got to see,"

"Who?"

"That dirty-nosed little Harry Crosby."

A few minutes later, there he was, with his shirttail out, and a complete delight to Margaret Cox, returning to Webster for a brief visit out of her precious honeymoon hours, anxious to see just "one kid."

"At the time," Nell Finnegan thinks back, "Harry wouldn't have impressed me."

"Of course, Nell," Agnes reminds her, "Harry was practically our nextdoor neighbor."

"That's right."

"And, Nell, we do remember his singing and whistling, don't we?"

"I'll say we do."

"What my sister means," Agnes explains Nell's vehement agreement, "is that we liked his singing as a youngster much better than we've liked it since."

"That crooning! Oh, he was a singer in those days!"

WHEN BING CAME up to Gonzaga in the fall of 1916, he was a fresh kid in a big Irish Catholic family, with lop ears and a faintly scared look, as if he had committed some mischief and was waiting for it to be discovered. The loving-cup handles that decorated his head command first attention in the portraits of the era. You don't need directions to find him in the class picture or the baseball-team shot. His physiognomy was not yet the concern of great cameramen; so the pale-blue eyes which contrast so appealingly with the sun- and wind-burned skin in the later movies just wash out of the early photos and occasionally give Bing a vapid look,

Harry Lillis Crosby was a cinch for the Gonzaga Fathers* He was an athlete; he accepted a degree of discipline and rejected a degree, a rugged individualist's credo, tempered by the injunctions of his churchgoing mother and the vigorous exchange of wills any family of eight must have, particularly when four are boys.

Gonzaga was a college with a high-school section; it was eight years before the little group of buildings huddled together above the bend in the Spokane River, just east of the town, was to be ennobled with the charter of a university. It was twenty-seven years after Father J. M. Cataldo had opened the school named after the patron saint of colleges, Aloysius Gonzaga, with an enrollment of eight boys.

At St. Aloysius college in 1916 the curriculum was fixed, a pattern of learning was established. In the long, straddling heap of masonry on Boone Street back of the Spokane River, little and big boys hurried to and from classes, attended by equally hurried, and worried, Jesuit Fathers. In classrooms bare of decoration, filled with fumed oak on the walls, seats, and desks, relieved by the blackboard's crisscross of chalk and empty space, young Catholics learned about life as the learned and ancient Society of Jesus held it.

The classical studies were first and foremost. In the high-school years there was lots of Latin, four years of it to be exact, and half as much Greek. There was an intense drilling in the grammar and syntax of the English language every term, as well as a degree of reading in the literature of England and America. Two years of history, two of mathematics, and a year of chemistry or physics completed the secular program. With this there was a four-year course in religion, building from the simple fundamentals to a more thorough examination and explanation of the Catholic faith. From the Commandments, this course went slowly and carefully to the Sacraments of the Church, thence to the reading and discussing of the great Christian apologetics.

After lunch, every day of the school year, the freshly washed faces of Gonzaga's boys peered solemnly over their desks at their

Jesuit instructors. This first afternoon hour was consecrated to the study of religion. After the noise of luncheon and play between classes, a gentle hush fell over the school. The physical tension of the morning classes relaxed by an hour or more of running around, screaming, more subdued talking, and eating, the secular subjects put aside, this was the time for a kind of communion of the spirit. This was the time to listen to the great words of faith, the Commandments Moses received at Mt. Sinai, the Gospel of Jesus, the stern admonitions of the Christian Fathers. Here, Bing Crosby gathered the intellectual stratum of his Christian consciousness. The rest was filled out in the regular offices of the Holy Communion, in his choirboy exercises and offerings, in the warm address to the Church and its beliefs that he found at home.

Bing never doubted; or at least any questioning he may have felt never rose to the surface. The combination of a devout mother and a well-balanced religious education, if anything, made his faith articulate, clear to him and to those around him. In the difficulties of his career it always remained a firm base for action, a continuing source of security. Where other entertainers, not all others, but a large number of them, could look only to their singing, dancing, or acting for hope and faith, Bing could and did look beyond. "In the most religious sense," a Jesuit priest who was at school with Bing puts it, "he always knew where he was going, and he always knew how."

Bing always knew "how" he should act; he was never certain how "successful" he would be. He always knew "where" he was going; he knew his life would have meaning and significance, the meaning and the significance a man of his faith would find in his life if he paid close attention to the directions for both contained in his schooling. Those certainties, of procedure and of the meaning of his life, underscored his every action, backed up his wavering moments, fronted his worries, and struck indecision from his life.

The key to Bing Crosby's personality, whether expressed in singing, talking, or actor's dumb show, is his relaxation. And the largest source of his remarkable relaxation, that insurmountable ease which is almost never disturbed, is his religious faith. The central importance of Catholicism in Bing's life having been discovered, it is all too easy to recast all of his career, the ups and downs and in-between moments, in terms of Catholicism. One can very properly assign the underlying certainties, in his attitude of relaxation, to his religion and more particularly to his religious education at Gonzaga. But one should not stop at underlying certainties. One should take the whole man. And taking the whole man, with all his attitudes and all his attributes, one finds the product of much more than the afternoon class in religion.

Gonzaga is a Catholic school, yes. It is this much more: it is a Catholic school in America. As such it has always had its full share of sports, of all kinds of nonacademic activities, of boys playing football and baseball, of boys swimming and running, of boys making light of their work, too, playing their full share

of pranks, also, of boys remaining boys.

Bing's high-school class was, like his grade-school class, one of the memorable ones. If only for its split into two groups of considerably unequal size, it would have remained important in Gonzaga's incidental history. Six of the members of the class of 1920 formed a unit known as the Dirty Six. Ed Gowanlock, later president of the senior class, Joe Lynch, Hank Corkery, Mike Dunne, Robert Porter, and Philip Sweeney were the unclean half dozen. These boys always worked together; they inaugurated the Derby Club, which, in their sophomore year at high school, was formed to patrol all varsity athletic events; they led as many class activities as they could. For a while it looked as if their organized efforts were going to be unopposed. Then the opposition struck.

"Now, wait a minute," Bing said to a group of his classmates who had been excluded, along with him, from the Dirty Six. "It can't be as simple as that," he continued in his changing voice, just beginning to assume the edge of huskiness. "We can build a few conflagrations ourselves. Let's organize a Loyal Opposition to our unsanitary friends, hm?"

"Fine idea, Bing." Bill Albi, his closest friend at high school, seconded.

"Right." others accepted.

"What'll we call ourselves?"

"Got it/* Bing snapped his right middle finger against the thumb of that hand. "The Bolsheviks. How does that sound? Opposition? Bolsheviks!"

"Great!"

"Perfect!"

The Bolsheviks it was. Thereafter the class of 1920 at Gonzaga's high-school division was thrown into an interminable tug of war between the Dirty Six and the Bolsheviks, six against many more in numbers, six against one in leadership. Bing was top man for the Bolshevik opposition, its most articulate if not its most physically active member. When it came to the talking, whatever the subject or the circumstances, Bing was spokesman for his majority party. He was a good debater, when he had the energy to prepare his material, and always, no matter the time or place or selection, a first-rate elocutionist.

"Those words," Joe Lynch, a leading Dirty Sixer, moaned. "Where does he get them from?"

"Same place you and I do," Ed Gowanlock reassured him.

"Huh? Where?"

"The dictionary!"

"I know, but who can spend all his time looking up words in the dictionary, and who can be sure he knows how to use them just because he knows Webster's definitions?"

"You know who can be sure he knows how to use them Bing Crosby," Ed said a little sadly.

"I know," Joe agreed.

Bing passed down the first-floor hall in which two of the Dirty Sixers were standing.

"Here, here," Bing said. "Move on, you vagrants, or I'll sick the constabulary on you." He laughed and moved on, slowly, as always, ambling in very clear contradistinction to walking.

If anything went wrong, the one side always blamed it on the other.

"The new books, Father Shipsey? I don't know what happened to them, but I'd ask one of the Bolsheviks," Mike Dunne might say, speaking for the Dirty Six.

"Oh-hoh, so our esteemed contemporaries are shifting the blame," Bing commented on Father Shipsey's referred inquiry. "A neat bit of roguery. Did they check their guns as they filed into class?"

"I don't think you have much to say about filing into class, Harry," Father Shipsey, who was head of the English Department, reminded him.

Bing winced ever so slightly. The reference was, if not exactly cutting, undeniable. Bing's entrances, with Bill Albi, were a class tradition. Almost always late in his descent from the Sharp Street house, Bing couldn't run to school; his congenital indisposition to exertion made that impossible. Besides, there was a possible lowering of dignity, and running made whistling, almost impossible; neither his dignity nor his music could be interfered with. Bing shuffled and ambled all the way up to the classroom, across Boone Street's slow traffic, up the stone stairs, across the entrance hall, up the wooden stairs. Somewhere en route he picked up Bill Albi. By the time they reached the classroom they were in perfect step together, matching a missing drummer's precise beat. Bing pushed the door open, stiff-arm fashion, gestured in a vaudeville dancer's flourish with his right hand, and made the first time steps into the classroom. As his figure emerged, another hand could be spotted on his right shoulder: Bill Albi followed, entire, clicking off the same simple taps with his feet, and in polished execution they carried their brazen performance to its end.

On Monday mornings it was a stronger and longer show. The day before, or two days earlier, on Saturday or Sunday afternoons, a large gang from Bing's class would go down to the Orpheum Theatre to see that week's show. The appeal of

Orpheum vaudeville was so great that it cut right across Dirty Six and Bolshevik lines. Hank Corkery and Pinky Gowanlock joined forces with Bing and Bill Albi and Bud Ludcke and anybody else who wanted to go to catch the latest jokes, the newest songs, and the slight variations on the familiar buck and wing and other tap specialties offered across the footlights by Spokane's leading purveyor of such delicacies. Came Monday morning class time and a reunited gang.

"Hey, Bing, remember that double-time maneuver?" Pinky yelled across the room.

"Like this?" Bing executed the maneuver,

"And this, remember?" Hank Corkery clicked some heel steps on the floor beside his desk.

"And this." Bing opened his eager mouth and sang some itinerant variations on an Al Jolson song, after the wandering style of a Jolson imitator on the Orpheum stage. In true Jolson fashion, he ended with some chirping whistling, a cross between a bird imitator and a peanut stand's identifying cry, but the rage of the Mammyfied moment

Harry Lillis 19

"Hey, fellows, here comes the Father," one of the nonperforming members of the class warned.

"Just a moment," Bing put him off. "Still have to execute a military mazurka. A-one, a-two, a-one, a-two " and he toppled over his desk into a very unmilitary heap beside Ed Gowanlock's chair. He looked up into his teacher's robe trailing the floor beside him.

"Er," Bing explained.

"Well done," the priest answered, "but I honestly think you're a better singer than a dancer, Harry."

"Yes, Father."

"Dancing is so much work, you know. It's not your vocation at all, Harry, is it?"

"No, Father."

The class laughed and set about its Monday morning work. The weekly run-down of the weekly show at the Orpheum was concluded.

Bill Albi was Bing's closest high-school friend. Wherever they went about school, if they tarried long enough, they carved their initials into the nearest wood, or, if the oak was too hardy and their knife too dull, they used their pencil. All around Gonzaga

they left their brand. A big "B" followed by "ing" for one of them. Under the "ing" an "al" and between them a small "n," reading, then "Bing n Bal." "Bill" was quickly supplanted by "Bal" in that nickname-conscious school, and the association of the two names was almost inevitable, if one or the other was mentioned.

Bal was always next to Bing in the class pictures. He was always next to him in class, unless alphabetical seating made that impossible. He was always close to him in their after-school sports. Gonzaga was divided in Bing's day, into two athletic groups, the Junior Yard Association and the Gonzaga Athletic

20 The Incredible Crosby

Club, the first for the boys under sixteen, the second for those over that age. It was age only that counted, not one's class. The result was that a good scholar, whose class was generally a year or two older than he, was not cut out of sports entirely or placed in almost impossible competition with the larger, heavier, older boys of his class. Mem sana in corpore sano was a deeply respected injunction at Gonzaga.

For Bing and Bal and others of their group there was no limit to the number or kind of sports in which they could engage. The only limit was one's natural reluctance to indulge in the rigors or techniques demanded by any one of the traditional games, football, baseball, basketball, tennis, swimming, etc. Basketball was out for Bing too much work, too much running around. Swimming was fine, and in his first competitions Bing won a large number of first prizes, seconds, thirds, and, occasionally, when he didn't place, an honorable mention or two. Football was all right, too. Bing was a natural for guard, where you just stood still and pushed. One of his intramural football opponents sums up his guarding: 'Tough. He was a tough little guy who would give as much punishment as you would want. Standing in place he was invulnerable. When he had to move very far from the line of scrimmage, he was in trouble. Bing just naturally didn't move fast on land.' In baseball Bing's enthusiasm was greater than his skill, but this last was not so small as to keep him off B squads and out of class competitions on the diamond.

After swimming, Bing's major athletic activity was yelling, By the time he got to college he was good enough at the controlled holler to attain to the position of assistant yell leader. Even before his robust voice and enormous lung power were officially recognized, both were a distinguished part of Gonzaga cheers and jeers at the major interscholastic and intercollegiate games, And Bing's drumming, a natural complement of his more direct

noisemaking, was coming along during the high-school days, too. But this, like his shattering holler, was not given titular recognition until college, when his percussive talents were incorporated into the Gonzaga band, and he was neatly fitted out with the raiment and name of drummer.

Bing's holler was well known to all his contemporaries at high school. His whistling was known to most of them. His singing was known to few, though it was coming on. His service as an altar boy has been forgotten by almost all of them and wasn't exactly shouted about during the high-school years by the 400 Gonzagans in those grades. All the Fathers at Gonzaga celebrated mass at St. Aloysius Church. All their students attended mass there, but only seven or eight were chosen to serve as altar boys. The service was difficult: it called for an appearance every morning at 6:30. It was relieved only by an alternation among the boys chosen so that each one served every third week. Nonetheless, even one in three weeks of 6:30 A.M. appearances was a chilling experience for most high-school boys. Bing, irresponsible about time in general, unconcerned about class time in particular, was never derelict in his duties as altar boy. All through high school he served, seven days out of twenty-one, one out of three weeks, morning after morning at 6:30. There is no record at Gonzaga, in the books or in anybody's mind, of lateness or complaint by Harry Crosby, Jr., as an altar boy. On the other hand, there is no indication anywhere that the discipline of this service interfered with Bing's natural sense of freedom, that it in any way ordered the rest of his school life, that as a result of the 6:30 duty he was any earlier for classes, more marked in attention, more attentive to marks or deportment. In his later years, one could say, with some feeling of certainty, that the mixture of early discipline and a natural laxity of behavior had left the large mark on Crosby: the personality stems from the Gonzaga years, the mixture is as before.

22 * The Incredible Crosby

Earlier, however, he was simply some of one and more of the other, part responsible, in larger part quite unaware of any strictures at all.

How many strictures could there be when the chemistry class suddenly discovered a cure for baldness?

"Gentlemen," Bing announced to a group in the chemistry class, one day, "we have discovered gold."

"Gold?" Pinky Gowanlock asked, incredulous.

"Ah," Joe Lynch commented, "alchemy."

"And what more properly in a chemistry laboratory?" Bing asked. "Just call us alchemists."

"Gold?" Pinky insisted, Pinky who was to be an investment

broker in later years. "Gold?"

"After a manner of speaking, ruddy one?" Bing went on, "A cure for baldness, to be exact. A hair restorer, a stimulant to the follicles, an alkaline for the acids, an acid for the alkalines. Eureka! And El Dorado!"

"So we have, so we have," one of the more scholarly members of the class confirmed Bing, "discovered a hair grower."

"More, more," Pinky demanded. "How? What? When?"

"Here," Bing explained "Today. Now."

"It will grow grass on billiard balls," the scholarly one expanded. "Honest."

"Ah," Bing said, "and here is the billiard ball." He turned to the class's only bald boy. "Come here, friend. Let us see whether or not this claim will be substantiated. We guarantee your money back if it doesn't work. Thousands have been satisfied, how about you?" He reached for the bald pate and before the embarrassed boy could protest he had smeared some of the newly discovered substance, a pale gluey stuff, on his hair-free head.

"Let me see it," Pinky asked.

"Let me have some," another boy said.

Harry Lillis 23

Me!" Joe Lynch demanded.

"And me!" the scholarly boy said.

All of them dug into the crucible in which the hair restorer lay, oblivious of its own earth-shattering importance. The boys took varying amounts of the light goo and rubbed it onto their palms and their lower arms, onto the back of their hands, their fingers, and their faces.

"Let's see what happens overnight," several suggested.

"I'll have a beard," one boasted.

"Hairy knuckles!"

"I'll be happy if it grows hair on the head," Bing protested, "That's what it's for, after all." Nonetheless, >he rubbed some on his hands.

Next morning, in chemistry class, the boys anxiously studied hands, palms, fingers, faces, and above all the bald one's head. Could that slight fuzz be a result of the new discovery? Nobody

remembered accurately enough whether or not there had been hair on just that spot on the face, on that finger, that stretch of wrist, before. Well, let's try some more. Let's see what happens tomorrow. We'll remember then just how much and how little hair we had today. A controlled experiment.

Tomorrow was not Der Tag. Memories were still uncertain, and the growth of hair wasn't exactly grass-high. Tomorrow.

Next day, well, maybe. Tomorrow.

Good God! Yes! Obviously a patch of new hair. Here! And here! And there! Let's put some more on Baldy's head.

"How we poured it to him!" Pinky laughed after school, talking with Bing and Bal Albi and Joe Lynch.

"It looks awfully good," Joe, who was the scientist, a doctor to be, affirmed solemnly.

"Damned if it doesn't," Bal, also to be a doctor, agreed.

Bing smiled almost audibly.

"Money in the bank," Pinky summed up.

24 The Incredible Crosby

It was money in the bank. Hairmor went on the market, a discovery of the chemistry class of Gonzaga High School. Its profits were assigned to the school; and if it didn't give the chemistry class's bald boy a stunning head of fresh hair, it stunned him and all his friends to discover that Hairmor could and would raise a small crop of the elusive thread on his head.

"Now," Bing announced, "the hair-free can be carefree!"

There were other discoveries for instance, a new way to play Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Monday night, February 24, 1919, was the appointed time for the junior class's great production. The boys were rehearsed over and over in the Roman drama. Pinky was mighty Caesar himself, Hank Corkery was Brutus, Mike Dunne was Mark Antony. There is some doubt about whether Bing was merely one of the conspirators against Pinky's Caesar or Cassius. It's certain that he didn't have the prescribed "lean and hungry look" for Cassius: he was chubby and obviously well fed. All that is certain is that he was on stage that memorable Monday night when Caesar was stabbed in Spokane.

Act III, Scene i. Things had gone exceedingly well for two acts. Suspense was well created. The audience of parents and priests leaned forward.

"Et tu, Brute! Then fall, Caesar." Pinky fell dead with a fat

thud.

Hank carried the rest of the scene, by Caesar's inert form. He turned the stage over to Mike Dunne. "Welcome, Mark Antony," he cried with full-fashioned Shakespearean resonance.

"O mighty Caesar!" Mike began. He went right through the famous lines to: "Cry 'Havoc' and let slip the dogs of war/* The called-for servant entered, and Mike left the stage. Down came the curtain. It was an old curtain, almost Shakespearean in its simplicity, a bolt of cloth rolled around a pole. When that curtain descended, it did so with a sound and this night the

Harry Lillis 2\$

sound was especially loud. It came down firmly and unmistakably upon Caesar's head. He had been killed too close to the apron of the stage, and his body had been left for dead right under the curtain. Approximately seven inches from the floor the curtain hung, resting on Caesar's pink-thatched head. Pinky let out a more than whispered ouch and withdrew his head; the curtain continued its rolling descent to the floor, and Act III 7 Scene i, was over.

The audience roared with laughter. There was a memorable pause before Scene 2 was introduced, as Pinky examined his aching skull and remonstrated with his killers.

"Why didn't you remember to carry me off the stage?" Pinky demanded indignantly.

The conspirators replied only with laughs.

"Ouch!" Pinky continued to complain, as he felt his way around the knob left on the side of his head.

The continued response of Brutus, Cassius, servant, Mark Antony, and Roman colleagues was laughter, echoed again and again in the audience, which couldn't help noticing the dramatically resurrected Caesar's irate accents.

And so it went. From Julius Caesar and reenactments of the shows at the Orpheum it was an easy and logical development to sturdy imitations of anything and everything around him. Bing was a mimic. His occasional reproductions of student and teacher mannerisms were looked forward to by all his classmates. His minute study of the Indians who still peopled Spokane's back streets was admired by his Gonzaga High School associates as a scholarly attainment of high degree, as a theatrical achievement of note, as the last word in entertainment and a sure-fire laugh.

"Bing, the Indians," Mike or Joe would suggest.

"You're on," Hank Corkery would announce, pointing his

right index finger at Bing in the manner of an assistant director*

26 The Incredible Crosby

"Let's go," Bing would say to Bal Albi.

"We're on," Bal would confirm, and they were.

The Crosby-Albi Indians were caricatured red men, of course, complete with "how's" and "ugh's" and the palms of their hands right-angled to the backs of their heads. But the caricatures were not cruel. In Spokane, race prejudice was not widely felt. And besides, many of the families in town boasted of Indian blood; some were first or second generation mixtures of white settlers and Indians off the reservation since the 1910 exodus. There were funny Indians, however, those down around the railroad station, those who hung around Benny Stubeck's cigar store, where Bing and some of the other Gonzaga kids used to hang out. Indians were curiously silent, for one thing. Indians dressed differently, for another. And Indians, silent and madly attired in rash combinations of the white man's conventional garb and their own blanketed costume, were also dancers, one heard tell. As a matter of fact, one had seen a couple of war dancers in one's time, hadn't one? And they were wild things, weren't they?

"The war dance goes like this," Bing said. "Follow me."

He strutted, his head bobbed on its socket, up and down, up and down, sideways and as far around as it would go. In a display of energy extraordinarily rare for him, he pushed and pulled with his knees, simulating the Indians' hopping dance.

"Woo-woo-woo, wooooo!" Bing cried, "woo-woo!"

The others took up the cry as they followed the intrepid leader of the Bolsheviks suddenly turned Running Bull. The din was huge, the shouts, the stamping on the floor, the rushing clamor of young boys parading across a high-school hall in relentless imitation of Indians. It was not to be expected that this unusual sound would go unheard by anyone in authority. As luck would have it on all such occasions the one in authority who heard was Father Big Jim Kennelly, Gonzaga's rugged dis-

Harry Lillis 27

ciplinarian. Six feet three inches, 250 pounds, and free-swinging with his key ring, Big Jim was a literal holy terror.

"Hey, hey!" Father Kennelly's stentorian tones joined the commotion, * 'what goes on here?"

"Nothing, Father," one of the hastily recruited Coeur

d'Alnes explained.

"Nothing? Is this what you call nothing? What then, my boy, is something? Poor logic."

"Yes, Father."

"Harry," Big Jim commanded.

"Father Kennelly?" Bing responded.

"There are better ways of using that energy."

"Yes, Father."

"We do have extracurricular activities, you know. Now get out of here and blow off your steam on the football field or in debating or elocution. Forget the Indians."

"Yes, Father."

Something about the huge man with his priestly skirts flopping at his feet, about his iron voice and steel eyes, about his unabashed scoldings always to the accompaniment of the clang of his key ring, some one thing or many impressed Gonzaga boys more warmly than any one other school experience. The memories of Gonzagans who passed under his watchful eye all go back to Big Jim. Class after class in the teens and twenties and first couple of years of the thirties remembered Father Kennelly. In reunion at Gonzaga or away from the school he was saluted, praised as a brilliantly successful disciplinarian "I learned how to behave from Big Jim" and a lovable character "He tossed that key ring like a shot-put, and it was more deadly" and the springboard for all school-day reminiscences "Do you remember the day Father Kennelly caught us whooping and dancing like Indians?"

Straightforwardness, in the manner of Big Jim, was a

28 The Incredible Crosby

principle ardently followed and carefully inculcated at Gonzaga. As Gonzaga boys remember the Kennelly key ring, they can't forget the unrelenting directness of Father Curtis Sharp, who was athletic director of the school in Bing's day. Priests and students like to talk about Curtis Sharp.

There was his arrival in that small Minnesota town. It was Father Sharp's novitiate as a Jesuit. He was assigned to a tiny town in upstate Minnesota, and there he went. When he arrived, he found a welcoming committee.

"Father," a spokesman for the committee spoke up, "will you please come with us."

He went. The small party, three big, heavy-set men and Curtis Sharp, made for a shack at the outskirts of town. Into the shack they went, the door was closed, and the priest was motioned to a rickety chair against the wall.

"Now, Father," the spokesman elucidated, "let me explain a few things to you."

"By all means."

"We don't like Catholics. Especially Catholic priests. We don't like them, and we don't want them, and we don't intend to have them here. Now get this straight. We have no respect for your collar or your cloth, and if you don't get out of town we're going to throw you out."

"Are you really?" Father Sharp asked in his mild way. He wasn't as big as his welcomers, as any one of them was. He was a priest, and he talked quietly and unbelligerently. "I don't think my Provincial would like me to come back so soon," he continued. "I think I'd like to stay."

"I don't think you understand," the spokesman interrupted. "We don't want you to stay. As a matter of fact, we're not going to let you stay."

"Oh, but I do understand." Father Sharp looked milder than ever. "I tell you what. Let the strongest and heaviest and best

Harry Lillis 29

fighter among you step forward. And" (here he removed his jacket and his collar) "I'll remove the badges of my profession, and you can toss just an ordinary man around. How's that?'"

The strongest and heaviest and best fighter stepped forward. Father Sharp stepped forward. A few well-placed body blows, a couple of sharp uppercuts to the jaw, some clips on the cheeks, and the strongest and the heaviest was out cold.

"Now," said Father Sharp, "who's next?"

He took similar care of the other two welcomers and then carefully replaced his collar, brushed down his clothing, and slid into his jacket

"Now, who is going to run whom out of town?"

There was no way, after all, for the welcoming committee to know that Curtis Sharp, a mild-mannered Jesuit entering their sacred precincts, had been an amateur boxing and wrestling champion.

Years later, when Bing had become famous, he and some friends came up from Los Angeles for a Gonzaga football game.

Before the game began, Bing and his friends decided to forestall the effects of a winter day in Washington with the effects of a warm bottle of whisky. They remained behind in the locker room to manage their forestalling. Father Sharp came looking for Bing and his party.

"We're waiting for you, gentlemen," Father Sharp began. "The opening ceremonies, you know " He stopped. He noticed somebody downing the last of the bottle as he approached the group.

"Wait!" he cried thunderously. "Wait!" They looked up, all of them, trembling just a noticeable bit. "That last soldier is mine." Father Sharp stopped the drinker. And he grabbed the bottle from his shaking hand, quaffed the "last soldier" in one gulp, and strode from the locker room with just the faintest chuckle clattering the concrete behind him.

^o The Incredible Crosby

Straightforwardness was the mode of expression of the Gonzaga Fathers themselves, and the vigorous address they demanded from their students was of a piece with it. In an assiduously organized and conducted program of elocution and debate they implemented straightforward expression. Bing did well at both, but made his major mark in the first. The frightening specter of a snake that terrified a village, the heroism of Horatius at the Bridge that summoned up by Harry Crosby with gold-medal-winning fervor. He worked many afternoons at these and other flowing verbal exercises, rolling his Vs, "ladling his Ts," smacking his "ing's" and "tion's" hard against his teeth, making sure Father Shipsey approved of his parsing, his scanning, and his phrasing, of his accents and over-all dynamics. This was a major part of Gonzaga training, one that Bing entered into with a good deal more than willingness.

One effective means of debate was to be found in the political organization of the high school. The first two years formed the House of Representatives. The second two made up the Senate. All of the school's 400 students participated in either section of the Legislature; it was mandatory. And here, whether in mock imitation of the houses of Congress, rising to false indignation over pork-barrel enactments, or in genuine fury at some infringement of student rights, debating training proceeded at a pace that was at once intense and enjoyable.

With this background of debating and elocution, Gonzaga boys spoke well, enunciated clearly, chose their words with exemplary care, pronounced them properly. The happy result in the practice of their religion was unmistakable: when Bing made his responses as an altar boy, he knew what he was saying, and so did everybody else in church. When he was asked to expound some article of faith, he did not founder in muddy phrases or woolly inflections. Neither did he repeat by well-worn rote. One was responsible for one's words, that above every-

Harry Littis 31

thing else, at Gonzaga. Asked a question, one had to respond not only correctly, but clearly, at just the proper length and with a full understanding; one could always be asked to go on, to speak further about Lent or venial sin or repentance. One could always be marked for delivery as well as for knowledge. A Catholic communicant had to have learning, learning was for communication, and Bing learned well.

3

DING WHISTLED Poor Butterfly on his way to school. He sang For Me and My Gal on the way back. Bing whistled Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag as he delivered newspapers. He sang Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning with real feeling as he made his way in the 5 A.M. dark to the Loggers' Club, to do his two hours' cleaning job. He whistled and sang Peg o y My Heart, Memories, Pretty Baby, Roses of Picardy, Back Home Again in Indiana, The Bells of St. Mary's, After You've Gone, and Dardanella as he struggled through farm chores for a couple of weeks. Bing's taste for the whistling and singing was a lot stronger than his feeling for raking, and baling, .and milking cows, and besides he was not a natural roommate for thirty cows. There was no better music for picking strawberries than the

Harry Lillis 33

Curse of an Aching Heart. For a trip to the Portland, Oregon, jail, accused (justly) of trying to escape the tab at a Chinese restaurant, what better than They Didn't Believe Me or Chinatown, My Chinatown? For postal clerk, Keep the Home Fires Burning. For operating an elevator, Somewhere a Voice Is Calling. Bing performed a vast variety of jobs and tasks and chores in his high-school and college years, all around Spokane, and some away from the city. His family wasn't anything vaguely resembling affluent; and though Everett and Larry were beginning to bring in some money, the first in his own range of positions, from bootlegger to truck-company representative, the second as a teacher and newspaperman, there still wasn't enough to keep everybody in clothes and food and entertainment. It was a large family, five boys (Bob, the family's youngest, was born in 1916) and two girls. Bing's father made a fair living as a brewery's bookkeeper, enough to pay the basic bills and buy a few phonograph records for the house. It all added up: Pop, Everett, Larry kept the house running; Bing and Ted did odd jobs; and Bing whistled while he worked.

Bing did a little of almost everything there was to be done in Spokane, coming away from each new job, no matter how dull it had been, with a renewed vitality, a larger list of friends, a longer list of songs, a stronger set of muscles. He got along well with everybody who bothered to get along with him and with some who didn't. Then, as later, he was the cheerful embodiment of an American procedure that has continually fascinated Europeans. After they have first recovered from the shock of the pattern, many, the more articulate, manage to raise their voices to sum up their impressions. Richard Hertz, a former member of the German Foreign Office, later a college professor in America, offers a particularly succinct summary and analysis in his book, *Man on a Rock*.

"In a sense," Hertz says, "America shatters all the anti-

34 The Incredible Crosby

bourgeois notions the disillusioned European brings over the Atlantic. While the bourgeois in Europe signifies the end of meaning, and therefore to an extent the end of life, even American artists and writers who have dragged their prophetic gift through real-estate offices, dry-cleaning establishments, shoe-repair shops, and filling stations, are in the end reconciled and absorbed by the sweeping power of the nude fact: Life."

Hertz's statement need be amended only to this extent: instead of "even American artists and writers who have dragged their prophetic gift through real-estate offices, . . ." make it "especially American artists and writers." And, if you will, amend that statement once again, to read "especially American popular musicians" and you will have some notion of the central source of the vitality of American popular music.

"People in America," Hertz continues, "seem to become bourgeois because they want more of life, or they run away from the bourgeois, again because they want more of life life impersonal, a gift, not a claim. There is this life-worship that unites conformist and non-conformist 'The genius of the Maple, Elm and Oak. The secret hidden in each grain of corn/ " * The lines quoted by Hertz are from Vachel Lindsay's poem, *On the Building of Springfield*.

It was "the sweeping power of the nude fact: Life" that absorbed Bing as he turned, in his two college years, from the study of the law to the pursuit of music. It was "life-worship" that impelled his musical career, organized it, carried it along. At no point in the early years, years of whistling and singing and beating almost aimlessly on doors and pots and pans and rude drum equipment, did Bing consciously imagine himself a singer or a musician. He was fascinated with music, as many of his school friends were. He was sufficiently interested to convert his whistling and singing and drumming, as he had his abilities

* Reprinted from Man on a Rock by Richard Hertz, Copyright, 1946, by the University of North Carolina Press, Used by permission of publisher.

Harry Lillis 35

to sweep up floors and push buttons and pick berries, into a job of work. When, during the school years, he and his friends, the Pritchard brothers, the Rinker brothers, and Jimmy Heaton, knocked together a band, it was easy for him to make the band his major interest. The impulse was there; all that was needed was the organization of a vehicle to transport the impulse from whistling at work to working at whistling.

Al Rinker had known Bing at Gonzaga in his last elementary-school years, when Al was an eighth-grade boarder and Bing a reputable high-school upperclassman, elocutionist extraordinary, debater of parts, and leader of the honorable opposition in the class of 1920, the Bolsheviks. Al had watched him win swimming medals at Mission Playground and had occasionally joined with him in some of his games. But for the most part their activities were separate; Al was twelve, Bing sixteen. By grade-school and high-school standards that four-year difference was the largest possible social chasm. But chasms disappear or are bridged easily in music. When Bing began to sing at parties and bang away at drums and look for and find other musically minded youngsters, Al's piano playing was far more appealing than his fewer years were unattractive. They combined efforts; slowly, gradually, only half-consciously became musical associates, then friends.

Al's family was a musical one. His mother, part Coeur d'Alfine Indian, was adept at half a dozen instruments, a good singer, and a determined inculcator of musical habit. She fostered an intense interest in singing on the part of her one daughter, Mildred, which eventually led to one of the great jazz careers and general recognition as the First Lady of jazz singing. Mildred Rinker adopted her first husband's surname for professional purposes and became famous as Mildred Bailey. Al's brothers, Chuck and Miles, ended up in the music business; the family's preoccupation with notes and beats and the sonorities that made use of both stayed with all the Rinkers of Spokane all

36 The Incredible Crosby

their lives. In Bing's day in Spokane, Al, Miles, and Mildred were good people to know if you were interested in music, and Bing was.

When Bing got to college in 1920, he got to work as a law student, concentrating on the social sciences, making his first inquiries into legal machinery, spending enough time at his books to indicate to his teachers a better than passing interest in jurisprudence. He spent more time at his drums, however,

winning school recognition for his rolls and clangs and bangs in the Gonzaga band, achieving recognition, too, for his rhythmic achievement outside college grounds, but hardly of the same sort.

One of Bing's early musical groups was the Dizzy Seven, formed during his freshman year at college. It worked something less than regularly, and consequently every job was an event, a cause for jubilant celebration, and a delight to go to and work at. Unfortunately, all of the members of the Dizzy Seven were not free to work all of the jobs; some of the Seven were boarders and restricted in their nighttime hours. Sometimes the boarders could be replaced. Occasionally they couldn't. One memorable night, there were no substitutes to be found for the incarcerated few, and furthermore there were no substitute instruments to be discovered to replace those the Dizzy boys had left in the schoolrooms. Bing called to his colleagues up in the dormitories from the grounds below their rooms,

"All set," Bing announced.

"I'm not sure I want to go," one begged off.

"Don't be silly," Bing argued, "I've got everything arranged. It's a cinch."

"The hell it is!" another demurred with feeling. ,

"I've got the rope," still another informed Bing.

"Let's go, then," Bing commanded.

Harry Lillis 37

They went. One by one, a banjo, a trombone, a violin, finally a set of drums were lowered. The recalcitrant Dizzyites were quieted, and as the drums were lowered the signal was given from above that the full complement would be along for the date. But as the drums were making their descent from dormitory window to waiting Crosby below, a new figure put in an appearance, a six-foot three, 25-pound figure.

"Going someplace?" Father Kennelly asked.

"To er to er, uh to play a dance, Father," Bing explained.

"Go ahead," Big Jim told him, "go right ahead. But if you go, boys, don't bother coming back." The six-foot three, 250 pound figure receded into the darkness, key ring swinging from his right hand.

The passage of the instruments and the direction of the rope were reversed. One by one, a banjo, a trombone, a violin were

returned to the Gonzaga dormitory rooms, and the Dizzy Seven musicians who were boarders were sure now they didn't want to go. Bing held out his drums and made a quick retreat. Somehow he was going to play that date. It was only \$3 a man, but it was worth a lot more than money. Reputation, for example. The opportunity to let go. He ran names down in his mind. Hmm, no, he works at night. Yes, no, maybe. Al Rinker. A kid, but a good pianist. He ran all the way to Al's house.

"Al, the Dizzy Seven's behind bars. Will you play the date instead?" Bing asked breathlessly.

"What date? What Dizzy Seven? What bars?"

. Bing explained, Al accepted, and the two went off to work, picking up a banjo player and a C melody saxophonist on the way to the job. Shortly afterward, Bing and Al organized a new and more professional band.

The Musicaladers, as the new band was called, was a six-piece outfit of almost conventional 1920 jazz instrumentation. Miles

5 8 The Incredible Crosby

Rinker played alto sax and clarinet; Bob Pritchard played C melody; Jimmy Heaton played cornet; Fats Pritchard clunked the banjo; Bing was the drummer and Al the pianist and general manager. The voicings followed the simple three-part harmony that had come out of New Orleans with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, and the other early Emigres. The library ranged from the genuine jazz patterns of Prince of Wails and Jimtown Blues and Beale Street Blues to the merely romantic phrases of My Wonderful One and Whispering. As the Musicaladers' experience broadened and their jobs increased, their repertory did, too; soon most of the pop tunes of the day were included, Alice Blue Gown, Tm Forever Blowing Bubbles, Love Sends a Little Gift of Roses, A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody, Avalon, Margie, My Man, Three O'Clock in the Morning; soon, each of the precious jazz records that made their way into Spokane was being scanned for a good variation on the blues chords, for a new solo idea, a new way of using the two saxes together or the cornet and clarinet. The band found inspiration in the records of the Memphis Five and the Tennessee Ten, in new jazz novelties, such as Duck's Quack and Louisville Lou, and they were not at all sure that they would ever hear anything again as exquisitely constructed and as touching as Ted Lewis's record of Fate. Paul Whiteman was a little staid in 1920 and 1921, shortly after he had organized his band at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, but the tunes he introduced were good. Ray Miller was always good for an idea, and the first Cotton Pickers discs were grabbed with wild enthusiasm.

Jimmy Heaton, out of the same neighborhood across the river from town center, was the musical genius of the group. He couldn't read a note, but his ear was impeccable. His experience

was like that of hundreds of other young boys in the United

Harry Lillis 39

States of his time and of the next twenty-five years: a first hearing of jazz struck a responsive convolution; a second determined him to learn an instrument; perilously, incorrectly, but unyieldingly, Jimmy learned to manipulate the valves of the cornet and to build the fleshy mound on his upper lip, the embouchure, which would permit him to blow the right sounds, to control pitch and dynamics; several years later, with professional instruction, he became a musician of great skill and ended up as first trumpeter at the Twentieth Century-Fox studios in Hollywood, under Alfred Newman, one of the most demanding jobs for a brass man in the entire business. Jimmy was the copyist and the instructor of the Musicaladers, but the copying and the instruction all lay within the head. Since he couldn't read, and neither could anybody else in the band, he couldn't write the music, so he listened avidly to the records they wanted to copy and relayed them, phrase by phrase, to his confreres.

"Now, look, fellows," Jimmy would call out, "it goes like this: E flat, D, E flat, F natural, E flat, D, E flat, D, C. And that's Whispering.' 9 Then, as solos would pop up on the records, Jimmy would call out the new notes for each of the Musicaladers. And after an evening of sweating and yelling and roaring performances a new tune would be added to the repertory.

Jimmy Healy, who had played drums with Al and Miles and Jimmy Heaton, had had nothing to recommend him but his shifting set of new drums. He couldn't keep time at all. Bing could. He had a natural sense of rhythm that recommended him highly to his new associates. They were enthusiastic. He was just learning to roll, but they figured he would gather plenty of technique as he went, and he did keep fine time. Somehow he never did gather much technique.

"I know you keep time, Bing," Miles objected one night, "but

40 The Incredible Crosby

when the hell are you going to learn a new roll? And when are you going to learn to do something besides beat the daylights out of your bass drum?"

"What you want, sir?" Bing replied, "is a virtuoso. That, my dear sir, I am not. I offer a reasonable competency, a percussive fluency of sorts, but not virtuosity."

Miles resigned himself. Bing kept fine time. He also sang. And though his singing once or twice generated fights with dancers, when one of the more obstreperous and pugnacious

kids around the bandstand screamed "Pansy!" at the perspiring, megaphoning vocalist and Bing replied with a well-aimed poke at the kid's jaw, it was generally a real attraction for the group.

The Musicaladers decked themselves out in blazers with wide and very bright stripes, white trousers, cheap duck at first, better duck when the high-school parties increased, and slicked hair of mirrorlike smoothness and a uniformity of parts, just left or right of center. The largest fee ever paid them was \$5 apiece until the ante was raised just a bit for a short engagement at the Casino Theater.

The stage at the Casino was just large enough for the six boys, but the white flannel trousers Bing had borrowed for the engagement to go with the rented Tuxedo coat were not. They were so tight he couldn't get up. He had to get up. His singing bit called for it, insisted on it; he got up. The pants split. Miles, equal to any occasion, called upon his Indian blood and rose to the occasion. He stood up, too, just behind Bing, Indian-fashion, and didn't move a fraction of an inch until the show was over. He marched off behind Bing in Indian file, giving the band a production look it had not anticipated. A major catastrophe had been averted.

When the Dwight Johnson band, playing at the Davenport Hotel, Spokane's finest, came into the Casino to hear the Musicaladers, another catastrophe threatened, and this one was not

Harry Lillis 41

averted. The Musicaladers were impressed by the professional musicians in the audience and not a little frightened. Nonetheless, they managed to get through their chores with something like equanimity until the middle of Oh, Sister, Ain't That Hot. Suddenly Bob Pritchard went wild. He went off by himself on the C melody, displaying all his rudimentary technique, playing hundreds of unexpected notes, blowing loud and clear imitations of musicians far beyond his stature. Pandemonium broke loose. Jimmy Heaton did his best to cover up; Fats Pritchard strummed his banjo crazily; Miles and Al just looked at each other with embarrassed bewilderment, and Bing hit everything in sight with his sticks. Only the shortage of sufficiently competent and just inexperienced enough C-melody men preserved Bob's life.

"Oh, Sister, ain't you hot!" Bing sneered.

"The curse of an aching saxophonist!" Al double-sneered.

The others made angry faces and gestures indicating their collective desire to pulverize Bob.

Bob went off, head lowered, shoulders hunched, knees sagging. He had been effectively punished.

The jobs got better before they got worse. There was Larieda's dance hall, just out of town, which the Musicaladers played during the summer of 1921, between Bing's freshman and sophomore years at college. There was the Pekin Cafe, a Chinese restaurant, one flight above the street. Bing's mother knew about Larieda's and about most of the other jobs but not about the Pekin. This was a "joint." It wasn't exactly the place for a future lawyer to be spending his evenings, or exactly the way he should pass the time beating the heads of drums. Bing beat his brains out trying to think of and formulate excuses.

"I've been talking torts with a fine kid in my class."

"Very nice, Harry."

"I've been riding around town, getting the air."

^2 The Incredible Crosby

"That doesn't sound so instructive, Harry."

"I've been talking torts."

'Tou certainly talk torts a lot, Harry."

The excuses grew thinner and thinner, and Bing's patience with them wore as badly as his mother's. He started to think about his career. Law was a good profession, and he knew he could do fairly well at it, but it wasn't his profession. Music, which had come into his life with as little fanfare as the janitor's job and the newsboy's, had made a firm impression on him: He had to play and to sing, and he remembered again and again, as he mulled the attractive points of the two careers in his mind, the experience of the summer before when he was stuck in town working as a clerk at the Great Northern Railroad Station and could get out to Twin Lakes to play with the Musicaladers only on Saturdays and Sundays. It had been week after week of itching unhappiness until Saturday, and then inglorious depression as Monday morning rolled around and the clerk's papers and files loomed before him again.

"It's music," he told his mother one day after a long session with himself.

"What about your law?" she asked.

"It's no go." And Bing detailed the course of his cerebration. Kate Crosby had encouraged his singing to the extent of sending him to a singing teacher in town. She recalled his high voice rising above Art Dussault's organ in Communion hymns. She couldn't forget the chapel trio in which Bing had joined with James Gilmore's basso profundo and Ev Taylor's high tenor, Bing acting as a voice of all parts, singing anything between the very low and the very high registers of Gilmore and Taylor.

"I'll never forget the Ave Verum you boys sang," she confessed, "or your hymns, either, Harry."

Bing made no attempt to recall Oh, Sister, Ain't That Hot or Don't Give Nobody None of That Jetty Roll

Harry Lillis 43

"Oh, Harry," Kate continued, other memories pressing in, "you were doing so well. You were second in English this year. And that gold medal in the freshman-sophomore debate. I was so proud of you."

"Maybe you'll still be proud," Bing suggested.

"I guess I always will," Kate admitted, and the switch from legal foolscap to music manuscript paper was completed.

Bing's father was satisfied. He liked Harry, Jr., as an entertainer and thought maybe his fancies weren't just the normal foolish ones of a father. He clapped his namesake on the back, his eyes twinkling in the manner that Bing and half of Spokane had come to expect from the good-natured man, and the career was well launched.

Just before leaving college in 1924, Bing and Al went into the Clemmer Theatre, a movie house that was experimenting with stage shows. The manager didn't want the Musicaladers. The band was in bad shape. Bob and Fats Pritchard had gone off to Washington State College, lured by the promise of a large college band as well as the rest of the attractions of a liberal education. Miles Rinker was on his way to a degree at the University of Illinois, and Jimmy Heaton was working in Los Angeles with Ray West's band.

"How about the band?" Al asked the Clemmer manager.

"It stinks," the manager replied "I wouldn't be caught dead with this band on the stage. But I will take you and Crosby. He can sing with the three boys I've got singing here now, and you can play piano in the pit. Thirty dollars a week. Take it or leave it."

"Apiece?" Bing gulped.

"Of course."

"You've acquired some talent," Bing congratulated the manager.

"That all depends on how you look at it," he replied.

Bing sang, unhappy at first at the quartet sound until he caught the rich sound coming from one of the three boys with whom he had been saddled. A large, well-produced bass voice. Bing, becoming aware of the cogency his own voice acquired when properly backed, turned more and more to the bass for assistance.

Bing danced, unhappy at first and at last. He wasn't a dancer. His frame was too heavily padded, and his natural walking habits didn't help. He was a fat man at heart, if a medium-sized one in his full figure.

"Take it easy," Al cautioned, "you're not meant for the energetic life. You're a singer and an entertainer of parts, but don't take the 'parts' too seriously."

"I know. I know," Bing panted, coming off stage, "but we're building the act."

Bing's dancing never built the act, but the years between leaving college and leaving Spokane were well spent toward that end. During the eight weeks at the Clemmer, Al and Bing were not able to accomplish much, but shortly afterward they began to pound an act into shape. For a couple of years they shuttled between odd jobs, party engagements and parties at which they entertained just for their own kicks. They fooled with all kinds of two-part harmonies, achieving a pleasant balance of two untrained voices, close sometimes, rangy at others, never harsh. AFs piano playing improved to the point where he could call himself a professional, at least in a vaudevillian's sense of the word, and he and Bing were so completely used to each other that they fell into each other's improvised measures with consummate ease. The ease was infectious. At parties they were a big hit.

'We killed 'em!" Bing summed up a party.

"Now, you're dancing," Al congratulated him.

"You mean because I don't take it seriously?"

Harry Lillis 45

"I do."

Bing clicked off a few steps, taking off the frown and concentration of a tap dancer illustrating the adeptness of Red Hot Henry Brown.

"That gets it," Al confirmed.

"Maybe we gets it," Bing suggested.

"Maybe we do."

"Maybe it's time to go out into the hard, hard world," Bing continued to speculate.

"There sure as hell is nothing more to do around here." Al wrote off Spokane.

"Sorrowful but true," Bing agreed.

"How about my sister Mildred?"

"How about her?"

"Well, you know she's in Los Angeles," Al continued.

"Soldo."

"And she's been doing some singing."

"So she has."

"So let's go down and see her and see what she can do for us. Maybe she can help us get a job."

"Hey, I forgot. Everett's down there, too. In the trucking business. He can put us up."

"He or Mildred. Let's go."

"How?"

"Let's drive."

"In that beat-up Ford?"

"In that beat-up Ford!"

They painted "Our Eighth Stutz And Still Enthusiastic" across the back of the Model T, piled some clothes into the back of it, and went off to their separate homes to get a good night's sleep before undertaking the long journey south. Next morning, by instruction, Al came to call for Bing.

"He's in his room, Alton," Kate Crosby directed Al.

46 The Incredible Crosby

Bing was sleeping soundly. Al shoved him from one side to the other.

"Hmmm?" Bing asked drowsily.

"This is it," Al announced. "This is the big day!"

"Hmmm?"

"We're off."

"Off our nuts, you mean."

"Bing," Al implored, "Los Angeles. Remember?"

"I don't know." Harry Crosby, Jr., shook his head, as he rolled over again in bed.

"I do know," Al Rinker insisted, as he pulled Bing's hands from under the covers and brought him to a sitting position,

"Okay, okay." Bing got up, dressed quickly, and collected all the money he had, from pants pockets, old shoes, dresser drawers. It amounted to \$50.

"How much've you got?" Bing asked Al as he pulled an old sweater over his head.

"Sixty dollars."

"We're rich! Let's say good-bye to the folks."

A round of good-byes at the Crosbys' was followed by one at the Rinkers'. Kate Crosby made off to the Poor Clares monastery to say a novena for the boys' well-being, and the Great Hegira of 1925 was under way.

The rattly, slow-rolling Model T was without a top; when Bing was at the wheel, Al's legs were sprawled over the windshield; when Al drove, Bing stretched out from seat to window. They sang all the way; other drivers looked at them as they might at a circus or a state hospital ambulance suddenly stripped of its roof; Crosby and Rinker, Song Specialists, were loud, if not funny, and not too proud to holler their happiness to the world, and it could be measured in decibels.

The first night, on the way to Seattle, they stopped at a little town called Eureka. Bing registered for a single room at a small

Harry LiUis 47

hotel, and after he was safely in it Al sneaked up. That conserved a little money.

Next day, they stopped at Wenatchee, where Doug Dykeman, an old Gonzaga friend, a football player of some distinction at college, managed the hat store. This was adventure, of a sort. It was more fun than odd jobs between odd musical jobs. And Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles lay ahead. On to victory!

In Seattle, they went over to see Vic Meyers, who led the band at the Hotel Butler. Vic had passed through Spokane

once, and they had spent a little time with him. He was Washington's leading bandsman; he became the state's lieutenant governor many years later.

"How about it, Vic?" Bing asked. "Let us sing, huh?"

"We'll try you on this next show," he promised.

A piano was rolled out to the middle of the dance floor; Al was put at it. Bing removed his cymbals from the car, and the act's implements were complete. They sang four songs and, though they caused no sensation, were well enough received so that Vic had an offer.

"A couple of fins for each of you, room and board for the week-end, and then on you go. How's that?"

"Perfect!" Bing and Al chorused.

They left Seattle after the pleasant few days' work, determined to make Los Angeles in four days, bad time for most cars, good for theirs, which couldn't go over 30 miles an hour and which had to be cranked from time to time when the oil in the motor congealed.

Sacramento, California, was the state capitol, but it wasn't the Statehouse dome that interested the beginning singers. It was the Sacramento Theatre they went to see.

"Good God!" Al exclaimed, "this place must seat 10,000 people." Actually it seated 2,000, which was about 1,200 more

48 The Incredible Crosby

than any theatre which they had seen or in which they had played. There was a Fanchon and Marco show at the house the week they landed there, sumptuous in its sets, stage crowded with chorus line, acts, and singers.

"Sure like to work a show like that, wouldn't you?" Al asked Bing. Bing assented vigorously.

A dreary trip followed Sacramento. The car stopped a dozen times and got going again, they felt, as much from their earnest entreaties as from their wild cranking. They stuttered and stammered in time with the quivering vehicle over the Cahuenga Pass into Hollywood, down Sunset Boulevard into Coronado Street, where Mildred lived, and stopped the car in front of her house. The Model T, "Still Enthusiastic," gave one last powerful heave, accompanied the last shiver with a gasp and a groan, and stopped, stopped forever, never to quiver, shiver, stutter, stammer, gasp, or groan again.

"I bet that car will never carry anyone anyplace any more." Bing wagered with himself, and won.

Al was ringing the bell.

After a few minutes a large woman with a soft face, unusually lovely eyes, and delicate features came to the door.

"No!" Mildred roared. "It can't be!"

"It is," Al assured her. "We're here!"

"I don't get it, I don't get it," Mildred sighed. Then she laughed with joy. "Oh, you kids! Imagine coming from Spokane in that hay wagon." She laughed again. "Ow!"

"We had some difficulties," Bing admitted.

"I don't know how you made it," Mildred said, and as she thought of the trip, and of seeing her brother and Bing after several years, and of her family in Spokane, she began to cry. The tears rolled out of her eyes as she motioned the boys into her house.

"Inside. Come on," she cried.

Harry Lillis 49

They stayed with Mildred three weeks, "balling," as she insisted, "to make up for that hay ride." Everett, who had a White Truck agency, took them around town, showing off the vastness and vitality of his adopted city. Mildred took them to night clubs, introduced them to girls, and saw to it they "balled" properly.

"Oh, what moonshine, moonshine on harvest moonshine," Bing improvised.

"Save your sorrow for tomorrow," Mildred quoted from a popular song.

The two Rinkers, the one now named Bailey after a husband of short duration, the other part of the new act of Crosby and Rinker, joined with Bing in a little fast and furious harmony.

"Now," Mildred decided the day after the third week had passed on, "now for some work. Let's go over to see Rube Wolf at the Boulevard Theatre. Maybe he can set you on the Fanchon and Marco time."

Bing looked at Al. Fanchon and Marco. Sounded good.

The audition was easy for Mildred to arrange. The boys sang Paddlin' Madeline Home, made passes at jazz sounds with kazoos, danced a few satirical steps, and generally did well by themselves, they thought.

"That'll do," Wolf told them, after three songs.

Their hearts sank. The "Ugliest Man in the World," as Rube Wolf was billed, had spoken with dead-pan finality.

A few minutes later, Rube came over to them again. "I think we've got a spot that will do well by you in a new unit called The Syncopation Idea. Like that?"

Bing and Al silently extended their hands to the Ugliest Man to thank him.

The Syncopation Idea was fun. There were the 18 Tiller Girls, Count Them, 18, English dancers and singers. They were fun. And it was more professional experience. Sixty dollars a

50 The Incredible Crosby

week apiece. Big money. And professional, professional, professional. The word stuck in their minds over the few months they played the Fanchon and Marco trine. They looked at themselves in the mirror and saw reflected two professionals. Song-and-dance men. Twenty years later, Bing sang Irving Berlin's A Couple of Song and Dance Men with Fred Astaire in the movie Blue Skies. A couple of choruses told the story of a couple of old vaudevillians. They might have been written for the first time around of Crosby and Rinker:

In us you see a couple of song and dance men
I'm the song I'm the dance.

For laughter, joy and happiness we're advance men
With a song and a dance.

I sing for my supper / dance for my lunch;

I croon when the landlord comes around.

For miles and miles the women and children pass out cold

When my voice hits the air and my feet hit the ground.

Last night out in the moonlight

I came to serenade a very pretty maid;

I sang her to sleep with "Asleep in the Deep"

That always makes them collapse. (Has them in sections!)

I saw her eyes close;
Then she started to doze,
But she arose when I sounded taps;

Which goes to show what women will do when we're around

And my voice hits the air arid my feet hit the ground.

(He's gone!) *

They were that happy, that corny, and that content. Not even the breaking up of The Syncopation Idea, after it had done all the California Fanchon and Marco houses, disturbed the clouds of euphoria that had settled over the boys. Not even the short

* Copyright, 1945, by Irving Berlin.

Harry Lillis 51

life of Will Morrissey's Night Club Revue, in which they were booked at \$250 (for the act), bothered them. They were annoyed when, after a week at the Orange Grove Theatre in Los Angeles and another in San Francisco, the revue not only folded but left them without any folding money: the \$250 sounded too good to be true, and it was.

"I'm gonna go see a guy at Paramount-Publrix," Al threatened, in their San Francisco hotel room.

"Go ahead," Bing said. "See if I care."

Al came back in an hour and a half. Bing was "resting." his feet up on the bed, his head thrown back against the reclining back of a Morris chair, his body taut between the chair seat and the bed.

"We're no longer at liberty," Al shouted, mocking the entertainer's euphemism for "out of work."

"Gently, gently/ 7 Bing cautioned as he opened his eyes. "And give with the details. But gently."

"Saw the guy. Talked him into it."

"It? What?"

"To alternate between here and L.A. The Metropolitan in L.A. and the Granada here."

"Holy Mike!" Bing jumped out of chair and bed. "How much?"

"Three hundred dollars a week. Together, of course." Al smiled proudly.

"The saints preserve us," Bing prayed.

They did a week at the Granada and then went down to Los Angeles to do their Metropolitan stint. While they were at the Paramount house, Paul Whiteman was holding forth at the Million Dollar Theatre. Between shows, Bing and Al went over

to catch Whiteman.

"That's a great show," Bing summed up, as they were leaving the theatre, "but an awfully small audience."

52 The Incredible Crosby

"I understand they're dropping a big bomb this week," Al said.

"Don't get it." Bing shook his head. 'They need more comedy, maybe. Maybe it's too much music. And you know that Whiteman is a funny man. A couple of weeks ago, a guy was telling me, he wired ahead for reservations on a train into L.A., saying that 'a large party' would board the train at Encino. The train stopped at Encino. Whiteman got on. The conductor recognized him, said 'Hello, Paul, where's the rest of your troupe/ "What rest?' Whiteman asked. 'Well,' the conductor replied, 'you said a large party would board at Encino/ Tm the large party/ Whiteman told him."

The boys laughed. "That's funny," Al agreed, "but the show sure isn't"

"They could use us," Bing suggested.

"Hold on, friend," Al suggested in turn. "Let's not get any delusions of grandeur."

Actually they didn't have to hold on very much longer. Whiteman returned the compliment and came over between shows to catch the boys at the Metropolitan. He'd heard there were some good acts at the Paramount theatre.

"Hey," the large party with the great band and singers reacted, "I like them." He sent for them.

Bing showed Al a message from Paul Whiteman in their dressing room. "Delusions of grandeur, indeed," he sniffed.

"My God," Al said, "this is too much."

"Nothing's too much," Bing disagreed,, "nothing at all."

4

HEY LOOKED AROUND the ornate lobby of Sid Grauman's Million Dollar Theatre. It was one of the first of the ornate movie palaces, and if it was nothing else, it was eye catching and eye stopping.

"Hey, bud" Bing called to the usher in front of the theatre, who was scarcely distinguishable from a marine major general in full-dress uniform.

"Yeah?"

"Where do we find Paul Whiteman?"

"On the stage, kid."

"No, no, General. Where does the big man hide out?"

"Well, if you think you can get in," the usher replied, "go around back, through the door at the left there."

They went around back, sent their names through to Jimmy

53

54 The Incredible Crosby

Gillespie, Whiteman's manager, and were, a little bit to their own astonishment, quickly admitted. They stared at the famous figure, topped by the huge egg-shaped face with its little waxed mustache. It was almost exciting enough to be in his presence. To think of working for him well, that was almost too much.

"How'd you like to work for me?" the famous figure asked.

"Very much!" Bing replied.

"Yeah," Al gulped

It was very quickly arranged. They were part of the troupe-Crosby and Rinker, Hot Songs.

"You'll join us at the Tivoli in Chicago in a few weeks," Whiteman said.

"Great," Bing acknowledged, and they left the theatre.

When they got out, they passed the general in front. Al turned to him.

"Any time you want to see Mr. Whiteman yourself," he said,

"just ask us."

And off they went

They decided to take the few weeks before joining Whiteman as a vacation, and up they went to Spokane to see the folks. Al's father had to sign the contract with Whiteman for him, since he was only nineteen, under legal age.

When they got to Spokane, they found they were big shots. Every kid they'd ever known at Gonzaga, in their neighborhood, all around town, had heard about the Whiteman deal, and they wanted to come and see the famous duo from Spokane. Everett had arranged a week at the Liberty Theatre, at the considerable salary of \$350, and there were a couple of other appearances around town they were expected to make, which would help line their trunks for the Whiteman theatre tour.

At Bing's house the Spokane conclave met in earnest to hear stories about the motion-picture stars the boys had seen in Los Angeles, to learn about big-time show business, and some just

Harry Lillis 55

to sit around and gape at Al and Bing. After a riotous couple of weeks, topped by some heavy drinking parties, they left from the Great Northern Station, to the accompaniment of cheers and roars, and one or two self-conscious jibes from the unbelievers.

The Tivoli was on Chicago's South Side, one of the many theatres around the Windy City that featured name bands and big vaudeville acts, in that heyday of both. It was large; the audiences it accommodated were large, too.

Al and Bing peeked nervously from their seats in the band at the mammoth assemblage they were about to meet. Al was ensconced behind a guitar with rubber strings; Bing made as if to blow into a French horn, but it had no mouthpiece. They were ostensibly part of the band.

Whiteman introduced them. "I want you to meet two sprouts. I was having ice cream in a little parlor in Walla Walla, Washington well, I heard them, and I want you to hear them. Crosby and Rinker!"

The boys leaped from their seats. Al jumped to the little piano, which was a standard part of the act; Bing grabbed the high-hat cymbal, and off they went.

Seven songs, and all well received. They were happy. They grinned sheepishly after the first couple, more naturally after four, and with full confidence after they had finished seven. It was time to go. They pushed at the piano to get it off into the wings. It wouldn't budge. They pushed with all their might. It still wouldn't budge. The unself-conscious grins were quickly replaced by very sheepish ones.

Whiteman looked at the audience as if to say, "Well, this is my department." He walked over with consummate fat man's dignity and had at the piano, but his three hundred and some pounds didn't help. The piano turned over on its side after three Whiteman heaves and clung with its steel hooks to the stage.

The audience roared, and Crosby and Rinker, Hot Songs, slipped quietly, shoulders narrowed, heads bowed, off the stage.

That was the only incident that marred the theatre tour from Chicago to New York. They played the Circle in Indianapolis, they played other theatres in Chicago and other Midwestern towns, and everything went very well.

Finally the Whiteman group landed in New York to play the Paramount, the motion-picture company's garish Times Square theatre that had opened a few months earlier, in late 1926. Again Al had his phony guitar, Bing blew noiselessly into the coils of the French horn. Again they were introduced as the boys from Walla Walla's ice-cream parlor.

But this time they never had a chance to fix pleasant smiles on their faces. The audience just didn't get them. The response was not even polite. Hands were firmly held quiet by that first show's audience. As they walked off stage, Bing said to Al, "Well, I guess that was about the biggest egg that was ever laid on a New York stage."

"I'm still dripping from it," Al said.

The manager of the Paramount felt exactly the same way. "They've got to go, Paul," he said.

"But they're good," Whiteman argued. "They did sensationally well in Chicago and Indianapolis.

"I'm sorry," the manager replied. "This is New York. And though they were a sensation, it wasn't the right kind. Out they go!"

Out they went, and for the remainder of the band's engagement at the Paramount they were free to sight-see.

When the Paul Whiteman Club opened, they were ready to go again. It was an important opening for the whole organization. The site was auspicious. It was the full second floor of the building that extended from Forty-seventh to Forty-eighth

Harry Lillis 57

Streets, from Seventh Avenue to Broadway, at the north end of Times Square and everybody in New York show business, singer, musician, booker, manager, and intense fan, was there to catch opening night.

An effusive introduction from Paul started things again.

"Okay," Al said to Bing, "let's go."

They went. They came off.

"Another egg," Bing said to Al.

"Well, maybe next show," Al said.

But the next show was just as bad. And the next. And the next. Finally they were pulling the curtains for other acts, actually working as stagehands, in an era when singers who weren't successful could act as stagehands, before the unions had put an end to that. They were out of the show again.

One night Matty Malneck, who was the featured violinist in the band, brought in a friend of his from Denver to catch the show and meet the members of the Whiteman organization. His name was Harry Barris, and he talked a great show.

"Singing, dancing, piano, writing songs, nothing I can't do!"

"Able man," Bing said to Al. "Man must be good to do all that."

Barris overheard. "I am," Barris said.

And he was.

Harry Barris was born in New York City but migrated west in his early teens and at fifteen was studying music in the East Denver High School with Paul Whiteman's father, Wilberforce Whiteman. At seventeen he had had his own five-piece jazz band and with it toured the Far West from Denver to Seattle, sleeping in day coaches to make ends meet. He had toured Japan, China, and the Philippine Islands and had written his first song afterward, an epic called Hong Kong Dream Girl. He had been a member of Gus Edwards's School Days act and had worked with Paul Asch in Chicago. Just before the visit to

58 The Incredible Crosby

the Paul Whiteman Club, he had done a quite successful act on the Publix circuit as a single.

"Harry," Paul said to him, "maybe you really are good, I'd like to see what you could do with my Walla Walla friends. Why don't you knock something together?"

"What is there to lose?" Bing asked Al.

"Nothing but yolk," Al replied.

They rehearsed together and quickly spotted a mutual singing and gagging ability. The clincher for Bing and Al was a

song of Harry's, Mississippi Mud.

"Great," Bing acknowledged. "That really ought to do it,"

"It will," Harry assured him.

And it did.

Whiteman fixed up two little white pianos for Harry and Al, with the inevitable caricature of himself across the middle of both, and brought the act on early in the show. They sang Ain't She Sweet, and the house responded. They sang Mississippi Mud, and the house came down. Barris's interpolations of all the current jazz licks in and around every tune they sang sold very well, and the contrast with AFs straight voice and Bing's vibrato was sure-fire.

What happened at that show happened again and again and again. Bing and Al responded as quickly and as completely to Barris as he himself did. The group was undeniably infectious. Whiteman was happy, and Crosby and Rinker were back in his good graces.

"The Rhythm Boys that's a natural name for you gentlemen," Whiteman opined. And it was, too. For it was certainly in things rhythmic that the trio was at its best. At the next recording date they made Mississippi Mud and Ain't She Sweet, and that record established them as a national name.

The trio relaxed. They were not only in Whiteman 's good graces, but in the country's, and it was obvious that they had

Harry Lillis 59

discovered a successful routine which, they were sure, would carry them forever. They became lazy. They decided it was no longer necessary to add new tunes. About this there was some difference of opinion with Whiteman; and when he went to Europe in 1927, he did not take the Rhythm Boys with him.

He did, however, arrange for a thirty-nine week tour of the Keith vaudeville circuit.

"You won't have to learn any new songs for this time around, Fellows," Whiteman said.

"Gotcha," Barris agreed for the trio, and they followed that suggestion all the way across the country.

Audiences were happy to hear what they had heard on records, and the tour was successful. The act neither progressed nor deteriorated and managed to hold its own with headliners like Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone, with whom they shared billing in Columbus, Ohio. Every morning Bing and Al played golf, when weather permitted, and they were able to say that

at least their putting had improved, even if their singing had remained static over the thirty-nine weeks.

The end of the tour was a triumphant appearance at the New York Palace, and for this they made a little extra effort. Just enough so that when Whiteman returned, he found them a somewhat bigger show-business name than they had been nine months earlier. He took them back.

The 1927 and 1928 Whiteman band was no ordinary "symphonic jazz" aggregation. It was able to play a little of every kind of popular music, and some that was not so popular. It was also able to break up into small jazz groups of real distinction. For a couple of years it featured soloists and arrangements which began to justify the tag under which Whiteman had ridden to fame, The King of Jazz.

The trumpet section was sparked by the legendary Leon "Bix" Beiderbecke. Frankie Trumbauer played C-melody sax,

60 The Incredible Crosby

and in 1928 Jimmy Dorsey joined, to give the reeds two impressive soloists. Bill Rank was a ranking trombonist, and Tommy Dorsey came in on trombone, with brother Jimmy, to complement his blowing. Izzy Friedman on clarinet, Min Leibrock on bass saxophone, Matty Malneck on fiddle, and Lennie Hayton at the piano were all more than ordinarily able musicians. When these men combined, as soloists or as section leaders, with the Rhythm Boys, the effect was startling by 1927 or later standards. On the records of *From Monday On*, *Because My Baby Don't Mean Maybe Now*, *Louisiana*, *Tain't So*, *Honey*, *Tain't So*, and *Coquette*, you can hear the Rhythm Boys, alone or with other singers from the Whiteman organization, backed by Bix or by Trumbauer or by Rank or some section work that presents these musicians at their early best. The trumpet trio, with Bix leading, on *Coquette* was a beautiful buffer for Bing's voice.

Bing was beginning to take solos. By 1928, one could hear a good deal of him with the Whiteman band, *Oh Miss Hannah*, *High Water*, *Muddy Water*, *My Heart Stood Still*, with vocal quartet backing, were some of his assignments. With singers of the commercial appeal of Jack Fulton and Charlie Gaylord and Skin Young to compete with, it was more than unexpected, to Bing himself at least, to find that he was getting lots of attention. When he hit an E on the nose in *OY Man River*, he was in with Whiteman audiences; and then when the F's came along and he clipped those with similar ease, there was no question of his solo talents. Using Bing as a soloist, the Rhythm Boys (alone, or with Gaylord and Young and Fulton) set up humming backgrounds that antedated by almost ten years the vocal-group sounds that found such success with Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller, the Pied Pipers and the Modernaires. The organ-point harmonies used by the Whiteman vocal groups intro-

duced a kind of musicianship hitherto unknown in dance bands.

Harry LULis 61

It was typical of Bing's luck that he should have been singled out to sing against this fetching sound.

In 1929, Bix left the Whiteman organization, and his book was taken over by Andy Secrest, a cornetist of pleasing sweet tone, but not of Bix's stature. However, the loss of this fine soloist was in part made up by the addition of Joe Venuti on violin and Eddie Lang on guitar. The one, an irrepressible Italian from Philadelphia, brought jazz ingenuity on an instrument that had hardly ever before been noted for it. The other, a quiet little man, also from Philadelphia, was an old friend of Bing's who had moved from the violin to the banjo to the guitar and had literally made that last instrument in jazz. He brought it to such prominence through his playing in the Dorsey Brothers' Scranton Sirens, in the Mound City Blue Blowers, and in almost every band that had ever played in and around New York that it became a fixture in the dance band, as the banjo had been before.

The Whiteman organization, large and cumbersome, had always been notable for a degree of good cheer. When Venuti entered, the degree was not to be read on a thermometer. When he and Lang were playing in a pit band of Joe Cook's Fine and Dandy, they sat right behind the pianist, Frank Signorelli, whose nose was supposed to rival Jimmy Durante's on a clear day. This was good for lots of laughs. One day somebody told Joe that he had heard of a druggist, in a small town outside of New York, about eighty miles away, whose nose was bigger than either Durante's or Signorelli's. Venuti and Lang took the next train to the town and dropped in on the druggist. They explained that they had come from New York. The druggist asked, "What brings you here, gentlemen?" "We came," Joe answered, "to look at your nose." The stunned druggist remained silent.

Before joining Whiteman, Venuti had had several bands of

62 The Incredible Crosby

his own. For one of them he auditioned a saxophonist, who produced a noise on his horn that offended Joe grievously. He didn't tell the musician he was bad. He simply invited him to come fishing with him. "And by all means bring along your saxophone." They got out to the middle of the lake, and Joe said, "Never mind the fishing rod, kid. Start playing," The saxophonist started playing, and, according to Venuti, the fish began jumping, right out of the water into the boat. "That proves what I always said," shouted Joe. "The saxophone is nothing but a fish horn!"

Joe, a first-rate golfer, was a natural companion for Bing, off and on the golf course. When his luck was bad, he let loose the largest string of Italian curses ever heard west of Sicily. One particularly luckless afternoon, after finding that the curses didn't relieve his injured pride, Joe took the club he was using, broke it over his knee, and tossed it into a water hole. The caddy laughed. Joe followed the first club with all the rest arid tossed in his golf bag too. The caddy bent over with laughter. Joe bent over, too, grabbed the kid by the middle, and threw him into the water. Bing, who was with him, couldn't stop laughing either; so Joe grabbed him, and in he went, too.

His favorite home-town story about himself concerns a stranger who, around six every evening, would shout "hello" to Joe, sitting on his front porch. Joe, who would yield to no one in his hospitality, felt he had no choice but to invite him in to dinner. Every evening for a month he invited him in. Unfortunately, Joe's hospitality was challenged by his sense of humor. The man was an unmitigated bore. He felt he had to get rid of him. He knew that he was fond of stewed rabbit; one night he served him a large dish of same. After finishing the rabbit course, Joe went out to the kitchen and brought back the skin of a cat. Holding it up in the air, he asked the stranger if he knew what it was. "Sure, that' s a cat" "Right," said Joe, "and that's

Harry Lttlis 63

what you've just been eating." The stranger turned green and fled, never to appear again.

Eddie Lang quickly became Bing's closest friend. He was a fellow Catholic, whose shyness and hesitant speech were in marked contrast to Venuti's garrulousness and Bing's effusive personality. But Eddie and Bing found much to talk about and discovered mutually compatible, never combatable musical ideas. The silken sound that Eddie drew from his guitar strings was entirely new to jazz. It was, as a matter of fact, rare in all of music, matched only perhaps by the exquisite sonorities of Andres Segovia, greatest of the Spanish classical guitarists. Bing, always on the lookout for fresh ways of matching his voice, discovered that single-string arpeggios and chords strummed on Eddie's guitar made perhaps the most engaging possible background for his husky vocal tones. From the time when he first met Eddie, he always used guitar backing if possible, and from the balancing of his voice and the Lang instrument came a combination that has since been used again and again with felicitous results in American popular music.

From the age of two, Eddie had played some string instrument. First it was a rude cigar-box affair, fitted with a broom handle and a violin string. Then it was a quarter-size fiddle. Finally, when he had progressed through high-school orchestras and schoolboy dance bands, it became a banjo. He played the banjo until, with the Mound City Blue Blowers, he prevailed

upon the other musicians to let him switch to guitar.

Eddie's quietness and shyness were not easily overcome. He could, however, be thrown into a bewildering and bewildered fury by attacks on his stuttering, and these were made with embarrassing regularity by both Venuti and Crosby.

And so the Whiteman band, with Lang and Venuti and Crosby and Barris its most striking personalities, came to the end of 1929. As no name band ever before, and few afterward,

64 The Incredible Crosby

it was accepted by the American people as its representative to the musical courts of the world. Whiteman had introduced George Gershwin's large-scale experiments, Rhapsody in Blue and An American in Paris, he had sponsored the debut performances of most of the other halting attempts at so-called "symphonic" jazz. Americans were proud of and pleased with these pretentious amalgams of jazz and traditional music. But they were more than pleased with and proud of the few moments of spontaneous jazz that a Whiteman evening produced and the many moments of inspired jazz singing they were caught up in them. Somehow, with no particular program to that effect, Bing was emerging as the most persuasive of the sounds associated with Whiteman and consequently as the typical American singing voice. The genial paternalism that had earned Whiteman the happy sobriquet of Pops was paying off musically as nobody, not even he, had dreamed. It was paying off financially too, of course, but even here the collective dreams of the Whiteman organization had hardly conceived anything so rich, so riotous, and so foolishly fabulous as the projected motion picture with which they were greeted at the end of 1929. The King of Jazz was on his way to Hollywood to make The King of Jazz, and wild fancies were being readied for Cinderella-like conversion into facts.

5

IN EVER BEFORE IN the checkered history of motion pictures was a film brought into the world with so much pomp and circumstance as The King of Jazz. This was to be the musical of musicals, colossal, stupendous, tremendous, gigantic, and all the other massive things that a musical of musicals should be in Hollywood argot. It was to present Paul Whiteman as the hero of an intriguing little story, around which could be fitted the many elements of his organization. There were to be many spots for songs, for "symphonic jazz" performances, and maybe a couple of "low-down jazz" spots.

With all this in mind, the Whiteman organization left New

York for Hollywood with anything but calm acceptance of their fate. This was going to be *The Great Adventure*, and everybody was determined to take full advantage of the possibilities.

65

66 The Incredible Crosby

"Everybody" included Whiteman's radio sponsors, Old Gold cigarettes, Universal Pictures, who were making the film, the guys in the band, and Pops himself. Old Gold had arranged to broadcast its regular Wednesday night Whiteman show from theatres across the country as the band made its way West, and it had dubbed the special train carrying the band the Old Gold-Paul Whiteman Special. The cars were decorated gaily and adorned with the Whiteman caricature, which appeared anywhere and everywhere that the man himself did.

The trip out was all that had been expected of it: noisy with the excited musicians, full of the clamor of fans who gathered around their favorites, alive with picture and radio executives and their underlings. No president or king ever crossed the country with so much splendor. Woodrow Wilson's great trip across America after the Versailles Conference was a Class B excursion by comparison.

When Whiteman arrived in Hollywood, he discovered more than ordinary difficulties. The story that had been planned was unacceptable all round. Pops was no romantic hero, so on sober thought (though there was very little sober thought connected with this extravaganza at any time) it was decided to shelve the love story. Paul Fejos had been brought from Germany by Carl Laemmle, the presiding genius at Universal, to direct *The King of Jazz* in the UFA tradition. Here, too, on extended consideration, it was decided that a mistake had been made. The "arty" patterns of German film making were hardly in accord with Whiteman's music and attendant productions. So Fejos was scrapped, along with the story; and after the enormous expense of bringing the band out, it was decided to begin all over again.

Back to New York for Whiteman and gang. It was impossible to meet that \$9,100 a week pay roll by playing golf games during the day and getting drunk at night, and both the links and the alcohol had been pursued with reckless abandon, in the Holly-

Harry Lillis 67

wood tradition, by the Whitemanites. Actually the Whiteman orchestra spent most of the summer of 1929 in Hollywood waiting for *The King of Jazz* to begin; they were there just long enough for much celebration, for Bing's reunion with his brother Everett, and for one tragic event.

The tragedy occurred when the band went up to Santa Barbara to do a benefit. Pops had bought the boys in the band Fords (emblazoned with the inevitable cheek-and-jowl-and-mustache caricature of the Old Man), and they proceeded to such outings in their separate vehicles. Joe Venuti's car partner was the accordion player, Mario Perri. There was a sharp turn, a soft shoulder on a particularly vicious long curve in the Los Angeles-Santa Barbara road, and a tremendous crash. Joe, with his customary luck, escaped unharmed. Mario was badly hurt. Fortunately there were other cars around, and they rushed the accordionist to the hospital. The band couldn't wait to see what would happen because they had to get back to Los Angeles for their Old Gold broadcast: it was a Wednesday night. Joe was almost out of his mind with worry and, as it turned out, with justified fear. When the musicians got back to the hospital from the studio, they found Mario dead.

A near tragedy followed quickly upon the band's and Bing's return to New York, occasioned by a careless visit of Bing's one night to one of the more spectacular speakeasies. Bing got involved, in the course of his heavy drinking, with a couple of the curious humans who populated speakeasies around the country in those days, short, heavy little men, bulging at the armpits with firearms and thoroughly frightening in their faces.

But Bing liked people, and he was just as happy to drink with these characters as with anybody else. His happiness went too far, and in less time than it takes to get drunk on a post-Prohibition Martini he was out on his feet. He woke up to find himself stared at and staring. The surroundings were vaguely familiar

68 The Incredible Crosby

and so were the people, but the feeling was very new. Somebody had slipped Bing a Mickey Finn.

From the bathroom, where he repaired to effect some order in his physical being, Bing heard noises that split his already shattered head into porcelainlike cracks.

"Could it be? Afraid it is. Yes the law."

Somehow Bing got to talking with a young boy who was in similar circumstances, and they managed to worm their way out of the situation by complimenting the raiding officers on their "superb performance of duty."

As he exited hastily, Bing called back to one of the cops, "You'll go far in your profession, son, far."

His luck had remained with him. He had avoided both jail and the possibility of extinction, which always confronted imbibers of speakeasy rotgut.

The band spent a few months in New York, making its expenses easily enough but not committed to any long-term engagement anywhere. The picture still remained on its schedule.

A new story had been prepared, and Fejos had been replaced by John Murray Anderson, who was generally acknowledged to be the best of New York's musical-revue directors. The whole picture's direction had been changed. The love story had been converted into a gala revue in what passed for Technicolor in 1929. There were specialties involving each of the band's specialists, with a spot for the Rhythm Boys, and Bing penciled in for his own solo in *The Song of the Dawn*. The score had been prepared by Jack Yellen and Milton Ager and by Mabel Wayne and Jack Rose. None of the songs they wrote was particularly distinguished, but a couple of them remained semistandards for several years afterward the Yellen and Ager *Happy Feet* and the Wayne and Rose *Monterey*.

Bing was rather dubious about his solo spot, worried about singing to the cold camera and the colder props on the set. How

Harry Lillis 69

does one elicit the dawn or any other romantic picture from the naked structural apparatus of a motion-picture set? It was easy enough to make a romantic sound in night clubs or theatres, no matter how pseudoromantic the surroundings might be. The warm lights and the appreciative audiences helped a lot.

But Bing never had a chance to test the cold camera and the colder props. The Old Devil Alcohol reared its attractive head again.

There was a supercelebration the night after the first week's shooting on the picture, and Bing, with friends Barris and Venuti and Lang, managed to attain new drinking heights. He left the party with Venuti and after a few steps outside the studio clubroom, in which they had been celebrating, decided that he could go no farther,

"Joe," he said, "let's sit down and talk this over."

"I'm agreeable," Venuti agreed.

And so they ensconced themselves on the Ventura Boulevard curb near Universal City, where their studios were located.

"Joe," Bing asked, "do you remember how that song goes?"

"What song?"

"That one."

"What one?"

After arguing back and forth for a little while, they compromised on singing any song that came into their heads, and they sang many. A cop came along and asked them whom they were entertaining.

"Ourselves," Venuti replied.

"And doing a fine job of it," Bing corroborated.

The cop suggested that they move on and do their entertaining at home or at the studio or, if they preferred, at the Lincoln Heights jail. They moved on.

"Hey, Bing?" Joe said questioningly.

jo The Incredible Crosby

"Yeah?"

"How about that girl you were supposed to be taking home?"

"Oops!" Bing said. "Back to work."

Somehow he made it back to the studio. Somehow he got the actress in tow, and somehow he got himself behind the wheel of his car and her in the seat beside him and went on his way. It was a comparatively easy drive from Universal City, just at the edge of San Fernando Valley, into Hollywood, where the young actress lived. They were almost at the hotel, and Bing was sure that he had matters well in hand. Such little caution as he had managed on the drive thus far left him. He began to sing and to laugh at the laughter that his singing produced in the actress.

Suddenly, just after turning his wheels for a left turn and releasing the accelerator to let his car go forward, there was a crash. It was all right for him to go left, but not until the car facing him had proceeded forward. They had both let their accelerators go at the same time, and the resultant crash was loud, if not serious. Bing and the girl were both tossed over the windshield of their open car onto the street.

Bing picked himself up. He looked around for the girl. She was on the curb, laid out as if for her coffin. The shock of that sight brought Bing immediately back to his senses. He picked her up and rushed her into the hotel, where, to his pleasant surprise, the doctor found her suffering only from a mild case of shock and certain to be all right after a few hours of rest and quiet.

Bing dashed out to claim his car. He found more than his wreck and the substantially less damaged other car. He found a policeman who, like his Universal City friend, was all for taking him to the Lincoln Heights jail. And this time there was no

moving on, except to the police station.

A hasty summons brought Jimmy Gillespie down, and Bing

Harry Lillis 71

and his opponent, who turned out to be the student manager of a visiting football team, were released, with the following Friday set for trial.

Bing had been assured that by pleading guilty he would get off with a fine, but he faced a judge who believed firmly in the Volstead Act and who wasn't going to release any violators of the Prohibition amendment.

'Thirty days!' the judge barked.

And thirty days it was.

Bing was dispatched to the Lincoln Heights jail, and not one of many pleas to Whiteman, to Gillespie, to his brother Everett, to Harry Barris, to Al Rinker, got through to them. He waited nervously for a day and a night, assuring all of his fellow inmates that he'd be out "any minute."

The next day Everett showed up. Worried because Bing hadn't returned home the previous night, he had made inquiries and tracked his heavy-drinking, singing brother to jail.

"Well," Bing asked, "when do I leave?"

"You don't"

"What do you mean? I've got my number coming up. The Dawn. Don't you remember?"

"I remember, but the judge refuses to."

Another prisoner yelled from across the cell block, "Well, when do we leave?"

The next day Everett appeared again, and this time with better news.

"I think I can get you over to the Hollywood station, and when you get there we'll be able to get you out during the day to go over to the studio."

"Well, that sounds more like it," Bing said.

"You know, of course, you'll have to have a policeman with you all the time you're away from jail."

"He won't have to sing with the Rhythm Boys, will he?"

j2 The Incredible Crosby

Everett laughed. "No."

Bing dashed over to the lot with the policeman in attendance a couple of days later. He ran up to Whiteman.

"Well, when do I do The Song of the Dawn?"

Whiteman shook his head sadly.

"When we do personal appearances," he said. "I'm sorry, Bing. You weren't here when the number was shot, and so it was given to John Boles."

"Ow!" Bing said as he sat down to ease his dejected body.

And so his appearances in The King of Jazz were confined to a few spots with the Rhythm Boys.

The picture rolled off pretty much as expected, and early in March of 1930 the band prepared to return to New York.

"New York?" Bing questioned Harry Barris. "It's going to be awfully cold."

"I follow you," Barris replied.

"And count me in," Al Rinker added.

The three of them decided to stay in California, where the breezes were never more than balmy and the humidity could be seen only on barometers, or at least that was the Southern California Chamber of Commerce's promise.

Staying in California was more than a decision on Bing's part. It was something of an act of fate; for shortly after the Whiteman band left the Coast, Bing met Dixie Lee at a party given by her producer at Fox, Sol Wurtzel.

Dixie was already a name to be conjured with in movie circles. Fox was the major producer of musicals as early as 1930, and Dixie Lee was a kind of slimmer, less arch, and possibly more talented Alice Faye and Betty Grable. Her pert little figure, her soft, warm eyes, and her easy manner, so unlike the conventional movie star's posturing and forbidding glamour, caught Bing's attention. He marked her name down in his book as one to file and not forget.

Harry Lillis 73

The Rhythm Boys were booked into the Montmartre on Hollywood Boulevard, a swank upstairs club that was then the

major meeting place for Hollywood's elite, with the possible exception of the Coconut Grove of the Hotel Ambassador. Singing there, the trio had every opportunity to be heard, every opportunity to make a motion-picture career for itself and to resuscitate some of the prestige that it had lost in leaving Whiteman.

While the boys were at the Montmartre, an astonishing thing happened., A procedure ensued which had not occurred very often before but which afterward became an established pattern in the entertainment business. Talk about Bing began to make the rounds. This has happened only rarely with an actor or an actress but again and again with a band, a band leader, a singer or a jazz instrumentalist. When any one of these displays conspicuous talent far above others in the field, he quickly gathers an enthusiastic following around him. This initial group of fans is not to be confused with the bobby-soxers or with the more sober high-school and college kids who write fan mail. Their enthusiasm is important, but it doesn't bulk as large in the career of the singer or musician as does the enthusiasm he generates in his own trade.

Suddenly three, four, seven, twelve people in the business decide that this is their singer, this their tenor saxophonist or trumpeter. They talk him up, first to each other and then to everybody else they meet who has any affiliation with the entertainment business. In bars, at cocktail parties, at lunch, they steer the conversation to their "boy." It happened again and again with Bing.

"Have you caught the Rhythm Boys?" an enthusiast who might happen to be an assistant director at Paramount would ask a potential fan, who might happen to be an NBC musical director.

74 The Incredible Crosby

"I remember them with Whiteman," the NBC man would answer.

"No, no, I mean at the Montmartre," the Paramount megaphoner would insist. "And I don't just mean the Rhythm Boys; I mean Bing Crosby."

"What about Bing Crosby? I remember an occasional song with Whiteman. I remember a couple of records, but what's so special about him?"

"Special!" the man from Paramount would scream. "Why, he's the greatest, the most sensational, the most overwhelming singer you've ever heard!"

"But I haven't heard him!"

"Make sure you do, or else I'll never talk to you again!"

And so the NBC man would repair hastily to the Montmartre. And he in turn would find his enthusiasm aroused by Bing's husky tones, by his lovely vibrato, by his occasional introduction of scat sounds in the normal course of a passionate ballad. The next scene shows the NBC musical director grabbing a musical director at CBS, and you can write your own dialogue.

This sort of thing happened to Bing then, as it happened later to Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, to Benny Goodman, to Glenn Miller, to Frank Sinatra, to Mildred Bailey, to most of the musical names that later went up in lights on theatre marquees and in large type in movie and radio billings.

Certainly the men from Paramount, NBC, and CBS and all the subsequent enthusiasts for Bing, as for the other names mentioned, had nothing to gain from their violent buttonholing of other people in the trade. Nothing to gain, that is, except the pleasure of hearing somebody they admired more often and under successively better circumstances. Nothing to gain except the good feeling that follows upon the good act, the unselfish

Harry Lillis 75

one, one that occurs more often in the music business than the average man on the outside would suspect. Follow this unselfish procedure through to its exciting end, and see how important it is in the career of a Crosby, a Columbo, a Sinatra, or a Goodman. See how the initial enthusiasts carry their flaming devotion along through the bars and parties and studios. See how it comes to the attention of a band booker or one who hires singing talent. See how it brings him along to hear the admired one and to fall in line himself and then to make or break his career.

While gathering his enthusiasts, Bing picked up any number of candidates for manager and a large number of people whom he would in turn be able to benefit later on. He never forgot those he could help. He did his best to forget the hundreds of would-be managers who gathered around him in flylike Hollywood manner as it became apparent that he would inevitably step forth from the Rhythm Boys to do a single, to carry his romantic innuendo to millions without the limitations of an act, with all the freedom of a distinguished individual.

One of the first of several ambitious managers was an agent, Leonard Goldstein, who did succeed in booking the Rhythm Boys into the Coconut Grove after they closed at the Montmartre. Goldstein was aware of the Ambassador's need for some kind of act to buck the Biltmore Trio, which was the featured singing group with Earl Burtnett at the Biltmore Hotel. The Biltmore and the Ambassador, Los Angeles' two major hotels, fought for public attention, even as NBC and CBS did. They pitted their caf 6 attractions against each other with a good deal more than friendly rivalry; and when in 1930 Goldstein heard

the Rhythm Boys, he was sure he had at last found an attraction for the Ambassador of the same stature as the Biltmore Trio. This latter threesome was a tremendous hit with students at the University of California at Los Angeles and the University

The Incredible Crosby of Southern California. Emphasizing a very simple voicing, it sang its songs softly and sweetly and drew people for the same reason that Guy Lombardo's saccharine music did.

Goldstein brought the Rhythm Boys to the attention of Abe Frank, the manager of the Ambassador.

"Don't be silly, Leonard," Abe argued. "I want a sweet outfit. My room has dignity. The Grove isn't for their kind of obstreperous act."

Goldstein pleaded. Abe Frank almost threw him out of the place. When he heard the Rhythm Boys a little later, Abe relented and hired them.

The money was \$350 a week, \$1 50 less than the Montmartre check, and \$2 50 less than their weekly earnings with Whiteman. But this was the second year of the Great Depression, and no work had loomed after they had closed at the tony spot on Hollywood Boulevard. They took it, with an attitude that was obviously eager.

The Rhythm Boys were an immediate hit at the Grove. Harry Barris's self-confident approach to his little piano, his cocky gestures and paradoxically appealing smirks delighted the hundreds of dancers who poured in nightly. The trio's specialties were still sure-fire. And then there was Bing. Harry had written It Must Be True for him, and the Gus Arnheim orchestra's straightforward performance of it behind him sold his soft accents perfectly. It Must Be True was the first of an impressive list of Barris songs for Bing. Out of Bing's variations on the chords of Lover Come Back to Me, which he interpolated into It Must Be True, Barris wrested the melody of I Surrender, Dear, perhaps the most successful of his tunes and certainly the most distinguished.

Bing himself worked on the lyrics with Gordon Clifford, and the two came up with a set of words so heavy with purple passion, so thick with a man's languishing love

Harry Lillis 77

We played the game of stay away,
But it cost more than I can pay.
Without you I cant make my way.
I surrender, dear.

I may seem proud, I may act gay.
It's just a pose, I'm not that way.
For deep down in my heart I say
I surrender, dear.

Little mean things we were doing
Must have been part of the game.
Lending a spice to the wooing,
But I don't care who's to blame.

When stars appear and shadows fall,
It's then you'll hear my poor heart call
To you my love, my life, my all,
I surrender, dear.*

Only a most unself-conscious singer could make it successful.
But lack of self-consciousness was Bing's greatest dramatic
virtue. He didn't understate the song, but neither did he pulver-
ize its lush words. These words, plus an undeniable melody, were
obviously to be a great hit, one that was going to be successful
as a song, one that would help its songwriter, and one that
would go a long way toward assuring the success of its singer.

Another Barris song of the same passionate stripe was At Your
Command, which Bing almost talked to success, wooing his
listeners with his husky whisper, soft Arnheim strings in the
background echoing his subdued and subduing mood.

Several times a week, the whole Coconut Grove show was
on the air for two hours. All of the room's talent was paraded
in this broadcast the two bands, Gus Arnheim's and Carlos

* Copyright, 1931, by Mills Music, Inc. Used by permission.

jS The Incredible Crosby

Molina's Latin group, a number of singers, and the Rhythm
Boys singing during intermissions between the band spots.
These broadcasts were looked forward to by high-school and
college kids with all the eagerness that any of the more famous
commercial shows elicited in them, and a lot more. After the
first few broadcasts it became de rigeur among the students to
follow every tremulous change of Crosby pace, to know his every
new song, and to be cognizant of all those which had been
planned for him in the future. Better than Bing himself did
these kids know what new tunes were coming up for the Arn-
heim band, for the Rhythm Boys, and for him. He became the
darling of young girls, who gathered around the bandstand to
watch him perform nightly.

Bing's singing manner was an unassuming one. He didn't
clutch the microphone, he didn't make romantic gestures. The
closest he came to demonstrative motion was an occasional look
now and then from the height of the bandstand at the mass of
upturned faces below him. It wasn't the fashion in those days

to scream with ecstasy or to swoon with the same emotion at the look or the sound or the twist of body of a singer, but the response to Crosby was just as unmistakable as the latter-day titters and jitters of the kids who followed Sinatra, In Crosby's time at the Grove it was mostly a matter of standing still, closely grouped, and hushing any disturbance of the impassioned quiet.

More and more the Rhythm Boys were becoming a vehicle for Bing. Less and less did Al Rinker combine with Barris and Bing in three-man performance. There were always the novel-ties, of course, and there were always a few rhythm tunes that had to be rendered in the inimitable manner of the trio. But the kids who followed Bing, Harry, and Al and their elders in the entertainment business, who had become the Rhythm Boys' avid fans, were mostly concerned about Bing, the songs he sang, and the way he sang them.

Harry Lillis 79

While he was disturbing the dreams of young girls and giving romantic confidence to young boys in Los Angeles, Bing himself was finding the culmination of his own romantic dreams in his pursuit of Dixie Lee. They spent a lot of time together, at parties and football games and the races. He began to assume that she was for him and he for her. Uncertain about his future, worried about where his next hundred, if not his next dime, was coming from, he was scared to propose to her; but one night at the Grove he did, and much to his surprise, and to the horror of Fox officials, she accepted.

Dixie was a big star, and certain to be bigger. Bing, in spite of the enthusiasm of so many people in the entertainment industry, was by no means a suitable mate, by motion-picture executive standards. This man with the downright sloppy dress, the receding hairline, and the lop ears was hardly the kind of glamour boy who would make suitable fan-magazine stories, hardly the opposite number of a girl who was being built into a 1931 incarnation of America's Sweetheart set to music.

But Bing was motion-picture material himself, Fox officials and fan magazines to the contrary notwithstanding. Mack Sennett, who had been in to hear him at the Grove several times, was convinced that he had a major feature attraction in Crosby. It was not very difficult to convince Bing. He wanted the additional income; he was gradually becoming aware of the responsibility of his impending marriage, and he jumped at the opportunity.

Mack Sennett, the wiliest of the short-subject producers of his time, a time when short subjects were still necessary to round out single feature bills at movie theatres, was smart enough to build inconsequential stories around Bing that made it possible for him to sing with little dramatic encumbrance. 'The first of six shorts he made for Sennett was I Surrender, Dear, in which, out of a couple of mild situations, excuses were

So The Incredible Crosby

made for Bing to sing. I Surrender, Dear was followed by Just One More Chance, Dream House, Billboard Girl, Sing, Bing, Sing, and Where the Blue of the Night, the last made some months later. The shorts were shot in two- and three-day periods, with typical Sennett funnymen and women filling out the scenes, and the directors calling "Print that!" after first or second takes, in a happy-go-lucky procedure so different from the rigid pomp and circumstance that even then attended the production of full-length movies, especially of the A variety, the kind into which Bing was to go.

Sennett withheld distribution of those pictures just long enough so that when they finally were available to theatres around the country, they coincided beautifully with Bing's record-busting phonograph and radio career.

His income at the Grove combined with the Sennett money, \$750 a picture, gave Bing the confidence to carry Dixie's acceptance to the altar, and they were married the unglamorous boy with the sloppy clothes and the lop ears and the Fox Films entry in the musical glamour Derby at the Blessed Sacrament Church on Sunset Boulevard. Entered in the records of the church you will find the marriage of Harry Lillis Crosby and Wilma W. Wyatt the date, September 29, 1930. The Los Angeles newspapers acknowledged the marriage as the wedding of a prominent screen star and a singer, one Bing Crosby. They detailed Dixie's rise from her home town, Harriman, Tennessee. Her part in the road company of Good News. Her first prominent film role, in the Fox Movietone Follies. Bing was just mentioned.

With the help of Sue Carol, one of Dixie's close friends, the Crosbys found a house, Sue's, on Las Vegas Boulevard, for a month of semi-honeymoon within Hollywood. Neither could leave; both were engaged in picture work; and Bing, of course, had his Grove chores.

Harry Lillis 81

The Grove chores did not remain a hardship very long. At the end of ten months at the Grove, no raise had been forthcoming for the Rhythm Boys, in spite of their enormous success. They remonstrated with Abe Frank about the poor money. He flatly refused to give them a raise. They flatly refused to continue, and the night of their squabble they walked out of the Hotel Ambassador, never to return as a group. That was enough for Abe Frank. He immediately took a complaint against the Rhythm Boys to the musicians' union, and they were placed on Local 47's unfair list.

The unfair list is a powerful weapon against entertainers. If the entertainer himself is not a member of the union, his being placed on the unfair list makes it impossible for musicians to work with him. As a matter of fact, it makes it impossible for any employer of union musicians to hire him if he wants his union musicians to continue working for him. It is a serious offense for any union musician to be caught working in a club that has been declared unfair or with a fellow musician or entertainer who has been similarly labeled by his union.

And so, just as quickly as affairs had brightened, they dimmed again. The motion-picture contract with Mack Sennett was still to be worked out, but six pictures at \$750 each over a period of a year did not loom as full employment, and Bing and Al and Harry had nowhere to turn.

Soon afterward Harry went back into the Grove with Loyce Whiteman, a singer whom he was romancing with all the sturdy cockiness with which he approached his regular job, just as winningly and just as successfully. He married her soon after.

Al Rinker, certain that the Rhythm Boys were a thing of the past, wandered off into other fields, to end up in radio as a producer of important musical shows.

Bing was really on his own; he didn't own very much.

6

IT WAS A lucky song for Bing I Surrender, Dear. It was the most successful song he sang at the Coconut Grove, it was the featured song in his first short for Mack Sennett and the name of the short itself; and it was his recording of the Harry Harris tune that won him his opportunity to broadcast.

It was the third day out of New York on the S.S. Europa's trip to Europe in the second week of June, 1931. William Paley, the president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, was reclining on a deck chair, just whiling away the time. Suddenly he heard, from a near-by stateroom, a curious, husky voice singing I Surrender, Dear. He listened attentively. " . . . To you my love, my life, my all, I surrender, dear." It was a remarkable sound; it was like no other popular singer he had ever heard. Maybe, he thought, that voice is for me and my network. He

82

Harry Lillis 83

dashed into the stateroom out of which the sound had come and

asked who had made it. It was Bing, and Paley was excited. He sent a radiogram to his New York office immediately, asking for more information about this Bing Crosby whom he had heard sing *I Surrender, Dear*. In Europe, Paley studied the information about Bing his New York and Hollywood offices had been able to glean. When he got back to New York, he looked at the Mack Sennett one-reelers and decided that this had to be. He sent wires to Hollywood himself this time.

Meanwhile at the other end Everett, who was convinced that his brother had all the makings of a major career in radio, had been trying to persuade Bing to do something about it.

"Look/" Everett said. "What you did in the movies for Mack Sennett can be done on a much larger scale on the air. You've got the voice, and I'm a salesman of great experience and no little talent. So let's combine, and we'll make you a radio star."

"All I've got is a cry in my voice," Bing said, "and I'm not sure that a couple of million people want to listen to me cry through their loud-speakers."

"Leave that to me," Everett replied. And when the wire came through from Paley, Bing was willing to do just that. He signed a regular management contract with his brother, 10 percent for services rendered, and they all made ready to go to New York, Bing, Dixie, Everett, and his wife Naomi. There were no future prospects on the Coast, it seemed, so why not New York?

When they got to New York, Bing immediately looked up Eddie Lang.

"Why Eddie Lang?" Everett asked.

"Because Eddie is the best musician I know, and certainly a guy who knows more about accompanying my tearful voice than anybody."

"All right," Everett said, "Eddie Lang."

Eddie, who was then working in the radio studios, put to-

84 The Incredible Crosby

gether a small band for the audition, and a day was set with CBS officials to hear the tearful voice. The audition was an enormous success. Bing may not have been certain about a couple of million Americans wanting to hear him cry through their loud-speakers, but the CBS powers-that-were seemed certain enough, and the terms that they and Everett agreed upon, \$600 a week, were very pleasant.

"Fortune smiles again," Bing told Eddie, "and damned if I'm not going to smile back."

Before doing his first broadcast, Bing made a few more sides for his record company, Brunswick. Jack Kapp, who was the artists and repertory chief at Brunswick, had signed Bing some months earlier, just as certain as the radio officials that he had something in Crosby, and Bing's first records, one after another, proved it. Stardust, Dancing in the Dark, I Apologize, Sweet and Lovely, Just a Gigolo, Harry Barris's Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams, I Found a Million Dollar Baby in a Five and Ten Cent Store, Out of Nowhere, I'm Through with Love, Many Happy Returns of the Day, Good Night, Sweetheart the songs Bing first recorded read like a Who's Who and What's What of the hit music of his time. He was well advised in the choice of tunes, whether the advice came from Kapp, Everett, or himself, and gradually, over these first dozen or so sides, his style evolved, a kind of pleading, sometimes passionate, sometimes straightforward sound, warmed by rich tones that did not waver in pitch, cooled by drab backgrounds that Bing's earnestness managed to overcome every time.

When Victor Young finally assumed the role of Bing's conductor on records, the backgrounds improved; but in 1931, as for several years after, neither the record companies nor their audiences were concerned about the degree of musicianship back of a singer. If the words were clear and the sound of the voice pleasant, that was enough. It was several years before

Harry Lillis 85

Bing was able to change that routine and make of the singing record a small work of art in which all involved observed the same standards.

Bing was set to begin his first broadcast on August 31, 1931. He had an 11 P.M., 15-minute shot planned. Came the broadcast, and the announcer made excuses.

"Mr. Crosby is ill, and his appearance has been delayed."

Came the second broadcast the same excuse. Actually Bing's illness was the result of the unfair listing he had won for himself when he walked out of the Coconut Grove with the Rhythm Boys.

Abe Frank was persistent, if nothing else, and he refused to settle his contract with Bing, in spite of large offers made by Everett and CBS. Finally they secured a ruling from the American Federation of Musicians, and Bing was allowed to go on. The only restriction placed on his singing was that he wouldn't be able to work out of Los Angeles studios. He was still marked unfair in that territory until and unless he and Abe Frank should come to terms.

On the third night, September 2, 1931, Bing made his appearance, and the rest, as they say, is history. Telegrams poured in to Bing, to Everett, to CBS. Bing, in the depths of depression,,

was just barely convinced that the yellow slips of paper from Western Union and the blue from Postal Telegraph were not the result of a well-organized press agent's scheme. Earlier that day he had left a note, which Everett still keeps as a memento of the occasion.

"Dear Ev," the note read. "Cancel all contracts. I gave all I had, and it's no good. Bing."

He was sure it was no good, and only the furor caused by his first few broadcasts assured him that "all he had" was more than enough.

It was Abe Frank who was the cause of the delay of Bing's

86 The Incredible Crosby

appearance on the air, but to everybody in the trade it was Bing's drinking. His reputation as the alcoholic synonymous had reached such proportions that nobody would believe it was either illness or contractual difficulties. Bing's propensities for alcoholic beverages were well known in the entertainment business. The story of his jailing in Los Angeles and the subsequent narrow escape from the speakeasy raid in New York were already part of the Crosby legend, and they had been blown up into something much more than they actually were. Musicians amused each other with mythical tales of Bing climbing telephone poles with cars, smashing cops' jaws under the influence, never having a sober moment, and crawling in bibulous stupor up to the microphone on those first few days, only to fall flat on his face. This last story concluded with a dramatic climax when the announcer told the millions of expectant listeners that Mr. Crosby was ill, with one foot on Bing's prostrate form to keep him from gurgling alcoholic nothings into the microphone. In the fall of 1931, the first unofficial members-of what Johnny Burke calls the "I Was There the Night He Fell through the Drum Association" signed themselves up.

Bing was a heavy drinker, more addicted to the happy water in his Whiteman days than later, but certainly never one to refuse to bend an elbow over a bar. But he never fell flat on his face at a broadcasting studio, at a theatre, or at any other engagement. There were many nights when there were x's in place of pupils in his eyes, there were several when his forward motion was visibly arrested by the high-octane fluid which passed for whisky in Prohibition days, but a growing sense of responsibility had cut these bouts down to a minimum, and, safely married and with a career well under way, Bing had forgotten the necessity to grab the nearest grain-stained glass.

Bing was pitted on CBS against NBC's Ruggiero Rudolpho Eugenio Colombo, better known as Russ Columbo. Russ, who

had played fiddle back of Bing in Gus Arnheim's band at the Coconut Grove, had come to New York some months earlier, persuaded by a song writer, Con Conrad, that he was the great singer of the time and would have no trouble with his career. Conrad, who felt about Columbo as so many others in the business felt about Bing, had taken Russ out of his own night club and his own band, in which he played violin and guitar and sang a little in the Crosby manner, bought him a top hat and dress suit, and had him photographed. He brought a resplendent young man to the attention of NBC executives. It was just as easy to convince them about Russ as it was to convince CBS about Bing, and within a few weeks he was on the air.

He was on at 11 P.M. on NBC; and when Bing went on at the same time, a natural rivalry was fanned to unnatural heights and some of the resultant publicity was quite ugly. Columnists, taking advantage of a good story, began to quote the two men about each other in a manner and a parlance that neither of them would employ about anybody, much less about his chief rival. And then one very amusing story started going the rounds.

"A lot of people seem to think Russ Columbo is Bing Crosby under another name," wrote one radio critic.

Another asked, "Are Bing Crosby and Russ Columbo one and the same person?"

Nobody really did think that Russ and Bing were the same, and the question was a little silly in the light of their broadcasting on separate networks at the same time and in view of the obvious differences in their voices. The styles were similar, but the timbres were strikingly different. Russ's was a soft, sweet voice, Bing's a rougher, stronger, more vigorous one, always informed by jazz phrasing. Furthermore, their personalities away from the microphone were as different as possible. Columbo was the smooth-looking, impeccably dressed Italian, with shining black hair and dark eyes, and skin to go with them. Bing was

88 The Incredible Crosby

fair, blue-eyed, and anything but an example of sartorial perfection. He showed up for broadcasts in poorly matched trousers and sports jackets, rarely wore a tie, and inevitably capped the ensemble with a golf cap or soft felt, to hide his thinning hair.

The big man before Russ and Bing had been Rudy Vallee, who, curiously enough, had been compared to Valentino in spite of the fact that Columbo was the more likely successor to the swarthy screen lover with the blazing eyes and well-flexed biceps. Vallee began to lose out in popularity and in drawing power, but he was still compared with Bing and Russ and a new collegian from Rutgers University, Ozzie Nelson, who was then making his first radio appearances.

The New York Telegraph on November 22, 1931, voted a plague on all their houses. "Have you noticed how slushy all the crooners' names sound?" an anonymous columnist on the paper asked. "Bing, Russ, Ozzie, Rudy, PHOOEY!"

The phooeys were reiterated again and again by columnists, who saw fine material in the rage for crooners, as later they did in the acclaim given swooners.

"Are they man or . . . ?" one asked.

Another answered him: "He may have a playboy personality, this Bing Crosby, but he also has a first-rate baritone voice, the one that helped put Gus Arnheim's band on the top rung."

Within a few months, in spite of the opposition of most columnists, Bing was an established radio name, and on November 2 he began a series for Cremo Cigars at 7:15 every evening on CBS. Cremo, one of the products of George Washington Hill's American Tobacco Company, will be remembered chiefly for two things, for Hill's dramatic slogan, "'Spit' is a horrid word," and for Bing Crosby. That the horror of "spit" and Bing's voice were not too often compared was a great personal victory for the singer. He was replacing a brass-band broadcast under Arthur Pryor, and only the strength of his voice can be

Harry Lftlis 89

credited for the tremendous success of that daily fifteen-minute program. Listeners had to endure distasteful commercial after distasteful commercial about the unsalubrious nature of saliva in order to enjoy the warming tones of their favorite singer. It was just as hard to put up with as it was later to overlook the droning tobacco auctioneers and the stuttering "LS/MFT" on other George Washington Hill programs.

Hill, whose slogans were so hard to get around, was determined to make it equally hard for Bing to get around his moral absolutes. He inserted a clause in the Crosby contract forbidding Bing's drinking. Sidney Skolsky in his Daily News column commented wryly, "There is also a law that forbids drinking."

One of the amusing coincidences of the Columbo-Crosby rivalry was the fact that Bing had had a hand in writing Russ's theme song, You Call It Madness, but I Call It Love, which was paraphrased by unbelievers as You Call It Crosby, but I Call It Russ. Much was made of this, as of the fact that Bing, in a newspaper column that appeared over his signature, praised a Columbo record. Somehow it was hard for reviewers and feature writers to believe that Bing had the kind of easygoing nature and unwavering ethic which made it unnecessary to battle with his competitor and, if anything, incumbent upon him to praise Columbo when praise was due and to go out of his way to ameliorate the phony feud which had been created by NBC and CBS

press agents working overtime.

Bing, happy to talk to newspaper people, told them anything they wanted to know.

"What do you do with your spare time, Mr. Crosby?" one asked him.

"I read Somerset Maugham, Warwick Deeping, and Eugene O'Neill. I like movies, fights, Jackie Cooper, Jans and Whalen, Bert Lahr, the radio, and a blonde."

In answer to another interviewer who asked him whether the

90 The Incredible Crosby

stories of his romantic prowess were true, he said, "I like for people to be interested in me. Sure. But they say I left a trail of broken hearts behind me when I left California for New York. Now I didn't do a thing like that. The fact is, I left a trail of broken bottles and unpaid bills."

He told another that he had discovered Dashiell Hammett with great interest and had been reading and rereading *Of Human Bondage* for three months and hadn't finished it because he couldn't bring himself to face that gloomy moment when he would be finished with the book and drop out of the lives of Philip Carey, Mildred, and friends.

When he met Rudy Vallee one day, a friend overheard the conversation and relayed it to the newspapers; they made much of it.

"Oh, are you Bing Crosby?" Rudy asked.

"Oh, are you Rudy Vallee?" Bing asked in turn.

"I've always been a warm admirer of yours, Mr. Crosby."

"I've always been a warm admirer of yours, Mr. Vallee."

"Well, so long, Mr. Crosby."

"Well, so long, Mr. Vallee."

And that was all there was to it. But the papers thought that that was a big and important meeting. Actually, Bing and Vallee were sufficiently each other's admirers to be annoyed by a clumsy little song about them and Russ Columbo which Al Dubin and Joe Burke had written, called *Crosby, Columbo, and Vallee*. The song had a very short run when Bing and Rudy refused permission to the publishers, Witmark and Sons, to print their pictures on the cover.

When it became obvious that no real feud could be built up

between Columbo and Crosby or between Bing and Vallee, the columnists tried new tactics. They rumored the impending divorce, in January, 1932, of Bing and Dixie. Winchell reproved his colleagues for the cheap attempt. Finally they were reduced

Harry Lillis 91

to true stories, to interviewing Bing and discovering that, for example, he had in 1930 played golf with Bobby Jones and Johnny Farrell and that it had turned out to be "a nice walk Anyhow." They reported that Judge, in summing up radio, had commented, "Bing Crosby succeeded Rudy Vallee as our First Male, and the radio suddenly went masculine." They reported movie moppet Jackie Cooper writing fan letters to "Dear Bing and Lee" (Dixie) and scrawling a few well-chosen words after the salutation. They reported, in sum, that a new type of person-ality had been born, a man who was a masculine singer, who was not ashamed of the way he looked or dressed or the fact that a man in his late twenties wore a toupee for stage appearances and admitted it.

Bing had his share of fan clubs; as a matter of fact, the fan magazines reported with some indignation and some applause that the Rudy Vallee Booster Club of New York, of 5,400 members, had become the Bing Crosby Booster Club, with its membership unimpaired. Letters arrived daily at CBS from women all over the country, offering to plight their troth to Bing (they forgot about Dixie). He received a vast variety of pash notes and mash notes, but he also had his share of mail from males. From the very beginning he attracted the kind of audience that had previously been limited to John Charles Thomas and Lawrence Tibbett, even before he talked on the air, even before his talents as a comedian were displayed publicly. His voice pleased men as well as women. He interested older women, who were not anxious to project their own frustrations through him. Though he was not able all by himself to effect a revolution in radio or record singing, he had created a conspicuous trend away from the simper and the unrelated sigh, from all the ugly pretension of crooning. In spite of the fact that his name was coupled with Vallee's and with Will Osborne's and with those of all the other crooners of his time, Bing was not one himself.

92 The Incredible Crosby

He sang out when the music and/or the words demanded it. He sang softly when that seemed proper. "I'm a baritone, not a Crooner," he said and made people believe it

The most literate attack on crooners was made by Dean Harold L. Butler of the Hill College of Fine Arts, Syracuse, New York. Butler concluded a vituperative attack with this summation: "Crooners emasculated, effeminate whiners whose jazz tunes are terrible." Dean Butler also managed to get in a few

well-aimed socks at American popular composers Richard Rodgers, George Gershwin, Vincent Youmans, Ferde Grofe, and all the men who wrote jazz or popular songs.

Bing answered Dean Butler: "Hearing the general run of trained singers, both on the air and in concert, constitutes an adequate refutation of the Dean's allegation that singers are made not born." Bing was as fascinated with words in 1931 as he had been in high school and college and continued to be when he became a radio master of ceremonies.

"Concert singers," Bing said, "either sing woefully out of tune or with an utter lack of understanding or expression/ 7 And then he went on to defend the distinguished composers whom Butler had attacked.

The story broke in the country's newspapers at the end of 1931, and repercussions were felt in Bing's home town. The Spokane Chamber of Commerce on January 5, 1932, listed a talk by Ted:

How did Bing Crosby get that way?
His brother, Ted Crosby, will tell you.
An intimate narrative of Bing's success,

Ted made an attempt then, in an informal speech, to explain his brother, the first of many informal speeches of explanation that culminated more formally in a short book, written in collaboration with Larry in 1937 and revised in 1946. Whatever the Spokane Chamber of Commerce meant by "that way" was

Harry Lillis 93

never made clear, and Ted confined his intimacies to the simple facts of Bing's life, which had generally been sufficient in themselves to explain his magnetism and success.

Along with Bing's success on the air, Columbia had brought several other singers to fame, notably Kate Smith, Morton Downey, the Boswell Sisters, and a man with an accordion, Arthur Tracy, who called himself the Street Singer. Bing had done some singing with the Mills Brothers, who had been rescued from a small spot on WLW in Cincinnati by Tommy Rockwell, an Irishman with as large a drinking capacity as Sing's. Tommy had formed his own booking corporation with Irving Mills, and Bing had elected to go with them, along with the Mills Brothers, the Boswell Sisters, Cab Galloway and Duke Ellington, and a flock of other name bands and singers. Tomm/s business was constructed on the conviction that every branch of the entertainment industry fed the other, radio to records or records to radio, both to theatres and motion pictures. It wasn't hard to sell Paramount Pictures on the wisdom of this policy, and they organized a skeletal story in early 1932 to fit the talents of Kate Smith, the Mills foursome, the Boswell trio, Tracy, Galloway, George Burns and Gracie Allen, and Vincent

Lopez. Paramount executives weren't sure that Bing would fit the major part in the picture, a crooner who makes his way through some contrived difficulties to the arms of Leila Hyams, by way of Stuart Erwin and George Barbier and the accumulated broadcast sounds of the talent they had already purchased. But then Morton Downey and Rudy Vallee, whom they had also considered, were at once too specialized and too stiff for a romantic lead,* and they decided to throw Bing into the role. He made a quick trip to Hollywood in the last winter months of the 1931-1932 season to go through his first important motion-picture paces and so satisfied Paramount officials with his performance that they optioned his services for more

94 The Incredible Crosby

to come and fitted him out with a theatre tour to occupy him until the release of *The Big Broadcast*, which was the name they had given their radio revue.

In the spring of 1932, Bing had the opportunity to try his magnetism on live audiences. He was booked into the Paramount Theatre in New York, the scene of his dismal failure with Al Rinker when they both made their New York debut with *Whiteman* in 1927. This time there was no sitting on hands by his audiences. His practiced personality, his magnetism in fact, drew thousands of people into the theatre for twenty weeks, to clap, roar, and stamp their feet with approval. He was surrounded by a lush stage show girls, lights, and accompanying acts and when he got up to sing, clad in a navy-blue coat and flannel trousers in one scene, a dress suit in another, an expectant hush fell over the crowd. This was the great Crosby. What did he look like? What did he sound like?

The sound was just as expected, the same voice they had heard on radio and on records. The look was perhaps a little less than expected. Here was a man 5 feet 9 inches tall, weighing 155 pounds, a little bit dumpy about the middle, and unquestionably blessed with one of the sorriest sets of ears ever to decorate a singer's head. He didn't look especially romantic, but he sounded it, and the very fact that his face and figure were so much like those of the garage mechanic or the salesman with whom the girls had entered the theatre seemed to add to his effect.

He went into the Brooklyn Paramount and repeated his New York success and went on to appearances at the Oriental Theatre in Chicago, Shea's Buffalo, the Paramount in New Haven, the Metropolitan in Boston, came back to the Oriental in Chicago, did a week in St. Louis, and everywhere repeated his New York success. Everywhere people came to see what he would look like and everywhere, after the first few minutes of disappointment at the squat figure and the normal Ameri-

can face, audiences gave of themselves in complete fervor.

In Chicago Bing was interviewed and once more allowed as how he read Maugham, Deeping, and O'Neill, liked movies, fights, Jackie Cooper, Jans and Whalen, Bert Lahr, radio, and a blonde. He was photographed with the blonde, Dixie Lee, but Dixie was not quoted except in one interview, in which she gave a trembling world the news that Bing did not snore in his sleep.

CBS had warned Bing that if Dixie went on the air they would cancel his contract. She wasn't part of the act so far as radio and theatre officials were concerned. The complete reversal of the original situation when Bing had married her had been effected. She had given up her career, to all intents and purposes, to return to it later only twice in movies, once on records. She was Bing's wife now, and the very model of a Catholic spouse. Fox Films was deprived of a great star, but a great star had in turn won a loving wife.

On the way back to Hollywood in the fall of 1932, after his successful theatre tour, Bing opened a copy of a new magazine, one that was dedicated to the ancient American premise that nothing succeeds like success especially if you can make fun of it. The magazine was Ballyhoo, Norman Anthony's monthly investigation of mores, morals, and morons, the periodical that made Elmer Zilch a great American character for a year or two.

In the pages of the magazine Bing found a contest. "Match your favorite radio star," Ballyhoo challenged, and there were two lists, the one of names, the other of adjectives:

Rudy Vallee punk

Bing Crosby lousy

Russ Columbo punk

Kate Smith marvelous

Tony Wons lousy

Morton Downey punk

Amos & Andy lousy

96 The Incredible Crosby

Satirizing the elaborate prize contests then current, Ballyhoo offered 10,000 prizes for the best 10,000-word essays on "What I Like about Radio." The prizes, Ballyhoo announced, had not been decided yet, but they would be given for the best essays and for the readers who matched the names and adjectives correctly.

Bing roared as he tried to decide whether he was punk or lousy or punk or lousy or punk or lousy or marvelous.

On another page he found an ad for the Little Croono. "Become a crooner," this ad suggested. "Vallee did it, Crosby did it, Columbo did it, why not you? When inserted in the mouth, the Little Croono changes the ordinary singing voice into a beautiful croon. No matter how base your voice, it comes out in a soft moo."

Bing laughed as he thought back upon the many moves he had made with his "moo's" from Spokane to Los Angeles to New York and now back again to the Cinema City. He made a soft moue with his mouth himself, as he contemplated the past, the present, the future, and realized that, if he could say nothing else for himself, he could say, as he had told several people who had become pompous about his singing, "Well, anyway, I don't take myself too seriously."

Part Two*. BING

I N THE FIRST big years of his career, Bing Crosby was everybody's idea of a collegian, a 1933 version of the little figure in the huge raccoon coat, with hatbrim tipped back, pipe slung loosely from one side of his mouth, good-natured and delighted with the foolishness of his existence. Collegian was the name of this phenomenon and in Bing's second movie, College Humor, he did almost as much to fix the image in the American mind as F. Scott Fitzgerald did in his books, This Side of Paradise, The Beautiful and the Damned, Tales of the Jazz Age, etc. F. Scott's concern was the capricious undergraduate of the preceding decade, a man whose social standing matched his easy consumption of poisonous bootleg alcohol. Bing was far removed from the Princeton of Fitzgerald, but in most of the other ways his screen life and a good part of his private doings reflected the whimsical pattern of Old Nassau and its many Eastern counterparts in the bibulous twenties. With this background, it

97

98 The Incredible Crosby

came as a delightful surprise to the mounting numbers of Crosby fans to hear how vigorously and vitally their man relayed the sagebrush sentiment of The Last Roundup and Home on the Range. The celebrated drunkard of the Paul Whiteman gang, the tipsy ebullient of Paramount Pictures was some distance in the public eye from "dogies" and campfire community sings. But Bing "was born in the West; and though his life in Tacoma and Spokane had been far removed from bronco busting and steer herding, it had also been utterly unlike that of the city kid in the East or even the Mid-

dle West. Early in life he had had deeply bred into him a large feeling for wide-open spaces and the accompanying informal life.

After Bing's movie career began in earnest, with his second feature-length film, all of his life could be measured by his motion pictures, by his screen successes and near successes (there never were any real failures), by the gradual emergence of the real three-dimensional man on the artificial two-dimensional screen. The real Bing Crosby arrived more speedily in radio and on records than in the reels. In that arrived and emergence he assumed a legendary stature, not only among those who know him only as an actor and singer on the screen, over the air, or on records, but among those closest to him as well, friends, mother, father, brothers, wife.

Bing built his career as a singer, a good singer, a singer who set styles, who did more than any other singer to make popular song lyrics credible, to raise the standards of popular song writing by leavening those of popular song singing. He became an utterly delightful master of ceremonies, a sponsor of fine music and comedy, a brilliant acting personality and a legend.

7

THE PICTURE, *The Big Broadcast*, was just that. Bing's name r if it didn't become a household word, was at least a drug-store conversation commonplace. Wisely, he had refused the top billing role offered him by Paramount, preferring in 1932, as in later years, to be one of the picture's stars, believing that if the film were a success he would be carried with it, that if it were a failure he would not be blamed so much as would the picture itself. His singing of *Please* proved the most salutary moment of the labored story; all over the country youngsters picked up his "boo-boo-boo's," reviewers' compliments were handsome and many, his radio success was duplicated. Back to the presentation houses to cash in on the movie's conspicuous success. This time (September, 1932) to San Francisco and thence to New York for the new radio program, for an appear-

99

100 *The Incredible Crosby*

ance in December at the Capitol Theatre, and for a short vacation.

First the Capitol, headlining a shamelessly old-fashioned vaudeville bill. Bing's name appeared in large block letters in the ads, sparkled in the incandescents that glowed above and around the theatre marquee. In smaller type and fewer lights the name of the variety show's master of ceremonies, appeared, a slant-nosed, fast-talking musical-comedy actor of growing im-

portance Bob Hope. Here on the Capitol stage, during the holiday season of 1932, the first of the several Roads Bing and Bob were to take together was entered upon. "The gags were not very funny, I guess," Bob remembers, "but we laughed insanely. Bing wasn't as lardy then as he was in Morocco and Singapore and Utopia and Zanzibar, but there was something exquisitely funny about watching him make love to a microphone, and while my jokes were no hell, I made up in enthusiasm what I lacked in humor."

The rivalry in ribaldry of Crosby and Hope was most intense backstage; their dressing rooms rolled with the unyielding flow of insult, careened with the insistent but good-natured invective. Perhaps "ski nose" for Hope and "butter belly" for Bing originated then; neither of the principals remembers when and where their affectionate sobriquets for each other were born; all of their colleagues, little and small, the ordinary and the extraordinary members of the entertainment profession who then as later made innumerable trips to the scene of the Crosby-Hope imbroglios, remember that the terms were as numerous as Rabelais' long list of bawdy synonyms, and as rib tickling.

After the appearance at the Capitol, Bing and Dixie went South for a rest. The preceding few years could be counted as more than a thousand radio broadcasts, more than a thousand "on-stage" appearances; 1931 and 1932 could be remembered for the number of times Bing had sung I Surrender, Dear and

Bing 101

It Must Be True and Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams. Bing and Dixie settled down for some golf and some siesta under the Miami sun in preparation for the new radio show and its inevitable problems, pains, and pleasures.

The radio show was still on CBS. Bing had refused all the offers of sustaining programs the network had made him since the summer of 1932; neither the money nor the program conditions had ever met his approval. "'How about a couple of half hours of that Chesterfield block?" CBS offered again. "Wednesdays and Saturdays you pick the music, the musicians, it's your show."

"It's my show," Bing agreed, "right down to the words I Speak."

The twice-weekly Chesterfield show that Bing headed was the first to give some inkling of his script-reading and ad-libbing gifts. He chose his own script writers; and though these latter hardly caught the twinkle in the larynx and the light on the lips and the shine of the words that later made so much of the Kraft Music Hall program, some of the genuine Crosby personality emerged in the husky introductions to songs sung by Bing or played by the studio orchestra under Lennie Hayton.

Lennie had been one of the pianists with Paul Whiteman when Bing was one of Pops' fixtures. He knew how to play for Bing, how to arrange for him, decorating his simple, tasteful scores with piano interludes on the same level, of the same quality. His dark eyes, his soft voice, the warm thrusts and twists of his hirsute head commanded the musicians under him with unmistakable authority.

"A moody man," Bing summed up Lennie to another dark-eyed, soft-voiced musician, Eddie Lang. "A brooder, but a considerable musician, or should I say and a musician?"

As on all his previous CBS series, Eddie sat behind Bing, marking the keys for him, striking the changes of chord and

i02 The Incredible Crosby

tonality, giving his singing a lovely guitar background and his personality a secure resting place. As in his Whiteman days, Eddie Lang was Bing's closest friend, his omnipresent attendant, his confidant, his social and musical adviser. Bing and Dixie and Eddie and his wife Kitty double-dated with almost as much frequency and fervor as the two men spent time together, ingesting great quantities of Italian food, digesting talk, sports, music, all the accoutrements of the good life as it is lived in New York.

The first week in April Eddie came to Bing with some news, not very important, just news of personal interest.

"Getting the tonsils out, Bing."

"At last, eh? When does the cutting commence?"

"Begins and finishes on Sunday."

"Be gone long?"

'Til make the Wednesday show/*

He didn't make the Wednesday show or any other. A blood clot arose during that Sabbath tonsillectomy and went speedily to Eddie Lang's heart, and he was gone.

"There aren't words. . ." Bing hunted for some expression of his feeling. He made public statements, clean, well-formed sentences of regret, but they were inadequate, as such eulogies inevitably are. The Lang obsequies made way for Crosby obloquies.

"Look," one musician commented, "his best friend dies and he just hitches his cap and looks the other way. He didn't even feel it."

"What a cold guy," another agreed.

"Yeah, and Eddie was such a warm little guy."

"Did you read what Bing said?"

The other musician nodded.

"Eddie retained a shy modesty that won him the friendship and admiration of everyone."

Bing 103

"Brrrrr," the second hornblower shivered.

Bing had learned to withhold his feelings; he knew he had become a public character, that everything he said and did was public property; he refused to put his closest feelings on public display. Inevitably the effect was as of an impenetrable emotional frigidity. As warm as his stage and screen and air personality was, his talk and gestures and expression of personal feeling were cold. Inevitably this withdrawal was noticed and thus commented upon.

Bing and Dixie went back to California; with them went Kitty Lang, better aware than the musicians of Bing's withheld grief, equally aware of the loss to jazz in Eddie's passing, Bing had lost his closest friend; jazz had lost a man whose mastery of his instrument made his records until well into the 1940*5 the peak of guitar performance in jazz and his short life the subject of a legend as firm and as fabulous and as tragic as that of Bix Beiderbecke (who had died two years earlier) if somewhat better grounded and less melodramatic.

With Eddie's death, something else died in Bing's life. He didn't lose interest in jazz, but he became less a part of it. His early tutelage under Mildred Bailey, his years with the talented soloists of the Whiteman entourage, and his close association with Eddie Lang had preserved until the spring of 1933 a warm feeling for jazz phrasing, for little peradventures and occasional large trips around the melody in the hot tradition. The commercial entertainment world had already made large inroads in the Crosby singing style, but until Eddie died he was still pre-eminently a jazz singer, still the former Musicalader, still a conspicuous product of the best days of Whiteman. When he returned to Hollywood to make his second, third, and fourth feature films, Bing was a public figure, his singing was as much a part of all the American people (though they were not all aware of it) as it was a part of him. Bing's private jazz world

104 The Incredible Crosby

was just about finished. He made occasional sorties back into it over the ensuing years, but the returns were like the trips

back to Spokane, visits to the old school, the old baseball lot, the swimming hole, and Benny Stubeck's cigar store nostalgic, unimpassioned. He was interested but not involved.

"If Eddie Lang had lived. . . ." That is a hypothesis of great interest chiefly to the jazz fanatic, the wildly intense jazz fan and jazz critic. Actually the myriad Crosby fans around the world, especially those who have given his singing style earnest attention, have more than a slight concern in this question. It is possible that Bing's singing might never have become quite such a universal rage, that its private jazz character might have proved too strong for complete public acceptance, though it is hard to imagine Bing anything less than the household voice. It is certain that Bing would have lost less of jazz in his inflections, gained more of an understanding of the emerging jazz modernism of the middle forties. However, what the blues lost, Brahms' Lullaby, Stephen Foster, and the hillbilly ode gained. A gain? A loss? It depends on your musical attachments.

Just before Bing returned to Hollywood, he paid a visit to Baltimore; and while he was there he paid a visit within the visit to some friends of his who were appearing at Loew's Century Theatre. Even as so many performers visited him backstage when he made theatre appearances, he paid his token calls to others. The friends were Les Reis and Artie Dunn, whose close harmonies had been an important feature of CBS's all-out popular-music campaign in 1930, 1931, and 1932, sharing time with Kate Smith, Morton Downey, Arthur Tracy (The Street Singer), and Bing himself.

Bing strode into the dressing room.

"Headlining, eh? Big-time boys."

Les and Artie laughed.

Bing 105

"Just finished dinner and had to see you. Kill the people/ 7
Bing said.

"Why don't you do a little killing yourself?" Les asked Bing.

"What do you mean?"

"We have an amateur contest tonight," Les explained. "Why don't you surprise everybody and do an impersonation of Bing Crosby?"

Bing laughed and said he'd love to.

When Les and Artie's turn came they joined heads and voices for a while and then led into the amateur hour. Bing stepped out on stage, introduced as a remarkable 'likeness in face and voice of the great crooner." The applause was mild; nobody rec-

ognized him. He sang a couple of songs and went off to slightly more enthusiastic response, but hardly overwhelming. A little later in the amateur show another boy walked up on stage and suggested that he would like to imitate Bing Crosby. He did, and he won the contest. Bing never revealed that he'd been the first Crosby imitator. He was well known, but not so well known that his face and voice were immediately recognizable. And then, as in later years, both were so much like the average American's that it was all too easy for them to be confused with those of a local plumber with singing ambitions who had listened to Bing on the air, on records, and watched him in the movies.

Back in Hollywood, Paramount made plans to make the face and voice of Crosby a lot better known. They circulated pictures to all the fan magazines and newspapers of Bing clutching a microphone as if for dear life, to tie in with the theme title and story of *The Big Broadcast*. It was no wonder that the Baltimore audience didn't recognize Bing; he didn't look in person too much like the Paramount glossy prints. He never made up on the stage with quite that much mascara. His ears weren't

io6 The Incredible Crosby

pinned back that resolutely against his head with spirit gum and liquid rubber. Furthermore, he didn't dress as carefully for the stage as he did for those first Paramount still photos, with a collar pin holding his tie properly in place and his jacket and trousers matching.

In his second movie, Bing went to college. The title was *College Humor*, and the story was replete with all the rah-rah cliches, right down to a "thrilling" football game, and chorus girls as "campus sweethearts" and classroom lovelies of a kind no college in this country has ever seen. The girls were called, for the purpose of the picture, the Ox Road Co-eds, after one of the picture's hit songs, *Down the Old Ox Road*. During the filming of the picture, a tie-up was made with *College Humor* magazine, and the girls were photographed in bathing suits (which by 1933 were abbreviated costumes) on top of, beside, and all around the magazine's delivery trucks. The trucks, in turn, carried large placards advertising the motion picture.

As in all of Bing's early pictures, the cast was filled out with members of the Paramount stock company, faces and personalities well known to Paramount pictures and their audiences. Richard Arlen and Jack Oakie played the straight and the comic college boys. Mary Carlisle was the heart interest, and there were a few other girls of something more than chorus-line interest tossed in for decorative emphasis. To tie in with *The Big Broadcast*, George Burns and Gracie Allen were signed for this picture too, and, with Bing's name and voice, Paramount continued its heavy plugging of radio names. The picture's great attraction was Bing's voice, and in two songs, *Learn to Croon* and *Down the Old Ox Road*, he justified his producers' faith in

him. Again he was not starred but simply featured along with Arlen, Oakie, Carlisle, and Burns and Allen. And again, the music was more important than the story. Learn to Croon was

Bing 107

a particularly effective presentation of Bing's singing style, with its use of "la-de-da-de-da-da-da" to drive home his engaging scatting.

Paramount wouldn't let Bing get very far away from its Melrose Avenue lot to watch the construction of his first Hollywood home at Toluca Lake or to play golf at Lakeside near by. Only between shots could Bing spend time with his pregnant wife. Fortunately Gary Evan Crosby was born on June 27, 1933, making an easy appearance in this world and not interfering with the production of College Humor. Bing spent a little time with his wife and child and then went right back to work, to make another quickie at Paramount.

This time the variation on the theme was called Too Much Harmony, and some changes were made in the stock-company cast. Jack Oakie remained. Skeets Gallagher replaced Richard Arlen to act as a foil for Oakie's humor, to handle some straight lines, and occasionally to get a few gags himself. Harry Green, a Jewish dialect comedian, added to the picture's attempts at comedy, and Lilyan Tashman and Ned Sparks strode through some sardonic lines from reel to reel. There was a heavy chorus number, danced on a huge, silk-covered kettledrum, and the girls who hammered so lustily on the silk were perhaps a little prettier than usual, headed by Pat and Toby Wing. Bing sang his songs to Judith Allen, whose histrionic ability did not match her charms, but then no great acting was demanded by her role or anybody else's in the picture. And again there were two good songs, The Day You Came Along and Thanks. Bing's record of these two songs, along with the two in College Humor, and Please from The Big Broadcast, were easily the big vocal records of 1933. They weren't quite the distinguished songs, they hadn't quite the distinguished backgrounds that his early sides had had, but they were catchy tunes, sung with unmistakable

The Incredible Crosby

authority and in a crooning style that was quickly supplanting all others in popularity in the broadcast, phonograph-record and motion-picture America of the early thirties.

There was time for a trip to Catalina Island, to play hide-and-seek with swordfish, but not very much time, for during the course of that fishing expedition Bing was notified that he had been loaned to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to appear in Going Hollywood, one of Marion Davies's last gasps before she and a number of other silent stars finally acknowledged their inability

to cope with the sound cameras. To ensure the picture's success, MGM wanted the big singer, Bing, and they got him, and a sure-fire song for him to sing, Temptation. This latter lugubrious lament sold an uncertain vehicle for both Davies and Crosby, and along with another song, At Sundown, pushed the picture to considerable box-office success.

Three pictures in 1933, quickly filmed, quickly distributed, quickly successful, made Bing a box-office star of enormous importance. In one distributors' poll after another he was listed among the top ten movie stars, a young, blue-eyed, blond-haired boy challenging the superiority of such hitherto unyielding oldsters as Will Rogers, Wallace Beery, and Marie Dressier.

There was talk of combining Bing with Paramount's other big star of the moment, Mae West, but somehow the pipe-smoking-collegian conception of Bing that the movie studio had carefully fostered did not seem to go with the full bosom and bumptious bustle of The Gay Nineties and She Done Him Wrong woman. Bing was an American idol; Mae West was an American star. They both were very popular, but Bing's popularity was of more than a moment and of a soundness and a straightforwardness that then as later made the faintest sexual innuendo in his public appearances unthinkable. From the very beginning he was a family actor.

Bing began 1934 with a new radio contract, singing for

Bing 109

Woodbury soap, a completed home at Toluca Lake, and two more movies scheduled. He decided to remain in Hollywood and to use some of the fancy amounts of money coming in from his movies to build a horse-breeding ranch, twenty-five miles on the Hollywood side of San Diego. The Rancho Santa Fe boasted, when Bing was finished with it, a hundred acres, a swimming pool, stables, a track, and some beautiful old and new Spanish adobe houses.

After its completion, Bing made We're Not Dressing back at Paramount. The story, a revision of James M. Barrie's The Admirable Crichton, was the first to make any attempt really to utilize Bing's personality. Cast in the role of a sailor who slaps and slapsticks some sense into the self-assertive daughter of a millionaire, he was aided and abetted by the tart voice and knowing ways of Carole Lombard, who played the shrewish heiress. And there was some added comedy in the added presence of Burns and Allen, Leon Errol, and Ethel Merman. The big song was May I; but big as it was, it was not responsible for the picture's success. At last some recognition was paid Bing as a personality, if not as an actor. The reviews were favorable, as the prints were hastily rushed around the country to take advantage of the mounting popularity of the crooning actor.

In his best public manner, shortly after We're Not Dressing

was completed, Bing made the announcement of two more sons. The twins, Philip Lang, named after the late guitarist, and Dennis Michael, named after Bing's mother's father, were born on July 13, 1934, and were introduced to the world by way of the formal announcements that characterized most of Bing's association with the press in these early years of his career. He was still not ready to make his private life public property. And again there were knowing insiders who confided to each other that the man was "cold, shockingly reserved, without the necessary feeling for a man in his position." Just as musicians had been

The Incredible Crosby

eager to condemn him for lacking proper feeling for the departed Eddie Lang ? there were others in the entertainment business in Hollywood who were not satisfied with Bing's reserve. They expected to be taken into his confidence, and they were very much annoyed that Bing, for all of his warm greetings on the set and around Los Angeles, kept his personal life pretty much to himself. By this time, most people knew that he had assumed all of Eddie Lang's obligations and had brought Kitty Lang out to Hollywood with him, and so recriminations on that score had been killed. But there was always room for some new complaint, and the new complaints always were based upon Bing's so-called frigidity of manner and mien and his insistence upon the right to live his life outside the fan magazines, night clubs and other public places and spaces of the movie metropolis. He was getting all the publicity he or Paramount could have desired, and it was the most desirable kind of publicity photographs of his ranch, his horses, his children, and a few scenes taken at broadcasts and on the movie lot. But there simply were no extracurricular romances to report, no hair-raising stories of any kind. For all the resentment of the little people who wanted, and didn't get, Bing's confidence, he did not become involved in fist fights or verbal battles. He was a well-behaved actor and singer who went about his business, and not all the resentment in Hollywood, where such huge quantities of resentment are stored up among the frustrations and inhibitions of the movie colony, could move Bing from his well-planned, well-organized, almost reclusive life.

Bing's next movie vehicle was *She Loves Me Not*, the Howard Lindsay-Russel Grouse story about the chorus girl who seeks refuge from a pursuing gangster in the rooms of some undergraduates at Princeton. Miriam Hopkins played the embattled chorus girl, and Bing and Elliott Nugent the chief undergraduates.

Bing in

It was on the set of *She Loves Me Not* that a vital change in Bing's career was effected. His make-up man, Harry Ray, was an old friend. He had known Bing since the Coconut Grove days,

he had made him up for five of the six Mack Sennett two-reel comedies, and he had been with him through all the pictures at Paramount. For years Harry had fastened Bing's ears back, to keep the loving-cup appendages from filling too much of the screen and detracting from his romantic appeal. Usually the adhesive was applied with the aid of hot ventilators, to keep it moist until the ears were settled in place. One of the important procedures involved in this process of skin adhesion was to let the rubber behind the ears dry for a few minutes after its application. On the way to the *She Loves Me Not* set one day, Bing fiddled with his ears a bit; they didn't seem securely in place. Harry patted them a couple of times and then assured Bing that they were all right.

The day's shooting was to be confined to Bing's singing *Love in Bloom*.

"Quiet!" yelled the director. "Everybody quiet!"

The cameras swung into place, the microphone was lowered over Bing, and with properly romantic expression he launched into the effective strains of the Leo Robin-Ralph Rainger song.

At the fourth bar, Bing noticed a few guarded smiles on the part of prop men and electricians. At eight bars he saw that the cameramen were having a hard time restraining their laughter. At sixteen the whole crew was going, and the laughter was audible. Even the director was rocking back and forth in his canvas chair. Bing stopped.

"What's wrong?" he yelled.

"One of your ears popped, Bing," Harry explained.

Bing started to yell at Harry as if it were his fault, and then he stopped and laughed as he felt of his ears, one out, one in.

"Harry, this is it," Bing announced. "From now on I'm put-

112 *The Incredible Crosby*

ting my ears back in place. If people don't like my ears, they don't have to come to see my pictures."

And that's why a few avid readers of Sidney Skolsky's column, anxious to supply the diminutive "Don't-get-me-wrong-I-love-Hollywood" columnist with movie boners, cited the fact that Bing's ears were held close to his head in part of the movie and were in their natural position, spread-eagled away from his head, in the rest. It was almost as if the director were playing the game the movie's title suggested, with Bing's ears: "She loves me, she loves me not, she loves me. . . ."

It was on the set of this picture that the first vigorous atten-

tion was paid by newspapermen to Bing's dressing habits. One day a newspaperman came to visit Bing in his dressing room.

"See you in a moment," Bing told him. "I've got to get dressed for a party. Stupid business, but I've got to get dressed."

Bing put on a blue suit Harry Ray held out his blue polka-dot tie for him. Bing slipped on black-and-white shoes. Then he sat down in a chair to talk to the newspaperman. He pulled his trouser legs up to make himself comfortable.

"Quite the picture of sartorial elegance, don't you think?" Bing asked the newspaperman.

"Most impressive."

"You really look swell," Harry Ray added his compliment, "But what goes with your socks?"

"Socks?" Bing asked. "What's wrong with my socks? They're blue, for a blue suit. Right?"

"No, Bing," Harry explained. "One is green."

"One is green? Well, what the hell. I've got socks on, haven't I?"

And perhaps a little disturbed at the disclosure, he excused himself, telling the newspaperman he would be back in a minute.

Bing 113

While Bing was gone, Harry told the man, "And there you have Bing Crosby. He's just as casual as that about almost everything. You know how I got to be his make-up man?"

The question was rhetorical. He explained, "One day, walking along the Paramount lot, I bumped into Bing. He remembered me from our days together at Mack Sennett. 'What are you doing here?' Bing asked me. I explained that I was doing some make-up work. 'Do you know anything about make-up?' he asked me. 'Hell, no/ I said. 'Good/ Bing said. 'You can do my make-up. I don't know anything about acting/ "

She Loves Me Not was as successful as the five earlier Crosby pictures; the Woodbury show was another big radio program for Bing; and his Brunswick records continued to sell very well. It was obvious that Bing had become an institution, and it was time to institutionalize Bing fully. He had several secretaries, and Everett was kept busy turning down more offers than he accepted. He and Bing decided to call the rest of the family in on the Crosby enterprise. They sent for Larry, who had been a wandering newspaperman for some years around Washington and Montana, to take charge of Bing's publicity, public re-

lations of all kinds, and some of the managerial end of the business. They asked Bing's father to come down from Spokane and take over the accounting of Bing's growing fortune.

"Where will we house all this?" Bing asked. "Got to have the family put on a good front."

"Let's build a building," Everett suggested.

"A building it will be. With a couple of impressive offices and maybe some paneling, we can really look as though we've gone Hollywood," Bing agreed.

Land was duly purchased on the section of Sunset Boulevard known as the Strip, that stretch of land within Los Angeles that belongs to the county and not the city and is thus set apart by

114 The Incredible Crosby

this affectionate name. A three-story stucco building was erected on the site, with yellow boards to shine gaudily during the nine months of California sunshine, with the top floor set aside for the Crosby enterprise, and, sure enough, with paneling in the offices. Here the thousands of letters from the hundreds of Crosby fan clubs were filed but not forgotten, Dad Crosby beamed at his reunited sons, and Bing's business could be taken so well in hand that he hardly ever had to, or wanted to, make an appearance at the offices. Like most of Bing's other enterprises, this one, too, was successful. The building better than supported itself by the number of offices that were rented out, and the land was purchased and the structure erected before Los Angeles real-estate values boomed. Bing was incorporated; a larynx, two blue eyes, and a well-padded figure had, in the language of the race tracks, been parlayed into a million-dollar company.

The importance of Bing's third and last 1934 movie, *Here Is My Heart*, was hardly to be found in the picture itself. The movie marked a return to the Paramount stock-company pattern; and though the story gave Bing some opportunity to display his talents as a comedian, the songs once more carried the day. But the picture was important, for following *We're Not Dressing* and *She Loves Me Not*, it cinched again Bing's appearance in the box-office *Big Ten*, and its songs were important enough to make an impressive debut for him on a new record label and for the new record label itself.

The label was Decca, an inoffensive blue circle on the traditional black disc with a hole in the center. The man behind the label was Jack Kapp, who had fought long and effectively for Bing at Brunswick, Jack, an astute record man, had made plans for his new company for quite a while. He had signed an agreement with the Decca Company of England, long established in that country as an important vehicle for popular songs, and the

Bmg 115

British outlet for several Continental firms, like Polydor in France and Odeon in Germany. He began to sign up Americans, beginning with Bing, filling out his list with such phonograph-record giants as Guy Lombardo and the Mills Brothers.

s

J

ACK KAPP LEFT Brunswick Records in 1933 when that company refused to elevate him to its presidency. He had reached the eminence of the position of recording director with Brunswick in 1930, at the age of twenty-nine. After four years he felt another move was indicated, and the only move available was to the very top of the organization. Jack ate, slept, walked, and talked records. Record salesman son of a record salesman father, he was a shrewd record merchandiser by his early twenties. When he left Brunswick he had enough experience behind him as a traveling salesman of the grooved disc and as a director of recordings to make auspicious plans for his own company.

The first big step Jack Kapp took when he formed American Decca was to concentrate production on 35-cent records. His second was to move the bulk of his manufacturing facilities be-

116

Bing 117

hind one artist, Bing Crosby. He had other hit artists when he started, notably Lombardo; he added others in the years to come; but always the leading Decca name was Bing Crosby, and Jack did everything to maintain a policy that would ensure that position for Bing and assure Decca's No. 1 position as the firm that owned the world's No. 1 voice. His loyalty to Bing was reciprocated; in spite of fantastic offers from other companies, in the face of remarkable opportunities to form his own recording outfit, Bing remained with Decca and Jack Kapp.

Bing's Decca debut was made with the aid of the songs from *Here Is My Heart*, three of which were big hits for him and the movie *Love Is Just around The Corner*, June in January, and *With Every Breath I Take*. The movie itself was reasonably entertaining, set on the French Riviera, presenting Kitty Carlisle and Roland Young as indigent nobility and Bing as a tune-

ful, titillating waiter. Alison Skipworth's voice boomed across the screen in answer to Roland Young's polished whispers, and Bing offset a heavily mascaraed make-up with his easy handling of a few better than easy lines and the entirely engaging songs he had to sing. The phonograph-record boom was beginning in late 1934 and early 1935, when his first Decca sides appeared with the Here Is My Heart songs. Jack Kapp's well-organized distribution of these records went some of the way toward assuring that boom and the further popularity of Bing Crosby.

In late 1934 and through a big part of 1935, Bing continued to broadcast for Woodbury soap, at the handsome weekly stipend of \$6,000 and with the pleasant knowledge that his weekly half hour was all his to do with as he wanted. He used the bands of Georgie Stoll, a little man with a large shock of hair who was making a movie career for himself, and Jimmie Grier, with whom Bing had worked in the Gus Arnheim days. On the Woodbury program, Bing first became aware of the intelligent use that could be made of small vocal groups back of him. He

ii 8 The Incredible Crosby

used both the Boswell Sisters and the Mills Brothers for this harmonizing purpose, striking a semi-jazz note in his work with the three girls from New Orleans and the four boys who made a nation jump to their vocal impressions of a small instrumental jazz combination.

During 1935 Bing made three more movies. He made a brief appearance in The Big Broadcast of 1936, another of Paramount's sprawling presentations of their contract players, good, bad, and indifferent, which was most noteworthy for Bing's singing of I Wished on the Moon. The song itself provided a vehicle not only for Bing but for another recording artist and another record company. It proved to be excellent material for one of the best of the early records of the swing era, a "date" record, that is, a record on which the performers are gathered from various bands because of their several jazz excellences. This record was under Teddy Wilson's name, and the performers included, in addition to Teddy on piano, one John Jackson on clarinet, a nom de danse for Benny Goodman, who, because of his contractual obligations to Victor, was not allowed to appear on Teddy's Brunswick record.

By 1935 the songs Bing sang were automatically the songs America sang and its musicians played. It was important for song pluggers to get Bing to sing their songs; for when he did, they were almost certain to become the country's top hits, not perhaps as certain in 1935 as ten years later of automatic acceptance by everybody, but already in that earlier year sure to receive the earnest attention of other professionals. If Bing sang a song, other singers showed immediate interest. His taste and his importance as an arbiter of taste were both exemplary and style setting. Everybody, from the leaders of small bands playing Saturday nights in the back rooms of America's saloons

to the major bandsmen who played in the important hotels and ballrooms and night clubs, looked up when Bing opened his

Bing 119

mouth to sell some new words and music and tell some new tune's story.

Mississippi, made in early 1935, had three good tunes, *Soon, Down by The River*, and *It's Easy to Remember*, just as *Here Is My Heart* had had. But where the earlier bit of froth never proved to be any more than airy nonsense set to a good score, the river-boat story was superior in almost every respect. It was a remake of an old Buddy Rogers story, with William Claude Fields added to tell tall tales of his early days as an Indian hunter and contrast Bing's soft singing elegance with his robust, ringing bawdiness. Joan Bennett was Bing's romantic foil, and an expensive production was built around Bing, W.C., and Joan.

In 1935, Bing made *Two for Tonight*, which boasted five big songs *I Wish I Were Aladdin*, *From the Top of Your Head to the Tip of Your Toes*, *It Takes Two to Make a Bargain*, *Without a Word of Warning*, and the title tune. This was one of the big scores of 1935 or any other movie year. The movie itself was quickly dismissed, even by the *New York Daily News*, notoriously friendly to all Hollywood product, as "such flimsy nonsense." Bing, Joan Bennett, Mary Boland, Lynne Overman, Thelma Todd, and some minor players traipsed through a shoddy plot about stranded Thespians taking over a millionaire's large Long Island estate. Fortunately, there were the songs.

Bing finished movie making in 1935 with another expensive production. It was the movie version of Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*, in which Bing, Charlie Ruggles, and Ethel Merman played a group of light-fingered, light-mannered thieves, working Atlantic ocean liners. Ida Lupino was in for the occasional clinches, and the songs were the Broadway musical's great hits, *Anything Goes*, *I Get a Kick out of You*, *You're the Top*, etc.

During the summer of 1935, Bing followed the horses around

120 *The Incredible Crosby*

the country, from the tracks in Mexico to Saratoga Springs in New York; and when he made his New York trip, he stopped in at Ben Marden's *Riviera* to pay a surprise visit to his old boss, Paul Whiteman, on Pops' opening night. The scene was worthy of the most fanciful backstage movie backslapping, lusty handshakes, tear-dimmed eyes, and a general atmosphere of "Hail the conquering hero."

When the year ended, Bing and Paul Whiteman were reunited briefly again. Whiteman had been in charge of the Kraft Music Hall, the Thursday night variety program of an hour's length on NBC. Its sponsors decided they wanted to keep the program's musical emphasis but somehow lighten its tone. There was a conspicuous difference in weight between Paul Whiteman and Bing Crosby, both as men and as musical composers. They elected to replace the rotund leader with the less meaty singer. On December 5, 1935, Bing and Paul shared the Kraft Music Hall program for one night, the singer crooning from Hollywood with the assistance of Jimmy Dorsey's orchestra, the bandleader thwacking the air with his long baton from New York. The week after, Bing took over in full force and made the force of his personality fully felt.

The trend of his last years of broadcasting on CBS for Woodbury and Chesterfield, during which some inkling of the Crosby personality had been allowed to ooze out between songs, was continued more forcibly in the Kraft Music Hall programs. A writer with the curious name of Carroll Carroll displayed even more curious talent. He actually caught Bing's personality, giving him back his own lines; they sprang right out of his mouth onto Carroll's typewriter. The continuity was also so loosely woven that it was always possible for Bing to ad-lib more than a few occasional "ands," "ifs," and "buts" and to give added life to one of the most lively radio programs ever organized.

From the very beginning, the show had astonishing balance

Bing 121

and remarkable maturity for American radio. The comedy for its first few years was in the long hands and bilious bazooka barks of Bob Burns. Burns, an Arkansas hillbilly comedian, traded slow lines of a pseudomoron character with Bing's fast, polysyllabic speech and semiprofessorial, semiham-actor delivery. The music was supplied by Jimmy Dorsey's band, a pert little combination consisting of most of the men Jimmy and his brother Tommy had led in New York before a fight over rehearsal time on a song had broken up their dually led organization. There was even a mite of jazz from time to time, hastened to the microphone by Freddie Slack's piano and Jimmy's clarinet and alto, but the general tenor of the program's music was set by Bing's baritone. And Bing's baritone, through never Asleep in the Deep or On the Road to Mandalay, was confined more and more to the straight and narrow path of the No. 1 plug popular song and the standard classics of American musical comedy and film composers.

Carroll Carroll (the first name was always his; the second was originally Weinschenk) had to overcome some timidity on Bing's part when he first took over from Paul Whiteman on the Music Hall

*Tm a singer and a pretty bad actor," Bing explained. "I

don't think I'll do so well with a lot of lines."

"Let me try," Carroll suggested.

Carroll, a very small man (just five feet tall), followed Bing around closely during the first six months of the program, listening carefully to the singer's speech, making some notes, remembering other lines. He was small enough not to be noticed when Bing was busy with a song or a visitor. Not until the six months were up did Bing call him by his name. After that opening period, the Crosby-Carroll relationship warmed up. A working routine was established. Each Thursday, the day of the program, he and Bing lunched at the Brown Derby on Vine Street,

122 The Incredible Crosby

a block away from the NBC studio where the program was aired.

"We'll make it in the side room." Bing had made the first appointment. He wanted to avoid the main dining room of the Derby, crowded as it was with show-business people, many out to impress the others by having their names called for telephone messages during lunch. Bing felt it was ostentatious to make "a grand entrance through the center door into the main room."

Bing seldom changed Carroll's scripts. He would occasionally suggest a substitute line, a new ending, a different twist for a gag. He ad-libbed changes, but rarely by subtracting, almost always by adding. He and Carroll both liked polysyllabic words, florid diction, particularly the Juxtaposition of slang and a choice, precise, proper vocabulary. They worked well together.

There were some unwritten rules. Bing's jokes had to be plausible. "No falling out of windows," Carroll once explained, "or one lung talking to another." It was program policy to present opera singers like Feodor Chaliapin, Lauritz Melchior, Crete Stueckgold, and Rose Bampton, concert artists like Alexander Brailowsky, Harold Bauer, and Jose Iturbi, along with Connee Boswell and Mary Martin, Duke Ellington and Art Tatum, any and all movie stars and radio comedians. The longhairs were shortened; the crew-cuts were lengthened. Men and women from the opera and concert stage were humanized; jazz musicians and rowdy comics were treated with dignity, presented as artists in their own right. The result was a humanization all around that did well both for the program and for its guests.

Rose Bampton was presented with such un pompous, relaxed warmth that college jazz enthusiasts reacted with pleasure. She was astonished to find a rousing welcome at universities on her concert circuit. At Louisiana State, she was overwhelmed by the demonstration that she received. Later she discovered that the

Bing 123

college men, fascinated by her air appearances with Bing, had wired him: "HOW SHALL WE TREAT BAMPTON?" Bing had answered: "GIVE HER THE KEY TO THE CITY." And that's exactly what they had done.

Carroll explained some of his method after it had been developed by a few years of work with Bing. "Give him something he can see himself in. Bing plays Bing on the air, and certain things are appropriate. Every person has a cadence, and when I talk to a person I try to capture that cadence." He explained further how that treatment worked with several of the singers who had appeared for regular periods opposite Bing on the Kraft show. "When Mary Martin was Bing's air partner, she played the wife a wife a little bit sharper than her husband, because Mary is a sophisticated young woman. Trudy Erwin was made the mousy type, not meaning that Trudy is actually mousy, but that she's a soft personality." When, in 1944, Marilyn Maxwell took over, "we scripted her as Bing's sweetheart because one imagines her better that way than as his wife. She is a ready and willing girl, but Bing was cast more in the role of a diffident wolf."

There wasn't much one could or needed to do with Bob Burns, who occupied the comedy spot with Whiteman and was held over when Bing took over. The large rustic wit actually was born in Van Buren, Arkansas, the setting for most of his tall stories; the relatives with whom he peopled his tales were real, though most of the names (for example, Grandpa Snazzy) were not. He had led a normal rural life in the wilds of Arkansas. At sixteen, by chance he had invented the bazooka, his weird-sounding blowing instrument. One day, while playing around with a local band in a plumbing shop in Van Buren he picked up a couple of pieces of pipe, stuck a big whisky funnel in the end, blew lustily, and lo! he had made the first bazooka, named onomatopoeically after its sound. He left college for a minstrel

124 The Incredible Crosby

show, served as a gunnery sergeant overseas in the First World War, and came back to vaudeville and eventually to pictures. The Rudy Vallee program served as a beginning in radio; but not until he and Bing found each other did he really achieve stardom. The contrast of their voices and personalities, even in straight lines, called forth laugh after laugh. And it was with real affection that Bing introduced "the Scourge of Arkansas" each week for the first three years of his stewardship of the Music Hall, "'Robin Burns, who will discourse further on his Arkansas relations."

The list of guest stars on the Music Hall during its first six years (after its seventh, it was shortened from a full hour to a

half, and its nature was radically changed a great variety show became a good musical program with comedy relief) reads like a Who's Who of show business. The list occupies 19 columns of 28 names each. Just leafing through it you come up with such contrasting personalities and talents as Louis Armstrong and John Barrymore, Joe E. Brown and Rose Bampton, Donald Budge and Salvatore Baccaloni, Ina Claire and Jackie Cooper, Tommy Dorsey and Emanuel Feuermann, Joe DiMaggio and Kirsten Flagstad, the Coolidge String Quartet and the Ink Spots, Boris Karloff and Lotte Lehmann, Gregor Piatigorsky and Zasu Pitts, Martha Raye and Leopold Stokowski, Helen Traubel and Joe Venuti. It was this astonishing catholicity of taste that gave the program its unusual flavor. The Kraft Music Hall under Bing Crosby didn't merely run the gamut it hopped, skipped, and jumped it.

Usually, when the average fan associates his hero or heroine with the roles they play he is liable to wild distortions of fact, to horrible misimpressions of personality and eventual disenchantment. More and more, as his movie career advanced, Bing's personality was triumphing over the stereotyped roles assigned him. In his radio work, after December 5, 1935, he could be held

Bing 125

fully responsible for his air opinions and impressions. And his fans could believe what they heard. The Bing Crosby who was equally at ease with Louis Armstrong, Salvatore Baccaloni, John Barrymore, Joe DiMaggio, Duke Ellington, and Leopold Stokowski was the real Bing Crosby. His sponsors, their advertising agency, and NBC, writer Carroll Carroll, producer Cal Kuhel, and all their associates could be proud of whatever part they played in bringing his languorous, articulate wit and affable learning, along with his unavoidably winning singing, to the millions of American radio listeners.

9

THE GREAT THAW began in 1936. With the appearance in Bing's life of Johnny Burke and John Scott Trotter, some of the latter-day warmth and softness of character began to emerge in Bing's public personality. Both men figured prominently in Bing's music thereafter Johnny as his regular lyric writer, first with Arthur Johnston and Jimmy Monaco, later with Jimmy Van Heusen; John Scott as Bing's orchestra leader, both as close friends.

John Scott had been Hal Kemp's arranger for more than eleven years, playing piano with his band and doing most of the arranging after he quit the keyboard. In the winter of 1935, he and Hal decided to "call it quits," as John Scott describes it.

John had never been farther west than Denver in all those years with the band, a rare limitation of travels for a dance band, and
126

Bing 127

so, ostensibly on vacation, he came out West to see what that part of the country looked like. He traveled up and down the Coast and, in early summer, settled down in Los Angeles.

Johnny Burke, a good friend from the East, met him one night, and they sat down to talk over old and new times.

"You know, this Crosby's a remarkable fellow/ 7 Johnny told John Scott.

"I'm aware of that, Johnny. I knew him casually when I was with Kemp, and during those jam sessions we used to play at Barney Gallant's in the Village on Saturdays you remember those matinees that we did when the squares left Bing was an occasional contributor or visitor. I didn't see much of him after that, but I have remained aware of his remarkable qualities."

"No doubt," Johnny confirmed. "Well, I think you should do something with him."

"Nice thought."

"No, I mean really. There's some orchestration to be done for Pennies from Heaven, and I'm going to talk you into it."

Johnny, who was doing the tunes for the movie with Arthur Johnston, talked John Scott into it first and then went to see Bing.

"John Scott Trotter? Sure I remember him from the Hal Kemp records," Bing told Johnny.

Johnny quite properly had counted on Bing's knowing all about John Scott. Bing had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, knowledge of all things in general, or as much as he could absorb, and certainly of every name and achievement of every name in the entertainment world.

Johnny continued. "Make a good arranger for Pennies, don't you think?"

"First rate," Bing agreed. "Got to have him."

And so John Scott went to work with his friend Johnny Burke on their friend Bing Crosby's Pennies from Heaven.

The two Johns were delighted to spend time with each other and decided that their friendship was sufficient to tide them over the joint tenancy of an ornate Spanish house. There was little strain in their friendship except on those occasions when Johnny came home drunk. John Scott hated to get tight himself, and he was no admirer of inebriation in other people. He used to scold Johnny with all the intensity of a doting mother, softened with a great deal more humor than a mother ever shows.

One night Johnny came home drunk. The house creaked, all of it creaked, and, like all the old gags about drunks, it creaked twice as loudly at the tread of an intoxicated foot. Johnny followed the old gag to the last shoelace, taking off his shoes and creeping up the stairs, taking half an hour to get from the hall to the bedroom. He forgot about John, in his happiness at having arrived, and got heavily into bed. The three-quarter bed he fell into was John's, not his, and the large musician was quickly aroused. He seized Johnny with a war whoop and threw him up and down a half-dozen times, bouncing as much drunkenness out of him as he could, and accompanying the bounces with the simulated wrath of Andrew Volstead.

Incidents like this didn't really mar their relationship. They merely served John Scott as conversational gambits with which to oppose Johnny's kidding about his fantastic kitchen adventures.

John Scott was always more than just a bachelor who cooked. He made weird combinations of food and insisted upon preparing his own ice cream and using only the proper ingredients.

"**When you make coconut ice cream," John Scott insisted, "you use the mflk of the coconut itself." And he did.

There was usually something cooking in the kitchen three-day soups, overnight stews, and complicated other courses to fill out the Pantagruelian meals John Scott prepared for his Gargantuan self.

Bing 129

Pennies from Heaven was a successful independent venture for Bing, and not the least part of its success was the title song, which Johnny wrote for it. It was released through Columbia Pictures, and its success encouraged Bing to continue to make independent pictures thereafter, usually at the rate of one a year, an important clause he reserved for himself in all his future contracts with Paramount.

As a result of their work together in Pennies from Heaven, John Scott and Johnny became close Crosby friends, becoming anchor men in the delightful minstrel show more generally known as the Crosby Circle, John Scott's anchorage heavier only because of an avoirdupois considerably larger than that of

the lithe Johnny.

At Bing's occasional parties, Johnny was introduced by Crosby as "a rare entertainer, a man who can reproduce the seamy side of life on the keyboard, for this, my friends, is a barrel-house pianist." And actually, in the great jazz tradition, Johnny had played in a few of the Midwest's more distinguished bordellos. He came up from Chicago's tough stockyard district, went to the University of Wisconsin, and, after a few adventures in brothel piano, joined up with Chicago bands. He played with the legendary Husk O'Hare band, in which the cornet chair was held down for a short while by Bix Beiderbecke. The high spot of his early musical career was recording a piano roll for Sears Roebuck. He was a good piano-roll pianist. He had learned a few left-hand tricks, filling in a heavy bass in the skeletal arrangements played by Husk O'Hare and His Genial Gentlemen of the Air, in order to make a small band sound larger.

He began to write songs in the late twenties. And by 1930 he'd done the music (not the words!) for the successful Yours and Mine, with George Little providing the lyrics. He made a quick trip to Hollywood that same year to write the music for

130 The Incredible Crosby

George Little's words for a Fox musical called Let's Go Places. The star was Dixie Lee. He had been engaged because, as a hot pianist, it was assumed that his music would have some of the spirit necessary for Dixie, who was generally considered a hot singer in those days. There were no hot writers who were hot pianists, too, and this gave Johnny a special dispensation. Dixie had complained bitterly that she didn't have her kind of music. Johnny gave her some measures that fitted well with her personality.

Between that Hollywood trip and his permanent settling down on the Coast in 1936, he did some successful writing with Harold Spina, switching from music to lyrics. His biggest songs were The Beat of My Heart and Annie Doesn't Live Here Any More. Then came Pennies from Heaven and almost all of the following Crosby pictures.

Johnny's association with Bing provided him not only with a larger, lustier career but with a wife as well. One of Bing's three other 1936 pictures was Rhythm on the Range, which was still in production when Pennies from Heaven was being put together. As a publicity tie-in with the picture, Paramount organized a Bing Crosby beauty contest to pick the most beautiful cowgirl in the West, the beauty with chaps and spurs to be known as Miss Western States. From Tucumcari, New Mexico, Bessie Patterson arrived as the winner and duly played a bit in the movie. The movie was an amusing combination of legitimate Western atmosphere and Broadway wisdom and wise-cracks. Bob Burns was brought over from the Kraft Music Hour,

and his comedy was matched with the loud voice, large mouth, and active body of Martha Raye, in a memorable scene around a campfire, during which Johnny Mercer's I'm an Old Cowhand was sung, played, and stomped. Louis Prima gargled a few lines and played some trumpet, and Bessie Patterson provided some legitimate local color. For her bit, Tucumcari, New Mexico,

Bing

did its best. On the local theatre marquee, she received top billing: "Bessie Patterson in Rhythm on the Range with Bing Crosby."

Johnny met Bessie at a Paramount business office and found he had more than business to talk about with her. He stayed close to her during her remaining years as a student, saw to it that she went to the University of Southern California, and thus made sure that she was in Los Angeles forever after. When she graduated, a specialist in dramatics, cinematography, and the quick rib, Johnny married her. Her specialization in the last nearly matched his it had to be he had so mercilessly ribbed her during those college years.

One day, for example, Johnny provided Bessie with some interesting material for her music class.

"You know," he told her, "there never was a greater singer than Skinnay Ennis. He was once a great basso, but his voice went bad, and so he had to adopt that whispering style to keep from cracking his tonsils completely. But he really was once a magnificent opera singer."

In all seriousness Bessie confided this information to her class and was roared down by the resultant laughter, which taught her that Johnny could not always be believed and that it was more fun to play along with him in his ribbing than to try to fight it. When he pointed out a little nondescript man with a faded look as "the man who really writes Irving Berlin's songs." it was better to think twice before accepting or rejecting the statement, For the "little nondescript man with a faded look" turned out, to Bessie's bewilderment, to be Irving Berlin.

Working on the picture with Bing, John Scott discovered what a quick study the singing star was. He noticed that he picked up tunes in a few minutes and that, though he might be reading a newspaper while the orchestra ran through an arrangement for the first time, he had paid sufficient attention

The Incredible Crosby

so that, when his turn came to sing with the band, he made no mistakes or very few. In recording the title tune from Pennies from Heaven, John Scott expected to explain some of the phras-

ing and the mood to Bing. But the singer just picked up his music and went to work, and his performance was finished and fine, and his phrasing right, and the mood precisely what John Scott had expected to explain to him. He noticed that Bing didn't read music but had a facility for following the notes; that is, his eye would go up and down with the raising and lowering of the melody, and his ear was as accurate as any musician's could be expected to be.

One afternoon about one o'clock John Scott finished recording the Pennies from Heaven score, and at three o'clock that same afternoon he was on the way to New York to take up a new job with the American Record Company. He stayed with the company, which issued records on the Brunswick, Columbia, and Vocalion labels, right through the spring of 1937, making records with all of the Columbia, Brunswick, and Vocalion artists, finding his work with Raymond Scott and Duke Ellington especially interesting.

"The sessions with Duke were absolute revelations," John sums up.

On June 1, 1937, he received a wire from Bing and Larry Crosby: "CAN YOU BE HERE 21 ST. DORSET LEAVING. YOU'RE TO

TAKE OVER MUSIC ON KRAFT SHOW."

On June 21, John Scott walked into Larry Crosby's office, said hello to Bing, and a few minutes later left for his summer vacation. He was set as the Kraft Music Hall director.

When the Kraft program got under way again that fall, John Scott was astonished to watch Bing go through his casual paces. Sometimes he would finish a song at rehearsal. Sometimes he would gag his way through it. Sometimes in the first eight bars, or the second, or the third, or the fourth, he would find a

Bing 133

friendly face among the onlookers, to whom he would slip a few words, a wink, a smile, or he might break off the song altogether to make conversation.

His revelations of erudition were as startling as they were unrelated to situation or people. At one rehearsal Cal Kuhel, the program's producer, who was given to strange haircuts, arrived with a new one. Cal was sitting in the control room, pacing the rehearsal, oblivious of anything but the construction of his program. Bing was at the mike, ready to go into his song. He looked up at Cal behind the heavy glass of the control-room window and noticed the new haircut.

"Oh, my God!" Bing screamed, "Jean Cocteau!"

Cal looked a great deal like the French playwright, novelist,

and artist, but there was no reason to expect that Bing would be familiar with how the French playwright, novelist, and artist looked and notice the connection. But he did.

At other times Bing would listen to somebody explain the virtues of an opera and in particular the stunning performance of an opera singer. He would listen attentively, puncturing the conversation with a few "you don't say's" and "realty's" and "how interesting's." He indicated by these polite interruptions that he really knew nothing about the opera at all. However, when the conversation was finished, Bing would turn on his heel and walk away, whistling one of the more obscure arias from the opera.

In 1936, while he was busy with his new radio program, with his warmer and fuller personal life and the load of pictures that fell on his shoulders that year, Bing found time to organize the Del Mar Turf Club. The club was set in motion by the erection of fair grounds at Del Mar, near the Santa Fe ranch, a logical site, Bing decided, for a handsome new race track. He gathered his friends around him Johnny Burke; Pat O'Brien, the movie actor; Charles Howard, the eminent horseman; Lloyd Bacon,

Incredible Crosby

the director; and Oliver Hardy, the heavy half of the Laurel and Hardy comedy team.

"Friends." Bing explained, "I think this is a logical place for a fine new race track, and, to keep it friendly, I don't see why we don't incorporate as the Del Mar Turf Club and get to work to provide some pretty earth for the nags."

The incorporation was quickly accomplished, with Bing as president and O'Brien, Bacon, Howard, brother Everett, Johnny Burke, and Hardy as directors. In March, 1937, the first meeting was held at the "pretty earth" by the sea, just across the road that runs down the California coast past Del Mar to the Mexican border.

When Pennies from Heaven was finished, Bing went on to a picture that provided a handsome vacation land for him, as well as an important change of material and general story line. The movie was Waikiki Wedding, set in Hawaii, and overrun with Hawaiians, all real, none of the Joe Cook variety. Bing roistered through the film caparisoned in typical Crosby garb gay Hawaiian shorts, a yachtsman's cap, occasionally a tee shirt with a denim jacket, and, like the Hawaiians in the picture, a large share of leis.

The story was typically thin, serving chiefly as a vehicle for Bing's singing and the comedy of Bob Burns and Martha Raye, brought over from Rhythm on the River to continue their bazookaing and bawling, and with Shirley Ross to play the romantic lead and offer Bing singing support, as Kitty Carlisle

had in Here Is My Heart. The movie's songs were in the Hawaiian groove. Blue Hawaii was a conspicuous success, and a song Harry Owens had written, which Bing had heard Owens do with his Royal Hawaiian orchestra in Honolulu, Sweet Leilani, took movie, radio, and record audiences by storm when the picture was released in 1937.

When Bing added the Hawaiian gambit to his chessman's

Bing 135

galaxy of musical moves, he surprised no one. In and out of his profession, Bing was expected to sing anything and everything that came up; and if he chose to do the twangy tunes of the Islanders, it was no more surprising than the fact that he ran so effectively through the sing-song lilt of Western songs. The Last Roundup had been a big hit for him just before he left Brunswick, and he continued to record Western songs for Decca, sang a few in Rhythm on the Range, and with pleasant frequency broke the possible song monotony of his radio program with dogie lyrics. A song composed and sung by one of the most distinguished of Calypso singers, the Lion, and called simply Bing Crosby, summed up not only the naive reaction of the West Indian performer but the reaction of most of Bing's audience as well

Of all the world's greatest singers

that I have heard and seen
On the movie screen,
Of all the worlds greatest singers

that I have heard and seen
On the movie screen,
Lawrence Tibbett and Nelson Eddy,
Donald Novis, Boles and Morton Downey,
Kenny Baker and Rudy Vdlee,
But the crooning prodigy is Bing Crosby.
They love the way he sings with

his very heart and soul y
Which captivates the world.
His millions of listeners never fail to rejoice
About his golden voice,
They love to hear his la-da-de-da

[Whistling]

So sweetly and with such harmony
Thrilling the world with his melody.

136 The Incredible Crosby

Now mention must be made of

Bing's romantic life
Centered on his wife.

Her eyes are like the soft sylphs of poetic dreams,
Her smiles are like the moonbeams.
A former star, -we know she can sing,
But now her voice she has reserved

for her sons and Bing.
So, so happy must be Bing Crosby
That he has married a beauty like Dixie Lee.
And now I wonder if you heard him

singing that song
May I Be the Only One to Say I?
And yet I'm wondering if you heard again
Everytime It Rains, It Rains Pennies from Heaven.
But Love Thy Neighbor was the

most thrilling song,

And Git Along, Little Dogie, Git Along.
So sweetly and with such harmony
Thrilling the world with his melody.

Perhaps to prove that Bing not only was versatile but could be held down to movie trivia and triumph over the trite as he did with the original and effective, Paramount cast him next in a cinematic cream puff called Double or Nothing. Martha Raye was back, and Andy Devine added his hoarse voice, Benny Baker his dulcet New York tones, to keep the comedy moving. Mary Carlisle was in again for romance, and Bing had some more effective songs to sing. Johnny Burke, who was a Crosby regular by the end of 1936, was writing the second of his "philosophical songs" for Bing. Johnny explained it thus:

"In Pennies from Heaven I had to capture some of a point of view, a philosophy. I had to write a popular song lyric which said a little bit more than I love you or you love me and employed more than the obvious clichés of popular songs. After

Bing 137

that the most successful device was to listen to Bing's conversation and either take my phrases directly from him or pattern some after his way of putting words together. Such a song and song title was The Moon Got in My Eyes for Double or Nothing."

Johnny continued to write that kind of song for his next few pictures. One of the most effective was My Heart Is Taking Lessons in his very next, Dr. Rhythm. Dr. Rhythm, in addition to Johnny's song, written with Jimmy Monaco, offered Mary

Carlisle and Andy Devine again, with Beatrice Lillie carrying most of the picture's comic distinction, and Louis Armstrong and his band providing some musical highlights. Bing played a singing policeman in this movie, which proved an acceptable box office attraction, though hardly an important Crosby film.

The set of the film was more important than the film itself, for it was on that set that Louis Armstrong, asked to name his favorite vocalists, replied, "Bing. That's all, man!"

And it was on the Dr. Rhythm set too that Bing brought his objections to elaborate make-up to a head. The director came up to Harry Ray one day and said, "Harry, we've got to do something. Bing looks dirty in the rashes. His face is too different from the girls'."

"Okay," Harry replied, "I'll talk to him."

Harry dutifully went after Bing.

"How about make-up?" he inquired.

Bing answered, "I've done two pictures without it. I look fine, young, healthy. Let's keep it that way."

"Look, Bing," Harry explained, "there's a new kind of make-up that's been invented pancake, it's called."

"Sounds good," Bing commented.

"Good?" Harry enthused. "It's sensational! You can put it on in two minutes, and it washes off in two minutes with just soap and water."

138 The Incredible Crosby

"Okay, Harry. Show me how it works. I'm a man who'll listen to a man. Put it on yourself, and let me see how it works/*

Harry wet a sponge, dipped it into the pancake box, and put on the make-up, with assistance from Bing, who insisted on dabbing on extra quantities. When the make-up man's face was well powdered, Bing held him at arm's length.

"Harry," he said, "that looks marvelous. I want you to wear it tomorrow and wear it all through the picture. I'm impressed with pancake make-up."

Harry was stopped for a moment. Then he thought of a way that might conceivably shift the make-up from his face to Bing's.

"Bing," he said, "you're a sportsman, and I'm a sportsman. Let me prevail on your sportsmanship."

"What's the proposition?"

"Tomorrow Gonzaga comes down to play Loyola at Gilmore Stadium. If your boys win, forget about pancake make-up and I'll wear it all through the picture. But if Loyola wins, you'll wear it from now on."

Bing extended his hand. "It's a deal, Harry."

Loyola won, 13 to 7, and Bing came to work early the following morning, dabbed on his pancake make-up, and has worn it ever since.

Gonzaga's football fortunes did not match Bing's personal success, but the college was on the American map to stay as a result of the enormous success of Harry Lillis Crosby, who never forgot the discipline and the security of his classical Catholic education. In interview after interview he referred to his alma mater; and though several interviewers confused St. Aloysius Gonzaga in their orthography with a legendary Mexican character by the name of Gonzales, and some spelled it "Gonzuga" and some "Gunzoga," it was considerably better known, and

Bing 139

often by its right name, as a result of the heavy impact Bing Crosby made upon the American consciousness.

In October of 1937, Bing went up to Spokane for an important convocation of the Gonzaga faculty and students. He was to receive an honorary degree. All of Spokane came out to receive Bing, and the college put on its best show in preparation for the conferring of the Doctor of Philosophy in Music. Father Leo Robinson, then president of Gonzaga, had attended school some of the years when Bing and Larry and Everett had been there, and so the presentation had more than just academic importance.

With a considerable show of sentiment, Father Robinson hung the academic ribbon, significant of Bing's doctorate, around the singer's neck. If he had remained to complete his college education in 1924, Bing would have received an ordinary Bachelor of Arts degree with hundreds of other Gonzagans. By striking out on his own, forgetting the last years of college in favor of the bars and stripes of popular music, he'd reached the top level of academic distinction.

"You can call me 'Doctor' now," Bing informed Bob Burns, who had made the trip up to Spokane with him.

"My Uncle Zeb in Van Buren would never stand for it." Bob replied, "and neither would the rest of America."

"You're so right," Bing murmured. And the academic degree was filed away in a suitcase as Bing went back to Hollywood

to continue his quite unacademic career as a singer, actor, and radio conferencier.

10

IF BING'S "COLDNESS" was thawing in 1936, by 1938 the change from solid to liquid to gas had achieved the volatility of combustible nitrogen. In his public and in his private appearances, Bing was a merry man. It was no longer necessary to fill out his movies with patchwork romances. Of *Sing, You Sinners* one of his critics wrote properly that here "Bing really found himself or, more accurately, his audience discovered him . . . [playing] a rough sketch of himself, a lazy, happy-go-lucky undependable but good-hearted fellow who's mad about horses. There wasn't a love scene for him in it, and his brother got the girl but as far as Bing was concerned, that was all to the good, and the audience liked the real Crosby even better than the Crosby they had seen before."

Bing's brother was played by Fred MacMurray, who played

140

king 141

clarinet in a trio made up of -the family Bing was superintending from the stable. Bing played guitar, and young Donald O'Connor made his movie debut as brother, jockey, accordionist, and singer. The clergy looked up favorably when they noted the touching Sunday service introduced in the film, with lusty hymn singing by Crosby, MacMurray, and O'Connor, and the public looked on with interest and amusement at the antics of the two men and the boy in a scene dedicated to *Small Fry*, a specialty number written for the picture by Frank Loesser and Hoagy Carmichael. The scene was set by a backdrop depicting a ramshackle cabin. MacMurray, decked in gray frightwig, false bosom, long dress, and apron, was wearing an old woman's glasses and smoking a corncob pipe. Bing's figure was filled out by a Prince Albert coat; he wore white gloves, white-rimmed glasses, a white beard, and a stovepipe hat and was clutching a mug of beer in his left hand. Donald O'Connor was attired in rags and a kid's beat-up old felt hat. The scene was memorable visually, delightful aurally, as Bing and Donald went happily through the staccato rhythms of the tale of the difficulties encountered by *Tall Fry* in dealing with *Small Fry*.

Another critic summed up Bing's acting at that time. J. C. Furnas said, "He borrows something from the deadpan school of slapstick comic and something from the insouciant ogle of the professional master to produce an effect of being congenitally at home and sure of himself anywhere."

Johnny Mercer wrote and sang songs that suggested he was at home anywhere, too; and when he combined with Bing to record Small Fry and a 1938 variation on the old Gallagher and Shean vaudeville routine, the public was made aware of his similar talents. Johnny explained to the host of newcomers who showed interest in him after these records how his career and Bing's came together.

"I think it was back in 1927, or thereabouts, that I first heard

The Incredible Crosby

of Bing Crosby. I was back home in Savannah, and I won't ever forget the occasion because I had just bought a Paul Whiteman record of Ol' Man River which featured a vocal unlike anything I'd ever heard before. The singer didn't croon as all the other singers did at the time; it seemed to me he employed a completely new and different style which sounded more natural and effortless than any I'd ever heard. I had no idea who Bing Crosby was but I got a terrific bang from his singing. And like millions of others, I still do.

"Later I went to New York, and from there to Hollywood to compose an operetta, Paris in the Spring. I think that was in 1930. One night I went, alone, over to the Ambassador Hotel to catch Gus Arnheim's band and the Arnheim singer. I had never forgotten his name and his work. Somehow I worked my way backstage and there I introduced myself to Harry Lillis Crosby. We chatted a couple of minutes. Even then I considered him the best of the singers of pop tunes, and I especially admired the way he interpreted a lyric. When Bing sang a song he sang it the way the composer intended it to be sung. The same holds true of his singing today.

"The next time I came into contact with The Groaner was about 1935. I was writing songs for RKO films and trying to act, too. The pictures were Old Man Rhythm and To Beat the Band. While working with Whiteman I had become friendly with Matty Malneck, the violinist and arranger who now is a very successful leader here in Hollywood. Malneck took me out to Bing's home in the Valley and it was then, after all those years, that I got to know the guy well.

"Shortly after I wrote some songs for Bing's picture, Rhythm on the Range, which had I'm an Old Cowhand as one of the Crosby specialties. About the same time Bing and I hooked up to record Small Fry and Gallagher and Shean for Decca. We've been thrown together quite a bit ever since."

Bmg 143

Out at the Valley home, the new house on Camarillo Street

to which the Crosby family moved in late 1937. Johnny Mercer and Johnny Burke and Dave Butler, the director, John Scott, Pat O'Brien, and a lot of other choice Crosby friends collaborated in the organizing of the Westwood Marching and Chowder Club. Not content with their celluloid efforts, these men, their wives, and such other gay Hollywoodians as met the stiff requirements in comedy and talent of the Westwooders, were determined to put on for their private delectation a one-night show that would top anything they ever did in public. The program of the first of three performances of the club tells the story.

THE WESTWOOD
MARCHING AND CHOWDER CLUB

presents
The Midgie Minstrels

Saturday, April 16, 1938
For One Performance Only

PART THE FIRST

1. Opening Chorus, "Hello, Hello" Ensemble
2. Those Girls Six Bits of Femininity

or yj^ worth of "Swanee"

3. "Frivolous Sal" with Ruth Lowe r
and her 3 Mocking Birds

Off-Rhythm Boys, "Sailing Down Chesapeake Bay"

4. Jimmy Monaco The Original Ragtime Jimmy.

From Red Lights to Kleig Lights

5. "That Ever-Lovin' Ziegfeld Follies Baby" . . . sung by
Kitty Rasch (class of 1908)

The Incredible Crosby

6. Larry Crosby The IT Boy in "Oh My Garden"
accompanied by THE Elaine Cooper

Off-Rhythm Boys, "Sweet Cider Time"

7. "I Did It for the Red, White and Blue" The Merry Mercers,
Ginger & John

8. Jerry Colonna "The Clean Shaven Fillip"

Encore, "Louisville Lou" if requested

9. Perry (Union) and Virginia Botkin . . . Two Folks

and One Guitar

10. First Act Finale, "When You Wore A Tulip" . . Ensemble

Crackerjacks, large peanuts, and exceptional popcorn sold
between the acts by David Butler, Concessionaire.

Very good prices, too.

PART THE SECOND

1. The Natchez Sunshine Four . . . "Bits and Tidbits,"

"Jungle Town"

2. Lee & Burke, or Burke & Lee Dixie & Johnny

in a potpourri of chatter, patter, and Ja-Da

3. Ray Mayer The Masked Musical Marvel

demonstrates his latest invention, THE PIANOLA

4. Bessie Patterson A Lass and a Lasso!

Off-Rhythm Boys singing "Dearie, Please Don't Be Angry"

5. Joe Venuti The Jiving Alligator,

or a Bit of Burp Accompanied by Sally

6. Bing Crosby*

Refreshments served gratis in lobby during recital

7. A lull

8. Pat O'Brien A Bit of Old Erin

* By courtesy of the Emanuel Cohn Minstrels.

Bing 145

9. The Yacht Club Boys "'Why?'"

10. Dr. William Sexton For Men Only

11. Edmund Lowe And Away We Go

12. Finale, "Waiting For the Robert E. Lee" Entire Company

The above program subject to change with plenty of notice. No money refunded once the curtain goes up. If it goes up.

END MEN

JOHNNY MERCER

JOE VENUTI

HERB POLESIE

INTERLOCUTOR AND

TICKET TAKER

The clothes were, as might be expected, the gayest Gay Nineties costumes. Bing appeared in pants that sported a huge check, a vest that had still a different check, and a black Prince Albert coat with a polka-dot bow tie and a large top hat. Bessie (Patterson) Burke finished her number with a French twist, turning around to show bare cheeks beneath her bear chaps, filling out a lusty cowgirl costume with a gusty rear view. Joe Venuti's full dress was set off by pants with huge stripes and a tie with stripes just as large. Dixie and Johnny Burke wore neat little bolero jackets and derbies. John Scott Trotter and David Butler showed off their enormous girth, the first in short pants, the second in long trousers pulled up, with a basque shirt for John Scott and a lumber shirt for Dave. The Butler tonnage was further adorned by a leopard skin, topped by a beret and a scarf, and Trotter trotted around in wooden sabots. These two added their weight to Bing's for the Off-Rhythm interpolations. The evening was loud, long, and unforgettable. -For years afterward,

The Incredible Crosby

this and the succeeding shows elicited considerable laughter and happy reminiscences on the part of the participants.

A second evening, Saturday, June 25, 1938, was given by the Westwood Marching and Chowder Club, North Hollywood Branch. It was called the Second Breakaway Minstrel Show, and it began according to the program with an olio, a fancy way of referring to the miscellaneous nature of the performance. One more Westwood Marching and Chowder Club vaudeville was put together the next year, and then the exigencies of wartime, the shortages of materials, and the commitments on the time of the participating actors, actresses, musicians, and singers for wartime benefits here and abroad made it impossible to go on with the club's activities.

The amount of work involved in those one-night stands was almost as much as went into a full-fledged "A" production at a Hollywood film studio. Actually for months before each of the three evenings, Bing and Dixie and Johnny and Bessie and John

Scott and Johnny Mercer and Joe Venuti and all the rest went eagerly about their preparations. They went from professional costurner to professional costumer, raided the property departments at their studios, and paid several visits to beauticians to acquire wigs and complicated make-up preparations and often to have their hair done in some exotic manner for the performance. Just what the costumes were to be, and the tonsorial accoutrements, were kept a careful secret, each from the others, until the night of the minstrel show itself. There was as much secrecy and as much pleasant confusion and as much hiding away of boxes as at Christmas time. These professionals gathered around Bing and Company acted like amateurs making their debuts in public. The spirit before, during, and after the performances was as intense, as delighted, and as marked by garrulousness as any first experience of an elementary-school child.

Bing 147

The accusation of coldness was hardly sustained by this sort of Crosby behavior. Bing took and gave lots of kidding and found no subject too touchy as he moved easily into his role as Hollywood's major family star. There was a lot of talk about the amount of money he was making, and the men around him made occasional passing comments about it.

Harry Ray one morning, making up for Paris Honeymoon in 1938, placed a few bets with Bing on some races at Hollywood Park. Bing had side bets with almost everybody on the lot during the local racing seasons at Santa Anita and Hollywood and often enough on out-of-town meetings, football games, baseball, and boxing as well. After setting their stakes together, Harry turned to Bing and said, "This is a nice means of supplementing your income. YouVe got luck and you've got money, and you make more. You know, you've got so much money I bet you don't fool with banks any more. I'll bet your back yard is full of carefully buried steel boxes."

Bing laughed. "You're almost right, Harry," he said. "'Almost right."

Paris Honeymoon was a quickie. It presented Bing as a Westerner in a Graustarkian European country, with a charming little girl by the name of Franciska Gaal, who made her one American movie appearance in this film; Akim Tamiroff to give the movie further authentic accent; Shirley Ross for some more singing and to fill out the romantic triangle; and comedy by Edward Everett Horton and Ben Blue. In the speed with which the film was put together, packed away in cans, and distributed around the country, a hit song was not neglected, and Paris Honeymoon came up with the inevitable Crosby singing elegance exhibited in YouY0 a Sweet Little Headache.

In 1939 Bing went back to the juvenile strain so shrewdly exhibited in Pennies from Heaven and Sing, You Sinners. East

Side of Heaven, another independent production this time re-

148 The Incredible Crosby

leased through Universal, presented a little baby, addressed as a boy through the film. To the amused consternation of Bing and Director David Butler, when the film was finished they discovered that the baby was a girl. Boy or girl, the tot was an excellent foil for Bing, who was directing his romance more and more to children, show business, and songs and less and less to the Hollywood ingenue. Johnny Burke fashioned some more songs in the "philosophical" genre That Sly Old Gentleman from Featherbed Lane, Sing a Song of Sunbeams, and East Side of Heaven. The lyrics stayed just this side of corn, and Bing's vigorous singing gave them added substance, avoiding for them and the picture the maudlin level their titles suggest.

East Side of Heaven was followed by an unbeatable combination of show-business lore and child actors, in The Star Maker. Here Bing played a part fashioned after the career of Gus Edwards, who had brought George Jessel, Eddie Cantor, Walter Winchell, Georgie Price, and Lila Lee, to name just a few of his stars, into prominence through his children's revues. Bing sauntered through the film in checked suits, polka-dot bow ties, and derby hats, following the careful research of Paramount historians into the New York entertainment world of the beginning of the twentieth century. Again he had good songs to complement the story: An Apple for the Teacher, Go Fly a Kite, and A Man and His Dream. There was some classical and semiclassical music purveyed by a young singer, Linda Ware, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra under Walter Damrosch. Ned Sparks and Laura Hope Crews balanced the lushness of the music and sentiment by their humorous ironies, and Louise Campbell was on hand as the girl who always and always believed that Bing could be and would be a successful producer.

Once more, in 1940, Bing returned to children and independent production. In If I Had My Way he didn't croon any

Bing 149

lullabies to a babe in arms, but he did cross-harmonize with young Gloria Jean. The Swedish-accented El Brendel was the comic relief, and the songs were I Haven't Time to Be a Millionaire and April Played the Fiddle. Again it was all good family entertainment and very successful.

In all of his films, but particularly in his independent productions, Bing looked out for his old associates in the entertainment business, some of whom went back as far as his first forays as a singer with Al Rinker. Bing has a carefully organized pension list, which he keeps carefully hidden from people but which

he follows assiduously as each of his pictures is cast. Just before shooting is started on a picture, Bing sits down with the assistant director and they go over the list of men and women for extras and bit parts, and then Bing checks the requirements of each of these small roles against his list of worthy pensioners.

On the set of *The Star Maker*, he turned to the assistant director and said, "I notice that for tomorrow's shooting we need an elevator starter. What does it pay?"

"Seventy-five dollars a day," was the answer.

Bing thought of one of his needy friends. He knew he could use the money.

"Look," he told the assistant director, "I've got the very man for the part. Give it to him, will you?"

The next day he came to work, sat down at his dressing table, started to put on his make-up and prepare his toupee. From the table he could see the scene. He noticed that another man was in the uniform of the elevator starter.

Bing called out to the director, "What happened? Couldn't you get the guy I suggested?"

"We didn't try," the director said. "We thought this fellow would be better."

"Well," Bing said, "maybe you're right"

150 *The Incredible Crosby*

He hesitated a minute and dipped his hand into the cold cream.

"Gee," Bing said, "this is a lovely day."

He took off his toupee and started to work off his pancake and other make-up.

"I think I'll take advantage of the weather and play some golf."

The director hurried over to his dressing-room table.

"Bing, I think you're right," he told him. "I think your man is just the man for the part. We'll get him right away."

"What about the guy you've already got? Once he's called he's got to be paid."

"Sure, sure," the director assured him. "He'll be paid too. Don't worry."

Bing had discovered that in this quiet way, without fussing, without arguing, there was more of a chance of combating the complications, the devious maneuvers of Hollywood movie making. In almost every instance, when there was such a difference of opinion, unless he was convinced he was wrong, Bing made his point this way.

It's important to make clear that Bing didn't use dictatorial powers then and hasn't since. He's well aware of his importance, as he couldn't help being. Since 1933, from his very first movie, he's been Paramount's No. 1 star, but he has never used his power to unfair advantage. He's used it to help old friends in trouble, to help young friends get started. He's never foisted his taste on other people when doing so meant the loss of work for somebody else or a severe change in policy. He's tried to make his opinion and taste felt, and most often he's succeeded. And he's succeeded not only in making these things felt but in convincing producers and directors of his wisdom by the success of the people he's championed and the ideas he's added to films, to his radio shows, and to his record dates. Generally he's

JBmg 151

followed the direction of the men who administrate his segments of the entertainment world, but he's insisted in his own quiet way, -with his own masterly indirection, that from time to time his own view be given more than perfunctory consideration. His encouragement of Martha Raye, Bob Burns, Victor Borge, Johnny Burke, John Scott Trotter, Mary Martin, Johnny Mercer, and many, many others was certainly substantiated by their performances. Their careers provide him with a strong argument, as he helped provide them with careers and continuing inspiration.

II

I N* LATER YEARS Bing's friends talked about the advent of Bob Hope in the Crosby career, and in his personal life, as "typical Crosby luck." There was no way of explaining the how and why of the "Crosby luck" but there was, and is, much wondering about it. Before the Great Thaw, before Bing began to warm up so noticeably in his public life, there was not only the coldness of which musicians and actors and other associates had taken such sullen notice. There was Bing's uncertainty about his career, there were his repeated questionings of his several presents and futures, there were his often-expressed doubts about his staying power. In 1932 Bing told a few interviewers he was just a phenomenon; he didn't think he would prove anything more than an oddity brought over from radio and records into films to be stared at and listened to and then quickly f or-

Bing 153

gotten, like all freaks. In 1937 he was making plans for his retirement. Bob Hope appeared on the Paramount lot, and all thought of Bing Crosby's retirement was forgotten.

Hope did not save Crosby's career; it was never that far gone. But he offered at least a shot of adrenalin; he made Bing's work a pleasure; he helped quash Bing's tentative plans to retire to his ranch, or sail around the world, or breed horses for a living.

Before their two weeks at the Capitol together in December of 1932, Bob hadn't known Bing very well. The blue eyes and fading brown hairline were familiar to him as a visage he had seen around the Friars' Club in New York, mingled with all the other faces from show business. But Bing as something more than a successful singer didn't really make sense to him until that Capitol show. Then there were all the on-stage and backstage exchanges and what developed into a kind of ritual with Bing.

Bing was feeling his showmanly strength; he liked to do more than just sing; he liked working with Hope. After his first couple of days at the theatre he made it a point to see Bob when he arrived in the morning.

"Let's throw in a couple of jokes," Bing would suggest.

"What kind?"

"Oh, you say to me, 'Who was that lady I saw you with last night?' And I say, That was

"Stop, stop! I know what you mean! Only, you ask me the questions. I'm the comedian around here, remember?"

They never did settle upon which was the straight man and which the comic. It's that moot point which has served so well for so many years as the base of the Crosby-Hope comedy a suggestion of rivalry, an intimation of swords' points differences always successful as a pattern for comedy (compare the Ben Bernie-Walter Winchell, Fred Allen-Jack Benny exchanges, and others) , particularly meaningful in the United States where

The Incredible Crosby

feigned anger, vigorous physical attack, and vituperative verbal abuse so often veil the strongest attachments between friends, especially when the friends are men and don't want to be mistaken for anything else.

Bob saw Bing again in 1935 when he returned East to watch the horses go by at Saratoga. They met at Ben Marden's Riviera, at the Whiteman opening, when Bing made his surprise appearance. They exchanged greetings, and then Bing made more than a polite inquiry.

"Bob," he asked, "why don't you come out to Hollywood?"

"Oh, I don't know." Hope answered. "I guess it's because the boys haven't said the right word yet."

Bob recalls his thinking at the time. "I was being very hard to take then. I had done several musicals, Roberta, Say When, The Ziegfeld Follies revival I thought I was a pretty big man."

In 1937 Hollywood said the "right word," and Bob came out to make his first picture for Paramount, Thanks for the Memory, which immediately established his sliding-pine proboscis and bland mien as one of the prime wonders of the American scene. But before the picture was completed, before there were enough rushes to show that Hope's mild musical-comedy manner and apathetic radio appearances belied his real talents, Bing had extended his glad hand.

"Like to see more of you, ole man," he greeted Bob on the lot.

"Likewise, I'm sure," Hope replied with a mock curtsy.

"Come on out to Del Mar."

"The glue factory?"

"The very same."

"Will do."

Bob went out to what he called "those Del Mar things," to the important races, to the important functions, such as the annual Turf Club ball. He was present that memorable afternoon when Joe Frisco, famous to show folk as a stuttering

Bing 155

comedian of almost impeccable and certainly unending wit, borrowed money from Bing to bet on one of the races.

"H-h-how a-b-bout a tw-tw-twenty, B-Bing?"

"For what nefarious purpose?"

"T-to p-p-put on a n-nag's nose."

"A laudable endeavor, Joe, though probably doomed," Bing complimented as he surrendered the money.

Joe placed his bet and waited for the race to be run. Calmly he watched the horses skirt the Del Mar fences; calmly he collected his money he had bet and won on a 20 to 1 shot. He went looking for "B-Bing." He found him.

"H-hey, B-Bing!" he commanded.

"Mr. Frisco, at your service," Bing acknowledged with a bow.

"B-Bing." Joe said, "h-here's tw-tw-twenty dollars." and he suited the action to the word. "S-sing us a s-s-song!"

The crowd around Bing and Joe Frisco burst into laughter, and "B-Bing" went along with the gag; he sang a few bars of I Surrender, Dear.

"Now that you're a native Californian, or anyway an adopted one," Bing suggested to Bob, "you must get into the swing of things. Golf, that is."

"I will follow your example."

"Now, now, Mr. H., I don't expect you to compete in my Del Mar tournament. Just a few friendly rounds, you understand."

Bob played a lot of golf with Bing. When the war came along, they matched strokes in benefit matches, about 150 between 1941 and 1946.

"Of course," Bob explains, "I've never had the swing. Bing is a studied golfer. He hits in the low seventies without any real trouble. But, as a result of watching him and working with him, I caught the bug, and after maybe eight or nine years I got so I could score in the low seventies, too."

Audiences around the country expected a comedy game when

156 The Incredible Crosby

Bing and Bob showed up for their announced benefit matches. We have Bob's word for it that "they were thrilled when a genuine game was rolled off." There was Bing's 71 in Atlanta, in the course of which he shot an eagle on a 530-yard hole, "Some of the greatest shots I've ever seen." Bob admired. "That's a smart boy smart at anything he attempts."

O. B. Keeler, sports columnist for the Atlanta Constitution, did a whole column on Bing's performance. Bing was prouder of that newspaper notice than of most of the raves for his acting and singing in his really distinguished films.

In Salt Lake City, Bob and Bing went right from the airfield and a bumpy plane ride to the golf links. The airplane trip apparently agreed with Bob. He shot birdies on three holes.

"What are you doing?" Bing asked. "Smoking reefers?"

Bing walked to work often, swinging a pet mashie or putter ahead of him, flicking at tufts of grass with the golf club, walking around the Paramount lot with the club as a kind of boy's cane, much as a child would swing a slender tree branch. When he left early, having finished a day's shooting ahead of schedule, he would go over to Lakeside to get in nine, sometimes eighteen holes before supper.

"What goes here?" Bob would complain to his director when he discovered that Bing had finished early and was off golfing.

"What do you mean?"

"What am I a slave? I'm still working, and he's on the ninth tee already."

And Bing pulled the same complaining line on his director when Hope had got off early and he was still busy before the camera.

The two men worked together with consummate ease. Suggest a topic, and they had a gag, a routine, a finished line of chatter. Failing anything else, they always had their series of affectionate names for each other.

Bing 157

"As I live," Bing would greet Bob. "Ski snoot!"

"Mattress hip!" Bob returned.

"Shovel head!" It was Bing's turn.

"Blubber!"

"Scoop nose!"

"Lard!"

"Yes, dad!"

When Bob's radio show for Pepsodent shone its brightest, Bing was its guest. When Bing's Kraft Music Hall reached its comic heights, Bob was an accessory before the fact. Inevitably, when Bing made his first transcribed program for Philco in the fall of 1946, Bob was his guest, and Hope finished the year for him, too, as Bing opened the Pepsodent series for 1946-1947 and appeared on the Christmas show. Over the years each had become top man in his field; by a very simple 2 plus 2 makes 4 arithmetic, the combination of the two was sure to burst box-office blood vessels, to send their radio-program ratings way ahead, to sell huge quantities of records.

In 1939 Paramount hit upon the inevitable; and the cheering was deafening, as it always is when Hollywood falls headlong upon the obvious. Combine Bing Crosby and Bob Hope in one movie! The production powers congratulated each other. The idea, they quickly assured each other, was nothing short of sensational. Of course, they were right.

The first of the Crosby-Hope pictures established a design for all their films together that was as inevitably successful as the idea of combining them was in the first place. The Road to Singapore took a couple of vaudevillians down the coast of Africa, ran them through their old vaudeville routines, tossed them into the arms of Dorothy Lamour, allowed them to contemplate her figure from that vantage point, and left room for innumerable jokes, songs, and semiserious dances by Bob, Bing, and Dorothy. One running gag was started in Singapore that was repeated in

158 The Incredible Crosby

the successive Road pictures: when in trouble, Bing and Bob would start to play pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, fixing their most aimless, most innocuous expressions on their faces, ending, after a couple of run-throughs of the old nursery rhyme, with a few well-placed blows about the face and body of their would-be victimizer now become their victim.

Bing was really in his element in The Road to Singapore. In only one or two scenes did he have to dress up: his costume for most of the picture consisted of bedraggled trousers and a beat-up old sailor's shirt and cap. In one scene he and Bob and Dorothy ran through the engaging figures of Sweet Potato Piper on ocarinas; they couldn't have had more fun making a scene than they did here, making harmonies of a crude sort on the gourdlike instruments fashioned after the shape and size of sweet potatoes. Dorothy played the largest, Bing the smallest, Bob the medium-sized sweet potato, and both the tune and the setting of the scene (a small African village filled with incredulous natives watching the wild trio) permitted considerable freedom in the way of grimaces and gestures; needless to say, they took full advantage of this freedom.

Every last ounce of ham in Bing and Bob was extracted for The Road to Singapore and their subsequent appearances together. The sets upon which the movie was made reflected the atmosphere of the film itself. Gags flew furiously between takes and across them; Bing and Bob ribbed Dorothy relentlessly, and when the opportunity came to wear sarongs they pranced around in childlike joy, mocking the costume and the movements that had made the Lamour torso something more than just another celluloid body. When Victor Schertzinger, the good-humored director of the film, took particular trouble with a close-up shot of Bing's face, Bob interfered.

"You're not worried about anybody knowing what he looks like, are you?" he questioned seriously. "We're trying to keep

Bing 159

that from the country until they get penicillin around to everybody!"

"Come, dad," Bing chided Hope, "don't be jealous. Well do your shovel puss full justice when we get those stronger lenses."

They played with each other and for each other like little boys, never ceasing to find delight in each other's company, wondering constantly that this sort of game could and would continue to be a job of work. They decorated their dressing rooms with retouched pictures of each other, which they had supervised, adding and subtracting features with the malice of little moppets. In prominent places in their photo galleries (and each covered his walls, in the Hollywood tradition, with snapshots, newspaper and magazine blowups, and glossy prints from the Paramount files) these delightful examples of photographic mayhem leered down at visitors. Bing did less to his photos of Bob than Hope did to his. Bob had Bing's ears considerably enlarged for one shot, making a normally big pair of loving-cup appendages look like the handles on the Davis Cup trophy. In another he had a darkroom artist cross Bing's eyes. To fit in with the photographic fun, Bing sent Bob a studio portrait of himself in a boy's sailor suit, with a pipe hanging from his lips. It was lovingly inscribed.

"Dear Flab: [Bing had written] I may have something good for you in the fall." And he had signed it simply "Bing." It was a reminder, not without some irony, of those bookers' promises which all struggling actors and singers and acrobats, all who ever work in and around the stage, radio, or night-club floor, know so well, which Bing and Bob could still remember easily from their "scuffling days," as they and their associates would call those early years of the locust.

Both could remember the difficult beginnings; each had a commanding respect for the other's genuine talent, for the unmistakable skills that had brought them beyond the possibility,

160 The Incredible Crosby

the mere hope of "something good for you in the fall." Bob described Sing's acting with the admiration of a man of similar gifts who watches his peer perform without envy, with understanding, with the appreciation that only an equal talent can have for an equal.

"The average person thinks Bing just walks through his Scenes," Bob summarized, "and he's right and he does. That's one of the greatest assets in our business the ability to just walk through scenes. That's why Bing has lasted in this business

so long and will last. He's got that great gift of phraseology, always coming up with the right words, always adding just the right little light comedy phrases. And, above all, he's one of the greatest underplayers of all times. Just watch him cut that scene down to one twitch of his face, one flick of his hand great, nothing else/*

Tipping back in his chair on the set of a Road picture. Bob will watch Bing go through his solo scenes with unveiled, unfeigned respect. When the Crosby performance becomes particularly engaging, it will elicit an almost involuntary response from Hope. "Go to it, blubber/ 7 he will cry out, "keep 'em weeping, dad!"

There is no end to the two men's comic potential together. Their mutual kinetic energy, cinematic, broadcasting, or in their personal lives, defies time, place, and their ages. Many of their funny lines are written by accomplished gag men; many of their funniest are ad-libbed on the spot by either or both. They can't and won't give up any opportunity for a laugh, especially if Bob can have it at Bing's expense, or Bing at Bob's. There was that appearance Bob made on Johnny Mercer's Chesterfield show in 1944.

Bob had been working in *The Princess and the Pirate* for Sam Goldwyn. His pirate's costume was complete, even to the detail of a long beard. For the first of the two broadcasts of the

Bing 161

Mercer program, in the early afternoon to reach Eastern listeners in the early evening, Bob had to rush over to NBC between scenes in full costume and beard. Right in the middle of the show, while Bob and Johnny were exchanging lines at the microphone, lost in their easy banter, Bing came running out of the wings, clad in a barber's coat, lunging at Bob with a huge pair of shears. Neither Hope nor Mercer had any idea that Bing was present. He broke up the show. Bob and Johnny screamed with laughter, forgot the script entirely, and just howled; the musicians fell out of their chairs. "The audience," Johnny reports, "was hysterical, and for a couple of minutes it was plain panic. I wonder what listeners to the show thought." He laughs again as he remembers the incident. "Only Crosby could pull a gag of that magnitude."

Listeners to the show who were mystified could make sense of the howls and screams and mystifying break in the show by examining the issue of *Look* magazine that followed the broadcast by two weeks. An NBC photographer had been present to take some posed photographs of Bob and Johnny; alert, he had caught Bing's flying-wedge attack with shears, and the resulting shot illumined a page of *Look* brilliantly.

"He makes us laugh," Bob explains, "makes us laugh a lot, often when you least expect it. And he laughs at us. He loves

to be surprised by a funny line, anytime, anywhere, any place. I remember that kid who went up to Bing one day at NBC.

"Just a boy, maybe seventeen or eighteen. He went up to Bing, who is most approachable when he isn't playing golf or isn't distracted by thoughts about his increasing weight. "Mr. Crosby/ the kid said, 'I wanna be an actor. Can you help me?'

" 'What've you done?' Bing asked him.

" 'Nothing.'

" 'Well, how do you handle lines?'

1 62 The Incredible Crosby

" 'Well/ the kid replied, 'I'm not a Clyde Beatty, but I guess I can handle them all right/

"His answer broke Bing up. He stood in front of NBC laughing like one of his own audience. And he helped the kid make connections. The kid had made connections with him."

Bing admires people who take full advantage of opportunities for gags. He is fond of repeating endless variations on the theme of opportunity in his native land. He talks seriously, as an outstanding example of American achievement, of what can be done in this country, of the hardships involved, and the unexpected ease, of the wonder of his career and Hope's. He avoids the cliches and bromides of patriotism, but the patriotism is unmistakable, though he never stoops to flag waving and the sentiment is cloaked in quick patter.

"America really is the land of opportunity," Bing insists. "Look at us," he says, pointing to Hope and himself. "Where else could a piece of spaghetti and a meat ball both wind up with so much gravy?"

B

ING LET LOOSE one of his largest laughs. It rang loudly against the walls of Studio B in the long, squat NBC building at the corner of Sunset and Vine in Hollywood. "Look at him." He pointed to a little man hurrying nervously across the stage, down the few steps at the left to a seat in the audience. "He always looks as if he were running away from the Cossacks."

The very small figure, given some slight dignity by the well-cut shoulders of his jacket, robbed of some by his open smile

and racy, American-Tirolese hat, sought refuge in a seat next to friends, found it, and then finally lost the look of a frightened hare. From the depth of the studio chair an arm arose in greeting. It shook with friendly motion at Crosby, who was still laughing, still at stage center.

164 The Incredible Crosby

"That Barney Dean," Bing said, shaking his head and laughing again, this time more quietly.

A lot of heads in the front row at the Crosby rehearsal turned to the left to catch Barney's eye and hand and wave and get their waves in turn. For quite a few moments he received more attention than Bing. Some of the front-row dwellers left their dwellings to go over to Barney's.

"How'd you make out yesterday?"

"Please believe me," Barney answered, "I didn't. I had Army and 6 points. So what happens? A tie game!"

"How about Friday night?"

"I made a couple. I had the black corner. Two knockouts and I was fainting. But the blacks took the rest." Black corner? The two corners at the weekly prize fights at the Hollywood American Legion Stadium are, respectively, black and white. The regular bettors choose a color and a corner and bet on it all night rather than on individual fighters in individual fights. There's more of a gamble that way, because the corners are not chosen until the last minute before the fight, when a huge wooden disc is flipped and, heads or tails, black or white, they are decided.

"Please believe me," Barney continues, "I am not doing well. Besides, I'm tired." And he sits down. His court breaks up, and the Crosby show starts again.

Barney didn't exactly flee the Cossacks, but he did leave Russia, in true Jewish emigrant fashion, as a child of twelve. That was in 1915. Kiev, Barney's town, was not a healthy place for little Jewish boys in 1915. It was the center of vicious pogroms in those last years of czarist Russia, and hardly a city with a future for a kid with an eye on show business.

"I got off the ship at Ellis Island and as soon as they released me went straight to the Polo Grounds." Try to find out whether Barney actually did go to watch the New York Giants play baseball or didn't. Try, but don't actually hope to succeed, because

Bmg 165

Barney is a gag man. Sometimes his stories make immediate

sense; sometimes you understand them later; only rarely are they entirely clear. Barney is the man who whispers ideas to Bing and to Bob Hope, leaning across a klieg light or a camera's panhandle to suggest a different bit of business here, a new word there, an odd gesture between that usually ends up as a belly laugh in the finished film. For this he is listed as a writer on the Paramount Pictures pay roll.

"Me a member of the Screen Writers Guild," Barney scoffs, "and I can't even write my name." But he can. And he has a fine show-business history of which he is justifiably if irreverently proud.

"In 1920 I was rescued from the electric chair," he reminisces, "and I graduated when somebody taught me a time step."

His first job in the show world was with Eddie Leonard, the comedian-dancer who headlined in 1920 vaudeville. "I was the guy that got the sand from the shuffle dance because I had the least talent." Four steps carried Barney through a great many more years. He was with Patty Moore and Sammy Lewis, a successful vaudeville team, from 1928 to 1930. Then, for ten years, he was part of the act of Taradash and Fratkin (the second his unglamorous name). One day Fratkin turned to Taradash and complained.

"Where are we getting with these names?" Barney asked. "When we get billing (if we ever get billing), they'll never be able to put those names on the marquee; they're too long."

"Mmm," Taradash said to Fratkin.

"Let's be brothers," Barney suggested.

"Yeah. There's a vogue for brothers now."

"What'll we call ourselves?" partner asked partner.

"Ahhh," Barney said. "Look." He pointed to the big billboard at Forty-seventh Street and Broadway. Priscilla Dean, a

166 The Incredible Crosby

major name in motion pictures in 1930, loomed large, in photograph and name, on the advertising poster. "How about Dean?"

"Dean it is," partner told partner. And thus Barney Fratkin became Barney Dean.

But the Dean Brothers never got billing Taradash and Fratkin had been just as successful.

"You could fill Yankee Stadium with the acts I passed Through," Barney sums up the lean years between 1920 and

1940. "Strictly no talent." He shrugs his shoulders.

In 1940 he came to Hollywood. He knew a lot of people. Twenty years in show business added up to many, many acquaintances, but still no work. One day he wandered over to the set at Paramount, where Bing Crosby and Bob Hope were making the first of the Road pictures, this one to Singapore.

"Barney," Bing and Bob chorused.

After the usual exchange of greetings, the usual half-serious and sentimental, half-funny and apparently offhand hellos, Bing and Bob turned to Barney with a proposition.

"Barney/ 7 Bing said, "we've got a little sequence that needs a few jokes. Think you could do it?"

Barney fingered the last money he had in his pants pocket. It was 40 cents. But he wasn't a writer.

"Who the hell knows about writing?" he asked Hope and Crosby. "Honestly, fellows, I can't write my own name."

"What's the difference?" Bob quieted him. "You'll make some money."

And he's been with the two of them ever since, alternating between the Ears and the Ski Nose as each schedules his separate pictures, and an automatic fixture on the sets of the movies they do together.

"They make it so easy for me," Barney explains. "You remember that spot in My Favorite Blonde, when Bing passes Hope on the street and Bob says, 'No, no, it couldn't be'? Of

Bzng 167

course. Well, Hope always gives me credit for it, but it was his idea, not mine. And Bing turns on his heel, or does something like that, and before I know it I've thought up a situation. It's things like that that they do which keep me out of the gutter, where they picked me up."

The Road pictures are irresistibly associated with Barney in the minds of the men and women close to Bing and Hope, and they are close to Barney, too, but the associations are different.

"Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey is supposed to be the Greatest Show on Earth," Barney muses. "Well, I'm willing to lay a purse on it that the Road pictures run it a close second. Bing and Bob really give Dotty Lamour a bad time. Which," he hastens to add, "'she enjoys. I'm supposed to be a gag man, but the gags fly so fast on that set that I can't even remember the straight lines."

Barney is willing to accept a kind of indirect credit for his association with Bing. He describes Bing's friends, and, by easy inference, you can deduce his position with Bing.

"Bing is a very choosy guy. Though he likes everybody, he doesn't like to have everybody around him. He really doesn't like to have anybody around unless he has class. It doesn't matter what his vocation," Barney smacks his lips on the choice word. "He has friends from every walk of life. A bum out of the gutter with class is a lot better than a guy in tails without any."

Since Barney has chosen to play the role of the "bum out of the gutter" and he obviously has what he calls "class," his rank in the Crosby hierarchy is high. Barney has his own hierarchy of friends, which is not different from Bing's except in its nomenclature. There are three major classes. Everybody is a gentleman, really, but not necessarily of the same stripe.

i. There is the low-class gentleman, the man in tails who doesn't rank with the gutter bum. These are the people Barney nods to, the men Bing nods to, accepts as humans but not as

168 The Incredible Crosby

friends. Among them are some famous names and some infamous ones, some rich, some poor, some middle class.

2. There is the high-class gentleman, not especially brilliant in his pursuit of pleasures (which come first in Barney's life, as they have much of the time in Bing's) or his work. People in this group are the run of Barney's mill, including bookmakers, music publishers, actors and actresses, even, though rarely, some of the gentry.

3. There is the hoodlum gentleman. This is the species rara avis. It includes in its precious number Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Johnny Burke, Jimmy Van Heusen. Here, too, there are a few of the infamous along with the famous, but in all, on top or bottom by the social strictures of our time, very few people. It takes a lot of "class" to match the majesty of the true gentleman with the eating, drinking, gambling, living largesse of the true hoodlum. And, above all, to make this glorious set one must have "common sense." But what Barney means by "common sense" is not what either the psychologist or the financier does. Under "common sense" Barney lists most of the virtues. A man possessed of it is considerate of his fellow men, concerned for their welfare, kind to his mother, and doesn't beat his wife or child. "It's only common sense," Barney says. "Right?" What he means by it he either cannot or will not articulate. He's ashamed of the accepted words for virtue, of "tolerance" or "goodness." He will always look for the negative statement of any of his own considerable decencies and if he can't find it won't talk about the subject at all

Barney calls himself an agnostic, and in the few moments

away from the gags, which fly so fast he can't even remember the straight lines, he will mull over the problems of one in his straddling position. He will, then, away from his gambling, away from such private haunts as the bar at Slapsy Maxie's, the successful night club in Hollywood now run by his old vaudeville

JBmg 169

associate, Sammy Lewis, late of an evening at the Burkes', discuss this agnosticism.

"What's the sense of fooling you or me," Barney says. "I don't know and neither do you." Confronted with someone's certainty about his faith, Barney doesn't ridicule. He asks about how and where that person came to his faith. What is God and why? And none of the answers satisfy him. Yet to those around him in the Crosby circle he has a ready faith, a firm and not at all an agnostic one. For what Barney finds in the "hoodlum gentleman" and in the great "common sense" of this figure is not far from what the more orthodox find in their saints and their good men. And in his own unflinching attention to the comforts of his close friends, his easily extended, unpretentious, and unmistakable love for those around him, in these things clearly resides the good man.

When Bing jokes about Barney, or Johnny Burke or Jack Clark describes him seriously, there is much more than the humor or the accurate description. There is almost a tear in the voice, if not in the eye, and such a warmth as few people draw from others. Etienne Gilson, a scholar learned in Scholasticism, spoke in one of his Gifford Lectures of the place of the heart in men. ". . . The essence of moral good and evil [is] . . . transferred from the outward act to the will; for it is by the will, as St. Augustine says, that a man's life is made righteous or sinful. . . . And by will we must here understand the secret impulse of the heart whereby it turns to a certain object or a certain end in preference to others. So constantly in the language of the Psalms does the 'cry' or 'clamour' of the human heart go up to God that with the Fathers it almost passes into a technical expression. . . . When we come to give it a name in philosophy then, as a real movement of a will tending to its end,* we call it simply 'intention,' "

The "cry" and the "clamour" of Barney's heart are self-evi-

170 The Incredible Crosby

dent, even when his words deny them. His "intentions" in Gilson's use of that term, show a will tending to the good ends. And his acts, the simple humility with which he decries his own talents, his inevitable presence at the bedside of the sick children of his friends, his warm pats on the back, his friendly teasing, his readiness to become the butt of others' jokes and never really

make them the object of his these are his secret impulses. The transference of the inward will to the outward act, in reverse of the procedure Gilson describes, is always performed by Barney with gracious ease.

In 1945, or thereabouts, the movie-fan magazines, those bumptious Boswells of America's chief idols, began to pay attention to Barney. His closeness to Bing was becoming apparent; and though neither he nor the famous man he was associated with was to be seen at Giro's or the Mocambo or the glamorous parties at the glamorous homes of the glamorous stars, the fan writers wrote about him. They used wiles, they penetrated beyond the night clubs and the mansions, where most of their copy originated, to search out the little man who some said was Bing's closest friend. One of the writers found a story in the trip Barney took with Bing to Jasper Park, Canada, where The Emperor Waltz company went on location in the summer of 1946 to get backgrounds as close to Alpine Switzerland as possible.

"Barney Dean, a Paramount writer" was the description Barney suffered. At a pivotal point in the story, which was built around Barney, Bing asked him to take over the wheel of his car and drive behind him while he took a long walk. The walk was true enough, but Barney can't drive a car, never has and probably never will, not unless a few guarded manipulations of the accelerator, the gear shift, and the wheel will save somebody else's life.

True recognition of Barney must go beyond the assignment

Bzng 171

to him in a fan story of a little dialogue along with inaccurate details. He must be understood as more than a constant companion of Bing's, who looks funny in a Tirolese hat. He is a wit of sorts, and he does make people laugh, just by sitting still or walking across a room. But he also warms their hearts; he also moves with graceful motion. He is an integral, an inevitable part of the lives of a small group of distinguished people. He is himself a hoodlum gentleman (and let us by all means remove the quotation marks here). It is no mere coincidence that this little Russian Jewish dancer with four steps should be such a close associate of the big American Catholic singer.

13

EVERY BUSINESS HAS its behind-the-scenes' powers, usually referred to as "they" in the well-known phrase, "they say." The "they" of the music businesses "they say" is a diversified group made up of song publishers, big singers, and recording execu-

tives on the one hand, and on the other of the fine musicians, soloists, singers, and song pluggers of more integrity than fame. These specialists say that Bing likes a schottische type of song; they were saying it in 1932 when Bing sang Please, and they were saying it in 1939 when the score for The Road to Singapore was being contemplated.

The schottische, they said, was Bing's type of song because its polka-like beats, its singsong accents were a natural for his personality. Its rhythm, clicked off with the incisive and infectious

1 7 2

Bmg 173

regularity of a march or a hillbilly ballad, was perfectly tailored to Bing's singing style, a sharp and engaging vocal manner if ever there was one. Who better, then, to write Bing's music than Jimmy Van Heusen, if they were right? Jimmy was a superb schottischer. Jimmy Monaco, who had been writing the music for Johnny Burke's words since 1936, was getting tired; he wasn't well; a replacement was indicated, and Jimmy Van Heusen was the logical replacement.

Johnny had met Jimmy on a trip to New York the year before. He had heard his handsome score for the short-lived Swinging the Dream, the refurbished Midsummer Night's Dream presented with high hopes, poor luck, and Benny Goodman at the Radio City Center Theatre. He remembered particularly Jimmy's lovely tune, Darn That Dream. And Johnny, like most of the men deeply involved in the music business, was privy to Jimmy's story. He knew that Jimmy had been born as Edward Chester Babcock in Syracuse, New York; that he had assumed the pseudonym of James Van Heusen, after a popular men's shirt of the time, when he went to work on a Syracuse radio station, to avoid the censure of his father, who didn't want the family escutcheon soiled by a connection with the show world. He knew that Jimmy had worked as an elevator operator at the Park Central Hotel when he came to New York; that between propelling his cage up and down the shafts of the large hostelry he had frequented the company of Charlie Barnet, the saxophone-playing band leader, and Charlie's roommate, Herb Reisner, the astute song plugger. He knew that Jimmy had served time behind the counter at Remick's, the music publishing house, and had demonstrated tunes there at the piano. And he was well aware that, as he himself had started as a composer and had shifted to writing lyrics, Jimmy had worked first as a lyric writer before concentrating on the notes and keys. All of that experience as well as an impressively demonstrated harmonic sense

The Incredible Crosby

within the orthodox frame of the popular song convinced

Johnny that this man had to be his new collaborator.

"I've got my new composer, Bing," he informed the star of The Road to Zanzibar,

"Who is the lucky man?" Bing inquired.

"Jimmy Van Heusen."

"Never met him, but the talk about him is good."

"You know about him?"

"But of course. Singing the Dream lad, isn't he?"

"But of course." Johnny walked away muttering something to himself about "I should've known he'd know. Fabulous man. Knows so damn much."

Bing, as always, supported Johnny's suggestion that Jimmy be signed to do the music for the second Road picture, and in September, 1940, Mr. Van Heusen boarded the Twentieth Century at Grand Central bound for Hollywood, Burke, Crosby, and Zanzibar.

Jimmy sat down to read the script for The Road to Zanzibar. He was encouraged that the story was in the Singapore groove, that no extensive knowledge of Zanzibar, its customs, climate, or people, was called for. But what about Crosby? The fact that they said that Bing liked schottische-type songs was not enough. And anyway Jimmy was much more than just a writer of schottisches. He went to the bar and ordered "a schottische and soda no, excuse me, I mean a Scotch," and he comforted himself with the liquor and the thought that Johnny Burke "knew everything there was to know about Bing. A couple of days' conversation, and I'll be well fortified,"

Johnny met Jimmy at the train, and Jimmy went right to the heart of his problem how about the man Crosby?

"What sort of guy is Crosby?"

"You'll meet him," Johnny replied.

Bmg 175

"I know, but if I have a good understanding of him it will make it so much easier for me."

"I suppose you're right. The best way to find out is the way I did. I'll introduce you to his wife, Dixie."

"Good! I'll bring along a notebook."

Johnny introduced Jimmy to Dixie. He asked her his pivotal

question. She answered.

"Well, let me see. He mixes well. He has blue eyes and brown hair. He's the romantic idol of millions of girls. Sings all the time. Loves horses. Plays golf. Likes to wear old clothes. . . ."

"Please, Mrs. Crosby," Jimmy demurred, "I could get all that from a fan magazine."

"That's where I got it," Dixie admitted. "Frankly, I don't know how to describe him. Maybe if you talked to his dad at least you'd hear some boyhood anecdotes."

Jimmy repaired to the offices of Crosby, Inc., and settled down to get the inside on Crosby, Jr., from Crosby, Sr.

"Sir?"

"Yes. Yes. Bing. Yes. Always got into trouble. Don't think he ever studied. Used to drive me crazy with the drums. He still can't play them, really. Real boy, though. You know, a roughneck."

"But there must have been a sentimental side to him," Jimmy objected.

"Better ask his mother about that. The Crosby men aren't demonstrative."

Jimmy sought out Mrs. Crosby. Her story was somewhat different from her husband's.

"Never got into trouble. Harry always studied. He played the drums beautifully; still does. Real boy, though a gentleman."

"How was he in sports?"

"His brother Everett could tell you more about that."

176 The Incredible Crosby

Back to Crosby, Inc., and brother Everett

"May I ask you some questions about Bing?" Jimmy asked his older brother. "If I had a thorough insight into his character, I feel it would help me to compose the right melodies for him."

Everett, in good form, grunted his answer. "Pretty busy," he harrumphed. "Have to change some contracts. Bing's always signing papers without reading them gets into more damn schemes. Invests in anything. See Larry." He grunted again. "Pretty busy."

Jimmy walked around the hall to Larry's office and continued his inquisition.

"Was Bing good at hunting?"

"Nope!" Larry was born in Tacoma, Washington, and spent most of his pre-Hollywood life in the Great Northwest, but his abbreviated language and taciturn personality seemed to spring from the Green Mountains of Vermont

"Why? Did he dislike killing animals?"

"Yep!"

"Does he like fishing?"

"Yep!"

"But he kills fish. Isn't that the same thing?"

"Nope!"

"Can he swim?"

"Yep!"

"Can he play tennis?"

"Is he really a great golfer?"

"Yep!"

"Can you tell me about it?"

"Nope!"

"Who would I have to see about that? His brother Bob?"

"Yep!"

So Jimmy went out to look for brother Bob, the family's baby, who by 1940 had established himself as a successful singer with the Dorsey Brothers' band and with his own, as the leader of the country's most distinguished, if not its only, large Dixieland jazz band. At certain times, in certain situations, Bob was as sparing of his words as the oldest of the Crosby sons.

"What about Bing's golf?"

"I quit golf today. Ask Bob Hope."

The comedian had an answer.

"He kicks his ball out of the rough. Talks on my backswing, sings when I'm putting."

"How do you like his singing?"

"I guess a lot of people like it. But, confidentially, I hear he has no pitch and takes two months to learn a song. They say he has no range and can't read a note. John Scott Trotter will tell you."

Musician to musician, Jimmy asked John Scott to tell him the truth, the whole ditto and nothing but the ditto.

"What's the truth about Bing's voice? I heard a rumor. . . ."

"Write anything you like for him. Terrific range. But only play it once. Remember, just once. He learns so quickly that the second time through he starts improvising."

"What about those nodes on his throat?" There was a widely circulated legend to the effect that Bing's gravel-throated singing sound, the identifying quality of his voice, sprang from nodes on his throat. When Everett insured his voice for \$100,000 with Lloyd's of London, shortly after the inauguration of his radio career, the legend was thoroughly supported for thousands of newspaper readers and their informants, the radio and screen columnists.

John Scott didn't know about nodes. "Here's Dr. Stevens's address," he told Jimmy, and he sent him to consult Bing's doctor.

"Doctor," Jimmy told Stevens, "it's very important, for

178 The Incredible Crosby

professional reasons, that I know about Bing Crosby. Those nodes. . . ."

"Have to consult my records," Dr. Stevens answered in his best professional manner, which, Jimmy noted, was none too professional. His eminence as a Mayo man was unquestioned; his manner was more that of a relaxed college undergraduate, if a little less enthusiastic. "Let's see," the doctor continued. "Seems normal enough if I remember correctly. Slight adenoid trouble. Wouldn't hurt to have them out,"

"How about his spirit, his energy? Just think of running a racing stable and. . . ."

"Look up Lin Howard; they're partners."

Jimmy went out to the track to talk to the second half of the Binglin Stables, the very successful horse-racing executive and business executive of the racing enterprises he and Bing had organized. He found Lin Howard smarting under the steady, though hardly serious, abuse of radio comedians directed at Bing's horses. It had proved a sure-fire laugh to refer to a Crosby runner as last in a race. There had been literally hundreds of

gags, tens of similes (" . . . as far behind as one of Bing's horses." "They finished in a dead heat Crosby's horse was dead . . .").

"I'm getting sick of those cracks on the air. We get plenty of winners. Bing should quit making jokes about our horses."

"Doesn't that mean he has a sense of humor?"

"I don't know. Ask Barney Dean; he writes gags for him."

Jimmy found the little man. He asked Barney about Bing's sense of humor.

"He uses too many big words, but he gets laughs anyway."

"Will he listen to advice?"

"Please believe me, yes. But ask Dave Butler he's directing the picture."

Bing 179

Jimmy found the big man. He asked the perspiring director about Bing's receptivity.

"Please believe me, no! Everything happens to me."

"But, you see, I'm writing the music for your picture, and I thought if I could get the inside story about Bing it would . . .

"Why don't you talk to his sons?"

Back to the Crosby manse in North Hollywood and the Crosby clan.

"Well, fellows?"

"He's a problem, sometimes," Linny said.

"I'd say provocative," Denny said.

"I'm not prepared to make a statement," Phil said,

"I'd suggest you question Johnny Burke," Gary said.

Having gone full swing, Jimmy came back to Johnny, confessing he was "completely bewildered." He told Johnny he'd "better explain all that happened" if he expected "a safe and sane collaboration."

"What did you find out?" Johnny asked. He was very, very nonchalant about it, Jimmy thought. It was an attitude, half serious, half kidding, he was to remark often in Johnny's be-

havior.

"If my calculations are right," Jimmy summed up, "there is no such person as Bing Crosby. Or else there are two hundred and seventy-three Bing Crosbys."

"Didn't you have lunch with him today?"

Jimmy started to get up, involuntarily. He sat down again. "No," he said, "I was two minutes late. The waiter seemed to think I should understand."

"You'd better keep that in mind," Johnny warned, "and he's never two minutes early either."

"Listen," Jimmy said with a degree of tenseness, "there must

180 The Incredible Crosby

be something in him that no one has fathomed yet. Although I hear he has a close circle of friends about the size of the population of China. Everyone seems to know him intimately. Jockeys can talk about him with great authority. Cowboys can. The Underworld. The Aristocracy. Poets. Peasants. But they all have different versions. Maybe he just has the knack of fitting into the other fellow's picture."

"Maybe."

Jimmy thought that Johnny looked bewildered, too, but there was no certainty. There was that nonchalance, half serious, half kidding.

Four years later, Jimmy looked closely at Bing again. He decided that after writing for him for four years, after being associated with a man for that long and seeing a lot of him, you had to learn something about him. "In fact," Jimmy decided, "I can give assurance, very briefly, that he has brown hair, blue eyes, loves horses, plays golf, is married and has four children and sings. And I know what I'm talking about I happen to be one of his millions of close friends."

Actually, Jimmy did not take very long to discover some salient characteristics of Bing Crosby. On the set of *The Road to Zanzibar*, he watched Bing and Bob Hope clown, he saw how deftly their clowning was captured in the finished film. He spent lots of time with Bing as the film was put together, not explaining his songs much, but listening proudly to Bing negotiate the pretty phrases of *It's Always You*, which proved to be the movie's biggest song, watching cheerfully as Bing and Bob hampered home the verbal and musical humor of *Birds of a Feather* and *You Lucky People*, *You*, hoping that *You're Dangerous* would emerge as something more than just a song stopgap to the easy flow of situation comedy with which *Zanzibar* was filled.

The Road to Zanzibar was another Singapore. Its songs were

Bmg 181

hurt by the strike of the broadcasting networks against the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the song licensing association, when the National Association of Broadcasters organized Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) to compete with ASCAP. Without radio promotion, not even It's Always You was able to attain hit proportions. The song business had become a tight web of cross-plugs, films to radio to records; when one step was omitted, a large dent was made in a song's potential popularity. But the picture was a huge success even without the hit songs. The country was eager for all the Crosby-Hope collaboration it could and would be given. Bing's movie fans (for which read all eighty million moviegoers in 1941) had marked time with his previous 1941 film, Rhythm on the River. The river in question was New York's Hudson; the rhythm was provided by a rambunctious little jazz outfit roughly presided over by an old Crosby musical associate, trumpeter, and singer, Wingy Manone. Harry Barris, the old Rhythm Boy colleague of Bing's, made the motions of a saxophonist in the band and sang some, talked more, and gestured impishly, in the Rhythm Boys' manner. Most of the movie was set in a New York boardinghouse, with time out for river-boat dancing, singing, and playing, and with some songs by Bing and Mary Martin (Only Forever, Rhythm on the River, What Would Shakespeare Have Said?, When The Moon Comes Over, and That's for Me). Oscar Levant and John Scott Trotter made brief and effective movie debuts, Levant's understandably more loquacious than Trotter's. Before the year was over, Bing made another movie, another in the show-business series, more auspicious than Rhythm on the River, more pretentious, not in every way more successful. The Birth of the Blues was at its best in its revival of the American song classics, the St. Louis Blues, My Melancholy Baby, and Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nellie. It reproduced old New

182 The Incredible Crosby

Orleans jazz spots with some authenticity but with more attention to the Motion Picture Production Code, which made it impossible to move the cameras' panhandles into brothels, where the hot music actually originated, than to jazz tradition. There was an entirely real New Orleans advertising wagon, with Jack Teagarden's trombone slide falling over the back end, in the "tail-gate 7" manner prescribed for Crescent City sliphorn artists in the early years of this century. There was some amusing dialogue assigned to Teagarden and to Wingy Manone, and a makeshift jazz band assembled behind the faces of Bing, ostensibly fingering a clarinet, and Brian Donlevy, supposedly blowing a trumpet, and with Harry Barris on bass, Harry Rosenthal,

a pianist better known to musicians for his saturnine face and temperament than his keyboard jazz, Perry Botkin, Bing's favorite guitarist after Eddie Lang, double-talker Cliff Nazzaro on drums, and a legitimate, unnamed clarinetist. The band was called the Basin Street Hot Shots for the story's purposes; its temperature was not up to its name; more musical heat was generated by the singing trio of Bing, Jack Teagarden, and Mary Martin in the novelty measures of The Waiter, the Porter, and the Upstairs Maid.

Next on Bing's schedule was a production among productions, a musical of such colossal, stupendous,, gigantic proportions as even to frighten the ubiquitously assured Crosby. The film was Holiday Inn, a festive celebration of American holidays with an all-Irving Berlin score and Fred Astaire dancing for good measure. Bing continued to play his career safe. He wasn't starred in Holiday Inn but costarred with Astaire, and the picture's top billing went to its composer; theatre marquees offered Irving Berlin's Holiday Inn with Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire. Working with Astaire, by 1942 one of Bing's "million close friends," was almost as much a Marching and Chowder Club party as the Road pictures. Bing confided to friends that if he

Bing 183

were to realize his "major ambition" it would be "to become a tap dancer like Fred Astaire." These same friends watched with wonderment when Bing and Fred went to the races together.

Bing placed his bets, as usual on his own horses. In one race, Fred had a heavy bet on Triplicate, running against one of Bing's horses. The race began; Bing took a casual look at his horse and then began to root.

"Come on, Triplicate," he yelled.

Bing's friends waited for him to root for his own horse.

"Come on, Triplicate," Bing implored.

His friends were puzzled. Then they heard a sort of explanation.

"Come on, Triplicate," Bing pleaded again. "He's got to win," he added, "that's my friend's horse."

"He really means it, too," Bing's friends told each other with more than passing amazement. "Against his own horse. Will Crosby wonders never cease?"

There were some Crosby wonders in Holiday Inn Bing danced! He didn't realize his major ambition; he didn't become a tap dancer like Fred Astaire as a result of working with the blithe, lithe terpsichorean; but he did manage to be more than a singer taking some dance steps he was almost as convincing

as he was heavy on his feet. The story was simple, slight, softened to the needs of its stars and the Berlin songs. Bing, as a night-club owner, opened Holiday Inn in Connecticut and offered floor shows presenting himself and Astaire in spectacles only film cabarets can ever afford. Easter Parade was reprised from the stage musical, As Thousands Cheer, to celebrate the secular side of the Day of Resurrection. A new song, Abraham, paid spiritual tribute to Lincoln's Birthday. Plenty to Be Thankful For was for Thanksgiving and the Song of Freedom for Independence Day. Let's Start the New Year Right named its holiday clearly, and so did the motion picture's justified big hit^

184 The Incredible Crosby

White Christmas. By the Christmas holidays of 1942 Irving Berlin's Yuletide greeting, "May all your Christmases be White," sung by Bing, had almost replaced Silent Night and Adeste Fideles as America's musical celebration of December 25. By 1947, the combination had taken the holiday over to such an extent that a columnist could write that "millions of American youngsters think that Christmas means only one thing: Bing Crosby singing White Christmas"

The year 1943 began with a bang and a telephone call. Johnny Burke had been trying to locate Bing; he finally found him at the Brown Derby eating with Fred Astaire, with whom he had just finished playing golf.

"B-Bing," Johnny stuttered, "L-listen, B-Bing, before I say anything I want you to know that Dixie and all the kids are all right."

"Isn't that nice, Johnny?" Bing replied calmly. "How's your family?"

"Listen, Bing," Johnny repeated, and he spoke his next few words slowly, carefully, precisely. "Your house has just burned down."

"Oh, that old thing," Bing dismissed the fire. "Did they save my Tuxedo?"

"Honestly, Bing. Seriously, your house burned down. They were taking down the stuff from the Christmas tree when it started. You'd better come out here right away."

"But I just ordered my dinner. Wait till I finish and stick Astaire with the check. I'll be out."

Bing finished his meal and drove out to Camarillo Avenue to view the ruins of his house and see his family. He went over to the pile of ashes and charred wood and rummaged through them. He found what he was looking for, an old shoe, smoldering a bit but not burnt through. He put his hand in it and came up with \$1,500 in small bills.

Bing 185

"Tomorrow's betting money," he explained to Johnny and then walked over to Dave Shelley's house nearby, where his family was waiting for him.

Bing entered airily, and Dave greeted him just as lightly.

"Hello, Bing," he said, "what's new?"

Bing laughed so hard and so much he fell down.

Shortly after the fire, Bing moved his family into a new house, a resplendent edifice just off one of the tees of the Los Angeles Country/Club, which bounds Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles. There was a nice touch of irony attached to the purchase of this house. Though Bing's house was really on the grounds of the Los Angeles Country Club, though he was acknowledged a first-rate golfer and an outstanding member of the Hollywood community, he could not join the club and use its grounds. The membership was entirely Los Angeles big business; one of its prime rules forbade the admission of anybody directly associated with the movie colony.

Bing made a brief appearance in *Star Spangled Rhythm*, another roll call of Paramount^ stars, minor players, and some additional specialty talent. Before process shots reproducing Gutzon Borglum's huge heads of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, sculptured out of the rock of a North Dakota mountain, with an American flag waving in the breeze and before a crowd of upturned heads, Bing sang *Old Glory*. It was well sung, but the material was not as effective as the setting and the singer demanded.

After *Star Spangled Rhythm*, Bing went back to his film: history of his own business. *Dixie* was devoted to the life and musical adventures of Dan Emmett, a fin de siècle minstrel singer and composer from the South. There was a slight romantic story, with Marjorie Reynolds, who had made some attractive screen footage in *Holiday Inn*, playing Bing's ailing wife. There was some bright comedy, more in Billy de Wolfe's play-

i86 The Incredible Crosby

ing than in his lines. There were some well-staged minstrel-show scenes. For these, Bing had to don blackface,

"Don't forget your ears/* make-up man Harry Ray reminded Bing.

"Got you!"

A few minutes later, in Bing's dressing room, Harry noticed that the singer was preparing to depart for the set.

"Let me look you over," Harry asked.

"Look away, look away," Bing sang the line from Dixie, which was an important part of the film's score.

"Your neck, Bing," Harry reproached him.

"What about my neck?"

"You forgot to blacken it."

"Oh, no," Bing refused, "not my neck."

"But whoever heard of a blackface minstrel with a white neck?"

"I'm not just an ordinary minstrel," Bing explained, "I'm a lazy minstrel man. So I don't blacken my neck." And he didn't.

During the filming of Dixie a conflict arose between Burke and Van Heusen on one side and Paramount officials on the other. Johnny and Jimmy wanted to organize their own music-publishing firm and to publish their own tunes, as part of the publishing combine headed by Buddy Morris, Bing was part of the Morris combination, having shifted his publishing interests from Santly-Joy-Select, along with his brother Larry, when Buddy, former vice-president of the Warner Brothers' Music Publishers' Holding Corporation (the Remick, Harms, and Witmark catalogues), had established his Mayfair and Morris companies. Buddy Morris, a dapper little man who looked and dressed and acted much like former New York Mayor Jimmy Walker, had made a brief start as his own entrepreneur with Johnny Mercer in the Mercer-Morris Publishing Company. Bing liked him as a man and as a publisher; so

Bmg 187

did Johnny and Jimmy; they wanted to have their own firm, but Paramount had two publishing companies of its own. Paramount Music and Famous Music, and wanted to keep the successful writing team on the home lot, from the first composing stages of their songs to the last publishing procedure. In spite of the vigorous difference of opinion over publishing, Johnny and Jimmy finished their songs for Dixie, and Bing proceeded to record them for the sound track.

If You Please went according to Crosby schedule, easily, excellently. Then came Sunday, Monday, or Always, the song everybody expected to be the picture's big hit (as it turned out, even bigger than expectations). Bing usually was, as John Scott Trotter and Jimmy Van Heusen and every other musician associated with him had discovered, a quick study. He usually

mastered his new songs with one hearing. Sunday, Monday, or Always wasn't especially difficult; but Bing just didn't seem to be able to get it. He sang a half tone too high, a half tone too low, consistently off key and away from the melody.

"What's wrong, Bing?" the assistant producer asked him.

"I don't know. I just don't seem to be able to get the tune."

"Is it that hard?" the assistant producer asked.

"I just don't seem to get it Just as Paramount doesn't seem to get the Burke and Van Heusen music company. That's understandable: I don't get Johnny and Jimmy's song; Paramount doesn't get their publishing idea."

"Wait a minute, Bing," the Paramount executive suggested.

"I'll be right back." He hurried out of the recording studio to phone. He called Paramount's executive producer, Y. Frank Freeman. He explained Bing's "difficulty" with the song. Freeman hurried over to the studio.

"Bing," Freeman greeted his star, "I think we understand Johnny and Jimmy better now. We can easily see why they should have their own publishing firm."

1 88 The Incredible Crosby

Bing arose from the chair in which he had been sitting, awaiting disposal of the song situation. He walked to the microphone, gave the nod to the conductor, and sang Sunday, Monday, or Always straight through, without any interruption, without any "difficulty."

Bing's loyalty to his friends was one thing Jimmy Van Heusen learned in his first few years with him. He noticed how closely Bing's musical tastes paralleled his and, where they didn't, how carefully Bing listened, choosing carefully among the records Jimmy played for him and the performances they listened to together in night clubs and at private parties. To Jimmy, Roy Eldridge on trumpet, Coleman Hawkins on tenor saxophone, Benny Goodman on clarinet, and pianists Teddy Wilson and Art Tatum were "the greatest." Bing's taste was close to his here and almost as well informed. If he didn't "love Ellington the greatest band in the business," it wasn't because his enthusiasm for Duke's music was less than Jimmy's; it was just differently expressed.

Jimmy talked about music a great deal. At a party, he explained that his own piano playing had been "positively influenced by Teddy Wilson. I copy his playing; I memorize his records. And I don't know a musician who hasn't been influenced by Ellington. Great orchestral composer. But I don't think he's a great song writer, because he writes pianistic and orchestral things. I call Dick Rodgers a great song writer."

Bing listened.

"You know, Bing," Jimmy told him, "on one record, the Victor Herbert Sweethearts, you had almost a two-octave range. You went from a low F sharp to a high E natural."

"Really?" Bing acted as if he were enormously impressed.

"Your voice has changed. Lowered about a fourth I would say."

Bing 189

"The man has inside information," Bing explained to the other guests. "He can go on like this for hours."

"Come on, let's go over and listen to the pianist." Jimmy led Bing away from some overinquisitive people who were starting to ask questions either too dull or too personal. "In a crowd," Johnny Burke explained pointedly, "Jimmy assumes that function. He always guides Bing away from the squares." With which Johnny made his departure.

Jimmy had assumed another function in Bing's life. He had taken Eddie Lang's place as Bing's advisor, confidant, and chief musical aide. Like Eddie, like Bing, he was closemouthed about himself. He made no bones about the fact that he had broken the bones of his right hand in testing a plane; not many people in Hollywood knew that he was a first-rate flier, went to work as a test pilot early in the war, and had written two movie scores with that broken right hand. Jimmy's parties did not share his silence about himself; they were frequent enough, gay enough, sufficiently filled with good music to gain a high reputation in the world's best-known party town. Besides, Jimmy was reckoned well up toward the top of any list of Hollywood bachelors. His almost completely bald pate, with its stray wisps of brown hair, was eagerly followed by the women who knew him as he made his way along Vine Street to his office in Hollywood or along the back streets of the Paramount lot to his quarters in the music building there. He had discovered, at least in part, "what sort of guy Crosby is"; in the course of his discovery he had moved into Bing's inner circle, had become one of his closest friends, and had clearly established what sort of guy Van Heusen was. A friend of his and of Bing's summed up Jimmy. "Inevitably," he said, "Tie became Bing's friend and, if I may use the well-worn phrase, his bosom companion." Inevitably.

14

IN THE LATE twenties Phil Silvers had played on the same bill

with the Rhythm Boys a couple of times. He came out to Hollywood to look the place over and, looking, saw Bing. "I didn't want to go into the old routine, 'Don't you remember me? Huh?' " So the bespectacled comedian with the fast-fading hair didn't say hello to Bing. One Thursday, however, he was importuned by Jerry Colonna into coming backstage at the NBC studios.

Bing was, as usual on Thursday afternoons during the radio seasons of 1936 to 1946, in his dressing room, one of the row of small cubicles stretching down the hall between the studios in the big building at the corner of Sunset and Vine. No rug to cover the missing hair, of course. Wild clothing, savage in its uncompromising lack of composition, either in color or in de-

190

Bing 191

sign, and maybe, if you looked closely enough, socks that didn't match. Colonna brought Phil in.

"Bing," said Jerry, "Phil Silvers wants to say hello."

"Hello," said Bing, quite undemonstratively.

Okay, Phil said to himself, the big brush. So, the big brush. Anyway, he hasn't seen me since I was a kid. Who do I think I am? Anyway?

To his very next party, Bing invited Phil. "He was just undemonstrative, that's all, see? You never hear him raise his voice. Bing is quiet, but he loves the people around him. He's got a system, conscious or not. When you finally get the system, or that part of it, anyhow, which you are smart enough to understand, then you stop thinking in terms of 'big brushes/ The very next party he invited me. Some brush!"

Phil settled down in Hollywood. His jaw-shattering grin, lighting up the large, soft face under the shadow of the wide-brimmed hat; his cheery greeting popped up in pictures with delightful regularity, with Zanuckian regularity, at Twentieth Century-Fox, How about radio, Bing inquired.

"Have you ever been on the air?" Bing asked.

"Nobody ever asked me," Phil answered.

Two weeks later, Phil was on the air on the Kraft Music Hall. He had a reputation and a naturally funny face; everybody was set to be bowled over. The musicians especially had that expectant look come on, funnyman, knock us out. But Phil was scared. The microphone was frightening. The whole atmosphere was tense; radio was a new experience and something less than a natural one for him. But at rehearsal the words were en-

couraging.

"Okay, Phil," the program's producer said, "you're going to be great."

"Atta boy," John Scott Trotter said.

Not a word from Bing, however. "My Buddy. My Pal," Phil

192 The Incredible Crosby

thought. "He hasn't said a word to me." And for all the nice things the others said, he became twice as nervous. "I was adequate, maybe," he remembers., 4< but that's all."

Ten minutes before air time, Bing came into his dressing room. "Aha," thought Phil, "here it comes. The pep talk."

They talked about some future camp show for the Army. Phil was really getting nervous, and the inclination to let his knees quiver and his teeth rattle continued right through to Bing's introduction on the air.

"... A young comedian creating a furor at Twentieth Century-Fox. You saw him in Cover Girl, in Coney Island. . . . My good friend and compatriot on many a camp tour. . . "

Up to there it was rehearsed. Phil had his mouth open waiting for his cue, when

". . . on many a camp tour and a big smash in Boise, Idaho Phil Silvers."

The Boise reference was a private joke between Crosby and Silvers. It broke Phil up. He let out a big yell, forgot about his nervousness, forgot the new medium, forgot everything except that he was with the selfsame Buddy, the very identical Pal who had seemed to desert him, and he relaxed. After the yell came the good lines that had been rehearsed and the good ones that hadn't been as Phil ad-libbed his way through a very satisfying program.

Bing wasn't often nervous. He'd sing anywhere and everywhere, Phil noticed. Sing in his car, rolling down the road, in or out of town. Sing in dining cars for waitresses. Sing barber-shop harmony when he could, and obviously he loved it. But when the bond tour came up in 1943, he was a little reluctant.

"After radio shows and the movies, what am I going to do with a big live audience?" Bing asked.

"Kill 'em," Phil replied.

"I don't know," Bing worried.

Bing 193

Fortunately, there was a way of getting back into his stage stride for Bing. A series of impromptu comedy appearances with Phil and Johnny Burke and Jimmy Van Heusen at parties worked off the rough edges. The small audiences brought back the Crosby confidence, brought it back many times redoubled.

"So I became the villain." Phil moans. "He got so he loved to do the comedy bits for the bond shows, and the audiences figured he was carrying me, since I was a comedian. They resented the interruption of Bing's singing. Bing wouldn't let go of the comedy, nor would he disappoint the audiences. We worked out a new routine. Bing sang eight or nine songs first, and then we went into the comedy act. It was like a dozen radio shows rolled into one."

Bing caught the up-tempo stage pace again. He'd stop in little towns, whistle stops, wherever an audience could gather, be entertained, and signed up for Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau's embossed certificates. Sometimes the train would be sidetracked in little towns without audiences. Bing would leave the train and take a leisurely walk around the town.

"We leave in three hours," the conductor would say.

"Three hours. Got you," Bing would affirm.

In three hours, on the second, he'd be back. Maybe the train would start a few minutes early or as many late; whenever or however, Bing would appear a few moments before it departed. It was as if he were hiding in the control tower or between cars on the next siding, but he clearly never was.

"Scary," Phil says. "I walked behind him, matching the slow, strolling gait, watching the inevitable pipe, hanging down from his mouth. We'd walk and walk and walk. And walk. And walk right back to the train as it was ready to leave, not ready because Bing was back but ready if he did get back."

On the train trips, as most of the time at home, Bing rose early. No matter what time he got into bed, the next morning

194 The Incredible Crosby

around the milkman's hours Bing was up. In Cheyenne, Wyoming, they stayed in the hotel opposite the railway station, and Bing got up early. It was so early, nobody was abroad yet in Cheyenne's streets. Bing walked across from the hotel to a 20 by 20 patch of grass with a rail around it.

Around noon, the room clerk called Phil "You'd better get down here," he told him. "Fast"

Phil got down and followed the clerk's pointing finger.
"There. See?"

Phil saw. Bing had just stretched out on the patch of grass, tipped his hat under his head, fixed his pipe in his mouth, and fallen asleep. Now, at high noon, there were 20,000 people, or so it looked, gathered around the rails, staring incredulously at him, not quite believing, but assured enough so they wouldn't go away, and their numbers were increasing by the split second.

Phil thought fast.

"Okay, you big ham," he said. "Three-sheeting again." And he led him away.

That same night in Cheyenne, Bing decided he wanted a little diversion.

"Let's go to the local ballroom, Phil," he said. "I feel like hearing a good band."

They paid their 75 cents apiece and walked in. Nobody bothered them. Under the artificial light it was more difficult to recognize Bing than it had been at high noon on the grass. After a little while, Bing suggested a breath of fresh air. When they returned to the ballroom, they were stopped at the door by an attendant.

"Where d'ya think you're going?"

"In," Phil replied, but they had to show their stubs. After they got in again, Phil turned to Bing.

Bing 195

"Big man" he mocked, "not even good for a decent deposit."

Bing looked so much like the guy next door or the man behind the counter at the market that nobody ever paid him the mild compliment of looking twice, unless their attention was called to him, as at a bond show. In Spokane the face was more familiar.

A gas-station attendant yelled, "Hey, Bing!"

Bing yelled back, "Frank! How're things?"

Somebody else turned to Bing on the street in front of their hotel. "Well, Bing Crosby!"

"Well," Bing acknowledged, as he named the man's name, wheeled in turn, and talked for a few minutes.

At the Spokane hotel, Bing and Phil found a suite of rooms reserved for them.

"Sorry," Bing demurred, "too big. Got something a little cosier?" As always., he looked for the single room, or the small pair.

"And not too high up," Bing added. As always, he shied away from the top stories, as he avoided flying and any other means of encountering great heights.

When they were settled in their small suite, not too high up, Bing made himself comfortable on his bed.

"Ahhhhhh," he murmured, stretching himself, "mmmm."

The phone rang. Bing picked up the receiver.

"Joe?" he said "How are you? Whatcha been doing? Good. Coming up? Good."

A few minutes later Joe came up. Phil did a small take. Joe was a bishop. Introductions completed, Bing and the bishop sat down to talk.

". . . That window . . . oh . . ." Bing groaned.

". . . Smashed to smithereens . . ." Joe said.

". . . Great team . . ." Bing enthused.

ig6 The Incredible Crosby

". . . , And another thing we used to do ... remember?" Joe asked.

In Seattle, it was a huge open-air show thousands of people milling around the stage but nobody tried to tear Bing's clothes; nobody, as a matter of fact, really bothered him. They were content to watch quietly, waiting for the funny gestures and grimaces of Bing and Phil as they prepared their program, smiling when the motions of Crosby and Silvers or their facial expressions caught their fancy. Phil looked around and noted the smiles with pleasure. Suddenly a cry disturbed the quietness of the smiles and the soft laughter that Bing's antics on the stage had elicited. Phil looked around again. It was a baby crying, a baby who was lost. He leaned down and picked it up. "Mama will find you" he comforted the very little child. "See," he said, "I'll hold you where you can be seen." But the baby wouldn't stop crying.

"Sweet Leilani" Bing was talking to the audience. "Sweet Leilani for- a \$500 bond."

Still the baby would not stop crying. Phil turned to Bing,

thrusting the child in front of him.

"Here, Bing," Phil said, "this is more your racket."

Bing took the baby, took a good look at it, and exclaimed, "My God! A girl. I haven't seen a little girl in years!"

At the obvious reference to his wholly male family, the crowd burst into loud laughter and fixed firm attention upon the stage. Bing sang Sweet Leilani, holding the little girl in his arms. Her mother noticed her, and the family was once more complete.

"Mr. America," Phil murmured to himself, "Mr. America."

The camp tours continued through the war. There were several with a large troupe Bing paid for himself, including a band, dancers, specialty acts, and comedians. The latter were Phil Silvers and Rags Ragland as often as not. And when Phil and Rags were along, it was a ball all the way. Bing would call to

Bing 197

them in the morning, singing as he passed their separate berths in their Pullman car.

"Oh Philly Boyyyyyy," Bing sang to Phil.

"Oh Raggedy Man," Bing sang to Rags.

Others in the car who hadn't noticed that Bing Crosby was among them looked up in amazement. It couldn't be Bing Crosby. But after a couple of grace notes and a husky bass note it was obvious that it was. Bedlam. The aisle was quickly jammed with people going quietly crazy. Somehow the latent hysteria never developed. Bing looked up and smiled, said "Hi" to a couple of people, and before there was time for the throbbing mob to get out of hand he was out of the car.

With Jimmy Van Heusen, on one trip in 1942, Bing covered 5,000 miles around the western United States. It was just the two of them, Jimmy and Bing, singing with piano, singing and playing hundreds and hundreds of songs, old and new and in between. Jimmy's little baby upright piano was wheeled from hospital ward to hospital ward, stopped some place in the middle of the room, and they were on. At one hospital they encountered a problem.

"This kid," one of the doctors told Bing, "doesn't think about anything but dying. He won't talk. He never smiles. I don't know what you can do. But go in and see him anyway, won't you?"

"Love to," Bing said. And in he went.

"Hi," Bing greeted the dying soldier, whose bandage-swathed

body hulked sadly against the back of his bed.

No acknowledgment.

"Let's see now," Bing continued, as if he had been greeted enthusiastically. "Let's knock off a couple of songs." Jimmy and Bing piled through a couple of dozen.

"Next?" Bing asked.

Not a nod.

The Incredible Crosby

"Well, here we go again. The indefatigable Mr. Van Heusen will carry on, I'm sure." Back they went to the singing and playing.

Bing looked out of the corner of his eye and noticed the white figure moving ever so little. There was the very slightest suggestion of a smile on the boy's face. Then a real tooth-baring smile.

"Do you play anything yourself?" Bing asked, for no apparent reason at all. Nobody had told him the boy played. Somehow he knew,

"Guitar," the boy said.

"Guitar it shall be," Bing said. He turned to Jimmy. "James," he ordered, with a commanding gesture of his right hand, "a guitar. With some dispatch, now." And he clapped his hands.

Jimmy and Bing carried musical instruments with them when they went camp touring, to leave with those soldiers and sailors and marines who did play but didn't have any to play on. The guitar was accordingly brought, with the requested dispatch, and handed to the soldier.

"Well, then," Bing asked him, "shall we cut a few?"

The boy nodded.

"A-one, a-two," Bing beat off, and they cut a few songs. When Bing and Jimmy left a long while later, the boy who wouldn't talk or smile, the boy who could think about nothing but dying, waved a strong good-by, said good-by, strummed a couple of chords of good-by.

"He died," Jimmy finishes the story. "But I don't think he died thinking about dying. To that kid, as to almost all the other soldiers, it was a dream come alive. To those guys Bing is a myth, a god. They just can't believe it's Bing when he shows up. When they finally relax and accept him, because he has relaxed, almost anything can happen. Almost anything."

Bing 199

Three shows a day were a commonplace on the Crosby-Silvers-Ragland-Van Heusen tours. At Wendover Field, on salt flats 150 miles outside of Salt Lake City, Utah, Bing, traveling that trip with Jimmy and Bob Hope, discovered that there had been no entertainment at all for the men assigned there. It was the most deserted camp Bing and Bob and Jimmy had ever seen, if not simply the most deserted in the country. No town pitched its roofs within the 15-mile radius of the field. And no entertainers pitched tents at the field, until Crosby and Company.

One show. The applause was tumultuous, of course. But the one show was not enough. The guys' eyes pleaded.

Two shows. Applause again, and much, much more. Two shows were not enough. The guys' eyes pleaded.

Three shows. Hope told every joke he had ever told. Bing sang every song he could, and Jimmy played every tune he had ever written. That just about did it.

There were the shows with son Gary, whose gravel-throated singing tones sounded so much like Bing's. Father and son exchanged lines, touched off a few weak dance steps, sang separately and together.

"Ah," Phil Silvers commented, "the Gentile Marx Brothers."

Then, in 1944, it was Europe and the men fighting overseas that Bing went to entertain. Fred Astaire, working in Blue Skies with him, went with Bing. As Astaire danced, Bing looked on with unconcealed awe. "If I had it to do all over again if I had the talent I would be a dancer as much like Astaire as possible."

Bing sang at the opening of the Stage Door Canteen in London's Piccadilly. He left the toupee at home, as he always did in his camp appearances, dressed in poorly matching trousers and jacket, his sports shirt buttoned at the collar but

200 The Incredible Crosby

without a tie. He slouched forward to the microphone, right hand in right pants pocket. His G.L. accompanist rolled off a few runs, played the telltale chords, and they were off.

When Crosby and Astaire reached the U.S. Army Eighth Air Force bomber base in England, they gladly posed for pictures, hundreds of pictures, that the soldiers, male and female, would treasure for decades to come. A memorable shot for the ladies

in question offered Bing in a disconsolate moment: one nurse held his right hand, with a huge needle poised above it, ostensibly prepared to inject him; another nurse held his pulse gingerly; another looked slyly, happily aware of her knowing pose, at Astaire, who held an ether mask within inches of the pipe-adorned Crosby countenance; and this last, the face, was a sad and worried spectacle, eyes lifted imploringly to Heaven, mouth twisted down around the pipe with dejection. A little bit of hammy acting, and three girls took home a never-to-be-forgotten moment immortalized in negative and positive.

At Chalons-sur-Marne, Bing joined forces with Dinah Shore to give a show for a detachment of engineers. A steak was cooked for the singers. The colonel saw them struggling with it.

"Look/* the colonel said, "I know it's tough. But remember, my orderly had to chase that cow 10 miles before she stepped on a mine."

From London, Bing broadcasted to the troops on the Armed Forces Network. He spoke in German to the German people and Bob Musel, United Press correspondent in London, thought of a name for the phenomenon of Crosby, the American Propagandist, talking German to the Germans. "Der Bingle" was Musel's description in the story he cabled home, the day Bing made his first broadcast to Deutschland. The name made sense. The minute Musel's story hit the ink of American newspapers was the minute "der Bingle" was ac-

Bing 201

cepted by millions of people as the proper name for the singer-actor-sportsman-propagandist. First Harry Lillis. Then Bing. Then, to metonymy-happy columnists, the Groaner. Finally, der Bingle, a citizen of the world who had to have a name befitting a man of such parts. Der Bingle.

Part Three: DER SINGLE

As AN INTERNATIONAL, character Bing found new scope, new responsibilities, a richer life but a more difficult one as well. He was an important entertainer; General MacArthur cabled for special Crosby broadcasts to his besieged men at Bataan; a group of servicemen formed a Hope and Crosby for President and Vice-President Club; he was presented with the "G.I. Oscar" as the result of a poll of eight theatres of war taken by Yank, the official army newspaper, in which Bing was selected as "the person who had done more for the morale of overseas servicemen than any other entertainer" When a chairman was sought to head the drive for funds of the Sister Kenny Foundation to Fight Infantile Paralysis, Bing was the

logical choice.

His motion pictures became more important. He became the biggest record seller in the history of the phonograph. He inaugurated a new type of radio program, which threatened to change the very nature of radio. His life drew closer to the lives of the other entertainment giants of his time and became the subject of assaults by some of the pygmies of the same world. There was talk of his voice fading, and a quick rush to his defense by many, but most of all by his voice itself.

When the radio editor of the Lincoln, Nebraska, Star asked him for a statement as part of a series of short articles on 'What They

203

204 The Incredible Crosby

Might Have Been,' 9 Bing sent a personal reply right off in the form of a telegram.

IT'S FLATTERING TO SAY THE LEAST FOR ANYONE TO ASSOCIATE ME WITH ANYTHING AS LOFTY AS AMBITION. 'EXCELSIOR' IS A WORD NO MAN EVER WROTE ON THE CROSBY BANNER, AS WITNESS THE PERFORMANCE OF MY HORSES. HOWEVER, IF YOU'LL BEND AN EAR AND LET ME WHISPER IT, I'LL MAKE AN EXCEPTION IN YOUR CASE AND MAKE A CONFESSION. IF I HADN'T FOUND SOMETHING AS EASY AS SINGING TO EARN ME A LIVING, I'M AFRAID THE NAME OF CROSBY WOULD BE ADDING TO THE CLUTTER OF THE STALLS THAT PEDDLE LEARNING TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AT TWO FIFTY A VOLUME. IN SHORT, EVER SINCE MOTHER CROSBY LENT ME A HAND WITH MY FIRST GRAMMAR SCHOOL COMPOSITION ON WHY A FLY CAN WALK A CEILING, A PHENOMENON THAT'S ALWAYS FASCINATED ME, I'VE CHERISHED A YEN TO HUNT AND PECK MY

WAY INTO THE CHARMED CIRCLE OF LITERATI. HOWEVER, THE LURE OF THE OPEN ROAD, A TOPLESS FLIVVER AND A SET OF SECOND HAND DRUMS WERE MY UNDOING. THE GYPSY GOT THE BEST OF THE BARD AND THE SHAKESPEARE IN ME HAS BEEN GROANING WITH FRUSTRATION EVER SINCE. YOUR LETTER REKINDLES OLD AMBITIONS, AND DON'T BE SURPRISED IF YOUR FAVORITE PUBLISHER COMES OUT WITHIN A FORTNIGHT OF YEARS WITH A WHODUNIT CALLED 'MURDER IN SWING TIME' OR 'THE MYSTERY OF THE MUSICAL CLUE/ I MIGHT ADD THAT HAD I RECEIVED YOUR LETTER TWENTY YEARS AGO YOU WOULD HAVE FOUND ME SWINGING OFF THE NEXT TRAIN TO LINCOLN AND CAMPING ON MR. THROOP'S DOORSTEP FOR A STAFF JOB AT EIGHTEEN BUCKS PER WEEK. WARMEST REGARDS.

BING CROSBY

But Bing didn't have to give serious consideration to what he might have been. He knew, as most of the rest of the world did, just what and who he was der Single.

"THAT'S A GREAT shot of a priest!" Barney screamed. He pointed at Bing, dressed for the part of Father O'Malley in *Going My Way*. It was on the set; the picture was in its early stages. Bing's friends weren't quite used to seeing him in the garb of a priest of the Roman Catholic Church. But this!

"What's wrong?" Bing called from the camp chair where he was happily engrossed in his reading.

"Look at you," Barney directed.

Bing looked up and down. "I don't see anything wrong."

"What're you reading?"

"Oh, that!" Bing laughed and returned to his attentive perusal of the Racing Form, studying the past performances of the horses that were going to run in that day's races around the country's tracks.

206 The Incredible Crosby

Bing Crosby in the reversed collar, the black vestment and suit of a priest, with a straw hat cocked jauntily on his head and a Racing Form in his hands nothing could better have pointed up the unique quality of the film he was making. American audiences were enthralled with the movie when it was released in 1944; though there were no "great shots" of the Crosby priest reading a Racing Form, nor any talk of horses, the picture was warmed throughout by this feeling, by the juxtaposition of opposites, the alternation of sober language befitting the clergy and street slang, the variety of moods and manners and miens that had made Bing all things to all men and now made his election to the priesthood so right and proper and convincing. The ingratiating story started as an idea in the head of writer-director-producer Leo McCarey, who was a little scared of its reception by Paramount executives but not at all unsure of the success it would meet with at the box office.

"Too religious," they told McCarey at Paramount.

"It's not just a religious picture," he answered; "it's Bing."

"It's still a religious picture."

"It's a beautiful story."

"Maybe. But"

"Look," McCarey insisted, "I'll put up every cent I've got in the world, \$51,000. Will that convince you?"

McCarey's money talked; it was not enough in itself to sell Paramount, but it was a beginning. Bing's confidence in the story, the projected screen play, and the role he was going to play cinched the picture. In the middle of 1943 work was begun on *Going My Way*.

Frank Cavett, who had first outlined the story of the New Jersey priest who had written *Love Sends a Little Gift of Roses* and other successful popular songs to McCarey, was one of the two writers who prepared the screen play from the director's story. The other writer was Frank Butler, previously known for

Der Bingle 207

his collaboration on the Crosby-Hope Road pictures. The three men managed to capture, not only a sure-fire plot, but the elusive diction of Bing himself, which fitted the characterization of Father O'Malley so well, and the stumbling, staggering, touching speech of the little old priest Barry Fitzgerald played.

For Fitzgerald's sensitive voice and hands and bodily movements, brilliantly trained at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, there was Father Fitzgibbon. The old priest was made to order for Fitzgerald; the screen-play description suggests just how well tailored the part was: "He is an old man, disintegrating under the weight of his years. He is absent-minded, irritable and stubborn. He speaks with an Irish brogue, and his humor is barbed, sometimes painfully so." Add to this Father Fitzgibbon's self-description: "The Bishop may hold a grudge against me. He may think I've got a mouthful of clover and can't preach. . . ." Not since Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars* had the little actor, one of the really great men of the twentieth-century stage, found such a vehicle.

And never before had all of Crosby been permitted expression: the part of Father O'Malley was an open invitation to review his life, to reach back to Gonzaga and the formative years of his childhood, to the Jesuit Fathers who had taught him, to Father Corkery with whom he had grown up, to Father Curtice Sharp, to Big Jim Kennelly. Even the sets reproduced the atmosphere of his old school. Paramount's art department had "dressed" St. Dominic's Parish House, where most of the picture was laid, beautifully; its fumed-oak walls and Victorian decoration were right out of half the late nineteenth-century Catholic edifices in America, including the school named after St. Aloysius Gonzaga. Bing felt at home here, and his every action in every scene in the film in which he appeared (and he was the dominating figure in all but a few frames) reflected his ease amid these surroundings.

"It's right!" Leo McCarey cried triumphantly.

Bing showed just how right it was by sitting calmly on the set in his clerical garb reading the Racing Form.

In his preface to the volume of Best Film Plays of 1943-44, which he coedited with Dudley Nichols, John Gassner summed up the salient achievements of *Going My Way* excellently. He compared the picture with Wilson y the screen biography of Woodrow Wilson, which "stands first in this collection, as one mark of progress in the social efficacy of screen drama."

"On a different, and yet not entirely unrelated, level of prominence stands *Going My Way*. It is another screenplay revolving around men of good will, a tribute to those who move in small ways its wonders to perform; who taking fire from the empyrean of a faith, bring it down in individual portions to the common earth of common men. Of all recent spiritual screen dramas, *Going My Way* proved to be closest to everyday light without losing but actually gaining radiance, revealed itself as most engagingly related to ordinary humanity, and managed to dispense its meaning with the greatest freedom from debatable hypothesis and with the greatest gayety. If a little sentimentality crept into it, it was not the kind for which apologies are urgently in order. If the benevolent course of action, if the limited social service and the good will in the film cannot be regarded, at least by some of us, as a panacea (it has been tried so often by individuals and groups without saving the world from its disasters!), that need hardly trouble the sceptic. *Going My Way* makes no immoderate claims for creed or policy that we can feel called upon to refute. Its contagion is of the spirit, and its validity is unimpeachable on this score, and also on the score of its recognizably human portraiture. The excellent blending in *Going My Way*, of drama and music, is, moreover^

Der Single 209^

as singular an accomplishment as Hollywood has delivered in many years." *

The picture opens with a scene on New York's West Forty-ninth Street. "An upper window fades in. . . ." The street is bedraggled, worn, old, a multiformity of brownstone houses, once elegant, now heavily peopled with the ill-clad and ill-fed in what the screen-play authors call "ill-conditioned flats." We are first introduced to one of the most sharply drawn characters in the movie, Mrs. Quimp, "fortyish, flat-breasted^ ominous. She owns a moist, peaked nose, a malicious tongue, and a talent for purveying gossip. Her voice is adenoidal, metallic, as if filtered through a Jews-harp. She is referred to-

locally, and without affection, as 'The Quimp/ "

Father O'Malley's "Excuse me, Ma'am . . ." are the first words. He asks the way to St. Dominic's. Before he gets to the church he gets a verbal spanking from Mrs. Quimp for not knowing the way, some information about the Quimp's piety from other residents of her house (" . . . she's a regular two-a-day-er.... Very religious. Burns candles! . . . Candles and 'scandals . . ."), learns that Mrs. Quimp could tell him plenty about them, too, gets the directions he wants, gets involved in, a baseball game in which he misses a ball, which sails through an irate Mr. Belknap's window, trades words with Belknap,. offers to pay for the broken window and leave his ebony, silver, and mother-of-pearl rosary as a deposit, receives it back from. Belknap, who informs him he's an atheist (" . . . I don't believe in it matter of fact, I don't believe in anything . . ."), gets soaked by a street sprinkler. The incidents occur quickly,, forcefully; they set the scene of the film firmly in New York and establish Father O'Malley's personality strikingly.

Back at the Parish House, Father Fitzgibbon receives the

* Copyright, 1945, by Crown Publishers.

210 The Incredible Crosby

difficult news from Ted Haines, Sr. (Gene Lockhart), that the mortgage he holds on St. Dominic's will shortly be foreclosed. Neither the priest's nor Ted, Jr.'s, arguments can sway the mortgage-holding financier.

For his first interview with the old priest, Father O'Malley has to appear in a sweatshirt decorated in front with the stenciled 'Property of the St. Louis Browns' in back with a Mickey Mouse cartoon. A telephone conversation with Father Timothy O'Dowd (Frank McHugh) interrupts Fathers O'Malley and Fitzgibbon; it adds to the antipathy the old priest feels for the young priest, who, though the fact is concealed from him, has come to relieve him of his duties. He shows O'Malley around the church and church garden; in the church the scene fades on a statement by O'Malley, after he has dropped a coin in the candle repository: "I love the symbolism of the candles the light of faith shining in a pagan world sort of keeping vigil for you while you're busy . . . (aside) and t>oy, how I need it."

Father Fitzgibbon is appalled at all the athletic apparatus O'Malley owns, gets involved in a dispute over golf with O'Dowd and O'Malley (says Fitzgibbon tartly, ". , . a golf course is nothing but a pool-room moved outdoors"), receives a gift of a litter of puppies and their mother, and sends O'Malley over to keep Mrs. Quimp from being evicted by Ted Haines, Jr. This Father O'Malley accomplishes, in the process becoming something of a friend of the young Haines.

There follow some amusing scenes in which "a gang of young hoodlums" steal some live fowl from a truck, pass the remaining bird, a turkey, onto "Fadder" Fitzgibbon, who is discomfited a little when he learns from O'Malley that the gobbler was stolen, not won in a raffle by the gang's leader, Tony Scaponi, and his friends. Then we meet Carol James, "a slim, lovely girl in her late 'teens. She is definitely not 'Big City' but has a world

Der Single 211

of self-assurance." Carol has run away from home in another city to get away from her parents and to pursue a singing career. Her excessively romantic gestures are neatly parodied by Bing in the course of singing *The Day after Forever*; in a film happily free of devices, it is a most casually introduced musical aside; the song is a brightly integrated moment in the procedure of the story, as all the music is. After the singing lesson, O'Malley sends Carol off to look for work and a room, with \$10 he insists on lending her.

A long scene dwells on O'Malley's rehearsal of Tony's gang as a choir for the church, which is sadly lacking musically. The boys' progress through *Three Blind Mice*, the enticement of baseball after the singing session, and the hold of strong-armed, strong-voiced Tony over his boys, to a dulcet, decorous *Silent Night* is funny, moving, charming, and always unusually fresh, fresh beyond the hackneyed music itself.

Fitzgibbon had been annoyed by the sound of *Three Blind Mice* blasting through the basement where the boys were singing. Without waiting to hear more he had rushed off to complain to the bishop and get O'Malley transferred. He returns, troubled in mind and soul by the knowledge that O'Malley has been carrying him and not he O'Malley. He faces the young priest with a contrite expression, facial and verbal, and offers his aid ("If me cooperation means anything, I want ye to know ye'll have it"). Then he goes upstairs to lie down. Instead of retiring, however, the old man runs away; his absence is discovered when he doesn't show up for dinner. An alarm is sounded then by the police, and Father Fitzgibbon is brought back to St Dominic's in the inevitable pouring rain with which the movies make dramatic moments melodramatic. Barry Fitzgerald's portrayal of the "frustrated, soaked, unhappy little man" relieves the scene of any falseness. By means of a memorable few gestures and vocal inflections he follows the

212 The Incredible Crosby

screen-play directions: "Like a small runaway boy, thwarted by the terrors of the night, he has come home." Home, he is well fed and tucked to bed with the aid of some Irish whisky hidden behind *The Life of General Grant* in the bookcase. The whisky reminds Fitzgibbon of his mother, still in Ireland, and the song

cue is straightforward and unforced; Bing sings Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, an Irish lullaby.

Returning from taking Tony's gang to a Western movie, O'Malley runs into Jenny Linden (Rise Stevens), an old girl friend, recently returned from Europe and South America to make her Metropolitan debut that night as Carmen. The dressing-room scene in which she discovers that he stopped writing her to become a priest has a dramatic impact beyond the lines themselves. When Jenny sees O'Malley's priestly clothes, revealed by his opened overcoat, she understands. And Bing again follows script directions implicitly. ("There is a great serenity about him; a great dignity.") Jenny's words, spoken in a hushed voice, in a beautifully managed sotto-voce episode, express that serenity and dignity of Bing's O'Malley: "Father Chuck . . . (With a catch in her voice, a little gesture of bewilderment, a little smile.) It'll take me a little while to get used to that (Another pause, and she speaks very brightly.) Where's your parish, Father?" Little in the wholly affectionate portrait of priests in* this film establishes so effectively as this extract the strength of O'Malley's character, the respect of others for him and, by implication, for all priests. In one of the most particular developments of the story, Going My Way is most general.

The Quimp complains about the behavior of Carol James and Ted Haines, Jr., and so O'Malley goes up to the apartment in which Ted has set up Carol to investigate the situation. He discovers nothing that violates his priestly proprieties and takes advantage of the scene's moral flavor to deliver the movie's one heavy, clumsily prosaic sermon: "... I get a great happiness

Der Bingle 213

out of helping people realize that religion isn't this . . . (He grimaces mournfully and gestures both hands down to the floor) taking all the fun out of everything but this (He smiles and gestures, bringing both hands upward). It can be bright bring you closer to happiness. . . . Do you go to church, Ted? (As Ted reacts.) Or should I change the subject? (As Ted nods.) Here's something you might try. . . . When your conscience you know, that little fellow on your shoulder starts whispering to you don't stick your fingers in your ears give him a break." When Ted suggests that "if you want to do things badly enough . . . that little fellow can't stop you from doing them," O'Malley has an answer: "No, but he can stop you from having a good time while you're doing them." AH of which may be theologically sound, but in this form it cheapens the Christian concept of conscience and makes a Walt Disney cartoon of religion. The title song, which follows, is in the same vein. It is relieved of some of its commonplace sentimentalizing of religious doctrine by Johnny Burke's ease with a lyric line and the tightness of Jimmy Van Heusen's melodic line:

This road leads to Rainbowville

Going My Way?

Up ahead is Bluebird Hill,

Going My Way?

Just pack a basket full of wishes,

And off you start with Sunday morning in your heart.

Round the bend you'll see a sign.

Dreamers 9 Highway.

Happiness is down the line,

Going My Way?

The smiles you gather will look well on you,

Oh, I hope you re Going My Way, too.*

* Copyright, 1944, by Burke and Van Heusen, Inc.

214 The Incredible Crosby

The Quimp brings her latest bill of complaints to Father Fitzgibbon; this time the offender is O'Malley. To each of her citations, delivered with great asperity, Fitzgibbon offers an example of O'Malley's handsome performance of his priestly duties, delivering his rejoinders with softness, patience, and tolerance. The Quimp leaves bewildered, wilted*

Jenny comes to hear the boys' choir, remains to marvel and discuss with O'Malley and O'Dowd some way of selling Chuck's songs as a means of meeting the mortgage. This scene is followed by one with the two Haineses, Sr. and Jr., and Carol, in which the father discovers that the son has married the singer, who is now working, and that Ted, Jr., is off to war as a pilot. Ted, Sr., is reconciled to the news in a tearful, happily unprolonged exchange of lines and whines.

At the Metropolitan Opera House, O'Malley runs his boys' choir through Going My Way, with Jenny Linden's help, for a quartet of music publishers, Dolan, Lilley, Burke, and Van Heusen (named, amusingly enough, after Robert Emmet Dolan, who conducted the orchestra for the picture's sound track; Joe Lilley, who did most of the arrangements and had for years scored Bing's pictures and many of his recordings; and Johnny and Jimmy). The publishers are not sold on the possibilities of the religious song, but they are quite taken by Swinging on a Star. Their movie response was, of course, more than duplicated by the picture's audiences, by radio listeners, and

by record and sheet-music buyers throughout America. The song demonstrated Burke and Van Heusen's way with material designed for children. Though the most successful of their children's efforts, and justifiably a hit of epidemic proportions, *Swinging on a Star* does not by any means reveal the limits of the pair's talents as writers of words and music for youngsters. They have a cabinet full of songs originally addressed to Johnny's girl twins, Rory and Regan, and younger boy, Kevin Cur-

Der Bingle

tis (named after Father Sharp), and the Crosby boys. In the normal order of things it was to be expected that Bing would record these tunes for tots; somehow there was never room in his schedule of less distinguished, considerably more transient romantic ballads and nebulous novelties for the children's works. It would be a mistake of perhaps major proportions if he were to grow old beyond the ability to do them justice without recording the songs. In the meantime we can content ourselves with the nursery-rhyme classicism of *Swinging on a Star*, which at least suggests the brightness of the missing songs in its Mother Goose-like clarity, simplicity, and charm:

Oh, would you like to swing on a star,
Carry moonbeams home in a jar,
And be better off than you are,
Or would you rather be a mule?

A mule is an animal with long funny ears,
He kicks up at anything he hears.
His back is brawny and his brain is weak,
He's just plain stupid with a stubborn streak.
And by the way, if you hate to go to school,
You may grow up to be a mule.

Or, would you like to swing on a star,
Carry moonbeams home in a jar,
And be better off than you are,
Or would you rather be a pig?

A pig is an animal with dirt on his face,
His shoes are a terrible disgrace,
He has no manners when he eats his food
'N 7 he's fat 'n lazy T n extremely rude!
But if you don't care a feather or a fig,
You may grow up to be a pig.

2i 6 The Incredible Crosby

Oh, would you like to swing on a star,
Carry moonbeams home in a jar,
And be better off than you are,
Or would you rather be a fish?

A fish won't do anything but swim in a brook,
He can't read his name or write in a book.
To fool the people is his only thought
Yeah, but even though he's slippery, he still gets caught.
But then if that sort of life is 'what you wish,
You may grow up to be a fish.

And all the monkeys aren't in the zoo.
Every day you meet quite a few.
So you see it's all up to you,
You can be better than you are.
You could be swinging on a star*

Johnny's close study of versifiers and versification, with particular attention to the brilliant ways with rhythms and rhymes and plays on words of William Schwenck Gilbert, had stood him in good stead. And Jimmy's bachelor life had not deadened him to the sound and shape of children's lives and the musical substance that might be constructed out of them; he gave Johnny's amusing words rollicking tunes to carry them. The tight uniting of words and music was not lost upon Bing or the Robert Mitchell Boys 7 Choir, who together sang both in *Going My Way*. Their performance was the kind which would have stopped a stage musical cold and elicited such applause from the audience, again and again, that several dozen additional sets of lyrics would have been necessary. As it was, wherever the movie played, deafening applause greeted this section of the film and the next few lines were lost in the roar of appreciation.

The next scene took the music publishers, Jenny, and her

* Copyright, 1944, ty Burke and Van Heusen, Inc.

Der Bingle 217

Metropolitan conductor to church to put the money for the song into the collection box so that Father Fitzgibbon would not be aware of its source. Then a golf match, in which Fitzgibbon is prevailed upon by O'Malley and O'Dowd to swing at a few balls with a club. The filming of this match at the Riviera links near Bing's home inspired an NBC press agent to comment, "Bing Crosby has reached the millennium. He's being paid to play golf." But then, in all of *Going My Way*, Bing was being paid to play himself and to run, ramble, and saunter through the paces of a life he dearly loved.

A fire that comes close to destroying St. Dominic's serves as an excuse for Father O'Malley to tell Father Fitzgibbon that the boys' choir is out on tour with Jenny Linden, to give him

the first check sent in by Jenny, for \$3,500, and to inform him,, further, that a new church will be inevitable, because Ted Haines, Sr., has agreed to a mortgage to meet the difference between the money Jenny and the boys make and the cost of the new building. "That's right, Father," Haines admits. "He Father O'Malley convinced me that I have a heart of gold. And, after all, it wouldn't be a church without a mortgage."

Just before O'Malley leaves to engage in some more trouble* shooting at another parish, he tells Fitzgibbon that his successor will be O'Dowd. "Oh, no!" Fitzgibbon moans pathetically. "Oh, the Bishop wouldn't do that to me again." "The scene dissolves to the interior of the temporary church. . . ." Father Fitzgibbon is reunited with his mother, "an extremely ancient-looking woman, who has a lovely wrinkled face" (a bit part played with silent and moving expertness by Adeline De Walt Reynolds), after starting on his sermon of farewell to Father O'Malley. The choir sings Too-ra-loo-ra-loo. "The old woman is crying as she toddles forward. Then we see Father Fitzgibbon leaving his platform and going to meet her. She comes to him and takes him in her arms. And now the scene

2i8 The Incredible Crosby

cuts to the exterior of the temporary church and we find O'Malley standing outside the partly open door ... the singing comes out ... He closes the door, smiling contentedly. Then we watch him, holding his light luggage and walking across the snow-covered garden to the dim background as the scene fades out along with the last strains of the song." And the audience dissolves in tears.

It was difficult enough for the cast of *Going My Way*, for the prop men and grips, the assistants and associates, the cameramen and lighting experts, the soundmen and painters and carpenters, for any and all connected with the picture to keep from crying as the more poignant scenes were performed. In motion-picture palace and flea-bag movie house, wherever *Going My Way* was shown, the reaction of its audiences was ready, willing, and able. Laughter, smiles of joy, tears. If the catharsis was not of pity and fear, it was surely a purge of all the sentimental responses that was effected, and often a spontaneous emotional return on a higher level. Motion pictures, significantly more productive of tears than any other medium in our time, had rarely, if ever, elicited such an emptying of the tear ducts, such a blowing of noses, such a shameless streaming even of manly eyes. The film's "weeper rating," if that is any index of quality, was the highest of its year, if not of its decade.

By all the accepted rating systems and indexes of success, *Going My Way* triumphed. At the box office it rolled up returns of \$6,500,000, placing fifth in a mid-1946 report of the Ail-Time Top Grossers. Leo McCarey's \$51,000 investment earned him \$2,000,000; Paramount and the rest of Hollywood's movie

makers lost their fear of religious films. As a matter of fact, the film companies were so heartened by *Going My Way* as a story and as an exercise of the talents of its star that when *The Miracle of the Bells*, a bestselling novel centered around a

Der Bingle 219

priest, was cast by MGM, Frank Sinatra was set for the clerical role.

When the balloting was completed for the annual awards of the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences, Hollywood's highest honors, its Oscars, *Going My Way* had grabbed four choice statuettes. For the best starring performance, male Bing Crosby. For the best supporting performance, male Barry Fitzgerald. For the best direction Leo McCarey. For the best song Johnny Burke and Jimmy Van Heusen (*Swinging on a Star*, of course) .

Nothing in Bing's background had prepared him for Oscar-dom. Again and again, upon every possible occasion, he had minimized his acting. "I'm a singer, not an actor," was his usual offhand dismissal of any serious consideration of his talents as a Thespian. He knew that as the years mounted he had become a remarkably sure acting personality. After *Sing, You Sinners*, it was obvious that the many facets of his personality held untold prospects for film exploitation. But nothing in his long string of singing roles, in his several sagas of show business and sentimental tales of tots, suggested the genuine histrionic ability that *Going My Way* displayed.

There were many to disparage his performance of the part of Father O'Malley, to damn it with faint praise: "He's a great personality, one of the half-dozen or so great personalities of the screen, and Father O'Malley lay right down his alley. It was a beautiful demonstration of a brilliantly engaging personality, but don't call it acting." But do call it acting. An examination of the screen play shows how little most of the lines held for even "a brilliantly engaging personality." With all the skill in the world available to "great personalities of the screen" it would be impossible to make some of the speeches assigned O'Malley better than suffocating. Take that maudlin examination of conscience referred to above. Or another tepid bit of

220 The Incredible Crosby

philosophizing, addressed to Ted Haines, Jr., when that "typically Young American" character is busy evicting the Quimp: ^Ever thought that here's a chance to do something really fine?" In answer to Ted's flat "No," he continues: "Well, think about it. Try opening up your heart. Forget the Knickerbocker Savings and Loan for a while and be yourself. Try a little charity. (He smiles engagingly.) 'Bread upon the waters Do unto others'

and all that sort of thing. Believe me it pays off." Such writing is obviously little more than clumsy paraphrasing of the vigorous morality of a churchman; it is singularly devoid of eloquence; it reduces the priest to pathetically homely utterance. But Bing made the flat words soar; his husky inflections, his timing lent eloquence where it was sorely needed; his very real dramatic talent rose far above such inanities, giving the finished film an evenness that was by no means all in the script.

Bob Hope spoke for hundreds of Bing's associates in the business and thousands of other professionals who had watched the O'Malley characterization unfold on the screen. "That was real acting," Bob said. "Bing is serious about his acting now. I think he'd like to win another Oscar and he will."

When Gary Cooper presented Bing with his Oscar, accompanying the presentation with a warm salute to the acting that had won him the award, Bing was embarrassed. He accepted the statuette with a "throwaway" line. "Heavens!" Bing said, "are you talking about me?" And then he spoke for a few minutes, seriously, slowly, with intense but not overvisible emotion, of the pride he took in his country, of the privilege it had been to work with Barry Fitzgerald and Leo McCarey in the making of *Going My Way*. "America is a land of fabulous opportunity in which a string of spaghetti and a meat ball. . . ."

The title of the film originated in an incident that had occurred to Leo McCarey. A sailor sprang out of the black, thundering, storm-swept Los Angeles night at McCarey's car. Me-

Der Eingle 221

Carey made out his soaking figure and his words: "'Going my way?" The words were a natural description of the meaning and people of his film story, originally called, with far less dramatic impact, *The Padre*. The new title stuck, not only to the film but to its star. When Bing was asked by a patriotic organization., *Appreciate America, Inc.*, to write and sign a few words of personal philosophy to be offered to advertisers around the United States who wanted to sell their country as well as their goods, he inevitably used the movie name as a point of departure. The short finished statement summed up Bing's personal philosophy; by using the film as a "come-on," it suggested how important a position it occupied in Bing's life as the symbol of his most meaningful professional contribution, as a significant summary of his basic thinking.

Under an appealing photograph of Bing in his St. Louis Browns baseball uniform, a clip from the film, with his right index finger pointing to the first words on the page, was the tempting line, "Going My Way, Mister?" The statement filled out most of the rest of the page.

"It is the American Way to believe in a God! God, not the state, is the source of man's rights! The fatherhood of God is

the ONLY guarantee of the brotherhood of man. To embrace brotherhood requires brotherly love which necessitates elimination of those characteristics that anger others and foster intolerance! While religions differ, ALL can subscribe to the Golden Rule. 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you' and therein lies the answer to ALL the problems of today! Americans can live as friends without sacrificing racial or religious ideals! This is the American the BEST and the ONLY way!"

16

THE PRECINCTS OF Hoboken, New Jersey, are as different from those of Spokane, Washington, as the accents of the inhabitants of the two towns. Sociologically, architecturally, aesthetically they are worlds as well as three thousand miles apart. But it was Hoboken that produced, in the late thirties, the only competition of any significance that Spokane's Bing Crosby had to face, as a singer and as a personality. Frank Sinatra, the Hudson River wharf town's pride and joy, rose from the dirty streets, untidy lots, and ramshackle schools of his home town with as much ease as Bing had demonstrated in his sauntering career away from the Western metropolis, and with much more certainty and directness of purpose. By the time Frank was ready to make his laryngeal way, an impressive precedent for ambitious young singers had been established; Bing had person-

222

Der Bingle 223

ally attended to the establishing. In the case of Sinatra, as in the lives of almost all singers of popular songs after 1932, it was more than just a pattern of success that Bing had established; he entered directly into Frank's career consciousness; he was a shining example; he was also a challenge.

At eighteen, Frank Sinatra had sung a little, thought a little more about singing; he had even held some audiences at local Hoboken fetes enthralled with his voice. In January, 1936, a month beyond his eighteenth birthday, he went to a Bing Crosby movie and came out tense, thrilled, and self-confident.

"I can do that."

"What?" his girl Nancy asked.

"Sing like Bing. If not just like him, anyway I can make it. Like him."

For several years he had collected every picture of Crosby he

could lay his hands and paste upon for a series of scrapbooks devoted to Bing. They were filled in with the usual newspaper and fan-magazine items about the singer, his comings and goings, appearances on and off the air, in movies, in theatres. From his collection the eighteen-year-old Sinatra had gleaned something, perhaps nothing more tangible than inspiration, perhaps a hint of the arcana Crosbyana. At no point did he try to imitate Bing's vocal manner, though some influence from Bing's phrasing, from his intelligent handling of a lyric and his shaping of a melodic line was inescapable. More immediately attainable than the distinctive Crosby sound and less destructive of Frank's individuality was Bing's casualness, his unworried approach to viewing and listening audience, his soft-spoken introduction of songs and people his relaxation, in sum.

During Frank's year and a half at the Rustic Cabin outside Hoboken, his frantic radio schedule on New Jersey stations when he was an unpaid but eager tyro, his six months with

224 T/ie Incredible Crosby

Harry James and three years with Tommy Dorsey, it was his relaxation that always gave his work dignity and distinction even when his voice was tired and tremulous. His assiduous imitation of the Crosby slouch, of Bing's gentle, unforced mien, added great poise to Sinatra's efforts. His considerable talent as a singer, his variations on the Crosby microphone and theatre techniques (notably the famous loose grasp of the mike stand -at the halfway point, thumbs touching, hands hanging limply) gave him individuality.

When the Dorsey band arrived at Paramount's Hollywood studios in 1940 to make a fast film, a three-day wonder called *Las Vegas Nights*, the producer assigned to this miracle of haste and bad taste asked to hear Sinatra.

"What?" Tommy asked incredulously, with some show of his justly famous belligerence, "you haven't heard Frank?"

"Oh, I've heard him," the producer quickly assured him. "I just wanted to hear some of the things he does, so we can make a choice for the film."

"All right," Tommy agreed grudgingly. And he called out some numbers in his books, Frank's numbers.

Frank ran through his specialties, his personal triumphs, concluding with his magnum opus, *Without a Song*. As the last orchestral chord of the Vincent Youmans baritone shout made its way among the resonant packing boxes and ladders and drapes of the sceneryless sound stage, Frank heard enthusiastic applause, the clapping of one pair of hands. He looked all around him; he looked up. On one of the crates, yards away, sat the enthusiastic applauder. The hat, the pipe, the figure, the

face were familiar.

"Bravo!" Bing called down. "Beautifully done."

"Thank you, Mr. Crosby," Frank creaked.

"Thank you, Frank. I've looked forward for a long time to hearing you this way. It was a privilege."

Der Single 225

Later, his knees no longer knocking, his voice restored to its full strength, Frank pondered the incident.

"I'd never been able to sing if I'd known he was there. Whatta guy!"

Still later, several years later, the source of admiration of the same goggle-eyed, scrapbook-attentive kind he had conferred upon Bing, Frank summed up the quality of this first meeting with his idol.

"I don't think I can remember any thrill like it. I've never been shy about myself but that visit of Bing's that day really made me proud."

Two years after Las Vegas Nights, Frank was on his own, a singer of popular songs with a good past and a glittering future, the first since Russ Columbo to come within musical measures of matching Bing's stature. But he was in trouble: in leaving Tommy Dorsey he had involved himself in a series of contracts that sliced his slender body into many parts, leaving little of himself for himself. It was a familiar but not a pleasant procedure in the entertainment business. Tommy was suing him; some bookers were suing him; some managers he had never heard of, who had heard too well of him, were suing him. It was a grim moment in an otherwise scintillating career.

At the height of his legal misfortunes, Frank was settled in Hollywood for a few months. On one of his periodic trips to town center, to the streets that mark the axes of the West Coast music world, Sunset and Vine, he met Bing.

"How're they treating you?" Bing asked, then answered his own question. "Wait, don't tell me." He held up his hand, his valuable pipe hand. "I know."

"You do?" Frank said glumly.

"Look, I know what you're going through. In a slightly different way I had the same trouble. Ninety people, as I remember

or was it ninety-two (at one point I lost count) discovered me. Everybody I looked at turned out to be a manager or a booker with a lien on my life. And it cost it really cost." Bing winced as he thought of the claims, the clamor of claims on his young business life after he had achieved more than just passing popularity.

"Boy, does it cost!" Frank added feelingly.

"Kid, you're just starting." Bing felt entitled to the avuncular role; Sinatra was still toddling when he left Spokane in 1922. "Don't hurt yourself. Be smart Pay off. Get the loot any place you can. But get it, and pay off. In six months you'll forget all about it, and you'll be free."

It cost Sinatra \$60,000, but he did "pay off." And at the end of a year, it was just that much more on which he didn't have to pay taxes. He didn't miss it. He was free.

In 1943 and 1944 and 1945, Bing and Frank made more benefit appearances, did more radio shows for soldier and sailor consumption than either has been able to remember or account for. A series of appearances on the most glamorous of the service shows, Command Performance, drew devastating laughter from studio audiences and similar response from the boys for whom they were intended. The fan mail received from camps and bases overseas was understandably heavy and enthusiastic. Take the second anniversary show of Command Performance

Dinah Shore was mistress of ceremonies. She introduced Frank, seriously^ decorously. He sang Speak Low. She introduced Bing with well-weighed words about his importance as a singer and a personality, as an institution. He sang Candlelight and Wine. Then came the talk, fast talk, much of it very funny, all of it beautifully timed by some of the most practiced entertainers in the business, by the three biggest singers of the time.

Der Bingle 227

"You know, Bing," Dinah said, "a singer like Frank Sinatra comes along only once in a lifetime."

"Yeah." Bing responded ruefully with the famous line that has been placed in a hundred other contexts and used several times by Bing himself and that actually originated in this fast ad lib interchange on Command Performance. "Yeah, and he has to come along in my lifetime!"

"No, no, Bing," Dinah protested. "He's quite a man, really."

"I know."

"He has a lot of backbone," Dinah continued.

"He's all backbone," Bing commented.

<r Well, how about your pot tummy, Dad?" Frank asked.

"It's not so big," said Bing.

"I'd like to have it full of war bonds," said Frank,

Then the singers told each other how much each genuinely admired the other's singing, with serious asides to Dinah to give their fulsome mutual praise conviction. To keep it from becoming maudlin, too lush or gushy, in spite of the honesty of their stated opinions, they launched a duet, singing a big song of the year, a wonderfully apposite song, People Will Say We're in Love. Everybody in the audience and on the show, including Bing and Frank, broke up.

Followed a skit in Scottish dialect, in which they played Crooner McCrosby and Swooner MacSinatra, each vying for Dinah McShore's hand. The forced moments and the poor dialect were quickly compensated for by the ensuing battle of songs between the two men. Sinatra sang I Wonder What's Become of Crosby, the Sinatra of 1909. When Frank sang Stardust, Bing commented wryly, "That's my song. I introduced it in 1904. It was very big for me in Des Moines."

The loose, relaxed, informal nature of that show on February 1, 1944, was the proper carry-over from the open golf tournament and bond auction of the day before at Lakeside. The

228 The Incredible Crosby

August participants were Bing and Frank, together again, Bob Hope, Kay Kyser, and Bob Crosby, with occasional assists from other performers. Bob Hope was the master of ceremonies. When Sinatra emerged from the clubhouse, Bob greeted him loudly.

"Look, Frankie," he shouted. "It's fresh air! Breathe quick."

Bob continued for the audience at the golfing green. "You know, once we found Frank laid out stiff on the clubhouse floor. He had pulled his bowtie too tight/*

Frank was attired in his by then familiar informal clothes; like Bing he affected the easy, relaxed clothing of the man who figures his clothes live for him and not he for his clothes; like Bing he topped it all with a yachting cap. Brother Bob had something to say about the cap.

"He's caddying for old man Bing." He explained further, "He knows he'll be in the lake all day!"

At the bond auction, an estimated \$250,000 was sold by auctioneers Crosby, Sinatra, Hope, and Kyser. There was some interesting bidding for some provocative items. Marlene Dietrich's black-lace garters brought \$1,750. Orchids, pinned on feminine bond buyers by Sinatra, brought \$2,000. A impound steak in that day of sirloin scarcity brought \$2,000. One of the most spirited bouts of bidding was stimulated by Dorothy Lammour's sarong, modeled by Sinatra.

Hope announced, with his large reserve of gusto almost exhausted, that the "best golf tee you'll ever see" was Kay Kyser's nose. Giving Kay the comparative comfort of a blanket folded under his head, the boys had at the beak-nosed orchestra leader. Bob Hope fixed the ball in place, taking lots of time fixing the network of corrugations on the Kyser proboscis. Sinatra, squatting beside Kyser, was officially designated as overseer; but Frank, newer at his work than the others, less used to being a man of distinction, broke up. He couldn't resist the giggles, at

Der Bingle 229

first; full-blown laughter took over in a few seconds at the ludicrous sight of Hope swinging from Kyser's nose. It was a brilliant adventure in slapstick; it had some of the quality of the old Keystone comedies, with everything in it except pies in the faces of the participants; it had something the Keystone epics didn't have the entertainment world's biggest names, most articulate ad libbers, most inevitable money hirers. Over all Bing puffed away at his pipe, looking on benignly, leaving the disorderly parade of gags to Hope, for once in but not entirely of the proceedings. Most of Bing's attention seemed to be devoted to putting Frank at ease. The unstinging barbs didn't come till the next day at Command Performance.

Later that year, in November, listeners to the Crosby radio program were rewarded with a double dealing of singers: Bing sang, as usual, from Hollywood; Sinatra was cut in from New York, exchanged some remarks with Bing, and sang after a lengthy, laudatory introduction from his admiring and admired idol of old.

Hope made a point of kidding Bing about Sinatra as soon as it was obvious that Frank was more than just a passing fancy of the American public. When Bob and Bing recorded The Road to Morocco together for Decca, the kidding off the record was as steady and as funny as that on it. Bing struck first.

"That's pretty good tenor you sang for me," he complimented Hope. "Why don't you leave your name at the door?"

Bob was fast on the uptake.

"I think I'd better team up with Sinatra he's a little younger. More my speed."

When Hope and Crosby appeared together on the Elgin Christmas show that Christmas, their insistence upon kidding each other's singing, the constant references to Sinatra and to Bing's fading voice had almost dire consequences. Bob and Bing ad-libbed so much that seven minutes had to be cut from the

230 The Incredible Crosby

scheduled program. And Hope teased Bing so mercilessly, and so effectively, that Bing broke up in the middle of a song. He tried to rescue the spot.

'That's the last time I do a show for Bulova," Bing cried.

"Ow!" Hope informed Bing later. "You plug Bulova a rival watch and this poor guy's just spent \$50,000 on a show to sell Elgins. Oh, Dad!"

There were no holds barred; the Crosby-Sinatra mock feud was on. It never attained the proportions of the Hope-Crosby imbroglios, but it did lead to some funny moments in their radio work and it did impress the public, vividly, with the considerable affection the older singer had for the younger, and vice versa. It impressed all but two young ladies, old enough to know better, but intemperate enough in their singing enthusiasms so that their age carried no weight. The ladies in question were in their mid-twenties, generally restrained, balanced, and happy together as roommates. There was only one disagreement to mar their happiness: one of the girls was a Sinatra fan and the other a Crosby supporter. They argued the respective merits of their singers. They listened to the Battles of Baritones and Scuffles of Swooners with which radio's disc jockeys livened their programs, pitting Bing against Frank, Frank against Bing. They "yah-yahed" each other as each felt her man had scored a decisive triumph against her roommate. And as long as it went on this way this vigorous difference of opinion over the merits of the two singers merely duplicated a hot contest of wills and critical appraisals in which seemingly half of the United States was indulging itself. Recorded performances were tossed at recorded performances.

"Bing never sang anything like Frankie's OV Man River"

"No? How about Bing's OV Man River? And furthermore he made it twice once with Whiteman, once alone/ 7

"Yeah? How about Sinatra's White Christmas?"

Der Bingle 231

"Are you kidding? Who made it first and better?'"*

"Yeah, maybe. But Bing never made Stormy Weather, and even if he tried he couldn't do it like Frankie."

"No? No? Well, FI1 damn well show you how Bing could do Stormy Weather!"

With which promise, the irate Crosby lady lunged at the unyielding Sinatra girl and stabbed her with an ice pick. Frankie's admirer ended up in a hospital; Bing's faced charges in a police house and life without a roommate. Most disturbing of all, sociologically anyway, was the raw fact that a Crosby fan had erupted so violently; such heat was expected of supporters of Sinatra and the Brooklyn Dodgers but not of Bing's backers. It was conduct unbecoming a Crosbyite, and if Bing's fan clubs had thought to set up courts-martial there is no doubt that the irascible young lady would have faced sterner treatment from her coenthusiasts than she did from the police.

Fans of both singers were expected to follow the example of their favorites. And certainly their favorites made their example known. Servicemen knew as a result of the special Armed Forces Radio Service airings Bing and Frank did together. Their radio followings in this country knew because of their regular exchange guest appearances. Show business knew. There was that time it was at Toots Shor's restaurant on Fifty-first Street in New York, where all the mobs hang out, prize-fight, baseball, radio, movie, and music-business gangs.

"Lemme tell you about the nicest thing that ever happened at my restaurant," Toots insists. "Frankie ran into Bing at the door one night. They shook hands and walked back into the dining room, arm in arm and gabbing away like a couple of old maggies. The joint was full, and everybody, as soon as they seen 'em, stood up and started clapping. They kept it up till the boys sat down at a rear table and started to order. Made ya feel good."

232 The Incredible Crosby

At the very suggestion that there is any real rivalry between Frank and Bing, the huge restaurateur would reach for the "crumbum" who had made the suggestion and would perform some of the same shameless mayhem upon his body that he does upon the body of the English language. And if Frank were around at the time this unfortunate idea was promulgated, he would add his pugnacious spirit to the undertaking.

For a while after Frank arrived in Hollywood to stay, in 1943, there was talk about the "two camps" the Crosby Circle and the Sinatra Society, the senior and the junior leagues of the music business and its allied professions. The implication was unmistakable: if you were "important" in popular music, you belonged to one of the two sets; you were "most important" if you had made the older man's association. Crosby's associates were few, distinguished, well known as such; you could name

them quickly. There were Johnny Burke and Jimmy Van Heusen, Barney Dean, John Scott Trotter, Buddy Morris, Lin Howard, the outstanding members of the Westwood Marching and Chowder Club led by Pat O'Brien and Johnny Mercer, Hope of course, the golfing fraternity teeing off behind Spokane's Bud Ward. Frank's intimates made almost as definable a unit. Axel Stordahl, his arranger, was very close. Hank Sinatra, ex-prize fighter, resolute New Yorker, was a combination bodyguard and best friend. George Evans was press agent, part-time personal manager, and full-time General Extricator (from the scrapes into which Sinatra strode so regularly and so unwittingly and sometimes so knowingly) . Julie Styne and Sammy Cahn were his attendant song writers, smaller versions physically of Van Heusen and Burke and, if the thought isn't too horrifying to Sinatra adherents, considerably less talented opposite numbers of the Crosby composer and lyric writer and friends. And then there was Bobby Burns, a combination secretary, road manager, and man of all work for Frank. These

Der Bingle 233

eminent fell unmistakably into one camp or the other. But then there were the followers of both. Where and how did they fit in? Hollywood musical society was as exercised over this conflict of loyalties as Cholly Knickerbocker would be over the uncertain attentions of New York socialites to one or another presiding dowager.

Phil Silvers brought his bald head, blinking eyes, and mellow wit to both inner circles. He spent more time with Frank, but when he married Jo Carol Denison, Miss America of 1942, it was Bing who threw the wedding party. Bing had tried to reach Phil for days after Phil and Jo Carol were wed. He never told Phil why, and each time he asked him whether or not he was free, for a coming Sunday or Wednesday or Saturday, Phil happened to have previous commitments. Finally Phil gathered Bing wanted very much to see him and his new wife; he canceled an appointment and hurried over to Bing's the next night; he found a beautifully traditional groaning board set for him and his wife and a host of good friends, with a host wonderfully, eagerly concerned about the little town in Texas from which Jo Carol had come.

Skitch Henderson started as a pianist in the Sinatra entourage. He played on Frank's radio program when he was mustered out of the Army in 1945. The next year he was on Bing's new radio show for Philco. But he continued to play with Frank when he could, and Frank continued to refer to Lyle Henderson as his favorite accompanist, referring to him as Lyle or Skitch until the superpersonable blond keyboard tinkler was differently introduced at a benefit they did together in Chicago in the summer of 1947. "Frank Sinatra's favorite accompanist," the official barker of the program at Soldier Field roared. "Spit Henderson!" Still he stayed close to Crosby; Bing's telegram topped the impressive list of wires and wirers that greeted Skitch

on his opening with his new band at the Pennsylvania Hotel

234 The Incredible Crosby

in New York at the end of June, 1947. "KNOW YOUR MUSICAL SUCCESS ASSURED," Bing telegraphed, "BUT WORRIED ABOUT YOUR SOCIAL AFFAIRS WITH COLBY AND ME HERE IN THE WEST."

The Colby referred to was Anita, owner of the metonymical tag of the Face, Skitch's close friend and, in her lordly Hollywood position as David O. Selznick's aide, social mentor to Henderson as well. And Skitch's official guardian continued to be Bing's Johnny Burke.

There were others with apparently dual affinities, like Phil and Skitch and Toots Shor. That segment of Hollywood society which worried about such things brooded for a while about this anxious problem: assuming one could approach either singer, assuming one could get within range of the very good graces of Bing or Frank, which would one choose, and why would one vacillate between the two? It was a particularly vexing decision for song pluggers, who wanted to offend neither great man, who needed the aid and assistance of both to ensure the success of their songs. The more astute pluggers, as the less snobbish Hollywoodians, discovered to their overwhelming pleasure that the choice was not necessary. These were not churls but choice human beings; Bing and Frank didn't look for satellites but for friends. The older man's company was harder to gain; seeking it was trouble enough; he was not a casual frequenter of the cafés and the society thereof; he was almost a recluse by Hollywood standards. The younger man could more easily be found; he was more approachable. But neither, in the language of their business, "fluffed off" either's friends; and though they were not actually bosom friends, it was in fact an asset, if you sought Bing, to come well recommended by Frank and a help in reaching Sinatra if it was known that you were highly regarded by Crosby.

In spite of the efforts of some men in the business who had fared badly with either or both singers to create a social and a

Der Bingle 235

professional animus between them, Bing and Frank were constant in their feelings for each other, as individuals, as musical moguls, as social solons. In two pieces they penned for Columbia Records' Disc Digest, they summed up their mutual affections. Through the sometimes self-conscious gagging and generally ribald tone of the short articles their obvious admiration for each other streaked vividly.

Bing headed his epistle to the nation of singing fans, "Frank,

You're Great." He went on.

"I'm a great admirer of Frankie Sinatra. Every time I hear him sing I have to marvel at the Voice that comes from 'out of nowhere.

"After all, a singer like my friend conies only once in a lifetime. WHY did it have to be in my lifetime? [At this point, count has been lost of the number of times Bing has used this line.] Now that the pencil with the fringe on top is making movies, too, I have been wondering if Hollywood is big enough to hold the both of us. Nevada, here I come. However, as highly as I regard the lad, I am convinced that Sinatra will never replace the old-fashioned pipe cleaner around the house. I'm often asked by people who haven't seen him in person if Frankie Boy is really as skinny as he has been advertised. Honesty compels me to admit, with some reluctance, that the answer is yes. [Actually Frank weighs 138 pounds, which isn't a hardship for his five feet ten and a half inches of length; but it doesn't exactly leave his bones uncovered either.]

"I am told that he weighed seven pounds at birth. He's been losing ever since. When he went to school he didn't dare turn sideways for fear that teacher would mark him absent.

"I remember one day he dropped around to visit me on the set at Paramount when I was making Irving Berlin's Blue Skies. The prop man gave him a yo yo to amuse himself with while I was busy before the camera. When I came back to my dressing

236 The Incredible Crosby

room I was mildly surprised to see the yo yo standing still and Sinatra going up and down.

"I quietly conducted a little private research into the stories of the flagpole's fantastic following among bobby-soxers. Everytime I came across one of those kids wearing dad's shirts and baby's stockings I asked her if she liked Sinatra. Finally, when I was in Paris, I met two French bobby-soxers who had never even heard of F. Sinatra. The reports of his popularity are highly exaggerated, as this plainly shows.

'Well, regardless of what other people think of Sinatra . . . I like him. He's a scholar, a gentleman and a fine singer. But what has he got that I haven't? . . . Don't tell me ... I

knOW. A DAUGHTER."

In a brief note appended to the Crosby article, Sinatra asked Bing to "read the next issue . . . Ill be getting back at you! Some of those cracks are slander . . . pal!"

Frank's piece, which he actually wrote himself, was headed "Who Isn't???" His first line explained the query.

"Fin a Crosby fan," the Voice admitted. "Everybody's a Crosby fan. Even while appearing at the elegant Wedgewood Room at the Waldorf-Astoria, people who haven't worn short socks for maybe forty or fifty years would approach me with the following remark: 'You know, Mr. Sinatra, we're really Crosby fans, but after hearing you sing tonight, we think you have a very cute act/ Now isn't that peachy! Don't get me wrong . . . I'm not complaining, because if there were no Crosby nobody would have reason to come up and talk to me. What is that . . . fun? It gets lonesome, hey! Seriously, all the success that we young crooners are enjoying today is due to the wonderful ground work cemented by Bing. Knowing Bing as I do, I can readily understand why he is considered an American institution. I can also appreciate why the public, year in and year out, continues to show its heartfelt appreciation for Mr. Q ... he

Der Bingle . 237

is amiable and extremely cooperative under any and all conditions. The warmth that he radiates is comparable to a blazing fireside on a wintry evening. I'm deeply grateful for any measure of success that I may have attained . . . but aside from the material things that have come from success, Show Business has introduced me to many many great people. But the payoff came the day I met Bing. I think by now you can readily understand why I'm so rabid a Crosby fan. He's a good Joe. Oh yes, I nearly forgot . . . this boy sings a fair song . . . but of course we mustn't forget that he has wonderful arrangements. At the beginning of this little opus, you'll notice I mentioned that everybody is a Bing Crosby fan. In the way of a late flash, I have just uncovered someone who is NOT a Bing Crosby fan . . . MY DAUGHTER NANCY . . . She goes f or his youngest son, Lynn. I don't know I GIVE UP!"

The nicest aspect of these utterances of Bing's and Frank's is that they simply made public their private statements about each other, with the inevitable injections of self-conscious humor added to perpetuate the myth of a friendly rivalry between the two.

On one issue and on one issue alone is there a serious divergence of opinion and of affiliation in the Sinatra and Crosby camps. Frank is intensely activated by a vigorous social conscience; Bing is not. Frank's sympathies have been engaged by the condition of oppressed people around the world, and he has expressed those sympathies in quite unambiguous terms; though Bing is more than gently moved by terror and poverty and the accompanying flight away from both, he doesn't feel his position entitles him to any political authority. Frank feels, understandably, that there is a death train hurtling dangerously through the world and that it is the bounden duty of anyone, public or private figure, singer or priest or politician, to throw his weight against the screaming, screeching, devastat-

ing vehicle. Both positions are tenable; it would be hard to gainsay either. It is important to examine both, important in one's estimate of the two men, important in one's appraisal of the moral obligations of a citizen of the world, whether it is Citizen Crosby, Citizen Sinatra, or you.

Frank's warmth and honesty and courage and conviction compel admiration; movie stars and crooners don't often stand up that strongly against the vested interests of their time because of an understanding of the much-mentioned but little-ameliorated lot of the common man. But honesty and warmth and courage and conviction are not enough; one can get into trouble with that equipment in the cruel world of politics if there is no finishing edge of shrewdness of judgment, sagacity and prudence in action, and most intelligent choice of affiliation. There are greater troubles, after all, than that occasioned by offending Louis B. Mayer of Metro-Goldwyn or Jack Warner of the famed Brothers. In following sincere political convictions one can buck the Un-American Affairs Committee of the United States Congress or a similar investigation into subversive activities conducted by the California State Legislature; and for all the comic-opera bluster and hapless herring throwing of these organizations there is just enough substance to their charges, just enough apprehension of the underground network of conspiracy and conspirators at work in this country to make some of their talk effective and some of their legal motions meaningful beyond the usual foul speech and bitter beating of the air of men like Martin Dies and J. Parnell Thomas. Sinatra bucked both committees, the California and the Congressional, by his affiliations with organizations like the Hollywood Independent Citizens Committee for the Arts, Sciences and Professions (HICCASP) and his willingness to accept an award for his lusty Americanism from the American Youth for Democracy (AYD), a youth group with a preten-

Der Single 239

tious but evasive name it was earlier more accurately known as the Young Communist League. HICCASP never strayed far from the Communist line; as a result it was open to suspicion, as were its more vocal members like Sinatra and his bearded friend, sculptor Jo Davidson, who was chairman of the national ICCASP. Frank meant well in accepting the AYD award; he was not aware of the organization's Red origins. Frank was taken in, as many, many others were, by the genuine liberal precepts of HICCASP; he was not shrewd or prudent enough to note the similarity of this ostensible liberal society's platform to the Communists'; he was not mature enough politically to grasp the significance of what Earl Browder once inadvertently called the "transmission belt organization" through which the Reds worked. Honest, warm, courageous

and naive Sinatra was used by the Communists; consequently he was abused by overanxious, Red-baiting legislators not subtle enough or genuine enough in their anti-Communist doctrines to distinguish between legitimate Reds and their fellow travelers on the one hand and misguided men of good will, like Frank, on the other.

Bing's attitude toward politics has been an almost unvarying one of nonparticipation. Only once, in 1940, did he emerge from his political silence to commit himself. It was during Franklin D. Roosevelt's third campaign for the presidency. Bing, nominally a Republican, had followed Wendell Willkie's rise from his dark-horse position at the nominating convention, through the dramatic campaign which followed that almost viva-voce election of Willkie as the GOP standard-bearer. Bing's imagination was fired; he wanted to do something, but he continued to debate the ethics of an entertainer's participation in politics until the very last minute. At the last possible moment, on election eve, he acted.

On the Monday night before the Tuesday of Election Day,

The Incredible Crosby

1940, the Republicans had, as usual, bought lots of time on the networks to do their last campaigning. At the peak of the evening, Wendell Willkie himself spoke. Shortly after, Bing was introduced as one of the distinguished men and women to speak in behalf of the candidate. The singer did not offer a learned analysis of campaign issues; he neither exhorted nor harangued; he made a simple personal declaration,

"I've heard your speech, Mr. Willkie," Bing said. "I like your story. I'm going to vote for you." That was all. For what it was worth, in the waning moments of a tense presidential struggle, Bing Crosby was willing to speak for the record. He felt even that was questionable; any more he would have described as "way out of line."

The next day America went to the polls and once again elected Franklin D. Roosevelt president of the United States. Bing had spoken; he felt obliged to say something more. On the Kraft Music Hall program that followed Election Day, forty-eight hours later, he did.

"On Tuesday," Bing said, "Franklin D. Roosevelt was re-elected' President of the United States. As we say in this country, 'the best man won. Now we must all get behind the President with renewed vigor and faith in him and in our country."

Some of Bing's coworkers honored him for his unassuming entry into political life* They knew that if he had undertaken a lengthy, intense personal campaign for Willkie or any other Republican candidate he could well have proved a potent vote

getter. And they honored his brief political testament: an entertainer has no political authority. But there were others who were not satisfied; they wanted more from Bing as they did from any and all prominent in public life. One of this latter group came to Bing in 1945; she had a moving story to tell.

"You know about the Sleepy Lagoon boys, don't you, Bing?"

Der Bingle 241

"The Mexican kids?"

'The Mexican kids who are being railroaded for a crime they didn't commit."

"Yes, I know about them/ 7

"Well, what about them?"

"As far as I've been able to ascertain, it seems to be what is generally called a gross miscarriage of justice."

"Exactly. Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Me? You know how I feel about political activity."

"But this isn't political activity; this is in defense of human rights. And there is something you can do that will help and help a lot."

"What?"

"We're throwing a benefit together for the kids at the Trocadero next week. All kinds of names." She listed an impressive lot of Hollywood luminaries. "You would make a wonderful headliner for that bill."

"No," Bing said, "I'm sorry. You know I won't appear. And you know why. I'd be proud to make out a check for you. A big check. But I won't appear, and I don't want my name read at theTroc."

"But, Bing"

"I'm sorry."

"You know what your name would mean."

"Precisely. This issue should be settled on its own merits, not on the dubious contribution of a tired old crooner to the controversy. Let me give you a check."

She took the check and the story as well back to the benefit committee. Before long there was another Crosby rumor.

"A great guy, you understand, but he's a reactionary."

"Why mince words? He's a fascist."

Some members of the Sinatra group took up the chant. They were smarting under the criticism of Frank's political activities

The Incredible Crosby

implicit in Bing's stand, a criticism implicit to them but not to Bing. And somehow, as these bigoted stories are built among those most blatant in their condemnation of bigotry, Bing became an anti-Semite, too. A director who had worked closely with Bing was known to have made anti-Semitic remarks when drunk; he also made remarks unsympathetic to all the other minorities available for inebriated comment. By simple deduction, Bing was transformed into a Jew hater, though the other minorities the director had cursed drunkenly were not named as the subject of Crosby's wrath.

One of the several times these accusations came to a head was at a New York party in the summer of 1947. A number of intimates of Sinatra were present, including a comedian and some song writers. The song writers heard the author of this book, who was also present, make some slurring references to "cheap popular songs." They were offended; they brought their complaint to the comedian, who saw some justice in the complaint and a broader injustice still in the offending remarks.

"He complains about popular songs, and he's writing about Bing Crosby?" the comedian asked.

"Yeah," one of the song writers said with feeling.

The comedian continued. "Where does he get off complaining when he's writing a biography of that dirty fascist anti-Semite."

The cruelty of this accusation directed at Crosby because of this author's disparagement of some popular songs was increased beyond the limits of the falsehood itself by the past history of the comedian. He was one of the men most conspicuously befriended by Bing; at every earlier opportunity he had extolled his benefactor. In calling Bing wicked names, which his personal experience with him completely belied, this comedian reflected more upon himself than upon Crosby. But to some unknowing onlookers and eavesdroppers his loose

Der Bingle 243

talk gave further credence to a whispering campaign already successful in some circles in its ugly smearing of Bing.

Frank himself was well aware of Bing's close friendship with Barney Dean. He had a ready answer for those who insisted that Barney was Bing's "white Jew" who further averred that Bing's attitude was summed up in the phrase, "Some of my best friends are Jews." Sinatra and Crosby remain above the conflicts of their virulent friends as of their violent fans. Frank remembers the part Bing has played in his career and attests to it often and eloquently. His ability to rise above the antagonisms and animosities of his supporters is an index of his own stature; it suggests that Sinatra, in following the Crosby pattern so closely, has attained some of his boyhood idol's size.

17

THE HIATUS THAT followed upon *Going My Way* was disturbing to Crosby well-wishers. The two succeeding films were from a different world. One, *Here Come the Waves*, marked almost a return to the barren product of Bing's first few years as a Paramount property. The other, *The Road to Utopia*, in spite of its slick, sleek employment of the comedy talents of Bing and Bob Hope and its parrying use of the Dorothy Lamour figure, face, and voice, seemed almost sacrilegious. Once a man has become a priest to the majority of his fellow countrymen, it isn't so easy to unfrock him. In the case of these pictures, it was almost as if a deliberate effort were being made to flaunt Bing's secular humors in the face of his public.

Here Come the Waves has a certain passing significance as the only Crosby film for which Johnny Mercer did the whole
244

Der Bingle 245

score. Johnny Burke and Jimmy were busy turning out the scores for other films; they were also worrying over their part in the ill-fated Broadway musical, *Nellie Ely*, which was due to go into production in the fall of 1945. Mercer managed a thoroughly commercial score, with at least two lasting songs, *That Old Black Magic* and *Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive*, and a couple of others of some distinction, *Let's Take the Long Way Home* and *I Promise You*. These four songs and *There's a Fellow Waiting* in *Poughkeepsie* were sprinkled liberally over a rough-and-tumble story about a sailor and *Waves'* musical show, in which Bing, as a prominent singer recruited by the Navy, played a logically prominent part. There was some typical Hollywood nonsense in the dual role played by Betty Hutton, and the cast was filled out with such Paramount players as Sonny Tufts. The picture's high musical moment was spoiled for some: *Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive* was sung in blackface by Bing, a totally unnecessary implementation of the Uncle Tom diction and Georgia accent in which Johnny Mercer had

written the song.

The Road to Utopia was benefited by its Burke-Van Heusen songs, particularly by the universally popular Personality, a neat example of the extent to which bawdy verbal humor could be introduced into a film which remained within the canons of the Production Code Authority (PCA). The fourth of the Code's set of twelve Particular Applications states clearly, under the heading of "Obscenity": "'Obscenity in word, gesture, reference, song, joke, or by suggestion (even when likely to be understood only by part of the audience) is forbidden.'" During the filming of scenes in which the slightest particle of innuendo is present a representative of the PCA is usually on the set. And all song lyrics must first be reviewed by the PCA. Personality was passed without a murmur of protest. And in truth it presents nothing that any healthy human being could find objec-

The Incredible Crosby

tionable, but by the curious interpretation of the PGA, which has censored so many less risqué segments of films, it is remarkable that Johnny's unmistakable references to female anatomical features possessed by his historical women in dazzling degree should have gone unquestioned. A glance at the lyric of Personality, if it doesn't prove an indictment of the PCA ? is worth the time for the laughs involved.

"When Madame Pompadour

Was on a ballroom -floor

Said all the gentlemen: "Obviously,

The madame has the cutest personality!"

And think of. all the books

About DuBany's looks!

What was it made her the toast of Paree?

She had a 'well-developed personality!

What did Romeo see in Juliet?

Or Piero in Pierette?

Or Jupiter in Juno?

You know

And when Salome danced,

And had the boys entranced,

No doubt it must have been easy to see

That she knew how to use her personality!

A girl can learn to spell,
And take dictation well,
And never sit on the boss's settee,
Unless she's got a perfect personality!

A girl can get somewhere,
In spite of stringy hair,

Der Bingle 247

Or even just a bit bowed at the knees,
If she can show a faultless personality!

Why are certain girls offered certain things,
Like sable coats and wedding rings,
By men who wear their spats right?
That's right-
So don't you say I'm smart.
And have the kindest heart,
Or what a wonderful sister Yd be!
Just tell me how you like my personality! *

For the rest, The Road to Utopia depended on Bing's and Bob's delightful take-off of the vaudeville routines of the early part of this century, early in the picture; on their bright exchange of the lyrics of Put It There, Pal (well recorded for Decca by the two) ; on a skirmish with a bear rug, which turned out to be a live bear; on some cops-and-robbers' chases through the Alaskan wilds, with gold as the lure, in which the comedy almost became melodrama in the manner of the silent pictures. Dorothy Lamour and Bing were aided by two songs, It's Anybody's Spring, and Welcome to My Dream; the picture was ably directed by Hal Walker, yet was still a bit disappointing.

The hiatus was brought to a resounding close by the release of The Bells of St. Mary's. Here was Father O'Malley again, and for good measure a nun, Sister Benedict, played by Ingrid Bergman. The original story was written by Leo McCarey, inspired by the life of his aunt, Sister Mary Benedict, who was one of the Sisters who helped to build the Immaculate Heart Convent in Hollywood and who died in a typhoid fever epidemic. This aunt had been McCarey's childhood counselor; in memory of her, he dedicated the novelization of the screen play "to those

* Copyright, 1945, by Burke and Van Heusen, Inc.

248 The Incredible Crosby

whose lives are dedicated to the teaching of children; to my

aunt who inspired the motion picture upon which the book is based and, through her, to teachers of all faiths in all lands."

For *The Bells of St. Mary's*, McCarey did not have to go begging at the doors of producers. He formed his own company, Rainbow Productions, obtained more than willing release for the film through RKO Radio Pictures, and watched the finished picture pile up grosses that ran ahead of *Going My Way* by more than half a million dollars, to place fourth among the All-Time Top Grossers reported by *Variety* in mid-1946.

The Bells of St. Mary's had to stand comparison with the earlier Crosby-McCarey investigation of the lives of Catholic regulars in more ways than the financial. It was not, of course, the stunning surprise that *Going My Way* had been. But it wasn't the disappointment that so many sequels turn out to be either. Its screen play, written by Dudley Nichols, one of Hollywood's most astute technicians, if not the very best, was less given to cliché and bromide. Its plot was no more original than *Going My Way*, and, in fact, bore some unfortunate resemblances to the first story. Here the school building, St. Mary's, which Sister Benedict presides over, is in bad shape, physically even more than financially, and the evil capitalist is introduced in the person of Bogardus (Henry Travers), who is erecting a new building next door, which the nuns fully expect to take over for their school. So there are the parallel buildings, school for church, and the financiers who are opposite numbers. In addition, there is the intraecclesiastical rivalry, earlier between Fathers Fitzgibbon and O'Malley, and now between Father O'Malley and Sister Benedict.

The length and breadth of the story, if not its depth, are suggested in the first scene, when O'Malley arrives at St. Mary's as the new parish priest, actually in charge of the impoverished school. The housekeeper, played with typical spirit by Una

Der Bingle 249

O'Connor, informs him in response to his questions about his predecessor, Father Fogarty, that "they took him away last night."

"Where did they take him?"

"Shady Rest." The housekeeper continues. "He even said a prayer for you that your stay here might be successful and enjoyable, though he doubted it very much. You see, he had very definite ideas about running the school about the raising and the education of children. And so have they."

"They?"

"The Sisters." She lowers her voice. "Father Fogarty said they wanted their way in everything. And after he was confined to his wheelchair they had it."

"They didn't let him have his way in anything?"

"Oh, yes, when the gardener quit, they let him sprinkle the lawn."

"Well, maybe he was getting along in years/*

"He looked all right when he came here."

"That's strange. I don't anticipate any trouble."

"You don't, eh? You've never been pastor of a parochial school, then?"

"No. This is my first experience."

"Then you don't know what it means to be up to your neck in nuns."

"No."

"Well, good-night, Father. Sleep well tonight!"

The film is devoted to O'Malley's experiences "up to his neck in nuns." He meets the Sister Superior, Sister Benedict, and discovers an undercurrent of impatience with him and a considerable difference of method. The Sister doesn't approve of his laxity in letting the children off for a holiday on his first day at the school. Then he discovers that the nuns really expect to be deeded Mr. Bogardus' building but that that "querulous

250 The Incredible Crosby

Scrooge," as his character was so well described by Look magazine, is fully expectant in turn of having the old school sold to him. "If you don't sell it to me, that building is going to be condemned," he warns.

Before the story comes to its almost happy ending, a secondary thread of plot has been introduced in the problems of a deserted wife who succeeds in convincing O'Malley that her fourteen-year-old daughter belongs at St Mary's. To this girl, Patsy, Bing sings the film's one original song, Johnny and Jimmy's Aren't You Glad You're You. An exposition of the six senses (the nominal five and a sixth to be), the song suffered in most of its performances, even in Bing's on record (but not in the film), from the entirely irrelevant romanticism with which it was endowed. Patsy's mother is reunited with her husband, through O'Malley's efforts, but Patsy, worried over her parents, is about to fail to graduate until Sister Benedict, at the last minute, relents when all the facts are made clear to her.

Bogardus relents, too, when his doctor suggests that his heart might trouble him less, that he might live longer if he becomes

generous. He overwhelms innocent bystanders on the street with his generosity; he donates the building to the school.

Before fading out on Sister Benedict's farewell to St. Mary's, the film furnishes an extraordinarily moving Nativity play, in which the school's tiniest children sing, "Happy birthday to You, Happy birthday to You, Happy birthday, dear Jesus, Happy birthday to You." as well as two musical moments of considerable emotional validity. In one Father O'Malley sings O Sanctissima with the school children; in the other Sister Benedict sings a lovely little Swedish song in the original and in English.

Sister Benedict prays before the chapel altar, in a scene that all by itself made many clamor that the 1945 Academy Award go to Ingrid Bergman. "Father, help me," the departing Sister

Der Bingle 251

Superior prays, fearing she's being removed for poor work. "Dear Lord, dear Lord, remove all bitterness from my heart. Please help me to see Thy Holy will in all things."

Father O'Malley brings help. He insists, "I've got to tell you. When Dr. McKay said you were perfect, he was right for that's what you are. I cannot tell you how firm I am in that belief. But he was talking about you as a person; he didn't mean physically. You see, Sister, you have a touch of tuberculosis, and that's why you have to go away for a while. Dr. McKay felt that you shouldn't know about this. He felt that the knowledge would hamper your recovery, and I promised not to tell you. But, Sister, to have you go away like this. . . ."

"Thank you, Father, thank you. You've made me very happy. I'll get well quickly now. You'll see, Father."

"Of course you will."

"Of course I will." She laughs delightedly. "Oh, Father, Father, if you hadn't told me this, I don't know what I'd have done. . . ."

He cuts her off with a "Hup-up-up" and adds, ". . . if you ever need anything anything at all no matter what it is, or wherever you happen to be. . . ."

"Hup-up-up," she interrupts. She nods emphatically and wipes her nose and tries to smile, "Don't tell me; I know. I'll just dial <O' for O'Malley."

And thus the picture ends with the music of the title song, written in 1917 for an English musical comedy, ringing in the closing titles.

There is more to the story. What remains is covered ade-

quately in the most severe criticism to which *The Bells of St. Mary's* was submitted. As was to be expected, the daily reviewers, and the weekly, and the monthly were wildly enthusiastic. Not so novelist James T. Farrell, functioning in his secondary role, as a critic. Farrell, a disaffected Chicago

2 52 The Incredible Crosby

Catholic, has been one of the most telling employers of the Marxian dialectic in our time. Free of the tyrannies, tautologies, and hysteria of the Stalinists who pay at least lip service to their philosophical progenitor, Karl Marx, Farrell is a biting iconoclast. His views deserve earnest consideration, even when they seem to fall wide of their mark, for the service they perform in sharpening issues.

"The praise which so many Catholics have showered on this film," Farrell says of *The Bells of St. Mary's*, "suggests strongly the growing hollowness of conventional morality in our time. In the film, little details indicate again and again that the new building is more important than the children who are to be trained and educated in it." Farrell feels that "this emphasis on the building, instead of on the children, mirrors, in a somewhat sentimental fashion, what is now really commonplace in American education." He complains that the Catholics who praised the film failed to notice "this aspect of the plot and accept this attitude on education as if it were truly healthy and moral."

According to Farrell, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, "like almost all other Hollywood films, is developed in terms of what James M. Cain calls 'the love track/ "

Inasmuch as the two protagonists are a priest and a nun, there is no obvious love interest. But the element of flirtation crops up again and again in the scenes that bring Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman together. Psychologically, this is the soundest aspect of the film, and it is handled in a way which could cause no shock to the most moral and religious-minded person. However, the flirtatious rivalry of the nun and the priest has a concealed sexual character. The priest and the nun act in an emotionally immature manner which fosters the use of the children as a means of keeping their rivalry alive. Thus, while the relationship between the nun and the priest is not psychologically false, it nevertheless fits in with the other elements of the plot. Just as the children are objects secondary to the build-

Der Bingle 253

ing, so are they secondary to this relationship. In turn, we can see how the star-system is involved in Hollywood dramaturgy. For the necessity of playing up the roles of the stars helps to dictate the character of all the human relationships portrayed in the film.

One incident concerning the children will, perhaps, illustrate

these observations. One of the boys is beaten up by a little bully who is something of a favorite with the priest. The nun, in competition with the priest, champions the boy who has been beaten up. She buys some boxing-manuals, teaches herself the rudiments of pugilism by studious shadow-boxing, and then trains her little champion. He beats up the bully, and thus the priest is outdone by the nun. This little incident seems to be amusing and harmless. And yet in its moral implications it is far from harmless or merely funny. For here we see a nun and a priest using two boys as expressions of their own teasing rivalry. The children who are considered of secondary importance to a building are here merely supernumeraries in a rivalry which throws a man and a woman in opposition to one another. The fact that the administrators of the Production Code, that critics, priests, Catholic laymen, and others approved of this film is significant. One can pertinently ask if they examined the moral implications of the film before they praised it. In addition, one can ask if they would favor such schools, educational practices, and pedagogical instruction as are suggested by the real role of the children in this film.*

Farrell objects further to "the expression of banal and empty sentimentalities about doing good [which are] on the same moral level as the popular songs which ooze optimism and the commercial advertisements which promise the good life to customers smart enough to buy the right products. In the name of such optimism and sunshiny goodness [he continues], serious writers are attacked as cynics and denounced as nothing less than the enemies of the human race. To try to present

* Observations on The Bells of St. Mary's. From Literature and Morality, Copyright, 1947, by James T. Farrell.

254 The Incredible Crosby

images of human beings in terms of the torn, tragic and ambivalent emotions which human beings feel and express in real life is immoral; to present goodness as it is represented in The Bells of St. Mary's is moral."

He cites the fact that the nun "is treated like a child by her doctor and by the priest" when she becomes ill and likens Hollywood's treatment of movie audiences to this. "Life and death cannot be clearly and seriously mirrored on motion-picture screens because the audience cannot be trusted to face these realities, even though they must face them day in and day out in their actual lives. ... At the same time moral films of this calibre are produced, callousness and cynicism develop by leaps and bounds all over America. One might well ask: Can there be any connection between this kind of film morality and the callousness we find all around us in our daily lives? An investigation which sought to answer this question might be very illuminating."

This is certainly not the place to conduct the investigation Farrell proposes, but some of its results might be suggested

here by examining his criticism of *The Bells of St. Mary's*. It would be difficult to prove that the film actually suggests that "the new building is more important than the children who are to be trained and educated in it" The emphasis upon the building seems normal enough; when you need a new house or a new apartment, and do everything possible to get either, you are not confessing thereby that the house or the apartment is more important than the people who are going to live in it.

"The love track" deserves some examination. Another writer has something to say about such an interpretation as Farrell offers of the "concealed sexual character" in the rivalry of the nun and the priest. Harold J. Salemson, in the April, 1946, *Screen Writer*, suggests that false elements of sex have been imputed to films like *The Bells of St. Mary's* and *The*

Der Bingle 255

Keys of the Kingdom. He attributes this to "the warped minds which have been created by a decade and more of understatement calling forth the most libidinous fantasia on the part of moviegoing children as well as adults. . . , The public has learned to supply from its own imagination the specific acts of so-called misconduct which the Production Code has made unmentionable.

"In this sense, a whole symbolism has been developed: a handshake or a glance have become propositions of illicit love; a kiss has become an overt sex act; almost any fadeout on two characters of opposite sexes unless it is clearly established what happens to them next has become almost a flat statement of the fact that from there they retired together, to put it politely."

Horrifying as the suggestion may be to Farrell, it is all too likely that he has injected into *The Bells of St. Mary's* sexual elements which are not actually in the picture. He can still draw a bill of attainder against the movie producers, on Salemson's counts: perhaps his mind has been warped "by a decade or more of understatement calling forth the most libidinous fantasia on the part of moviegoing children as well as adults [*italics not the author's*]." And as for the children being secondary to the relationship of the nun and the priest, Hollywood star system or no, the central characters in Mr. McCarey's story are Father O'Malley and Sister Benedict, and it is entirely legitimate dramatically that their actions should frame the other persons and the rest of the plot of the religious drama.

It would seem, then, that Farrell's chief striking force lies in his objection to the boxing incident, an objection which is much more easily sustained than his exploration of "the love track" and his annoyance with the importance assigned the new school building. One can sympathize, too, with his castigation of "the banal and empty sentimentalities about doing

Good," though this criticism would apply more successfully to the writing in *Going My Way*, and again, as in the earlier O'Malley tale, the acting of the principals cuts a wide swathe through the expressions of "optimism and sunshiny good-

ness."

Farreirs objections to the Hollywood product make general sense, but his specific disagreements with *The Bells of St Mary's* are wide of the mark. The realities of life and death are faced more vigorously in this film, as in *Going My Way*, than they are in most American movies. There are adventitious elements in the plot and some moments of childishness in the handling of illness that cannot help disturbing intelligent moviegoers, but they hardly add up to the callous evasion of reality that Farrell posits.

It is to be hoped that criticism like James T. Farrell's will stimulate a closer examination of its own product by Hollywood. It is also to be hoped that men like Farrell will come to recognize in pictures like *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's* much more than a fulfillment of the obiter dicta of conventional morality. Perhaps then they will understand that the makers of such films, men like Bing Crosby, Leo McCarey, and Dudley Nichols, are taking a firmer grip upon the problems of the world, the world as they see it and have lived it. If they will suspend their anticlerical prejudices long enough, they will learn that the Crosbys, McCareys, and Nicholsons are their allies, that from them there may very well come the thoroughly desirable presentation of "Human beings in terms of the torn, tragic and ambivalent emotions which human beings feel and express in real life." Regarded, then, as simple Christian apologetics, not apologias, *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's* mark an impressive beginning, a step to maturity in the movies, a most welcome foot forward.

ARNOLD STEVENS is a stoop-shouldered man of medium height, with a wisp of a mustache, hair closely slicked back on his head, and a diffident manner, which, like the rest of his figure, suggests an undertaker far more than one of the most eminent surgeons of his time. His talk and his bearing are similarly as much unlike that of a great doctor as they are unlike what you would expect of Bing Crosby's hunting companion. But Steve is not only a great surgeon; he is Bing's doctor, and he is often in close attendance when Bing goes shooting in the Nevada and Montana wilds. He is important in Bing's life,

but his meeting with the singer was neither propitious nor significant. It was entirely an accident.

When Steve came out to Hollywood in June of 1937, a ^ s " tinguished product of the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, he was

258 The Incredible Crosby

bedeviled by the problem of where to set up his offices. A quick look at downtown Los Angeles decided him against that roaring city center. He decided he preferred Beverly Hills or Hollywood. Walking down the Sunset Strip he saw work still in progress on the Crosby Building. The real-estate agent in charge agreed to make some alterations on the left half of the second floor, acquainted Steve with the fact that his landlord was Bing Crosby, and in the normal course of events they said "how do you do" to each other.

The acquaintance was left at a nominal nod and an occasional greeting until the next year. Bing, no hypochondriac, had no regular doctor and saw no reason to consult one regularly, but in 1938 he found himself suffering with bursitis, and the knob on his right shoulder interfered with his golf. He went to see Dr. Stevens, and Dr. Stevens saw him through his bursitis with ease and dispatch. When Dixie's appendix became inflamed, it seemed logical and reasonable to go to Steve. When there was minor surgery to be performed on the Crosby boys, again Steve was called in. Steve explained to friends when he became in effect the Crosby family surgeon.

"I guess you can call me just that his family surgeon. The remarkable thing you discover in a professional relationship with Bing is just how amazingly well-balanced he is. If there is any real symptom, he wants it run to ground, and he wants to know the whys and wherefores. If you explain to him why he's bothered with this ache or that pain, he's satisfied. He is really what I would call the perfect patient. He just wants to know as much as possible about his ailments, and the delightful thing is to watch the four kids follow their father's example. They also want to know, and they're also perspicacious, like their father."

Bing and Steve discovered mutual hunting and fishing interests, and their relationship developed considerably beyond that of a doctor and patient. They went on joint expeditions in

Der Bingle 259

and around Bing's Elko, Nevada, ranch and spent a lot of time in northern California together.

"He's way above average." Steve describes Bing's hunting. "He's got amazing stamina, can outwalk anybody, including the cowboys who go off with him on his game hunts. To a hunter,

his unselfishness is astonishing. He plays dog while the rest play points. Somebody has to play the dog when you hunt deer. Bing always nominates himself.

"He's loved by all the ranchers around him. In his spare time he always drops in on his neighbors, even those who are hundreds of miles away, as neighbors are in Nevada. In snowstorms, when company is particularly welcome, he makes long trips to see the ranchers, sits down with them, chats, sings, becomes one of them. The ranchers sense that he wants to be treated as just another man, not as a celebrity, and that's exactly the treatment they accord him.

"Bing is equally good at hunting deer, duck, and pheasant. He's made auspicious plans to increase his hunting proclivities, looking forward to downing several brace of elk, bear, and moose over the next few years. He's particularly effective with a 12-gauge Winchester shotgun and a 3006 rifle, using the 12-gauge gun for all the birds, implementing it with the rifle for deer. He is a tenacious and patient trout fisherman and can stand by the hour, waiting for the elusive fish to jump into tackle range."

Steve has always felt that Bing's only serious problem on trips with him was tolerating his amateur motion-picture program. He's been amazed at the tolerance with which Bing has regarded his camera exploits. Steve is as interested in pictures as he is in hunting, and he gets his 16-mm. Eastman pinned on animals and on Bing and their associates with as much interest as he shows in nabbing the birds and beasts, or perhaps more.

Steve's medical background prepared him for the kind of

260 The Incredible Crosby

life he's led in his years as an associate of Bing's. It took him all over the United States, starting at Washington College in Tacoma Park, Maryland, outside of Washington, D.C., his home, where he got his B.S. degree. After that tiny institution, smaller than Gonzaga, he came out to Los Angeles to take his M.D. at Lorna Linda, a county medical establishment, and then he went to the University of Minnesota, where he took his M.S. degree in surgery, with a year and a half at the Mayo Institute superimposed upon his three years at the university. He then went to El Paso, where he did some surgery.

When he came out to Los Angeles to stay, Steve soon made academic associations and was appointed the assistant clinical professor of surgery at the Los Angeles County Veterans Hospital, part of the county medical educational project. After the war, his teaching activities were cut a little, to enable him to devote more time to his practice, but he remained in a supervisory capacity as senior consultant in surgery at the Veterans Hospital, which had become a teaching institution under a joint project of the University of Southern California, UCLA, and

the county medical program. Steve was put in charge of their surgical teaching program, taking time out occasionally to lecture at the Veterans Hospital. In addition, after the war, he was elected president of the Beverly Hills Medical Society.

In 1937 Steve was elected to the American College of Surgeons and a member of the American Board of Surgery, the most distinguished association of surgeons in this country, a membership which in itself certifies an authority with the scalpel beyond the ordinary. He has published some twenty articles in the regular national surgical publications, and in 1934 he was credited in the Yearbook of Medicine as the first to determine the neutralizing capacity of the duodenum in relation to the prevention of stomach ulcers. He makes a point of the fact that his experiments in this line were conducted in vivo,

Der Bingle 261

that is, with a living animal, instead of in vitro, with a test tube. He spent five years and a month in the Navy during the war, volunteering early for the service. His last duty was as chief of surgery at the 2 ? 300-bed naval hospital at the University of Oklahoma at Norman.

Bing and his friends never cease to wonder at Dr. Stevens's completely unassuming manner, at his calmness in the face of the most delicate surgical problems, and at his down-to-earth qualities as a human being. Of course, if he weren't the relaxed person he is, if he weren't so without pretension and so little impressed with his importance, he would not be so vital a fixture in the Crosby Circle. Nonetheless, one of the major topics in C.C. discussions is the humbleness and humanity of G. Arnold Stevens. In sessions at Johnny Burke's house, Johnny and Jimmy and Barney and Bing will sit around citing one instance after another of Steve's striking humanity and selflessness, his rough-and-readiness. One of Jimmy's favorite stories concerns a tense moment in his own medical history.

Jimmy was sitting on a piano stool with Sammy Cahn, running through some tunes. He felt a sudden pain in the vicinity of his groin. He fell right off the stool in anguish and couldn't get on his feet again. They tried all over to get Steve but couldn't find him, and so another doctor was called in. This doctor looked at Jimmy, listened to his explanation of his symptoms, and pronounced a grave judgment, using a series of medical terms that completely mystified but also impressed Jimmy. He ended by prescribing an immediate operation.

Then in came Steve, just dropping in to see the Burkes. He was still in his naval uniform, awkward and uncomfortable in it; his uniform, like his garb in mufti, never fitted him. He struggled into the room. The other doctor started to talk, using the medical language again, obviously trying to make an impression. Steve disregarded him.

262 The Incredible Crosby

"Got a pain in your belly, Jimmy?"

Jimmy nodded weakly.

"What did you say it was, doctor?" Steve asked.

The other doctor explained

'Come on with me, Jim," Steve said, in response to the doctor's explanation.

And he took Jimmy gently from the room outside into his car, sat him down gently, and told him that he would diagnose the condition on the way to the hospital. In the car he explained that it was his diagnosis that Jimmy was suffering from a gall-bladder attack. They got to the hospital and discovered that Steve was absolutely right and that an operation was quite unnecessary. They discovered that the pompous medico the Burkes had got as a last-minute substitute for Steve was a chiropractor.

When Bing is absent from discussions of the undoctory Dr. Stevens, the regular members of the Circle make marked comparisons between Bing and Steve.

"Look," Johnny says, "Bing can't park a car. He can never back it up. You know the way he backs in as best he can and leaves the keys in so that other car owners can extricate themselves if he's in the way. Notice the way Steve is just as clumsy."

"What do you mean?" Barney interjects. "He can park a car."

"I know, Barney, but he doesn't pay much attention to where he's parked it or how carefully he parks it."

"Yeah," Jack Clark says.

Jack is one of the newer members of the Circle. A boyhood friend of Johnny's in Chicago, he is as different from his own father, a Methodist clergyman, as a free-swearing, easy-living, former test pilot can be. Jack has managed the Hollywood Plaza Hotel, been in charge of a television research project for Buddy Morris and Bing, and was manager of the Post and Gatty round-

Der Bingle 263

the-world flight with Will Rogers. A colorful man with a vocabulary as mixed as Bing's and similarly at home with people from every stratum of society, he fits naturally into the range of interests and expressions of the Crosbyites.

Johnny will explain how much alike Steve and Bing are in their clothing habits.

"They've got about the same indomitable lust for old clothes and beat-up accessories. I've never seen Steve once in a suit that fitted him."

Steve will come in upon one of these discussions, face the company, and point proudly to a new suit that he's wearing.

"How about it, gentlemen?" he will ask. "Slick, huh?"

Barney will get up, feel the cloth, and say in mock approval, "Gute ware" Yiddish for good cloth.

Jack will step up and grab a big chunk of loose cloth in the back of Steve's jacket and hold it tight, thus giving it the effect of a good fit.

"Yeah," Jack will say. "Fits you like a glove. Picture of sartorial perfection."

Johnny will spring up and grab the collar of the jacket and pull it up.

"Wonderful fit around the neck," he will say.

Barney will make a dive for his trousers and hold a crease in each leg around the knee.

"Wonderful line in the pants," he'll say. "Please believe me."

"I get the point," Steve will end the discussion resignedly. "You'd better give me a double bourbon."

Steve spends a lot of time at the Burkes'. He and his associate doctor, Tommy Foltz, a soft-speaking Arkansas liberal, will come over on a Saturday afternoon and down a considerable quantity of bourbon as they run through the limitations and values of socialized medicine, the life of a physician, and the delight they all share in Bing Crosby's company.

264 The Incredible Crosby

Tommy will reminisce about his days as an intern and, winking at his pretty wife, will explain how little sexual lure a woman has when she is a patient.

"I don't know," Steve will comment. "We've had some lusty babes walking in our office, and you've worked on some of the wildest."

"Listen to Steve," Barney adds. "Steve talking about women! Of all people. . . ."

And he starts to laugh. And then he falls back on the leather couch near the bar and laughs some more until he finally becomes weak.

"What's the matter, Barney?" Johnny asks. "Tired?"

"I don't know," Barney says faintly, wiping his eyes as he talks. "There's just something so funny about Steve and women. They just don't go together."

"Am I a hermit?" Steve asks. "An ascetic, a celibate?"

"Celibate?" Barney asks. "Who said anything about prison?"

And then they all laugh at Barney.

On Sunday mornings, Steve and Tommy often come over with the rest of the Circle for the Burkes' late breakfasts, for what has become a tradition of Sabbath "red and white." The red refers to lochs (smoked salmon); the white, to cream cheese. The Circle members disappear into the Burke kitchen to prepare the gastronomical treat. They fry eggs, with anything that's available tossed in. Barney may have brought over a huge quantity of salami to slice up for the omelet; Jack may have brought over some onions. There are usually onion rolls, whitefish or sturgeon, great gobs of butter, and some cereal and fruit and fruit juice for those weaker souls who must approach any breakfast, including Sunday's, warily. The food is piled up on the tables surrounding the bar, and, with occasional sorties into the kitchen to heap bagels upon the salmon and cheese fire, a three- to six-hour feast is negotiated.

Der Bingle 265

Conversation at these Burkefests ranges all the way from a piecemeal attack upon recent movies to a sober medical discussion in which Steve runs down some difficult concepts and more difficult terminology for the lay appreciation of Johnny, Bessie, Jack, Barney, Bing, and friends. During the baseball and football seasons, the Circle will move en masse from the Burkes' bar to the Los Angeles Coliseum, Gilmore Stadium, or Wrigley Field, grabbing a roll or a hunk of whitefish as they go, to continue their sessions over a broken-field run or a triple-bagger lost in the sun. Since the 1947 baseball season, Bing's participation in these discussions has been professional for then he bought a quarter interest in the Pittsburgh Pirates. Hope followed Bing's move by buying a share of the Cleveland Indians. A further dimension was added to their comedy.

The Crosby-Stevens relationship fits naturally into the casual life enjoyed by all the members of the Crosby Circle. It's a relationship based on a great deal more than just their similarities of dress, but there's no doubt that the affinity of the two is more than a little summed up by their clothing habits. Another

Crosby associate, drawn close to Bing by clothing, is the man who dresses him at Paramount, Mickey Cohen.

"In more soigne circles/ 7 Mickey explains, "I'd be known as Crosby's 'couturier. 9 Around the studio they refer to me more simply as a 'wardrobe man/ No matter what they call me, in all modesty there's nobody better suited to get the measure of a man. After fifteen years of working around the clock with him, listening to his constant crooning, spending weary hours in consultation on sketches, scripts, or who's rated the best in the sixth at Santa Anita, Bing's measurements are well inked in my books to stay. His girth may vary, but his head and chest measure ever the same."

Mickey usually shows Bing sketches of his costumes for a picture and asks which he prefers.

266 The Incredible Crosby

"Whatever you think I should wear is okay by me," is Bing's unvarying answer.

Mickey has an interesting point of Crosby view, as close a range as one could get on a man, and it's left him with a vital impression of the man.

"We all enjoy working with him, too. There are a lot of laughs. Besides, he's the nearest we have to a buddy who can talk with horses, and there's still the scant chance maybe someday one of them will talk back.

"Though I don't want to get maudlin or sticky about this, as Crosby's clothing consultant our association is even more closely cemented than the others. For one thing, both of us are color-blind. It doesn't startle me to see Bing arrive early in the mornings wearing a wild red shirt and a Panama hat with a breast-of-pheasant-feathers hatband. He really goes for those feathered hatbands that he orders from Hawaii in all color combinations, each of them carefully feathered by hand. He gave me one, and I'm quite proud of it. I've never been sure exactly what to wear with it, but I take it out of the closet at intervals and brush the feathers to keep the pheasants in trim.

"It would be unfair for me to take any credit for Crosby creations off screen. Certainly they display a certain freshness, dash, and some ad-libbed color combinations that are original, to say the least. And perhaps the least said the better on this score. Except to add that the shirts are filed prominently with the levis, cowboy chaps, wading boots, and skis, alongside the Bond Street stuff in the closets of his Bel Air home. The mere mention of a Tuxedo starts him groaning and not musically."

Mickey has had an occasional problem with a Hope-Crosby picture. Bing will complain about a costume of his: "'Why can't I have one like Bob's?"

Bob will put in a demurrer: "Case Crosby's creation and

Der Single 267

then look at mine. What is this anyway? Just a little something left over after Bing's is cut out?"

Bing ribs Mickey a great deal. He will often introduce him to people, particularly pretentious people, as "my producer, Mr. Cohen, but of course you gentlemen have heard of him," and then Bing lets the gentlemen worry about their position in relation to his "producer" and leaves Mickey to flounder in the same predicament.

Once in a flashy resort hotel, Bing started a rumor that Mickey was a champion polo player and got Mickey into trouble with a genuine ten-goal poloist who was staying at the hotel. The ten-goal man kept at Mickey, asking him, "What about a few chukkers, Mr. Cohen?" and begged him not to be so modest. "Mr. Crosby has told us all about you."

Mickey had a hard time convincing the polo player that he had never swung a mallet in his life.

But once he had the opportunity to get back at Bing. It was necessary to call Mickey for a quick wardrobe change. Bing got on the phone and asked for Mickey's extension. 'Mickey picked up the phone.

"Mickey?" Bing asked.

"Yes," Mickey said.

"This is Bing."

"Bing who?" Mickey asked.

19

AFTER NINE AND a half years of the Kraft Music Hall, Bing walked out in June, 1945. He was annoyed at the financial problems involved in working for Kraft. With an annual income of about \$900,000, Bing was keeping less than one-ninth. He wanted some arrangement that gave him a more even break. Kraft officials and their advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, pointed out that their contract ran until 1950. Bing pointed back to the California law, which held no contract valid for employees after more than seven years. For the rest of 1945 there were arguments back and forth by Mr. Crosby and Kraft, and the cheese company had to fill in its program with a rough organization of talents, led by Eddie Duchin, when its fall series got under way.

Der Bingle 269

While Bing's representatives on one hand and Kraft and its middlemen on the other carried the argument through the rest of the year, Mr. Crosby finished *Blue Skies*, another Irving Berlin song cavalcade, built around a flimsy show-business story. Bing played the part of a man who found the restaurant and night-club business irresistible. He held off marriage to Joan Caulfield as he opened one night club after another, each built on a different gimmick, new songs (which were old Berlin hits), and the comedy of Billy DeWolfe. When he finally married Caulfield, he got into trouble because he couldn't keep his promise to keep one night club. The picture began in a disc jockey's radio studio and ended there, as the jockey reunited Crosby and Caulfield. The jockey was played by Fred Astaire, as a dancer taken off his feet by a fall from a high stage platform. Some added significance could be attributed to this role, since Astaire announced that with it he was retiring from the screen, never to dance any more except in illustration of some of the more complicated steps he was going to teach in his new dance studios from coast to coast. Neither he in his early reel quest of the girl nor Bing in his successful pursuit of her hand was endowed with much of a character. As in *Holiday Inn*, the two men were left largely to their own resources and those of Irving Berlin. The songs ranged happily from the title piece to a new song written for the musical adventure, *You Keep Coming Back like a Song*, which followed its own directions in its reiterated appearances in the film. Some of the other song certainties from the Berlin piano were *This Is the Army*, Mr. Jones and *I've Got My Captain Working for Me Now* (introduced in a delightful skit with DeWolfe), *A Couple of Song and Dance Men* (cited in Part One), *A Pretty Girl Is like a Melody*, *Mandy*, *The Russian Lullaby*, *Always*, and *Top Hat*, *White Tie*, and *Tails*. These and about as many again assured the success of a movie that was something less than the logical

2jo The Incredible Crosby

follow-up to *The Bells of St. Mary's* but satisfactory enough to roll up enormous grosses all around the country.

After *Blue Skies*, Bing came to New York to follow Johnny and Jimmy's Nellie Bly around the Eastern city circuit. The first tryout appearance of Nellie Bly was in Boston. Bing went up with Johnny and Jimmy.

They had rooms booked at the Ritz Hotel, and they got out at the Back Bay station. It was in early December, and the New England snow was piled high. There were no cabs running, and the Hub City had made no provision for sleighs as a substitute. Jack Clark, who was along, turned to Johnny.

"Let me call the police station."

"No, no," Johnny said. "He wouldn't want that/ 7

Bing, who was standing aside, came up to them.

"This is a very simple problem," he said. "Let's take the suitcases, and let's go."

He led the way. At least five times people stopped and looked at them and turned to each other.

One said, "That was Crosby."

The other said, "Naw, you're wrong. Couldn't be. What would Bing be doing carrying a suitcase in Boston?"

When a bunch of kids looked up from the snow man they were building, Bing broke gently into the strains of White Christmas. The kids just gaped and gawked in astonishment. Wherever he went in Boston, Bing was surrounded by people. He didn't go very far, but neither did he remain in lonely seclusion in his room, nor did he deck himself out in dark glasses and other protective coloring when he left his hotel.

When they came into New York, they found the same cab situation. There were no cabs. So Bing picked up his grips again and walked to the Waldorf. Bing loved to walk, and he spent a lot of his time in New York in December of 1945 walking from block to block, taking long strolls through the streets he

Der Bingle 271

had known when he was getting started as a radio and presentation-house singer. On Seventh Avenue he was stopped by a drunk.

"Has anybody ever told you you looked just like Bing Crosby?" the drunk asked him.

"Yeah, a couple of people," Bing replied.

"You're not really Crosby, are you?" the drunk asked, holding onto Bing's arm for support.

"No," Bing laughed, "of course not."

"That's better," the drunk said. "I know Bing Crosby wouldn't be walking along Seventh Avenue all alone and unprotected, just like me."

Bing walked on.

In New York, too, he indulged himself in one of his favorite

stunts, which is to get in the alley that runs along the Shubert Theater, connecting Forty-fifth and Forty-fourth Streets, between Eighth Avenue and Broadway, and dance for an audience of the little street singers who gather there. As usual, Bing reversed procedure and paid the kids for the privilege of dancing for them.

Bing came back to California after -Nellie Bly flopped, quickly and painfully and got to work for Kraft again. He had settled on a last thirteen-week period for them as a solution to their difficulties. The programs went as usual, smoothly organized and conducted, reflecting John Scott Trotter's summary of their procedure.

"If you wanted to plan nine years of no confusion, it would be impossible. But Bing has set a mood for this program in which no confusion is tolerated. Each man knows his job and does it, and there is, as a result, no confusion at all, except maybe when Bing is away. And even then, it's tempered by the fact that we've all worked so long with him and consequently work so well together."

272 The Incredible Crosby

During these thirteen weeks John Scott taught at the University of Southern California, giving his delighted students a course in the mysteries of scoring for radio and the films. Particularly impressive features of the course were his conducted tours of Hollywood's Radio City, in which he took his classes to rehearsals and broadcasts of the more famous radio conductors. Several times he let them sit in on the Kraft show. They were able to watch the exciting prerehearsal performances of the Kraft orchestra, in which John Scott ran through serious music never performed on the air but important to him and his musicians as a means of getting their kicks. It involved such recherché musical items as suites by Hindemith and Ernest Toch, with whom John was studying. When Bing arrived at any of these performances, he would ask John Scott, "What's the 'patron' music for today?" He always alluded to Toch and Hindemith and such as patron music. He referred to the lack of commercial allure of the music, to the fact that it could achieve listeners only by way of the offices of deeply interested patrons,

John Scott during this period also had the opportunity of conducting the Los Angeles County Band. Actually this band had no fixed personnel. It was any collection of musicians that the funds allocated for its purpose would support, and it was directed by a series of guest conductors, one of which in the spring of 1946 was John Scott Trotter. He opened his program with a few bars of Bing's theme, Where the Blue of the Night, and listeners undoubtedly expected more music in the same vein, but to their surprise, he moved with his string orchestra into a beautiful set of tunes by Toch for baritone and orchestra, Four Songs for Martha, written in memory of a departed friend, and concluded with a short piece by Hindemith. For those capa-

ble of following the music, it was obvious that John Scott Trotter was more than just a competent radio conductor. His expertness in reading the difficult music before him suggested

Der Bingle 273

once again that his talents were considerably broader than radio and motion pictures had ever given him any opportunity to display. His friends who were musicians wanted to know then, as they had before and continued to after, why he wasn't entrusted with some symphonic orchestra, at least in his off season, in the time available to him for that sort of conducting, between Crosby assignments.

The high light of the last Kraft series occurred on Bing's birthday in May. Bob Hope showed up with a huge cake covered with a hundred candles. When he raced out on the stage, the audience screamed as no radio audience had ever screamed before. Hope presented Bing with the cake.

"This is the hottest audience you've ever worked in front of." he told Bing.

"Take it away," Bing said, "before it burns up the studio."

But Hope wasn't to be stopped. On the way to the studio he had scribbled a short poem to Bing. He read it on the air.

Happy Birthday, dear old flab,
I know your age but I won't blab;
I just want to say Happy Birthday, Pop,
Here's your cake with the cheese in the
middle and the Pepsodent on top.

Just a few minutes before the end of the show, Bing said, "I want to thank Uncle Robert for the shoo-fly pie and apple Pandowdy," and then he kissed Bob on the forehead. Hope noticed a little tear in Bing's eye.

During 1946, Bing completed two pictures and started a third. The first of the three to be released the following year was *Welcome Stranger*, in which he was paired again with Barry Fitzgerald in an obvious attempt to cash in on the unforeseen but not unmarked box-office success of *Going My Way*. Unfortunately, where the earlier film built a story around char-

274 The Incredible Crosby

acter and established personalities sufficiently substantial to overcome maudlin writing and creaking plot, this screen play carried about as much weight in its characterizations as a radio soap opera and bore more than one clear resemblance to that flimsy narrative form in its tale of two doctors, a schoolteacher,

the head of the chamber of commerce of Fallbridge, Maine, and his son. After an exchange of tempers in the Going My Way pattern, Bing and Barry unite to find love for the first, to retain medical stature and gain a hospital for the second. Without Bing's astonishing ease of delivery, even of entirely empty lines, without his singing warmth (expressed in a quintet of Burke and Van Heusen songs, two of more than passing importance My Heart Is a Hobo and As Long as I'm Dreaming), without his latter-day ability to mug and yet not to ham, to throw his best gestures and lines and songs away, the picture would have been unendurable. Joan Caulfield (as the school-teacher) offered a friendly smile and Barry Fitzgerald a knowing but not convincing grimace. The direction, by Elliott Nugent, promised again and again in the course of the film's production, to become something of significance, as Nugent threatened "to take all day on this shot" or that, "until I get it right." But the direction offered nothing of any distinction and permitted Fitzgerald to turn in his most forced and least distinguished movie performance to its date. And still Paramount could look happily at the balance sheet on the film: reviewers dismissed it pleasantly, as well-made hokum; audiences accepted its stars, whistled and sang its songs, and once more established a Bing Crosby film as a top grosser.

Shortly after completing Welcome Stranger, Bing went on location at Jasper National Park, in Canada, with The Emperor Waltz company. The Canadian Rockies were used to simulate the Tyrol, in which much of Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett's fable of an American phonograph salesman in 1901

Der Single 275;

Austria-Hungary was set. The story, a considerable departure from this same directing-writing team's Lost Weekend, paralleled the love of Virgil Smith, the salesman, for Johanna, Countess von Stolzenberg-Stolzenberg, with the infatuation of Virgil's plebeian fox terrier, Buttons, with the Countess' poodle, Scheherazade. Both Virgil and Buttons suffer bitter reproofs and setbacks as a result of their lowly station. Both finally obtain in their love suits, in the course of which a degree of suspense is added to a larger one of satire and skillfully blended with music; Johann Strauss's Emperor Waltz, logically enough, and one of Bing's early radio successes, I Kiss Your Hand, Madame. The casting, both for and against type, could not have been shrewder. Richard Haydn's Emperor Franz Josef, Roland Culver as the Countess' father, and Lucile Watson as his fiancée are altogether delightful. Sig Rumann and Harold Vermilyea add telling caricatures of pompous figures, and there is some wonderful upstaging of the principals, Bing (Virgil), and Joan Fontaine (the Countess) > by the two dogs. The ball at Schonbrunn Palace, given by the Emperor to celebrate Johanna's temporarily scheduled marriage to a marquis, is the film's major production moment, a handsomely mounted re-creation of Hapsburg revels. In all, the movie served as a personal triumph for Bing, for the featured players,

the writers, and the director. Life magazine summed it up glowingly and accurately as: "... a musical film as light and rich as a Sacher torte . . ."

The Road to Rio was made a year later than The Emperor Waltz, but released several months earlier. To many it was the best Road picture since the first two journeys to Singapore and Zanzibar. Its wild-eyed plot, presided over by villainess-in-chief Gale Sondergaard and a pendant capable of hypnotizing and used industriously on Dorothy Lamour, is the heavy thread employed to sew together the vaudeville routines of Bing and

276 The Incredible Crosby

Bob Hope. The thread of the plot proves as serviceable as mercerized cotton as jazz musicians Crosby and Hope make their way from a one-night circus stand to Rio de Janeiro, and contains an impossible little band in which they collaborate with the Wiere Brothers, the successful dissipation of the villainies, and l'amour, toujours Lamour. The musical score, one of Burke and Van Heusen's best, has two fine songs to recommend it, a simple but touching ballad, But Beautiful, which Bing sang with enormous conviction on the soundtrack, and You Don't Have to Know the Language, in which the Andrews Sisters added their voices to Bing's. Good as these songs were, they had to compete with the antics of the picture's stars on the bandstand, which, demonic as they were, did manage to suggest working dance-band musicians. If the Road to Rio delighted the general movie audience, it amused James Petrillo's union brothers even more.

When Bing came back to radio in the fall of 1946, he looked forward to his work with great anticipation. He'd won a substantial victory. He was going to be permitted to transcribe his shows. Bing felt that the transcribed show was the radio program of the future. Its advantages were obvious. A finished program could be cut with a studio audience; but if any of the individual contributions to the program were in any way marred by performers' mistakes, missed lines, or audience laughter or shouting that interrupted the even flow of the talk and music, "wild tracks" that were recorded before the audience show could be inserted in place of the fluffed bits. Thus there would be no interruptions to the fluent continuity that Bing demanded in his radio work. In addition, the records could be played at the same time all over the United States, and thus it was not necessary to buck such obvious competition as the Sinatra show, which Bing otherwise would have had to face, with both the singers losing listeners as a result. In addition, it

Der Bingle 277

was possible to obtain guests when the guests were available and not to worry about their having to dash over from theatre

or movie lots or their own radio programs to perform with Bing. It was a happy setup and one Bing had been fighting for for several years. Understandably, the New York Times welcomed his first program in October as a "portentous premiere" and declared that "Mr. Crosby has delivered a major if not fatal blow to the outworn and unrealistic prejudice against the recorded program."

He plunged into plans for his new show. The frantic bidding of more than a dozen of radio's most affluent sponsors had ended with a contract to transcribe his programs for Philco Radio. The American Broadcasting Company, a new network compounded of stations of the old National Broadcasting Company's Blue web, was willing to take a chance with a transcribed nighttime show. There was not much chance involved, actually; Bing's name and the quality of his guest artists were sufficient to carry it. With Trotter in charge of the music and some slick production by Bill Morrow, who turned down several better paying shows to work with Bing, the transcribed Wednesday night half hour was sure of success.

In addition, there were other guarantees. Bing and his brother Everett had insisted on a clause in the contract that gave them the right to pass on the program that preceded theirs and that followed. They had a fuller command of their audience that way and could keep the time surrounding Bing's free of offensive programs that would lose the Crosby half-hour listeners. The Philco program returned Bing a weekly salary of \$7,500 out of a program budget of some \$22,500.

The program got under way auspiciously. Bob Hope was the very proper first guest, and the show delivered a smashing Hooper rating as a result. Almost one-fourth of all the radio sets tuned in at the time Bing went on (nine o'clock in most

278 The Incredible Crosby

sections of the country, ten o'clock in the East) were tuned to the Crosby show. The program seesawed in interest for several weeks afterward until it hit its real stride with the appearance of Al Jolson. Bing, with his remarkable luck for teaming up with the man of the moment, had found a perfect partner in Jolson. For even as Sinatra had looked up to Bing when he was getting started, Bing had had a high regard for Jolson when he made his first singing beginnings. They kidded each other about their ages, compared notes about their singing ability, and paired voices in duet after duet. The only real letdown, and that to only a small segment of Crosby listeners, was the combination of Jolson, Crosby, and John Charles Thomas in a minstrel show in the spring of 1947.

The Jim Crow accents of that entertainment routine were too sedulously imitated, and some of the wit and humor and easy singing of the three men was lost because of the bad taste involved. It was, some felt, an unnecessary cheapening of the

great talents of these men, which didn't do them justice as singers or human beings. It offended this country's most conspicuously oppressed minority; and even though the offense was unintentional, it was undeniable.

To a large section of show business, there was reason for added criticism of Bing, criticism and dissertation.

"Something," these people said in late 1946 and early 1947, "has happened to Bing's voice. It's declining. It's fading. The great man is finished."*

The most vigorous statement of this case was made in Salute magazine in the spring of 1947 by George Frazier, the Variety record reviewer. A few pertinent quotations will tell his story.

"Sooner or later it happens to everyone. A man's legs go back on him or his eyes begin to fail or the beauty goes out of his voice. He knows then that the moment for him to make for the showers has finally come. Yet as much as we realize this, we

Der Single 279

never really believed that it could happen to Bing, but it has, and it is not a pleasant task to have to chronicle it. The decline of Bing Crosby as a singer is a deep and abiding bereavement.

"Around Broadway they used to say that Bing came on pre-historic, which was the big street's quaint way of stating that he hit you like a caveman when he went to work on a popular song. They don't say this anymore. For if they concede his vast popularity and magnificent showmanship, they are also aware that his voice is no longer there. Bing just doesn't sing very well anymore. Indeed, in certain recent instances he has sung badly. . . . It is difficult to say when the deterioration in Bing's singing began to set in. For my own part, I became acutely conscious of it in his Decca recording of I Love You (from Mexican Hayride.) That, to my ears, was the first of a succession of progressively more inadequate Crosby records. His recent Pretending and Getting Nowhere are downright embarrassing. This is not an isolated opinion. It has, for example, been shared in print by John S. Wilson, PM's competent record reviewer, and Frank Conniff, the New York Journal-Americans rising young columnist. A few weeks ago, Conniff, whose pieces are frequently sparked by some knowledgeable jazz criticisms, wrote: 'In the wry tone of this-hurts-me-more-than-it-hurts-you, some of the charter members of the Crosby Chowder and Picketing Club have been hinting that the master has lost his touch. His current records, his latest picture, and his radio show are getting the once-over-lightly from all sides/ . . .

'To spot the cause of Bing Crosby's decline as a singer is a ticklish job. Neither he nor the people near him have made any adequate explanation as this is written. But the fact that

opera singers and less strenuous vocalists go into their fifties with their voices unimpaired makes people wonder why Bing should have started slipping while still in his forties. The ob-

2 So The Incredible Crosby

vious answer is that opera singers take extremely good care of their voices. Bing never has. The ease with which he scaled the heights led him into careless ways. There would seem to be a good deal of significance in a recent dispatch from Hollywood which stated that he had given up pipe smoking. If this is true, it means that Bing, for the first time in his career, is worried about his work.

"It may be that Bing will make a comeback. But history is against it. So this then would seem to be the end of an era an era that began back in the '20s and no one should be blamed for feeling bad about it. In his time, Bing was a very special man and we are all richer for having had him sing to us."

Billy Rose answered Frazier in an article for Modern Screen, in which he pointed out that his records were still crowding the seven-figure mark in sales. He cited the enormous success of his radio program: "As I punch this out, he is again among the First Fifteen with a rating of 21.7. And remember, we're not hearing Crosby in person. We're getting the transcribed show which the network wisenheimers insisted could not succeed."

He listed the remarkable success of Bing's last seven pictures, showing that there had been a steady increase after the 1941 Birth of the Blues, figured at 100 per cent, through Going My Way, the highest grosser in the thirty-five-year history of Paramount, to Blue Skies, which, with its run not completed, had grossed 421 per cent of the 1941 pictures' take. Rose concluded on a note of triumph:

"Fortune Magazine, as you know, plays them close to the chest and doesn't go in for overstatement. I like its conservative estimate of Old Frog-in-the-Throat in its recent article 'Crosby is head man in every branch of American entertainment but sidewalk magic. First in films, first on the air, and first on the phonographs of his countrymen.'

Der Bingle 281

"Declining, eh?"

"So is Mt. Everest! So is kissing!"

To some extent, the claims of the Crosby critics must be allowed. Most of his records made in the second half of 1945 and through much of 1946 were disappointing. His top notes

seemed to come with great difficulty; his phrasing was not as relaxed and certain as it had been in the past. But, to people on the inside, it was clear that it was not a fading voice. Jimmy Van Heusen explained: "Bad top notes? Bing has been singing bad top notes and making them good ever since he's been singing." There was a clear uncertainty in Bing's work, and the blame for that could be laid at the door of his musical collaborators. For a long time during this so-called decline and fall, Bing was paired with various small groups on the Decca roster. Missing the sure baton and intelligent aid of John Scott Trotter, he had floundered between the notes of little units who were working with him to improve their fortune. The association with Bing was obviously more than just a shot in the arm for musical outfits on the way up, but unfortunately, though the collaboration was a hypodermic for their professional rating, it didn't help Bing. As he worked more and more with John Scott Trotter on the Philco show, made a few records with him, and began to work more regularly as a singer, his voice emerged from the dark clouds of poor colleagues. It shone again, and in his mid-1947 records he was clearly an assured vocalist once more.

Undoubtedly time has made some ravages upon the Crosby throat. His range has lowered, but it hasn't been cut. The lowering necessitates a new approach for a singer who was once a baritone with a tenor quality and some of the notes of the higher singer, who has now become a bass-baritone with a particularly secure lower register. No, Bing was not ready for the past tense and consignment to the Book of Memories in 1947.

2 82 The Incredible Crosby

His career as a singer, as well as an actor and a master of ceremonies, has a bright future.

Bing had one other career that was open to question. In 1944 he became an independent producer, forming Bing Crosby Producers to release through United Artists. His first picture, *The Great John L.*, made money but didn't arouse any critical acclaim. A lackluster investigation of the life of prize fighter John L. Sullivan, it had a certain allure in its Burke and Van Heusen songs and its well-organized fight sequences, but it had to fight its way to something better than a draw in theatres around the country. Bing's second picture, *Abie's Irish Rose*, left the critics similarly unmoved, but it created a large controversy.

Bing thought he was taking all the necessary precautions by hiring a rabbi, a priest, and a Protestant minister to act as technical advisers during the filming of *Abie's Irish Rose*. But the stereotyped characterizations of Jewish and Irish families were too much for such organizations as the National Conference of Christians and Jews, which denounced the movie as "the worst sort of caricature of both Jews and Catholics . . . a film that sets us back twenty years. . . ." The Anti-Defama-

tion League of B'nai Brith declared that the film was "not only distasteful to people of refinement but showed no originality of any kind. ... Its general effect could not be other than to rivet the stereotypes on the minds of the audiences who would see it." On the other hand, the National Jewish Monthly cited the film "among other evidences of goodwill demonstrations of our time." Rabbi Max Nussbaum of Temple Israel, Los Angeles, deplored the hysteria aroused by the movie's alleged caricatures. "Qualitatively the picture could be much better, and so could the play," Dr. Nussbaum said. "But not one of the attacks makes much of the fact that the film was made only with the best of intentions to promote national tolerance. That

Der Single 283

intention it realizes." The rabbi took time out to laud Bing, "whose record of service to Jewish and minority causes is unparalleled."

Bing deleted some of the most objectionable sequences in the hope that the film could be made more acceptable, and he offered to make any other changes that could be suggested by dissident groups. But, with all the changes, it remained Abie's Irish Rose, what Time magazine called "a tired old theatrical joke about a Jewish boy and an Irish Catholic girl. It was undiluted corn a quarter of a century ago; by now, the course of recent history has covered the feeble joke with a rather repellent mold." Time summed up: "It turns out, in 1946, that jokes about racial and religious groups are not really good, clean fun after all."

The fate of Abie's Irish Rose was fodder all over again for the anti-Crosby crusade, which in late 1946 and 1947 had assumed sinister proportions. Hollywood's Communists, as a part of their general anti-Catholic position, had singled out Bing Crosby, the most prominent lay Catholic of our time, as the logical victim of their anti-Roman Catholic campaign. With frightening regularity they set rumors in motion about Bing, looking frantically for weak spots in his armor. They even went so far as to prepare a movie roughly paralleled on his life, with some effective distortions of the true Crosby story, to undermine his career.

Bing had no comment to make about these attacks and survived them with little difficulty. The significant appearance of Communists and their fellow travelers in the front ranks of those who found fault with his singing, with his politics, with his movie making, didn't bother Bing. His attitude toward the attacks was the same as the position of nonparticipation he had adopted toward all political activity. In remaining aloof in this fashion, he smiled through the sometimes subtle, sometimes

violent underground assaults upon him with the traditional ease of the man on the flying trapeze, and fortunately the large bulk of his countrymen remained unaware of his assailants and their arguments. They paid little attention to his "fading voice," his poor record as an independent producer, and the scurrilous motion picture directed against him. He remained their favorite singer, their favorite actor; in Jimmy Fidler's poll to select the outstanding personality in the world, above Frank Sinatra, above General Eisenhower, above President Truman, above the Pope, they elected Bing Crosby their favorite person.

20

THE IMAGE OF Bing Crosby held by most Americans, and most Americans hold tight to an image of Bing Crosby, is either of themselves, if they are male, or of their brothers, fathers, or sons. The projection is generally glamorized beyond the narrow confinements of their lives to take in the whole handsome sweep of Bing's activities, and as a result of this projection their lives become more glamorous. What makes this identification with the life and times of Bing Crosby so real and so remarkable is that it is so easy to accomplish. It doesn't take a worryingly wide stretch of the imagination: all that is required is a good long look at the motion-picture screen upon which Bing cavorts, a careful hearing of his recordings of White Christmas, Sweet L&ildni, San Antonio Rose, or Silent Night, an examination of what is known of his personal life (a wife and four boys, golfing,

285

286 The Incredible Crosby

9 a glance at his sartorial inelegance and lo! the projection is completed. It's not hard it's painfully easy. For Bing is the average American, and therein lies his genius.

Ask Americans around their country why they like Bing Crosby (never if they like him; to imply that they might not is horrendous and a source of personal offense). Most find themselves, at first, at a loss for words. "Why, I just like him. He's he's Bing!" But they get beyond this unrewarding tautology, with a little help, and into the happy categories of projection. In Bend, Oregon, "Because he's a great hunter and fisher." In Pecos, Texas, "Because he loves horses." In Chicago, Illinois, from a housewife, "Because he's such a grand father wasn't he made Father of the Year, or something?" (He was, in 1945, by the National Father's Day Committee,) In Los Angeles, from a man at a bar, "Because he's one of the boys he can drink anybody under the table and remain a gentleman." In

answer to the question, "Have you ever seen him drink anyone under the table?" this admiring sot was indignant. "No, of course not. But he can that's obvious!" In Memphis, Tennessee, from a little Negro boy (about twelve), prevailed upon to talk with some difficulty, "Because he's just like me I mean his singing and dancing and everything." In a gasoline station on the Arizona desert, "Because he's a great rancher." In a plane flying from Spokane to San Francisco, "Because he's a great businessman do you know he's a millionaire? That he's covered his money? Protected himself not like them other movie stars. Men like Bing are the lifeblood of America." On Broadway, in New York, "Because Bing Crosby is show business. He's everything we've got. Just name it, and he can do it and better 'n anybody!"

The Face of America this voice has a face, and a figure, everybody's face, everybody's figure. By now everybody knows

Der Bingle 287

Bing's hair is half gone; and though his millions of fans like to see his pate covered with a toupee when he runs through his romantic screen paces, they're happy to know he's balding; it makes him more like the average man. It's comforting, too, to realize he's only five feet nine inches tall, that he's got a spreading but not paunchy waist, that his ears stand out firmly from his head, and that he dresses like a tramp. That's why the interminable kidding to which he's submitted by Bob Hope hasn't palled as a gag line; Americans like to be reminded, and constantly, just how much like them their No. 1 star really is.

When, during a tour of army camps in the Southwest early in the war, his train was sidetracked in a little Arizona town for a few hours, Bing went for a walk. As is usual in these cases, he wasn't bothered; occasionally someone would stop on the street and look carefully at him, peer questioningly into his face, then walk away muttering something about "Danged if he don't look like Bing Crosby!" Suddenly a girl planted herself in front of him, grabbed him by the shoulders, and then held him before her at arm's length, shaking him slightly, the way one does an old friend one has not expected to meet.

"What are you doing in town?" she cried.

Then, realizing that she had treated Bing Crosby just like an old friend one has not expected to meet, she flushed with embarrassment and ran away. An old friend, yes, but also a movie idol, a great man, an institution.

Bing is the average man, or at least a composite of all the average men, but he is not a mediocrity; that's strikingly clear. Apart from his more, perceptible achievements, his astonishing ability to remain one of the people and yet to live apart, his ease with his studio audiences and with fans and detachment from the normal activities of stars of the first movie magnitude

at the same time these are the accomplishments of a man supremely aware of his position and of its large responsibilities.

288 The Incredible Crosby

Bing does not often talk about his relationship with his fans, but, as Johnny Burke says, " (If you'll forgive the very necessary bromide) his actions speak louder than his words." He knows his fans have an unshakable, indomitable faith in him, and he reciprocates that faith. He wants no part of fantastic publicity stories; he has no regular press agent; and the men who publicize his movies and radio programs and records, hired by Paramount, ABC, Philco, and Decca, are under strict orders not to tamper with the truth, not to exaggerate the facts about Crosby, and not, especially not, to create wild stories in the time-honored tradition of press agents. The Bing Crosby personality is well enough implanted in the minds and emotions and fantasy lives of his several audiences.

Bing has never allowed his philanthropies to be made public. Occasionally a story leaks out through one of the bewildered recipients of the Crosby charities, but usually the facts reported in the columns about Bing's donations are not to be trusted. It is almost common knowledge that his royalties from his recordings of Silent Night and Adeste Fideles all go to charities, to the Chinese Relief Fund, and such. The royalties are huge, too; Silent Night f at the end of 1945, had sold 1,800,000 copies, Bing's second biggest seller (his first: White Christmas, 2,500,000). In December of 1941, Silent Night sold 300,000 records and raised over \$8,000 just that one month. At the beginning of the 1946-1947 radio season, Bing promised Father Corkery, president of Gonzaga University, \$75,000 for his old school, from the proceeds of his guest appearances for that year, and he delivered the tidy sum in \$25,000 installments, as he made his rounds from program to program. He donated the organ to his old parish church in North Hollywood and gives virtually every cent he makes from guest appearances to religious charities. His list of old friends and show-business acquaintances marked for personal aid is both too long and too personal to

Der Bingle 289

warrant details, but an illustration of his method of proffering help is in order.

Early in 1947 Bing picked up the Los Angeles papers and read, some unpleasant news about an old friend, a trombonist and singer whom he'd known for almost twenty years, whom he'd used in several of his pictures. The musician had become a band leader; but times were bad for band leaders, and he was stranded in Los Angeles without enough money to pay off his band. In addition, his wife was suing him for divorce in an unsavory court action, which was bringing him just that much

more ugly publicity. Bing, working on *The Road to Rio* at Paramount, asked the musician to come out to the studio. He greeted him warmly and then made an abrupt about-face.

"You know," he told the troubled bandsman, "I'm getting sick and tired of seeing your face around here. When can you get out of here, and how much will you need to get back to New York? Answer one at a time."

"Immediately," was the answer to the first. "Four hundred dollars" answered the second.

Bing turned to his stand-in, Leo Lynn, and directed his next movements. "Get him \$600, and put him on the next train out of here." He turned to the musician. "Now git! And don't let me see you around here until you're persona grata with everybody. Honestly, every time my back is turned. . . ." He winked and went off to work whistling.

When he got back to New York, the musician told friends, "All he did was save my life and career. That's all."

Bing permitted some straightforward press releases during the war about the activities of the Crosby Research Foundation. But there was a double need to keep most of its activities secret. In the first place, these extensive research laboratories were involved in the organization and machining of one of the many atomic-bomb parts. In the second, hundreds of amateur in-

290 The Incredible Crosby

ventors, connecting Bing Crosby's name with their prospective fortunes, would besiege the place. As it is, there was more than a trickle of Rube Goldberg scientists, with perpetual-motion machines to sell, through the doors of Crosby Research. And some of this was desirable, because the express purpose of the foundation was and is to encourage the obscure inventor,, the little man of small means but large talent.

Men in the several businesses in which Bing engages rarely see him. Cattlemen deal with his representatives when they want to buy beef from his Argentine or Elko, Nevada, ranches. During the war he stayed far from the aircraft foundry at Puente, California, in which Crosby money had helped to expedite the fabrication of sand-cast aluminum airplane parts. His business-property holdings around Los Angeles, notably the Crosby Building on the Sunset Strip and a business building at Fourth and LaBrea in the city, are handled for him by real-estate men. His securities are held for him, bought, and sold by the Crosby Investment Corp. From Decca Records he earns around \$400,000 a year; he's sure of \$300,000 each annum for two Paramount pictures and \$7,500 a week from Philco each week he broadcasts. There is subsidiary income from his independent productions, endorsements, and the other lush facets of a major entertainer's professional life. The major enter-

tainer's huge earnings almost justify Hope's famous crack: "Bing doesn't even pay an income tax anymore. He just asks the government what they need."

When they think seriously about it, most Americans know that Bing is a very wealthy man. They may not be in command of the details, but they realize his fortune runs into seven figures. They remember, however, that he looks like the rest of them and dresses the same way and that his taste is like theirs, at least his musical taste, the only one he has demonstrated publicly. Though he is better informed musically than the average Amer-

Der Bingle 291

ican, he really does have average taste; in its amazing catholicity it inevitably must encompass the average, along with the rare and the unusual.

Bing really does like the Andrews Sisters. "I like singing with Them," he says. "It's fun." He really likes every kind of popular music from the Hawaiian and hillbilly to Stephen Foster, Jerome Kern, the Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana, George Gershwin, Silent Night, Irving Berlin, Dixie, The Star-Spangled Banner, and Burke and Van Heusen.

He makes some distinctions among singers. "My favorite male singer? Frank Sinatra, of course." He smiles; his blue eyes twinkle. "Though sometimes it might be Perry Como. And let's not forget Jack Teagarden. And Louie." And as he pronounces the name of Louis Armstrong, his voice becomes huskier, a little hoarse, almost as if he were trying to imitate Louie's singing style, "I like the blues singer, Eddie Vinson. And Johnny Mercer he sings fine blues, just about as well as anybody. A lot of people don't like the quality of his voice." He laughs. "But I like it.

"There's Mildred Bailey. Mildred, of course. She had a lot to do with my singing style; we sang so much together. She's so good.

"But man, woman, or child, the greatest singer of them all is Ella Fitzgerald." And here he will stop to cite one record after another of Ella's; he admires with the warmth and thoroughness of a Bing Crosby fan appreciating his voice.

"I guess, like most people, my tastes in musicians lean toward the fellows I've known personally and worked with, Eddie Lang, Bix, the Dorsey Brothers, my brother Bob's band. I love Duke; he's always had a great band; he always comes through with something. Music?" Bing sighs. "I like all of it." And he means it.

When all is printed and prattled, perhaps the most endear-

ing of all of the many roles of Bing Crosby to the American public is that of the father. Twice, the four boys have been exhibited to the public. They just passed through *Out of This World*, in which Bing recorded the voice tracks for Eddie Bracken, in a scene set in an orphanage. Garbed in flamboyant pajamas suggestive of their father's costumes, they heckled the late Robert Benchley through a bedtime story in *Duffy's Tavern*, a mammoth Paramount musical released the same year as *Out of This World*. Bing reprised *Swinging on a Star* as his contribution to the Tavern festivities, but his youngsters' appearance was received with more interest, with what amounted in some cases to a commotion on the part of audiences.

Bing's audience at large has gleaned some of the facts about the four boys beyond their looks. They know that they share the fair physical characteristics of both their parents, ranging from Gary's light-brown hair to Philip's towhead. They know that their voices and manners suggest their father, Gary's husky, gravel-throated utterances almost a carbon copy of Bing's enunciation and often his diction as well.

"The Irishers," as Bing calls them, "the Gentile Marx Brothers," as Phil Silvers has dubbed the quartet, were brought up on fairy tales told by their father in which Little Red Riding-hood's wolf became a bad jockey and all the other villains of the nursery stories were likened to the nefarious characters of the present-day underworld. And Bing, who never displays any enormous affection for his children, is secretly very proud that they are hoodlums, "hoodlum gentlemen" in Barney Dean's set of ethical categories.

When they're absorbed in sports, it's almost impossible to tear them away. One day, at the Del Mar ranch, they were playing baseball with Phil Silvers. Dixie called to them to come in for lunch. Phil moved to go in.

Der Bingle 293

"Phil, will you listen to me," Denny, one of the twins, pleaded with him. "When you go in there, it's never ready. Let's wait another twenty minutes, and then we'll go in and maybe the food will be waiting."

They played a little longer. Ten minutes later, Dixie called to them again. "I'm not going to tell you again. Everybody in for lunch. And, Phil, I'm a little surprised at you."

"Include me out, kids," Phil begged off as the boys returned to their game. "I'm not going to get into trouble."

Denny repeated his earlier plea and explanation, and they all

went back to the baseball. A third time, Dixie called, and this time with unmistakable severity.

"All right, kids," Denny decided, "we'd better get in. She's crackin' up."

Dixie worries a lot about what the kids may pick up around race tracks and some of the other environments to which they have been conditioned. She remembers their precociousness.

When Linny, the youngest, was two and a half, he was taken to a Del Mar Turf Club banquet, cautioned to behave, to eat his oatmeal, and above all to keep quiet. Seated at the table, he played with his cereal. Phil Silvers, who was at the affair, happened to look at Linny just as a voluptuous blonde passed the table, clad in a halter and a pair of brief pants, revealing a large bare midriff, Linny looked her up and down, the oatmeal spoon dangling from his mouth, and watched her passage away from the table as far as his eye could carry him. Then he caught Phil's eye, winked, and said, "Wow!" Bing, who'd caught most of the dumb show and the exclamation, called to Phil, "He's his father's boy!"

Linny was bad one day, according to the Crosby household's code and penalty system. Dixie sent word up to the nursery. "Send Linny down to me."

294 The Incredible Crosby

Linny began what he calls the "death march" from the nursery to the den. When he got within twenty feet of the room, he began to talk. "There's my young, my beautiful young mother." Dixie felt like breaking up, but she was determined to maintain some sort of discipline.

"Don't give me that malarkey. You know what you were doing today," Dixie said. "And, anyway, what are you doing up so late? You go into the living room, and tell me what time it is." Dixie turned to Bing. "This will be funny," she said. "You know he can't tell time."

Linny came back into the den.

"Well," Dixie asked, "what does the clock say?"

"Ticktock, ticktock," Linny answered.

They roared, and Bing, recovering from his laughter, commented, 'The kid's a natural. You've got to admit that. He's a born comedian.' He fell back into his laughter.

Philly is as polite and proper as his twin, Denny, is rough. Once, Denny wanted to borrow a tool from Philly.

"Get your own," Philly said.

"Look," Denny argued, "we've got ninety of them around the house."

"No, apostrophe, no," Philly answered, and settled that.

Linny has a vivid imagination. One morning, when he was three years old, he woke up at four and couldn't sleep the rest of that day. Dixie asked him why he was so tired.

"I couldn't sleep. I got up at four this morning and started walking. I reached for a handful of stars and threw them in front of me to light the way."

The boys are proud of their father and fully aware of his importance. They give vent to their feelings in the ways boys have. When Perry Como's son Ronnie couldn't get into a Los Angeles school because they were all so crowded, Bing got him into his kids' military academy, St. John's. Linny discovered

Der Bingle 295

who Ronnie's father was and pulled him out on the drill field. He made him drill for two hours.

They don't have to be coaxed into doing anything they know they can do. And though they aren't exhibitionists, neither are they inhibited. It's not too hard to find out that Gary plays the trombone, that the twins play trumpet, and that Linny fools with the piano. As might be expected, they sing well and often, but never so well and so earnestly as at Christmas.

Each year at Christmas, Bing gathers his Irishers in tow and makes the rounds. Starting at Toluca Lake, they visit the homes of their first neighbors, singing Christmas carols and passing the hat around. The money collected goes to charity.

After Toluca Lake, the five Crosbys visit their second community, North Hollywood, singing as they go. They go from friend's house to friend's house, drop by the homes of Bing's parents and brothers, all the people close to him and his family, little or big. When they reach Bob Hope's, the singing goes off without interruption. When Bing passes the hat around, Bob invariably has something to say.

"Watch it, kids. Be careful to see he gets only his fifth and not the works."

They wind up at the home of Bessie and Johnny Burke, close to their own, and then, voices a little hoarse, glowing with the Christmas spirit, Linny, Denny, Philly, Gary, and Bing Crosby wend their tired way to their own home.

The annual trips have become a dear tradition. Like Charles

Dickens's Christmas Carol Or Bing Crosby.

A CROSBY DISCOGRAPHY

THE SEASONED COLLECTOR of Bing's records will find this discography valuable, perhaps, as a master check list of Crosby's commercial issue. This zealous discophile probably owns almost all the records listed on these pages, many of them in all their versions and in their different editions. He will be interested to discover that Thanks appeared on Brunswick, Columbia, Melotone, Vocalion, Lucky, Romeo, Okeh, Conqueror, Banner, Perfect, and Oriole, as it made its way through the various labels of the American Record Company. He would be more interested in a list of Bing's famous "fluff" records, those eagerly preserved masters on which he parodies the songs at hand, usually employing some mistake of his own as a point of departure. Such a list would have no point of arrival: nobody, not Bing, nor Jack Kapp, nor the associated and assembled engineers who have handled the Crosby recording sessions, nobody knows how many of these "fluff" sides have been made and who owns them. Outside of a few very well-known gaff discs, these blowup records are properly hard to come by; the titillation to be afforded by hearing Bing use an off-color word is generally reserved for his intimates.

The novice at collecting Crosby records starts with a difficult count against him, the count of Crosby records that are no longer available. Many more than half the sides listed here are out of print. Fortunately, in 1947 Decca initiated a policy of repressing the outstanding records of its outstanding artist. In addition, on the label of its recently acquired subsidiary, Brunswick, Decca has begun to reissue Bing's very first records as a solo singer, those impressive performances of the early post-Whiteman era. The two Brunswick albums thus far available and the Columbia set of reissues, which is harder to obtain,

297

298 The Incredible Crosby

make a substantial beginning for a Crosby collection. For Bing's earlier records, one must turn to the aforementioned Seasoned Collector, the Salvation Army junk pile, or the impassioned petition, this last directed at the RCA Victor Record Company in the hope of persuading it to reissue the Whiteman and Beiderbecke albums listed in these pages as well as the other Victor-owned Whiteman-Crosby collaborations. For Bing's later records, one must trust to Decca's kindness. It is easy enough to decide which of this large group of ballads, novelties, dramatic performances, and occasional jazz bits one wants to own: every independent radio station in America and most of the network outlets as well devote at least one fifteen-minute portion of their daily schedule to a program of Crosby rec-

ords.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN DISCOGRAPHY

B Brunswick L Lucky

BA Banner M Melotone

BB Bluebird O Oriole

C . ! Columbia OK Okeh

CL Clarion P Perfect

CO Conqueror R Romeo

) Decca S Silvertone

Dl *. \ ". ". 1 1 \ '. I!!".'."!./.. Diva V Victor

H Harmony VE Velvetone

VO Vocalion

Where one number follows another without a label letter or two preceding the second number, the label designation of the first number belongs to the second as well (for example:

I Cried for You 02273, 3542; both records are

Decca). The names in parentheses are generally those of the bands and/or singers who appear with Bing on some of these records. Where collaborators are not listed, Bing's accompaniment may be understood to be that of a studio orchestra, usually

A Crosby Discography 299

directed by Victor Young, Lennie Hayton, Jimmy Grier or John Scott Trotter, occasionally by somebody else.

Abraham (Ken Darby Singers) 018425

Accentuate the Positive (Andrews Sisters) 023379

Adeste Fideles (Guardsmen) D6zi

Adeste Fideles (Max Terr's Mixed Chorus) 018510

After Sundown B66^ f 1^13135, 008371, R2344

BA33i68, Pi3<D42, 02970

After You've Gone (Paul Whiteman) 2098

After You've Gone (Eddie Condon) 024114

Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life 2315
Ain't Got a Dime to My Name 018514
Ain't She Sweet Sweet Lil (Rhythm Boys) 20783, 24240
Alexander's Ragtime Band (Connee Boswell) 01887
All by Myself 023649
All of My Life 018658
All through the Day 023680
All You Want to Do Is Dance . - 01376
AIM en el Rancho Grande 0547
Aloha Kuu Ipo Aloha C 3797
Aloha Oe (Farewell to Thee) 0880
Along the Navajo Trail (Andrews Sisters) D2 3437
Along the Santa Fe Trail ^3565, 4201
Among My Souvenirs >2 374?
Amor Oi86o8
And the Angels Sing 02413
Anniversary Song (Ken Darby Singers) 024273
Anniversary Waltz, The 04065, 23716
Anything You Can Do (Dick Haymes, Andrews Sisters) 040039
Apalachicola, Fla (Andrews Sisters) .024282
Apple for the Teacher, An (Connee Boswell) 02640, 3602
April Played the Fiddle E>3 1(S1
Aren't You Glad You're You? 018720
As Long As I'm Dreaming 023848
At Twilight (Paul Whiteman) 1993
At Your Command 36145, 80058
Ave Maria (Schubert) (Victor Young Choir) 018705
Baby, Oh Where Can You Be? 1851

Baby, Won't You Please Come Home 023636

Baia

300 The Incredible Crosby

Ballerina 024278

Basin Street Blues (Connee Boswell) 01483

Beautiful Dreamer 03118, 18802

Beautiful Girl 66694, Mi 3 132, 008368, R2341, 0X2830

BA33i65, Pi 3039, 02967, VO2830

Beautiful Love 018735

Be Careful, It's My Heart 018424

Be Honest With Me 03856, 18767, 25231

Because My Baby Oon't Mean Maybe Now (Paul Whiteman) 01441

Begin the Beguine 018898

Bells of St. Mary's, The 018721

Bench in the Park, A (Paul Whiteman) 02164

Bench in the Park, A (Rhythm Boys) 02223

Between a Kiss and a Sigh 02289

Between i8th and i9th on Chestnut Street (Connee Boswell) 02948

Beyond Compare 0912

Birds of a Feather D 3 6 37

Birth of the Blues, The 03970

Black Moonlight 6643, Mi 3 127, ^2867, 008363, 9553, R2336

0X2867, BA33i6o, Pi3034, 02962

Blue (Eddie Condon) 024114

Blue Hawaii 01175

Blue Prelude B66oi, VO2868, Mi3i28, 008364, 9553, R*337

0X2868, JBA33i6i, ^13035, 02963

Blue Shadows and White Gardenias E) 4 1 93

Blue Skies 023646
Blues in the Night 04183
Blues Serenade, A D1 933> 3543
Bob White (Connee Boswell) 01483
Bombardier Song, The (Music Maids and Hal) 018432
'Boots and Saddle 06i6, 2677
Boy in Khaki, A D 4^7
Brahms Lullaby 03840
Brother, Can You Spare a Dime? #6414
Bundle of Old Love Letters, A (Paul Whiteman) 02047
But Beautiful 024283
Cabin in the Cotton 66329
Calinda, The (Rinker, Gaylord, and Fulton) V20882
Camptown Races, De (King's Men) 03644, 18803
Can I Forget You? , . 01462
Can't Get Indiana off My Mind 03321
Can't We Be Friends? 02001

A Crosby Discography 301
Can't We Talk It Over? 66240
Changes (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, Young, and Barris) 21103, 25370
Chapel in the Valley D 3^ 1 4
Chiquita (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 01448
Christmas Melodies (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 050098
Ciribiribin (Andrews Sisters) 02800
Clementine (Music Maids and Hal) D 433
Close as Pages in a Book Di8686
Conchita, Marquita, Lolita, Pepita, Rosita, Juanita Lopez ^4343

Connecticut (Judy Garland) 023804
Constantinople (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 01402
Constantly 018513
Coquette (Paul Whiteman) 1755
Country Style 023849
Couple of Song and Dance Men, A (Fred Astaire) 023650
Cuba (Trudy Erwin) 023646
Cynthia ^3257
Dancing in the Dark 66169, 80056
Dancing Shadows (Rinker, Gaylord, and Fulton) 21431, 27687
Dancing under the Stars Di6i6
Danny Boy 018570
Darling, Je Vous Aime Beaucoup 018531
Darling Nellie Gray (Paul Taylor Choristers) 01874, 3540
Day after Forever, The 018580, 18704
Day by Day (Mel Torme and his Mel-Tones) 1)18746
Day Dreaming ^43?
Day You Came Along, The 66644, 62830, ^^13132, 08368, R234i
0^2830, BA33i65, Pi3039, 02967
Dear Little Boy of Mine 041 52
Dear Old Donegal (Jesters) 023495
Dear Old Girl (Three Cheers) 01044
Dearly Beloved 023679
Deep in the Heart of Texas 04162
Deep Purple E)2 374> 25285
Devil May Care 03064
Did You Ever See a Dream Walking? (King's Men) 66724
Did Your Mother Come from Ireland? 03609
Dinah (Mills Brothers) 36240, 6485

Does Your Heart Beat for Me?

Dolores (Merry Macs)

Don't Be That Way

Don't Fence Me In (Andrews Sisters) 023364, 23484

302 The Incredible Crosby

Don't Let That Moon Get Away E >1 934

Down by the Old Mill Stream ' D *447

Down by the River E>39 2

Down the Old Ox Road B66oi, 1^13135, 04303, R*344, 008371

BA33i68, Pi 3042, 02970

Do I Hear You Saying? (Rinker and Gaylord) ' V21398

Do You Care? 04064

Do You Ever Think of Me? (Merry Macs) D 34 2 3

Dream Girl of Pi K.A 04000, 25228

Eagle and Me, The . 018635

Early American 018912

East Side of Heaven 0*359

Easter Parade 018425

Emperor Waltz 024170

Empty Saddles (Guardsmen) 870

Evelina 018635

Evening Star (Paul Whiteman) 01401

Everybody Step 023648

Face the Music Medley, Part One 620106

Faded Summer Love, A B6200, 80055

Faith of Our Fathers (Max Terr's Mixed Chorus) 018511

Feudin' and Fightin' E> 2 3975

Fine Romance, A (Dixie Lee Crosby) 0907, 23681
Five Step (Rhythm Boys) V2o883
Folks Who Live on the Hill, The 01462
Fool Me Some More (Gus Arnheim) V2256i
Freedom Train, The (Andrews Sisters) ^23999
Friend of Yours, A 018658
From Monday On (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, and
Young) .V2i2 7 4, 25368, 27688
From Monday On (Rhythm Boys) 21302, 24349
From the Top of Your Head 0547
Funny Old Hills 02201
Gal in Calico 023739
Galway Bay 024295
Gay Love C2ooi y 2536, CL5476, 1*1428, 0X3428
Gems from George White's Scandals B20102
Georgie Porgie (Paul Whiteman Chorus) , * . 01492
Get Out and Get under the Moon (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 01402

A Crosby Discography 305
Get Out and Get under the Moon 1402
Getting Nowhere 023647
Ghost of a Chance, A ^6454
"Girl of My Dreams 02671, 18866
Girl with the Pigtails in Her Hair, The 03098, 3603
Give Me a Heart to Sing To B&)53> Mi 3166, BA-tfiqq, Pi-šo\$
02994, R2368
Give Me the Simple Life 023469
Go Fly a Kite 02641
'Go West Young Man (Andrews Sisters) 023885

'God Bless America 02400, 23579

'God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen (Max Terr's Mixed Chorus) 018511

Going My Way (Williams Brothers Quartet) 018597

Golden Earrings 024278

Golondrina, La (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 50070

Good, Good, Good (Andrews Sisters) 023437

Good Night, Lovely Little Lady B6854, Mi3i34, 0^2834

R2343, BA33i67, P^ofi
02969, 02834, 008370

Good Night Sweetheart 66203, 80046

Goodbye, Little Darlin 7 , Goodbye 03856, 18767, 25231

Goodbye, My Lover, Goodbye (The Jesters) * 2 3975

Got the Moon in My Pocket ^18354

Gotta Get Me Somebody to Love 023661

Gotta Get Me Somebody to Love (Les Paul Trio) 023850

Great Day (Paul Whiteman) 2023

Grieving (Rinker, Gaylord, and Fulton) 21678

Gus Edwards Medley (Two Sides) (Music Maids) 02700, 3602

Gypsy Love Song (Frances Langford) 02316

Hang Your Heart on a Hickory Limb 02360

Happy -Birthday-Auld Lang Syne (Ken Darby Singers) 024273

Happy Feet (Paul Whiteman) * 2164

Happy Holiday (Music Maids) 018424

Happy-go-lucky You and Broken Hearted Me (Isharn Jones) 36306

Hasta Manana 023 547

Hawaiian Paradise 0886

Hello, Mom 04367

Here Lies Love 66406

High Water (Paul Whiteman) V 3599 2 > 3 61S6

Ho Hum (Gus Arnheim, Loyce Whiteman) 22691

Home on the Range 02676

304 The Incredible Crosby

Home on the Range 6663, C4302-M, 1^13131, VChSyo

60003, R2 34> 0X2870, 008367

BA33i64, Pi3038, 02966

Home on the Range True Confession (Connee Boswell) 01887

-Home Sweet Home (Victor Young Choir) .018705

Hot Time in the Town of Berlin (Andrews Sisters) 023350

House Jack Built for Jill, The 0905

"How Deep Is the Ocean 1*6406, 4301

How Long Will It Last 66259

How Soon (Carmen Cavallaro) 024101

Humpty Dumpty Heart 04064

I Ain't Got Nobody 03971

I Apologize , #6179, 80057

I Can't Begin to Tell You E> 2 3457

I Can't Believe That You're in Love with Me E> 2 3457

I Can't Escape from You 0871

I Cried for You 02273, 3542

I Do, Do, Do Like You (Skylarks) >2 3954

I Don't Want to Walk without You 04184

I Dream of Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair 03098, 18801

I Found a Million Dollar Baby B6i4o, 80045

I Found a Million Dollar Baby 03321

Found You B6248

Got Plenty of Nuttin* 08o6

Guess It Had to Be That Way 36644, 7^13165, BA33198, Pi 3050

02993, 0X2878, 008412, R2367

Have Eyes 02201

Have So Little to Give You Oi 184

I Haven't Time to Be a Millionaire 03161

I Kiss Your Hand, Madame 01851

I Kiss Your Hand, Madame 024170

i Left My Sugar Standing in the Rain Mississippi Mud

(Rhythm Boys) V20783, 24240

I Like to Do Things for You (Rhythm Boys) 02170

I Love You 018595

I Love You Truly Oioo

I Never Realized On86

I Only Want a Buddy Not a Sweetheart 3736, 18769

I Promise You 018644

I Still Love to Kiss You Goodnight 01451

I Still Suits Me (Lee Wiley) 024100

I Surrender, Dear (Gus Arnheim) V226i8, 25280

A Crosby Discography 305

"I Surrender, Dear ^ 2 535 25229

I Want My Mama 018316

I Wish I Were Aladdin 0547

I Wished on the Moon E>54?

I Wonder What' s Become of Sally 018531

I Would If I Could, But I Can't 6623

Ida 02494

Fd Know You Anywhere ^35^5

Fd Rather Be Me 018690

I'd Rather Cry over You (Paul Whiteman) 1496
If I Had a Talking Picture of You (Paul Whiteman) 2010
If I Had My Way 02448
If I Had You (Sam Lanin) ' .0X41188
If I Knew Then 03024
If I Loved You Di8686
If You Please 018561
If You Should Ever Need Me 66090, 80043
111 Be Home for Christmas 018570
111 Be Seeing You 018595
111 Be Yours (J'Attendrai) 023510
111 Capture Your Heart (Fred Astaire and Margaret Lenhart) 018427
111 Follow You 36427
111 Get By (Ipana Troubadors) 1694
111 Remember April 018621
111 Take You Home Again, Kathleen 018721
I'm a Dreamer, Aren't We All 2010
I'm Afraid of You (Paul Whiteman) 21389, 27685
I'm an Old Cowhand 0871, 2679
I'm Building a Sailboat of Dreams Dz 447
I'm Coming, Virginia 20751
I'm Crazy over You (Sam Lanin) 0^41228
I'm Drifting Back to Dreamland E>4339
Fm Falling in Love with Someone (Frances Langford) 02316
I'm Gonna Get You (Gus Arnheim) 22691
I'm Hummin'- I'm Whistlin' I'm Singin' 36953, Mi 3166, BA33199
Pi3o5i, 02994, R2368
I'm in Love Again (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, and Young) 20646
I'm in Seventh Heaven (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 01877

I'm on the Crest of a Wave (Paul Whiteman) 1465
I'm Playing with Fire B6 4 8o
Fm Sorry, Dear B6226
I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes 018316, 18769
I'm Through with Love 66140, 80045

306 The Incredible Crosby
I'm Waiting for Ships That Never Come In 03257
I'm WingnV Home (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, and Young) V '21365
In a Little Hula Heaven Di2io
In My Merry Oldsmobile * 02700
In the Land of Beginning Again Di 8720
In the Mission by the Sea 01565
Iowa 018912
Is You Is or Is You Ain't Ma Baby (Andrews Sisters) ^ 2 335
It Ain't Necessarily So D8o6
It Could Happen to You 018580, 23686
It Makes No Difference Now 03 590, 18766
It Must Be True (Gus Arnheim) 22561, 25280
It Must Be True 02535, 25229
It Was the Dawn of Love (Alton Rinker and Jack Fulton) V21453
It Won't Be Long Now (Rhythm Boys) 20883
It's a Lonely Trail 02237
It's Always You 03636
It's Anybody's Spring 018743
It's Been a Long, Long Time 018708
It's Easy to Remember (Rhythmettes and Three
Shades of Blue) &39 1 * 373 1

It's the Dreamer in Me Oi888
It's the Natural Thing to Do 01376
It's the Talk of the Town 023469
It's within Your Power 36464
I've Found a New Baby 023530
Fve Got a Pocketful of Dreams ^933
I've Got My Captain Working for Me Now 023649
I've Got Plenty to Be Thankful For 018426
I've Got the World on a String 36491, C4301-M
Fve Got to Pass Your House to Get to My House B66io
Fve Got to Sing a Torch Song 36599
IVe Told Every Little Star 023679
Jingle Bells (Andrews Sisters) 023281
Joobalai , 02200
June Comes Around Every Year 018675
June in January 0310
Just a Gigolo (Harry Barns) 22701, 3371 18
Just a Kid Named Joe 02257, 3601
Just a Prayer Away (Ken Darby Singers) 1)23392
Just a Wearyin' For You Oioo
Just an Echo in the Valley #6454

A Crosby Discography 307
Just My Luck Di886o
Just One More Chance 66120, 80044
Just One More Chance 02999
Just One of Those Things 018887
Just One Word of Consolation (Three Cheers) 01044
Just Plain Lonesome 018354

Kentucky Babe (Fred Waring) 023990
Kokomo, Indiana (Skylarks) 024100
Lamplighter's Serenade, The 04249
Last Round Up, The B6663, C4302-M, 02879, 0^2879, 6A33203
Pi 3055, 02998, Mi 3170, 008417, 602372
Laugh and Call It Love 01934
Lawd, You Made the Night Too Long (Don Redman) \$20109
Lazy . 018427
Lazy Oay (Isham Jones) , 66306
Learn to Croon 66594
Legend of Old California 03388
Let 'Em Eat Cake (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 39003
Let Me Call You Sweetheart Oioi
Let Me Whisper 01819
Let's All Meet at My House (Woody Herman and Muriel Lane) 04162
Let's Call a Heart a Heart E*947> 25230
Let's Oo It (Dorsey Brothers) 0X41181
Let's Put Out the Lights 66414
Let's Spend an Evening at Home 66724, 02869, Mi 31 30
CO8366, 0^2869, BA33i6 3
Pi3037, 02965, R2339
Let's Start the New Year Right 018429
Let's Take the Long Way Home 018644
Let's Tie the Old For-get-me-nots ^ 22 73
Let's Try Again 66320
Let's Waltz for Old Time's Sake D1 554
Like Someone in Love 018640
Lily of Laguna (Mary Martin) 018278
Linger a Little Longer in the Twilight 66491

Little Angel 01845

Little Dutch Mill 26794, Mi3i33 r 008369, R2342

6A33i66, Pi304o, 02968

Little Lady Make-believe E-194> 3 6 3

Little Pal (Paul Whiteman) 1877

Little Sir Echo 2385

308 The Incredible Crosby

Little Things in Life, The (Gus Arnheim) 22580, BByioz

Livin* in the Sunlight, Lovin' in the Moonlight (Paul Whiteman) 02171

Lone Star Trail >35 8 4> 4 2 ^i

Lonely Eyes (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 20418

Lonesome in the Moonlight (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 01448

Lonesome Road, The 02257, 354 1

Long Ago and Far Away Di86o8, 23680

Louise (Rhythm Boys) 01819

Louise (Paul Whiteman) ^ 1 77 1

Louisiana (Young, Gaylord, and Fulton) 21438, 25369

Lovable (Paul Whiteman) 27685

Love in Bloom B6936, 1^13165, Rz367, 0X2878, 02878

BA33198, Pi305o, 008412, 02993

Love Is Just around the Corner 0310

Love Me Tonight B6 35 1

Love Thy Neighbor B6852, 0^2845, BA33201, Pi 3053, 02996

Mi3i68, 02845, 008415, R2370

Love, You Funny Thing 66268

Lovely Lady #756

Lullaby (from Jocelyn) (Jascha Heifetz) 040012

Magnolia (Rhythm Boys) 20679

Make Believe (Paul Whiteman) 21218, 25249

Makin' Whoopee (Paul Whiteman) 01683

Man and His Dream, A 02641

Mandy Is Two 04249

Many Happy Returns of the Day B6i45, 80058

March of the Musketeers (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton,
Young, and Cullen) 21315

Marcheta ^3*3?

Mary (Paul Whiteman) 21103, 26415

Mary's a Grand Old Name 018360

Maybe 02874

Maybe Fm Wrong Again 0309

May I? B6853, 1^13167, 0X2835, BA33200, Pi3052
008414, R2369, 02995, 02835

McNamara's Band (Jesters) 023495

Me and the Moon 6912

Meet the Sun Half Way 03162

Metropolis, Part Three (Paul Whiteman Chorus) ^35934

Mexicali Rose 02001

Mighty Lak' a Rose (Song Spinners) 023482

A Crosby Disco graphy 309

Mine (Judy Garland) 023804

Miss Annabelle Lee (Rhythm Boys) 21104

Miss You 04183

Mississippi Mud (Irene Taylor, Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton,
Young, and Barns) 21274, 25366

Mississippi Mud (Rhythm Boys) 36199, 39000, 67200

Mississippi Mud (Frank Trumbauer) 0X40979
Mississippi Mud I Left My Sugar (Rhythm Boys) 20783, 24240
Missouri Waltz (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, and Young) 20973
Missouri Waltz 02676
Mister Crosby and Mister Mercer (Johnny Mercer) 01960
Mister Meadowlark (Johnny Mercer) 03182, 25148
Moon and the Willow Tree, The 02998
Moon Got in My Eyes, The ^)1 375
Moon of Manakoora, The 01649
Moon Was Yellow, The 0179
Moonburn (Joe Sullivan) 0617
Moonlight and Shadows Di 186
Moonlight Becomes You 018513
Moonlight Cocktail 04184
Moonstruck #6594
More and More 018649
Muddy Water (Paul Whiteman) 20508
My Angeline (Paul Whiteman) C1 755
My Baby Said Yes (Louis Jordan) ^23417
My Blue Heaven (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, and Young) 20828
My Buddy 03736
My Girl's An Irish Girl 024295
My Great, Great Grandfather 018432
My Heart and I 0631
My Heart Is a Hobo , 023849
My Heart Is Taking Lessons 01648, 25233
My Honey's Lovin' Anns (Mills Brothers) 36525, C4304-M
My Isle of Golden Dreams -2775

My Kinda Love (Oorsey Brothers) 0X41188
My Kinda Love 61773-0
My Little Buckaroo 01234, 2679
My Love B662^
My Melancholy Baby 02289, 3542
My Mother's Waltz (Ken Darby Singers) 023392
My Old Kentucky Home (King's Men) 03886, 18803
My Pet (Rinker, Gaylord, and Fulton) 21389, 27686

310 The Incredible Crosby
My Reverie 02123
My Suppressed Desire (Rhythm Boys) 01629
My Woman 66268
Neighbors in the Sky 02626
Nell and I DiSSoi
Never in a Million Years Dizio
New San Antonio Rose C>359 ' 18 7 66
Night and Day 018887
Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square, A 35&4
No Te Importe Saber (Let Me Love You Tonight) 03965
Nobody's Darlin' But Mine 018391, 18770
Now Is the Hour (Ken Darby Choir) 024279
Now It Can Be Told Di888
Now That You're Gone 06200, 80044
Oh But I Do 23739
Oh! How I Miss You Tonight 04152
Oh Miss Hannah (Paul Whiteman) Cl 945
Oh! What a Beautiful Mornin' (Trudy Erwin) 018564
Old Black Joe 1 018804

Old Cnaperone, The (Skylarks) D2 3954
Old Folks Da3
bid Folks at Home ^391, 18804
Old Oaken Bucket, The D 4343
Ol 7 Man River (Paul Whiteman) V2i2i8, 25249
01' Man River 023678
On Behalf of the Visiting Firemen (Johnny .Mercer) 03182, 25148
On the Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe 018690
On the Sentimental Side 01648, 25233
On the Sunny Side of the Street (Lionel Hampton) 023843
On Treasure Island 0617
bnce in a Blue Moon 66854, 1^13129, 008365, BA33i62
> ?i3036,R2338, 02964
One I Love, The 024283
One More Time (Gus Arnheim) V22joo
One Rose, The Di2Oi, 3541
One Two, Button Your Shoe 0948, 25232
Only Forever 03300
Orange Blossom Time (Paul Whiteman) 1845
Our Big Love Scene 6696, Mi 3133, BA33i66, #2342
008369, Pi 3040, 02968
Out of Nowhere . , B6o9o, 80043

A Crosby Discography 311
Out of This World 018675
Out o' Town Gal (Paul Whiteman) 1505
Palace in Paradise Di6i6
Pale Moon (Merry Macs) 03887
Paloma, La (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 050070

Paradise 126285

Paradise Isle ^3797

Pass That Peace Pipe 024269

Peckin* 01301

Pennies from Heaven ^947> 25230

Pennies from Heaven (Frances Langford and Louis Armstrong) 015027

Pennies from Heaven Medley (Frances Langford and
Louis Armstrong Oi 5027

People Will Say We're in Love (Trudy Erwin) 018564

Personality 018790

Pessimistic Character, The 03162

Pinetop's Boogie Woogie (Lionel Hampton) ,, . .023843

Pistol Packin' Mama (Andrews Sisters) 023277, 23484

Please (Anson Weeks) 36392, 04304^

Please ^345

Poinciana 018586

Poor Butterfly (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, and Young) ""^24078

Poor Old Rover (Foursome) 2385

Prairieland Lullaby 03388

Pretending 023661

Pretty Lips (Alton Rinker) V2o6zj

Prove It by the Things You Do (Mel Tonne and his Mel-Tones) 018746

Put It There, Pal (Bob Hope) . .- 040000

Rancho Grande, El (Foursome) 02494

Reaching for Someone (Paul Whiteman) 01822

Red Sails in the Sunset 06i6

Remember Hawaii r ^4173

Remember Me? 01451, 18866

Rhythm King (Rhythm Boys) 01629
Rhythm on the River 03309
Ridin' Around in the Rain36852, Mi3i67, 0X2835, 1^33200, R2369
Pi 3052, 02995, VO2835, 008414
Ridin' down the Canyon 03952, 18768
Road to Morocco, The 018514
Road to Morocco, The (Bob Hope) 040000
Robins and Roses

312 The Incredible Crosby
Rose of Mandalay (Ipana Troubadors) 01694
Rose of Santa Rosa (Bob Crosby) D23840
Roundup Lullaby D8yo
Route 66! (Andrews Sisters) 23569
St. Louis Blues (Duke Ellington) 320105, 55003
Sail Along, Silvery Moon 1518
Sailor Beware , 0631
San Antonio Rose E) 359> 18766
San Fernando Valley 18586
Santa Glaus Is Comin' to Town (Andrews Sisters) D2328i
Sentimental and Melancholy Di2oz
September Song Di8898, 23754
Serenade to an Old-fashioned Girl, A 23648
Shadow Waltz 66599, Mi3i36, 008372, OKzBjj, BA33i69
R2345, V028 77 , Pi3o 4 3, 02971, 009553
Shadows of Love B6794, Mi3i34, 008370, 0^2834, BA33i67
R2343, Pi 3041, 02969, VO2834
Shadows on the Window B6276
Shanghai Dream Man (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, and Young) V2o683

She Reminds Me of You ^6853, Mi 3168, 0^2845, BA33201, R2370

Pi 3053, 02996, VO2845, 008415

Shepherd Serenade 4065

Shine (Mills Brothers) B6276, 6485, 04305^

Shoe Shine Boy 905, 3601

Siboney 2 3547

"Side by Side (Rhythm Boys) V2o627

Sierra Sue 3*33

Silent Night, Holy Night (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 050098

Silent Night, Holy Night (Guardsmen) D62i

Silent Night, Holy Night (Max Terr's Mixed Chorus) 18510

Silver on the Sage D2001

Silver Threads Among the Gold (Ken Darby Choir) 024279

Sing a Song of Sunbeams .02359

Sing Me a Song of the Islands , 4*73

Singing Hills, The 3064, 4200

Singing Sands of Alamosa, The 4339

Sioux City Sue (Jesters) 23508

Sittin' on a Rainbow (Paul Whiteman Chorus) 02224

Skylark 4193

Sleigh Ride in July 18640

Small Fry (Johnny Mercer) 1960, 3600

Smarry

A Crosby Disco graphy

Smile Right Back at the Sun 023848

Snuggled on Your Shoulder .66248

So Do I 0948, 25232

So the Bluebirds and the Blackbirds Got Together (Rhythm Boys) 01819

So Would I 023784

Some Day We'll Meet Again 36427

Some of These Days 86351, VG>286 9 , 11113130, 0X2869, CO8 3 66

36635, ^09551, ^60010, BA33i63
Pi3037, 02965, C4305-M, R2339

Somebody Loves Me * 2 ^74

Someday Sweetheart Dioi

Someone Stole Gabriel's Horn

(Dorsey Brothers) 86533, 1^13170, Pi 3055, BA33203

02879, 02998, 0X2879, 008417
R2372, 04522, 0X4522

Song of Freedom (Ken Darby Singers) 018426

Song of Old Hawaii, A 03299

Song of the Dawn 02163

Song of the Islands D88o

Soon 0392

South America, Take It Away (Andrews Sisters) 023569

South Sea Island Magic O886

Spell of the Blues, The (Dorsey Brothers) 0X41181

S'posin' (Paul Whiteman) 01862

S'posin' (Music Maids) 02413, 3543

Star Dust 66169, 8o 5 6

Star Dust 02374, 25285

Starlight 66259

Star-spangled Banner, The (Max Terr's Mixed Chorus) 02400, 23579

Star-spangled Banner, The (recitation) 023999

Start the Day Right (Connee Boswell) 02626

Stay on the Right Side of the Road

(Dorsey Brothers) 86533, Mi 3169, BA33202, VO4522

R237i, 008416, Pi 3054
02997, 0X4522, 009557

Still the Bluebird Sings 02640

Straight from the Shoulder 66936, .^13169, BA33202, Pi3054

02997, 008416, R237i

Strange Music 018649

Street of Dreams 66464

Summertime 02147

Sunday, Monday, or Always 018561

Sunshine (Ranker, Gaylord, Fulton, and Young) 21240

314 The Incredible Crosby

Susianna (Sam Lanin) 0X41228

Suspense 024269

Swanee River (Old Folks at Home) ^39^ 18804

Sweet and Lovely 6179, 80057

Sweetest Story Ever Told, The (Song Spinners) 023482

Sweet Georgia Brown (Isham Jones) 36320, 6635, 02867, .^13127

R2336, 009551, 8363, 0X2867
BA33i6o, Pi3034, 02962, L6ooio

Sweet Hawaiian Chimes 01845

Sweet is the Word for You 01184

Sweet Leilani Oi 175

Sweet Lil Ain't She Sweet (Rhythm Boys) 20783, 24240

Sweet Lorraine ^ 2 3^55

Sweet Potato Piper 02999

Sweetheart of Sigma Chi 04000, 25228

Sweetheart Waltz, The 0245

Sweethearts E)2 3 1 5

Sweetly She Sleeps, My Alice Fair 018802
 Swing Low, Sweet Chariot (Paul Taylor Choristers) 01819, 3540
 Swinging on a Star (Williams Brothers Quartet) 018597
 Symphony 018735
 Tain't So, Honey, Tain't So (Paul Whiteman) 01444
 Takes Two to Make a Bargain #548
 Tallahassee (Andrews Sisters) 023885
 Tea for Two (Connee Boswell) 03689
 Temptation 56695, ^"13136, 0X2877, BA33i69, R2345
 Pi 3043, 02971, 008372, VO2877
 Temptation 023754
 Thanks .66643, 4303^, 02870, 1^13131, 0X33164
 02870, 008367, Pi 3038, 02966
 0X2870, J3A33i64, R2340, \$8367
 Thanks to You (Gus Arnheim) , 22700
 That Little Dream Got Nowhere 023636
 That Saxophone Waltz (Rinker, Gaylord, Fulton, and Young) 20513
 That Sly Old Gentleman 02360, 3600
 That's for Me 5309
 That's Grandma (Rhythm Boys) 27688
 That's Grandma (Rhythm Boys) 01455
 That's How Much I Love You (Bob Crosby) 023840
 That's My Weakness Now (Rhythm Boys) 1444
 Them There Eyes (Gus Arnheim and Rhythm Boys) 22580
 There Ain't No Sweet Man (Paul Whiteman) , . , 21464, 25675

 A Crosby Discography 315
 There'll Be a Hot Time in the Town of Berlin 023350
 There's a Cabin in the Pines B66io

There's a Fellow Waiting in Poughkeepsie (Andrews Sisters) 023379
 There's a Gold Mine in the Sky 01565, 2678
 There's No Business like Show Business (Dick Haymes,
 Andrews Sisters) 040839
 These Foolish Things 018829
 They Say It's Wonderful 018829
 Thine Alone 02680
 Things We Did Last Summer, The 023655
 This Is My Night to Dream 01649
 Three Caballeros, The (Andrews Sisters) 023364
 Three Little Words (Duke Ellington and
 Rhythm Boys) 22528, 25076
 Till the Clouds Roll By 023678
 Till We Meet Again ^1773
 'Til Reveille 03886
 To You Sweetheart, Aloha 02775
 Too Late 66203, 80046
 Too Marvelous for Words (Jimmy Dorsey) 01185, 25193
 Too Romantic 02998
 Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-Ra 018621, 18704
 Touch of Your Lips, The 0757
 Trade Winds D 3 2 99
 True Confession Home on the Range (Connee Boswell) . . . , 01887
 Try a Little Tenderness 66480
 Tumbling Tumbleweeds 03024, 4200
 Twilight on the Trail 0757, 2677
 Two Cigarettes in the Dark 0245
 Two for Tonight ^543

Very Thought of You, The
 Vict'ry Polka (Andrews Sisters) 023277
 Wa Da Da (Rhythm Boys) 1455
 Wait till the Sun Shines, Nellie (Mary Martin
 and Jack Teagarden) 018278
 Waiter and the Porter, The 03970
 Waiting at the End of the Road (Paul Whiteman) Cig74
 Walking the Floor over You 18731, 18770
 Waltzing in a Dream (Anson Weeks) 66394
 Waltz of Memory, The 018360
 Waltz You Saved for Me, The #3354

 316 The Incredible Crosby
 Way You Look Tonight, The (Dixie Lee Crosby) 907, 23681
 Welcome to My Dream 018743
 Well Gather Lilacs
 We'll Make Hay While the Sun Shines
 6695, VO2868, Mi3iz8, ^2337, 009557
 8364, 0X2868, BA33i6i, Pi 3035, 02963
 We'll Rest at the End of the Trail 0791, 2678
 We're a Couple of Soldiers 6696, Mi3i29, 1^33162, K2338
 008365, Pi 3036, 02964
 Were You Sincere? B6i2o
 What Am I Gonna Do about You? (Les Paul Trio) 023850
 What Are You Waiting for, Mary? 2641 5
 What Do I Care, It's Home 65*5
 What Is Love? 01234
 What Price Lyrics? (Rhythm Boys) V21302, 24349
 What Will I Ten My Heart? 01185

What's New? 02671

When Day Is Done 03614

When I Lost You D 3477

When Mother Nature Sings Her Lullaby 01874

When My Dreamboat Comes Home 018371

When the Bloom Is on the Sage 02237

When the Moon Comes over Madison Square 3300

When the Organ Played O Promise Me Oi 554

When the White Azaleas Start Blooming 018391

When You Dream about Hawaii Oi 518

When You Make Love to Me 023686

When You're a Long Long Way from Home ^3477

When You're Away 02680

When You're Counting the Stars Alone (Paul Whiteman) 01993

Where My Caravan Has Rested (Jascha Heifetz) 040012

Where the Blue of the Night Meets the Gold
of the Day B6226, 80055

Where the Blue of the Night Meets the Gold of the Day #3354

Where the River Shannon Flows (King's Men) 03609

Whiffenpoof Song (Fred Waring) 23990

Whistler's Mother-in-law, The #397*

Whistling in the Wildwood #2448

White Christmas (Ken Darby Singers) .018420

Who Calls? 03887

WTio's Sorry Now? .023530

Whose Dream Are You? 018708

Wistful and Blue (Alton Banker)

A Crosby Discography 317

With Every Breath I Take (Rhythmettes and Three
Shades of Blue) 0373 1

With Summer Coming On 86329

Without a Song (Paul Whiteman) 02023

Without a Word of Warning 0548

Would You? (from San Francisco) ^75^

Would You? (from Road to Utopia) 018790

Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams (Harry Barris) Vzzyoi, BByioz

Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams (Jimmy Dorsey) 02948, 25193

Yah-Ta-Ta, Yah-Ta-Ta (Judy Garland) 023410

Yes Indeed (Connee Boswell) 03689

Yoddin' Jive (Andrews Sisters) 02800

You and I 03840

You Are My Sunshine ^3952, 18768

You Are the One E>345

You Belong to My Heart 023413

You Brought a New Kind of Love to Me (Paul Whiteman) 02171

You Do (Carmen Cavalkro) 024101

You Don't Have to Know the Language (Andrews Sisters) 024282

You Keep Coming Back like a Song ^23647

You Lucky People You 03636

You Made Me Love You (Merry Macs) D 34 2 3

You May Not Love Me Oi886o

You Must Have Been a Beautiful Baby 02147

You Sang My Love Song to Somebody Else (Jesters) 023508

You Took Advantage of Me (Young, Gaylord, and Fulton) V2139&, 25369

Young and Healthy (Guy Lombardo) #6472

Your Mother and Mine (Paul Whiteman) 01845

Your Socles Don't Match (Louis Jordan) D334 1 ?
You're a Sweet Little Headache 02200
You're Beautiful Tonight, My Dear (Guy Lombardo) ^6477
You're Dangerous ^3^37
You're Getting to Be a Habit with Me (Guy Lombardo) 66472
You're Stall in My Heart B6285
You're the Moment of a Lifetime (Floras Negras) E>39 6 5
Yours Is My Heart Alone 03118, 23716
YouVe Got Me Crying Again - 36515
You've Got Me Where You Want Me (Judy Garland) 023410

318 The Incredible Crosby

BING CROSBY ALBUMS

BALLAD FOR AMERICANS: In four parts. Decca Album No. A- 134

BELLS OF ST. MARY'S: Aren't You Glad You're You; In the Land of Beginning Again. The Bells of St. Mary's; 111 Take You Home Again, Kathleen (this song not in the picture) . Decca Album No. A-4io

BING CROSBY DRIFTING AND DREAMING: Drifting and Dreaming; It's Been a Long Long Time. Where the Blue of the Night Meets the Gold of the Day; The Waltz You Saved for Me. When You're a Long Long Way from Home; When I Lost You. I'm Drifting Back to Dreamland; The Singing Sands of Alamosa. Decca Album No. A- 578

BING CROSBY JEROME KERN: Till the Clouds Roll By; Ol' Man River, Dearly Beloved; I've Told Every Little Star. All Through the Day; Long Ago. A Fine Romance; The Way You Look Tonight. Decca Album No. 485

BING CROSBY, VOLUME i : Out of Nowhere; If You Should Need Me. Just One More Chance; Now That You're Gone. I Found a Million Dollar Baby; I'm Through with Love. Goodnight, Sweetheart; Too Late. Brunswick Album No. B-1oi2

BING CROSBY, VOLUME 2: Where the Blue of the Night Meets the Gold of the Day; A Faded Summer Love. Star Dust; Dancing in the Dark. Sweet and Lovely; I Apologize. Many Happy Returns of the Day; At Your Command. Brunswick Album No. 6-1015

BLUE SKIES: Blue Skies; 111 See You in Cuba. You Keep Coming Back Like a Song; Getting Nowhere. A Serenade to an Old-fashioned Girl; Everybody Step. All By Myself; I've Got my Captain Working for Me Now. A Couple of

Song and Dance Men; (this side is Fred Astaire, without Crosby) . Decca Album No.A- 4 8i

COWBOY SONGS: Home on the Range; Missouri Waltz. Boots and Saddle; Twilight on the Trail. Well Rest at the End of the Trail; There's a Gold Mine in the Sky. I'm an Old Cowhand; My Little Buckaroo. When the Bloom is on the Sage; It's a Lonely Trail. Silver on the Sage; Mexicali Rose. Decca Album No. A-69

CROSBY CLASSICS: I've Got the World on a String; How Deep is the Ocean. The Last Roundup; Home on the Range. Thanks; Down the Old Ox Road. My Honey's Loving Arms; Please. Shine; Some of These Days. Columbia Album No.M-555

CROSBYANA: With Every Breath I Take; It's Easy to Remember. June in January; Love is Just Around the Corner. Down by the River; Soon. I Wished on the Moon; Two for Tonight. I Wish I Were Aladdin; From the Top of Your

A Crosby Discography 319

Head. Without a Word of Warning; Takes Two to Make a Bargain. Decca Album No. A-22i

DON'T FENCE ME IN: Don't Fence Me In; Pistol PackhV Mama. New San Antonio Rose; It Makes No Difference Now. Be Honest with Me 7 Dear; Good-bye Little Darling, Goodbye. You Are My Sunshine; Riding Down the Canyon. I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes; I Only Want a Buddy Not a Sweet-heart. Walking the Floor Over You; Nobody's Darling but Mine. Decca Albums No, A-4*7, A-559

EL BINGO: Siboney; Hasta Manana. You Belong to My Heart; Baia. Alii en el Rancho Grande; Amor. No Te Importe Saber; Flores Negras. Decca Album

No. A- 547

FAVORITE HAWAIIAN SONGS: Hawaiian Paradise; South Sea Island Magic. Sweet Leilani; Blue Hawaii. Dancing under the Stars; Palace in Paradise. My Isle of Golden Dreams; To You, Sweetheart, Aloha. When You Dream about Hawaii; Sail Along, Silvery Moon. Sweet Hawaiian Chimes; Little Angel. Decca Album No. A- 140

FAVORITE HAWAIIAN SONGS, VOLUME i: Song of the Islands; Aloha Oe. Hawaiian Paradise; South Sea Island Magic. Sweet Leilani; Blue Hawaii. Dancing in the Dark; Palace in Paradise. Paradise Isle; Aloha Kuu Ipo Aloha. Decca Album No. A-46o

FAVORITE HAWAIIAN SONGS, VOLUME 2: When You Dream about Hawaii; Sail Along, Silvery Moon. Little Angel; Sweet Hawaiian Chimes. My Isle of Golden Dreams; To You, Sweetheart, Aloha. A Song of Old Hawaii; Trade Winds. Sing Me a Song of the Islands; Remember Hawaii. Decca Album No,

GOING MY WAY: Going My Way; Swinging on a Star. Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-

Ra; The Day after Forever. Ave Maria; Home Sweet Home (this song not in the picture) . Decca Album No. A- 40 5

HOLIDAY INN: Happy Holiday; Be Careful, It's My Heart. Abraham; Easter Parade. I've Got Plenty to be Thankful For; Song of Freedom. Lazy; I'll Capture Your Heart. You're Easy to Dance With; I Can't Tell a Lie (Fred Astaire without Crosby). White Christmas; Let's Start the New Year Right. Decca Album No. A-^g6

MERRY CHRISTMAS: White Christmas; Let's Start the New Year Right. Adeste Fideles; Silent Night, Holy Night. Faith of Our Fathers; God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen. Ill Be Home for Christmas; Danny Boy. Jingle Bells; Santa Clans Is Coming to Town. Decca Album No. ^403

ROAD TO UTOPIA: Put It There, Pal; Road to Morocco (not in picture, Road to Utopia). Welcome to My Dreams; It's Anybody's Spring. Personality; Would You. Decca Album No. A-423

SMALL FRY: Small Fry; That Sly Old Gentleman. Shoe Shine Boy; Just a

The Incredible Crosby

Kid Named Joe. An Apple for the Teacher; Medley of Gus Edwards' Song Hits. The Girl with Pigtails in Her Hair; Little Lady Make-Believe. Little Sir Echo; Poor Old Rover. Decca Album No. A-2oz

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY BING CROSBY: I Love You Truly; Just a-Wearyin' for You. The Sweetest Story Ever Told; Mighty Lak a Rose. You and I; Miss You. I'll Be Seeing You; I Love You. Decca Album No. A-6zi

STAR DUST: Star Dust; Deep Purple. Just One Word of Consolation; Dear Old Girl. Swing Low, Sweet Chariot; Darling Nellie Gray. The One Rose; The Lonesome Road. I Cried for You; My Melancholy Baby. A Blues Serenade; S'posin'. Decca Album No. A-i8i

STEPHEN FOSTER SONGS: I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair; Nell and I. Beautiful Dreamer; Sweetly She Sleeps, My Alice Fair. My Old Kentucky Home; De Camptown Races. Swanee River; Old Black Joe. Decca Albums No. A-440, A-4&2

UNDER WESTERN SKIES: Empty Saddles; Roundup Lullaby. The Singing Hills; Tumbling Tumbleweeds. Legend of Old California; Prairieland Lulkby. Sierra Sue; Marcheta. Along the Santa Fe Trail; Lone Star Trail. Decca Album No. A-2jo

VICTOR HERBERT MELODIES: Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life; Sweethearts. I'm Falling in Love with Someone; Gypsy Love Song. When You're Away; Thine Alone. Decca Album No. A- 50 5

WHAT So PROUDLY WE HAIL: Star-spangled Banner; God Bless America, Ballad for Americans (4 sides) . Decca Album No. DA-453

DRAMATIC ALBUMS

THE HAPPY PRINCE, Oscar Wilde's fairy tale. With Orson Welles as narrator, and Bing as the Prince. 4 sides. Decca Album A-420

THE MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY. Edward Everett Hale's classic story. With Bing as narrator. Decca Album Uj

THE SMALL ONE. Charles Tazewell's Christmas story. With Bing as narrator. Decca Album No. A-553

ALBUMS IN WHICH BING CROSBY SIDES APPEAR

BIX BEIDERBECKE MEMORIAL ALBUM. By Paul Whiteman's Orchestra. 12 sides; Bing is heard on all except two. Victor Album No. P-4

CHRISTMAS Music. Bing is heard on two sides: Silent Night, Holy Night and Adeste Fideles. Decca Album No. A-i\$9

GEORGE GERSHWIN POPULAR SONGS. Bing is heard on two sides: Maybe; Somebody Loves Me. Decca Album No. A-g6

A Crosby Discography 321

HAWAII CALLS. Bing is heard on two sides: A Song of Old Hawaii; Trade Winds. Decca Album No. A- 19 3

Music OF HAWAII. Bing is heard on two sides: Song of the Islands; Aloha Oe, Decca Album No. A-io

PATRIOTIC SONGS FOR CHILDREN. Bing is heard on two sides: God Bless America; The Star-Spangled Banner. Decca Album No. A- 50

A SOUVENIR PROGRAM. By Paul Whiteman's Orchestra. 10 sides; Bing sings on all except one. Victor Album P-ico

INDEX

Abie's Irish Rose (movie), 282-283
Academy of Motion Picture Arts and

Sciences, 219

The Admirable Crichton (play), 109

Ager, Milton, 68

Albi, Bill (Bal), 16-20, 23, 25

Allen, Fred, 153

Allen, Judith, 107

Ambassador Hotel (Los Angeles), 75-

77, 81, 142

(See also Cocoanut Grove)

American Broadcasting Company,

277, 288
American Federation of Musicians,
8!, 85
An American in Paris (Gershwin
composition), 64
American Record Company, 132, 297
American Society of Composers, Au-
thors & Publishers (ASCAP), 181
American Tobacco Company, 88
American Youth for Democracy
(AYD), 238-239
Amos 'n f Andy, 95
Anderson, John Murray, 68
Andrews Sisters, 276, 291, 299, 301-
304, 306, 311-315, 317
Anthony, Norman, 95
Anti-Defamation League of B'nai
B'rith, 282
Anything Goes (movie), 119
Appreciate America, Inc., 221
Arlen, Richard, 106-107
Armed Forces Network broadcasts,
200, 231
Armstrong, Louis, 124-125, 137, 291
Arnheim, Gus, 76-78, 87-88, 117,
142, 302, 304-306, 308, 310, 314
ASCAP (American Society of Com-
posers, Authors & Publishers),
181
Asch, Paul, 57
Astaire, Fred, 182-184, 199-200, 269,
301, 305

B

Babcock, Edward Chester (see Van
Heusen, Jimmy)
Baccaloni, Salvatore, 124-125
Bacon, Lloyd, 133-134

Bailey ? Mildred, 35-36, 45, 48-49, 74,

103, 291

Baker, Benny, 136

Baker, Kenny, 13 j

Ballyhoo Magazine (quoted), 95-

96

Bampton, Rose, 122-124

Barbier, George, 93

Barnet, Charlie, 173

Barrie, Sir James M., 109

Barns, Harry, 57-58, 63, 69, 71-72,

76-78, 81-82, 84, 181-182, 301,

309

(See also Rhythm Boys)

Barrymore, John, 124-125

Bauer, Harold, 122

Beatty, Clyde, 162

The Beautiful and the Damned

(book), 97

Beery, Wallace, 108

Beiderbecke, Bix, 59-61, 103, 129,

291, 298, 320

The Bells of St. Mary's (movie), 247-

256, 270

Benchley, Robert, 292

Bennett, Joan, 119

Benny, Jack, 59, 153

Bergman, Ingrid, 247, 250, 252

Berlin, Irving, 50, 131, 182-184, 235,

269, 291

Bernie, Ben, 153

Best Film Plays of 1943-1944 (book,

quoted), 208

The Big Broadcast (movie), 93-94,

99, 105-106

Big Broadcast of 1936 (movie), 118

Billboard Girl (movie), 80

Blftinore Trio, 75

Bing Crosby (calypso song, quoted),

3*3

3*4

Index

Bing Crosby Productions (Crosby Productions, Inc.), 282

Binglin Stables, 178

The Bingvilk Bugle (comic strip), 7

Birih of the "Blues (movie), 181, 280

Blue, Ben, 147

"Blue Skies (movie), 199, 235, 269-270

BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.), 181

Boland, Mary, 1 19

Boles, John, 72, 135

The Bolsheviks (school club), 16-17,

35
, Victor, 151

Borge,

Borglum, Gutzon, 185

BosweU, Connee, 122, 299, 300, 304, 313-315, 317

Boswell Sisters, 93, 118

Botkin, Perry, 144, 182

Botkin, Virginia, 144

Boulevard Theatre (Los Angeles), 49

Bracken, Eddie, 292

Brackett, Charles, 274-275

Braflowsky, Alexander, 122

Brandt, Lucille, 10

Brendel, El, 149

Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), 181

Brooklyn Dodgers, 231

Browder, Earl, 239

Brown, Joe E., 124

Brunswick Record Company, 84, 113-114, 116, 132, 135, 297, 321

Budge, Donald, 124

Burke, Bessie (Mrs. Johnny), 130-131, 144-146, 265, 295

Burke, Joe, 90

Burke, Johnny, 86, 126-130, 133-134, 136, 143, 145-146, 148, 151, 168-169, 1 73" 1 74* 179-180, 18^-187, 189, 193, 213-214, 216, 219, 232, 234, 245-246, 250, 261-265, 2 7> 2 74> 2 7 6 * 2 % 2 > 288, 291, 295

Burke, Kevin Curtis, 214

Burke, Regan, 214

Bnrke, Rory, 214

Bums, Bob, 121, 123-124, 130, 134, 1 39^51

Burns, Bobby, 232

Burns and Allen (George and Gracie) , 93, 106, 109

Burnett, Earl, 75

Butler, David (Dave), 143-145, 148, 178-179

Butler, Frank, 207

Butler, Harold L., 92

Cahn, Sammy, 232, 261

Cain, James M., 252

Galloway, Cab, 93

Campbell, Louise, 148

Cantor, Eddie, 148

Capitol Theatre (New York), 100,

J 53

Carlisle, Kitty, 117, 134

Carlisle, Mary, 106, 136-137

Carmichael, Hoagy, 141

Carol, Sue, 80

Carroll, Carroll, 120-123, 125

Casino Theatre (Spokane), 40

Cataldo, Father J. M., 13

Catholicism, 13-15, 28, 31, 252-253,

283

Caulfield, Joan, 269, 274

Cavallaro, Carmen, 304, 317

Cavett, Frank, 206

Chaliapin, Feodor, 122

Chesterfield radio program, 101, 120

Circle Theatre (Indianapolis), 56

Claire, Ina, 124

Clark, Jack, 169, 262-263, *&\$, 2 7

Clemmer Theatre (Spokane), 43-44

Clifford, Gordon, 76

Cocoanut Grove (Los Angeles), 75-

82, 85, 87, 111

Cocteau, Jean, 133

Cohen, Mickey, 265-267

Colby, Anita, 234

College Humor (movie), 97, 106-107

College Humor Magazine, 106

Colombo, Ruggiero Rudolpho Euge-

nio (see Columbo, Russ)

Colonna, Jerry, 144, 190-191

Columbia Broadcasting System

Index.

(CBS), 82, 84-86, 89, 91, 93,
95, 101, 104, 120
Columbia Pictures Corp., 129
Columbia Recording Corp., 132, 235,
297-321
Columbo, Russ, 75, 86-90, 95, 225
Command Performance (radio pro-
gram), 226, 229
Communism, 239, 283
Como, Perry, 291, 294
Como, Ronnie, 294-295
Condon, Eddie, 299
Coney Island (movie), 192
Conniff 7 Frank, 279
Conrad, Con, 87
Cook, Joe, 61, 134
Coolidge String Quartet, 124
Cooper, Elaine, 144
Cooper, Gary, 220
Cooper, Jackie, 89, 91, 95, 124
Corkery, Father Francis (Hank), 7,
10, 18, 24-25, 207, 288
Cotton Pickers (jazz band), 38
A Couple of Song and Dance Men
(song, qu'oted), 50, 269
Cover Girl (movie), 192
Cox, Margaret, 10-11
Cremo Cigar radio program, 88
Crews, Laura Hope, 148
Crooning, 91, 96
Crosby, Bing, in amateur theatricals,
6-9, 24, 30, 35, 143-146, 232
birth, 4
business activities, 113-114, 175-
176, 282, 286, 290
career as entertainer, acting, 6-9,
101, 121, 140-141, 160, 219-
220
ad-libbing, 16-17, 92, 101, 120-
122, 160, 263
comedy talent, 100, 109, 121,
140-141, 153, 160-161, 193

dancing, 18-19, 26, 44, 183, 199,

271

"Dizzy Seven," his college band,

36-37

drumming, 20, 34-37, 39, 41,

3 2 5

fans and fan clubs, 91, 114, 231,

288

"feuds" with professional rivals,
Columbo, 87-90

Hope, 100, 152-161

Sinatra, 229-237, 243

Vallee, 88, 90-91

first dramatic performances, 6-9,

24, 30, 35

first musical activities, 6, 11, 17-

21, 32-42

first singing jobs, 43-44, 47, 49-

5 1

movies in which he has appeared,
Mack Sennett shorts, 79-83,
111, 113

first full-length films, 93-94,

97-99, 105-113

(See also Movies)

movies produced by him, 282-

283

musical style, 91-92, 104, 107,

142, 223

"Musicaladers," his first profes-
sional band, 35, 37-42

"Oscar" award for acting, 219-

220

personal appearances, army camp
tours and war bond rallies,

192-199, 203, 226-228

European tour, 199-200, 203

theatre tours, 55-57, 59, 94-

95, 99-100
(See also Theatres)
radio (see Radio)
records,

Decca records, 114, 116-117,
135, 141-142, 229, 247,
297-^21

discography, 297-321
early recordings, 60, 82, 84-85,
98, 107-108, 113, 142,
297-321

singing, 6, 11, 17-21, 32-35, 42-

4^, 47, 49-61, 82-92, 94-95,

98-101, 107-109, 113, 117,

142, 278-281

with Rhythm Boys, 58^60, 68,

326 Index

Crosby, Bing, career as entertainer,
singing, with Rhythm Boys,
71-78, 81, 85, 181, 190
with Whiteman, 52-61, 63-67,

7 2

song-wnting, 76, 89
dothing, 88, 106, 112, 190-191,

199, 263, 265-266
clubs, 15-17, 133-134, 143-146,

\$W> 2 3 2 > 2 93
education, college, 3, 5, 10, 13, 20-

ai, 34, 36-37, 41-44, 138-139,
288

elementary school, 3-4, 6-11
high school, 3, 6, 12-31, 35, 207
law studies, 36, 41-42
family, brothers and sisters (see
Crosby, Bob; Crosby, Cather-
ine; Crosby, Everett; Crosby,
Larry; Crosby, Mary Rose;
Crosby, Ted)

parents (see Crosby, Harry

Lowe; Crosby, Katherine
Harrigan)
sons, 215, 258, 286

(See also Crosby, Dennis; Crosby,
Gary; Crosby, Lindsay;
Crosby, Philip)
wife (see Crosby, Dixie Lee)
first odd jobs, 6, 32-34
friends, the "Crosby Circle/' 129,
167-168, 171, 180, 183, 189,
232, 261-265
jail visits, 33, 69-71, 86
marriage, 79-80, 90
origin of nickname, "Bing/' 7-8
personal appearance, 88, 94, 105-
106, 111-112, 190-191, 199,
263, 265-266, 287
personal traits, attitude toward

drinking, 67-70, 86, 98, 286
desire for privacy, 103, 109-110,

2 34
kindness and loyalty to friends,

149-150, 183, 188, 191,

288-289

likes, 89-90, 95, 161-162, 291
musical tastes and interests, 103-

104, 118, 133, 135, 172-
173, 188, 291
patriotism, 162, 220-221
political attitudes, 237-243, 283
popularity, 74-75, 78, 203, 284-

287

punctuality, 179
reading tastes, 89-90
religious faith, 5-6, 14-15, 21, 30-

31, 221

personality, 108-110, 120, 124,
126, 133, 140, 147, 149-152,
179-180, 219, 287-288
philanthropies, 203, 288
ranching, 109, 133, 286, 290
romance with Dixie, 72, 79
songs written about him, Bing
Crosby (calypso, quoted), 135

Crosby, Columbo, and Vallee, 90
sports interests and activities, 12,
19-20, 35, 59, 62, 91, 108,
119-120, 133-134, M7> J 54-
156, 176, 178, 183, 217, 227-
229, 257-259, 265, 286
baseball, 147, 265
fishing, 108, 258-259, 286
football, 147, 265
golf, 59, 62, 91, 155-156, 217,

227-229

horse racing, 119-120, 133-134,
147, 154-155, 178, 183, 286
hunting, 257-259, 206
wealth, 290
Crosby, Bob, 33, 176-177, 228, 291,

312, 314

Crosby, Captain Nathaniel II, 4
Crosby, Catherine, 4, 6
Crosby, Columbo, and Vallee (song) ,

90

Crosby, Dennis Michael (Denny),

109 179, 293-295

Crosby, Dixie Lee, 72, 79-80, 83, 90-
91, 95, 100-103, 107, 130, 136,
144-146, 175, 184, 258, 292-294,
302, 316

Crosby, Everett, 4, 6, 33, 45, 49, 67,
71-72, 83-85, 113, 134, 139, 175*
177, 277

Index

327

Crosby, Gary Evan, 107, 179, 199,

292, 295

Crosby, Harry Lfllis (see Crosby,

Bing)

Crosby, Hany Lowe, 4-6, 33, 43, 113-

114, 175
Crosby, Katherine (Kate) Helen Har-
rigan, 4-6, 41-43, 45-46, 175
Crosby, Inc., 175-176
Crosby, Larry, 4, 6, 33, 92, 113, 132,
139, 144, 176, 186
Crosby, Lindsay Howard (Linny,
Lynn), 179, 237, 293-295
Crosby, Mary Rose, 4, 6
Crosby, Naomi, 83
Crosby, Philip Lang (Phil), 109, 179,
292, 294-295
Crosby, Tea, 4, 6, 33, 92-93
Crosby Building (Los Angeles), 113-
114, 258, 290
Crosby Investment Corporation, 290
Crosby movies (see Movies)
Crosby Productions, Inc. (formerly
Bing Crosby Productions), 282
Crosby Research Foundation, 289-
290
Crouse, Russel, no
Culver, Roland, 275

D

Damrosch, Walter, 148
Darby Singers, Ken, 299, 303, 306,
309, 310, 312, 313, 316
Davidson, Jo, 239
Davies, Marion, 108
Davis, Jack, 10
Davis, Rachel, 10
de Wolfe, Billy, 185, 269
Dean, Barney, 163-171, 178, 205,
232, 243, 261-265, 292
Dean, Priscilla, 165
Decca Records, Inc., 114, 116-117,
135, 141-142, 229, 247, 279,

281, 288, 290, 297-321
Deeping, Warwick, 89, 95
Del Mar Turf Club, 133-134, 154-

Denison, Jo Carol, 233

Derby Club, 15

Devine, Andy, 136-137

Dies, Martin, 238

Dietrich, Marlene, 228

DiMaggio, Joe, 124-125

"Dirty Six," 15-17

Disc Digest (magazine, quoted), 235-
r,- 237 t

Discography, 297-321

Dixie (movie), 185-187

Dixieland music, 38, 177

"Dizzy Seven," 36-37

Dr. Rhythm (movie), 137

Dolan, Robert Emmet, 214

Donlevy, Brian, 182

Dorsey, Jimmy, 60, 74, 120-121, 132

Dorsey, Tommy, 60, 74, 121, 124,

224-225

Dorsey Brothers, 61, 177, 291, 307,

39> 3*3

Double or Nothing (movie), 136-137

Downey, Morton, 93, 95, 104, 135

Dream House (movie), 80

Dressier, Marie, 108

Dubin, Al, 90

Duchin, Eddy, 268

Duffy's Tavern (movie), 292

Dunn, Artie, 104-105

Dunne, Mike, 15, 17, 24-25

Durante, Jimmy, 61
Dussault, Art, 42
Dykeman, Doug, 47

E

East Side of Heaven (movie), 147-148

Eddy, Nelson, 135

Edwards, Gus, 57, 148

Eldridge, Roy, 188

Elgin Christmas radio program, 229

Ellington, Duke, 93, 122, 132, 188,

291, 312, 315

Emmett, Dan, 185

The Emperor waltz (movie), 170,

r- .

Ennis, Skinnay, 131

Errol, Leon, 109

328 Index

Envin, Stuart, 93

Erwin, Trudy, 123, 301, 310, 311

European trip, 199-200

Evans, George, 232

Famous Music Corp. (publishers) ,

186

Fauchon & Marco Vaudeville Circuit,

49-50

Farrell, James T. (quoted), 251-256

Fanell, Johnny, 91

Fejos, Paul, 66, 68

Feuermann, Ernanuel, 124

Fidler, Jimmy, 284

Fields, W. C., 119

Fine and Dandy (review), 61
Finnegan, Agnes, 3-4, 7, 9-11
Finnegan, Nell, 3-4, 8-11
Fitzgerald, Barry, 207, 211, 219-220,

273-274

Fitzgerald, Ella, 291
Fitzgerald, F. Scott, 97
Fkgstad, Kirsten, 124
Foltz, Tommy, 263-204
Fontaine, Joan, 275
Foster, Stephen, 104, 291
Foursome (quartet), 311
Fox Films Corp., So, 95, 130
Frank, Abe, 76, 81, 85
Fratkin, Barney (see Dean, Barney)
Frazier, George (quoted), 278-280
Freeman, Y. Frank, 187
Friars' Club (New York), 153
Friedman, Izzy, 60
Frisco, Joe, 154-155
Fulton, Jack, 60, 300-302, 305, 306,

308, 309, 311-314, 317

Furaas, J. C., 141

Gaal, Franciska, 147
Gallagher, Skeets, 107
Gallant, Barney, 127
Garland, Judy, *oi, 300, 317
Gassner, John (quoted), 208

Gatty, Harold, 262

The Gay Nineties (movie), 108

Gaylord, Charlie, 60, 300, 302, 305,

306, 308, 309, 312-314, 317

Gershwin, George, 64, 92, 201

Gilbert, W. S. T 216

Gillespie, Jimmy, 53-54, 71

Gilmore, James, 42

Gilson, Etienne, 169

Going Hollywood (movie), 108

Going My Way (movie), 205-221,

244, 248, 25[^]-256, 273-274, 280

Going My Way (song quoted), 213-

214

Goldstein, Leonard, 75-76
Goldwyn, Sam, 160
Gonzaga, St. Aloysius, 5, 13, 138
Gonzaga College, 3, 13, 20-21, 34, 36-

37, 41, 138-139
Gonzaga High School, 3, 6, 12-31, 35,

207

Gonzaga University, 5, 10, 288
Good News (musical comedy) , 80
Goodman, Benny, 74-75, 118, 173,

188
Gowanlock, Ed (Pinky), 15-16, 18-

19, 22-25

Granada Theatre (San Francisco), 51
Grauman, Sid, 53
The Great John L. (movie), 282
Green, Harry, 107
Grier, Jimmy, 117, 299
Grofe, Ferde, 92
The Guardsmen, 299, 302, 312

H

Hairmor, 22-24

Hampton, Lionel, 310

Hardy, Oliver, 134

Harms, Inc. (music publisher), 186

Hawaiian music, 134, 291, 319

Hawkins, Coleman, 188

Haydn, Richard, 275

Haymes, Dick, 299, 315

Hayton, Lennie, 60, 101, 299

Healy, Jimmy, 39

Heaton, Jimmy, 35, 38-39, 41, 43

Index

Heifetz, Jascha, 308, 316
Henderson, Lyle (Skitch), 2^2*4
Herbert, Victor, 188
Here Come the Waves (movie), 244-
245
Here I\$ My Heart (movie), 114, 117,
*34
Herman, Woody, 307
Hertz, Richard (quoted), 33-
Hill, George Washington, 88-
Hillbilly music, 104, 291
Hindemith, Paul, 272
Holiday Inn (movie), 182-183, *%5>
269
Hollywood Independent Citizens
Committee for the Arts, Sciences
and Professions (HICCASP),
238-239
Hope, Bob, 1-2, 100, 152-162, 165-
168, 177, 180-181, 199, 203, 220,
228-230, 232, 244, 247, 266, 273,
F> 1 7 J* 28y ' 295 ' ?x1
Hopkins, Miriam, no
Horton, Edward Everett, 147
Howard, Charles, 135-134
Howard, Lin, 178, 232
Hutton, Betty, 245
Hyams, Leila, 93
I Surrender Dear (movie), 79-82
I Surrender Dear (song), 76-77, 80,
82-83, loo > *55
If I Had My Way (movie), 148-149
Independent Citizens Committee of
the Arts, Sciences and Professions
(ICCASP), 238-239
Ink Spots, 124
Iturbi, Jose, 122

i

ames, Harry, 224
ans arid Whalen, 89, 95
azz, 37-39. 103-104, 118, 121, 182
azz, "symphonic/' 63-64
Jean, Gloria, 149

329

Jessel, George, 148
The Jesters, 301, 303, 308, 317
Johnson, Dwight, 40
bhnston, Arthur, 126-127
bison, Al T 18, 278
ones, Bobby, 91
ones, Isham, 303, 314
brdan, Louis, 309, 317
Judge Magazine, 91
Julius Caesar (play), 24
Juno and the Paycock (play) , 207
Just One More Chance (movie), 80

K

Kapp, Jack, 84, 114-117, 297
Karloff, Boris, 124
Keeler, O. B., 156
Keith Vaudeville Circuit, 59
Kemp, Hal, 126-127
Ken Darby Singers, 299, 303, 306,
309, 310, 312, 313, 316
Kennelly, Father "Big Jim," 26-28,
37, 207

Kenny Foundation, 203
Kern, Jerome, 291
The Keys of the Kingdom (movie),
254
The King of Jazz (movie), 64-69, 71-
7 2
The King's Men, 300, 301, 309, 316
Knickerbocker, Cholly, 233
Kraft Music Hall radio program, xox,
120-125, 170, 132, 135, 157, 191,
240, 268-269, 271-273
Kroetch, Gertrude, 8
Kuhd, Cal, 12*, 133
Kyser, Kay, 228-229

Langford, Frances, 303, 305, 311
Lanin, Sam, 305, 3x4
Ladies 7 Home }ournal, 8-9
Laemmle, Carl, 66
Lahr, Bert, 89,95
Lamour, Dorothy, 157-158, 167, 228,
244, 247, 275-276

33 o

Index

Lane, Muriel, 307
Lang, Eddie, 61, 63, 69, 83-84, 101-
104, 109, 182, 189, 291
Lang, Kitty, 102-103, 109
Larieda's Dance Hall (Spokane), 41
Las Vegas Nights (movie), 224-225
Laurel and Hardy, 134
Lee, Dixie (see Crosby, Dixie Lee)

Lee, Lfla, 148

Lehmann, Lotte, 124

Leibbrook, Min, 60

Lenhart, Margaret, 305

Leonard, Eddie, 165

Let's Go Places (movie), 130

Levant, Oscar, 181

Lewis, Sammy, 165, 169

Lewis, Ted, 38

Liberty Theatre (Spokane), 54

Lflley, Joe, 214

Lillie, Beatrice, 137

Lindsay, Howard, no

Lindsay, Vachel, 34

The Lion (calypso singer), 135

Little, George, 129-130

Livingstone, Mary, 59

Lloyd's of London, 177

Lockhart, Gene, 210

Loesser, Frank, 141

Loew's, Inc. (see Metro-Gold wyn-Mayer)

Loew's Century Theatre (Baltimore), 104

Loggers' Club, 32

Lombard, Carole, 109

Lombardo, Guy, 76, 115, 117, 317

Los Angeles Country Club, 185

Los Angeles County Band, 272

Los Angeles County Veterans Hos-

pital, 260

Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra,
148

Lost Weekend (movie), 275

Love Sends a Little Gift of Roses
(song), 38, 206

Lowe, Edmund, 145

Lowe, Ruth, 143

Ludcke, Bud, 18

Lupino, Ida, 119

Lynch, Joe, 15-17, 22-23, 25

Lynn, Leo, 289

M

MacArthur, General Douglas, 203

McCarey, Leo, 206, 208, 218-221,

247-248, 256

McHugh, Frank, 210

MacMurray, Fred, 140-141

Malneck, Matty, 57, 60, 142

Man on a Rock (book), 33-34

Manone, Wingy, 181-182

Marden, Ben, 120, 154

Martin, Mary, 122-123, 151, 181-182,

37> 3*5

Mary Benedict, Sister, 247

Maugham, Somerset, 89-90, 95

Maxwell, Marilyn, 123

Mayer, Louis B., 238

Mayer, Ray, 144

Mayfair (music publishers), 186

Melchior, Lauritz, 122

The Memphis Five, 38

Mercer, Ginger, 144

Mercer, Johnny, 130, 141-146, 151,

160-161, 186, 232, 244-245, 291,

309, 310, 312

Mercer-Morris Publishing Company

(music publishers), 186

Merman, Ethel, 109, 119

The Merry Macs, 301, 302, 311,

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 108,

219, 238

Metropolitan Theatre (Boston), 94

Metropolitan Theatre (Los Angeles),

51-52

Mexican Hayride (musical comedy),

279

Meyers, Vic, 47

Midgie Minstrels, 143

Midsummer Night's Dream (play),

173

Miller, Glenn, 60, 74

Miller, Ray, 38

Million Dollar Theatre (Los Angeles),

5^53

The Mills Brothers, 93, 115, 118, 301,

309

Mills, Irving, 93

Minstrel shows, 143, 146, 185-186,

278

The Miracle of the Bells (movie),

218-219

Mississippi (movie), 119

Mitchell, Robert, 216

The Modcrnaircs, 60

Molina, Carlos, 77-78

Monaco, Jimmy, 126, 137, 143, 173

The Montmartre (Hollywood), 73-

76

Moore, Patty, 165

Morris, Buddy, 186, 232, 262

Morrisey, Will, 51

Morrow, Bill, 277

Motion Picture Academy of Arts and

Sciences, 219

Motion Picture Production Code,

182, 245-246, 253, 255
Mound City Blue Blowers, 61, 63
Movies in which Bing Crosby has ap-
peared, Anything Goes, 119
The Bells of St. Mary's, 247-256,

270

Big Broadcast, 93-94, 99, 105-106
Big Broadcast of 1936, 118
Billboard Girl, 80
Birth of the Blues, 181, 280
Blue Skies, 199, 235, 269-270,

280

College Humor r 97, 106-107
Dixie, 185-187
Dr. Rhythm, 137
Double or Nothing, 136
Dream House, 80
East Side of Heaven, 147-148
The Emperor Waltz, 170, 274-275
Going Hollywood, 108
Going My Way, 205-221, 244, 248,

255-256, 273-274, 280
Here Come the Waves, 244-245
Here is my Heart, 114, 117, 134
Holiday Inn, 182-183, 185, 269
/ Surrender Dear, 79-80, 82
If I Had My Way, 148-149

Index 331

Mack Sennett shorts, 79-83, 111,

113

Mississippi, 119
One More Chance, 79
Paris Honeymoon, 147
Pennies from Heaven, 127, 129-130,

132, 134, 147
Rhythm on the Range, 130-131,

135, 142

Rhythm on the River, 134, 181
Road to Morocco, 100, 229
Road to Rio, 275-276, 289
Road to Singapore, 100, 157-158,

166, 172, 174, 180, 275
Road to Utopia, 100, 244-247
Road to Zanzibar, 100, 174, 180,

She Loves Me Not, 110-113

Sing, Bing, Sing, 80

Sing, You Sinners, 140-141, 147,
219

The Star Maker, 148-149

Star Spangled Rhythm, 185

Too Much Harmony, 107

Two for Tonight, 119

Waikiki Wedding, 134

Welcome Stranger, 273-274

We're Not Dressing, 109

Where the Blue of the Night, 80

Movies produced by Bing Crosby,

Abie's Irish Rose, 282-283

The Great John JL, 282
Movietone Follies (movie), 80
Musel, Bob, 200
Music, crooning, 91, 96

Dixieland, 38, 177

Hawaiian, 134, 291, 319

hillbilly, 104, 291

jazz, 37-39, 103-104, 118, 121, 182

schottische songs, 172

symphonic jazz, 63-64

western songs, 98, 135, 318-320
Music business, 172, 181, 232, 234
Music Maids, 300, 301, 303, 313
"Musicaladers, 35, 37-43, 103
Musicians' Union (see American Fed-
eration of Musicians)
My Favorite Blonde (movie), 166

Index

N

National Association of Broadcasters,

181

National Broadcasting Company

(NBC), 86-87, 89-120, 125

161, 277

National Conference of Christians and

Jews (quoted), 282

National Father's Day Committee,

286

National Jewish Monthly (quoted),

282

Nazarro, Cliff, 182

Nettie Ely (musical comedy), 245,

270-271

Nelson, Ozzie, 88

New Orleans Rhythm Kings, 38

The New York Daily News, 89, 119

New York Telegraph, 88

Newman, Alfred, 39

Nichols, Dudley, 208, 248, 256

Novis, Donald, 135

Nugent, Elliott, no, 274

Nussbaum, Rabbi Max (quoted) f 282-

283

O

Oakie, Jack, 106-107

O'Brien, Pat, 133-134, 143-144, 2 p

O'Casey, Sean, 207

O'Connor, Donald, 141
O'Connor, Una, 248-249
Odeon Records (Germany), 115
Of Human Bondage (book) , 90
Oh, Sister, Ain't That Hot (song),

41-42

O'Hare, Husk, 129

Or Man River (song), 60, 142, 230
Old Gold radio program, 66
Old Man Rhythm (movie), 142
On the Building of Springfield

(poem), 34

One More Chance (movie), 79
O'Neill, Eugene, 89, 95
Orange Grove Theatre (Los Angeles),

Oriental Theatre (Chicago), 94
Original Dixieland Jazz Band, 38
Orpheum Theatre (Spokane), 18-19
"Oscar" award, 219-220
Osborne, Will, 91
Out of This World (movie), 292
Overman, Lynne, 119
Owens, Harry, 134

The Padre (original title of Going
My Way), 221

Palace Theatre (NYC), 59

Paley, William, 82-83

Paramount Music Corp. (music pub-
lishers), 186

Paramount Pictures, Inc., 93, 98-99,
105-108, 110-111, 113-114, 118,
129-131, 136, 148, 150, 153-154,
156-157, 159, 165, 185-187, 206-
207, 218, 224, 235, 244-245, 265,
274, 280, 288-290, 292

Paramount-Publix Theatres (Los An-
geles, San Francisco), 51-52

Paramount Theatre (New Haven),

Paramount Theatre (New York), 56,

94

Paris Honeymoon (movie), 147
Paris in the Spring (operetta), 142
Patterson, Bessie (see Burke, Bessie)
Paul, Les, 303
Paul Whiteman Club (New York),

Pekin Cafe (Spokane), 41

Pennies from Heaven (movie), 127,

129-130, 132, 134, 147
Pennies from Heaven (song), 132
Pepsodent radio program, 157, 273
Perri, Mario, 67

Personality (song, quoted), 245-247
Philco radio program, 157, 233, 277,

280-281, 288, 290
Piatigorsky, Grego, 124
Pied Pipers, 60
Pitts, Zasu, 124
Pius, XII, Pope, 284

Index

333

Please (song), 99, 107, 172

The Plough and the Stars (play), 207

Polesie, Herb, 145

Polydor Records (France), 115

Porter, Cole, 119

Porter, Robert, 15

Post, Wiley, 262

Price, Georgie, 148

Prima, Louis, 130

The Princess and the Pirate (movie),

160

Pritchard brothers, Bob and 'Tats,"

35, 38, 41, 43

Production Code Authority (PCA),

182, 245-246, 253, 255

Pryor, Arthur, 88

Radio, American Broadcasting Com-
pany, 277, 288

American Tobacco Company pro-
gram, 88

Armed Forces Network broadcasts,

200, 231

Bzng's radio career, 66, 82-91, 93,

95, 98, 100-101, 108-109, 113

117, 120-125, 130, 132, 135,

157, 191, 200, 226, 229, 231,

233, 240, 268-269, 271-273,

277, 280-281, 288, 290

Chesterfield program, 101, 120

Columbia Broadcasting System

(CBS), 82, 84-86, 89, 91, 93,

95, 101, 104, 120

Command Performance program,

226, 229

Crema Cigar program, 88

Elgin Christmas program, 229

German propaganda broadcasts, 200

Kraft Music Hall, 101, 120-125,

130, 132, 157, 191, 240, 268-

269, 271-273

National Association of Broadcast-
ers, 181

National Broadcasting Company

(NBC), 86-87, 89 > 120 > 125

161, 277

Radio, Old Gold program, 66

Pepsodent program, 157, 273

Philco program, 157, 233, 277, 280-

281, 288, 290

Woodbury Soap program, 109, 113,
117, 120

Ragland, Rags, 196-197, 199

Rainbow Productions, 248

Rainger, Ralph, 111

Rank, Bill, 60

Rasch, Kitty, 143

Ray, Harry, 111-113, 137, 147, 186

Raye, Martha, 124, 130, 134, 136,

i\$*

RCA Victor Record Company, 298-

321

Recordings, American Record Com-
pany, 132, 297

Brunswick Record Company, 84,
113-114, 116, 132, 135, 297-
321

Columbia Records, 132, 235, 297-

321

Decca Records, 114, 116-117, 135,
141-142, 229, 247, 279, 281,
288, 290, 297-321

Discography of Crosby records, 297-

321

Odeon Records (Germany), 115
Polydor Records (France), 115
RCA Victor Record Company, 298-

321

Vocalion Records, 132

Redman, Don, 307

Reis, Herb, 173

Reis, Les, 104-105

Remick's Music Corp. (music pub-
lishers), 173, 186

Reynolds, Adeline De Walt, 217

Reynolds, Marjorie, 185

The Rhythm Boys, 58-60, 68, 71-78,
81, 85, 181, 190, 299, 300, 304,
306, 308-316

Rhythm on the Range (movie), 130-
131, 135, 142

Rhythm on the River (movie), 134,
181

Rhythmettes, 306, 317

334

Index

Rinker, Alton (Al), 35-39, 41, 43-60,
71-72, 78, 81, 94, 148, 300, 311,
316

(See also Rhythm Boys)

Rinker, Chuck, 35

Rinker, Mildred (sec Bailey, Mildred)

Rinker, Miles, 35-41, 43

RKO films, 142, 248

Road to Morocco (movie), 100, 229

Road to Rio (movie), 27[^]-276, 289

Road to Singapore (movie), 100, 157-

158, 166, 172, 174, 180, 275

Road to Utopia (movie), 100, 244-

247

Road to Zanzibar (movie), 100, 174,

180, 275

Roberta (musical comedy), 154

Robin, Leo, 111

Robinson, Father Leo, 139

Rockwell, Tommy, 93

Rodgers, Richard (Dick), 92, 188

Rogers, Buddy, 119

Rogers, Will, 108, 263
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 239-240
Rose, Billy (quoted), 280
Rose, Jack, 68
Rosenthal, Harry, 182
Ross, Shirley, 134, 147
Ruggles, Charlie, 119
Rumann, Sig, 275

St. John's Military Academy, 294
Salemson, Harold J., 254-255
Santa Fe Ranch, 109, 133
Santly- Joy-Select (music publishers),

186

Say When (musical comedy), 154
Schertzinger, Victor, 158
Schottische songs, 172
Scott, Raymond, 132
Second Breakaway Minstrel Show, 146
Secrest, Andy, 61
Segovia, Andres, 63
Selznick, David O., 234
Sennett, Mack, 79-83, 111, 113
Sexton, William, 145

Shakespeare, William, 24
Sharp, Father Curtis, 28-29, 207, 215
She Done Him Wrong (movie), 108
She Loves Me Not (movie) , 110-113
Shea's Buffalo Theatre (Buffalo,

N.Y.), 94
Shelley, Dave, 185
Shipsey, Father, 17, 30
Sholderer family, 6
Shor, Toots, 231, 234
Shore, Dinah, 200, 226-227
Signorelli, Frank, 61
Silent Night (song), 184, 211, 285,

288, 291

Silvers, Phil, 190-197, 199, 233-234,

292-293

Sinacola, Hank, 232
Sinatra, Frank, 74-75, 78, 219, 222-

239, 241, 243, 276, 278, 284,

291

Sinatra, Nancy, Jr., 237
Sinatra, Nancy, Sr., 223
Sing, Bing, Sing (movie), 80
Sing, You Sinners (movie), 140-141,

147, 219
Sister Elizabeth Kenny Foundation,

Inc., 203

Sister Mary Benedict, 247
Skipworth, Alison, 117
Skolsky, Sidney, 89, 112
The Skylarks, 304, 310
Slack, Freddy, 121
Smith, Kate, 03, 95, 104
Sondergaard, Gale, 275
The Song of the Dawn (song) , 68, 71-

72

Song pluggers, 172-173, 234
Song Spinners, 308, 314
Sparks, Ned, 107, 148
Spina, Harold, 130
The Star Maker (movie), 148-149
Star Spangled Rhythm (movie), 185
Stevens, Dr. G. Arnold (Steve), 177-

178, 257-264
Stevens, Rise, 212
Stokowski, Leopold, 124-125
Stoll, Georgie, 117
Stordahl, Axel, 232

Index

335

Strauss, Johann, 275

The Street Singer (see Tracy, Ar-
thur)

Stubeck, Benny, 26, 104
Stueckgold, Crete, 122
Styne, Julie, 232
Sullivan, Joe, 309
Sullivan, John L., 282

Sweeney, Philip, 15
Sweet Leilani (song), 134, 196, 285
Swingin r the Dream (musical com-

.
Swinging on a Star (song), 214-216,
219, 292
The Syncopation Idea (skit), 49-50

Tales of the Jazz Age (book), 97

Tamiroff, Akim, 147

Taradash and Fratkin, 165

Tashman, Lilyan, 107

Tatum, Art, 122, 188

Taylor, Ev, 42

Taylor, Paul, 301

Teagarden, Jack, 182, 291, 315

Terr, Max, 299, 303, 313

Thanks for the Memory (movie), 154

Theatres where Bing Crosby has ap-
peared, Boulevard Theatre (Los
Angeles), 49
Capitol Theatre (New York), 100,

*53

Casino Theatre (Spokane), 40
Circle Theatre (Indianapolis), 56
Clemmer Theatre (Spokane), 43-44
Fanchon and Marco circuit, 49-50
Granada Theatre (San Francisco),

51

Keith vaudeville circuit, 59
Liberty Theatre (Spokane), 54
Loew's Century Theatre (Balti-
more), 104

Metropolitan Theatre (Boston), 94
Metropolitan Theatre (Los An-
geles), 51-52

Million Dollar Theatre (Los Angeles), 51, 53

Theatres where Bing Crosby has appeared, Orange Grove Theatre (Los Angeles), 51
Oriental Theatre (Chicago), 94
Orpheum Theatre (Spokane), 18-

*9

Palace Theatre (New York), 50

Paramount-Publix Theatres (Los Angeles, San Francisco), 51-

5 2

Paramount Theatre (New Haven,

Connecticut), 94

Paramount Theatre (New York),

5 6 >94

Shea's Buffalo Theatre (Buffalo,

NT.), 94

Tivoli Theatre (Chicago), 54-55

This Side of Paradise (book), 97

Thomas, J. Parnell, 238

Thomas, John Charles, 91, 278

Thompson, J. Walter, Co., Inc., 268

Three Cheers, 301, 307

Three Shades of Blue, 306

Tibbett, Lawrence, 91, 135

Tivoli Theatre (Chicago), 54-55

To Beat the Band (movie), 142

Toch, Ernest, 272

Todd, Thelma, 119

Too Much Harmony (movie), 107

Torme, Mel, 301

Tracy, Arthur, 93, 104

Traubel, Helen, 124

Travers, Henry, 248

Trotter, John Scott, 126-129, 131-132,

143, 145-146, 151, 177, 181, 187,

191, 232, 271-273, 277, 281,

299

Truman, Harry S., 284

Trumbauer, Frankie, 59-60, 309

Tufts, Sonny, 245

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp.,

191-192

Two for Tonight (movie), 119

U

Un-American Affairs Committees, 238

Universal Pictures Co., Inc., 66, 148

Index

Valentino, Rudolph, 88

Vailee> Rudy, 88, 90-91, 93, 95, 124,

X 35

Van Heusen, Jimmy, 12.6, 167, 173-

180,. 186-189, 193, 197-199, 213-

214, 216, 219, 232, 245, 250,

z6i, 370, 274, 276, 281-282, 291

Vaudeville, Bittg's early interest m f
18-19

Venuti, Joe, 61-63, 67, 69, 124, 144-
146

Venuti, Sally, 144

Veimilyea, Harold, 275

Vinson, Eddie, 291

Vocalion records, 132,

W

Waikiki Wedding (movie), 134

Walker, Hal, 247

Ward, Bud, 232

Ware, Linda, 148

Waring, Fred, 307, 316

Wamei, Jack, 238

Warner Brothers Music Publishers'

 Holding Corporation, 186

 Warner Brothers Pictures, Inc., 23&

 Watson, Lucille, 275

 Wayne, Mabel, 68

 Webster School, 3, 5-11

 Weeks, Anson, 311, 317

 Welcome Stranger (movie), 273-274

 We're Not Dressing (movie), 109

 West, Mae, 108

 West^ Ray, 43

"Western songs, 98, 13\$, 318-320

Westwood Marching and Chowder

Club, 143-146, 182, 232

"Where the Blue of the Night (movie),

So

"Where the Blue of the Nig&t (song),

White Christmas (song), 184, 230,

270, 285, 288

Whiteman, Loyce, 81, 303

Whiteman, Paul, 38, 51-61, 63-67,

71-72, 76, 86, 94, 98, 101-103,

X20-121, 123, 142, 230, 298-303,

305, 307, 308, 310-317

Paul Whiteman Club (New YorM,

56-57

Whiteman, Wilberforce, 57

Wilder, Billy, 274-275

Wiley, Lee r 304

Williams Brothers Quartet, 303, 314

WillTde, Wendell, 239-240

Wilson (movie), 208

Wilson, John S., 279

Wilson, Teddy, 118, i8S

Winchell, Walter, 90, 148, 153

Wing, Pat, 107

Wing, Toby, 107

Witmark, M. T & Sons (music publishers), 90, 186

Wolf, Rube, 49

Wons, Tony, 95

Wocxibury Soap radio program, 109, iijj, 117, 120

Wurtzel, Sol, 72

Wyatt, Wilma W. (see Crosby, Dixie Lee)

The Yacht Club Boys, 145

Yank Magazine, 203

Yellen, Jack, 68

You Odl It Madness, But I CdZI it

Lov (song), 89

Youmans, Vincent, 92, 224

Young, Roland, 117

Young, Skin, 60

Young, Victor, 84, 299, 304

Young Communist League, a 39

Yours and Mine (musical comedy),