



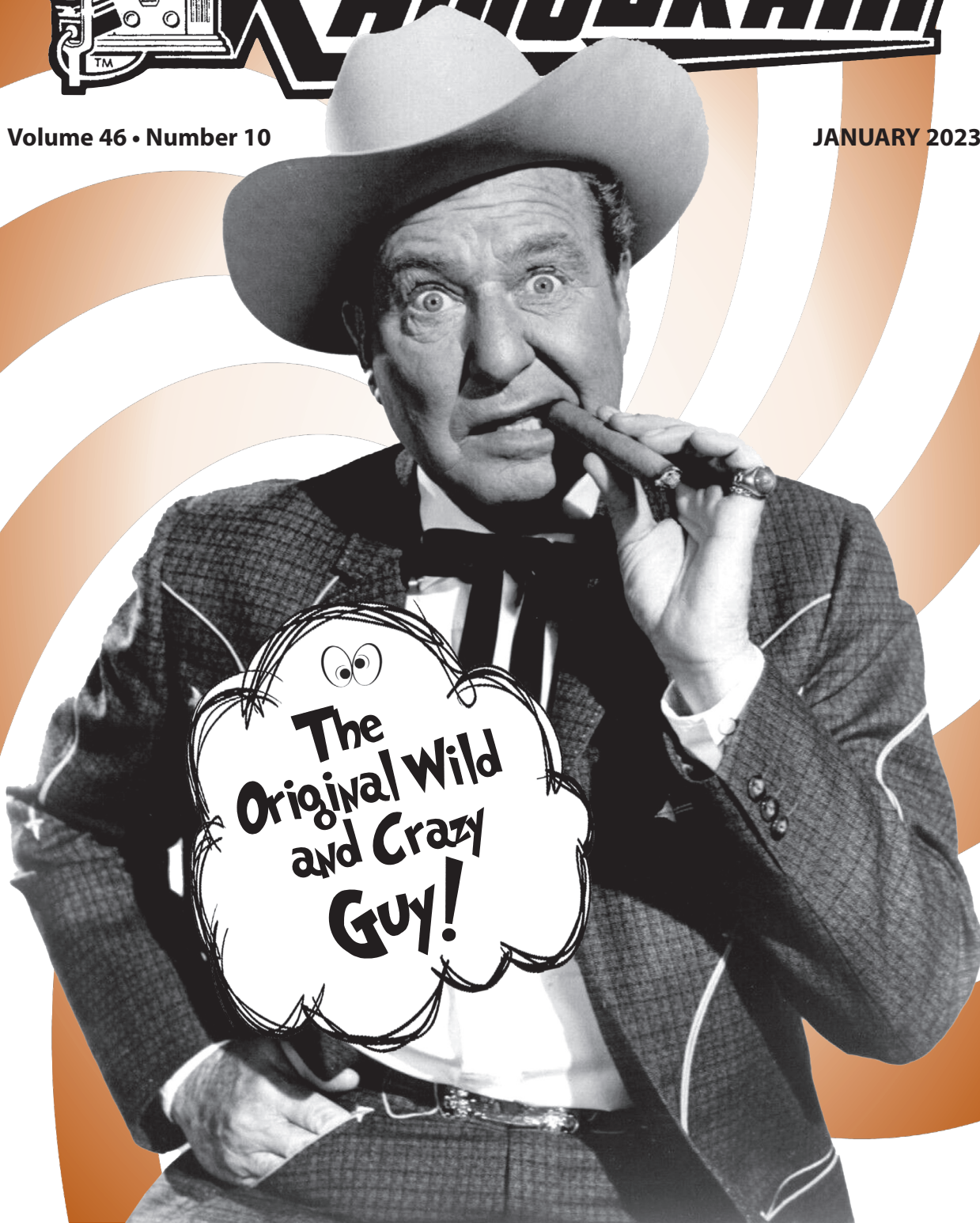
EDDIE... PERSON • MARKING A SCRIPT FOR PROPER DICTION • ROBERT Q. LEWIS • PATRICIA RYAN

*sperdvac*

# RADIOGRAM

Volume 46 • Number 10

JANUARY 2023



The  
Original Wild  
and Crazy  
Guy!



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- JEFFREY J. LEBRUN in memory of all departed voice artists
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- ROBY & JOYCE MCHONE
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- MELVIN MOREHOUSE in memory of Brace Beemer
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- CHUCK SIVERTSEN
- LOREN SLAFER
- KENNETH L. SLEEPER
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- MICKEY SMITH in memory of my beloved wife, Mary
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- JERRY & BARBARA WILLIAMS in memory of Michael Rye
- JAMES C. WORDEN



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**SPERDVAC**

A CALIFORNIA NONPROFIT PUBLIC BENEFIT CORPORATION

2625 Middlefield Road #171  
Palo Alto, CA 94306-2516

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## from the president

### GREETINGS SPERDVAC MEMBERS!

**W**ELL, we made it to 2023! How many of you know that next year marks the 50th anniversary of our organization? Reaching the 50-year milestone is a major accomplishment considering all the changes we have seen since 1974. Of course, I was not there at the very beginning. I was still in junior high at the time. The founders of our organization included the *Encouragement* and *Preservation* as fundamental elements of who we are and what we do. We strive to honor their vision and fulfill these principles in all that we do.

On 19 December 2022 all SPERDVAC members should have received an email from Sean Dougherty, our membership chair, announcing the launch of our new SPERDVAC Internet Radio Station. This new member resource comes directly from the diligent efforts of our own Corey Harker. He has been working for quite a while to create this online resource for our members. In case you did not see it, here is a portion of what Sean sent out.

Corey Harker has been working in secret for months building out a server on which to host an Internet radio station that will feature shows from SPERDVAC's carefully cultivated library of disk transfers, as well as audio from recreations, panels, and interviews from SPERDVAC's rich history of hosting some of the greatest luminaries of classic radio.

For the launch, SPERDVAC RADIO features 47 hours of holiday programming that will be rotated throughout December. After the trial, SPERDVAC RADIO will feature (42) blocks of programming (6) hours long, which will rotate throughout the month so no matter your schedule, you'll be able to tune in to your favorites.

Our monthly Zoom Video production of SPERDVAC Coast-to-Coast (SCTC), has yet to see the live attendance that would justify continuing in its original form. A decision was made in consultation with the show's Technical Director and board member Zach Eastman that we transition from a video program to an audio program. Our members will still be able to ask questions of our guests through the live Zoom channel during the recording. SCTC will be a "radio" show available to our members through the SPERDVAC radio station. Zach said he would convert earlier SCTC shows to audio and place them in our Radio lineup of programs each month.

I want to thank Corey Harker, Zach Eastman, and Walden Hughes for their tireless and commendable efforts to keep our or-

ganization strong and help us tackle all the challenges of transitioning technologies. I would be remiss if I did not also express my appreciation to Sean Dougherty and Robert Tevis, our membership chair and vice-president, respectively. As with the previously mentioned board members, they have freely dedicated countless hours to addressing our organization's unglamorous but vital administrative duties. To all the board members mentioned above, you have my personal gratitude for your consistency, dedication, and professionalism.

Walden Hughes asked me to mention that our next SPERDVAC RADIO SPERDVAC Coast-to-Coast will feature an interview with child actress Mimi Gibson on Sunday, January 15, at 2 p.m. PT. Look for Sean Dougherty's email with the link and additional details.

Please remember that if you have any questions about membership, volunteering, or accessing spervac.com, please email info@spervac.com. We will get back to you as quickly as possible. Of course, if we have more members volunteer to help, I suspect our response time will be even faster. For those of you with skills, gifts, and talents that you feel would benefit us, info@spervac.com and president@spervac.com is the best place to reach us.

I wish you all a safe and happy 2023.

Until next time, stay safe and stay tuned!!

*Timothy Knofler*





**IT'S  
THE BIG SHOW  
WHENEVER YOU  
WANT IT! JUST  
"DIAL"  
SPERDVAC.COM!**

## HAPPY NEW YEAR

and ANNOUNCING our brand new SPERDVAC INTERNET RADIO STATION! To access the station go to [www.sperdvac.com](http://www.sperdvac.com).

SPERDVAC Board Member Corey Harker has been working in secret for months building out a server on which to host an Internet radio station that will feature shows from SPERDVAC's carefully cultivated library of disk transfers, as well as audio from recreations, panels and interviews from SPERDVAC's rich history of hosting some of the greatest luminaries of classic radio.

The launch of SPERDVAC RADIO is part of the Board of Directors' efforts to reach the most possible members with each activity. These efforts include hosting our monthly Zoom interviews on SPERDVAC Coast-to-Coast, scanning and uploading our library of scripts to [sperdvac.com](http://sperdvac.com) as well as adding streaming audio to the site.

For the launch, SPERDVAC RADIO is featuring 47-hours of holiday programming that will be rotated throughout December. After the trial, SPERDVAC RADIO will feature (42) blocks of programming (6) hours long, which will rotate throughout the month so no matter your schedule, you'll be able to tune in to your favorites.

This is our trial for the new station so we're wide open for suggestions on what would make it the most valuable to you. Please check out the new station as part of your holiday listening and let us know what you think!

Happy Holiday season!



**sperdvac.com**

## Rochester

(Eddie Anderson)



THE success and fame as a gravel-voiced comedian that has come to Eddie Anderson, better known as Rochester to millions of radio and screen fans, was earned the hard way, even though it came all in a lump, overnight practically.

when he made his bow on the air as Jack Benny's "gentlemen's gentleman" and Man Friday, the butt of many of Benny's best gags.

Rochester was a seasoned trouper, having experienced many lean and fat years in vaudeville, musical shows and as a night club entertainer before his squeaky vocal pipes and wisecracks were heard over the radio. His career in the entertainment world has been a variegated one since he forsook his freshman class in high school at San Mateo, California, to become a chorus boy in the Negro show, *Struttin' Along*. That started it all, and decided the youthful Eddie Anderson, as he was then programmed, that come hailstones or high water, he was determined to make the theater his future.

When the *Struttin' Along* show finished its tour, Rochester, who of course did not then bear that now humorous and widely known monicker, teamed with his brother, Cornie, and another young Negro lad as a free lance vaudeville act, taking bookings where they could find them—in theaters, night clubs and cafes and with bands. Transportation from one West Coast town to another in those early days was often via "the shoe leather express," as Rochester puts it, or hitch-hiking. Sometimes their collective bankroll was able to stand the strain of bus fares or even train tickets.

The trio, known as the "Three Black Aces," and specializing in song and dancing, got their first break in 1923, when they were signed to tour with the California Collegians band, a jazz orchestra then featuring one of the screen present day stars, Fred MacMurray.

In 1925, after a vaudeville tour over the Pantages circuit, Rochester left the act and joined up with a Fanchon and Marco unit show, playing de luxe movie theaters throughout the country and Keith-Orpheum vode houses. When the rasp-voiced comedian finally wound up back in Los Angeles the night club boom had started there. Rochester decided to invade this field of entertainment endeavor, with the result that he was a fea-

tured attraction at Sebastian's Cotton Club for two and one-half years.

But Easter Sunday of 1937 will always be a memorable day and date for Rochester. It was on that day that Jack Benny discovered him, hired him and bestowed the monicker of Rochester upon him. The rest is history.

Though he is most adept at dancing, with a style similar to the peerless Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, to the strains of jazz or swing rhythm, Rochester likes his music classical, the compositions of Rimsky-Korsakov, Bach, Rubenstein, Stokowski and Rachmaninof being among his favorites.

He rides horses and motorcycles and at various times has maintained a stable of racing steeds. Golf and motorcycling are chief among the Rochester diversions.

His success on radio and screen has revealed him to be a shrewd businessman. He has invested in a factory in San Diego, Calif., which manufactures parachutes, a venture of which he is most proud.

As Little Joe in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *Cabin In the Sky*, Rochester had his most important screen role. He has also appeared in M-G-M's *Broadway Rhythm* and other films including, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Country Doctor*, *Buck Benny Rides Again*, *Man About Town*, and *Love Thy Neighbor*. He also enacted the serious role of Noah in *Green Pastures*.

Rochester depends largely for his success on two factors—his ready repartee and his peculiar voice. It was Hall Johnson who gave this vocal peculiarity probably its best description as "a gritty glottis." That rasping voice has become familiar around the world, via the air waves and screen.

He weighs 186 pounds and is five feet, seven inches in height.

### LIFELINES

Born, Edward Anderson, on September 18, in Oakland, California. Educated, Oakland public schools and San Mateo (Calif.) High School. Height, five feet, seven inches. Hair, black. Eyes, black. Weight, 196 pounds. Occupations, vaudeville and night club entertainer, radio and screen comedian.

Plays: *Struttin' Along*.

Pictures: *What Price Hollywood?*, *Man About Town*, 1932; *Green Pastures*, *Old Country Doctor*, 1936; *Buck Benny Rides Again*, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 1940; *Cabin In the Sky*, 1942; *Broadway Rhythm*, 1943.

1924 • 20 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP • 1944

Who's  
Who

at  
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER



Jack Benny's valet Rochester, i.e., Eddie Anderson, appears in the pages of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *Who's Who* in 1944 as one of the studio's featured players. The biography includes the significant date of Easter Sunday 1937 as the "day that Jack Benny discovered him, hired him and bestowed the monicker of Rochester upon him." Rochester will always be remembered as a superior talent who complemented Jack's repertory company.





*André Baruch*

COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM  
THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY  
LUCKY STRIKE "YOUR HIT PARADE"  
SATURDAY, MAY 28th, 1938  
10:00 to 10:45 P. M.

(COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM)  
(.....30 seconds.....)

CUE: \$

BARUCH: [ Listen to the chant of the tobacco auctioneer?

AUCTIONEER: CHANT THREE SALES

1st Sale ... 31 - 36  
2nd Sale ... 33 - 38  
3rd Sale ... 34 - 39

BARUCH: [ ALL DONE? SOLD TO THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

Naturally the independent tobacco experts like the  
auctioneer you just heard, know who buys what  
tobacco. With these experts with men who know  
tobacco best, it's Luckies -- two to one.

("HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN" ..... (ORCHESTRA)

BARUCH: [ Lucky Strike presents YOUR HIT PARADE all  
America's choice in popular music played by Mark  
Warnow and the Lucky Strike Orchestra. Later in the  
program we shall introduce as our guest of the  
evening that internationally famous singing star of  
stage and radio Hildegard. Each week YOUR HIT  
PARADE brings you America's favorite music the ten  
tunes which the Lucky Strike Survey reveals as the  
most popular songs in the land. The leaders in sheet music and record sales and the  
songs played most frequently on the radio all  
tunes you request when you're out dancing and the  
these figures are assembled and tabulated, Not just a program of  
result is YOUR HIT PARADE. but the only authoritative and complete  
picture of America's musical taste today. |||

EXPLANATION OF SYMBOLS  
ANDRE BARUCH SCRIPT

\$	Fortissimo (Give it plenty of umph).
/	Take a breath.
^	Keep inflection up.
~	Drop inflection, as with comma.
—	Stress.
—	Change of Thought.
—	End of sentence.
—	Long sentence. Take deep breath.
E	Easy.
\$	Snappy.
→	Continued on Next page.
X	Pause. No Breath.

ADAPTED FROM  
Radio Stars - October 1938

# / / / / / / / / / /  
 Fortissimo (give it plenty of umph).  
 Take a breath.  
 Keep inflection up.  
 Drop inflection, as with comma.  
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 Change of Thought.  
 End of sentence.  
 Long sentence. Take deep breath.  
 E \$  
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 Snappy.  
 ↓  
 Continued on Next page.  
 X  
 Pause. No Breath.

( "HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN" . . . . . (ORCHESTRA)  
 BARUCH: } Lucky Strike presents YOUR HIT PARADE ./. all  
 America's choice in popular music played by Mark  
Warnow and the Lucky Strike Orchestra. || Later in the  
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 these figures are assembled and tabulated, / and the  
 result is YOUR HIT PARADE. | Not just a program of  
 dance music / but the only authoritative and complete  
 picture of America's musical taste today. ||

ADAPTED FROM



## We're Searching for Volunteers

### SECRETARY WANTED

**SPERDVAC** has an open officer position. We are seeking a SPERDVAC member to volunteer for the position of secretary. The person chosen will be responsible for:

- Taking minutes at all board meetings and keeping the book of minutes.
- Working with membership director to maintain our membership records
- Providing and maintaining notices, holding our corporate seal and other duties as may be prescribed by the board of directors or the bylaws.

Please consider volunteering for this key officer role in SPERDVAC. Interested people should send an email to president@spervac.com.



Your Invitation to Join Us Each Month for Lively Chats with Radio's Stellar Personalities from Those Who Starred in Our Favorite Shows to Those Who Chronicle the Days of Old and New Radio Drama. Watch for Monthly Announcements and Consult our Website.

## WHAT RADIO SAYS TO ME

by **ROBERT Q. LEWIS**

**R**adio is fascinating, not only from an entertainment standpoint — but from the stations themselves, whose call letters express an endless variety of thought, deed, action to suit any mood. For young people, intent on a radio career, here are a list of stations. Apply to the ones most suited to your temperaments or desires.

For instance, if you long for success, **WISH** (Indianapolis, Ind.) should be your cup of tea. If you're the flirty type, there's **WINK** (Ft. Myers, Fla.) or **WINX** (Rockville, Md.), which could get you **KIST** (Santa Barbara, Cal.).

Talkative folk should apply at **WIND**, which is naturally in Chicago, and if you enjoy burning the candle at both ends, try **WICK** (Scranton, Pa.).

If you're in no particular hurry, there's **WALK** (Patchogue, N. Y.) and **WAIT** (Chicago). Men of action should investigate **WHAM** (Rochester, N. Y.), **WHEE** (Martinsville, Va.) and **WHIZ** (Zanesville, O.).

Don't like your present climate? Try **WARM** (Scranton, Pa.) or **KOLD** (Yuma, Ariz.), and if money is what you're after, there's **KOIN** (Portland, Ore.) and **KASH** (Eugene, Ore.).

If you **KARE** (Atchison, Kans.) for comfort and vittles, there's **KOZY** (Grand Rapids, Mich.), and **KOOK** (Billings, Mont.), **KALE** (Richland, Wash.), **KAKE** (Wichita, Kans.) and **KORN** (Mitchell, S. D.) on the **KOB** (Albuquerque, N. M.).

Like to ask questions? You'd be a



natural for **WHO** (Des Moines, Iowa), **WHOM** (N. Y. C.), **WHAT** (Philadelphia), **WHEN** (Syracuse, N. Y.) or **WICH** (Norwich, Conn.).

You can be **WILD** (Boston, Mass.), **KALM** (Thayer, Mo.) or **KOY** (Phoenix, Ariz.), and if you're ill, get **WELL** (Battle Creek, Mich.) in a **WEEK** (Peoria, Ill.).

If you're the informal type, you can **KOMB** (Cottage Grove, Ore.) a **KOYL** (Odessa, Tex.) while announcing your station's **KALL** (Salt Lake City) letters.

All right, **KEED** (Springfield, Ore.), don't complain. You could be in a **KOMA** (Oklahoma City) or **KAWT** (Douglas, Ariz.) in a **KAVE** (Carlsbad, N. M.).

If you're **KEEN** (San Jose, Cal.) on the outdoors, you can fly a **KITE** (San Antonio) or **KICK** (Springfield, Mo.) a football, and if you're a night-owl, try **WHOO** (Orlando, Fla.).

And if you're as weary of all this as I am, just **WAVE** (Louisville, Ky.) goodbye, and reach for some relaxation with a **KOKA** (Shreveport, La.) **KULA** (Honolulu)!

From the September 5, 1959, edition of the trade publication *Sponsor*, Robert Q. Lewis has fun with the call letters of radio stations across the country.



*The*

**Original V**

*by  
Dan McGuire*





# Wild and Crazy Guy!

Probably the most intriguing trivia tidbit about Phil Harris is his real name, Wonga Philip Harris. Yes, Wonga. A weird mistake on his birth certificate? No.

**B**ORN JUNE 24, 1904, in Linton, IN Wonga was the only child of Harry and Dollie Harris. They performed in some summer stock theatre and vaudeville. Harry worked for several circuses, including Ringling Brothers. He played the clarinet and was leader of the band. He taught young Wonga to play several instruments, including the drums, which the boy favored. As for his son's name, Harry chose it to honor a performing Indian chief who became a close friend during his circus years. Phil used the name well into his teen years and never expressed any recollection of being taunted as a result.

His parents' background in vaudeville may have given him the initiative to acquire a job at Linton's Nicklo Theatre at the age of nine. Playing drums alongside a woman who played piano, Wonga also provided sound effects for the silent films.

Keeping an eye on the screen, he would blow a whistle, toot a car horn, crank a wind machine or give a drum roll. He got to see movies for free and was paid five dollars per week!

Wonga attended Hume Fogg High School in Nashville. There he honed his musical talent as a trap drummer in the school band. Soon after graduation, he was able to put his talent to use playing drums in the Francis Craig Orchestra. With the instinct of a show biz pro, he recognized the distraction that his unusual name might present. He discarded the name Wonga, shortened Philip to Phil, and from then on became just plain Phil Harris.

Before long he decided to branch out. Parlaying his multi-musical talents and on-the-job experience unusual for one his age, he rounded up a group of fellow musicians to form a five-piece Dixieland band called the

Dixie Syncopators. Phil doubled as leader and singer of some comedy vocals.

The band signed with an agent, and soon they were playing one-night stands and some longer engagements throughout the South. They even managed to wrangle a trip to Honolulu, where they helped open the new Princess Theatre.

The Syncopators had steady work for a couple of years before some grew restless and the group disbanded. Phil took a job with a band called the Palais de Dance just in time to join them for a tour of Australia.

Phil and several other musicians were recruited to augment the group. One of the newcomers was a left-handed ukulele player named Frank Remley, with whom Phil struck up what would become a long working relationship and friendship.

In 1928, Phil was back working on the West Coast. Musical groups were finding an appreciative audience there, and Phil had no trouble finding work by returning to his drummer role. For a time he played with the Henry Halstead Big Band Orchestra.

Then he met pianist Carol Lofner, and the two teamed up as co-leaders of the Lofner-Harris Orchestra. They were the first to perform at the new Rendezvous Ballroom in Balboa, CA. Lofner directed the orchestra. Phil, on drums, was out front and center, rather than at the back of the group, and occasionally took a turn singing. The group's success at the Rendezvous led to an engagement at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco.

In those days, said music man Meredith Willson, San Francisco was a key place for musical groups to perform. The new medium called radio was attracting more and more listeners, and San Francisco was the major

radio town on the West Coast. In his memoir, *And There I Stood with my Piccolo*, Willson recalls that, "Over at the St. Francis Hotel a curly-haired drummer by the name of Phil Harris was causing talk...."

The Lofner-Harris Orchestra was such a hit at the St. Francis that they were held over for three years. The orchestra's shows were being broadcast over one of the local radio stations. In an as-yet unregulated medium, stations from various areas often interfered with one another. Phil recalled that the ensemble was fortunate in that the station carrying their music was one of the two most powerful on the air at that time.

In 1931, Victor Records approached Lofner and Harris about doing some recording. With the orchestra augmented by Muzzy Marcelino on violin, the group recorded six sides for Victor. Phil provided a vocal on one number called, "I Got the Ritz from the One I Love (I Got the Big Go-By)." It may have been a precursor to the talk/sing novelty tunes for which he later became known.

Harris and Lofner separated in 1932. Harris formed a new band under his own name and based in Los Angeles. Phil led and sang as the group enjoyed a prolonged engagement at the Ambassador Hotel's glamorous Cocoanut Grove, with the shows being aired on radio.

In 1933, Phil appeared in a short novelty film for RKO Radio Pictures called *So This Is Harris!* Its plot centered on Phil's supposed appeal as a lady's man. It was a surprise hit and won the year's Academy Award for best live action short subject in the comedy category.

That led to his first part in a full-length film, RKO's *Melody Cruise*. Phil did only a little singing, instead co-starring as the wise-cracking sidekick of womanizing millionaire

This article is a modified excerpt from Dan McGuire's book *Old-Time Radio's Comedy Couples*. It's available online at [www.backwhenbooks.com](http://www.backwhenbooks.com).

Charles Ruggles.

He followed up with two more short films, *Romancing Along* in 1936 and *Harris in the Spring* in 1937. Both films proved popular, and they no doubt boosted Phil's recognition factor with moviegoers who had never seen him in person and had only limited exposure to his radio appearances.

In addition to the making of his first film, 1933 proved to be an eventful year for Phil in a way he could not have anticipated at the time. That year he and his band performed on *The Fleischmann Hour*. The band had grown to twenty-five pieces and was renamed the Phil Harris Orchestra. The name change and the popularity of *The Fleischmann Hour* surely helped to increase

Phil's name recognition. It also was during this guest appearance that he made the acquaintance of an attractive young singer named Alice Faye.

In 1934, the orchestra played in Chicago for the first time at the College Inn. They were replacing the popular "yowsa, yowsa" man Ben Bernie and his orchestra. Phil worried that it was going to be a tough act to follow. Fortunately, the World's Fair was drawing people from near and far, and many of those people found their way to the Hotel Sherman to hear the Harris orchestra.

Despite the hard times of the Great Depression, or perhaps because of them, people craved entertainment. Phil and his orchestra managed to keep busy providing it. They did some recording for Decca Records in 1933 then again in 1935. During 1936 and 1937, they recorded 16 sides for Vocalion, mostly hot swing tunes that sold well.

Along the way, Phil had made the acquaintance of many entertainment personages, including George Burns and Jack Benny. In 1936, he came close to providing the music for the *Burns and Allen* radio program.

Phil recalled that Burns had suggested him for the spot and inquired if he'd like the job. Phil agreed and the orchestra cut short its current engagement to prepare to move to New York. Unfortunately, George Burns apparently did not have the final say. Two days before they were scheduled to leave, Phil was told to unpack. The slot was going to be filled by Wayne King.

Barely a week later, Jack Benny invited Phil to dinner at Hollywood's famed Trocadero Restaurant. Jack was seeking a replacement for the departing band on his radio program. Unaware of the Burns near miss, Jack asked Phil where he was working and Phil confessed

that at present it appeared he was sort of between jobs. Scarcely missing a beat, Jack said, "You're with me!" Just like that, Phil and his orchestra became a regular part of *The Jell-O Show*, making their debut performance on October 4, 1936.

Phil undoubtedly could have maintained his popularity as band leader and singer long enough to retire comfortably when rock music began to drown out the big bands. But the Benny program definitely was a major turning point in his life.

Benny made it a practice to incorporate announcers, singers and band leaders into the cast with speaking roles. It did not take long for Jack's great team of writers to work Phil into the script.

Phil was possessed of a voice that projected well, and he was a handsome fellow with his naturally curly hair. The real Phil tended to be modest and soft spoken, but the writers built him up as a rather brash, hip-talking wise guy whose comments invariably proved him not as smart as he thought.

Frank Remley had by that time joined Phil's orchestra. Having switched from a ukulele to a playing guitar, and the fact that he was a left-handed guitar player was deemed somehow humorous and was often mentioned in the script. Noting that Remley and Harris were pals, and playing on the conception that musicians often partied after a late-night gig, the writers began to feed Phil lines about raucous band parties. They portrayed Harris and Remley as heavy drinkers, which enabled a lot of hangover gags.

Remley himself did not get into the act, but he did provide Benny with what Phil referred to as a trigger laugh. When anyone in the cast read a gag line that tickled Remley, he instantly burst out laughing, even though he'd heard it during rehearsals.

That triggered people in the audience to join in the laughter almost before they'd had time to grasp the punch line.

Phil had acquired a bit of a Southern accent during his years in Nashville. He played upon that in some of his songs and in comic exchanges with Benny. When his recording of "That's What I Like About the South" proved to be a big hit, it prompted a running gag in which Benny couldn't believe that the song was so popular. In one program, a large portion of the show was devoted to Phil singing the song and explaining it chorus by chorus

to Jack, who expressed uncomprehending disbelief.

A key element of Jack Benny's humor and the program's success was the fact that he mostly allowed himself to be the butt of jokes by his cast. Mary Livingston, announcer Don Wilson and Jack's supposed valet, Rochester, all took potshots at him.

Singer Dennis Day's job was to drive Jack nuts with his wacky logic.

As Phil's character was developed, he made self-deprecating gags about his Southern upbringing. He took to giving people nicknames, referring to Mary Livingston as "Livvy" and Benny as "ol' Jackson." Benny routinely endured Phil greeting him with, "Hiya, Jackson."

For his part, Phil appeared impervious to joshing by Jack and any of the other cast members. In keeping with his self-admiring persona, he frequently hinted that the audience was really there to see him. A typical Harris entry line was: "The program's been dull, but now Harris is here. So come on, all you folks, prepare to cheer!"

In his autobiography, Jack Benny described Phil's on-air personality as "the brassiest, most worldly character...loud-talking, illiterate, rude, alcoholic, arrogant, boastful. He was completely immoral (yet) radiated vitality and a sheer gusto in animal pleasures that made him unique among all the characters on radio." Phil thus stood out and endeared himself to listeners, coming across as a novel and welcome change from the usual bandleader or announcer who doubled as a straight man for the star.

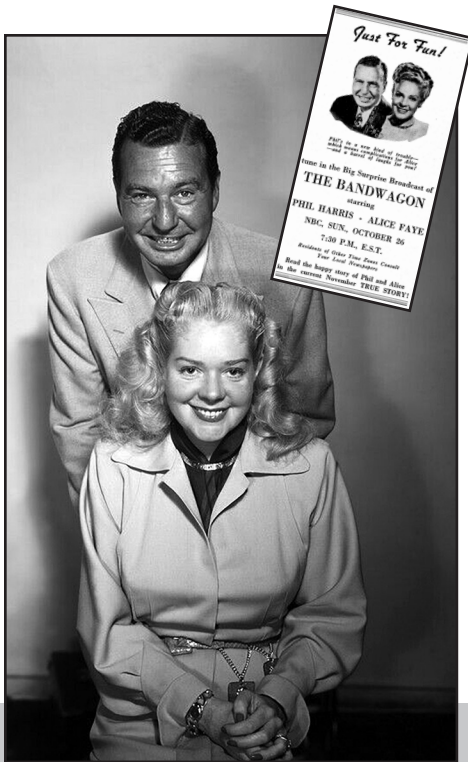
Becoming a regular on the Benny program made Phil's name a household word. It provided a steady income without one-night stands. It also meant that when Jack made his 1940 film, *Buck Benny Rides Again*, Phil would ride along with the other cast members who had featured roles including Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Andy Devine and Dennis Day.

When *The Jell-O Show* took its summer break, Phil was free to book his orchestra out of town if he chose. Otherwise, he could stay put in one place, except when the show was broadcast from some other town.

Jack did like to broadcast from various locations. One of his favorite spots was the California desert town of Palm Springs. An ardent golfer, Phil fell in love with the area in the early 1930s, and he purchased property at the Thunderbird Country Club in Rancho Mirage. It was part of a prototype development, the first community designed to be constructed surrounding a golf course. Phil became a dedicated promoter of golf charity and a frequent player.

Sometime in 1940, Phil had one of those life-changing lucky happenstances. He chanced to meet again that lovely singer, Alice Faye, whom he had met some years ago on *The*





*The Fitch Bandwagon, or colloquially The Phil Harris and Alice Faye Show, premiered September 29, 1946, immediately following The Jack Benny Program, upon which Phil had been appearing as himself for 10 years and continued to appear despite having his own show.*

*Fleischmann Hour.* She was now quite popular and one of 20th Century-Fox's musical film stars. She was even more attractive than he remembered.

Phil was quick to renew the acquaintance and ask for a date. She accepted. Another date followed, and they soon became an item. Alice found Phil as attractive as he found her, and they agreed that their romance was the real thing. On May 12, they traveled to Mexico and had a "quickie" wedding in Ensenada.

The newlyweds continued with their respective careers through 1941. However, Alice was pregnant during the filming of *Weekend in Havana*. She elected to take a break from film work and be a stay-at-home mom for a year. On May 19, 1942, the Harrises welcomed their first daughter, Alice Faye Harris, Jr.

With Phil a regular on the Benny program, Alice was able to take some time off, but after hiring a full-time nurse for the new arrival she briefly returned to Fox. Then, on April 22, 1944, she presented Phil with their second child, another girl, whom they named Phyllis Wanda. The demands of motherhood and a bitter feud with Fox boss Darryl Zanuck led to her retirement from films.

As an established band leader and a fixture on the Jack Benny show, there was no doubt Phil could support the family. They had now settled in a home about 110 miles from Los

Angeles in the Southern California desert country that Phil loved. He could indulge his love of golf at a growing selection of courses.

Then came an offer that was too good to pass up. The F.W. Fitch Company wanted Phil and Alice, as a team, to star on *The Fitch Bandwagon*. It would give Alice and Phil the opportunity to work together without requiring a great deal of Alice's time away from her girls. Phil and Alice discussed the offer, agreed that it was a good one, and accepted, with a schedule worked out that would minimize Alice's time away from home.

The program featured top bands of the era, including Phil's as well as those of Cab Calloway, Tommy Dorsey, Guy Lombardo, Ozzie Nelson, Harry James and others. Depending upon which band was providing the music and where they were currently engaged, the program originated from various cities, including New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.

In 1944, the show underwent a format revision and began including comedy skits between musical selections. Phil and Alice took over as co-hosts in September 1946.

Following the format that had evolved, they each usually were featured in at least one musical number. In between, they would partner in short sitcom stories. Audience response was more enthusiastic than they could have hoped.

Fans of Alice Faye were delighted to again hear her warm, pleasing voice singing new tunes and old favorites. Folks who enjoyed Phil's somewhat loco humor could now enjoy a double dose, first as he taunted Jack Benny then on the Fitch program. To the writers' delight, the audience as a whole seemed especially to enjoy the gentle, tart, husband/wife comedy segments.

**P**ERHAPS because it was no longer the same program that it had been, the Fitch people abandoned the show in 1948 in spite of its popularity. The Rexall Drug Company liked what they had been hearing and took over sponsorship.

Listeners became accustomed to a familiar Rexall pattern for the beginning of the program: a bit of theme music and an opening intro by the announcer, who then said, "and now, a few words from your Rexall family druggist."

Actor Griff Barnett, portraying the druggist, then gave the opening pitch for various Rexall products. His message always ended with the familiar catch phrase, "Good health to all from Rexall."

*The Fitch Bandwagon*, of course, had to be renamed. The Rexall people chose to keep it simple and focus attention on the stars they were sponsoring and so the program became *The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show*.

By then the program had evolved into a full-fledged situation comedy, with spots reserved

for the stars to do one number each near the beginning and end of each show. When he married Alice, Phil's character had been modified both here and on the Benny show. Jack even devoted one program to his amazement that an ego-centric bumbler like Phil could land a lovely, intelligent woman like Alice.

Phil became a happy, faithful husband, and his supposed taste for spirits was eliminated from his character. Gags about the wild behavior of "the boys" in his band were still grist for the mill, though, and while Phil was no longer chasing the ladies he continued to think himself irresistible. The writers often had him stopping to admire his dimples and his wavy hair in a mirror. Listeners could count on this evoking a pleased self-appraisal: "Oh, you dawwwwwg!"

Alice played the loving wife who endured his talent for getting himself into a bind in spite of her efforts to discourage his farfetched schemes. Her patience often was tested to the breaking point, and she could sometimes sidetrack him with a tart zinger.

Still, with the help of his pal Frankie Remley, Phil continually got in over his head and had to be rescued by Alice.

A pretend Remley tagged along with Phil when he branched out from the Jack Benny program, joining an array of supporting players that included Phil and Alice's two daughters. The real Remley, who had no acting experience or ambitions, had no objections. His character was assumed by actor/writer/director Elliott Lewis, one of the most versatile and prolific people in radio—so much so that he earned the nickname "Mr. Radio."

Elliott Lewis was a consummate actor, performing in everything from mystery and romantic dramas to a starring role as Othello. His comedy roles were few, but he enveloped himself in the Remley character with relish. He later told an interviewer that afterward he would not take on another comic part because nothing could ever be as much fun as portraying Frankie Remley.

Lewis, as Remley, was an amoral, woman-chasing, smart-alecky wise guy who was too dumb to ever be anything but cheerful. In effect, he took over the character that Phil had been before he was mellowed by marriage. He was still the left-handed guitar player in Phil's band, but his primary function now was to get his pal "Curly" into trouble or to help him compound an existing problem.

When Phil, in spite of multiple unhappy past experiences, would confess a dilemma to him, Remley always had a cockamamie



solution. Or, if he could not solve the problem himself, he would voice his trademark phrase, “I know a guy . . .”

In one exchange, Remley asks, “What would you do without me, Curly?” To which Phil replies, “The same thing you’re doing with me—be a moron!”

Then there was Julius Abruzzio, the obnoxious delivery boy from the neighborhood store. Julius was played by Walter Tetley, who already had perfected a similar role as Leroy Forester, nephew of Throckmorton P.



Gildersleeve, on *The Great Gildersleeve*. Leroy was a frisky, wisecracking youngster of indeterminate age who practiced piano lessons grudgingly, whose report card left something to be desired, and who often protested rules or tasks set for him by his uncle with a semi-whiny, “Gee whiz, Unc.”

When he tried Gildy’s patience, audiences chuckled to hear the great man lower his voice and say, “Leeeee-rooooooy!” Despite his sometimes pesky or mischievous behavior, Leroy respected his elders and was basically a good kid.

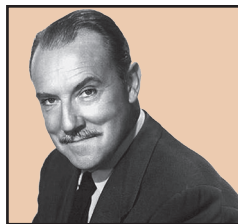
For the role of Julius, Tetley and the writers cranked things up a bit. Walter was possessed of a perpetually high-pitched voice that sounded like someone stuck in the early stage of adolescence. He embellished that with a touch of a Brooklyn accent, and the writers frequently gave him lines that included phrases such as “me mudda” or “ya wanna?” Two of his most frequent utterances were, “Are you kiddin’?” and “Get outta here!” He came off sounding a lot like Leo Gorcey in his *Dead End*/*East Side Kids* movies.

His frequent deliveries to the Harris household were both a joy and a trial to Julius because he had a crush on Alice that he could scarcely conceal. He addressed her as “Miss Faye,” and privately lamented that she should be stuck with such a schlemiel as Phil. Although he never came out and said it, he clearly thought that Phil and Frankie Remley did not have a brain between them. When they encountered one another, his greeting was usually something like, “What are youse two geniuses up to today?”

Julius usually showed up about midway into the program, when Phil and Frankie already were in hot water. They would try to brush him off (unless they thought they could utilize him in some fashion), but he always could coax them into fessing up that they had a problem. It was then Julius’ joyful mission to say, “Well, if I was youse guys...” and come up with a fix that sounded good to the boys but was sure to raise the water temp.

Some surviving recordings of *The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show* include a pre-air audience warm-up. Although Walter Tetley was close to 40-years-old at the time, Phil introduces him as “the kid who steals the show every week.”

With the blessing of the sponsor, the writers introduced a fellow named Mr. Scott, a none-too-genial representative of Rexall. The venerable actor Gale Gordon was recruited to take on the role. His deep, clear voice was familiar to listeners as a supporting player on countless adult dramas.



In the comedy venue, he became Mayor La Trivia on the *Fibber McGee and Molly* program, where every week the McGees would pop his pompous balloon by goading him into a speechless tantrum that left audiences hysterical with laughter. As Principal Osgood Conklin, he created halls of poison ivy for Eve Arden on *Our Miss Brooks*, both on radio and in the 1952 television adaptation.

As Mr. Scott, he played an executive representative of Rexall charged with keeping an eye on Phil, Alice, et al, and looking out for the company’s interests. While he admired and had great respect for Alice, he made no bones about his belief that Phil and Frankie were a matched set of nincompoops.

Phil made no points by suggesting that the company could rake in the bucks if they bottled and sold some of his charm. Frankie’s attitude was that the company was trying to cramp their style, and he once asked, “What is a Rexall, anyway?” All of which confirmed Mr. Scott’s opinion that these two philistines should be paying Rexall for the privilege of being on the show rather than the other way around.

Rexall sponsored Phil and Alice through 1950 before opting out. The show was popular enough that NBC continued to carry it on a sustaining, i.e., unsponsored, basis until it was picked up by RCA Victor. Undeterred, Mr. Scott changed hats and continued to haunt Phil and Frankie as the RCA watchdog.

Throughout the life of the show, running gags included many references to Frankie’s taste for the spirits, Phil’s vanity and their dunderheaded schemes. Phil would frequently attempt to demonstrate his intellect with comments such as “*The Mikado* might never have been written if Gilbert didn’t have faith in Ed Sullivan.”

He often was subjected to the humiliation of people recognizing him only as the husband

of Alice Faye. That in turn presented opportunities to joke about Alice being the real breadwinner of the family: “I’m only trying to protect the wife of the money I love.”

For her part, Alice may have privately considered the show’s closing a sort of running gag. Technically, she was still under contract to 20th Century-Fox. So each program ended with announcer Bill Foreman saying, “Alice Faye appears through the courtesy of 20th Century-Fox.” She and Darryl Zanuck knew she was not coming back. She may have taken some silent satisfaction in the knowledge that the weekly announcement was certain to irk the great man.

In 1949, CBS raided NBC, looking for stars whose programs could bolster their line-up. Jack Benny was one of those who received an offer he couldn’t refuse and made the switch. Phil and Alice elected to stay put on NBC, but Phil continued as a staple on the Benny show until he eased himself out in 1952. Bob Crosby, brother of Bing, then took over as orchestra leader.

The two network stations were two blocks apart on Sunset Boulevard. Since Phil and Alice aired right after Jack Benny’s show, and Phil was still part of the Benny cast, this presented a problem. Phil said that Jack proved what a great boss he was by directing the writers to make sure Phil’s appearance came during the first half of the program. Phil then left and hailed a taxi if possible or jogged to the CBS studio.

References to each other’s programs were inserted in both shows whenever a gag opportunity presented itself. Besides the potential laughs, each gag was a plug for the other show to help keep listeners loyal. Sometimes Phil’s segment of the Benny show was even used to set up the plot of the Harris/Faye show that was to follow.

After Benny moved to CBS, Phil would sometimes toss out a line that got a good laugh and then say, “I gotta give that one to Jackson. It might bring him back to NBC.”

A constant element of the show was the premise that Alice was always there to rescue her muddleheaded mate even though she was ready to throw up her hands at his misadventures. Underneath the nonsense, listeners

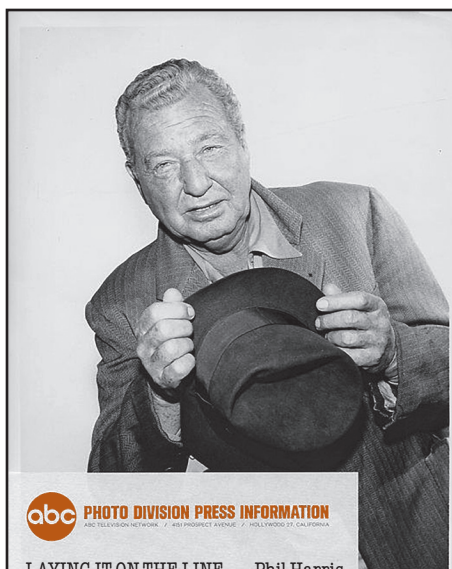
heard a genuine love and devotion that was shared by the two. Phil often revised lyrics of his songs to turn them into love songs to Alice.

Compared to film work, Alice found the radio program almost relaxing. Her participation required only Friday and Saturday rehearsals and the Sunday broadcast.

With television luring audiences away, the show ended after the 1954 season.

**Underneath the nonsense, listeners heard a genuine love and devotion that was shared by the two. Phil often revised lyrics of his songs to turn them into love songs to Alice.**





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LAYING IT ON THE LINE . . . Phil Harris, guest starring as a man on the skids, puts his life on the line in a delicate operation when he attempts to sell one of his eyes, Wednesday, May 20 on ABC-TV's "Ben Casey" (9-10 PM, PDT)

In later years Phil took on more serious, dramatic roles such as this "man on the skids" in the *Ben Casey* television series of the early 1960s.

**A**LICE AND PHIL could have tagged along with many other radio performers who made the transition to television. They instead made a conscious choice to make family life a priority and limit their show biz involvement. Gerald Nachman, author of *Raised on Radio*, notes that the complexities and pace of television far exceeded the demands of radio, where the Harrises were essentially working part time and could be together with their children most of the time.

At an old-time radio convention, co-writer Ray Singer avowed that his time on *The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show* was "six of the happiest years of my life. They're wonderful people, and it was a writer's paradise, because Phil was the kind of guy who loved living. (He) didn't want to be bothered with work. He left us alone. We never had to report to him. Dick and I would work out a premise and write the script. Phil and Alice lived in Palm Springs. They'd come in on Fridays and we'd rehearse. We'd do a rewrite on Saturday, do the show on Sunday and they'd go back to Palm Springs. (Phil) never knew what was going to happen . . . it was left in our hands. It spoiled us for everyone else."

When she found herself retired from both pictures and radio, Alice cheerfully switched roles to that of housewife and mother. Phil resumed his musical career, but at his own leisurely pace. During the 1960s and 1970s, he made numerous guest appearances on such

TV shows as *Kraft Music Hall* and *The Dean Martin Show*.

In addition to his love of golfing, he was active in a number of other sports. As a result, he appeared on ABC's *The American Sportsman*, which took celebrities on trips around the world to hunt and fish.

When it came to golf, he was involved in as many pro-amateur events as he could work into his schedule. He was a close friend and associate of Bing Crosby and, like Bing, helped promote various golf events and charities. His name on the list assured a large gallery because of his antics and teasing of fellow players. When Bing died in 1977, Phil stepped in to do commentary of the annual telecast of the Bing Crosby Pro-Am Golf Tournament.

In the music realm, Phil scored a hit with his 1950s novelty song "The Thing," about a mystery something in a box that a poor soul found and tried unsuccessfully to give away. During the 1970s and 1980s, he made frequent appearances leading a band in Las Vegas, often on the same bill with Harry James, the legendary swing era band leader.

When not behaving as the vain, inept character that he developed for comedy purposes, Phil was quite a talented musician. His bands and orchestras (whose theme song, by the way, was "Rose Room") played smooth, up-tempo music and had numerous hit recordings.

Even so, his talk/sing novelty songs are probably what fans most remember. Long before "The Thing," he had hits with "Woodman, Spare That Tree," "The Old Master Painter," "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)" and "The Preacher and the Bear."

Perhaps to counter that somewhat, Phil in 1972 produced an album for Mega Records called "Southern Comfort: The Best of Phil Harris." During the 1960s, he even branched out into doing some Country and Western.

In 1951, he appeared in the film *Thunder in the Pacific* with Walter Brennan and Forrest Tucker. In 1954, he appeared with none other than John Wayne in *The High and the Mighty*. Both parts were dramatic roles for which he received mostly favorable reviews. In 1956, Phil made a cameo appearance in the Paramount Pictures remake of Cole Porter's hit stage production *Anything Goes*. Here he basked in the glow of stars Mitzi Gaynor, Bing Crosby and Donald O'Connor.

He found a new outlet for his acting and singing talents when he lent his voice to several Walt Disney animated feature films. In 1970's *The Aristocats*, he supplied the voice of Thomas O'Malley. In 1973, he was the voice of Little John in *Robin Hood*.

By far his most memorable Disney role was Baloo the bear in 1967's *The Jungle Book*. Walt Disney himself suggested Harris for the part after meeting him at a party.

Phil improvised much of his dialogue, saying the scripted lines "didn't feel natural." No one objected, and he came across as just the sort of bear the story made Baloo out to be.

In the film's song "I Wanna Be Like You," he gets to do a scat-singing dance routine alongside the monkey king, voiced by the inimitable Louis Prima. But he topped that with his showstopper rendition of the Oscar-

*Continued Page 15*



Walt Disney's delightful animated adaptation of Kipling's *The Jungle Book* featured the voice talents of Louis Prima and Phil Harris as King Louie and Baloo, respectively. Their "I Wanna Be Like You" duet is a scream made all the more rhythmic and jazzy by Phil's manic improvising. It was said that Disney personally selected Phil to be the model for Baloo.



## Patricia Ryan: 'right actress for right role'

**N**OT LONG AGO, I purchased a collection of original 1940s publicity photos featuring an array of radio performers from that era. I recognized many of the actors, but a few required a little research. One from the latter grouping was of a young actress named Patricia Ryan. She was well-known in her day, but her day proved tragically short.

Pat Ryan was born in London on February 25, 1921. Her mother was English and her father an American who had originally arrived in England as part of the American contingent of soldiers sent to fight the First World War. When Pat was six weeks old her family sailed for the United States and settled in New York City. She was privately educated and was able to read by the time she was three. By the time she was seven, Pat was appearing on radio. Her first radio stint was on *The Adventures of Helen and Mary*, the forerunner of *Let's Pretend*. Pat would continue as a regular with *Let's Pretend* into her 20s. At the age of 11, she wrote an original fairy tale for *Let's Pretend*, cast and directed the play and performed one of the parts.

Ryan literally grew up acting on radio, maturing as an actress with each new role. Soap Operas were bread and butter to radio performers and Ryan managed to score a good number of serial roles. She found roles on *Big Sister*, *Aunt Jenny*, *Young Doctor Malone* and *The Parker Family* among others. Also, a fine vocalist, Pat was first heard as a member of NBC's *Rhythm Rascals* before NBC-Blue provided Pat with her own Sunday morning program in 1937.

Something of a turning point in Ryan's radio career transpired in the summer of 1941. She competed with 250 actresses for the role of Claudia in the radio series, *Claudia and David*, based on the Rose Franken creation then playing successfully on Broadway. Patricia won the role and played opposite Richard Kollmar playing David. The series was introduced to listeners as a 15-minute skit on Kate Smith's program and groomed as a summer replacement series for Smith. When Kate Smith exited the air that summer *Claudia and David* became a regular 30-minute weekly series during Smith's hiatus.

*Variety* (June 11, 1941) was effusive in its praise of the series after listening to the first skit on *The Kate Smith Show*. Speaking of the stars of the series, *Variety* said, "the job with bringing the story of Claudia to radio was in selecting the right actress for the role. The radio auspices have singled out one Patricia Ryan who will remind

many of Dorothy McGuire of the stage version. Which is good enough. Richard Kollmar also proved a good pick as the young architect whose fate it is to fall across the path of the child-woman."

Although the series failed to survive beyond its summer run, the series advanced Ryan's career. If Claudia was a "child-woman" as

described by *Variety*, Patricia Ryan was now moving toward professional maturity and beginning to reach beyond the child-like roles that she had previously filled with regularity. Indeed, by the end of 1941, not only Ryan but the country as a whole grew up suddenly as America went to war.

Pat was determined to support the war effort in any way she could. In between radio appearances, she began studying as a nurse's aide. When not behind a microphone or in a nursing uniform, Pat was spending time helping out at various service canteens. It was at one of these venues that Ryan met Seaman George Robert Gibson of the Royal Navy. They would marry in 1945.

Ryan's radio work broadened during and after the war. There were parts on *The Thin Man*, *Inner Sanctum*, *Treasury Star Parade*, *War Town* and *Cavalcade of America* and numerous others. Her final role would be a starring role on *Cavalcade of America*.

On February 14, 1949, Ryan appeared in "A Valentine for Sophia" on *Cavalcade of America*. The play was a popularized account of the actual romance and marriage of Sophia Peabody and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Pat would portray Sophia Peabody opposite Glenn Ford as Hawthorne. Sophia Peabody had actually been afflicted with crippling headaches and that fact was integral to the play.

The broadcast had barely begun when Patricia complained of an intense pain in the back of her head; she was unable to continue. Two other actresses stepped in to handle Pat's lines. Later in the play Ryan insisted she was sufficiently recovered to resume her role. After finishing the broadcast, the actress returned home to her husband and went to sleep. In the morning, when Gibson awoke, he found his wife unconscious and unresponsive. Patricia Ryan had died of a cerebral hemorrhage 10 days shy of her 28th birthday.☠

**ORIGINAL CAPTION:** Patricia Ryan, featured in the BLUE NETWORK'S "Parker Family," keeps a weather eye on the studio clock. For when the broadcast is over, Pat must grab a cab and hustle over to a New York hospital, where she now serves as a full-fledged Nurses' Aide.





## The Original Wild and Crazy Guy CONTINUED

nominated song "The Bare Necessities," in which he talks and sings to Mowgli about the merits of a simple life.

His Baloo performance won him countless new fans from a generation that grew up with television. In 1989, Phil did a brief reprise, returning to do the Baloo voice for a Disney cartoon series called *Tale Spin*.

**I**N LATER YEARS, when they were semi-retired, Phil took advantage of his free time to indulge in the outdoor activities that he so loved, fishing, hunting and golf. He had a dozen or more show business buddies that he could call on to join him. Bing Crosby was his most regular golfing companion. Alice joked that if she and Phil ever divorced she would name Bing as correspondent.

In May 1995, Phil Harris went to Linton, IN, to be an honored guest and performer at an annual festival held there. He was in frail health and on dialysis, but had promised to appear and did not want to disappoint. Though he needed to sit in a chair on stage, he sang two songs with much of the old Harris swagger and verve.

**"Radio gave me a chance to settle down, to marry, to establish a home and raise a family. It was all fun, everything. I say thanks to God every night that I get a kick out of every day."**

On August 11, 1995, in their Palm Springs home, he suffered a heart attack and died. He was 91. Phyllis Harris was with her mother at her father's bedside when he died. Besides Alice and their girls, he was survived by four grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Alice had his body cremated and interred in the mausoleum at Forest Lawn cemetery in Riverside County, CA.

Two years before his death, Phil had been inducted into the Indiana Hall of Fame.

He also is honored by two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, one for his work in radio and one for his recordings.

Phil Harris considered radio a veritable life-saver. He once told an interviewer, "If it hadn't been for radio, I would still be a traveling orchestra leader. I played one-night stands for 17 years, except for a few longer engagements. I slept on buses. I never even voted, because I had no residence. Radio gave me a chance to settle down, to marry, to establish a home and raise a family. It was all fun, everything. I say thanks to God every night that I get a kick out of every day."🎙️



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