



Sunday, 25 March 2012

## Cooking With Phil Harris

The image Phil Harris projected on the Jack Benny Show, and which followed him throughout his career, was the relaxed, boozy, vain guy who didn't let something like illiteracy or lack of formal musical training bother him. You couldn't help but like Phil Harris.

Unlike Benny and almost everyone else who was big in network radio comedy or comedy/variety, Harris didn't make the jump to television. He insisted in the '50s the right vehicle didn't come along but, frankly, the reason was he didn't need to work. He explains a bit of that here in a 1961 Associated Press feature story. Phil and Alice Faye virtually retired from show biz at the end of their radio career and, every couple of years, reporters would trek out to Palm Springs to see how he was doing.

### PASS THE CHITLINS!

#### Phil Harris, who rarely works anymore, spends his time cooking

By JAMES BACON

AP Movie-TV Writer

HOLLYWOOD, May 12 — (AP) — This may shock the boys at the corner saloon, but Phil Harris spends more time cooking nowadays than he does drinking.

It used to be that when Phil felt sad, his tears were 86 proof. No more. Of course, he never did as much drinking as Jack Benny made out. If he had, his liver would be in a bottle at the Harvard Medical School. The one-time bandleader now makes only occasional entertainment appearances, hence has plenty of time for the kitchen.

It's quite a sight to see Phil with a market basket picking out choice vegetables at the Farmers Market. It's even more astounding to see him hovering over the stove at his Palm Springs home, whipping up a special dinner.

"I cook every dinner at home," boasts Phil. "And I feel like I'm in heaven in that kitchen."

Phil is so ardent an amateur chef that his kitchen is restaurant equipped. He ribs his wife, ex-actress Alice Faye, as to the inspiration for his love of cooking.

"I either had to learn how to cook or starve to death," he says.

"I didn't used to let Alice in the kitchen, but I've taught her how to fix salads. She's a pretty good salad maker now."

PROBABLY no one in show business lives the good life Phil does. He and Alice live in a beautiful home facing the Thunderbird Country Club golf course. When he's not in the kitchen, he's out on the course playing with Bing Crosby.

Sometimes for variation Phil and Bing go hunting or fishing. Bing is a guy who knows how to live, too, but he has to work harder and oftener than Phil.

How does Phil—or anyone else—get this life of paradise?

"Well," he says, "when Alice was a big star, I told her always to save her money—and she did."

Actually, Phil doesn't need Alice's bank account. He is the only grownup show business personality who believes in Santa Claus—and Santa looks exactly like NBC's Gen. David Sarnoff.

Back in the days when radio was big, Jack Benny, Amos & Andy and some other stars made a famous exodus from NBC to CBS.

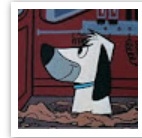
Phil had been a mainstay of the Benny radio show for many years. Then NBC gave him his own show, co-starring Phil and Alice. It was a top-rated radio show for a long time.

"I felt grateful to NBC," Phil recalls "so I didn't make the big switch. Gen. Sarnoff was grateful too, so he gave



HOME AT THE RANGE—Taking his stand at the stove, Phil Harris whips up a concoction at his home in Palm Springs, Calif. Now that he makes only occasional appearances, the former bandleader is the family cook, and lives it. His fancy cooking is good enough to lure his paid acting, Hollywood stars.

## About Me



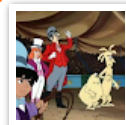
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fernandollera.com  
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episode the gang heads to  
Dooville to visit Scooby's  
parents. When they get  
there no one is there to  
meet them...

2 hours ago

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for their impact, so it is no  
surprise he had some  
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music in animation even  
back in 1946.

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### **Yowp**

The Life and Times of Yowp  
- Before he played a  
cowardly Great Dane that  
solved mysteries (I've  
forgotten the character's  
name, Scrubby or  
something), and before he  
portrayed Astro on ...

me a long-term contract.”

The contract, similar to the TV deal later given Milton Berle, was one that paid Phil whether he worked or not.

It still has two years to run.

Some sources say that Harris gets \$100,000 a year. The network never came up with a TV series for Phil, but occasionally uses him on special productions, such as the Bob Hope show.

He also does a month at Las Vegas each year.

NOW THAT HIS lucrative contract with NBC is running out, Phil and Alice are preparing a new TV series starring themselves.

“It’s not going to be one of these situation things where Alice is in the kitchen all the time. The air is filled with those.” Besides, she seldom is allowed in the kitchen at home—she wouldn’t know how to act.”

Harris’ cooking must be pretty good because Crosby, who can afford to eat in restaurants, is a steady customer.

And Benny never turns down one of Phil’s invitations.

“Jack never says much about the food but he loves that price,” says Phil.

What’s the secret of good cooking?

“A good cook starts his meal early in the morning by shopping personally for the meats and vegetables. All great chefs do their own shopping. Then take time, loving time with your dishes.

“About the only drinking I do nowadays is to sip a tea while I’m stirring the soup. Man, it’s real living. It’s the greatest relaxation in the world to create a meal.”

BUT THERE are hazards. When an AP photographer took pictures of Harris in his Palm Springs kitchen, he had just come back from a visit to his doctor. The photographer quoted Phil:

“That guy must be nuts,” he said. “How can anyone as relaxed as I have an ulcer?”

Maybe his own cooking doesn’t agree with him.

Incidentally, Phil wasn’t the only ex-radio or TV star of the day who didn’t have to work for a while. We’ll explore a few others from 50 years ago in a future post.

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [08:32](#)



## 2 comments:



**John** 25 March 2012 at 09:24

What a GREAT article! (BTW, James Bacon is the one that wrote the Gleason Bio, 'How Sweet It Is'). Thank you for sharing this with us.

[Reply](#)



**Pokey** 26 March 2012 at 07:07

Phil Harris, of course, would bounce back in 1966-67 playing Baloo for Disney, appeared on a "Here's Lucy" episode, and got work again..He did LOTS more hit records than those Jungle Book songs or "The Thing" [the Boom Boom Boom song]. "That's What I Like About the South", his duet with daughter Alice Jr., "One-Zy, Two-Zy", "Sadrac", "Sycamore", "Play a Simple Melody", etc., etc. [Of course like all greats did less memorable work, like 1993's "Rock-a-Doodle" as the Chanticleer rooster, a good TV special idea for the 460s.] In the 1940 WB cartoon "Malibu Beach Party", in his early years on radio with Benny, [after Don Bester-see "Page Miss Glory"], he was caricatured, as a non-speaking "Pill Harris" briefly. Steve

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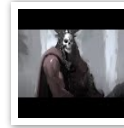
**Buddy's Cartoons**

[Er...](#) - Let's pretend that that "moving stuff" never happened. Essays-as well as your comments-are still there.

2 days ago



**Prydain on Film**



[Disney's Live Action/Hyper Realistic CGI Remakes,](#)

[and the Chronicles of Prydain live action storyboard pitch reel](#) - For

those waiting (including myself) for Disney to adapt the Prydain chronicles as a live action CGI series, since 2016, Disney repurchased the film r...

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