

Sunday, 24 June 2012

## Wonga is 104

Phil Harris would be 104 today and, if you think about it, he really had four careers. To some, he's best-known for his work on the Jack Benny radio show which he parlayed into his own show co-starring second wife Alice Faye. But it's not like Jack plucked him from obscurity. He had a dance band with a home base at several different Los Angeles night spots and was recording for Victor. He appeared in several films with Charlie Ruggles, including the comedy "Melody Cruise" (1933). So it was evident to Jack that Harris could act and fill a stooge role that his previous bandleaders had been handling. Harris had plenty of experience on the radio before he joined the Benny show as well. In fact, while Harris' "two shows" was a running joke starting in the mid-'40s, Harris was already hosting a musical show with his dance band on CBS when Jack hired him and continued to do so while appearing with Benny.

No doubt Harris was happy to settle down with Benny and give up the grind of touring. The *Galveston News* wrote about a Harris stop in its June 15, 1933 edition; it was a big deal and the paper had a number of Harris stories over several weeks.



### HOLLYWOOD HOLDS BRILLIANT OPENING WITH PHIL HARRIS' ORCHESTRA; CROWD ATTENDS

With all the brilliance, pomp and ceremony that goes with a Hollywood first-night and amid a scene of splendor and beauty, Hollywood Dinner Club opened its eighth summer season last night to a packed house, with hundreds being turned away.

It was the most colorful and successful premier from every viewpoint in the history of the popular west end theater-restaurant. Newly decorated in rare good taste and with a new Frigidaire cooling system the smart, fashioned crowd was thrilled by the appointments and the entertainment of Manager Sam Maceo as they danced, dined and made merry within a veritable forest of flowers.



Phil Harris and his orchestra proved a sensational hit. Thin debonair young man from Hollywood is a great entertainer and his combination of musicians and vocalists provide divertissement comparable to the best seen at the club in recent years.

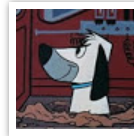
While Harris did not have any of the movie stars present in person, they were there in spirit. More than a hundred telegrams were displayed from big names in the picture industry who wished Phil luck in his first appearance away from California. Included in the lot were messages from Wallace Beery, Robert Montgomery, Ruth Chatterton, Maurice Chevalier, Gary Cooper, Kay Francis, Anson Weeks, Ginger Rogers, James Cagney, Edwin G. Robinson, Richard Barthelmess and scores of others. Baby Leroy, the tot in Maurice Chevalier's "A Bedtime Story," sent this message: "Ga Ga Goo Club," which means "Whatever Mr. Chevalier says goes for me, too."

To single out any particular number that Phil Harris did best would be difficult indeed. The first night crowd apparently liked everything he offered and cried for more. "Tea for Two," done with Leah Ray; "Love Tales," a number that West coast radio critics chose three times in a row as the outstanding number of the week, "It Happened to Me," theme song from "So

This is Harris," and "Isn't This a Night for Love," the theme song from the picture "Melody Cruise," in which Harris is starred and which will come to the Martini Theater Saturday, were well received.

Harris has some fine arrangements of dance tunes and most of those played were new and taken from current New York musicals and motion picture hits.

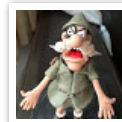
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## Blogs to See

### Peter Gray's Comics and Art



Spencer Jordan's amazing work... we are hoping artists like Ian

Knox...and families of these comic artists can see these gems... - made with fimo clay I had ago and its not very easy to do...  
4 hours ago

### Fernando Liera Blog Cartoons



Vehicle Verification Centers of Mexico City will reopen in August with COVID

safety measures. - ©2020 fernandollercartoons.com  
6 hours ago

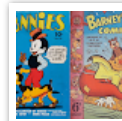
### Movies with Michael



Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

service of cowboy church. Today's musical selection begins with Gene Autry singing "Dear Hearts and Gentle People..."  
9 hours ago

### Termite Terrace headlines



Question for All You Cartoon Collectors! - OK so I've been doing some looking around. Bosko apparently had a comic book and I'm wondering if any of you know of

Leah Ray, lovely in a black and white lace gown, scored an individual hit and undoubtedly will become as great a favorite here as she was in California. Though still in her teens, she is a finished artist and has a style that wins her audience without a struggle.

Phil Harris' Ambassadors is another feature with the orchestra that clicked strongly. This trio make a nice appearance and harmonize perfectly.

If one may judge by his reception last night, Phil Harris is due for a highly successful month's engagement here.

Harris and the band will broadcast four times weekly over KPRC, Houston, and the same outlet will be used when he begins his national network broadcasts June 23.



For the benefit of those few radio fans who aren't acquainted with the performer, Patsy Flick, substituted one man's wit, after the latest visit of Phil Harris, whose "Hustle" show is heard together with Jack Ray's singing voice on these Friday night "Let's Listen to Music" programs over KPRC and associated KPRC stations. Jack is with his company, one of the persons in the field, at 9 a. m.

Ray was a Harris discovery—at least, he gave her her singing first job—and she later married MCA and New York Jets boss Sonny Werblin.

Harris debuted on the Benny show on October 4, 1936. It took a while for the writers to get his character in place; he was kind of a jerkish antagonist to Benny at first. It really sounds painful. Eventually, they had to realize "mean" didn't work, and that any put-downs of Jack had to be humorous, if not deserved. Harris became the self-absorbed, carefree, alcohol-friendly, illiterate braggart, one of radio's great characters.

There was little fanfare about Harris' arrival, nor much speculation about who would replace Johnny Green as the show's orchestra leader. The *Wisconsin State Journal* of October 8th sums up all I've been able to find in papers of the day:

Phil Harris won the band assignment for the Jack Benny program after a long series of eliminations. Benny was unable to make his mind up as to which of three band leaders he would take and was won over by hearing Harris play in

Los Angeles. Benny is also to have another new stooge in the person of Patsy Flick, who was on the Mutual network last year as a dialectician.

Band leader was Harris' first career, radio star was his second. His fourth was voice actor for Disney as a couple of casual characters. Harris as Baloo singing "The Bare Necessities" may be the highlight of "The Jungle Book." In between was his third career, that of doting husband to Alice Faye, amateur golfer and someone who only worked when he wanted to, enjoying the good life in between. In a way, all his careers are interrelated, and all entertaining.

Here's Wonga Philip Harris in his best animated role.

## Bare Necessities



Posted by Yowp at 14:53



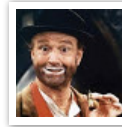
Labels: Jack Benny

4 comments:

additional covers you could share! ...

17 hours ago

### Way Too Damn Lazy To Write A Blog



Born on July 18, 1913 - Red Skelton - \*Today's post commences

with the Guzzler's Gin routine ...

1 day ago

### News From ME

Sorry... - As far as I know, I do not have any diseases. I just have too much to deal with right now so I won't be blogging much if at all. I'm postponing all the web...

2 days ago

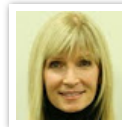
### Cartoon Research

In His Own Words: H.T. Kalmus on Disney in Technicolor - Suspended Animation #276 Many references may be found regarding two-strip Technicolor. I have been guilty of discussing Walter Lantz's King of Jazz (1930)...

2 days ago

### AFRTS Archive

Mary Turner 1985 - Mary Turner today Mary Turner really rocked the house.



Normally when any of the jocks got a reaction, it'd be split.

The ones that were really liked wou...

4 days ago

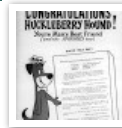
### The World of Knight



TONIGHT, 11:54 PM. - COPYRIGHT 2020 BY MILTON KNIGHT

4 days ago

### Yowp



Hanna-Barbera Birthday Did-You-Knows - 63 years ago today, some

forms were signed by George Sidney, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera creating what eventually became the biggest TV cartoon operation i...

1 week ago

### Supervised By Fred Avery: Tex Avery's Warner Brothers Cartoons

Wabbit Twouble: A Small Addendum to An Outstanding Podcast -



**Pokey** 24 June 2012 at 23:42

I was p[laying me mp3 of a multitracked WOnga Harris from 1950 singing Berlin's "Play a Simple Melody", which Bing and Gary Crosby also sang. It came from Irving Berlin's early Broadway musical "Watch Your Step". Maybe there was a revival. That would explain the 1950-era revival.Steve

[Reply](#)



**Zartok-35** 25 June 2012 at 01:32

Ah, Phil Harris. He was in Don Bluth's "Rock-a-doodle", which he narrated over liberally.

[Reply](#)



**Steven Hartley** 29 June 2012 at 08:11

I always thought the highlight of 'The Jungle Book' was the whole I Wanna Be Like You song performed by Louis Prima and Harris. It really grinds my gears when in 'Robin Hood' Little John looks too much like Baloo; and even voiced by Harris too.

[Reply](#)



**wbhist** 2 July 2012 at 19:13

Let's not forget his late 1950 / early 1951 smash hit, "The Thing."

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Original animation drawing from Wabbit Twouble with color notations

for the ink and paint department. Release date: 12/20/41 Availability: Looney Tunes Gol...  
3 weeks ago

**Mark Kausler's CatBlog**

[The Lady and the Tiger](#) - From the Cathy Hill Archive of Unpublished Comics comes "The Lady and the Tiger". This story was drawn before Cathy started the "Mad Raccoons" series. U...  
4 weeks ago

**What About Thad?**

[Cartoon Logic Podcast](#) - And yet another distraction from this brick and mortar blog... I've entered the world of podcasting with renowned animation director and historian Bob Jaques...  
10 months ago



**Likely Looney, Mostly Merrie**

[That's all, folks!](#) - My posts have gotten thinner over the years. I'm aware of that. I've been hopeful for a long time, that I can remain active with blogging and sharing furth...  
1 year ago



**Dr. Grob's Animation Review**

[The Flying Man](#) - 'The Flying Man' is a very short absurdist film in which a man drops his coat to take a swim in mid air. Another man with a dog drops by, tries the same th...  
2 days ago

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- ▶ [2020](#) (216)
- ▶ [2019](#) (376)
- ▶ [2018](#) (379)
- ▶ [2017](#) (380)
- ▶ [2016](#) (396)
- ▶ [2015](#) (389)
- ▶ [2014](#) (390)
- ▶ [2013](#) (388)
- ▼ [2012](#) (397)
  - ▶ [December](#) (39)
  - ▶ [November](#) (34)
  - ▶ [October](#) (32)
  - ▶ [September](#) (34)

- ▶ [August \(33\)](#)
- ▶ [July \(34\)](#)
- ▼ [June \(34\)](#)
  - [UPA Clipping File](#)
  - [Truce Toothbrush](#)
  - [How Do I Know It's Friz](#)
  - [There He Is](#)
  - [Señor Droopy Swirls](#)
  - [Smoked Hams Exit](#)
  - [Wonga is 104](#)
  - [The Rumors About Dr Seuss](#)
  - [That's Oswald](#)
  - [Buddy and Azusa](#)
  - [Benny and Azusa](#)
  - [Minerva Pious](#)
  - [Dippy Diplomat Outline](#)
  - [Scaredy Cat and Fake Cat](#)
  - [The Month of June \(Foray\)](#)
  - [Buck Benny and Ernie Bilko](#)
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  - [Hairpins and Ernie Nordli](#)
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  - [Withers and Willie Whopper](#)
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  - [Benny and Cantor on This and That](#)
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  - [Stop Staring!](#)
  - [Ub's Classroom](#)
  - [Jack Mather](#)
  - [The Lonesome Mouse](#)
  - [Bugs Bunny Emotes Again](#)
  - [The Man Who Stopped Being Mr. Dors](#)
  - [Swoongoons for Dennis](#)
  - [Cartoons Without Tails](#)
  - [Woody's Lantz-formation](#)
- ▶ [May \(31\)](#)
- ▶ [April \(32\)](#)
- ▶ [March \(31\)](#)
- ▶ [February \(29\)](#)

[► January](#) (34)[► 2011](#) (106)

## Labels

[Aline Mosby](#) (17)[Art Davis](#) (33)[Bad Luck Blackie](#) (9)[Bob and Ray](#) (10)[Bob Clampett](#) (82)[Bob McKimson](#) (59)[Bob Thomas](#) (53)[Chuck Jones](#) (142)[Columbia](#) (33)[Counterfeit Cat](#) (8)[Cynthia Lowry](#) (26)[Dick Thomas](#) (14)[Don Patterson](#) (17)[Earl Wilson](#) (6)[Erskine Johnson](#) (37)[Felix the Cat](#) (27)[Film Daily](#) (50)[Fleischer](#) (154)[Frank Tashlin](#) (24)[Fred Allen](#) (43)[Fred Brunish](#) (11)[Friz Freleng](#) (137)[Gene Deitch](#) (18)[George Pal](#) (10)[Grant Simmons](#) (4)[Hanna and Barbera unit](#) (99)[Hanna-Barbera](#) (2)[Harman-Ising](#) (61)[Henry Morgan](#) (13)[Irv Spence](#) (8)[Jack Benny](#) (454)[Jay Ward](#) (30)[Jimmy Durante](#) (17)[John Crosby](#) (84)[John Sutherland](#) (28)[Johnny Johnsen](#) (27)[Kenny Baker](#) (6)[King-Size Canary](#) (8)[Laugh-In](#) (11)[Legend of Rockabye Point](#) (6)[Little Rural Riding Hood](#) (7)[Magical Maestro](#) (9)[Maurice Noble](#) (12)[Mel-O-Toons](#) (4)[MGM](#) (553)[Norm McCabe](#) (5)[Pat Matthews](#) (10)

<a href="#">Paul Julian</a>	(13)
<a href="#">Paul Terry</a>	(2)
<a href="#">Sara Berner</a>	(5)
<a href="#">Screwy Squirrel</a>	(34)
<a href="#">Spider-Man</a>	(1)
<a href="#">Terrytoons</a>	(84)
<a href="#">Tex Avery</a>	(468)
<a href="#">Tom and Jerry Human</a>	(29)
<a href="#">Tralfaz Sunday Theatre</a>	(17)
<a href="#">Ub Iwerks</a>	(80)
<a href="#">UPA</a>	(57)
<a href="#">Van Beuren</a>	(94)
<a href="#">Vernon Scott</a>	(42)
<a href="#">Virginia MacPherson</a>	(14)
<a href="#">Walt Disney</a>	(145)
<a href="#">Walter Lantz</a>	(241)
<a href="#">Warner Bros.</a>	(586)
<a href="#">Who Killed Who</a>	(10)