

Sunday, 13 January 2013

He's Baloo, All Right

The best thing that could have happened to Phil Harris unfolded in 1937. They changed his character.

The Jack Benny radio show had been incredibly popular but some tweaking of the Benny gang was in order. The jolly announcer was in place, but there were two silly characters (Mary Livingstone and Kenny Baker) and a combative one (Harris). Two silly characters weren't needed, so Mary became a sharp-tongue put-down artist (apparently not that far removed from her real personality). And Harris' bickering with the star just wasn't funny, so he was completely recast in the mould of a musician stereotype—a casual hepcat with an eye for the bottle and ladies, one wrapped up in himself and who hadn't been wrapped up in school books as a kid. The improved Harris was a hit. He had enough traits that everyone could picture him—and picturing someone is what radio's all about. Guys, no doubt, admired him in a way. And Harris milked parts of that character for the rest of his life.

Phil Harris is a great example of the kind of money that's showered on show people who make it big. After his radio show died with network radio in 1954, Harris never worked regularly again. He didn't need to. He had enough money for an extremely comfortable lifestyle, spending his time travelling, golfing and fishing. But he popped up every once in a while and, in the process, made a second career for himself as an occasional voice actor for Walt Disney.

The idea that Disney would hire someone with Harris' reputation based on his long association with Jack Benny amused United Press International's venerable Hollywood reporter. This column appeared in newspapers starting July 14, 1978. Harris engages in the kinds of one-liners that the Benny writers put in his mouth some 40 years earlier.

That reprobate of heroic proportions

It's true! Phil Harris does Disney films

By Vernon Scott

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) - The Disney Studios is a pristine bastion of probity dedicated to "G" rated movies, the flag, motherhood and God.

Since Mickey Mouse first squeaked his way to fame some 50 years ago, the Disney reputation has been unsullied by scandal and unseemly skylarking, much less public displays of drunkenness or lechery. In the Sodom that is Hollywood, Disney shines like a beacon of virtue, an island of moral rectitude in a sea of depravity.

It comes as a distinct shock, therefore, to discover that Disney nurtures a reprobate of heroic proportions, a figure who looms large in the show business Who's Who of toppers, swingers and rascals.

Through the hallowed gates of Disney these days strolls a man who has become a fixture in the studio's feature length cartoons. He provided the voice of Baloo, the bear in "Jungle Book," of J. Pat O'Mally, the hip cat in "The Aristocats," and of Little John in "Robin Hood."

At present he is the voice of Feathers Valentino, a crane of dubious reputation who messes around with Charo in "Fox and Hounds."

This rampant blot on the Disney escutcheon is none other than Phil Harris, as unlikely a figure on the campus-like Disney lot as he would be occupying the office of headmaster at a girls finishing school.

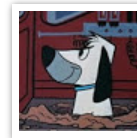
It was Phil Harris, one must be reminded, who toured Scotland with Bing Crosby many years ago. One night on the road to Aberdeen they passed several distilleries of Scotch whisky, lights aglow, operating full blast.

Crosby wryly observed, "Look at that, Phil, they're making it faster than you can drink it!"

Undaunted, Harris fired back, "Yeah, but I got them working nights."

While Harris was on a domestic tour through the South with Bing a few years later a group of Crosby fans asked what the stars were doing in Dixie. Bing told the ladies, "Phil's here to lay a wreath on the grave of Jack Daniels."

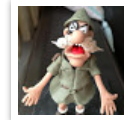
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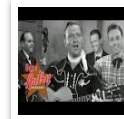


Vehicle Verification Centers of Mexico City will reopen in August with COVID

[safety measures.](#) - ©2020 fernandolleracartoons.com

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Movies with Michael

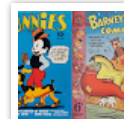


Cowboy Church #67 - Hello my friends and welcome back for another

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

7 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

Harris recalled those glory days in his distinctive whiskey baritone at lunch in the Disney commissary, his innocent blue eyes twinkling with pleasure.

The lovable reprobate has dedicated most of his 72 years to creating a reputation for wine, women and song as Crosby's crony off-screen and as Jack Benny's band leader-foil for 16 years on Benny's radio show. He also devoted seven years to defaming himself on his own radio show with wife Alice Faye.

He was every God-fearing wife's admonition to her husband, the horrible example. Few were the men who did not envy Phil's carefree lifestyle. The Walter Mittys of the world lived vicariously through his adventures.

Harris, despite his tenure at Disney, says he is unchanged. "I'm on the wagon right now, but only to lose weight," he said. "The minute I drop 10 pounds I'm heading right back to the nipple."

"Alice and I have been married since 1941 and I'm still looking for her money. We've lived in Palm Springs 30 years and I traveled so much Alice used to tell people she saw me only when I brought my laundry home. Now she says she brings my laundry To me."

Phil's low-life reputation was responsible for one of the longest sustained laughs in the history of radio.

In one skit, Benny was sitting in the parlor of the elegant home of the polished Ronald Colman and his fastidious wife, Benita. Colman was munching an apple when Benny began a story and mentioned the name of Phil Harris.

There was a pregnant silence and then Colman said disdainfully, "Please, Jack, not while I'm eating." The audience roared for a full minute and a half.

On his own show Harris featured his disreputable sidekick Frank Remley, a guitarist whose legendary carousing matched his own.

Now that Phil has become a Disney standby, he has discovered a whole new world of fans. Little kids, who once might have asked why he led their fathers astray, now point him and yell, "Hi, Baloo."

"It's just great," said Harris happily, "and now 'Jungle Book' is being re-released. Walt Disney himself wanted me for the voice of Baloo. But when I read the script I turned it down."

"The dialogue didn't sound like me. And I didn't want to be typed as a bear. But they asked me to try it once using my own words. That worked out fine. But Alice made me bring a recording home to prove I really worked at Disney."

"I'm here because they can use my voice, phrasing and inflection but the producers keep it clean. I sound like everyone else to me, but the voice must be distinctive. Long distance operators always ask, 'Is this Phil Harris?'"

"Baloo has resurrected my career. I love having kids recognize me and follow me down the street. But that doesn't mean I've changed my ways. Not at all."

"I was down south not long ago at a social doing when a guy comes up to me and says, 'The Reverend Billy Graham would like to meet you.' I'm a big fan of Graham and I considered it an honor."

"But we're not exactly the same type of character. When I shook hands with Billy my whole right side went sober."

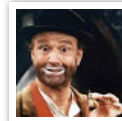
Walt Disney knew what he was doing. Baloo wasn't a boozier or a connoisseur of women, but he had Harris' carefree attitude toward life. He was perfect casting. It worked for Benny and it worked for Disney. When kids said "Hi, Baloo," to Harris, they were closer to the truth than they thought.



additional covers you could share! ...

16 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

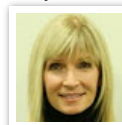
Cartoon Research

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 -

Posted by [Yowp](#) at [07:25](#)



Labels: [Jack Benny](#), [Vernon Scott](#)

2 comments:



Pokey 13 January 2013 at 12:55

Well, Phil's second Disney character, and his only non-ursine one, "Thomas O'Malley Cat" in "Aristocats", sure was a flirt..!Steve

[Reply](#)



Pokey 13 January 2013 at 12:58

And it's sure easy to confuse the above cat with fellow Disney actor J.Pat O'Malley due to the name (understandable,though...)Steve

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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

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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

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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...
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