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“Bing & Bob—A Fond Remembrance”

Crosby and Hope, Hope and Crosby, their names were synonymous. They were two of Hollywood’s most popular and enduring stars. Together they were the screen’s most successful comedy team. Their comedy exchanges and self-deprecating humour seemed timeless. Their popularity in movies and on radio and TV was unprecedented. Their Christmas specials were holiday traditions.

Bing was the “voice of the season” with his treasure trove of yuletide songs. His timeless rendition of “White Christmas”, which he introduced in the 1942 film,



“Holiday Inn”, is still the best selling single record of all time. His comedy sparring partner, Bob, introduced his own seasonal standard, “Silver Bells”, in his 1951 comedy, “The Lemon Drop Kid”. I have been one of their countless fans since my formative years when I listened faithfully to their weekly radio shows. Over the years I was fortunate to interview and socialize with them on a number of occasions.

In fact, one time while visiting Bob’s home with Rich Little he surprised me by telling Rich that he not only knew me, but that we had “worked together.” He obviously meant that I had interviewed him several times. However, I reveled in the thought that we had actually “worked together.”

Bob was always impressed with my total recall of his and Bing’s careers. Once when I mentioned the background behind a funny but obscure scene in one of their movies, he said in amazement, “how do you know that?” I got a big laugh from him when I replied that I knew their lives better than my own.

The stars of the hilarious ‘Road’ comedies were born in the same month in 1903, Bing in Tacoma, Washington, May 3, and Bob in Eltham, England, May 29. Their families moved while they were still youngsters, the Crosbys to neighbouring Spokane and the Hopes to Cleveland, Ohio. Both families had seven children. I was indeed privileged to be a friend to both of my boyhood idols and to produce radio anthologies about their lives and legendary careers. “We had a lot of respect for one another,” Bob remembered fondly,” as you know Bing had a great sense of humour and we had a lot of fun and travelled extensively together. I guess

we played at least a hundred exhibition games of golf for charities around the world.”

During one of my conversations with Bing, he recalled their initial encounter. “I first met Bob at the Capitol Theatre in New York where we were on the same bill. He was doing an act with a girl who played straight for him and he was a wise-cracking comedian. I was just starting out as one of the Rhythm Boys and we used to go together to the Friar’s club where all the actors hung out. I saw a lot of Bob in those days and we have been great friends ever since.”

Four years later they were reunited at the Capitol Theatre. “We were back in New York in 1932,” Bob told me. “I was the emcee and Bing was the headliner – he was a radio and recording star by that time. We were there for two weeks doing four shows a day. By the second week we started ad-libbing and we worked up an



impromptu act. Five years later I was signed by Paramount and moved to California. A short time after my arrival I went down to Del Mar Race Track, where Bing was one of the owners, and at his invitation, attended one of their Saturday night parties. We got up and did the same act we did at the Capitol Theatre. A couple of guys from Paramount who were there thought we really worked well together.

They thought we were ad-libbing. That was 1939 and that’s how the ‘Roads’ started. We made seven of them.”

On their way to Singapore, Zanzibar, Morocco, Utopia, Rio, Bali and Hong Kong, there was as much comedy on the sets as there was on the screen. Bing was never happier than when he was working with Bob. He remembered those happy times as we reminisced at his home in Hillsboro, California: “The most satisfying movies to me were the ‘Road’ pictures. I believe they provided people with a lot of fun. They were a pleasure to make with Bob and Dorothy Lamour.”

It was in 1985 while taping my last interview with Bob that in a wistful moment he reflected warmly on the legacy of his old pal and comedy partner. “The marvelous thing about Bing is that we still have his wonderful recordings and films and they are permanent. They will be here when we are gone and that’s a comforting thought.”

Bing was 74 when he left us in 1977. Bob passed away one month after his

100th birthday in 2003. Now they belong to the ages in film and broadcast retrospectives of 20th century pop culture.

[Share your memories, contact: gorda@rogers.com]