



NOTES FROM THE BANDSTAND

Bob Crosby

By **KARL PEARSON**

Bob Crosby was once quoted as saying, "I'm the only guy in the band business who made it without talent." Though the statement is far from the truth, it does display the sense of modesty that Bob has always had about his talent. While not in the same singing caliber as his famous brother Bing, he has always sung with a great deal of sincerity and has a great sense of rhythm. During his long bandleading career Bob has always been associated with

many outstanding musicians and can emcee a show with typical Crosby humor and charm.

George Robert Crosby was born August 25, 1913, the last of seven children born to Harry and Kate Crosby (brother Bing was born in 1903). From childhood on, Bob had a desire to be an entertainer; as a youngster he sang often in public. Bob's first job as a professional singer took place due to a conversation between Bing and



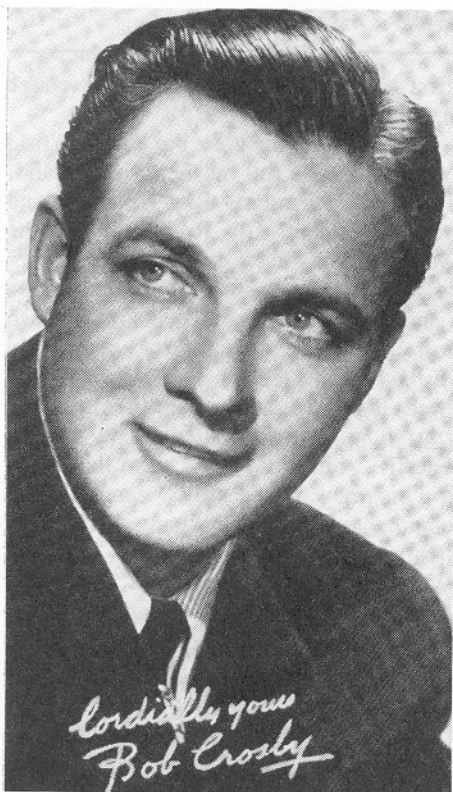
THE BOB CROSBY FAMILY in 1949. Shown, from left, are Mrs. June Crosby, Stevie, 2, Cathy, 9, Chris, 6, Bob Crosby, and Bob, Jr. 4.

West Coast bandleader Anson Weeks. Bing, who was at the height of his popularity in 1932, was having a few drinks one night with Weeks. Anson asked Bing, "Are there any more at home like you?" to which Bing replied "Sure, my kid brother." Weeks sent the younger Crosby a wire offering him the vocal spot in his orchestra. Bob joined the Weeks band, an organization that also included future bandleaders Griff Williams and Xavier Cugat.

Two years later, in 1934, Bob left Anson Weeks to join a band being formed by Glenn Miller for Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey. Bob's stint with the battling Dorseys was a rather unpleasant one, for Tommy seemed to have an intense dislike for young Crosby. Tommy was very critical of Bob's singing and once remarked, "I've got the best band, why can't I have the best Crosby?" was Tommy's comment. Fortunately Bob's stint with the Dorseys was to be a short one, for late in 1934 a series of events occurred that would change Bob's life greatly.

Those events involved the members of Ben Pollack's band, who were very dissatisfied with their leader and felt he did not have their best interests in mind. The band members voted to walk out on Pollack *en masse* and yet stick together as they had something special to offer to the public. The "Pollack Orphans" began their search for a new front man to lead their band. Gil Rodin, saxist and manager of the Pollack Orphans, was given a list of three possible leaders by their booking agency: Johnny "Scat" Davis, trumpet player with Fred Waring; Harry "Goldie" Goldfield, who played in the Paul Whiteman's group; and Bob Crosby. Rodin decided that young Crosby was the wise choice, and the band members agreed. A cooperative band was set up, with members of the band (including Bob) purchasing shares in the band and owning part of the orchestra.

In time, the Bob Crosby Orchestra



became a big favorite with the public, known for its loose, free-wheeling jazz performances and Bob's vocals. Bob fit in well with the band, was a fine leader who was eager to please the customers. A small jazz group from the band known as the Bob Cats also became a big audience favorite. The band recorded exclusively for Decca Records (as did Bing) and had several big-selling records. In addition to the records, the Bob Crosby band appeared on various radio programs for Camel Cigarettes, Ballantine Ale, and Roger and Gallet Cosmetics. They also appeared in several films, including "Holiday Inn" with Bing and Fred Astaire.

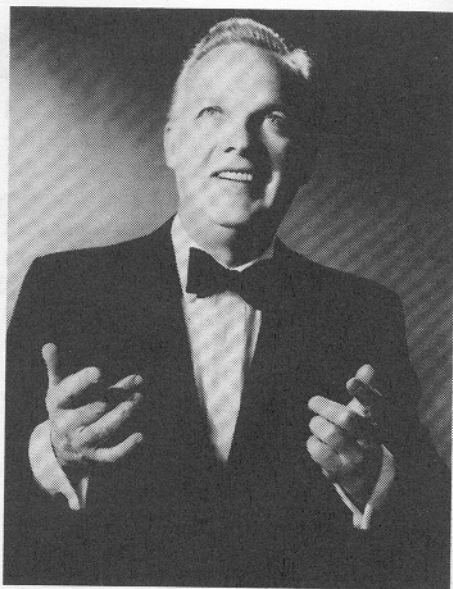
At various times the Crosby band featured many of the top musicians of the swing era, including Charlie Spivak, Irving Fazola, Billy Butterfield, Muggsy Spanier and Jess Stacy. Several more such as Eddie Miller, Ray Bauduc, Matty Matlock, and Bob Haggart were with the

BOB CROSBY

first Crosby band during its entire existence.

Like many of the great big bands, World War II took its toll on the Crosby Band. In 1942 drummer Ray Bauduc and saxist/president Gil Rodin joined the Marines. The dual loss affected the group, as both had been driving forces in the band. Several other musicians were also lost to the draft. The group eventually disbanded in December, 1942, and Bob tried his hand at motion pictures. He starred in a movie called "The Singing Sheriff", but it did more harm than good to his new-found film career. Bob commented on the film many years later: "It only took ten days to make, but it set Westerns back three years!" Bob even claimed that his good friend Randolph Scott, star of many Westerns, wouldn't talk to him for several months after the film's release!

In early 1944 Bob Crosby enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and after basic training was sent to the Pacific where he was put in charge of a 29-piece unit consisting of musicians and various entertainers. The group performed for enthusiastic troops throughout the Pacific, logging thousands of miles of travel. Bob returned to the United States in early 1945 and was immediately sent on a nationwide War Bond tour. Later in the year he was stationed in Los Angeles with Armed Forces Radio and in the fall was discharged from the Marines. He remained in California and began to make plans for a new band.



The new Bob Crosby Orchestra made its debut in early 1946, landing a weekly radio show for Ford, followed by a 15-minute series for Campbell's Soup ("Club Fifteen"). The Crosby Orchestra made several summer tours across the country, but as the Big Band Era began to fade, Bob gave up leading a band on a full-time basis. He concentrated on a career in radio, appearing on various programs. In 1952 Bob became a regular on the Jack Benny Program, taking the place of fellow bandleader Phil Harris. He remained with Jack for several years, also making the switch with Benny to television. Bob also had several television shows of his own at various times, including a successful weekly series.

In the years that have followed, Bob has kept himself busy with television appearances, organizing bands for specific engagements, singing and various business interests. He has lead several Bob Cat revivals featuring members of the original Bob Cats and toured the United States in the early 1970's as a part of the Big Band Cavalcade which also featured Freddy Martin and Frankie Carle. Bob's son, Chris Crosby, has followed in Dad's footsteps, as a guitarist and vocalist.

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