

The Great Depression Movies & Celebrities Reading: Bing Crosby

Bing Crosby

Bing Crosby was a figure of popular culture for nearly three decades. Who was Bing Crosby? What did he do to become so famous?

In 1903, in Tacoma, Washington, Harry and Kate Crosby gave birth to a son, Harry Crosby Jr. When young Harry was six, he earned the nickname "Bingo". Over the course of time, the "o" was dropped from this nickname, and he simply became known as Bing Crosby.

Bing became involved in music while in high school. He played drums for a short-lived band made up of other high school students. After high school, he moved on to quick success, singing with Paul Whiteman's Orchestra for \$150 a week. He then became the featured singer of the Rhythm Boys. It was with this group that Bing sang his first #1 hit, a jazz version of "Ol' Man River."



Crosby made his solo debut in September of 1931, and he quickly became known for his distinctive vocal talents. His deep baritone voice entranced millions of listeners. By the end of 1931, ten of the top 50 songs on the radio featured Bing Crosby.

In 1932, Bing starred in his first feature movie. The film was titled *The Big Broadcast* and was the first of many films starring Crosby. Bing would go on to become as well-known for his acting abilities as he was for his singing talent.

Crosby also had one of the most popular radio shows. Starting in 1936, he began hosting the Kraft Music Hall on the NBC Radio Network. He held this position for the next ten years, entertaining listeners across America, as well as abroad.

Words to watch for:
orchestra baritone
abroad nominated

During the years of World War II, Bing's broadcasts were transmitted to troops fighting in Europe and the Pacific. These broadcasts were also heard by countless German troops who became fans as well, calling him "Der Bingle". Crosby also flew to Europe and made a number of live appearances for soldiers stationed there. Between his broadcasts and live performances, he boosted the morale of many soldiers and helped them feel a little closer to home.

Bing Crosby's legacy as a performer is virtually unmatched. As a singer, he recorded more than 1,700 songs. Forty-one of those reached #1 on the popular music charts. His most famous recording is the song "White Christmas", which remains the best-selling song of all time.

Crosby is also one of the most successful actors of all-time. He appeared in a total of 79 films. More than 1 billion tickets were sold to see movies starring Bing Crosby. By this measure, it ranks him as the third most successful actor of all-time, behind Clark Gable and John Wayne. He won the Academy Award for Best Actor for his role in *Going My Way*. He was also nominated for the award on two other occasions. Many of his films are regarded as classics today, and they can still be seen on television.

Bing Crosby died on October 14, 1977, but he will continue to live on in the hearts and minds of people around the world for years to come. A song was once written in tribute to Bing which stated "Bing has a way of singing with his very heart and soul, which captivates the world. His millions of listeners never fail to rejoice at his golden voice."