

**Bing & Fred** - A Look at the Brief Partnership of Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire<sup>1</sup>  
Benjamin Sears

Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire are well-recognized as pioneering and unique performers. A partnership between them was inevitable, given the built-in contrast of song and dance. Their collaboration, however, was brief and did not reach the legendary status of the Bing Crosby/Bob Hope and the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers partnerships: Bing and Fred appeared together in two films, *Holiday Inn* (1942) and *Blue Skies* (1946), then in 1975 made a studio recording in London. In addition, Astaire made guest appearances on five Crosby radio shows (two coincided with each of the films); and was a special guest on the 1975 Crosby family TV special. Astaire and Crosby appeared together on USO tours during World War II, events detailed by Astaire in his autobiography *Steps in Time*. Bing may not have gone on record about Fred, but “when asked the inevitable question as to which was his favorite dance partner, Astaire usually gave the flip answer: ‘Bing Crosby.’”<sup>2</sup>

The partnership reveals both similarities and contrasts. The initial parallel is simply their rare qualities as performers: the genius of Astaire was making it appear that anyone could dance as he did; the genius of Crosby was that he made it seem anyone could sing like him. Both had success before going into film, but once they were established in film their careers settled. Crosby had his many radio programs along with his films, while Astaire worked almost

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered at the conference *Bing! Crosby and American Culture* at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY, in 2002.

Special thanks to Bradford Conner, Robert Tieman, and especially Regina Roberts for their help in reading and critiquing this paper.

<sup>2</sup>Tim Satchell, *Astaire: The Biography* (London: Hutchinson, Ltd., 1987): 205.

exclusively in film; later both would turn to television for regular “special” presentations. Both turned their backs on live performance at critical points in their careers, in both cases because of the control it gave them over the final product, but Crosby returned to live performance late in his career, with — perhaps to his surprise — happy results.

As singers, Crosby and Astaire were the beneficiaries of songs written by the era’s leading songwriters, and both introduced many songs that went on to become “standards”. Even here, though, they diverged. Both were well served by Irving Berlin and Harold Arlen. Crosby had a lengthy association with Johnny Burke, and many Crosby songs came from Burke, in partnerships with Jimmy Van Heusen and James V. Monaco. Cole Porter was important to Astaire’s career, writing *Night and Day* (in the score for *The Gay Divorcee*) at a critical point in Astaire’s life when he first worked without his sister Adele; even though Crosby appeared in two film versions of *Anything Goes*, it was only late in Cole Porter’s life that Porter wrote a score for Crosby (*High Society*). In retrospect, though, it seems no surprise that it was Irving Berlin who wrote the scores for their two joint films.<sup>3</sup>

Crosby quickly established his on- and off-screen persona of the friendly, relaxed, casual, even a bit lazy, fellow; with his trademark crushed hat and pipe. Astaire was debonaire, using the top hat and tails as his emblem, in contrast with Crosby’s casual attire. Over the years, Astaire developed a justified reputation for hard work. He was famous for his desire to rehearse

---

<sup>3</sup>Of other songwriters at the time Astaire had nothing written for him by Richard Rodgers over his career (though the idea for *Shall We Dance* came from a project that Rodgers & Hart wanted to do with Astaire); Crosby had one Rodgers & Hart film, *Mississippi*. Somehow Crosby missed the Gershwins; Astaire’s career was closely tied up with that of George and Ira. Kern gave Astaire *Roberta* and *Swing Time*, but nothing for Crosby. Revel & Gordon did write songs for both, though they are associated more with Crosby. Harry Warren also contributed songs to films for both. Robin & Rainger wrote for Crosby, with nothing for Astaire.

endlessly, even after a routine seemed perfected (his sister Adele found it maddening that he would keep refining a routine long after a show was into its run). This was mirrored in many of his film rôles in which his character is obsessed with show biz. In the fourteen films before *Holiday Inn*, it was only in *Carefree* that Astaire played someone who was *not* a performer. Appearances aside, Crosby achieved and sustained his career through his own high standard of professionalism. It was Astaire who retired (more than once), while Crosby worked up until the very end of his life.

By the time of *Holiday Inn*, the Crosby persona was well in place, and one with which the film-going public was quite comfortable (Crosby's startling change of form, *The Country Girl*, was in 1954). Gerald Mast in *Can't Help Singin'* calls him "The most comfortable personality in American film musicals. The comfort was the personality. Nothing was very serious or important to Crosby — as either a character in a film or an interpreter of a song. He slid through a song the way he slid through life — laid back and hanging loose."<sup>4</sup> As described by Gary Giddens in *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams, the Early Years, 1903-1940*, the Bing characters in *Holiday Inn* and *Blue Skies* reflect the characteristics of the on-screen persona developed at the outset of his film career, ". . .his movie character, established in his first feature, would remain fairly constant from one film to the next. Audiences would presume the man onscreen was no different at home: exceptionally likeable if, as revealed in *The Big Broadcast*, not entirely admirable."<sup>5</sup> Artie Shaw, quoted by Giddens, also saw a similar style, "He

---

<sup>4</sup>Gerald Mast, *Can't Help Singin'* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1987): 223.

<sup>5</sup>Gary Giddens, *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams, the Early Years, 1903-1940* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2001): 287.

developed a screen personality that worked because it was based on who he wanted to be — casual, relaxed. But it was a tense sort of relaxing because you knew he was working at it. Bing wasn't Bing any more than Bogart was Bogart.”<sup>6</sup> In books covering Crosby's films, one consistently encounters descriptions of his character and/or performance as “easy-going”, “affable”, “agreeable,” “a nice, ordinary fellow.”

The Astaire film persona was no less developed than Crosby's at the time of *Holiday Inn*. While the cares of the world may not overwhelm Astaire's characters, those characters nonetheless have pursuits in which they are relentless. Invariably the non-romantic pursuits relate to show business: he is a dancer appearing in or creating a show. Romantically, he is always quite single-minded in his pursuit of his leading lady. Like Crosby, his on-screen character relies on a great deal of charm to get him through whatever problems life — or unresponsive ladies — put in his way.

Gerald Mast directly compares Crosby and Astaire, “In contrast to the formal precision of Astaire's song style, Crosby simply opened his mouth to let the words and notes of a song slide out.”<sup>7</sup> Giddens, quotes Ken Barnes who had first-hand experience of their contrasting approaches,

Fred “treated every vocal like a choreographic routine. He would want to know what happened here, did he hear the brass there — he was very precise. Whereas Bing would just say ‘Well, the tempo's good, the key's fine. I'll leave it to you fellows.’”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Artie Shaw quoted in Giddens, op. cit., 264, from a personal interview.

<sup>7</sup>Mast, op. cit., 223.

<sup>8</sup>Giddens, op. cit., quoting Barnes, 513-514.

Crosby's laid-back style and Astaire's precision share much, though, and achieve similar results. Foremost is the innate musicality of their response to a tune. Bing, the band singer, is aware of what the instruments are doing and how to phrase accordingly. Astaire, the dancer, finds the rhythms and for him singing becomes another way of dancing. More so, the two anchor their interpretations in text, making it direct and conversational. While Fred is willing, and often forced by the composer, to venture into uncomfortable parts of his voice (even resorting to falsetto), neither singer feels forced in his singing, or ever strives to create affects that are not naturally part of their vocal equipment.

As film actors, neither Astaire nor Crosby fit the conventional mold of romantic leading men (Giddens makes the perceptive comment that Crosby was “. . . a highly unorthodox film idol, one who always got the girl yet was most admired for playing a celibate.”<sup>9</sup>) Both, in fact, were playing romantic leads at ages far more advanced than Hollywood tended to allow in such rôles. In these two films, as was the case in other of their features, there are no other strong masculine figures.<sup>10</sup> This is no accident. If they had to compete with a conventional leading man for the same girl, it would seem ludicrous for Astaire or Crosby to be the winner. In two films, *Roberta* and *Follow the Fleet*, Randolph Scott is Astaire's male co-star, but Scott's romantic interest is never Ginger Rogers. In both stories, Fred already knows and has (or had) a working partnership with Ginger, which leaves Scott free to pursue Irene Dunne (*Roberta*) and Harriet Hilliard (*Follow the Fleet*). In *Holiday Inn* Walter Abel provides contrast as Danny Reed, the daffy and

---

<sup>9</sup>Giddens, op. cit., 292.

<sup>10</sup>This is not quite as prevalent in Crosby's films as in Astaire's. However, in these two films the lack of a strong masculine figure – in terms of Hollywood's view of that type – is quite evident.

overwrought producer of Astaire's shows; certainly no threat romantically. Even less threatening romantically is the highly effeminate Billy DeWolfe in *Blue Skies* playing a character who is not even given a last name: he is merely Tony, Crosby's right-hand man.

It is the dancing (and to some extent the singing) of Astaire and the singing of Crosby that gave them qualities that transcended convention and made them acceptable for many years as leading men in romantic films. Through song and romantic dance they are able to convincingly woo their various partners.

From 1939 to 1946, Astaire was working for a variety of studios, usually paired with one of the studio's musical stars, regardless of the appropriateness of the pairing. Gerald Mast describes the pairing of Astaire and Crosby as one in which "Fred drops in on yet another studio's star."<sup>11</sup> While true in terms of Astaire's career at the time, it does a disservice to the abilities of both performers. The view of Edward Galfant in *Astaire & Rogers* is perhaps more cogent: "*Holiday Inn* gives the strategy of pairing Astaire with another male player a different dimension through the use of an unambiguously major star: Bing Crosby. The established personas of the two stars seem to underpin an apparently clear set of differences between them, laid out in the film's opening scenes."<sup>12</sup>

The pairing did not equal that of Astaire with Ginger Rogers or, perhaps more relevant to this conference, that of Crosby with Bob Hope. Nonetheless, one of the great aspects of Astaire's film career, and one that is often overlooked or misunderstood, was his ability to adjust

---

<sup>11</sup>Mast, op. cit., 164.

<sup>12</sup>Edward Galfant, *Astaire & Rogers*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 162.

his dancing to that of his partner. For example, John Mueller sees Astaire's work with Eleanor Powell in *Broadway Melody of 1940* from the point of view of Astaire's style, ". . . those dances seem to be much closer in sensibility to Astaire than to Powell."<sup>13</sup> I disagree. Astaire very much adapts to Powell's aggressive style, a style which does not lend itself to conveying romance as did the ballroom-based dancing he did with Rogers.<sup>14</sup> In terms of his on-screen relationship with Crosby, dancing was not an issue, since Astaire would handle the dancing and Crosby the singing. What is new for Astaire is that in these two films he adjusted his on-screen persona to allow Bing's to remain intact. In both films Fred turns out to be the "heavy."<sup>15</sup> This is not to say, however, that his characters are devoid of charm.

In *Holiday Inn* Ted Hanover (Astaire) tries to steal first one girl (Lila Dixon, portrayed by Virginia Dale), then a second (Linda Mason, played by Marjorie Reynolds), from Jim Hardy (Crosby). In both cases the initial motivation is show business, with romance apparently developing. Either way, he meets with no success. He thinks he is about to be engaged to Lila Dixon at the beginning of the film, but she is also drawn to Jim Hardy. Initially she decides to stay in show business with Ted, but eventually dumps them both by running off with a Texas oil

---

<sup>13</sup>John Mueller, *Astaire Dancing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985): 167.

<sup>14</sup>In his years of dancing with Adele, she was always the star of the duo. Fred was used to supporting her, and therefore it came naturally to support any partner, even when he became a star on his own. Thus, it should be no surprise that he always was willing to make his partners look as good as he did.

<sup>15</sup>Even their character names reflect the relationship: Astaire is Ted in *Holiday Inn* and Jed in *Blue Skies*, both of which rhyme with Fred, thus identifying his character with the hardworking show biz professional aspect his screen persona. Bing has the very normal names of Jim (*Holiday Inn*) and Johnny (*Blue Skies*), which can be seen as reinforcing his well-developed screen persona.

millionaire.

Bing, as Jim Hardy, is exactly as a contemporary audience would expect, playing a laid-back songwriter/performer who has tired of eight shows a week in New York and moved to a Connecticut farm where he can smoke his pipe and present shows at the farm only on holidays — creating his “Holiday Inn.” The film revolves around the tension between the different show business aspirations of Ted and Jim, a tension that cannot be resolved romantically as were the conflicts in the Astaire/Rogers films. These different aspirations are based on the contrast between the screen personas of Astaire and Crosby: Hanover/Astaire is dedicated to show business, Hardy/Crosby wants to take it easy.

Romantic tension is not ignore, however, and centers on who will get Linda Mason. Jim does put up a fight and on more than one occasion attempts to manipulate events to his advantage, but only as long as the result is that he can stay put at Holiday Inn. Giddens sums it up, “When in *Holiday Inn* a Hollywood producer besieges him with offers other entertainers would die for, he gazes around at his isolated homestead and complains: the idea that he could be left alone to hibernate with his talent was too good to be true.”<sup>16</sup> Apparently he is willing to give up Linda rather than the Inn. They do separate, so that Linda can pursue her show business career (under the guidance of Ted), but when she is rumored to be engaged to Ted, Jim finally takes truly aggressive action: a trip to Los Angeles (where she is making a film) to break up the engagement and regain Linda. At the end of the story, in terms of the customary “who gets the girl” ending, Jim is partnered with Linda. Ted and Lila become a couple at the end, more by default in order to create a happy ending than by their own choice.

---

<sup>16</sup>Giddens, op. cit., 583.

What is of interest here is the relationship of Astaire and Crosby not as characters, but as performers. Astaire and Crosby share two numbers, though overall they appear together in five. Their second pairing, *I Can't Tell a Lie*, has Bing seated at a harpsichord leading the Bob Crosby band in a colonial-era-style number celebrating Washington's birthday in which Fred and Marjorie Reynolds do a formal dance which is interrupted regularly by Crosby's prearranged jazz interpolations. Crosby does not sing or dance in this number, so the sharing does not reflect their performing styles. The film's opening number, *I'll Capture Your Heart*, was written by Irving Berlin specifically to point up the contrast of the singing hoofer and the hoofing singer. The song draws on the "play within a play" tradition, presented in the film as one of the Ted Hanover/Jim Hardy team's show pieces. In it Hanover and Hardy compete for the affections of Lila, arguing over which will sway her affections, singing or dancing. The competition is friendly, with even the "nasty" tricks they pull on each other conveying humor rather than malice. (The malice, in fact, appears later in the film in the Washington's birthday number, though still with comic effect.) However, off-stage, both men truly are competing for her affections. On stage and off, Lila will prove to have her own opinion on the matter.

In this routine Astaire is saddled with not one but two inferior dancers. Dale moves nicely, but is not capable of the kind of footwork that Rogers, Cyd Charisse, or even Rita Hayworth could deliver (Dale later partners Astaire and is also the subject of a song and dance ironically titled *You're Easy to Dance With*). Astaire does nothing to show them up. His complicated steps are the solo spots in the song; with the other two he moves appropriately.

Otherwise, in this film Astaire dances either with Marjorie Reynolds (better than Dale, but again no rival to Rogers or Charisse), or in one solo number (though the "drunken" number,

again using the music of *You're Easy to Dance With*, has solo sections). Throughout the film Ted is the bad penny who keeps turning up just when Jim and Linda think that their next holiday show is set and not to be burdened with Ted's presence. When they capitulate and let him stay, Astaire/Hanover gets his biggest solo in the film in the Fourth of July sequence, *Say It With Firecrackers*.

*Blue Skies* proves to be a recycling of the *Holiday Inn* formula in its basic set-up of the Astaire and Crosby characters and their relationship. The story is told through a lengthy flashback. As the film opens, Astaire is seen in a radio studio as "Jed Potter, in my anecdote."<sup>17</sup> No explanation is given as to why Potter is a radio personality, and the story he tells is unfinished, but it jumps back immediately to its beginning where Jed is the star of a stage show and is wooing Mary O'Hara, played by Joan Caulfield. As was the case with the two ladies in *Holiday Inn*, his interest in her is both professional and romantic.

Apparently Potter and Johnny Adams (Crosby), have been a show-biz duo, though by the start of the flashback story the partnership has dissolved and Potter makes no reference to it in the early scenes of the film. We do not meet Johnny Adams until Jed takes Mary to dinner at Johnny's nightclub; Johnny has left show-biz to run a nightclub, where he can make easy money and occasionally "annoy the guests with a song." Mary and Johnny are immediately drawn to one another, much to Jed's dismay. Mary and Johnny do marry, though Johnny himself advises against it, pointing out — more than once — that he is shiftless and that their life will be one of instability. In *Holiday Inn* Crosby, as Jim Hardy, only wants to work on holidays and otherwise

---

<sup>17</sup>The name Potter is a nice self-reference for Astaire. At the time he was married to his first wife, Phyllis, the former Mrs. Potter.

take it easy; in *Blue Skies* the shiftlessness proves to be that he quickly bores of the club he is running and sells it; “the act of turning one concept for a nightclub into reality leads only to the imagining of another”.<sup>18</sup> At first he is only changing venues within New York, but later he changes cities as well with each sale of a club.

Astaire’s character, as in *Holiday Inn*, tries to manipulate the situation to his own advantage and to keep Mary to himself. He does not succeed, becomes bitter, and turns to drink, with disastrous results in the final production number, *Heat Wave*, in which he falls off a platform, thus ending his dancing career (and, one assumes, replacing it with his unexplained radio career).

Irving Berlin created another duet for Astaire and Crosby, on the same premise as *I’ll Capture Your Heart*, this time even more specifically contrasting the singing hooper and hoofing singer, with *A Couple of Song and Dance Men* (“I’m the song”, “I’m the Dance”). Johnny happens to drop in on one of Jed’s rehearsals and they recreate an old vaudeville routine, one in which Johnny participates physically without being responsible for too much dancing — much of the routines consist of impressions of various character types.

This is the only number in the film in which Crosby and Astaire perform together (unlike *Holiday Inn* where they appear together in five sequences). While it is musically as interesting as *I’ll Capture Your Heart*, it has less potential as a production number. Its initial humor is based on the idea that Crosby cannot dance, then it gives way to the various impressions, most of which were tired by the time the film was made. Mueller, in *Astaire Dancing*, notes that “the dance mostly seems a commentary on Crosby’s famous laziness about

---

<sup>18</sup>Gallafent, op. cit., 199.

rehearsals. There is nothing inherently very funny — or even interesting — in demonstrating that Fred Astaire is a better dancer than Bing Crosby.”<sup>19</sup>

Again, Fred accommodates Bing in this number, allowing the song to be pitched in a key lower than what is best for his voice. Since the dance contrast is built in, Astaire does not particularly need to adjust his style to Crosby’s, though the sequence of impressions does not show off either to any advantage.

Overall in *Blue Skies*, the contrast between Astaire and Crosby is in the characters they play. As in *Holiday Inn*, Astaire’s character is driven, manipulative, given to drink, and generally less pleasant than the persona he developed in pictures from the RKO years (though still with a certain charm). In *Blue Skies*, Potter/Astaire’s drinking provides not the amusement of *Holiday Inn*, but is the direct cause of his downfall (literally and figuratively) as a performer, and the end of his career as a dancer. As in *Holiday Inn*, this unpleasant persona provides a contrast to Adams/Crosby which makes his laziness and lack of incentive seem charming, rather than a character flaw. The script of *Blue Skies* does occasionally attempt to put Johnny’s behavior in a bad light, as when Mary takes him to task and says that it is damaging their marriage. However, these moments are never developed and seem to exist only to give Mary an excuse for leaving Johnny. After their divorce, Mary is briefly engaged to Jed, mirroring the Ted/Linda engagement in *Holiday Inn*.

At the end of the film, Jed has invited Johnny to sing a song to end the radio broadcast. While he is singing Mary suddenly appears, and as both the broadcast and film end, she leaves on the arms of both men. It is unclear to whom she is returning: Johnny, Jed, or some compromise

---

<sup>19</sup>Mueller, op. cit., 269-70.

with both men in her life. *Blue Skies*, unlike *Holiday Inn*, does not provide a second tomato love interest to ensure that both men are paired up at the end; if Mary returns it is almost inevitable that the ending must be ambiguous.

*Blue Skies* does have a second girl — Olga San Juan playing Nita Nova, whose sole purpose is to partner Astaire and Crosby in various numbers as needed. With no explanations, she appears both as a partner to Johnny in his nightclub acts and as a partner to Jed in his stage shows. She ends the film seeming quite cozy with Tony (Billy DeWolfe) who knows her through his work at the various nightclubs. Her rôle in the story is never a romantic one and the pairing with Tony, as they sit in the studio audience at the end of Jed's broadcast, seems a forced pairing.<sup>20</sup>

The 1975 recording session is an interesting coda to the Astaire-Crosby performing partnership, and one that again seems inevitable, particularly given Crosby's performing style. In reference to Crosby's early recordings, Giddens makes the perceptive comment (and one that is applicable to this recording session, too) that, "The pop vocal duet is a peculiar art. Though obviously assisted by compatible vocal ranges, it is absolutely dependent on personal empathy. Bing was never more honest and affably himself than in duets."<sup>21</sup> Personal empathy is the hallmark of these performances.

Ken Barnes, in his book *The Crosby Years*, gives the best retelling of how the album

---

<sup>20</sup>This can be seen as perhaps a way to prove the DeWolfe character's masculinity. Gallafent posits that the pairing "seems to assure us that at least some stories — however accidentally — can still end on a clearly positive note". Gallafent, op. cit., 200.

<sup>21</sup>Giddens, op. cit., 512.

came to be. “Negotiations were already in progress for me to record a solo album with Fred and while this album was being planned Alan Warner suggested that it might be a good idea if we made two albums with Fred.”<sup>22</sup> There was some discussion of what this might be, and then it turned out that Bing would be in London at the same time that Fred would be there making the recordings. The decision was made to approach them about doing a duet album. Crosby agreed without hesitation though, in his usual style, with initially no outward indication of interest. “He looked directly at me with a rather stony expression on his face, stood up, shook my hand and then broke into a broad smile and said ‘Count me in. And let me see the material as soon as possible.’”<sup>23</sup> Astaire, initially skeptical about a duet album, also agreed readily when he learned that his partner would be Crosby. The only concern was who would get top billing, with both men gladly deferring to the other, Astaire arguing that “If this were a dancing record there might be some point to the argument — but it’s a vocal record and Bing is the daddy in that department. And that’s that.”<sup>24</sup> In response to this Barnes and Pete Moore wrote a new song for the album called, appropriately, *Top Billing*.

Due to travel commitments, early “routining” sessions were done individually. It was with these that the great contrast in the Astaire and Crosby working styles then came into play. The producers paid only one visit to the Crosby house “which consisted of one hour and a half around the piano during which time Bing would sing each song through no more than twice —

---

<sup>22</sup>Ken Barnes, *The Crosby Years* (New York: St. Martin’s Press 1980): 47.

<sup>23</sup>Barnes, *op. cit.*, 48.

<sup>24</sup>Barnes, *op. cit.*, 49.

once for the key and then once gain for the tempo.”<sup>25</sup> Astaire, on the other hand, was his usual perfectionist self, requiring nine rehearsals, each lasting at least three hours.

When the recording date arrived, Astaire wanted at least three hours of preparation beforehand; Crosby felt all that would be needed was about a half-hour. Needless to say, Bing won out.

A studio album of songs, of course, presents the two in a different partnership than a film does. Astaire tends to be overlooked as a singer because of his dancing, yet as stated earlier, what informs his dancing also informs his singing. Crosby was revolutionary in using the microphone to create his conversational singing style. Often overlooked in the appreciation of that style is that Crosby, too, had a strong rhythmic sense. Combine it with Astaire’s ability to be conversational and the two are found to have remarkably compatible styles, which will come across more clearly on recording than on film.

The recording, having no plot to dictate character, allows them a greater opportunity than in film to take pleasure in each other’s company, personally and artistically. Both films relied on conflict in delineating the two; the recording allows them to approach the songs each in their own context. Given that this is a recording and not a film, it is not surprising that Bing’s style rises more to the fore than does Fred’s. In fact, Astaire was uncertain of his own ability to handle the regular ad libs that Bing sprinkled throughout the sessions. Barnes set up some routines to allow both to ad lib, which gave Fred confidence. “But more often than not, Crosby would be one jump ahead of us and at the crucial point in the routine he would hit Fred with a completely different line. And yet, for some reason, Fred — who claimed to be a poor ad-libber — would

---

<sup>25</sup>Barnes, *op. cit.*, 49.

rise to the occasion by coming back with an equally funny remark. The result was that most of the ad-libs in that album were absolutely genuine.”<sup>26</sup>

Finally, a note on their respective ages. When these recordings were made Astaire was 76, Crosby 71. They are in wonderful voice, and certainly have lost none of their style over the years. These recordings are treasures in the careers of both men.

The pairing of Astaire and Crosby was not as lengthy, or ultimately enduring in popular culture, as the Astaire/Rogers and Crosby/Hope pairings. Their two films did not give them the opportunity to create the comic rapport of the Crosby/Hope pairing, and the Hollywood-created conflict of their styles was becoming stale in the second film. As is so often the case in show business careers, circumstances dictated events — the opportunity to bring Astaire and Crosby together again never arose and Crosby already had unexpectedly struck gold in 1940 with the first *Road* film, creating an enduring partnership with Bob Hope. The Astaire/Crosby pairing did, however, create one of Hollywood’s classic films in *Holiday Inn*. As Ira Gershwin wrote, “who could ask for anything more”?

---

<sup>26</sup>Barnes, op. cit., 51-52.

## **Bibliography**

Astaire, Fred, *Steps in Time* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959)

Barnes, Ken, *The Crosby Years* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1980)

Billman, Larry, *Fred Astaire: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997)

Gallafent, Edward, *Astaire & Rogers*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)

Giddins, Gary, *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams, the Early Years, 1903-1940* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2001)

Mast, Gerald, *Can't Help Singin'* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1987)

Mueller, John, *Astaire Dancing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985)

Satchell, Tim, *Astaire: The Biography* (London: Hutchinson, Ltd., 1987)

Suskin, Steven, *Show Tunes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2000)