

**CHRISTMAS TV SPECIALS &
MOVIES OF THE 1970s**

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BearManor Media

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Introduction

I wrote this book because I love Christmas. I've loved it from childhood onward. Of course, as a child part of what I loved was waiting to see what I got in my stocking from Santa Claus on Christmas morning and the fun of playing with my new toys with my brother and sister and friends.

As I have grown older that love of Christmas never left me. I still enjoyed the gift exchange, but I also loved the whole package: snow, decorations, the tree, caroling, church, driving around looking at Christmas lights, Christmas dinner, reading Dickens.

I also love that post-Thanksgiving period thru Christmas day watching Christmas movies and TV shows. On Thanksgiving night, we usually watch *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947) because it incorporates both holidays—Thanksgiving Day thru Christmas day. I can quite honestly say that I have almost every Christmas movie ever made in my library. So, during the Christmas season we are watching such classics as *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Bishop's Wife*, *White Christmas*, *Remember the Night* and several versions of *A Christmas Carol* along with more contemporary fare like *Elf*, and *Love Actually*.

What I miss are the Christmas specials I grew up with. I particularly recall with nostalgia those Christmas specials of the 1970's. Oh yeah, in our household we grew up watching variety specials starring golden oldies like Bing Crosby, Perry Como, Andy Williams, Dean Martin, Bob Hope, but also younger and more diverse entertainers like Mac Davis, Johnny Cash, John Denver and The Carpenters. These prime-time specials certainly put us in the mood.

Naturally being a child, we grew up watching those great Christmas cartoons of the 1960's—*A Charlie Brown Christmas*, *Rudolph*

the Red-Nosed Reindeer, The Grinch Who Stole Christmas, Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol, and Frosty the Snowman. The 1970's saw even more, including: *Santa Claus is Coming to Town, The Night Before Christmas, Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, The Year Without a Santa Claus, Frosty's Winter Wonderland, The Stingiest Man in Town, Rudolph's Shiny New Year*—as well as yuletide offerings from old friends like Bugs Bunny and Fred Flintstone.

It was during the 1970's that we saw the rise of made for television movies at a pace we never had before, and the Christmas season was tailor made for such films. Probably the most memorable one was *The Homecoming* (1971) which spawned the beloved television series *The Waltons*. In addition to *The Homecoming* there was *The House Without a Christmas Tree, It Happened One Christmas, A Dream for Christmas, The Young Pioneers Christmas, The Gathering, The Gift, Father Knows Best: Home for Christmas, An American Christmas Carol, The Nativity, The Man in the Santa Claus Suit* and many others that are profiled in this book.

This book will profile those three great areas—Christmas variety specials, Christmas animated specials and Christmas television movies—OF THE 1970's. These are new programs produced during specific years and so, don't expect to see Christmas shows before 1970 or after 1979 profiled (at least not in this edition).

What you will see are the date and network of the special (ah, back when we had basically, ABC, CBS and NBC), cast lists, a synopsis of what happens on the special, movie or cartoon. Songs that are sung on the variety shows, behind the scenes stories, newspaper accounts, reviews and in many cases how the special/movie fared in the network ratings for the week it was broadcast.

I imagine you thumbing through the book through the holidays and if one or more of these more than 100 specials profiled interest you that you will seek them out. Many of them are on DVD and You Tube.

So let us return to those days of yester year and sit back in a cozy chair and remember those great Christmas specials, cartoons, and movies of the 1970's.

Charles Tranberg
Madison, Wisconsin

Chapter One

The Bing Crosby Christmas Specials

1970-1979

Bing Crosby, more than any other performer of his era is identified by Christmas. Probably the chief reason for it is his rendition of the Christmas chestnut, “White Christmas”, written by Irving Berlin. It is the best-selling Christmas song of all time and the best-selling single, according to *Guinness World Records*.

Crosby first publicly sang “White Christmas” on his radio show, “The Kraft Music Hall” on Christmas Day, 1941. The lyrics had special meaning on this Christmas—the first since the attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into World War II.

Crosby entertained the troops during WWII extensively during World War II but found that he was reluctant to sing “White Christmas”. “I hesitated about doing it because invariably it caused such a nostalgic yearning among the men, that it made them sad,” Crosby later said in an interview. “Heaven knows, I didn’t come that far to make them sad. For this reason, several times I tried to cut it out of the show, but these guys just hollered for it.”

But Crosby had begun recording Christmas songs prior to this. The first Christmas carols Crosby reluctantly recorded came in 1935 when he recorded “Silent Night” and “Adeste Fidelis” for Decca Records. He finally was persuaded but donated the proceeds to charity. In fact, he recorded more than 70 Christmas songs during his long career.

In addition to the music that Crosby sang he became associated with the holiday with his annual Christmas specials both on radio

and later television. Crosby has also starred in several films that have had meaning to the holiday-- *Holiday Inn*, *White Christmas*, *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*.

The Bing Crosby Christmas Special (December 16, 1970-NBC)

Guests: Jack Wild, Melba Moore, The Doodletown Pipers and the Crosby Family. Sponsored by The Bell System.

Bing's first family Christmas special of the new decade (with seven more to go) with wife Kathryn and their children, Harry, 12, Mary Frances, 11, and Nathaniel, 9. The guests include the (at that time) very popular Jack Wild (Oscar nominated for his splendid performance as the Artful Dodger in *Oliver!* and more recently the star of the popular children's TV show *HR Puffnstuff*.) Singer-actress Melba Moore had won a Tony Award that year for her performance in the Broadway musical *Purlie*. The Doodletown Pipers were popular on television during this late 60's and early 70's due to their squeaky-clean image as opposed to the more daring rock acts of the day.

Highlights include an extended production number featuring Bing as a King who gives his crown to a "fool" (Jack Wild) for one day. Bing plays a street corner Santa Claus to Melba Moore's Salvation Army worker intruding on each other's territory. The Doodletown Pipers perform an energetic production number about Christmas mail.

Musical highlights include Bing singing "Do You Hear What I Hear?" and "Christmas is for Children." Melba Moore solos on "Love in the Large Size" and "What Child is This" and joins Bing for "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." Jack Wild sings and dances to "Topsy-Turvy Time." And then engagingly sings "Little Town of Bethlehem." The Crosby children sing "Jingle Bells" and Bing and Kathryn duet on "Sleigh Ride". Kathryn and Mary Frances sing "Away in the Manger" and the entire cast join in for "O