



BURL IVES— Just a Gypsy at Heart

This versatile performer juggles several successful careers but doesn't take them too seriously—his restless spirit won't let him

by PEER J. OPPENHEIMER

TO BURL IVES, the only place to be in time of crisis is on the open sea. Whenever things are going badly—and often when they're not—he's liable to drop everything and sail off on his 32-foot sloop.

With this versatile singer-actor-writer, sailing isn't just a hobby; it's an obsession and has been for more than 20 years. Burl's boat is his assurance that he'll never have to settle down in one place for long, and he wouldn't be happy without that assurance.

Born 50 years ago on a farm in Illinois, Ives began displaying maverick qualities early. But wanderlust really set in while he was studying at Eastern State Teachers College. "One morning," he recalls, "I left right in the middle of a class with 15 cents in my pocket and a banjo slung over my shoulder."

He hitchhiked across the country, singing folk songs for his meals (a hobby begun in childhood). There were times when his singing wouldn't buy him a cup of coffee, and he was forced to take any job to keep going. But however lonely and fatiguing his uncertain existence was, the demon within him never let him rest:

"I kept growing tired of the same faces day in and day out. I would try to talk myself into staying a bit longer, but I was too restless. There were so many places to see, so many people to meet."

He has since admitted: "Traveling is fun only when you can afford to do it in style. For years I was just a bum, living on handouts. Believe me, it sounds more romantic in retrospect than it was."

IVES FINALLY ended up in New York at the depth of the depression. He kept alive through odd jobs and even landed a few bit parts on Broadway. He began to make a name for himself when he got his own radio show on NBC in 1940. World War II interrupted and he went into the Air Corps. Two years later a medical discharge led him back to radio, but he was unable to shake the old feeling of discontent with any sort of permanence.

So he pulled up stakes and toured the country—in style this time—doing the thing he liked best, folk

singing. It became a way of life that made him America's best-loved balladeer. His fame eventually brought him the role of Big Daddy in the play, "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." And when the screen version took him to Hollywood, he found himself with a new career as a dramatic actor.

That career has won him an Oscar and a part opposite Sir Alec Guinness in Columbia's forthcoming "Our Man in Havana."

As an antidote to these spells of "hard work," Burl turns to the sailor's life. On most of his trips, his chief cook, cabin boy, and first mate is his wife

Helen, whom he married in 1945. Their 11-year-old son Alexander has inherited Ives' nautical enthusiasm, and whenever he's not in school, he joins them!

Says Burl of his need to "get away": "There are no ties, no worries, and no obligations on board my boat. That's where I relax, write my books and my songs, or just sit on deck and spit in the ocean. It's the only place where I am really alive. Some men are born to have roots. I don't like responsibilities, like a house and a car and having to be pleasant to neighbors. I'm just a gypsy at heart."

A very successful one, too.



Above, Burl, Alec Guinness, and Jo Morrow in a tense moment from "Our Man in Havana." As soon as the film was completed, Ives headed for his "home" on the open sea, accompanied by his wife Helen and son.