

Witch with heart of gold is Martha Raye

By JOAN CROSBY

HOLLYWOOD—(N.E.A.)—You do a mental doubletake when Martha Raye hands you a picture of herself as Benita Bizarre, the witch she is playing in the new NBC-TV Saturday morning series, Bugaloos.

She's all sequins and feathers. Her hair is made of wildly flying feathers, her nose is upturned, her eyebrows are dark and arched and she is very definitely a spoof of the Phyllis Diller look.

She smiles when you say so. "I know. I just sent Phyllis a copy of the picture. I love her."

Martha Raye, the raucous comedienne, is a quiet, soft-spoken lady in her own home, even though she characterizes herself by saying, "I've always been a slob."

She lives in Bel-Air in a red barn of a house with a picture of Snoopy in a Green Beret on the front door and a shingle hanging out saying, "Maggie's club house." Her den is covered and plaques from service organizations. Martha, 54, has made eight trips to Vietnam and is making her ninth in November.

"Sure you're scared under fire," she says. "But not while



Martha Raye as Benita Bizarre

it's happening. It's later, that night, when you think about it that you get scared."

She's a patriot who says that entertaining the troops is "the most rewarding thing I've ever done in my life. I feel privileged standing next to them."

Bugaloos, the series that brings Martha back to television on a regular basis, is this season's Puf'n'Stuf. It's produced by the Kraft brothers and is fanciful, fast-moving and funny, with original music.

Martha played a witch in the movie version of Puf'n'Stuf, now beginning to be seen in theaters. "I had fun doing her and I liked the character of Benita. She's a Mod witch who lives in a juke box. Benita's kooky and frantic."

Averaging seven guest appearances on variety shows a year, plus stock tours, Vietnam trips and now Bugaloos, keeps Martha as busy as she wants to be. When she's not working, she's a TV addict.

"The world is going nuts anyway," she says. "At least when I'm home watching TV, I can forget some of it."

Martha is a devotee of soap operas and as we were talking, the television set was tuned to one. "She's going to marry him," Martha said, as a doctor kissed a nurse and the nurse complained about the kiss. "Gee," Martha said, "I thought it looked pretty good."

She's a big fan of Carol Burnett. "She's the best. Carol is the most unselfish, delightful human being. She gives a lot to her guests and never worries about herself. I do three or four shows a year with her, and I've never heard her holler. I'm going to take some of her shows to Vietnam to show in the boondocks."

Martha Raye petted one of her four dogs and said, "I started in movies in 1936. Looking back, I'm grateful. I've been blessed with a good life. More so than I deserve."

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