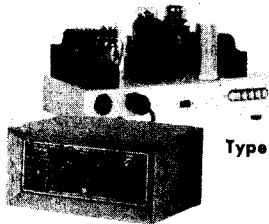


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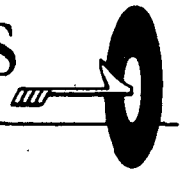
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HITS AND MISSES



I HAVE received three Atlantic LP's of piano music by leaders of "modern jazz"—that general area which includes the dialects described as "be-bop" and "progressive" and "cool" music. All of these words have to do with jazz's recent adaption, in its own highly syncopated field, of devices associated with modern music at large: the elaborate use of augmented chords and passing tones, the eccentric development of the percussion section, a persistent drift toward polytonality or atonality. Along with this there has naturally been a premium on brilliant individual technique.

It is evident in the two ladies and one gentleman under discussion. Mary Lou Williams (Atlantic LP 114, \$3.) is a distinguished veteran of many years of jazz arranging and piano playing. A notably powerful orchestrator for Andy Kirk and His Clouds of Joy, between 1929 and 1942, she went on to write scores for Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington, and recent years have seen her moving steadily into deeper "be-bop" (or "progressive" if you prefer), with never any idea of letting last year's interests represent the last word.

Always an urgent, propulsive pianist, she has become more and more experimental. As with many other modern jazz players, I personally find her dissonantal harmonic *impasto* a little too unrelievedly thick for my taste; in recent works she has sometimes seemed not only "cool" but also rather cloying. She is, however, invariably interesting, and on this record there is a charming "Mary's Waltz" which might have come from some more ornate admirer and pal of Erik Satie's. Her other selections are "Surrey with the Fringe on Top," "Pagliacci," "Opus 2," "From This Moment On," "S' Wonderful," "You're the Cream in My Coffee," and "In the Purple Grotto."

Billy Taylor (Atlantic LP 113, \$3.) is another remarkable technician, holding a formal Bachelorhood of Music from Virginia State College, and informal gauds and honors as a former pianist for "Dizzy" Gillespie and Machito's pungent Afro-Cubans. Here there is a great deal to listen to, and my chief complaint is not with cooling or cloying so much as with a persistent lushness which I wish would dry out from time to time. Like his idol-

ized Art Tatum, Taylor is a pianist who does not seem to entertain much admiration for the musical rest, for, in short, the uses of silence. He plays what are for me altogether too sleek, well-lubricated, ornamental versions of "Willow Weep for Me," "The Very Thought of You," "Somebody Loves Me," "Good Groove," "Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams," "What Is There to Say?," "If I Had You," and "Thou Swell."

MY favorite of the three pianists is Barbara Carroll (Atlantic LP 132, \$3.) who has the sparing quality I miss in Mary Lou Williams and Billy Taylor, albeit Carroll is a busy pianist as old-fashioned chording professors go and has any amount of animated, elegance. Working out of Worcester, Mass., via the New England Conservatory of Music, she brings a supple modern vocabulary to jazz playing and an over-all shaping of the chorus, or set of choruses, which seems to me quite unusual. I have the feeling that in the recent preoccupation with thickly augmented harmonies, many jazz players' minds have been dominantly vertical and that the horizontal virtues are in constant danger of getting lost. But not in Barbara Carroll's hands. With great deftness and swank, she performs "Taking a Chance on Love," "Tis Autumn," "They Can't Take That Away from Me," "The Lady's in Love with You," "You Took Advantage of Me," "Autumn in New York," "Love of My Life," and "My Funny Valentine."

A fine quartet of Dixieland numbers appears from the California front—Bob Scobey's Frisco Band playing "Wolverine Blues" and "Coney Island Washboard" (Good Time Jazz No. 49, 89c) and "Beale Street Mama" and "That's a Plenty" (Good Time Jazz No. 50, 89c). Scobey has been well known as the trumpeter for Turk Murphy's brass-bound little combination, and here, with some of the same men plus the splendid clarinetist Albert Nicholas, he gives a superbly breezy account of his materials. Formal musical experiment is as conspicuously absent here as it is obvious in the pianists under previous consideration, but there are many old school nuances and all the vigor one could want.

—WILDER HOBSON.

The Binaural Increment

READERS who attended the Audio Fair in New York last fall or the IRE (Institute of Radio Engineers) show this March, or who can be in Chicago for its first Audio Fair this spring, May 23-24, will be among the few so far initiated into a basic new way of recording that will have a large influence on music lovers as soon as it is reduced to practical dimensions for the home—which may be within the year. Binaural recording, now introduced commercially by Magnecord, Inc., makes a practicality, if a working compromise, out of a principle discussed in this department in September 1947—two-eared recording. The Binaural Magnecorder, a complete portable system for making two simultaneous recordings on one tape, one for each ear, is now on the market and the chances that a binaural tape library will be forthcoming are excellent.

To be sure, this preliminary development is not for the slim purse. The recorder is for the affluent (about \$900) or, more practically, for schools and institutions of many sorts who can use it not only to record music, but for a host of new analytical uses in music study and in such unmusical matters as conference recordings where three of four people talking heatedly at once can be understood separately via binaural recording; also, for an assortment of special industrial uses. However, Magnecord is going all-out for music now, and it is this column's firm conviction that with the proper tying-in of a number of recent developments in low-cost 'quality' sound reproduction binaural music can soon be in the homes of those who can afford a middle-priced tape machine in the \$400 class, eventually going lower when cheaper dual-track machines are converted to binaural sound.

What is binaural music? We hear "live" music with two ears, as we see the players with two eyes, each ear and each eye receiving its own special message. Flat photographs are one-eyed—taken through a single camera. Normal records are one-eared. The stereo photograph is double, one picture for each eye, the two blended for three-dimensioned sight; the binaural recording is also double, two separate recordings picked up by two mikes ears-apart and fed through separate systems to dual tracks locked together on a single tape. (So far double recording is impractical on disc but obviously simple on the two-track

tape machine now so common.) When one of these tracks is played, separately, into the ear via earphones, and when the recording is rightly done, we have a species of reproduction that is just plain incredible. The phones are not there—we hear "through" them and find ourselves surrounded by actual music, life-size. We can point to instruments in various directions, though this, I must emphasize, is *not* of importance in binaural music. Principally, we get a tremendous sense of immediate presence and depth of perspective that easily matches the striking effect of a good stereo picture.

Earphones are a nuisance. Why not speakers? Theoretically it won't work; the recordings are mixed and both ears hear both speakers, spoiling the binaural effect. But in practice Magnecord's experiments have shown what this writer has long suspected, that even a partial binaural effect can do wonders for music. If two speakers are set in two room corners, so that your left ear hears the left hand one loudest and the right ear the right hand one, there is a binaural effect of sorts, perhaps 30 per cent. Even so, it works. Naturally (as some may be thinking) the realism is helped along by the mere fact of two speakers in two corners that always works. But "AB" tests I have already heard (Magnecord will demonstrate for you) show convincingly that one recording played through two speakers is *not* the same as two recordings, one for each.

The audible gain here in musical realism might be called the Binaural Increment. With a wrongly miked binaural recording the Increment is virtually nil. The second track contributes little. But under optimum conditions (and we are far from sure yet what they are) the Increment is truly wonderful. If you get to hear the binaural demonstration, ask for the tape of a high-school choir singing spirituals. You won't soon forget it! Others may not be so good.

This avid experimenter has just received a binaural machine from the company and plans to plaster a large amount of tape with two-eared music to see what's what. Rumor tells already of planned trips to Europe with binaural equipment, to initiate a permanent binaural library of music on tape. A lot of experimenting is still to be done, as usual, but here is a basic new advance in musical potential over and above all that we have today.

—EDWARD TATNALL CANBY.

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