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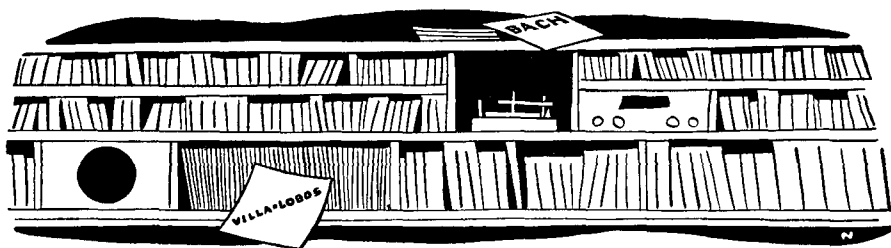
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The Audio Bookshelf

By R. D. DARRELL

COUNTING the scant five candles on the current Audio Fair and LP birthday cakes, or recalling that the "high fidelity" movement has mushroomed to its present growth only in the last couple of years, it's hardly surprising to find that the literature of audio encompasses little more than a handful of available books and an immeasurable, chaotically dispersed mass of periodical articles. Yet when we're reminded that sound waves were first recorded (visually, by Scott's "phonograph" of 1857) nearly a century ago, that the phonograph dates from 1877, and electronic sound from 1925, the literature's deficiencies—in extent, substance, and accessibility—become painfully obvious.

Happily, the steady flow of recent, current, and forthcoming publications promises that most of these deficiencies soon may be remedied. At any rate, it warns the book-buying audiophile that he must begin rescuing more shelf space from the greedy demands of discs and albums. And while he is anxiously revising his space and financial budgets, it might be well worth his while to review the incoherent past development as well as the present active status of the "Sound" bibliography.

Most of this literature's inadequacy obviously results from its peculiar location astride the boundaries of various arts and sciences. It impinges here on the domains of music, communication, and even home furnishings; there on those of acoustics, electronics, and even gadgeteering. It embraces (or eventually should embrace) at least some elements of history, physics, esthetics, psychology, physiology, and sociology!

Yet even as a peripheral art-science, the reproduction of music long has been a disdained if not disowned stepchild. For years the phonograph was generally considered little

more than a toy; serious interest in records was confined to a comparatively small band of "phonophiles." Musicians, musical educators, and musicologists only now are drowsily awakening to the full significance of this medium; they still have to buckle down to an earnest study of its history and potentialities. (Indeed, the first significant historical study is only now in active preparation—by Roland Gelatt, for publication by Lippincott in 1954.) Similarly, the technical aspects of audio long have won little more than the passing attention of leading acousticians and "radio" engineers, whose most striking achievements in this field usually have been by-products of investigations concerned mainly with speech communication. The comparatively few audio specialists have concentrated on the practical means of broadcast transmission, and film and disc recording, while even the practical problems of sound reproduction have been attacked only cursorily, especially where home rather than auditorium systems have been concerned.

Small wonder, then, that to date most authors (consciously or unconsciously sensing their limitations) have avoided comprehensive explorations of this incredibly complex field, or that their most successful productions have been severely limited in scope.

The audio bookshelf, as a consequence, has included (until very recently) mostly highly specialized publications: a few devoted to technical or semi-technical subjects, the majority dealing with music on records, and nearly all of them (by their very nature and the rapid expansion of techniques and repertoires) of largely ephemeral worth.

I catalogued the more important works (at least those in print in English as of 1951) in "Schirmer's Guide to Books on Music and Musicians," under such headings as Acoustics, Hearing, Phonograph/Gramophone,

Phonograph Records, Sound Recording & Reproduction, etc. Any serious audiophile-bibliophile might find it helpful to check these entries against his own library, but if he is a veteran, he is likely to sigh nostalgically to note that the out-of-print limbo even then had swallowed up such milestones of the Twenties and Thirties as the New Zealander Buick's "Romance of the Gramophone," the Frenchmen Hémardinquer's "Phonographe et ses merveilleux progrès" and Weiss's "Phonographes et musique mécanique," and the British Capt. Barnett's "Gramophone Tips," H. L. Wilson's "Music and the Gramophone," and P. Wilson & G. W. Webb's "Modern Gramophones and Electrical Reproducers."

EVEN the great flood of American "record books" of the Thirties and Forties left few works that are still available. And while many of these (like the critical surveys of Haggin, Hall, and Kolodin, or the Gramophone Shop Encyclopedia series) continue to hold an honored place on disc collectors' bookshelves, their present worth is largely historical, for they were devoted primarily to 78's. Only the third, 1950, edition of Kolodin's "New Guide to Recorded Music" and Hall's "Records: 1950 Edition" manage to include the first year's LP crops.

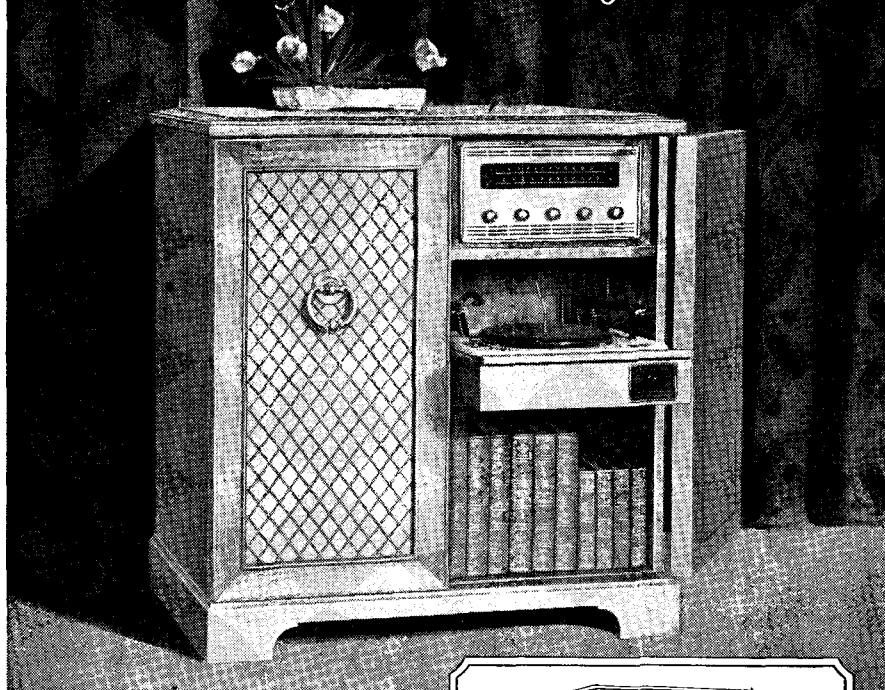
Several technical books have better withstood the ravages of time, or actually have grown in appeal to the more technique-conscious audiophile of today. Of those listed in "Schirmer's Guide," the following still are "musts" in my opinion: Mills's "Fugue in Cycles and Bels" (Van Nostrand, 1935), still the best general introduction I know to the technical aspects of sound; Lloyd's "Music and Sound" (Oxford, 2nd ed., 1951), the only first-rate book on acoustics written from a musical point of view; and Stokowski's "Music for All of Us" (Simon & Schuster, 1943), if only for its chapters on recording practices.

Turning now to the present, we reach the apotheosis of discographic catalogues raisonnés: Clough & Cumming's monumental "World's Encyclopedia of Recorded Music" [SR July 26, 1952], available—now in rapidly dwindling supply—via the London Gramophone Corporation at the by-no-means unreasonable price of \$17.50. This, of course, is an indispensable reference work for every phonophile who can afford it, as will be the Supplement, covering releases since May/June 1951, which is promised for early release.

The only notable latecomer in the way of a large-scale critical survey is Sackville-West & Shawe-Taylor's "Record Guide" (Collins, London, 1951;

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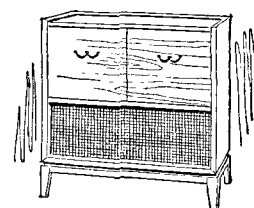
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\$6.75 in the USA), for which a supplementary "Record Year" was issued in England late in 1952. The enormous extent and progressively accelerating growth of the LP repertory alone undoubtedly are the major deterrents to other new or revised record books on familiar patterns, but at least one more American attempt is in the making: a "Guide to Good Listening," by David Hall, edited by Abner Levin, first announced more than a year ago, but now promised to be "coming soon" from Long Player Publications.

It will be extremely interesting to see how Hall and Levin grapple with the present-day problems of comprehensive evaluations. Personally, I'm convinced that the day of any one-book "complete" coverage is—if not over—certainly drawing to a close. In its place, I see future "record books" taking the form of either specialized-repertory critical surveys or selective general listings. Of the former type,

at least two highly promising pioneering works are now in preparation by Irving Kolodin (on orchestral recordings) and Philip L. Miller (on opera and lieder recordings), and there are sure to be others in their wake. Of the latter type, no less than three essays can be noted now. The first is Howard Taubman's "How to Build a Record Library," an expansion of *The New York Times's* famous "basic" classical and jazz record lists of 1952. The second is my own "Good Listening," due from Alfred A. Knopf, October 19, of which I need only point out here that it is primarily a book of musical rather than phonographic orientation, with its record listings confined to a thirty-three page index-discography in the back of the book. The third, as yet untitled, is by Deborah Ishlon and Irving Townsend, due from Ballantine Books next January.

The same problem of specialization

Collector's Blueprint

SEEMINGLY an occupational tic *douloureux* of record critics, the compilation of "basic" lists actually is a reflex acquired in response to an insistent public itch. Obviously, any such library of the "best" discs is as much an abstraction as the statistically "average" family, yet the preparation and study of such fictionally "representative" collections has become an inescapable ritual.

The best-known recent examples appeared in *The New York Times's* "recordings" supplements last year and made such a hit that thousands of reprints were distributed. Inevitably they now appear in book form, "*How to Build a Record Library*" (Hanover House, \$1.50), brought up to date, and now credited to the *Times's* music editor, Howard Taubman, with the "invaluable assistance" of staff member Harold C. Schonberg. Some 1,000 LP records of mostly "standard" works are listed in nine categories (orchestral, operatic, choral, chamber, keyboard, vocal, operetta and musical comedy, jazz, and "off the beaten path" music). Each category is prefaced by a brief historical survey and a selection of outstanding masterpieces, and the lists themselves are divided into "A" ("basic") and "B" ("for a more complete collection") sections.

of any such cream-skimmings of the recorded repertory, I too have made them, read those of other selectors with a horrid fascination, and (like most phonophiles) take inexplicable pleasure alike in welcoming confirmations and sneering at contradictions of my own judgments. By all accepted standards this list strikes me as one of the best (probably because I can agree with perhaps 80 per cent or more of the choices here!). Certainly, it is likely to be the most widely read and influential of them all.

Yet, apart from institutional collections, what individual disc library ever will be actually built according to this, or any similar, blueprint? As a tool, as a source of advice on troublesome selection problems, and as a sketch of the available repertory's extent, this little book is extremely valuable. But I pity the misguided listener who takes too seriously its introductory warning that "you can't afford to guess wrong about the records you buy."

What is wrong—or right—in artistic experience? Surely it's by making—and learning to recognize—mistakes, rather than by docilely accepting orthodox canons that the growth of personal esthetic discrimination is most vitally stimulated.

—R. D. D.