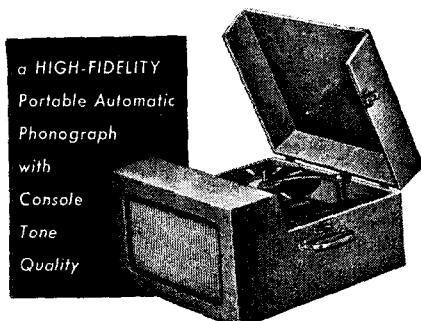


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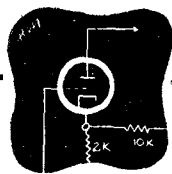
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**SOME HIGHS AND LOWS**

## Housebreaking Audio

**E**NDEAVORING recently to deflate the overblown claims for pre-recorded magnetic tapes [SR July 31], I touched in passing on a few sore spots of tape fanaticism, but even before the expected anguished protests arrived I realized that many of my complaints were equally applicable to other species of audiomania. Some excesses have been widely condemned: the flagrant misuse of that too-elastic term "high fidelity," for example, or the exhibitionistic saturnalia of those yearly Meetings at Pandemonium, the Audio Fairs. Yet the fundamental problem seldom is clearly stated.

It is simply a question whether our powerful electronic genii are to be masters or servants. In a homelier figure, our phonographs, radios, and tape recorders sometimes strike me as spoiled pets, like those monstrous pooches in Thurber's drawings, at once irresistibly engaging and clumsily destructive. We can't live without them, surely, yet unless they're properly housebroken and trained in good manners, there's no living—comfortably—with them.

On gray Mondays we all have our special peeves, and my blacklist is headed by the victims of "audiophile's tic"—operators who can't keep their twitching fingers off the controls. Forgetting that tone controls are useful only in matching a specific system to a particular acoustic environment, and that equalizers are only to compensate for specific recording characteristics, they are twisted and turned continuously so that no record ever sounds right in any room. And how often is the volume control set—and left!—for a loudness level appropriate to the type of music and listeners at hand? Conductors and engineers may not be infallibly right, but amateur second-guessers are almost invariably wrong.

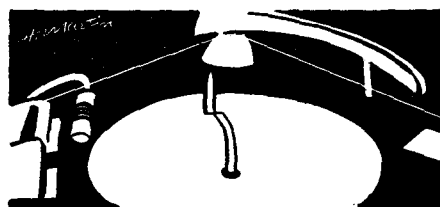
Then there are the recording men more anxious to win the admiration of their colleagues and competitors than to please home listeners. Certainly they go too far when they at-

tempt to make all musical experience a series of shock treatments. I keenly relish dramatic demonstration discs and get a great kick out of the real cannon and bells in Vox's recent Tchaikovsky "1812 Overture" (PL-8700) or Capitol's famous percussion solos (in SAL-9020), but I want more from music than shock. A little of such aural stimulants goes a long way. And worse still, such sensational treatment is wholly wrong for chamber and lyrical works. I'm sure the main reason why Delius, say, has fallen in phonographic favor since the war is that his essential romantic sorcery is alien to contemporary engineering. Every tonal detail now is captured in sharp aural focus—but where is the old atmospheric magic?

Next, the home-programmers who insist on inflicting their own special tastes on unwilling captive audiences. *Mea culpa!* I am one of these and fear that our sadism is incurable. But perhaps I can stir our suffering victims to revolt by citing the example of Johnny Appleseed's Choctaw wife (in Vance Randolph's collection of Ozark folk tales, "Who Blowed Up the Church House?") who, every time Johnny started to play his fiddle, "would go out in the woods somewhere, and not come back till he was done. A fiddle-tune sets an Indian's teeth on edge, just like these here steam whistles will run a dog crazy. Them Choctaws set around all night sometimes a-thumping on drums, and they like flute music when the moon is right for it, but they can't stand no goddam squeaky fiddling."

Finally, there are those tonal gluttons who have succumbed to the insidious LP (as well as magnetic-tape) temptations to indulge in outsized musical doses. It's wonderful to have complete operas and other large-scale works on records, but must we go to the opera house or take in a full concert program every night? Too often we all forget the one sure way to avoid musical surfeit and the most effective means of keeping our electronic pets from making a nuisance of themselves and us. Whether our home sound-systems are "true hi fi" or not, they do include one of the finest creations of audio-engineering genius, the greatest of all boons to human aural sensibilities: a simple switch labeled "On-Off." On gray Mondays, occasionally, try it in the "Off" position.

—R. D. DARRELL.



# Letters to the *RECORDINGS* Editor

## FORTHCOMING MARJORIE LAWRENCE

IN LETTERS TO THE RECORDINGS EDITOR [SR July 31] I noticed an appeal for Marjorie Lawrence recordings from J. W. D. Garrett. It may interest your readers to know that we are planning to issue a number of records of Miss Lawrence's recorded repertoire on the Camden label. Particulars are as follows:

"45 RPM Extended Play"—

MARJORIE LAWRENCE SINGS LIEDER: R. Strauss: "Lied an Meinen Sohn," Op. 39, No. 5; "Des Dichters Abendgang," Op. 47, No. 2. Hans Pfitzner: "Michaelskirchplatz," Op. 19, No. 2; "Stimme der Sehnsucht," Op. 19, No. 1. CAE 195 (available early in 1955).

MARJORIE LAWRENCE SINGS: "Danny Boy"; "Doun the Burn"; "Annie Laurie"; "My Ain Folk." CAE 190 (available September 1, 1954).

33 $\frac{1}{3}$  RPM Long-Play—

MARJORIE LAWRENCE IN OPERA AND SONG: R. Strauss: Final Scene from "Salome"; "Lied an Meinen Sohn," Op. 30, No. 5; "Des Dichters Abendgang," Op. 47, No. 2. Hugo Wolf: "Gesang Weylas." Hans Pfitzner: "Stimme der Sehnsucht," Op. 19, No. 1; "Michaelskirchplatz," Op. 19, No. 2; "Die Einsame," Op. 9, No. 2. "Danny Boy," "Annie Laurie," "My Ain Folk," "Doun the Burn." CAL 216 (available sometime in 1955).

PETER DELLHEIM,  
Recording Coordinator,  
RCA Custom Records Division.

New York, N. Y.

## HMV IN THE USA

IN RECORDINGS, SR July 31, Paul Hume reviews the HMV recording of "L'Elisir d'Amore" and states that the imported His Master's Voice discs are distributed by Addison Foster. Could you give me some information as to the whereabouts of this gentleman?

GENE PACK.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Addison Foster's address is 1226 Montgomery Ave., Narberth, Pa.

## CADENZAS FOR MOZART

THANKS TO Robert B. Gates for his pertinent comments on the ornamentation of Mozart's concertos for piano and orchestra [LETTERS TO THE RECORDINGS EDITOR, SR July 31].

Not only in their reticence to fill in Mozart's sketches do many pianists err, but an even greater hoax is perpetrated in the matter of cadenzas. Some go so far as to replace the few perfectly fine cadenzas that Mozart himself wrote (mostly in the concertos written for students) with formless and irrelevant hodgepodes of their own or someone else's invention. Others audaciously set out to improve on Beethoven's cadenzas

for the D minor, whose only fault, as Einstein says, is that they are too good.

In the twelve or thirteen concertos for which Mozart left no cadenzas only two pianists have been highly successful in creating choice blends of adherence to the subject matter and Mozartian embellishment of it (Paul Badura-Skoda and Artur Balsam).

All pianists could take a lesson from Badura-Skoda's excellent cadenzas for K's 482, 491, and 595.

CHARLES W. MOORE.

Chicago, Ill.

## "AIDA" ON THE WAY

WHY DOESN'T RCA VICTOR take the pleas of the people and give us an "Aida" with Milanov-Bjoerling-Thebom-Warren?

I think their "Il Trovatore" was one of the finest and best balanced recordings of an opera on records.

Since we are trying to convince RCA Victor to do more recordings, and since they have Mme. Milanov and some of the finest artists, how about "La Forza del Destino" and the great "Norma"?

LEO W. O'DONNELL.

San Francisco, Calif.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The word from RCA is that the much-requested "Aida" is

definitely "in the works" and that serious thought is also being given to a "Forza" and "Norma" with Milanov. The pleas of the people have been heard.

## MORE BY SCHNABEL?

SOME TIME AGO RCA Victor issued the first two volumes of the Beethoven Sonata Society recordings by Schnabel. Since then I have been expecting the regular appearance of the remainder of the set, but I have waited in vain. What are RCA Victor's plans for issuing the missing volumes?

LES KLEIN.

Toronto, Canada.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The remaining Beethoven Sonata Society recordings will be issued next year.

## TOSCANINI'S CHERUBINI

Do you know whether RCA Victor has any plans for issuing on record the Toscanini performance of Cherubini's Requiem Mass in C Minor which was done on the radio a few years ago?

KENNETH C. BROWN.

Portland, Ore.

EDITOR'S NOTE: No immediate plans for issuing this performance, but all Toscanini broadcasts with the NBC Symphony were recorded and are now being checked for possible future issue on LP. Toscanini's approval, of course, is a major factor.

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