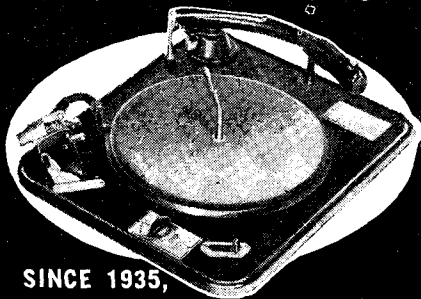


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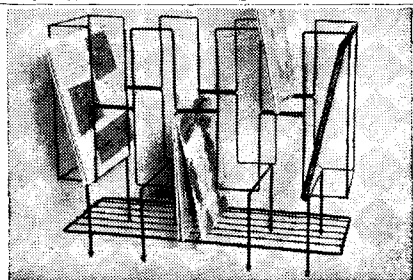
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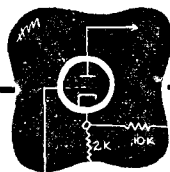
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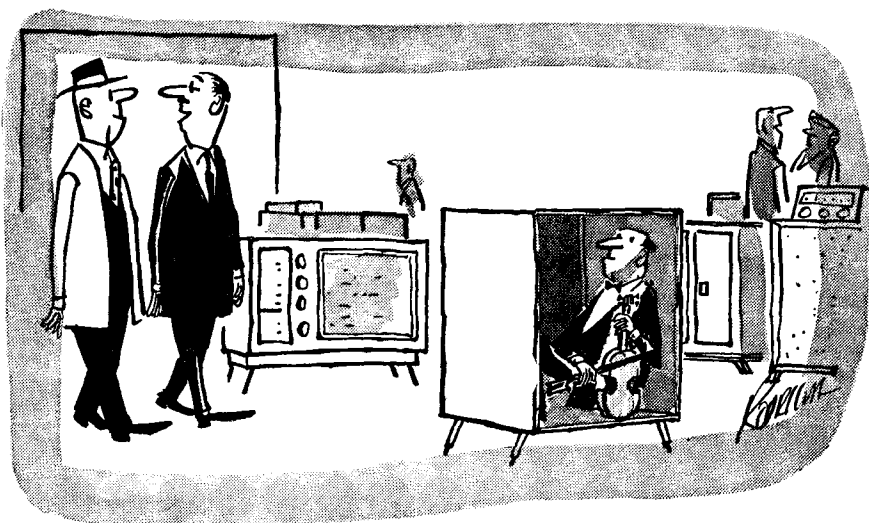
For those who can ☐ hear the difference**HIGHS AND LOWS****THE ERSATZ MELODY**

IN ONE of three audio "sessions" at the Institute of Radio Engineers' annual convention, held March 21-4 in New York City, Dr. Harry F. Olson, RCA Victor's prodigious researcher, described his latest creation, an "Electronic Music Synthesizer"—the most versatile and impressive device ever conceived to coax musical sounds out of vacuum tubes. At present I must echo the comment of one musically minded engineer's acclaim of the Synthesizer as "the most fascinating abomination I've ever heard!" But the adjective should be stressed no less than the noun: in the hands of imaginative composers as well as of ingenious technicians, the Synthesizer well may prove to have genuine artistic potentials. Meanwhile, there is of course no need to sell your conventional piano, organ, and orchestral stocks short. This two-ton monster is fabulously complex, expensive, and demanding, and its practical as well as its expressive exploitation will require well-nigh infinite pains if not years. Nevertheless, it is an unmistakable, dread, and yet exciting harbinger of an impending *deus ex machina* for an ever-nearing cybernetic musical age.

Home listeners can receive with greater equanimity the latest and far more immediately inevitable adaptation of the "book-of-the-month" notion to recorded music: a pre-recorded Tape-of-the-Month Club, the main enticements of which are the comparatively low fees (\$5.95 per selection to subscribers) and the

monthly distribution to members of "pre-view" tape samples. The first releases are Lengsfelder's "Musical Notes from a Tourist's Sketch Book" and the already broadcast- and disc-famous "Investigator," both of which are excellently recorded, although the former has little if any musical value to other than Muzak-conditioned ears. I can't imagine that serious listeners are likely to abdicate their personal tastes to the necessarily limited range of the club's program-makers, but the scheme has obvious advantages to any tape-fan anxious to build up a miscellaneous pre-recorded library as cheaply and easily as possible.

IN THE field of discs, all but the most insatiable of hi-fi fanatics have begun to gag over "demonstration" releases of high-decibel spicing and scanty musical or educative substance. It is a pleasure to report that technical neophyte and "expert" alike will find much more mental than physical stimulation in Tyler Turner's illuminating word-and-tone presentation, "This Is High Fidelity" (Vox DL-130). It includes "demonstration" passages, to be sure, but here they are subordinated to illustrating specific audio principles and dangers—common types of distortion, frequency-spectrum imbalance, the suitability of different studio acoustical characteristics to various kinds of musical textures, etc. The bulky accompanying booklet serves as an admirably comprehensive introduction to the mysteries of audio technology, but the prime attractions of this work (apart from its general



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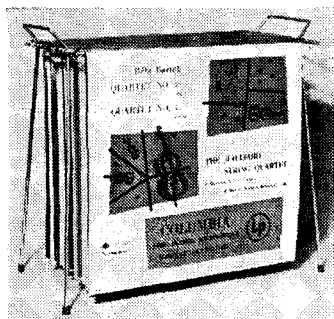
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freshness of approach) are the superbly convincing examples of the musical damage that can be wreaked by a recording or reproducing system which is top or bottom heavy, or in which there are marked mid-frequency "peaks." These examples present the most impressive evidence I know that true high fidelity depends far less on extended frequency range as such than on overall response smoothness and equilibrium.

The development of simplified home means for enabling even an untrained listener to evaluate these vital factors in musical reproduction was one of the major contemporary audio needs stressed by the writer in another of the IRE Convention's sessions, this one a symposium on "Music, High Fidelity, and the Listener." But to my grateful surprise (remembering other IRE meetings where music and listeners played second fiddle to strictly engineering methodology), the whole symposium proved to be vitally concerned with artistic and human, rather than exclusively technical, values. Daniel W. Martin, John A. Kessler, and Cyril M. Harris approached their special problems of reverberation and room acoustics directly from the point of view of musically experienced listeners, and Walter A. Rosenblith's subject set the clarion keynote for what well may be enlightened audio engineers' dominant concern in the future: "Man—a somewhat neglected component of hi-fi systems!"

Thus even the most discouraged contemporary music-lover, currently outraged by the excesses of hi-fi mania and trembling for the safety of gentle Euterpe under the Jugger-naut of an Electronic Music Synthesizer, need not consider the future entirely bleak and hopeless. To me this spring's IRE audio symposium marked a notable advance when every participant resolutely asserted the danger, if not the sheer impossibility, of attempting to define high fidelity in any operational terms which fail to include esthetic values and human experiential needs. I felt that a new season might be dawning in the world of audio engineering when the very first question from the audience of some 600 IRE members and guests was a request that the chairman call for a show of hands from everyone present who had heard a "live" concert or recital within the last two months. And I was sure of it when more than a quarter—perhaps even a third—of the crowd responded. That's still too small a proportion, no doubt, but it's far better than any similar assembly of engineers ever could have boasted in the past, and surely it holds promise for the audio harvests of the future. —R. D. DARRELL.

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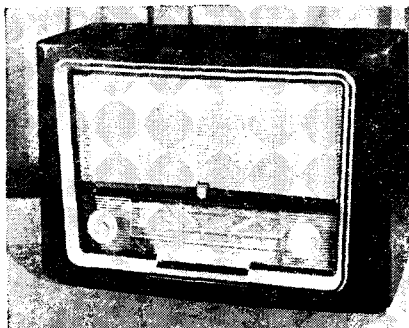


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Letters

Continued from page 59

who has used plain words for unpleasant fact. Too bad we have so few examples of insisting on the importance of facts.

ROBERT EPPLÉ

Hingham, Mass.

"NAPOLEON THE GREAT"

FORMER PRESIDENT Harry S. Truman, in his review of "The Confederacy" [SR Mar. 26], shows he has been reading some of the best word painting to be found. His word picture of Civil War scenes clearly shows the influence of Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll's "Vision of War" and "Apostrophe at the Tomb of Napoleon." The similarity in style and meter of the Truman word picture to Ingersoll's "Napoleon" is readily seen:

I saw him walking upon the banks of the Seine, contemplating suicide. I saw him at Toulon—I saw him putting down the mob in the streets of Paris—I saw him at the head of the army of Italy—I saw him crossing the bridge of Lodi with the tri-color in his hand—I saw him in Egypt in the shadow of the pyramids—I saw him conquer the Alps and mingle the eagles of France with the eagles of the crags. I saw him at Marengo—at Ulm and Austerlitz. I saw him in

Russia, where the infantry of the snow and the cavalry of the wild blast scattered his legions like winter's withered leaves. I saw him at Leipzig in defeat and disaster—driven by a million bayonets back upon Paris—clutched like a wild beast—banished to Elba. I saw him escape and retake an empire by the force of his genius. I saw him upon the frightful field of Waterloo, where Chance and Fate combined to wreck the fortunes of their former king. And I saw him at St. Helena, with his hands crossed behind him, gazing out upon the sad and solemn sea.

I thought of the orphans and widows he had made—of the tears that had been shed for his glory, and of the only woman who ever loved him, pushed from his heart by the cold hand of ambition. And I said I would rather have been a French peasant and worn wooden shoes. I would rather have lived in a hut with a vine growing over the door, and the grapes growing purple in the kisses of the autumn sun. I would rather have been that poor peasant with my loving wife by my side, knitting as the day died out of the sky—with my children upon my knees and their arms about me—I would rather have been that man and gone down to the tongueless silence of the dreamless dust than to have been that imperial impersonation of force and murder known as "Napoleon the Great."

SHERMAN WAKEFIELD.

New York, N. Y.

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