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STEREOPHONIC

Up to Date

IT'S NOT quite ten years since the LP record came in (Spring 1948), with results that everyone knows about. What might be called the era of good feeling that followed the "war of the speeds" has brought the cost of good music per minute to its lowest cost ever, with well-defined price categories ranging from \$1.98 for "economy" reissues to as much as \$7.98—via dollar step-ups—for one company's de luxe "Laboratory" series. The largest area of choice in the high (if not highest) fidelity category has settled at \$3.98, with public confidence restored and industry minds pretty much at one.

However, technology is a dynamic thing—especially if it involves the dynamics of music—and new horizons are beckoning. Like Cinerama and other wide-screen devices in the films, tape is challenging the old concepts of playing-time, fidelity, durability, and all the rest. And though it isn't even old enough to call itself a flourishing business, it has already developed its own factions, with the champions of stereophonic pushing aside the claims of monaural.

For those not indoctrinated, the distinction is a simple one. "Monaural" is basically the same kind of sound one hears from a conventional disc. (It is, in fact, a replica of the tape used in the studio from which discs are cut.) It provides true continuity, in the sense that no interruption need be tolerated for a conventional symphony or concerto, or an act of opera. It can be played through the usual audio amplifier from a "tape deck" (reels, etc.) and does not require more than a single good speaker. "Stereophonic" is a leap into the wild blue yonder of tomorrow, for it professes to approximate the concert hall or opera house effect of "direction" as music is performed—horns and other brass from one side, strings and percussion from another, piano soloist in the middle, etc. For the perfectionist dissatisfied with the "artificial" flavor of ordinary reproduction—no matter how skilfully processed—it suggests new vistas of realism in home listening. It requires some radical alterations in present facilities—an additional amplifier and second speaker are minimal, as well as the "tape deck"—also in habits of listening. Each monaural tape costs several times the equivalent on a

disc-recording, and "stereo" adds appreciably to this in equipment cost, though the tape itself costs about the same as monaural.

It is no secret that virtually all of the major companies (and the more enterprising lesser ones) have, for some months, been recording virtually all their sessions monaurally and stereophonically. (The experience of LP has taught them to guard all exits where a competitor's innovation might find them at a commercial disadvantage.) A good many refinements have already been introduced, particularly the use of a "fill" microphone to plug the "hole in the middle" characteristic of stereophonic sound several years ago. Several companies have pursued the production to the point of public sale—particularly RCA Victor and Westminster—which is the present point of contact with SR's readers.

SO FAR I have been able to hear only a sampling of each, in most instances duplicating performances already released on LP and evaluated in the customary terms—artistic and mechanical. Among the RCA issues are the Heifetz performance of the Brahms Concerto with Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the same conductor and orchestra's version of the Bartok "Concerto for Orchestra," Stokowski conducting Menotti's "Sebastian" ballet, Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony in Berlioz's "Fantastique" and Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet," etc. Asked for a sample of its catalogue (trade-named Sonotape), Westminster provided Artur Rodzinski and an English orchestra performing sundry works of Tchaikovsky (Symphony No. 4 and "Nutcracker" ballet) and the Beethoven Fifth Symphony, Egon Petri playing Beethoven's "Appassionata," Robert Mandell conducting Stravinsky's "Histoire du Soldat," etc.

The variation in quality is considerable, of course, but at its best "stereophonic" attains a degree of realism not common with disc and single speaker. As the experienced listener knows, a second speaker attached to a conventional system will add materially to the enjoyment provided by ordinary means. The sound is diffused, the point of origin masked. These are advantages built into the "stereophonic" system, which tend,

per se, to make it sound "more realistic" than single-speaker reproduction.

For the moment, however, this forward step has been offset by a long one backward—the reproductive end of the chain. No playback equipment is yet available (certainly not at a reasonable price) with speakers of the quality to demonstrate home "stereophonic" at anything like its laboratory promise. Ampex has one unit (more than \$800) and RCA another (about half that price), but the fidelity in each instance is compromised by speakers of a size currently used—for disc reproduction—only in table models or small consoles. Neither would merit serious consideration by a music lover assembling hi-fi components.

The immediate question, of course, is: Why cannot such tape reproduction be an auxiliary function of existing audio systems, especially those in which several hundred dollars has been invested for a quality amplifier and speaker? Some answers are already forthcoming, and it is certain that there will be others by the time the fall audio shows come around. The David Bogen company has just announced its Model ST-10 "facility" (no other name is offered) to do the electrical work at a price of \$52.50. The "tape deck" and second speaker are, of course, additional to this.

Assuming that the enthusiast spends the \$250 or so to make his present audio system suitable for "stereophonic" tape he will next discover that a Beethoven symphony disc priced at \$3.98 (with a Schubert symphony on side two) lists at \$14.95 in its stereophonic counterpart. In the case of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 Sonotape's product falls into the \$15.95 category, with a work of shorter duration (the "Appassionata") at a more modest \$9.95. Nor is it likely that stepped-up production will materially lessen costs—for the element of greatest expense is the basic tape itself.

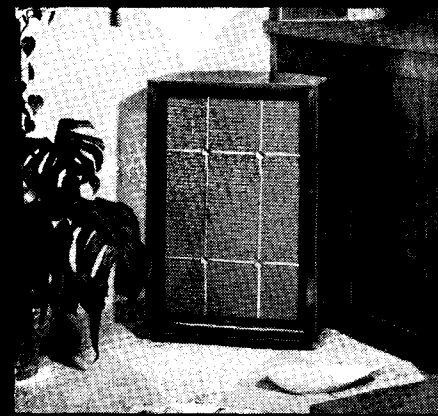
There is one factor that may change the course of "stereophonic" where price to the consumer is concerned: the experiments in England with "stereophonic" on disc. Admittedly, tape is a surer, easier process; but if "stereophonic" discs can be made to sell for half as much, the extra effort would be justified. Also, the conversion costs would be less (a special stylus, the Bogen kind of electrical "facility," and a second speaker). And the consumer would still have the familiar flat object in his hand rather than the unfamiliar reel with its threaded contents. The fate of industrial empires has been determined by even lesser factors. —I. K.

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THE AMEN CORNER

MY HOUSEHOLD, in a mood of economy not unattended by philosophic reflection, has avoided the joys and sorrows of television. But I must admit that rumors get around and that I have been persistently galled by the excitement and profits connected with the quiz shows. I am as capable of jealousy as the next man, and I have therefore decided to enter the quiz world atmosphere with my own particular enigmas. Herewith is THE AMEN CORNER's jazz quiz (I should imagine that, as a professional writer on jazz, I would be debarred from any possible net take as a contestant in similar affairs). I should warn would-be participants in this department's quiz that the questions are of stultifying difficulty, and that there are no prizes whatsoever. On the other hand, the answers will be found opposite.

Here we go, then, for a dozen brain scramblers:

1. What jazz singer, having taken his young son to a funeral, returned with the report: "The little feller was perfectly all right until they brought the loser down the aisle"?

2. What clarinet player was described as "a straight cross between Gary Cooper and Pee Wee Russell. He looks like Pee Wee Russell, and he plays the clarinet like Gary Cooper"?

3. What bandleader, playing in big houses like the New York Paramount, sometimes stopped his band *in medias res* and said: "The rest of the arrangement is more-or-less like that. You get the idea"?

4. What tuba player, faced with another of his ilk, declared: "You have rotary valves, and I hate you"?

5. What pianist, considering New York's roundabout and expensive one way street regulations, once had a taxi driver back him up a few doors along East 52nd Street, in order to call on what other pianist?

6. Name a jazz band, not the Original Dixieland, which was represented on phonograph records with the word spelled "jass."

7. Who failed to drive over a water hole, and then successively threw in his golf bag, his caddy, and himself?

8. What bandleader used to punctuate his broadcasts with the cry: "Is Perth Amboy listenin' in?"

9. Who played tailgate trombone with the early Paul Whiteman?

10. What band, having close connections with Brooklyn, New York, was engaged at the Florida—the best dancing spot in Tokyo, Japan—in 1936?

11. What is the first recorded instance of the syllables "bebop"?

12. What idol of modern jazz men never visited Spain for more than a weekend, but is well-remembered for a masterpiece depicting its sights and sounds?

These learned matters out of the way, it is time for a few notes on recent recordings. Trumpeter Chet Baker, a staggering performer on the jazz polls, is a refined artist who has often seemed a little too much so for me, but I hear a new authority in "Chet Baker and Crew" (Pacific



—Charles Peterson (in Ramsey and Smith's "Jazzmen").

Al Gold, Pee Wee Russell, Dickie Wells, and Max
 Kaminsky recording for the Hot Record Society.