

RECORDS, CIRCA 1987

By GEORGE R. MAREK

THE WISEST prophets make sure of the event first," said Horace Walpole to a friend. He was paraphrased a century later by James Russell Lowell, who wrote, "Don't never prophesy—unless ye know." In attempting to imagine what recorded music will be like twenty years from now, I show myself as an unwise prophet. I have not made sure of the event. I do not know. But neither do ye—so I'll chance some speculations.

First, I'll put forth a prediction which I must admit I do not fully believe: *There may be no record business in the year 1987.* It could happen that, sitting in all the homes of America, there will be an electronic "entertainment center," hooked up to a central computer serving the whole country. This entertainment center will supply not only television or radio programs but also will spew forth a fresh copy of the daily newspaper, printed on the spot with color pictures. When you feel like hearing music, you will be able to dial a number, choosing any piece of music—the newest hit or the oldest plainsong—performed by any artist you want. Perhaps you will not only be able to hear the music, you'll be able to *watch* the performer or the orchestra or the opera or the musical comedy on "Sight-and-Sound" tape. The "manufacturer of music," hitherto known as the record manufacturer, will derive his income from a licensing arrangement.

Well, it may happen. Yet, even if it does happen I do not believe that the record and tape business as we know it today will disappear. I believe that people will still want to own the music that they love, that a pride of possession exists which will continue to make music-lovers want to clutch their favorite recordings of the Ninth or of *Otello* or of *Die Fledermaus* to their bosom.

Whatever changes may occur, one thing is certain. Then, as now, as always, the artist will remain the salient messenger, the life-giving catalyst of music. Written music means little to most of us; it is only a series of curious-looking flyspecks on a sheet of ruled paper, until an artist comes along and kisses the notes to life. Tomorrow, as today, most people will respond to music in proportion to the number, the greatness, the glamour, and the vitality of the artists who will be around. We who listen, we who make music, we who

bring music to the public, all of us are dependent on the Rubinssteins, the Horowitzes, the Heifetzes, the Tebaldis, and the Toscaninis of the 1980s.

What kind of music will find favor? Obviously, the immortal masterpieces will endure. Yet immortality is a relative term. A great work of art, an "immortal work," may mean more to one generation than to another. Sometimes the statues in the museum walk off their pedestals, walk into the house where we live; we welcome them and form a friendship with them. At other times they remain statues to respect but not to live with. They wait—the time for the next visit will come.

As to new music—we cannot forever draw from the bank of the past—I hope and pray that composers will return to romantic writing in whatever new garment it will be clothed. Unless music sings and soars and speaks of love and human suffering in a voice which comes from the heart as well as the brain, unless it is born of emotion, how can it engage our emotions? How can it reveal ourselves to ourselves? Beethoven said that "music is a higher revelation than philosophy." We need revelation. I have no belief in electronic music or in the fractionalized grunts and babblings of our so-called avant-garde. That way lies impotence, not revelation. Obviously, this does not mean that the Stravinskys of the 1980s will write like Schubert. But the strong composers of the future will, so to speak, clothe old melodies in new harmonic garments.

I believe that some of the most vital music created today comes from the popular field. Much of it may be junk,

but some of it is fresh and strong and may in time influence the thinking of serious composers who even now are listening to "A Day in the Life" or "White Rabbit." Composers experimented with "psychedelic" music long before the dubious word was coined. What else are Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and Boulez's *Le Marteau sans Maître* than attempts to slide into a dream stage?

New old composers will be discovered, as we in the Sixties have discovered Nielsen and Ives and the periwigged Baroque boys and, to an unforeseen extent, Mahler. I should like to put forth two candidates for rediscovery: Haydn and Rossini, only a tiny part of whose music has currency today. Who knows much of Haydn's nonsymphonic music, and who knows anything of Rossini's serious works such as *Armida* or *The Siege of Corinth* and *Otello*?

RECORDING techniques will be altered. Microphones will become smaller, more sensitive, and will not be bound by a cable. New microphones will be able to discriminate as the ear does, picking out certain details of sound, those details which the artist and the recording director wish to hear. But microphones may disappear altogether; it may be possible to make the ceiling and walls of a recording studio so sound-sensitive that they will pick up the sound of an orchestra in its totality. Today we record on magnetic tape, sound impulses rearranging the molecules of iron oxide which are spread on the tape. That needn't always continue. We may someday record on tape which is activated by heat or the light of laser beams.

Tape in a convenient cartridge will, I believe, obtain a larger portion of the home-music business. Significant improvements will be made not only in the tape itself but in the cartridge. Tape must be made stronger so that it cannot break or be snarled; hiss, already very low, will be further decreased; its sensitivity—meaning the amount of information that a tape can absorb—will rise; and there will be new methods found to duplicate tape. At present, tapes are duplicated by running them through a "slave" unit; but this is a costly and time-consuming process. A way will be found of "photographing" a tape so that it can be instantly duplicated and "printed" in large quantities. Tapes may be played back with slower and slower speeds. So far we have come



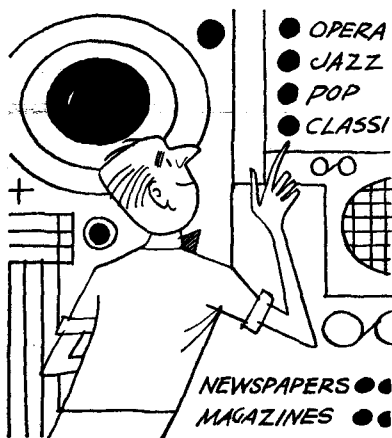
"Nancy Sinatra [in 1987] may be singing at the Metropolitan Opera."

from 15 inches per second to 7½, to 3½, and to 1½. The tape of the future may turn at 1½/16 revolutions and may be offered in a spool the size of a silver dollar, its playing time several hours.

All this does not, in my opinion, mean that records will disappear. Though my knowledge here is limited—I am far from a technical expert—I can see no way in which a tape in a cartridge can be produced as inexpensively as an LP. Besides, records are so convenient a carrier of music—we are so accustomed to that black disc—that I should be surprised if people will want to give them up. Records as well as tape will be improved. It is obvious that the monaural record will have died—and good riddance, too—long before twenty years have passed. It is probable that next we will have four-channel stereo recordings, two channels for left and right and two for left and right background overtones. That is how much recording is done today, on four-track tape; so why should we not have four-track records? This will more than double fidelity of sound. It won't stop there. It may go to fifteen- or sixteen-track recording, necessitating new types of phonographs capable of playing such a record. You will sit anyplace in your room and be surrounded with music. "Hi" though the "fi" may be today, and will be tomorrow, there will always be room for improvement. I haven't yet heard perfect reproduction. In twenty years, I would guess, the sound we capture today will strike our ears as imperfect as the sound of 1947.

THE physical characteristics of a record may be further improved. It may be possible to stamp them from material which cannot be scratched or warped. An electronic device or a laser beam may scan the grooves to assure listeners of getting records without any "typographical errors," meaning ticks and pops. Records, too, may be played on phonographs which turn at slower speeds. Perhaps there will be no needle, no mechanical contact of any kind, the sound being picked up by a light beam. Speaking of phonographs, in 1947 there were fewer than 17,000,000 phonographs in American homes. Today there are slightly more than 48,000,000 in active use. I am no great believer in statistical forecasts, but they do say that a reasonable projection of the in-use phonographs in 1987 is 100 million.

We know too little yet about "Sight-and-Sound." We know the scientific principle and we have several brands of reproducing machines on the market. These machines are still expensive, as is the videotape with which they operate. Many years may pass before an invention moves out of the laboratory, steps down from the luxury market, and ar-



rives at democratic usage. What is equally important, we have to learn new skills, not only technically but artistically. Will you want to see a performance of a Mozart symphony as well as hear it? Is there anything attractive about the sight of people making music? How do we make sight interesting in an aural art? No doubt you will want to see an *Aida*, a new Belafonte at Carnegie Hall, a new *Fiddler on the Roof*. If these are to come to the home in satisfactory form we will have to combine the skill of the motion picture director with the skill of the recording director. It won't do to transport "just-as-it-is" an art from the medium for which it was conceived to another medium. A straight translation of *La Bohème* from the opera house to the motion picture theater, a straight photographing of a theater performance of *Hamlet* is likely to be boring—we have found that out already!—because it fails to take advantage of the fluidity of a technique meant for motion and does not take into account the demands of the eye, which is more restless than the ear.

We are learning how to rehabilitate old sound. Some fine work has been done blowing the dust off the old masters. I have recently heard some remarkable experiments with music recorded in the 1940s. Syracuse University is working on the problem. So are other laboratories. Methods of enhancing will become more sophisticated within the next ten years.

How will we bring our little piggy—be it a record or a tape—to market? New methods of distribution will have to be found. It is to be hoped that more new record stores will be opened, particularly those offering good assortments to their customers. Indeed, we need record stores of all kinds. The expansion of the record business in the last twenty years is largely due to the increased availability of records. Department stores, discount stores, drugstores, supermarkets, and shopping centers daily visited

are now stocking records. I am all for putting records in with the eggs and aspirin. Yet a failure in distribution exists. This failure militates particularly against so-called "classical" music, the music which represents about only 2 per cent of the industry's dollar volume and which therefore cannot be ubiquitously available. With about 500 new records of serious music being produced every year and with the vast catalogues already in existence, no retailer could possibly have a copy of every classical record in stock. The Schwann Catalog is, to some extent, a book of fiction. I think—and here I may be guilty of wishful thinking—that many more people would be tempted to listen to good music were it more easily available.

It may be possible eventually to set up a system by which a dealer could get a copy of any record he wanted within a few hours. The computer could make this possible. But even that would only



be a partial solution to the problem. New ways of reaching consumers must be found, methods more accurately beamed at finding the people who are interested. There may spring into existence new forms of lending libraries or renting services. If we rent automobiles, why shouldn't we rent records?

If civilization continues, music will continue. If music continues, then the whole world will be drawn closer into its orbit. I hope that some day music can realize Schiller's (and Beethoven's) dream of *Dieser Kuss der ganzen Welt*. A new recording could be made available simultaneously to every country. Tapes could be duplicated, perhaps via satellite, instantly, and production of new records could begin in Milan or Bangkok on the same day as in Indianapolis.

In 1947, the record industry sold fewer than 500 million popular and classical discs. But it wasn't a bad year. Sales reached a peak of \$224 million at retail. (This was the highest since 1921 and was not destined to be surpassed until 1955. The low point, sales of \$6,000,000, occurred in the depression year of 1933.) This year the industry

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The New Russian Hit Parade

By STANLEY GREEN

NO ONE could expect American eyebrows to be raised over the intelligence that songs bearing such titles as "Tvoy Vzglyad," "Vremya i ty," or "Ya vsë zhe privyk k yeyë" are familiar to a vast number of citizens of the Soviet Union. Render them in the form familiar to all of us, and some surprise might be in order. They are, in order of quotation: "All the Things You Are," "Time on My Hands," and "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face"—three among sixty-five American show tunes currently being heard over the air throughout the U.S.S.R.

The translations of all the lyrics are the work of Vernon Duke, the Russian-born American composer of such acknowledged standards of the Broadway musical theater as "April in Paris," "Autumn in New York," "I Like the Likes of You," "I Can't Get Started With You," and "Suddenly," as well as the score for the classic *Cabin in the Sky*. Duke, whose real name is Vladimir Dukelsky, has devoted himself to rewriting the American lyrics for a series of thirty-two broadcasts on the evolution of musical comedy, which Radio Liberty has been beaming to the Soviet Union. Duke narrates the programs, offers musical illustrations at the keyboard, and accompanies a Los Angeles-based, ex-Russian pop singer, Vladimir Malinin, who croons the numbers with appropriate Slavic fervor.

Translating lyrics written in the American idiom so that they not only scan properly but make sense and have artistic value of their own was a challenge Duke was unable to turn down. "Many songs written for the Broadway stage," he maintains, "are just as valid as art songs as anything by Moussorgsky or my old teacher, Glière. What's more, they have a verve and freshness that speak directly to contemporary Russian youth. This is true no matter how old the song might be. All you really need is one song—one melody—that hits a responsive chord to help bridge the cultural gap. I was a seventeen-year-old boy living in Constantinople when I first heard Gershwin's 'Swanee' played in a café. That was enough for me. It opened a whole new musical world, and I was determined, from then on, to become a part of that world."

In refashioning the lyrics, Duke was careful to preserve the spirit of the origi-



Vernon Duke—"a challenge Duke was unable to turn down."

nal while also making the themes comprehensible to Russian ears. "You can't translate word for word," he says. "There just aren't exact translations for every word, even if it would be artistically feasible. And there are other problems. One of the songs I did was Irving Berlin's 'Alexander's Ragtime Band.' Who was Alexander? Would the Russians think I had turned one of the Czars into a bandleader? Since Berlin used the name merely because he liked the sound, I didn't feel guilty at all about calling it 'Dixielendsky Regtaym Marsch.' The words fit, and the Russians are completely familiar with the terms 'dixieland' and 'ragtime.' And since the song is really written in march tempo with just a hint of ragtime in it, I thought I'd get that point across, too."

Another difficult assignment was "Fascinating Rhythm." "George Gershwin's complicated tune was challenge enough for brother Ira to fit lyrics to," Duke says, "let alone working out their Russian equivalent. To begin with, there's no Russian word meaning 'fascinating.' So I settled for the word 'neponyatny,' which means 'not understandable,' since the whole point of the song is that the singer has no idea why the infectious rhythm has such an effect upon him."

Duke even had problems with one of his own songs, "April in Paris." Gender problems. It seems that, grammatically at least, April just could not be spent in Paris without upsetting the meter. So the song became "Lyetom v Parizhe," or "Summer in Paris." "It really makes more sense this way," Duke says. "April in Paris is much too cold and rainy."

Apart from acquainting his Soviet au-

dience with a form of American culture that they know little about, Duke also hopes that his broadcasts will have some effect, however small, upon forcing the Russian government to agree to ratify the Berne pact regarding copyrights. Almost all the non-Communist countries have agreed to the provisions which guarantee royalty payments for copyrighted material for citizens of all the participating nations. What is especially galling to Duke is that Russian composers and lyricists whose works are performed in non-Communist Europe and the United States do receive royalties based on sheet music sales, recordings, and the number of public performances. As Duke puts it, "What's good for the composer of 'Moscow Nights' should also be good for the composer of 'Night and Day.' There is such a great reservoir of interest in American culture throughout the U.S.S.R., and it's high time that the Soviet leaders began to encourage that interest. The way to do it is not to pirate copyrighted works but to treat our composers and writers with the same kind of financial consideration that they are given almost everywhere else in the world."

Recent events have certainly borne out this interest. In the mid-Fifties, an American touring company scored a resounding success in Leningrad and Moscow with an English-language production of *Porgy and Bess*. An American company of *My Fair Lady* visited four Russian cities, played to standing room—and may now be seen in a pirated edition known as *Maya Prekrasnaya Ledy*. Not a ruble was paid anyone connected with the original dramatic work. The same condition exists in the Russian-appropriated *West Side Story*, which keeps packing them in as *Vest Sideskaya Istoria*. Early this year, the Estonia Opera and Ballet Theater dusted off *Porgy and Bess*, and doubtlessly there'll be an unauthorized *Khallo, Dolli!* before long.

The Vernon Duke series on the American musical theater is indicative of the imaginative programing that has long marked the operation of Radio Liberty. Established in 1953, it is the only privately-owned broadcasting service devoted to beaming shortwave programs throughout the Soviet Union. Its purpose is to give the Russian citizens factual news that they otherwise would not get. The main headquarters of Radio Liberty are in Munich, from which it controls a truly world-wide operation. Fourteen transmitters in Germany and in Spain beam programs all over European Russia as well as to western Siberia; three in Taiwan cover the rest of Soviet Asia. All broadcasts are made by former Russian citizens, who staff an operation that programs 280 transmitter-hours daily in the seventeen languages that are spoken within the U.S.S.R.