

Will the Compact Disc Revive Quad?

by Mike Apsey

The introduction of the CD could mean the return of quadraphonic sound—and more accurate recordings. But don't throw away your LPs and cassettes yet.

A worthless exercise? Not really. You realize not only *what* the sounds are, but where they are coming from—left, right, front, back, all over. You are aided in this positional analysis by that complex piece of anatomy, your ear.

The coming of digital audio is fine-tuning an appreciation for hiss-less and pop-less music.

This is a do-it-yourself lesson in the advantages of quadraphonic sound. You *can* hear and identify the direction from which sounds originate. Using that ability, you know when someone is approaching from behind or how large or small a room is.

Consider a symphonic concert. Isn't part of the listening experience reflected sound and the sound of the applause around you? Sure it is. In view of this, I support putting the "two ears, two speakers" argument against quadraphonic sound theory to rest.

An Overpriced Gimmick?

Quad, though, is still thought to be dying a painfully slow death. The quad sound most people sampled and judged was emphasized artificially and not a demonstration of the subtle reality quad is capable of pro-



ducing. To many audio buffs quad was, and is, an overpriced gimmick.

Who's to blame for quad's ill-fated push? Everyone. The record companies, the recording engineers, the hardware manufacturers, and the state of the recording art at the time quad was released—with emphasis on the latter.

The problems quad sound presented to the LP industry were big ones. Cramming four channels of program into a single groove while maintaining greater than 25 dB of channel separation taxes even current LP technology. The public wouldn't buy it.

Magnetic tape held the only real hope for quad, but most consumer recorder/reproducers of the quad era were capable of reproducing only two channels at a time. Until recently, only a few true 4-track recorder/reproducers existed.

As if those problems weren't enough, most amplifiers sported only two channels. The quad buff had to add an additional stereo amplifier, and speakers. The quad proposition was expensive, and quad recordings were few. Fewer still were the *good* quad recordings.

Listen to the sounds around you. What do you hear? A refrigerator? Traffic? Other people talking? These sounds shouldn't surprise you because you know they exist before you notice them consciously. And because these ambient sounds contain no important information, you can ignore them.