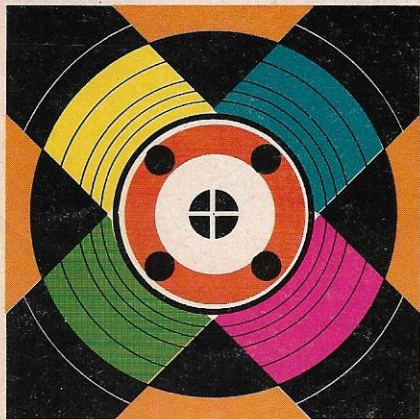


Quadraphonic Sound Comes of Age

by Bert Whyte, Associate Editor, Audio Magazine



In January 1972 mass-market quadraphonics achieved recognition in Schwann as a new and exciting medium. Since, readers have witnessed monthly increases in the listings of available 4-channel records and tapes.

Quadraphonic listings start on page Q-10 and include selections to tempt nearly every music lover. And this article heralds the coming of age of quadraphonics . . . and gives reasons why.

Early in 1966 I had lunch with Seymour Solomon, president of Vanguard Records. Mr. Solomon is one of the more venturesome entrepreneurs in the record business, and he was one of the first proponents of stereo recording. During the course of the luncheon we discussed the state of the stereo recording art and while we agreed that we had heard some very impressive recordings, we both felt that the reproduction did not give us the psychoacoustic equivalent of the concert hall listening experience. We recognized that one of the problems was in using a two-dimensional medium . . . stereo . . . to record the three-dimensional sound of the concert hall. I mentioned that I had discussed the idea of multi-channel recording with Leopold Stokowski some years ago, and Seymour had engaged in similar discussions with several engineers. What was proposed was that in addition to the normal two or three stereo channels on a magnetic tape, extra channels would be assigned to capture the "ambience" . . . the reverberant and reflected sounds from the walls, ceiling and floor, of the concert hall. Since we were just idly speculating about the matter, we envisioned an "ideal format" in which we would use 8 channels on standard quarter-inch magnetic tape, on an open-reel recorder. The 8 channels would be "in-line", all running in the same direction, left to right, over the magnetic heads to the take-up reel. Each channel would correspond to a separate amplifier/loudspeaker in the listening room. The disposition of our eight channels was left, middle, and right in front of the auditor, a left and right channel half-way down the sides of the

room, a left and right channel in the rear of the room, and our final channel in the middle of the ceiling. Even after 1966 such an idea was technically feasible, but needless to say we dismissed the whole thing as a fantasy and too impractical for any commercial consideration. So we finished lunch on a sort of wistful . . . "maybe someday" . . . note.

In the spring of 1969 Seymour Solomon phones me and somewhat excitedly asks me to come to his Vanguard studios to "hear something special." At the studio Seymour guides me to a seat in the middle of a listening room; gives a signal to an engineer, and then moments later I am absolutely stunned by the sheer emotional and sonic impact of the "Tuba Mirum" section of the Berlioz Requiem, with a brass band resounding from each corner of the room, in just the same manner as Berlioz had scored it for the concert hall, and which heretofore could have been heard only at a live performance! At the conclusion of the section, the last words of the chorus enter the reverberant field of the concert hall and are heard to decay from front to rear as they would in the live situation. I looked at Seymour and he grinned and said, "Well it isn't our 8 channel 'ideal format', but as you have heard, we can do a great deal with four-channel stereo". And indeed he could. I listened spellbound to excerpts from the Mahler 3rd Symphony, Handel's "Jephtha" and other works and became an instant convert to four-channel sound. Most astonishing of all was that this "quadraphonic" sound was not going to remain a laboratory curiosity. Vanguard was going to