

## THE OTHER SIDE OF FOUR-CHANNEL by David Beatty

### Why Have Four Channel

I feel that much that has been said about four channel has been confusing and misleading. Before any system is promoted, the basic concept of what it is trying to achieve should be settled and whether or not its achievement is worth the trouble. This has not been done with four channel sound.

There has been a tremendous outpouring of editorial matter discussing four channels and details of how it might be achieved, but virtually nothing demonstrating what it will do. When stereo was first demonstrated using tape, there was unquestioned and immediate 99% response in favor of the basic concept. This has been lacking with four channel. Even if the industry wasn't in a mess on HOW to do four channel, the WHAT it does is so dubious I wouldn't advise it.

### What Does Four Channel Do?

The original concept of four channel which AR demonstrated added some of the concert hall reverberation through rear channels and was a subtle improvement but not worth changing the industry over. Most of the recordings that have come out have not been of this type but have had instruments coming from each corner of the room. If this is really more pleasing, orchestras would probably have played this way for years.

Most people prefer to face what they are listening to. Most demonstrations of four channel have been very irritating and disturbing to me. Having sound coming from behind your head as well as in front of you is obtrusive, distracting and un-natural on most music. "STEREO-PHILE" Magazine's listening panels discovered that they". . . preferred a large two-channel system (with a stupendous depth illusion) to any four-channel reproduction."

### Experiment With Speakers

Since most of the recordings have instruments on each channel, it seemed to me that it might make more sense to try all four channels up front. Most people who have heard it liked it better this way. We then compared it with our four speaker "Wall of Sound" on two channel material and found that on much music it was nearly as good. There is no limit, the more channels you have, the more realistic the sound is; if you don't sacrifice quality.

Most present four channel does sacrifice quality. There are no published specifications on distortion of four channel decoders. They mostly have 3 to 5 times the distortion of Yamaha Stereo Receivers that sell for 1/2 to 2/3 the price. At the present time the dollars spent four four channel actually buy far less in the way of high-quality, low-distortion equipment than the same dollars spent in stereo.