

# Demonstrating What? Testing How?

By NORMAN EISENBERG

AMONG THE best-selling records is a group of releases so unclassifiable that the dependable Schwann catalog drops them into a marginal slot discreetly labelled "Spoken and Misc." The titles are then subdivided into classes of "samplers" and "test records." Even this attempt at classification fails to do justice to the indefinable "spoken and misc." among the "samplers." For there are samplers that provide musical excerpts; there are samplers that furnish less music and more sound effects; there are samplers that include printed or spoken explanations; there are samplers that even furnish moments of absolute silence. As for the "test records"—well, they simply test.

Regardless of how they are listed in the catalog or displayed by the dealer, a strong reason for their prevalence is that they can show off, or show up, a high fidelity system. The trend, begun in mono LP days, produced about ninety such records. Stereo already has added about one-half that number to the total. Many of them are issued under new labels, introduced only since SD.

If the sampler originally served as evidence of a record company's artistic intentions and acoustic abilities, it also demonstrated the superiority, not only of the LP medium, but of the new playback equipment as well. Audio sales people used them extensively; such records, with their variety and brevity, served better than a full, major work. This attraction extended also to audio equipment owners, particularly those who came to hi-fi with no strongly defined tastes in music. Characteristically, the samplers and demos offered, in the main, the tried and proven musical war horses.

The next step was to add literary explanation to the aural material and finally to manipulate the latter to make a point. This combination of techniques produced a new kind of record, suggesting almost a new communications form. One can regard it in two ways: the sound is there to illustrate the text, much like a magazine illustration; or the text may explain the sound. No one knows quite what to call these records; engineer Stewart Hegeman, who once busied himself with their pro-

duction, has suggested that if the old-fashioned medley could be called "incidental music," then perhaps the collections for deliberately making a point could be called "cidental listening."

Notable examples of this form, in monophonic LP, included releases by Capitol, Vox, and Westminster, some still available. Production of the Vox album, virtually a beginner's course in audio, has been discontinued. It is to be replaced, we are told, by a forthcoming stereo version. If the coming production is to be as good as its LP predecessor, it will have to be better than a present "Stereovox Sampler" (Vox, VST 1, \$2.98). This one starts with the opening bars of the last movement of the Dvorak Fifth and then unceremoniously lapses into a series of noises.

By way of happy contrast, "The Stereo Disc" provides just enough non-musical sounds to amuse and to make its points about stereo (Capitol, SWAL 9032, \$5.98). Most of the music on this record is of a less tepid variety than found on other samplers; included, for example, is part of Toch's Third Symphony. The excerpt from Britten's "Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra," played first in mono and then in stereo, serves its purpose quite well. The album is supplied with a handsome, informative booklet written in part by Edward Tatnall Canby.

A more ambitious, and less ingratiating, attempt at explanation comprises the opening moments of "Stereo Sampler" (Urania, SS 58, \$2.98). Skip this opening unless you want to hear what might be the sixth-grade Class Day version of "Look, We Got Stereo." Once past this nadir, the musical portions really soar; Urania seems particularly adept at recording the organ, *viz.* the excerpts from the Saint-Saëns Symphony No. 3 and the Prelude in G Minor of Bach. A subsequent Urania "Stereo Sampler" (SS 61) represents an improvement; it eliminates the opening drama and just modestly puts forth music.

Each of the records in Vanguard's series of "Stereophonic Demonstration Discs" (SRV 100 series, \$2.98 each) is, simply, a complete twelve-inch stereo release with full performances of major works by leading artists. As such, they are easily the best buys in SD today. According to Vanguard's

Maynard Solomon, records in this series represent the best efforts of this company and are sold at less than normal retail price to introduce them to the public. New collectors may find them a convenient way of building the "basic library"; older record fanciers may pass them by except for the chance to own a stereo version of something at very low cost.

For whatever it means, the most promising samplers and demos to date, aside from Capitol's, have come from the two majors. "Sounds In Space," an early Victor release—not sold but included with purchase of a Victor console—has its moments of sensationalism but generally puts the case for stereo intelligently and with an abundance of music. Another early, more "de luxe" album was "Listening In Depth," in which the intricacies of stereo were explained in an accompanying booklet by William S. Bachman (Columbia, SF-1, \$5.98). This record still sounds fairly good, although at times it seems that the audio spectrum has been shifted upward somewhat, with the highs a bit brash and the bass not full enough. This same company's "This Is Stereorama," issued under the Epic label (BC-1, \$2.98), is the better buy, with an equally rich assortment of music, plus superior acoustics and a few tests for good measure.

The few really top stereo samplers and demos just about equal the number of stereo test records. With the latter, of course, the basic question is, how useful are they? The answer will vary with the specific record and the inclination of the user. A record such as Audio Fidelity's FCS 50000 (\$6.95), with its variety of tests and explanations, might appeal to the average collector. On the other hand, more austere releases like London's PS 131 (\$4.98) or Victor's 12-5-71 and 12-5-73, which contain only frequency test tones, would be of prime interest to the professional. They have no explanatory matter and imply the use of test instruments to make the most sense of their signals. The London disc may be purchased at some dealers; the RCA pair is not even listed in the catalog.

In using any test record, the maker implies a certain "minimal" level of performance from the playback system, and even then, the record can only suggest the presence of trouble rather than pinpoint it. A poorly designed amplifier, for example, that cannot cleanly reproduce a forty-cycle signal, cannot enable you to evaluate the correct equalization of that forty cycles. Possibly you wouldn't even hear it clearly through your loudspeaker. In this case, you wouldn't know what specific element in the sound system was at fault.

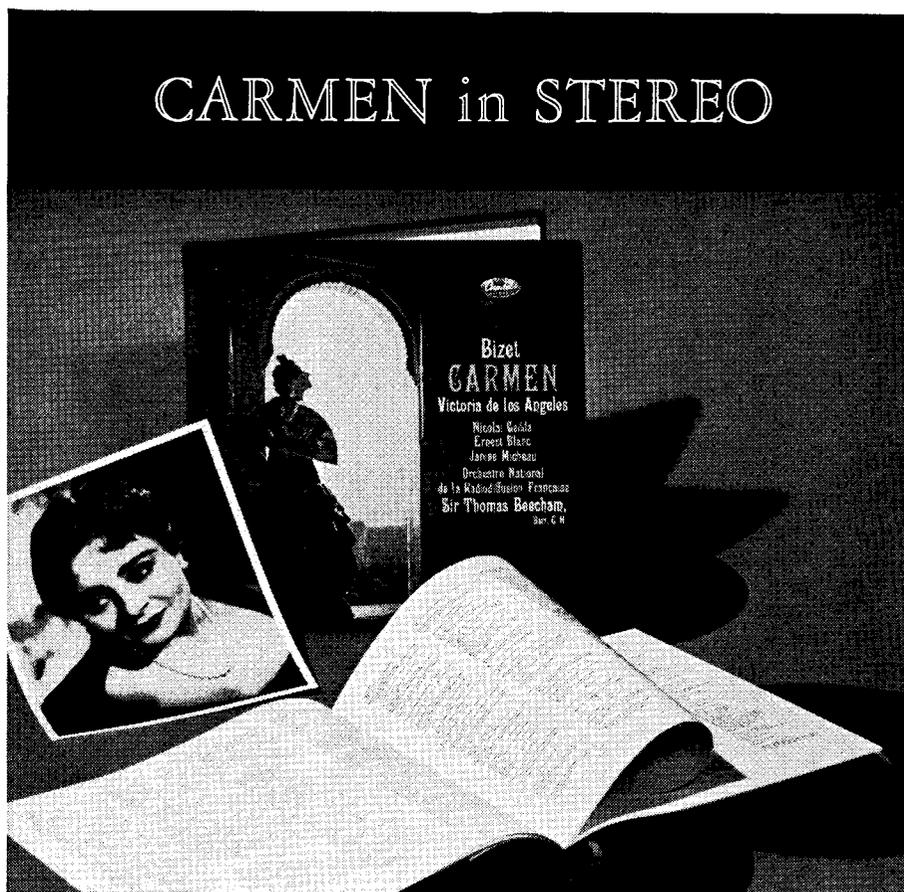
Some of the tests devised for the more popular test records do provide specific information. They actually make use of a deficiency to reveal it by means of comparison signals, as in the phasing test on FCS 50000, and the stylus wear test on a record issued by Components Corporation.

For serious evaluation of components other than the cartridge, professionals rely mostly on signal generators. With such a device, the technician gets a fresh tone each time without the slow, progressive wear that occurs on a record. What's more, such tones can be controlled precisely for frequency and volume. Response characteristics of records may vary from label to label (sometimes among different pressings of the same release). Despite these uncertainties, using a test record remains the only way to evaluate a cartridge, since this component comes to life and produces signals only when its stylus is vibrated by the wiggles in a record groove. Thus, in the spirit of "some help is better than none," professional testers do use records, even while complaining about "high frequency distortion" or "poor channel separation" or the fact that "none really goes down to twenty cycles." And because of the relative rigors of such use, a test record in the hands of a professional does not have a very long life. At Electro-Sonic Laboratories, for example, they are discarded after about twenty playings.

Outside the laboratory, a test record possibly can gladden the heart of the stereo owner by assuring him to *some* degree that his equipment is performing as it should—or, conversely, sadden him with the revelation that it is not. In this context, the Audio Fidelity release (FCS 50000) is an attractive package that also includes some classical sampler material of the war horse variety. A test record issued by *Hi Fi Review* (Ziff-Davis Stereo-Mono Test Record, \$1.00) contains a number of tests similar to those on the Components Corporation release.

A good deal of the material on mono test records may also be used for stereo check-outs. Each channel can be tested alone and then together for response, distortion, and balance. However, for certain unique aspects of stereo playback, such as channel separation and vertical compliance of the cartridge, the special signals on a stereo record are needed. Again, these tests are not perfect but they can be helpful. Among mono test records, of some use in stereo tests, are several issued by Cook; the richly packaged and annotated "Check and Double-Check" (Westminster TRC, \$10.00), which also is a prime example of "cidental listening";

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\*Featuring Orchestra of the Rome Opera House



# RECORDINGS REPORTS: JAZZ

## WORK, PERFORMER, DATA

## REPORT

"Count Basie: Chairman of the Board." Roulette Birdland R52032, \$3.98; also stereo, \$4.98. "Blues in Hoss' Flat," "H.R. H.," "Segue in C," "Kansas City Shout," "Speaking of Sounds," "T.V. Time," "Who Me," "The Deacon," "Half Moon Street," "Mutt and Jeff."

In its best stride, the band of Count Basie is a formidable joy to hear, and there is nothing in this LP to detract from that joy. It displays cohesion, polish, and an agility rare in any large band; selections titled "Segue in C," "The Deacon," and "Half Moon Street" can be taken as examples. Arrangements for all selections were done from within the band: i.e., by musicians making up the players' lines, or in one case, by an ex-line member writing for a group he knows (Ernie Wilkins). Other arrangers: Thad Jones, trumpet; Frank Wess, tenor sax and flautist; Frank Foster, tenor saxophone. Fine solo work is performed by Jones, Joe Newman, and Snooky Young of the trumpet section; by Al Grey, Benny Powell, and Henry Coker of the trombone line. The saxophone section is a smooth-flowing marvel, recalling voicings of the Ellington band at its best (and we can think of no better), yet with a wryness all its own. Add to this the Basie rhythm section, and there it is: a fine musical organization.

"Every Day I Have the Blues." Joe Williams with Count Basie and His Orchestra. Roulette Birdland R52033, \$3.98; also stereo, \$4.98. "Every Day I Have the Blues," "Baby Won't You Please Come Home," "Going to Chicago," "Gee Baby," "Joe Sings the Blues," "Shake, Rattle and Roll," others.

Joe Williams, vocalist with Count Basie, speaks and sings and shouts in clear, hard tones that underline his authority as interpreter of blues and popular songs. The backing from the band is no less eloquent—rich and lilting, smearing or insistent as the occasion requires. Williams's repertoire ranges from the classic popular song like "Baby Won't You Please Come Home," delivered with warmth and style, to a sort of song-story built from blues lyrics which he delivers with enormous punch, as for "Joe Sings the Blues."

"Warren Barker Is In." Barker and studio band. Warner Brothers Stereo 1331, \$4.98. "Flute Route," "Cappuccino," "Harlem Nocturne," "Cafe Espresso," "Black Coffee," "Love Me or Leave Me," "Midnight Sun," others.

A number of meant-to-be exotic rhythms back a series of listless-sounding solos from flute, guitar, trumpets, vibraphone. The point seems to be to veer away from making a positive or extended musical statement, and to provide a succession of moody tonalities that will be certain not to interfere with any conversations carried forward in coffee houses where the record is certain to be played. The big band is under wraps all the way.

"James Moody." Argo LP 648, \$3.98. "Darben the Redd Foxx," "Little Girl Blue," "Out of Nowhere," "Daahoud," "Yesterdays," "Cookie," "With Malice Toward None," "R.B.Q."

There is great charm to James Moody's flute playing—try the lovely, slow solo that makes an entry at the third band of the second side, titled "With Malice Toward None." Other members of the band are: John Coles, trumpet; Tom McIntosh, trombone; Musa Kalliem, baritone saxophone; Gene Kee, piano; John Lathen, string bass; and an unidentified drummer who might be Max Roach. In spite of the way every one plays throughout—as if he might lose caste if he were to hit a warm, easy note—genuine musical abilities shine through on more than one occasion. These are easily apparent in the relaxed "R.B.Q."

"Gee, Baby, Ain't I Good to You?" Songs by Donna Hightower. Capitol Stereo ST 1273, \$4.98. "Every Day I Have the Blues," "Gee, Baby," "All or Nothing at All," "I Laughed to Keep from Crying," "Lonesome and Sorry," "The First to Know," "The Blues Don't Care," "Can't Help It," others.

Donna Hightower, accompanied by a good studio orchestra led by Sid Feller, brings to her songs a pouty, schoolgirlish voice that unearths no memorable discoveries of melody or meaning. Many of her lines are thrown away, as if it were all she could do just to get past the memorized material. Her tricks are voice-catches and occasional drags of tempo. She "crigh-highs" ("I Laughed to Keep from Crying") or has the "blew-hoose" ("Born to Be Blue") when the script calls for it. Her slow-tempo songs are lumpy and uneven; she is at her best with medium numbers like "Lonesome and Sorry" and "I'll Be Around."

"Taylor Made Jazz." Billy Taylor and Band. Argo LP 650, \$3.98. "Biddy's Beat," "Theodora," "Mood for Mendes," "Daddy-O," "Cu-Blu," "Day Dreaming," "Can You Tell by Looking at Me," "Tune for Tex."

Eight compositions for small jazz band by Billy Taylor are presented on an LP distinguished by the presence of a number of Ellington sidemen—Harry Carney, Willie Cook, Paul Gonsalves, Clark Terry, and Johnny Hodges. Taylor plays piano, and the rhythm men are Ed Thigpen, drums, and Earl May, string bass. The order of things for each side is the same: medium-to-fast selections ("Biddy's Beat," "Daddy-O") at beginning and end, with two slow ones ("Theodora," "Mood for Mendes") in between. There is fine solo work throughout, and Taylor's piano playing is right for his selection of instrumentalists—entirely versatile, characterized by exquisite touch, yet with a hard core of firmness when that is needed. The tunes come through after careful listening.

"Herb Ellis Meets Jimmy Giuffre." Verve MG V-3811, \$4.98. "Goose Grease," "When Your Lover Has Gone," "Remember," "Patricia," "A Country Boy," "You Know," "My Old Flame," "People Will Say We're in Love."

The tunes were not all written specifically for this band, as with the Taylor LP above, but all were arranged either by Ellis or Giuffre. The approach to playing is that of a group of experimenters. Voicings for a saxophone section composed of Bud Shank, Art Pepper, Richie Kamuca, and Giuffre are light and supple. Occasionally, as in "Remember" (by Giuffre, not Berlin), they achieve a reed-tone organ quality that is unusual, well brought off, and interesting as experiment. The rest of the interest centers about the combination of two guitars; Herb Ellis takes solos and plays melody, while John Hall stays with the rhythm. In these hands, it turns out to be a good combination. The over-all effect is of quiet, cerebral music quite skilfully performed.

"Turk Murphy: Music for Wise Guys and Boosters, Card Sharps & Crap Shooters." Roulette Birdland R25088, \$3.98; also stereo, \$4.98. "Ace in the Hole," "See Your Mama," "You're a Wise Guy," "Red Eye," "Torch that Didn't Go Out," "Old Green River," others.

The Turk Murphy Orchestra, which at times has done well with many tunes reconstituted from the Dixieland-New Orleans repertoire, presents a number of sentimental songs that may be certain to evoke nostalgia in some quarters. That is unless one has a certain nostalgia-fatigue brought on by numberless other celebrations on LP of the gassy gaslit era. The vocals, by Murphy and Pat Yankee, strive to elicit the usual period feeling, but even when they do they can be done without. The band is heard very little.

"Ev'ry Hour, Ev'ry Day of My Life." Songs by Valerie Carr. Roulette R25094, \$3.98; also stereo, \$4.98. "Always," "I'll Always Be in Love with You," "I'll Be Around," "My Heart Belongs to Only You," "While We're Young," "Ev'ry Hour," "Why Was I Born?" "Always in My Heart," others.

Valerie Carr has a potent voice in the contralto range that reveals itself on this LP as capable of handling popular material. She can at times be quite moving; but one suspects that the coaching this young singer has received may have pushed her into attempting a dramatic style a bit beyond her age. Her sobbing delivery of "Why Was I Born?" is on the heavy side; in a lighter mood, as in "I'll Always Be in Love with You," she displays strength and control that are impressive. On the basis of evidence heard here, an early career of church singing probably contributed greatly to development of a voice that deserves to be better handled.

"The Real Boogie Woogie: Memphis Slim, Piano Solos." Folkways FA 3524, \$5.95. "Walkin' the Boogie," "Cow Cow Blues," "Jefferson County Blues," "Four O'Clock Blues," "Mister Freddie," "Trouble in Mind," "44 Blues," "88 Boogie," "Sail on Blues," others.

Memphis Slim, who appeared out of the fog enshrouding the stage at the Newport Folk Festival like the ghost of his predecessors Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis to render rolling boogie woogie rhythms as they hadn't been heard for a long time, has here gathered together a good representation of his repertoire. Fourteen selections of boogie woogie on any record are an awful lot; the pattern is varied by an occasional blues. Among them, the traditional "44 Blues" is one of the finest. It's a good, new recording of boogie woogie at a time when the genuine article has become something of a rarity.