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Through High Fidelity

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Tape, Talent and Imagination

The story of Tony Schwartz, who built his tape recording hobby into a creative career.

by ROBERT ANGUS

THE MOST important piece of equipment Tony Schwartz employs in tape recording is his imaginative frame of mind. It allowed him to see totally new perspectives in his hi-fi recording hobby; and his multi-faceted activity with reel and microphone has earned him such serious appellations as folklorist, sociologist, and documentarian. But none of these elegantly academic names fit a man who, essentially, is just a tape recording fan

with his mind as open as his ears.

Tony, by trade a commercial artist, is perhaps best known for his Folkways records and Phonotape releases. "Sounds of My City," released recently by Folkways, was recorded originally for broadcast on Station WNYC in New York. Last year, it won the Prix Italia, the prize given for the year's best radio program at the World Radio Festival in Rimini, Italy. His Vocational Guidance series for Phonotapes is a collection of on-the-job interviews with people in vari-

ous occupations—accountants, advertising executives, commercial artists, secretaries, and personnel interviewers so far. The idea is to enable someone interested in a certain job to hear, first hand, what the work is like on a day-to-day basis. Tony's best-selling record is "New York 19," a collection of sounds (mostly folk music) recorded in and near New York's theatre district. The record takes its title from the fact that this is New York's 19th postal zone. Most of the major record companies have their studios in

Gathering material for an album of children's game songs, Tony Schwartz sports his Magnemite portable recorder and microphone.

the area, and it is the home of Tin Pan Alley. Yet Tony felt the commercial music companies were missing something essential. He proved it by recording literally, at their doorsteps, teen-agers making their spontaneously fresh music with wastebaskets and Pepsi-Cola bottles.

A recent project, undertaken for the Columbia Radio Workshop, was "The Life of My Dog," the relationship of people to an animal.

Folklore is Tony's first love. Shortly after he acquired his first recorder (a temperamental wire model) in 1947, he began recording the sounds around him—children singing as they skipped rope, immigrants singing the songs of their homeland, or a man and a guitar sitting on a stoop in front of a tenement. One of his earliest projects was the taping of folk songs from the radio. One day, he happened to meet one of the artists he'd recorded. He mentioned the recording, and a few days later the singer showed up in person to hear it. As Tony explains it, "Folk singers, most of them, don't make a lot of money. So they sometimes never have a chance to hear themselves as they sound to others." Tony's recorder offered that opportunity to such singers as Harry Belafonte, Pete Seeger, Burl Ives, Moondog and The Weavers. Yma Sumac made her first recordings for him.

Tony is somewhat of an amateur sociologist. As he explains it, he felt that certain possibilities of recorded sound had never been explored. Nobody had gotten around to recording the sounds of the city. So, taking the sociological point of view, Tony set about finding the relationship of music and sound to everyday city life. A testimonial to his sociological capabilities is the fact that the head of the Sociology department at Bucknell University, Professor Richard Du Wors, uses the documentaries to bring his students "alive to the realities in the city world" in which they live.

The documentaries grew out of the belief that nobody has yet treated sound—raw, candid sound—from an artistic point of view. So Tony set about doing just that.

"I never go out looking for material, but always take the recorder along," he continues. "I tape the things that interest me. The sequence arises out of the mate-

rial I collect. I want my equipment and me to be the minimum participants in a situation. I find that if you don't make a big thing out of your equipment, the people you talk to won't, either."

Tony has been recording for nine years—first on wire, then switching to tape. During that time, he's owned seven recorders, including the two Magnecorders and the battery-powered Magnemite portable he has at present. The Magnecorders are used for much of his editing and for some recording; but Tony is loudest in his praise of the Magnemite. It is, he says, "a completely portable, lightweight tape recorder, which makes the world your recording studio and a little hand held box your control room."

Recently, a salesman for another recorder manufacturer tried to interest Tony in his product.

"But it has a 20 db distortion in the upper frequency ranges," Tony complained.

"Well, just follow the score and watch the meter."

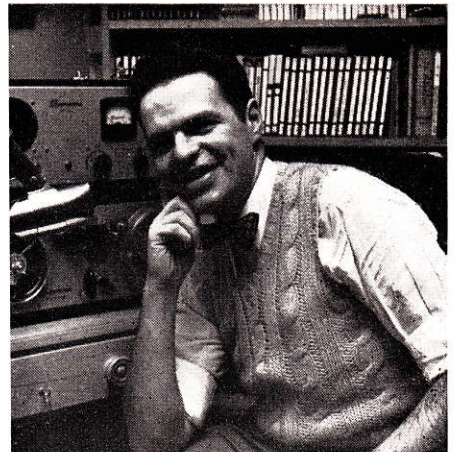
"But the city sounds haven't got a score."

The three recorders consume some fifteen hours of tape each month. The tape he uses is Mylar long-play tape. "Some people say that it stretches. Well, I've never had any trouble. And I've never had any temperature or humidity problems, either." Tony has tapes from as far back as 1948. He takes no special precautions for storage. "And I've never

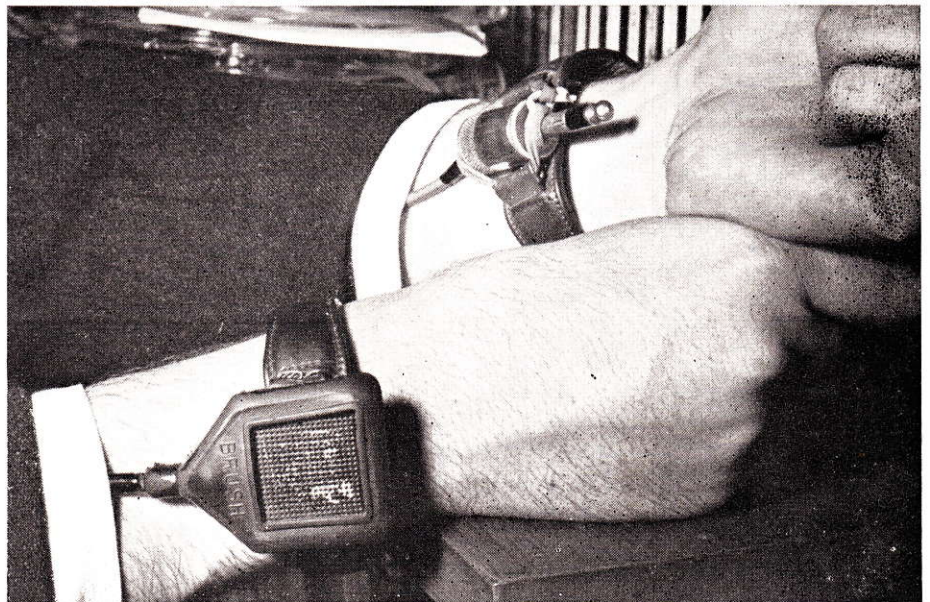
(Continued on page 19)



Using a microphone strapped to his wrist, Tony Schwartz records a street vendor.



Tony relaxes in his workshop. Behind him, in boxes, are the various recordings he's made since he bought his first recorder in 1947.



Wearing a brush microphone like a wristwatch, Tony prepares to go recording.

TAPE AND TALENT

(Continued from page 7)

had a recording become useless because of age."

For tape editing, he uses a Pilot amplifier in conjunction with the Magnecorders. But for home listening, he plugs the recorders into his living room hi-fi system. It includes a Bogen tuner-amplifier, and Bozak and University speakers. For his records, Tony has a Rek-O-Kut turntable.

Tony stores his tapes on three-, five-, and seven-inch reels along the wall of his workroom. Each reel is labelled—street musicians, political speakers, and street salesmen, for example. He estimates that about eleven hours of production go into each minute of finished record. Some of his recent projects include an interview with a New York taxi driver, "Sounds of Selling," "Christmas in New York," "Learning Through Sound," "Religious Sounds," "Home Remedies" and "Superstitions."

Throughout it all, Tony remains a defiant amateur. He's turned down nearly all commercial offers to "go professional." "If I did," he says, "I'd try to record things that would sell, rather than things that interest me. My enjoyment of tape recording is as a means of getting closer to life."

Tony sums up his work this way: "I consider my recording work as a means of expression and communication. My programs and records express ideas and feelings I have about life around me. I feel they are complete when people understand and feel what I am trying to say and respond with some of the emotion I have about the subject. I do not believe I could rush radio programs and records into production. Documentary recording projects, like children, need understanding, time and love, to grow to maturity." ■ ■ ■

RESONANCE AND PEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

at least, by the conventional tone control. But a peaked frequency is one which rises abruptly within a limited compass, and which cannot be controlled without seriously disturbing the tonal balance. That is why peaked response should be avoided in any audio component. The buyer should therefore insist on examining the frequency response graph. ■ ■ ■

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AA-920

Rated output with less than 1% distortion: 20 watts (40 watts peak); frequency response: 20 to 20,000 cycles, ± 1 db. Has built-in preamp and audio control with hum-free DC on tube heaters; tape head and phono inputs with separate equalization; 3-position rumble and scratch filters; bass and treble controls; loudness-contour and volume controls; plus tape recorder output. Housed in handsome enclosure finished in brushed brass and burgundy.

Dimensions: 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " h x 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ " w x 9" d.

\$99.50 Complete

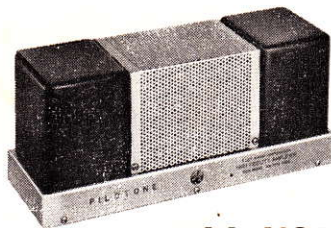


AA-903B

Rated output with less than 1% distortion: 14 watts (28 watts peak); frequency response at rated output: 20 to 20,000 cycles, ± 1 db. Has built-in preamp and audio control with hum-free DC on tube heaters; tape head and phono inputs with separate equalization; 2-position rumble and scratch filters; bass and treble controls; loudness-contour and volume controls; plus tape recorder output. Housed in handsome enclosure finished in brushed brass and burgundy.

Dimensions: 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " h x 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ " w x 9" d.

\$79.95 Complete



AA-410A

Basic amplifier—rated output with less than 1% distortion: 20 watts (40 watts peak); frequency response: 20 to 20,000 cycles, ± 0.5 db; 6L6GB output tubes. Chassis and cover cage finished in brushed brass.

Dimensions: 4" x 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 6" high.

\$59.50 Complete



AA-908

Basic amplifier—rated output with less than 1% distortion: 40 watts (80 watts peak); frequency response: 20 to 20,000 cycles, ± 0.1 db; 6CA7 output tubes; provision for selecting optimum damping factor. Chassis and cover cage finished in brushed brass.

Dimensions: 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " high.

\$125.00 Complete

Make your own performance tests of these amplifiers at your Pilot dealer.