

Japan Goes Hi-Fi

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Good audio isn't exclusive to the United States—it is rapidly gaining a foothold in Japan, too.



ABOUT ONE YEAR AGO, LP disks began to emerge in quantity from the pressing plants of certain Japanese record companies. And while the initial production was a painful process, with two pressings going into the scrap barrel for every one accepted, technical difficulties were soon overcome.

Since there were no Japanese manufacturers selling phonographs capable of reproducing LP's, the phonograph and record buying public interested in hi-fi consisted mainly of those Japanese

and those members of the United States armed forces stationed in Japan who could afford the imported articles.

Today the situation is far different. A considerable number of 2- and 3-speed Japanese-made LP phonographs are on the market, and hi-fi components are available. All of the record companies are in acceptable microgroove record production.

American record labels can be found in any record store in Japan. All of the major American companies have associate Japanese companies who press and market American records. Mother matrices are air-shipped from the States

to be converted into stampers and pressings by the Japanese associate companies.

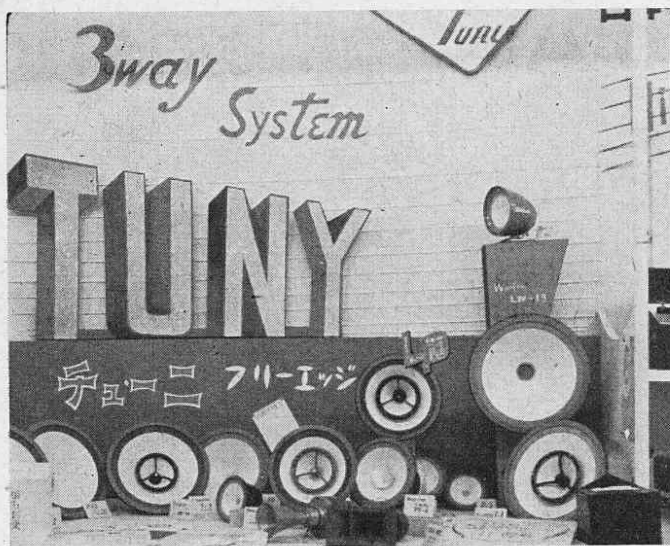
The Japanese pay the Americans a royalty based upon the record retail sales. It is interesting to note that approximately 50 per cent of all records sold today in Japan are of foreign label, and largely American. It is estimated that total Japanese record sales for 1954 will top 30 million.

Hi-fi sets in use in Tokyo alone today are estimated at more than 50,000. These installations are estimated at an average of \$90 each. Considering the fact that more than 95 per cent of the Japanese

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Above, Listening Room "Matsuya" Department Store, view from speaker end to rear. Notice the complete lack of the other sex!



Left, loudspeaker display from Hark K.K. Right, sapphire needles displayed by Nagaoka Seiki K.K.

hi-fi enthusiasts build their own amplifiers and assemble their own hi-fi systems, and considering the lower component cost in Japan, this average cost is comparable to an average Stateside cost of several times that figure.

In the Kanda area of Tokyo—just north of the famous Ginza—one can browse through more than a hundred retail stores that sell hi-fi parts. Loudspeakers, amplifiers, amplifier parts, pickup cartridges, turntables, preamplifiers, and equalizers are all in abundant

supply by many manufacturers, and are hawked in the many stores throughout the day and night.

One enterprising Kanda hi-fi store has set up a coffee shop on the second floor above his establishment. There, prospective hi-fi customers, while drinking coffee, may listen to LP's reproduced through the various loudspeakers, amplifiers, and pickups which are on sale in the store below.

There is always a demand in Japan for parts and equipments made in the

United States. If a store manager can display a Stateside item, he can always be sure of a higher price and a quick turnover. For this reason, there is a tremendous temptation to market Japanese-made articles with a Stateside label. This practice is definitely deplored by the Japanese government and stopped when detected. Reputable Japanese manufacturers and engineers alike join in condemning it. However, the practice is still a factor, and while small and
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Scenes in the Hi-Fi Coffee Shop of a Kanda store, where customers taste the delights of quality sound as well as the savor of the bean. Left, coffee-shop proprietor Kinjiro Maruyama inspects playing desk. Above, left to right: waitress, Hideo Iguchi, Nippon Times record columnist, and author. Note speakers in upper left.



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diminishing, will continue to remain a factor until the Japanese-manufactured components of Japanese design are more widely accepted by the Japanese themselves.

The newly formed Tokyo Chapter of the American Audio Engineering Society is rapidly taking the initiative in establishing engineering standards, arranging Audio Fairs, and in providing a medium for publication and discussion.

From November 27th to December 5th, an Audio Fair sponsored by the Nippon Audio Association was held in Tokyo with a total attendance of more than 55,000 persons. Forty nine manufacturers participated with display booths at one of Tokyo's largest department stores, the Matsuya.

Technical papers were presented by members of the Audio Engineering Society, and numerous demonstrations of Hi-Fi components were given. One interesting experiment involved a three-channel stereophonic broadcast by radio stations—JOKR, JOFR, and JOQR. Since the broadcast was made on standard broadcast frequencies, the general public participated by merely using three receivers and loud-speakers spaced around a room.

In order to provide optimum demonstration facilities for the exhibiting manufacturers, a special listening room was constructed for the use of the exhibitors. With this arrangement, loud-speaker silence was maintained in the display area, and each company was assigned a short demonstration period.

The Japanese are great music lovers as evidenced by the very crowded Tokyo auditoriums featuring both classical and jazz concerts several times each week, and by the numerous publications devoted to music. Along the Ginza, in Shimbashi, and in other night-club areas of Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe, and Osaka, one can hear the nightly strains of nothing but American dance music being played by Japanese orchestras. It is necessary to move out into the country to hear the purely Japanese Odori dance music.

Barring a major political upheaval in the Far East, Japan can be expected soon to become a large producer of hi-fi parts, and with improved component engineering hi-fi has an excellent chance to outsell and outclass other electronics industries in Japan.

It is a safe bet to predict that within the near future no self-respecting Japanese coffee shop in Tokyo (of which there are thousands) will be without a hi-fi system to soothe its music-hungry patrons!