

Soviet Recording Studios

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The author recently returned from a visit to the Soviet Union where he toured recording facilities in Moscow and several other Russian cities. His impressions are set forth in this article.

AS EVERYONE WHO READS THE DAILY PAPERS must know by now, the Soviet Union and the United States do not quite see eye-to-eye on all points. At times, our little political differences tend to obscure our human similarities. And, in an attempt to support our own points of view, we sometimes find ourselves denigrating *all* aspects of each other's society. Many Americans smugly point to the—by our standards—bleak living conditions in the Communist world. And Soviet newspapers keep their readers well informed about American race riots and assorted scandals. At times, diplomatic affairs are conducted at a level that would embarrass a kindergarten class. In Moscow, foreign residents are not permitted to live in the same apartment houses as Soviet citizens. Recently, former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey noted that Soviet visitors to America are not permitted to visit Minneapolis. (Mr. Humphrey made this observation to a group of Americans who were visiting Kiev, U.S.S.R. at the time.)

A New York organization known as the Citizen Exchange Corps has the notion that Americans and Russians who have actually visited each others' countries, and talked, perhaps even argued, people-to-people, will be less inclined to do something silly, like launching World War III. After all, Russians *are* people, they catch colds, worry about the younger generation, and work in recording studios, just the way good Americans do. So, reasons the Citizen Exchange Corps, let's get Americans to meet Russians with colds, Russians with kids, and Russians in recording studios; let's compare notes, and try to figure out a way to live together and keep our minimum daily dosage of Strontium-90 at a reasonably low level.

As a recording engineer, and a member of CEC's advisory board, I was asked to go over to the Soviet Union this past summer and meet with Russian recording engineers and musicians as a part of CEC's program of getting people with similar jobs together. After all, a land that has given the world Moussorgsky, Tchaikovsky, and Shostakovich, can't be *all* bad. And if I could manage to chat with an engineer or two in Moscow, perhaps at a later date some Soviet re-

cording people might get interested in visiting the U.S.A. And then maybe some more Americans would stop off in Moscow, and so on. With a little luck, and a lot of faith, some good might come of the whole thing.

So, under CEC auspices, I visited recording studios in Moscow and Leningrad and talked with engineers and musicians about their work. It would take a lot more than the three weeks that I had to analyze the Soviet record industry, and make an intelligent statement about its responsiveness to consumer demand *vis-a-vis* governmental directives, so this article is really just a "surface check".

The current two-track tapes being recorded in the Soviet Union are remarkably good, so it's probably safe to speculate that multi-track—8 or more—recording will not become popular unless there is a significant change in the type of music being recorded. And since music as a form of expression has certain obligations to Socialist Realism which may seem uncomprehensible to western observers, the future of Soviet music (and ergo, recording) will depend to some extent on Kremlin policy.

To further digress; in the Soviet system, Communism is regarded as the ideal condition, but one that has not yet been reached. The present condition—Socialism—is a step towards Communism. And during the Socialist period, all aspects of Soviet life have a primary obligation; to advance the state towards complete Communism. This philosophy is considered contrary to human nature by many westerners, but it cannot be dismissed in any analysis of Soviet affairs, including recording. (Prolonged thinking in this field is probably beyond the scope of **db**, and certainly beyond that of the author. But, it can be seen that the arrival of the first 16-track machine will involve more than an order to Ampex or Scully.)

For the moment, Soviet recording remains a fairly straightforward process, free of all the paraphernalia that has become an integral part of recording in this country.

But now, to the studios. They're very good indeed. The Radio Moscow studios are especially pleasant. Studio 5 (FIGURE 1) is a large room, completed in 1967. It is often used by Melodia for recording large groups. The console, shown as FIGURE 2 was manufactured by WSW, the *Wiener Schwachstromwerke Gesellschaft M.B.H.* in Austria. The tape recorder complement consists of four Studers; one 4 track,



Figure 1. Studio 5 in Radio Moscow. The view is from the elevated control room.



Figure 2. Melodia engineer Nicolai Danilin at the W.S.W (Austria) console at Radio Moscow (a shared facility of Radio Moscow and Melodia).

two 2 track, and one mono machine. Most recording is done on two tracks only, especially since the X-Y, and M-S systems are widely used here. The 4-track machine is generally reserved for overdubbing.

Melodia has permanent control rooms in the Bolshoi and Tchaikovsky Theatres in Moscow, and in Leningrad at the Philharmonic Hall and the State Academic Chapel (FIGURE 3). At the Leningrad locations, the consoles are of modular construction, and were built in Czechoslovakia by Tesla. A typical module is shown in FIGURE 4. Notice the patch point located on the face of the module itself. There is a shorting plug inserted here for normal operation. To insert an external



Figure 3. Leningrad State Academic Chapel's stage.

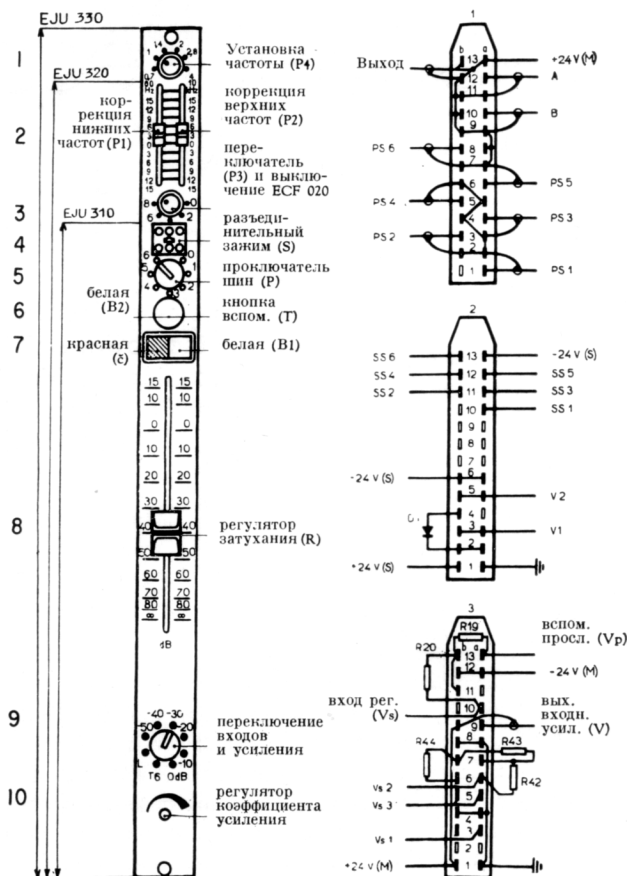


Figure 4. This illustration of a Tesla module is from a Russian specifications sheet. We have added the numbers on the left to indicate: 1. presence equalizer; 2. high- and low-frequency equalizers; 3. low-end cutoff; 4. patch point; 5. bus selector switch; 6. preview switch; 7. on/off indicator; 8. slide pot; 9. preamp pad; 10. preamp trim control.

device, the shorting plug is removed and a plug wired to the appropriate device is inserted.

In general, studio equipment is pretty much like that seen in Western Europe. Neumann microphones—especially 67's—are quite popular, as well as stereo mics, such as the SM69. EMT 140's are in use, as well as room-type echo chambers. Most of the speakers I saw were made in Eastern Europe, with the exception of a few Goodmans mounted in Hungarian enclosures.



Figure 5. The author (leaning over the Moog) brought a portable synthesizer with him. This group of Russian electronic-music composers was impressed by its performance characteristics.

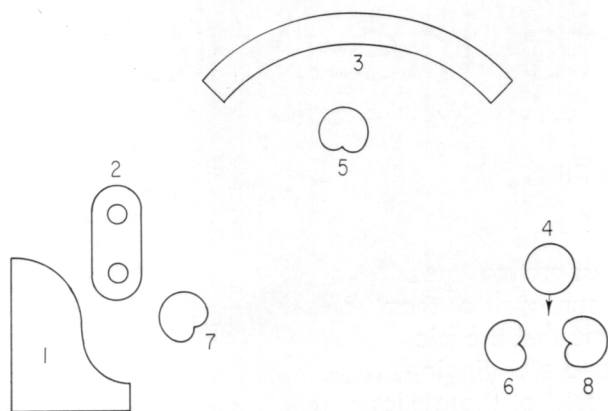


Figure 6. An illustration from a Russian audio textbook on studio operations. This is for a vocal/instrumental ensemble. 1. is piano; 2. bass and guitar; 3. vocal group; 4. soloist; 5. first right-track cardioid; 6. second right-track cardioid; 7. first left-track cardioid; 8. second left-track cardioid.

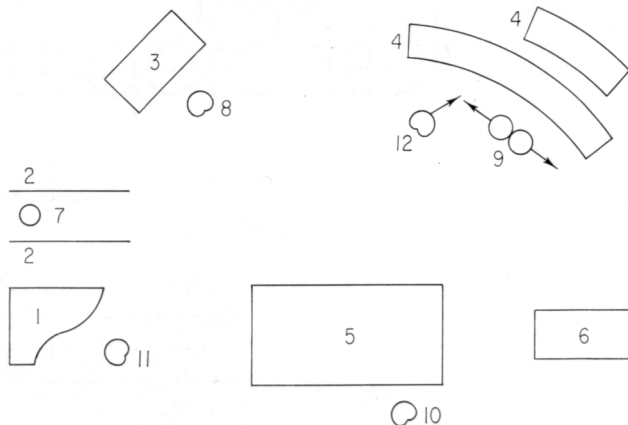
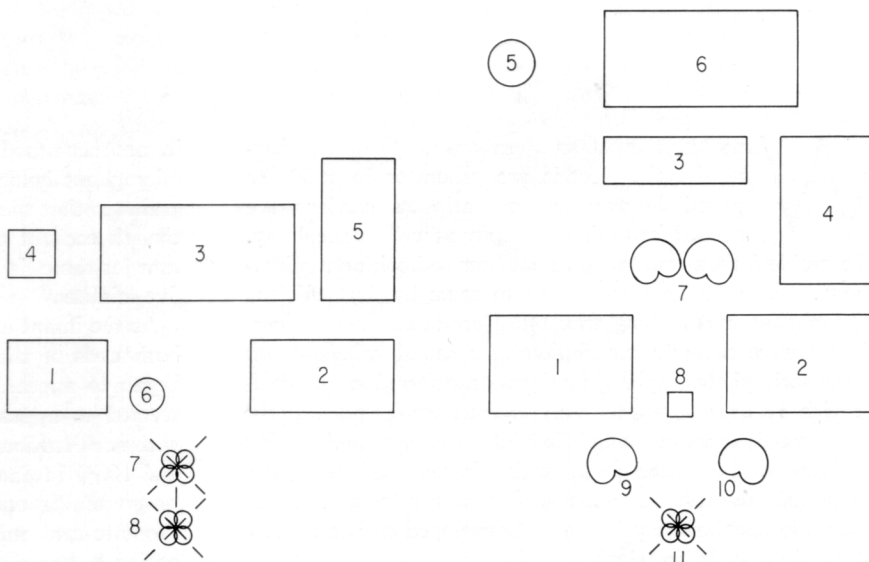


Figure 7. From the same book as Figure 6. This is a light music setup. 1. piano; 2. flutes; 3. percussion and guitars; 4. violins and brass; 5. violins; 6. violas and 'celli; 7. upright bass; 8. first right-track cardioid; 9. second right-track figure 8; 10. first left-track cardioid; 11. second left-track cardioid; 12. third left-track cardioid.

Figure 8. Two setups are shown in this illustration from the Russian text. On the left is a soloist with accompanying symphony orchestra. 1. violins; 2. violas and 'celli; 3. woodwinds and brass; 4. percussion; 5. contrabass; 6. soloist; 7. two figure 8 microphones; 8. again, two figure-8 microphones but arranged at a greater distance from the performers.

The setup on the right is for a symphony orchestra in a studio of about 4600 cubic meters. 1. violins; 2. violas and 'celli; 3. winds and brass; 4. 'celli and contrabass; 5. percussion; 6. winds and brass; 7. cardioid microphone; 8. director; 9. cardioid microphone; 10. cardioid microphone; 11. two figure-8 microphones.



TO RUSSIA WITH MOOG?

In Moscow, I found a studio devoted to experimental electronic music. The Studio contained a variety of tape recorders and the Soviet A.N.S.—Electronic Instrument for Composition. The A.N.S. is a large machine containing a glass plate covered with an opaque paint-like film. Portions of the film are etched away with a scribe, and the plate is passed in front of a light sensitive read-out device. Depending on the vertical location and length of the scribed marks, sine waves of controlled frequencies and durations may be produced. The length of a real-time performance is limited to the time it takes for the glass plate to pass the light sensitive read-out device, at which time the plate must be removed, and a new one inserted before continuing.

From New York, I had brought along with me about 150 pounds of MOOG Synthesizer, and the composers at the studio (FIGURE 5) were particularly impressed with its wave forming capabilities, and the keyboard which permits practically continuous performance.

In discussing the type of electronic music work being done in the Soviet Union, I was advised that the composers considered their work as *innovative* rather than *avant garde*, the latter is a term apparently not in favor at this time. I also

was told that their compositions were done within the framework of Socialist Realism.

While in the Soviet Union, I investigated the possibilities of returning at a later date with a group of Americans interested in the field of music and recording. Mr. Boris Lebedev, General Secretary of the Committee for U.S.S.R. Participation in International Power Conferences has kindly offered to receive an American group during the spring of 1970, and the Citizen Exchange Corps is now making preliminary arrangements. Any **db** readers interested in visiting recording studios in Moscow, Leningrad, and perhaps one or two other cities are invited to write to me, care of **db** for further details.

db Magazine will be glad to co-sponsor a trip such as the author suggests. It is expected that such a trip would encompass a three-week period. Estimated *total* costs, including air fare from New York, should be just about \$1000. If you are interested write to the author, **John M. Woram, db Magazine, 980 Old Coutry Road, Plainview, N. Y. 11803.**