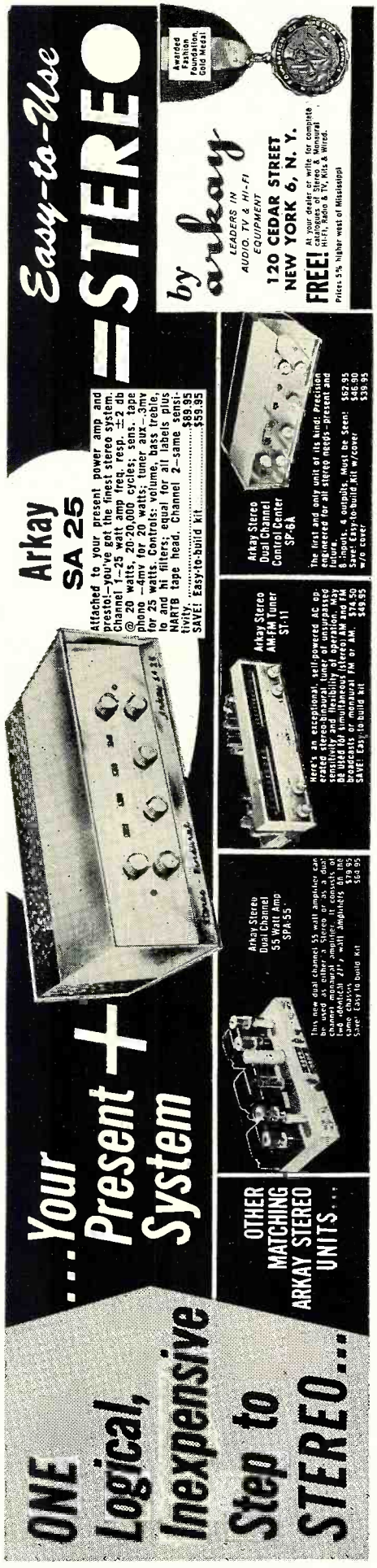

Sound on Tape

By BERT WHYTE

THERE has been a big spate of activity in the tape world on some new processes for the playback of stereo. *RCA* announced and demonstrated a new "magazine-loading" tape machine which employs four heads, a speed of 3¾ inches per second. The heads are so disposed that the tape from the magazine passes over one stereo stacked pair and then on its way to be automatically rewound, passes over the other stereo stacked pair. Thus, in essence, you have what is best described as "half-track stereo." *RCA* claims that with a new, very narrow gap structure and proper equalization, they have achieved response at 3¾ inches per second to 15,000 cycles.

The advantages of this system are, of course, immediately apparent. For one thing, the job of threading tape which so many people find exasperating is eliminated. For another the slower speed and the half-track idea will enable tape prices to be drastically reduced. There is already talk of an hour's stereo music for $6.95! There certainly is great promise in this, but like so many things there is a catch . . . quite obviously if tapes are brought out in the four-track magazine form, only those machines specially designed to play them will work.

Shure Bros., the Chicago manufacturer of magnetic heads, contends that it can make 4-channel heads available for mounting on regular reel-type machines and that these heads would be compatible with present-day two-channel stereo heads, thus keeping stereo libraries already acquired from becoming obsolete. It will be interesting to watch the battle on this one!

According to some people I've talked to who are "in-the-know," they don't feel that the real hi-fi nut will want to abandon the advantages of the 7½ inch speed. They maintain that it is possible to keep a better and flatter curve at the higher speed as well as better signal-to-noise ratio. As I have said before, noise level is the one area in which the tapes we have today could be drastically improved. If the 3¾ inch speed has even more noise, it will never find favor with the true tape connoisseur.

CONCERTAPES STEREO STARTER SET

Concertapes. SP1, 4 tapes on 5" reels. Price $19.95.

This is one very smart merchandising idea that I wouldn't be too surprised to see springing up in other companies. For $19.95, this is a very good bargain, giving you four tapes which can cater to the moods and tastes of almost anyone who might be visiting your home. With this set you can be sure of having something decent with which to demonstrate your stereo system.

Volume One is called "Silk Satin and Strings," featuring the Sorkin Strings with rhythm accompaniment. This is a massed string sound, whooped up very much in the Mantovani tradition. The numbers are such popular items as "Jalousie," "Sleepy Lagoon," "Laura," and others of similar persuasion. They are played quite well and on the whole the sound is clean and bright, with good directional characteristics and a good sense of depth. My only quibble here is excessive tape hiss on my review copy.

Volume Two is a spectacular big-band sound with Mike Simpson and his Big Band. This is a fine multi-mike stereo job, with plenty of stereo movement and in which you can easily place the instrumentalists. In a sort of "Ellingtonian" program we hear such as "Take the A Train," "C Jam Blues," "After You've Gone," "One O'Clock Jump," and others. Very high level sound here. The brass is quite weighty and bright, with a good solid bottom sound from the percussion.

Volume Three is "Lighting the Torch," with very "torchy" Nancy Wright and the Jay Norman Quintet. This is a very intimate close-up type of sound, with good liveness and good stereo perception. The quintet makes a lot of noise for its size and Miss Wright is placed forward in the stereo perspective giving a very live, almost "breathy" sound. Among her best on this tape are "Taking a Chance on Love" and "Take Me in Your Arms," with four other songs on tap.

Volume Four is called "Symphony of the Dance" and features Leonard Sorkin conducting the Musical Arts Symphony Orchestra. This and the "Big Band" tape are the best in the collection; this particular little tape I consider a "sleeper," since this has some really spectacular sound. The opening "Dance of the Clowns" by Rimsky Korsakov is a real knockout! A good sized orchestra is recorded quite close-up in a big liveness giving a sharply detailed sound with great presence. Brass here is terrific in its bright brazenness. There are some

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