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HIGH PERFORMANCE STEREO

Sound IS the Experience !™

A FRUSTRATING REALITY

BY

JOHN F. ALLEN

HIGH PERFORMANCE STEREO™



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FIRST IN DIGITAL STEREO

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Home entertainment technology continues to eclipse motion picture theatres. The public taste for quality sound has been recently demonstrated when sales of prerecorded cassettes outstripped LP's for the first time. Since cassettes and the equipment to play them cost more, one can conclude that purchasers want and are willing to pay for quality.

It's a frustrating reality but the small Walkman type cassette players with DBX noise reduction deliver better sound than 90 per cent of today's stereo equipped theatres. These handy portables complete with the new DBX noise reduction chips are now available from a few manufacturers. And with more than 20 companies licensed to make these units, we may expect more.

Another intriguing development impacts even more directly on theatres. Sony will soon introduce their new BETA HI FI video cassette system. For the first time films will now be available for home viewing with wide range stereo sound superior to that available from records and tapes. Agreements to release films in this new cassette format have already been reached with more to come.

In BETA HI FI some of the low frequency video information has been sacrificed to make room for a new frequency modulated stereo sound recording which is integrated into the video signal and recorded by the rotating video head. The quality Sony claims for this technique is indeed impressive. A frequency range of 20 to 20,000 Hertz with a dynamic range of about 80 dB, and that's without noise reduction. This compares with a frequency range of 50 to 12,000 Hertz and a dynamic range of about 50 dB for those few current video cassette recorders with noise reduction.

At present film soundtracks let alone most prerecorded consumer fare are not up to BETA HI FI's standards. None the less, the push towards better and better sounding home entertainment continues at warp speed.

The most revolutionary development now being introduced to the world however is the new Compact Digital Disc (CD). True digital recordings on a 4 inch disc. The sound quality available from these nearly indestructible platters is superior to records, tapes,

movies and even live FM radio concert broadcasts.

It remains to be seen how quickly CD's can overtake prerecorded cassettes, undoubtedly several years. Meanwhile, theatre owners must make earnest efforts to catch up with current sound technology and prepare for the future. Theatres must be established in the public's mind as palaces of aural and visual entertainment. First rate bright clear pictures with equally clear wide range multi-channel and stereo sound are a must.

I've sadly heard more than one exhibitor in effect state that they know how to buy really superior sound systems but it is simply their policy not to do so. It's the old line that the public can't hear the difference and doesn't care anyway. These exhibitors feel that sound is not really worth the investment. On the other hand, there are others who believe that their customers are not stupid and make sure that their theatres are clean and their presentations excellent.

Current non digital, or analog, recording technology is quite good. Digital systems will not themselves dramatically improve master recordings. But since films and commercial recordings are rerecorded, mass produced renditions made up of several channels mixed down to 2 or 4, digital equipment will substantially reduce the degradation encountered in the production process. The final results can rival life itself.

No one can say when, but sometime in the future theatres will be equipped to reproduce digitally recorded soundtracks. It seems shortsighted to build sound systems today that aren't ready for the future demands this will require. For instance, only the largest full-range speaker systems can really do the job. Equally important is the amount of amplifier power installed to drive them.

The large speakers definitely sound better than the smaller ones so you need not wait to hear an improvement. You simply won't have to replace your expensive speakers and amplifiers again.

I am surprised when I see exhibitors go for inferior sound systems. The words "cheap stereo processors" keep coming up in their discussions. If I may be allowed to offer a little business advice: Forget cutting corners. Sound is serious stuff. Look for the best and don't settle for less - your customers won't.

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