WPIC Transcribes Complete Series of Dickens Novels

Distinctive program feature sets a new high in enduring literary value

by Evelyn Keller, Publicity Director, Radio Station WPIC, Sharon, Penna.

More than three years of writing and research preceded the inauguration, over Radio Station WPIC, Sharon, Pennsylvania, on September 26, 1948, of a new series of weekly half-hour radio plays based on the works of the English novelist, Charles Dickens.

From the beginning, it was obvious that the huge casts involved largely composed as they were of non-professional talent, would make it impossible... or at least, advisable... to attempt to maintain a weekly schedule of live broadcasts. (In "Nicholas Nickleby," for example, there are thirty-four different characters. Fortunately, they do not all appear in any single episode!) All the programs, have, therefore, been produced in WPIC’s studios and transcribed on 16-inch Audiodiscs.

The aim of the series is to present, in half-hour episodes, the complete series of novels by Charles Dickens, numbering fourteen in all, if one includes the unfinished mystery, "Edwin Drood." The intent of the series is to give the radio audience dramatic programs of greater literary value and more lasting interest than soap operas. While individual Dickens works have been produced over the air, this series, so far as is known, marks the first time the entire fourteen novels have been adapted for broadcast use. Much care has been taken to present each work in a form that will be easy for the listener to follow, while yet

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Tense Moments of History Brought to Life on New Columbia Discs

Priceless Historical Recordings, from 1933 to 1945, Dramatize One of the Most Eventful Eras of All Time

The past decade holds many unforgettable memories for all of us. Memories of world shaking events and screaming front-page headlines. But, perhaps more clearly than anything else, we remember the radio. How we used to listen tensely, eagerly, anxiously to the news broadcasts — to the voices of commentators, correspondents, and men who were making history both at home and abroad.

Few of the general public, however, realized that at the same time these memorable voices were coming to us over the air, the recording turntables back at the station were quietly at work, engraving a permanent record of the drama that unfolded day by day.

The vast library of historical reference recordings and transcriptions filed away in the archives of the country’s leading broadcast stations can tell one of the most dramatic stories of all time. They can bring to vivid life events long gone by — they can speak to us with voices of those no longer here.

These priceless historical recordings, however, have not previously been available to the public. But Columbia’s recently released album entitled "I Can Hear It Now" brings a collection of dramatic historical selections to all who want to hear and remember. It is available in an album of five 12-inch discs and also on a single LP Microgroove record. This collection was

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Transcribes Dickens Novels

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Tense Moments of History

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prepared by Edward R. Murrow, radio news reporter, and Fred W. Friendly, radio producer and script writer. The compilation of this material was, in itself, a monumental task. Over a period of more than 2 years Mr. Murrow and Mr. Friendly played back a total of more than 500 hours of old broadcasts. Over 100 hours of this material were recorded from the lacquer to magnetic tape. This provided a flexible medium from which the final selections were made, and re-recorded on disc form, with narration by Mr. Murrow. His commentary unifies and explains the historical selections, leading the listener effortlessly through the highlights of a 13 year period, from 1933 to 1945. The events recorded are not necessarily included in their precise chronological order, but rather are arranged to give the maximum dramatic effect to the entire presentation.

The first famous voice to be heard is that of Will Rogers, from a recording made in 1932. This is followed by the very familiar voice of Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his message of encouragement to the nation on March 4, 1933. His voice is heard again and again — the last time in his report to Congress on the Yalta meeting. Then comes Huey Long — the Duke of Windsor in his abdication address — Fiorello H. La Guardia — Alf Landon — and John L. Lewis. You hear a dramatic on-the-spot account of the Hindenburg disaster — the voice of Neville Chamberlain telling a falsely relieved world that, after the acquisition of Sudetenland, Hitler will make no further territorial claims . . . and then the fanatical voice of Hitler himself, in an address to Edward Benees.

Other voices tell of the invasion of Poland — Italy's entry into the war — the fall of France. And later the tense moments of December 7, 1941 are brought startlingly to life, with John Daly interrupting a regular musical broadcast, informing a shocked and horrified nation of the Pearl Harbor attack. Then there is the U.S. declaration of war — the tremendous impact of D-Day — the Nazi invasion of Russia — and finally Hiroshima and the Japanese Surrender.

This is but a suggestion of the full historical contents of "I Can Hear It Now." Not only does it bring back memories more dramatically than could possibly be done by the written word — it points out the as yet untouched possibilities that actual historical recordings can play in the educational field. It is to be hoped that this Columbia Album is but the first of many similar record collections which will be offered to the public. For there is certainly a wealth of this interesting and instructive material available — both in the extensive files of the recording and broadcast companies, and in the hundreds of thousands of disc recordings made by government agencies such as the OWI and the Library of Congress.

Mr. Edward R. Murrow, noted reporter-analyst, is largely responsible for the compilation of Columbia Records new album of historical recordings. Mr. Murrow, an eye witness to many of the events covered in the album, is the narrator for this collection of actual recorded voices of the outstanding personalities who made history during the crucial period from 1933 to 1935.

the writer cannot help but be tremendously influenced by so intimate an acquaintance with an author who could devote an entire page to the description of the buttons on a man's vest, making each button an object of interest and a source of humor.

The success of this series leads one to wonder whether there are not other authors of Dickens' caliber and profundity to whose well radio might not regularly and profitably carry its message. When "Edwin Drood," the fourteenth and final Dickens book, is completed, we mean to go further afield. Conrad? Hawthorne? Willkie Collins? Stevenson? Perhaps, some day, even Shakespeare.

No attempt has been made to include the much overworked "Christmas Carol" in the series, though it is planned to use one of Dickens' other Christmas books . . . probably "Cricket on the Hearth" . . . at Christmas-time, 1949.

Casts are recruited from among the speech students of Youngstown and West-

minster Colleges (including one professor from the Drama Department of Westmin-

ster), from the members of the Youngs-

town (Ohio) Playhouse, and local amateurs and ex-professionals. One of the mainstays, for example, a man who has appeared in some role in every Dickens book to date, is an old-time stage actor who is now the manager of a local liquor store!

Direction and production work is handled by the writer, assisted by a studio engineer, a cutting engineer, a turntable operator for sound effects and music, and a staff announcer. Each half-hour episode is rehearsed and transcribed in one evening's work.

For the writer, this has been an exciting and fruitful experience. The end is not yet in sight, and the whole project may well consume five or six years. They will have been well spent. As a free-lance (for such shows as "Suspense" and the Kate Smith hour, in radio, and for other media), the writer cannot help but be tremendously influenced by so intimate an acquaintance with an author who could devote an entire page to the description of the buttons on a man's vest, making each button an object of interest and a source of humor.

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**MICROGROOVE IN YOUR STUDIO**

**Part 2, Equipment Requirements**

by C. J. LeBel, Vice President, AUDIO DEVICES, Inc.

In our last issue we discussed the three steps in the transition from standard to microgroove recording, steps which may be taken by any recording organization. In taking these steps it is necessary to make certain changes in equipment. The most important is provision for cutting at micro pitch — in the range of 224 to 260 lines per inch. Probably 224 to 240 lines is the most desirable range for most applications.

Some equipment already made has provision for this without change — that originally designed to provide continuous variation of feed pitch. In other apparatus some change is necessary. An overhead feed mechanism relies on a change of leadscrew for change of pitch. To make the shift, then, it is only necessary to purchase and insert a new leadscrew.

The swinging arm type of feed mechanism requires a little more effort. The feed action is produced by the operation of a worm and gear sector. The manufacturer of the machine can remove the worm and substitute another of different characteristics. He also has a removable worm arrangement so that the machine can be changed back and forth between micro and standard groove. The change is not as easy as desired, for the chassis has to be lifted up in the case. However, such a change is not one to be made often, and the arrangement is satisfactory.

Some recording machines have too much vertical vibration to be used for microgroove, unless an advance ball is used. The machine manufacturer can advise on this point, and can supply an advance ball rig if necessary. Inexpensive semi-professional swinging arm feed type machines are most likely to need this attachment.

The electrical characteristics are even simpler to achieve. When recording regular 16" transcriptions with standard groove spacing and microgroove radius, we would use normal transcription recording characteristics. This would be either the NAB standard 16 db boost at 10,000 cycles) or the 10 db boost which many studios have found to be their usable limit. Columbia microgroove characteristic is the same as NAB, except that the response is slightly higher below 100 cycles. A simple equalizer will take care of this. For a great deal of work the difference is negligible, and standard transcription equalization can be used.

We have carefully refrained from commenting on the 33 1/3 vs. 45 rpm situation. At the start, the average studio will have only 33 1/3 rpm equipment, so there will be no question of choice. Only time and experiment will indicate whether 45 rpm will become a serious factor in the average studio.

It is evident that the transition to microgroove is an easy one from the equipment point of view.

The subject will be discussed further in our next issue.

**Wendt's "Wax Works"**

The Story of a Record-Making Musical Family

Bill Wendt, a 16 year old student at Thomas Jefferson High School, Richmond, Virginia, was one of the three talented students selected to appear on the Philharmonic Symphony's CBS program "Week End With Music," on October 17, 1948.

That's how we first heard about Bill, who is not only an accomplished musician on the violin, piano, cello, string bass, and bells, but is also an up-and-coming recordist. As this is a rather unusual combination of talents, we felt that our readers would be interested in hearing about his recording activities. So here's the story in his own words, as quoted from his letter to the editor of Audio Record:

"I have been doing my own recording work for approximately ten months, having been introduced into this field by my oldest brother, Frank, who first became interested in audio work about seven years ago. When he entered the service he passed on to me his information on recording. While he was away my interest in this field grew considerably with the cutting of numerous discs, but as yet I have not had time to become well acquainted with the more technical side. All of the equipment was built by my brother with the exception of the recorder itself which is a Rec-O-Kut 16 inch recording table with the same make overhead feed: a combination that has served quite well considering the relatively low price. The cutter is a Presto 1-D which is driven by an amplifier using a pair of 6BA's and a UTC out-put transformer # LS-55. Fifteen watts, however, is not sufficient for recording piano with its ever-present peaks, and I am now helping Frank build a 60 watt amp. You see, this recording hobby is a sort of mutual interest.

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Report on "Madame X:"
RCA Victor's New 45 RPM Record

We have received a number of requests for information on the new RCA Victor 45 rpm record, "Madame X." No technical information has yet been released, but we have collected the available data on the subject. Here it is in brief.

X is a thin 7" pressing of pure vinyl. The center hole is large — about 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Maximum playing time is 5 1/2 minutes. Fine grooves are employed, and the playback stylus radius is 1 mil. Price is slightly under that of an ordinary shellac pressing of the same playing time. So far as we can tell, the recording characteristic is the same as that used on standard Victor records.

The large center hole permits the use of a special record changer of very interesting properties. The record stack is carried on the large size center spindle: there are no outside supports. As a result the changer is extremely compact and extremely rapid. Several observers have timed the change cycle at 1 1/2 seconds. To simplify the mechanism, all discs are of the same diameter, regardless of playing time. Record changer manufacturers are getting ready for production, and it is rumored that the simplicity of the mechanism will permit a net price of $5.

The point which has aroused the widest controversy is the speed: 45 rpm. It is rumored that 33 1/3 rpm was tried and discarded because of difficulty in securing reliable processing in mass production, when using the slower speed. A moment's consideration will show that for a given diameter, 45 rpm will give 35% higher linear groove velocity than will 33 1/3 rpm. It would be possible to get the same linear groove velocity at 33 1/3 rpm by increasing the outside diameter to 9 1/2 inches, which would increase the vinyl cost 82% over the 7 inch size. In short, the higher speed is a means of exchanging playing time for wider frequency range and reduced tracking distortion (with a fixed outer diameter).

Our readers will be interested to know that RCA Victor's engineers have promised us an article on "Madame X" for our March issue.

Two More Questions and Answers on LP Records

In the November issue of the "Audio Record" we asked if there was anything else our readers would like to know about LP microgroove records. Here are two of the questions received which we believe are of general interest and are not covered in the questions and answers previously given.

1. Question: Is more volume required in playing the new LP microgroove records on duo-speed record players because of the decrease of amplitude in the grooves?
   Answer: One needs about 3 db more volume.

2. Question: In what ratio is sound to surface noise compared to both LP and standard pressings?
   Answer: LP is about 15 db better than standard pressings. In other words, the sound to surface noise ratio being about 40 in standard pressings is 55 for LP.