

LETTERS

Binaural vs. Stereophonic—Again

SIR:

On semantic grounds, the suggested definitions of binaural and stereophonic reproduction seem to leave something wanting. If monaural refers to a single-channel sound source (the word is not used to mean listening with one ear), then binaural logically means listening to two channels. Since stereophonic listening also can consist of listening to two channels (or three or more), it too should logically qualify as a form of binaural reproduction. Semantically, therefore, binaural and stereophonic reproduction should not in all cases be two different things.

Conforming to the suggested definitions, however, methods of listening to musical reproduction can be classed as follows:

I. Single Channel

A. "Point Source"—single speaker (or one earphone).

B. "Diffused Source"—several speakers spaced apart (or two earphones) on one channel.

C. "Source-Free"—one or more speakers on one channel heard with *one ear only*.

II. Multichannel

D. "Stereophonic"—multiple speakers spaced apart, each on a separate sound channel. The respective channels originate from microphones spaced in a manner similar to the loudspeakers.

E. "Binaural"—two earphones on separate sound channels. The respective channels originate from microphones spaced a head's distance apart.

A and B are the conventional methods commonly referred to as monaural. Methods D and E are the present subject of lively discussion as improved means of reproduction. Method C, although an old trick, seems to have been overlooked.

Multichannel listening endeavors to restore to reproduced music its original spaciousness, detail, and arrangement of instruments. More, it tries to free the music from its connection with a box against the wall—it tries to restore presence. One wants to feel surrounded by the music, as happens at a good seat in a good hall.

Perhaps some readers would like to experiment with listening to orchestral reproduction with one ear *completely* stopped up. My own reaction is quite favorable. While one does not hear violins on the left and horns on the right, yet the music does seem to acquire more detail and free itself from association with a speaker at the other end of the room. It also becomes more spacious.

Among friends, reactions have been mixed. At worst, some experienced a loss of highs and/or bass. One complained of fuzziness. On the other hand, a musically trained couple who have a fine hi-fi system said about as follows: "The music had much more detail. Individual instruments were easier to pick out. We felt as though we were in the middle of the music and in fact had to turn the volume down a bit."

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