



## How I Got Started In Audio

FROM TIME TO TIME, I have been asked by readers how they can become hi-fi equipment reviewers. Frankly, I have always found this to be an unanswerable question, since in my case it came about through a unique series of events that are not likely to be repeated, although the story may be of some interest to today's readers.

For one thing, in my formative years (the mid-1930s) there was no audio (or video) industry as we now know it. Instead, we enjoyed acoustic phonographs and 78-rpm records of distinctly "lo-fi" quality (and with a typical 3- or 4-minute playing time), AM radios, and movie theaters (black-and-white only). These technological wonders were the ancestors of today's high-fidelity music and home-theater systems.

As a youngster, I was a voracious reader with an enthusiastic interest in science and technology. Purely by accident, I was introduced by a friend to the hobby of amateur ("ham") radio, and soon I was incurably hooked on electronics (a term that had not yet been coined). I became a licensed ham-radio operator at 14 and am still active as W2KFB today.

This interest logically led me to embark on an electrical-engineering program in college. During my junior year, the Pearl Harbor attack occurred. I enlisted in the Army Signal Corps reserve, completed my schooling, and two weeks after graduation went on active duty. In the following couple of years I received intensive training in radar technology at Harvard, MIT, and the Signal Corps Radar School. While I was en route to the Philippines, the atom bombs ended the war, and I spent the following year with my four-man radar maintenance team in the occupation of Japan.

Returning to civilian life, I joined the research and development staff of a large conglomerate that was involved with such diverse projects as medical electronics, motion-picture projectors, theater sound systems, and Doppler radar navigation systems, among many others.

During the late 1940s I noticed that some of my fellow engineers were spend-

ing their lunch hours in vigorous discussions of a subject that was totally unfamiliar to me. Intrigued, I soon became immersed in the arcane world of woofers, tweeters, and so on, and my life was irrevocably changed.

It started innocently enough. Our employer had no objections to our using its extensive laboratory facilities, outside of working hours, for measurements of our own amplifiers, tuners, and speakers. The theater section of the lab was equipped with loudspeakers (Altec Voice of the

Theater, Klipschorn, and others) as well as various amplifiers and appropriate test equipment.

As time passed, anyone who acquired or built a new piece of audio gear was invited to bring it to the lab for an objective evaluation. We soon developed a keen awareness of the "hype" that was then prevalent (and still is, to a greater or lesser degree) in promoting a new product.

Eventually, four of us decided to publish a newsletter — on a strictly part-time basis — to provide unbiased information about a variety of consumer audio components. *The Audio League Report* was probably the audiophile's equivalent (in microcosm) of the established consumer publications. It reached 5,000 readers, but unfortunately we were able to produce only seventeen issues over a three-year period! However, during its brief tenure the Audio League had established a reputation for unbiased and enthusiastic interest in the rapidly growing hobby of



high-fidelity music recording and reproduction.

My friend Gladden Houck and I went on to form a partnership, and in 1957 Hirsch-Houck Laboratories came into being. We had both left our original employer, but since we lived only a few miles apart we were able to continue our testing operations from our homes, still on a part-time basis. We

outfitted ourselves with war-surplus test equipment and began to evaluate new audio components for various publications as well as manufacturers and dealers.

After a time, it became obvious to us that our testing activities had become too much for a reasonable part-time operation, yet the income was not enough to

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support both of us and our families on a full-time basis. Around this time, Ziff-Davis, then the publisher of *HiFiStereo Review* and *Electronics World*, made us an offer that could not be refused, compensating my partner for his share of our assets and securing my services, and the name of Hirsch-Houck Laboratories, for the exclusive use of Z-D publications.

My first *Stereo Review* test report appeared in the October 1961 issue and dealt with six stereo phono cartridges. The total number of my test reports for this magazine to date is close to 2,400, and combined with those done for other publications, the total is around 4,000!

This account may give the reader some insight as to why I have never been able to give a meaningful answer to those who ask me how they can become an equipment reviewer. The best I can do is to stress that you must be an enthusiast who is deeply interested and involved in the products and their application. □