


ML 4938

"Columbia", "Masterworks" and  Trade Marks Reg. U. S. Pat. Off. Marcas Registradas. Printed in U. S. A.

COLUMBIA MASTERWORKS



STRANGE TO YOUR EARS

STRANGE
TO YOUR
EARS

*strange
to your
ears*

*strange
to your
ears*

ears

your

to

strange

*strange
to your
ears*

the fabulous world of sound with

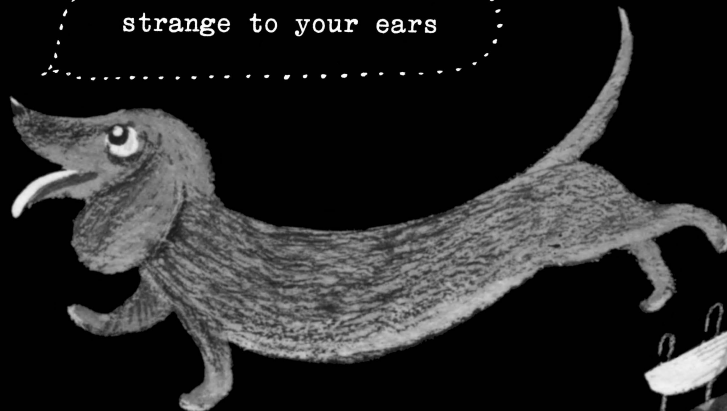
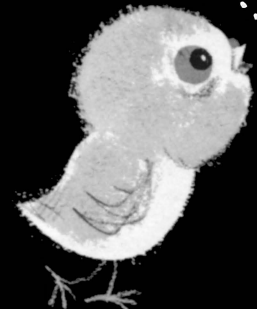
JIM FASSETT

STRANGE
TO YOUR
EARS

**strange
to your
ears**

strange to your ears

Strange
To Your
Ears



ML 4938

STRANGE TO YOUR EARS

ML 4938



Exclusive trade mark
of Columbia Records

THE FABULOUS WORLD OF SOUND

with

JIM FASSETT



Exclusive trade mark
of Columbia Records

■ Jim Fasset maintains that this whole thing began in Central Park, in New York City, which is not an unlikely story, at that. The Park is a sort of sonic vantage point in the middle of Manhattan. There one can easily hear the great Cunard *Queens*, bellowing greetings from their North River pier, and the immense muted blare of the city's motor traffic. In the middle distance ring out, from time to time, the tower bells of famous churches along midtown Fifth Avenue. Closer at hand there are bicycle bells; babies crying in perambulators; bird-songs and dog-sounds; sea-lions barking in the zoo.

Furthermore, somewhere in the park, especially when the weather is pleasant, it is often possible to encounter a rather young, very good looking man with a pipe between his teeth and a pre-occupied expression on his face, who looks as if he were trying to make up his mind what to say during the intermission in next Sunday's broadcast by the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. Possibly he is, in which case identification becomes complete: this is the musical director of CBS Radio, seeking inspiration in the byways of the Park. Sometimes he strolls, sometimes he bench-sits. When the pursuit becomes especially exhilarating, he sometimes rents a bicycle (50 cents an hour) and goes pedalling purposefully along the paths reserved for cyclists. Apparently Jim Fasset finds this process productive. At any rate, there hasn't been a silent Philharmonic intermission-break since he took over, since 1949. There hasn't been a dull one, either, though some of his ideas have been highly unconventional. (Anyone remember the taped interview during which coloratura Lily Pons conversed in parrot fashion with her parakeet?)

■ The concept of *Strange to Your Ears* came to Fasset, he says, on a summer day a year and a half ago, while he was sitting on a bench in a secluded section of the park. He was relaxed, but his ears were alert. In quick succession they registered a half-dozen sounds—a dog barking, roller-skates, a police siren, a liner hooting on the river, a baby crying and a fly buzzing. Of all these sounds, the source of only one—the fly—was visible, and Fasset dreamily congratulated his aural apparatus for recognizing the others so effortlessly. Then he thought twice about it. His dreaminess vanished. An idea for a program began to take shape in his head. A few months later, after many hours of fascinating but exhausting work, the Philharmonic listeners heard the

first of three intermission-programs, *Strange to Your Ears*, built around the recognition-factors which make familiar sounds familiar—and illustrating what happens when these recognition-factors are taken away, or changed. The high points of those programs, edited and rearranged constitute the content of this record.

There were at least two factors, other than Central Park and Fasset's flash of inspiration there, that entered into the final make-up of *Strange to Your Ears*. One was the irresistible versatility of magnetic tape recording, which Fasset has been exploring happily since the middle 1940's. Today's professional tape-recording machines commonly offer two speeds apiece. You have your choice of 7½ and 15 inches per second, or 15 and 30 inches per second. If you have two machines—both pairs of speeds—you can record initially 7½ inches per second, then make a copy with the tape going 30. Thus you will have speeded the sound up fourfold, with a two-octave raise in pitch. And so on. I am sure you get the idea, which can be either horrifying or enchanting, depending on how you take it. Naturally, the recording can also be copied backward, at any speed, and any two speeds can be re-recorded together, though this requires three machines.

■ By some mad freak of fate, and economics, CBS Radio just happens to have three machines, (and then some) to which Fasset has access for his Philharmonic intermissions. The broadcasting company also supplied the final catalytic factor in this enterprise, a genial, self-contained man named Mortimer Goldberg, a CBS tape-engineer. Like Fasset, Goldberg has all the outer markings of perfect respectability. There is absolutely nothing to lead anyone to suspect that, if these two men are left together in a sound-laboratory, within 30 minutes they will have discarded their jackets, yanked their ties awry and begun behaving very much like a pair of Mad Scientists in a Late Night Owl TV-show. However, that's what happens, and it is no use trying to conceal it. The record is evidence.

There is nothing brief and whimsical about this Fasset-Goldberg obsession. It involves spans of hair-trigger attention at which an FBI agent might balk. Take the canary-sequence which begins Side 2. At least a couple of hours of canary-song had to be recorded first, as raw material to explore. Then this had to be listened to—at half-speed or one-quarter speed: up to

eight hours of analytical auditioning—before the notion of the “triad” composition even could take shape. Then began a grueling stretch of tape-copying, cutting, splicing and re-copying, in which one false move always could send the experimenters back to the beginning. Fasset and Goldberg cannot remember how long it took them to produce this 30-second passage of triple-trio banshee-wailing, unearthly in its ghostly timbre, but my limited experience would suggest an 18-hour minimum. And that, friends, is aural devotion beyond the call of network loyalty. It is interesting to note that the very same sort of experimentation is being carried on now by some of today's foremost pioneers in musical composition, men like Edgar Varèse and the Frenchmen Boulez and Schaeffer. Within our lifetime we may hear concertos for tape-multiplied birdsong and symphony orchestra: quite seriously.

■ At the bottom of this is a phenomenon of which we all are part, though people like Fasset and Goldberg are far up on the forefront. This is the awakening of the ear, and it has been brought about by electronic and acoustical developments in the last twenty years, which have quite literally broadened our aural perception. The human ear is a marvelous mechanism, but it has inbuilt limitations, psychological as well as physical. We know something of the ear's evolutionary history, though not a great deal. Its key-mechanisms are three tiny lever-bones, or ossicles, (almost distortion-free in transmission, now) which once were part of the jaw-assembly of our remote underwater ancestors. How these ancestors heard—while their ear-bones were still occupied with food-snatching—we don't know. (There may be a clue in a *second*, independent hearing process, microphonic in nature, which our aural nerves still carry on, without ever transmitting the results to the brain: an earlier technique crowded out by a later.) But the ear as it serves us now is a device of the late Cenozoic jungle, designed chiefly for warning. It is highly directional, and discriminates against irrelevant sounds. Hence it is inferior, in a sense, to current condenser-microphones, which are omni-directional and do not discriminate at all.

It is almost impossible, for instance, to maneuver a human ear into the proper close-up position to hear what is now known in radio-audio circles as “Fasset's patented pin-drop.” (Side 1). The ear, and its associated brain-circuits, keep trying to put the sound back into

“normal” perspective. They reject the data. (You will find this a troublesome predisposition when you start trying to guess the problem-sound with which Side 2 ends.) Then, when the indiscriminate microphone and loud speaker accept the sound, and present it in new guise, the aural apparatus refuses to recognize it.

Or, sometimes, the human hearing-system re-interprets the sound. Midway through Side 1 of this record, you will hear what certainly seems to be a lot of horsepower coming your way along the Indianapolis Speedway. Run backward on Fasset's tape-machine, and at twice the pace, it turns out to be the Town Hall clock-chime in Copenhagen, Denmark, a much less alarming and more ingratiating sound.

■ All this is not meant to imply that the human hearing-system cannot be educated, cannot adapt, because it can (and in fairly short order, as you will find when you start puzzling out the mysterious sounds). I have seen a tape-editor—a Columbia Records tape-editor, I will add, to preclude any charge of subversion—push his reels backward and forward *by hand*, at perhaps one fortieth of normal playing speed, to make a correction. To me the resulting sound brought to mind the death-agonies of a wounded walrus, but to him it was quite clearly the schezo of a late Beethoven string-quartet, in which one of the performers had plucked a string a little too audibly before making an attack. A generation ago, no one in the world would have been able to do what he was doing, which may be worth thinking about.

The aural awakening that awaits you on this record is valuable; it will make you more conscious of your ears and the marvelous, two-million-relay neural circuit that serves them (and you). But it would be unfair to end this comment without pointing out another attraction of the record you might miss without a reminder from an expert (me). Only an editor—this is an axiom—can detect another editor's work. Into this recording Jim Fasset has crammed a surprising volume of sound-lore. Yet no listener, absorbing it, will have the faintest resentment about being educated. It is entertainment of a very high order from beginning to end. This comment, I may add, was not solicited and is not covered by my fee.

And, now dig those crazy sounds!

John M. Conly
Editor, High Fidelity Magazine

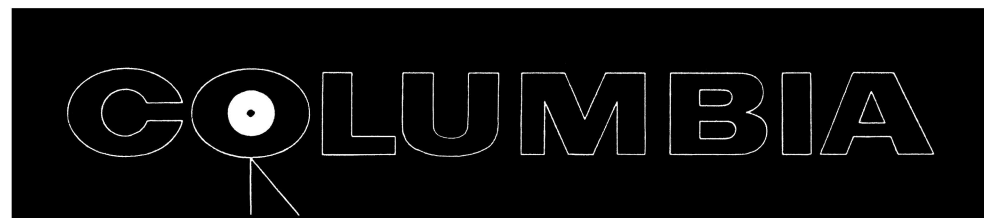
“PERMANENT” NEEDLES MAY CAUSE PERMANENT DAMAGE

No needles are really permanent. Some last much longer than others but all should be changed from time to time to safeguard your record collection.

Play safe. Ask your dealer for the new **Columbia Needle** – engineered, tested and guaranteed by Columbia Records.

Comparative Life Of Needle Stylus

DIAMOND	Highest initial cost but cheapest by far in the long run. Will last 50 to 100 times longer than sapphire needle.
SAPPHIRE	Good performance — will last 3 to 10 times longer than Osmium.
OSMIUM	Satisfactory and inexpensive. Be sure to change quite often.



“Columbia”, “Masterworks” and Trade Marks Reg. U. S. Pat. Off. Marcas Registradas. Trade Mark. Printed in U. S. A.

COLUMBIA

MASTERWORKS

STRANGE
TO YOUR EARS

ML 4938
NONBREAKABLE

SIDE 1
(x"LP" 32390)

The Fabulous World of Sound
with JAMES FASSETT



and



Trade Marks Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. Marcas Registradas. Made in U.S.A.

LONG



PLAYING

COLUMBIA

MASTERWORKS

STRANGE
TO YOUR EARS

ML 4938
NONBREAKABLE

SIDE 2
(x"LP" 32391)

The Fabulous World of Sound
with JAMES FASSETT



and



Trade Marks Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. Marcas Registradas. Made in U.S.A.

LONG



PLAYING