One of the outstanding advancements of sound-on-disc recording is not, as one might suspect, another electronic gadget but is, in the opinion of the writer, the formation of the "Sapphire Group," a social organization comprised of one hundred members in New York and fifty in Hollywood, all associated with sound recording. These two groups met and dined together monthly and in this friendly, congenial environment discuss the technical problems common to all sound recordists.

The early producers of disc and cylinder phonograph records were extremely keen competitors in this new and unique art. This may help to account for the fact that these men were usually personal enemies. I don't know whether Emile Berliner and Tom Edison were as well acquainted with each other as they were with the man who read the gas meter in their studios. It was, however, a common ruse for a recordist to assume the disguise of a meter reader and thus gain admittance to his competitors studio to learn of his advancement in the recording art. In such an environment, a social organization such as our Sapphire Group obviously would have been inconceivable. However, since the advent of radio broadcasting, the electrical recording and reproduction of sound has continued to improve so that today information about this art is generally considered common knowledge. It seemed inevitable, therefore, that a group of men engaged in various phases of the sound recording should assemble to discuss their common problems.

New York City Group

As early as 1942, the Sapphire Group became a reality in New York City with regularly scheduled meetings, a group pin, and a printed membership list. Prior to that time, it had been customary for W. H. Rose of Frank L. Capps and Co., Inc., to have lunch occasionally with G. E. Stewart of N.B.C. Recording Division and V. Liebler of Columbia Recording Corporation. As the size of this group increased and their discussion became more prolonged, there was no alternative but then to meet regularly for dinner when the discussion need not be curtailed by the necessity of returning to the office. The New York Sapphire Group continues to meet on the third Wednesday of each month in one of the dining rooms of the New York Athletic Club. As the group expanded, it became necessary to limit the membership to one hundred men all engaged in one of the many phases of sound recording.

By the end of 1945, the New York Sapphire Group membership included at least eight members from Hollywood. Some effort was made at that time to organize a Hollywood Sapphire Group, chiefly by Chester Boggs of Columbia Recording Corporation and the writer. However, it was not until Chuck Phillips of OWI in New York visited Hollywood in February, 1946, that the first meeting was held at Brittingham's Restaurant in Columbia Square on February 13, 1946. Seventeen of the 30 sound recordists invited attended the initial dinner and meeting. (See photo). Chester Boggs served as chairman. The eighteenth and vacant chair in the foreground of the picture was intended for Roy La Violette, CBS, who was called to cover a program before dinner was served.

After the dinner was served, a talk by each member present was recorded and the 16-inch disc forwarded to the parent group in New York City. The Hollywood Group has continued to meet regularly on the second Wednesday of each month except July. The membership increased so rapidly that it soon became necessary to decide either to limit the membership of the group or to transfer the meeting place to a larger dining room. As a result, a membership committee was elected to decide this and several other problems. The membership committee comprised six charter members: Chester Boggs, Harry Bryant, Bob Callen, Les Culley, Art Fethausen and Ernie Knight. At its first meeting, the committee decided that the group should be restricted to fifty active members, all

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Initial Meeting of Hollywood Sapphire Group, February 13, 1947

Seated at table from left to right are: Harry Bryant, Radio Recorders; Russ Hansen, Sam Goldwyn Studios; Bert Gottschalk, Electro-Vox; Ernie Knight, Dictaphone Lab; Charlie Douglas, CBS; Chuck Phillips, OWI; Jay Eisenman, CRC; Ludwig Sepmeyer, USN; Chester Boggs, CRC; Gary Harris, RCA-V; Bob Callen, NBC; Burton Boettight, Langevin Co.; F. H. (Shang) Winter, Radio Recorders; Les Culley, NBC; Victor Quen, C. P. MacGregor, Danell Minkler, Radio Recorders; Art Fethausen, C. P. MacGregor.

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Sapphire Group

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