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This editorial appeared in "Audio Engineering" (now "Audio") in its March 1948 issue and was prepared by the then Organization Committee for the formation of the Audio Engineering Society. The Committee was comprised of John D. Colvin, C. J. LeBel, C. G. McProud, Norman C. Pickering and Chester O. Rackey. (Mr. LeBel died in 1966 and Mr. Rackey in 1973.)

NEED FOR THE AUDIO ENGINEERING SOCIETY

Engineers engaged in the field of audio are generally agreed that there is a definite advantage to a professional society as a means of disseminating information and promoting intelligent study of the problems pertaining to their interests, but there has been considerable doubt that their field has been covered adequately. Audio engineering has been on the fringes of three existing societies without actually being the central interest of any one of them. Because of this, there has been sporadic discussion concerning the formation of a new professional society specifically devoted to audio engineering.

The most recent activity in this connection has been carried on simultaneously in New York and Hollywood. In the East, the interest is high among many of the engineers in the audio profession, but no embryo organization with a technical background has existed as a central meeting ground. The Sapphire Group in Hollywood has attracted audio engineers in that locality, and is a nucleus of activity in the West.

The creation of a new professional society is consistent with the example set by other specialized scientific and technical groups, where such course has been found necessary as a result of the inevitable broadening of scope of predecessor organizations.

Audio engineering has broadened to the point where a number of separate branches of the field deserve recognition, yet due to the lack of a specialized organization of engineers and researchers, the advances in the art have not become as widely known as they should be.

For example:

1. Speech input system design: Little of a detailed nature has thus far been published and practically no standardization has been achieved.

2. Studio design and use: Papers heretofore published have covered fundamental studio methods of utilizing those acoustical conditions. The problems of application and operation from the practical viewpoint have largely been left unreported.

3. Disc recording: The gap between the published material and actual practice is so great as to be incredible to one not actually in this field.

4. Tape and wire recording: The research aspect has been covered in the literature, but here again there is a big difference between the published information and actual engineering practice.

5. Hearing aids: Published information has not kept pace with engineering design practice. It is possible that this is due to the secrecy of a new art, but it may also be due to lack of encouragement of engineering papers.

6. Public address systems: The design of large, high-quality systems requires as much skill as that required to lay out a broadcast station, yet virtually nothing has been published on the subject. There are 1500 men in the high-quality field, and with encouragement many papers could be made available.

7. High quality home reproduction: The divergence between the ideal as discussed by Fletcher and associates years ago, and current practice is too great. It merits discussion.

8. Wired music systems: There are problems in this field which warrant discussion.

9. Telephone engineering: There has been very little material published on the aspects of this art which concern the broadcaster or wired music engineer, and practically nothing in any society journal.

Society Obligations

A professional society has obligations to the art as well as to the members. Among the duties it should assume are the following:

1. Develop technical and public appreciation of the importance of audio engineering as a separate profession, with its own distinct background requirements.

2. Foster educational presentation of subjects basic to audio engineering.

3. Foster research on subjects basic to audio engineering.

4. Foster periodic audio engineering meetings. (It is proposed to start with seven to ten meetings per year in each of two or three cities.)

5. Provide a facility for publication of papers.

6. Represent audio interests in the matter of engineering standards before the American Standards Association, the F.C.C., the R.M.A., and others of like nature.

7. Operate an employment register for qualified audio engineers, similar to that operated by the American Institute of Physics for physicists.

Discussion

A number of professional societies (and journals) have been nominally available for papers in the previously listed fields. Unfortunately, what is everybody's responsibility is now one's, and so audio engineering as a profession has had no real sponsorship at all. Likewise, there has been no one to encourage interchange of knowledge—presentation of the papers which are the lifeblood of any science.

Encouragement of publication has been badly needed, for the professional society journal situation has not been such as to attract the average audio engineer. One society journal covers the motion picture field, but most motion picture practice (optics, for example) is of little interest to the audio engineer in other fields. Another society journal has an excellent research and acoustical physicist's viewpoint, but one which has not attracted the engineer. The third society journal has attempted the difficult feat of covering the entire electronic field, making more than occasional attention to a particular subject impractical. As a result, two recent audio papers showed a lapse of sixteen and seventeen months between the first submission of manuscript and publication, and the fastest action seems about twelve months.

Conclusions

Since the obligations and duties mentioned in the foregoing are not fulfilled by any existing society, it appears that an independent society is now timely—one which is headed by audio engineers of character and run by audio engineers themselves. It has been claimed that there are already too many technical organizations. This argument will not stand close examination, and may be challenged on the basis of what test is best to judge whether there are too many organizations. By the test of operation, there are presently too few, for when too many diverse fields are combined into a group, a society becomes unwieldy. The obligations of encouraging college courses in the fundamentals of audio have not been fulfilled by any organization, and most existing courses in electronics are heavily weighted with radio engineering material.

These objections can be met only by a society and a journal which are 100% one. Any other procedure diverts most of our resources to the support of activities which only indirectly benefit or interest us. The physicists learned this long ago, and today they have societies for every field of interest.