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The meat of this Editorial is actually a review, of Julian Ashbourn's recently published book on Audio, subtitled *The Sound of Our World*, but before getting down to that, it's time for a brief mention on the staffing of *HIFICRITIC*. While I'll still sit in the Editor's chair, I've always struggled to enjoy digital audio myself, so I've now brought in a couple of deputies to help out on this side of things. Andrew Everard and Andrew 'Harry' Harrison will both provide some assistance, especially with the digital audio material (so Harry's group test on phono stages in this issue is ironically inappropriate.....so it goes).

There was some irony too when I started reading Julian Ashbourn's 163 page book, as the first few were concerned with the geological sounds that accompanied the birth of planet Earth. Happily the ear (and the eye) had evolved by p12, and was then followed by a chapter entitled *Animal Vocabulary* (pp21-32), discussing his experiments with bird song, which I found absolutely fascinating.

In fact I'd go so far as to describe this as an excellent all round book, which seems to have covered all the important bases in the development of sound and audio over the years. The early years covering the evolution of music and its instruments invariably make interesting reading, even for somebody already quite familiar with the history of composition and the acoustics of concert halls.

The real heart of the book comes with the invention of audio recording devices, and the steady development of software and hardware, that might have begun in the nineteenth century, but only really became a significant industry during the twentieth century.

Ashbourn is clearly a fan of Alan Blumlein, who had apparently been granted some 128 patents when he sadly died at the age of 39. His legacy in terms of stereo recording was unquestionably important even today, and Ashbourn devotes a complete chapter later on to S.O.S. – initials that stand for *Save Our Stereo* – tackling the thorny subject of simple miking versus multi-track recording. Here I must say I find myself in full agreement with Ashbourn, who clearly regards the development of multi-track studio recording with a jaundiced eye.

I also find myself in broad agreement with him on the topic of hi-res digital recording, which he "supports in principle" but then goes on to state: "One is tempted to suggest that we get CD quality digital audio right, before we shoot off at tangents in the pursuit of higher resolution."

The gaps that do exist seem to be mostly concerned with replay rather than recording equipment. One could perhaps argue for more coverage of loudspeakers and amplification, plus some sort of discussion on the merits of valves versus solid state. However, for a compact summary that provides an overview across the broad topic of Audio, I found the book very readable and interesting. My only criticism is the absence of any form of index!

*Paul Messenger*

Editor