

Mass-Produced Music

In the days of Mozart and Beethoven, or even in the days of Davy Crockett, music was a true art form; and when people were able to attend a concert on those rare occasions or listen to a guitar-strumming pioneer on an unusually quiet night in the settlement, they treated it as an artistic experience, or at least as enjoyable entertainment. Today, however, music has been transformed into a commodity, a product to be packed and sold. It is heard by millions of people daily and has invaded nearly all facets of human life--facets as diverse as baseball games, public media, and consumer spots.

A person can go few places and do few things without the accompaniment of music today. A baseball fan attending a game in any major league park in the country will find music thrust at him between innings, during warm-ups, and after pitching changes. As Johnny Bench strikes out to end the inning in Cincinnati, the Reds' fan must sit through the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive" before the Dodgers bat. In Cleveland, after the Indians have won the game, the fan exits to the sounds of "Happy Days Are Here Again." And what baseball fan has gone to a game without hearing, standing up to, and stretching to "Take Me Out to the Ball Game?" In Chicago, the fan doesn't have to wait for the end of the inning; the White Sox management plays a few bars of "theme" music before each batter.

There are other things besides baseball and sporting events which capitalize on packaged music. The public media, radio, and television, broadcast countless measures of music each day. Aside from a very few "all-news" stations, radio sells music as its chief commodity. Television series all have soundtrack music and theme music, and even the news programs have their theme music. The National Broadcasting Company, in fact, even has its own orchestra. Television and radio have certainly played a large role in forcing packaged music on millions of people.

The most pervasive type of canned music, though, is "Muzak," that warmed-over brand of music one hears in virtually every consumer spot--from offices to stores to restaurants--in America. Muzak sets the atmosphere, depending upon what atmosphere is desired. In the dentist's office, the Muzak is soft and calm and reassuring. At the S. S. Kresge Company, the Muzak displays a much more fast-paced, bustling mood for exotic food. No matter where one goes, the chances are good that Muzak will be there, too.

In former days, music was treated as something special. It was something to be cherished. Today, however, music is mass-produced by popular "artists" out to succeed in the money-making world of show business. It is warmed-over and redone to the least common denominator for mass distribution over the nation's Muzak systems. It plays a part in almost everyone's life, be it at a baseball stadium, in the family room, or in a restaurant. Perhaps someday, music will return to its former position as an elevated source of artistic enjoyment and entertainment. Until that day, though, music as an art will remain a fond memory.