



THERE are some who think that this modern world is too noisy, whose ears are deafened by the ever-present sounds about them. There are others who are not even aware of these noises. But intrusive or not, they are a part of modern life. Some years ago a New Yorker, Tony Schwartz, did realise that the sounds he heard were worth recording. One of the results was a radio programme called *Sounds of My City*—the stories, music and sounds of New York. The speech and music in this documentary programme were used as sound patterns assembled to present the sounds one man might hear as he goes about New York from home to work and play. The material was recorded over many years, and edited for a radio programme which was entered in the World Radio Festival at Rimini in Italy, and won the Prix Italia. It will be broadcast by 4ZB on September 8.

Tony Schwartz is a commercial artist by training and profession, but his tape-recording activities cover every available moment. Beginning his hobby purely for personal enjoyment and expression, he has developed its creative possibilities until some critics regard him as making "a basic contribution to the better understanding of people." His collection of over 10,000 folk songs is professional in quality, and his radio programmes have brought many offers of radio work. But he refuses to make this his regular livelihood. "If I did, I'd try to record things that sell, rather than things that interest me," he says.

The hobby started quite casually. When he left the Navy and started civilian work, after the war, he bought a magnetic wire recorder which he thought might come in handy for making off-the-air recordings of folk music broadcasts to add to his record collection. In 1947 he switched to the more flexible and faithful tape recorders, and since then has owned seven of these. From an intriguing whim, tape-recording has become a way of life. Part of his absorption with tape, he says, is that it allows him to produce a creative work that he can support by himself. But even more important, it provides him with a means of getting closer to people.

It was this interest in people that led him to folk music and recorded folk lore. After he had been taking songs off the air for a while, he met a singer he had recorded and discovered that these singers did not often hear themselves and have a chance to check up on their performance. He began to meet singers and record them in his own home. One day a singer mentioned a friend in California who might record some of his songs for Tony on an exchange basis. This began a fruitful correspondence with other owners of tape recorders who were interested in exchanging folk music, until Tony had one of the most extensive amateur collections in the world.

"You don't have to go far for authentic folk music, though," says Tony. "There's material all around us, but we're not apt to notice it. In fact, we may not even think it's folk music." One day when his mother was visiting, he played for her a recording he had recently received from a mountaineer of a folk song called "Dig My Grave." "That's not a folk song," she sniffed. "I used to sing that when I was a child." She then sang her own version of the tune, which she had always known as "In Jersey City."

Tony began to develop a new attitude to folk music. He learnt of sources close at hand—neighbours and friends from other countries. And the wealth of live material all round him where he had overlooked while sending tapes to the far corners of the earth both surprised and fascinated him. He began to record the folk-lore-in-the-making in his own community. With a light-weight, battery-operated tape recorder he roamed the streets of New York 19, the postal zone where he lived, to tape the folk music and folk-expressions of that heterogeneous area.

He got the songs of children playing games and singing in the streets, an Italian street festival, the jargon of sidewalk salesmen, sounds of street drilling, flower vendors and night-club barkers, a Puerto Rican storefront church service, an orthodox Jewish Friday night service at home, an auctioneer, and sidewalk musicians. He even taped the voices of customers at the grocers—the everyday expression of people.

One reason for the fascination of his recordings is that he never goes out looking for material, but just takes the recorder everywhere with him and records anything that interests him. Wanting to be as unobtrusive as possible, he carries his 12-pound recorder in its case. To enable him to start the recorder within seconds of hearing material he wants to record, he has extended the start-stop and volume control knobs through holes cut in the cover. He wears a rubber-covered microphone on a band on his right wrist, and from this a wire runs up inside his sleeve round his neck, and down his left arm to within reach of his recorder's input. Although recording on this basis is what he calls "educated guesswork," he is able to make satisfactory recordings of most subjects. Acoustics do not worry him too much, since the emphasis is on the contents and context of the recordings. "You should accept where you are and make the recording as clearly as you can," he says.

"When I'm out recording I always keep in mind some of the things I'm looking for, but at the same time keep myself ready for anything that sounds interesting or might be worth saving." As listeners will learn, there has been a great deal that Tony Schwartz has found worth the saving.

(For details of broadcasts, see panel on opposite page.)

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