

Peter Caranicas

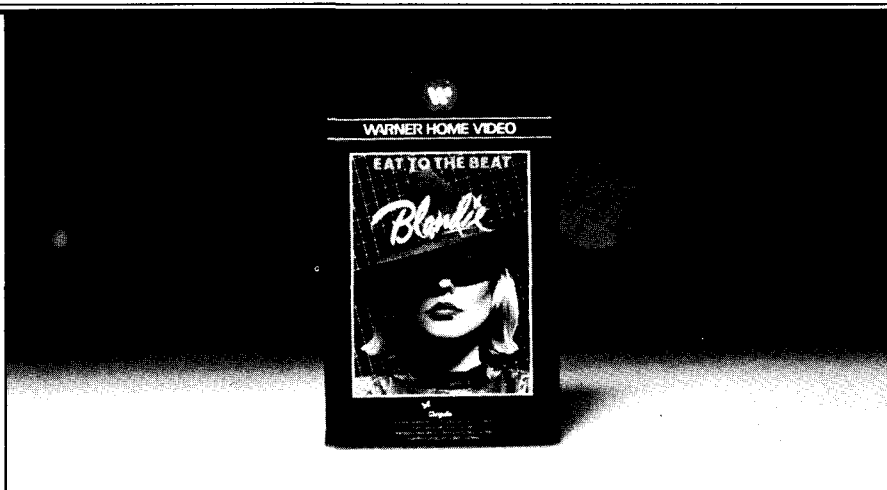
## The Challenge of Videodiscs

**T**he music world is abuzz with speculation about the new video technology and how it will affect recorded music. It has even coined a new expression—"video music"—to designate some of the art forms that could develop from a fusion of the two media. As might be expected, rock music leads the way in market experimentation; but jazz, classical, and other genres are quickly following suit.

Fans of the semipunk rock group Blondie converged in droves upon record stores last year to buy its *Eat to the Beat* record album. Today, those who happen to own a videocassette recorder (VCR) can also go to their nearest video dealer and buy an *Eat to the Beat* videocassette containing the same songs as the audio album. It's the first release of a major record album in a video version. While the video album costs a lot more (about \$60 compared to \$8), it also offers the visual bonus of the group in concert, as well as trick shots, special video effects, and such visual surprises as footage of an H-bomb explosion, all set to the exuberant *Eat to the Beat* soundtrack.

Is the hefty extra expense worth it? Only for diehard Blondie fans, most of whom are too young to be able to afford a VCR. But 1981 will be remembered as the year of the videodisc's large-scale introduction. Prices may settle to \$15 per disc program, or even less, as the costs of creating a videodisc are spread over millions of copies.

And selections aren't limited to rock. A small New York company, Improvising Artists Inc., has released several progressive jazz programs on videocassettes, with video special effects orchestrated to the music. Los Angeles video artist Ron Hays has created a number of spectacular, abstract visual



DON KUSHNIK

*Eat to the Beat* is the first major record album to be released in a video version.

accompaniments to the music of Richard Wagner. Rock-musician-turned-video-producer Todd Rundgren has woven a whimsical video program around Holst's *The Planets*. The MCA and RCA videodisc catalogs list ballet, modern dance, symphonic, and operatic performances.

A major obstacle to the growth of video music could be presented by the thorny issue of artist and union royalties and residuals. Assuming, however, these are overcome by negotiation, it may turn out that video music programs will be even more popular in the long run than feature films, the principal engine driving the emerging videocassette business today.

But before video music can develop, the manufacturers of video equipment and programs will have to pay greater attention to audio quality. None of the prerecorded cassettes on the market have stereo soundtracks, and the VCRs that play them are designed simply to be plugged into ordinary home TV sets, all of which have notoriously low-quality audio. The laser-optical videodisc sys-

tem on the market today—sold by Magnavox and Pioneer—does have stereo capability, but most current videodiscs are available only with monaural sound. RCA's player, which uses a different technology and is now being introduced, has no stereo capability at all, although future models may incorporate that feature.

If video music ever becomes as significant a factor in the consumption of music as audio records, it will certainly have much impact on the popularity of artists and institutions. In popular music, visually appealing performers (Olivia Newton-John, Kiss) may be favored over the simple or visually dull (Phoebe Snow, Barry Manilow). In classical music, the introduction of video may benefit forms that demand visual attention—ballet, modern dance, opera—the same way the introduction of sound once drove motion pictures to new heights of popularity.

Whatever the outcome, video, like stereo before it, will place new demands both upon artists and technicians, all to the benefit of the consumer. ■

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## SR Competition No. 19

At this writing many parts of this country are in the grip of a terrible drought. Desperate measures are being taken. There are more bricks in toilet tanks than in new home construction. Teenagers who used to shower monthly have cheerfully limited themselves to two baths a year. Handel's *Water Music* has been voluntarily removed from programs for the duration. We call upon all concerned SR readers, whether they live in the moist Carolinas or the dry Tortugas, to send us their drought relief plans. Unless the plan is very good, limit yourself to 100 words. A copy of Somerset Maugham's *The Rains Came* plus the usual \$25 to our three winners.

Entries for Competition No. 19 must be received by May 1 and the winners will be announced in the July issue. Send submissions to SR Competition No. 19, *Saturday Review*, 150 East 58 Street, New York, New York 10155. All entries become the property of SR.

## Winners of No. 16

One day when we were wondering whether we would ever be able to come up with another idea for a competition we hit upon the ultimate idea: a competition of competitions! And how beautifully you responded! So many great ideas flooded in that we shall probably be living for years, as the Russians say, on old fat (just a saying, nothing personal), which means that your suggestion, whether it wins today or not, might yet produce some modest income for you months hence. WATCH THIS SPACE! And now to our winners:

First prize to Fred Gurner of New York, before whose project reels the mind:

This is it, kids! The ultimate anagram! Tear any page from the Manhattan Phone Directory and find a corresponding anagram, using all the letters of all the names on one side of the page. Cross out the side not used. As an example, we have found that page 584 of the 1980-81 directory (Gural to Gutierrez) can be anagrammatized into pages 136-137 of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (in the Penguin edition of Alan Russell's translation). Another is page 1359 (Tamlar to Tannenbaum), which contains all the letters of Shake-

spare's sonnets 36, 37, 38, 57, and 69. We almost had the name Tang Fung Kwan left over! Readers are warned not to tear pages out of public phone books. Besides being inconsiderate, this might tip your hand as to what pages you are working on. Out-of-towners use your own phone books. Duplicate prizes will not be awarded. Good luck!

Immediately on receiving this entry we made a quick check of the phone booths in our neighborhood and found *every single directory* missing! Not just pages—the whole thing. *Millions* of people must be working on this contest right now! No duplicate prizes, thank goodness. (Quick thinking, Gurner.) We are now looking for that page in Flaubert that contains a statistically quite improbable number of g's.

Second prize to Patrick H. Hodgkin of Culver, Indiana, for this attractive challenge:

A short story by Graham Greene entitled "A Shocking Accident" hinges on the difficulty of accepting with appropriate sobriety a death caused by a falling pig. He explains the circumstances concisely: "Apparently in the poorer quarters of Naples they keep pigs on their balconies. This one was on the fifth floor. It had grown too fat. The balcony broke." Such a mishap must, we suppose, have been reported in the local press with as much deadpan as could be mustered. Readers are asked to describe this or some similarly ludicrous fatality (in English, not Italian) in fewer than 100 words. A copy of Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* plus the usual \$25 to each of the three winners.

Third prize to Amy Briggs of St. Paul, Minnesota, who provided us with a malenky smeck (a small giggle; see below):

"Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him, Horatio; a veck of horrorshow chepookas, of zammechat messel, he sobiratted me a thousand razzes."

If you blinked at that passage, so might Shakespeare have done. It is our own version in "Nadsat," the slang-language of teenage villains, invented by Anthony Burgess for his novel *A Clockwork Orange*.

Lewis Carroll invented a few words, Burgess a language, and Tolkien a language with an entire world attached. All we ask you to do is come up with a couple of sentences. Name the speaker, the language, and send a translation. Winners will receive a copy of Webster's *New World Dictionary* to facilitate their

re-entry into English. Have a horror-show raz (good time)!

Well, that should at least sell a few dozen copies of our colleague Burgess's book.

## Puzzles

### Literary Crypt No. 164

WHEN BOTH WHT OLD EWDZ  
LEE PAQUWDUZN LYWAZ ZOT  
MAZAQT OLD WHT QTLPOTK  
ZOT LVT ZW BQUZT LH  
LAZWYUWVQLCON.

TSTENH BLAVO

### Wit Twister No. 176

Edited by Arthur Swan

*The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash with a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.*

----- warnings tell where  
storms will pass.  
An ----- discovers  
seeping gas.  
Yet one windbag blew in and gassed  
us all:  
The ----- of our new  
concert hall! A.S.

Answers next issue

## March Answers

### Literary Crypt No. 163

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. Francis Bacon

### Wit Twister No. 175

Duse, Sued, Deus, dues, used

### Middleton Double-Crostic No. 205

Ring Lardner: On Chain Letters  
Outside of believing that it is bad luck to bet vs. the Yankees I ain't got no superstitions and will take this opportunity of warning my friends that I ain't going to be no party to a endless chain letter not even if it was started by Gen. Pershing.