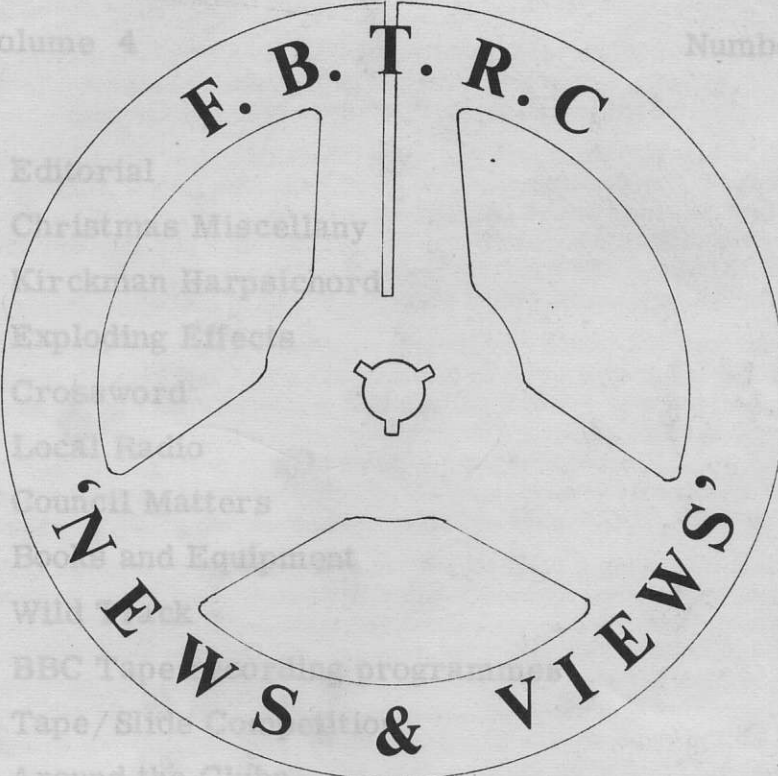


FEDERATION OF  
BRITISH TAPE RECORDISTS  
AND CLUBS

WINTER 1969 EDITION

Volume 4

Number 16



Editorial	1
Christmas Miscellany	2
Churchman Harpsichord	3
Exploding Effects	4
Crossword	5
Lock Rollo	6
Council Matters	7
Equipment	8
W.L.R.	9
BBC Tape	10
Tape/Slice	11
Around the Clubs	14
Editing and collecting tape	14
Tape Flutter	15

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## RECORDING THE 1772 KIRCKMAN HARPSICHORD

by M.A.GERZON

The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford has a small collection of historic musical instruments, including a 1772 Kirckman harpsichord. A former member of Oxford University Tape Recording Society (OUTRS), Paul Hodges (who is now a BBC recording engineer) has a keen interest in old keyboard instruments, and obtained permission for OUTRS to record him playing the Kirckman.

The first recording session was almost disastrous, as the stereo microphone amplifier (used by OUTRS to avoid the hum problems associated with microphone transformers) went wrong and had to be repaired on the spot. We had already been delayed by the fact that the victorian (?) electrical sockets of the Ashmolean had defeated our Fitall plug, and we ended up with a rather poor mono recording, made in great haste.

A second session was arranged a few months later, and we arrived better prepared, with two Revoxes and a B & O, fed by a coincident stereo pair of Reslo VRT ribbon microphones via an equalised low noise microphone amplifier constructed by our secretary Peter Craven. The live sound of the Kirckman is surprisingly firm in the bass and clear in the treble, not at all the 'tinkly' sound expected from modern harpsichords and for this reason we did not want to 'gimmick' the sound by such tricks as putting the mikes in the lid! As the acoustics of the room were dreadful, we did, however, use a closer microphone position than usual.

The recording went smoothly (after OUTRS' customary chaos in setting up), but we found that we had to grossly under-record our tapes in order to avoid the loss of the spiky transients produced by harpsichords (which do not register on meter or magic eye). It is necessary to retain these transients if the sound quality of the instrument is to be retained as far as possible on the tape. However, we were using BASF PES 35 LH tape, whose low hiss and high output (on a suitably biased and adjusted tape recorder) allow one to under-record drastically without the hiss becoming very noticeable.

On playing the tapes back on Quad electrostatic loudspeakers, we were rather disappointed with the lack of realism of our tapes; the firm bass was not very evident on the recording and the treble was slightly unpleasant. As we have found Quad speakers give the most accurate idea of what the signal fed into them is like (that's why many people don't like them!), we felt that our equipment perhaps was not good enough to capture the harpsichord properly. The HMV disc "Music for Virginals, Clavichord and Harpsichord" (HQS 1100) has always struck me as being a very fine recording, and so a direct comparison between the recording and the Kirckman harpsichord on the disc was made.

Recording the 1772 Kirckman Harpsichord (continued)

It became obvious that the disc recording too sounded nothing like the rich sound of the live Kirckman. We can only conclude that it is beyond the capabilities of even the best available stereo equipment to record harpsichords realistically.

While the millenium has not yet arrived in realistic sound recording and reproduction, at least OUTRS members have now heard what Haydn and Beethoven sound like on the sort of instrument that much of their music was originally played on; one must then wonder why people ever play them on the modern grand piano.

\* \* \* \* \*

EXPLODING EFFECTS

by KEITH UPTON

(or 'how to blow up your tape recorder ! )

Do you ever find yourself half-way through a tape and then suddenly feel the urge to have an explosion? No? Then you have not lived! Here is the method I use to create an explosion or crash effect, it's simple and only takes a couple of minutes to make. First analyse the type of crash you need and select items like jackplugs, nuts, bolts, pencils, small pieces of plastic or tin, a few coins (but this can make the crash expensive) and place all in the lid of your recorder. The detachable type of lid is best otherwise you tend to damage the recorder !

Set your recorder at twice the speed you will want the finished crash at, pick up the lid full of bits and pieces with one hand and check the recording level for full modulation of the tape. All set ? Then start the recorder going, brace yourself and hit the lid really hard (this is what is called sock-it-to-me)..not content with that, rock the lid to and fro to give that falling down effect. If you wish, drop some of the bits on the floor. Drop the lot if you are really enthusiastic !

Place the remains of the lid and pieces in a safe place, (you may need them again) and playback your efforts at 'half-speed'. You will be surprised at the results (especially if you forgot to switch to RECORD). Creaking and other noises can be added by ad-libbing a few grunts or groans at the same time as hitting the lid (sometimes these come naturally, depending upon where you drop the bits !) Anyone who finds this method useless may contact me for further instructions and actual examples !

\* \* \* \* \*

GOLDEN TAPE OF ZURICH CONTEST Congratulations to Ken McKenzie and Peter Bastin on their success in this important contest. Each won a bronze medal for their entries which had to be a 30 second musical item for the Olympic games in Japan in 1970. Two of the Gold medals were won by Germany and the other three by the Swiss.