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Sabatino

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(54) **ACQUIRING AND PROCESSING ACOUSTIC ENERGY EMITTED BY AT LEAST ONE ORGAN IN A BIOLOGICAL SYSTEM**

USPC 600/300, 559, 301, 529; 340/521
See application file for complete search history.

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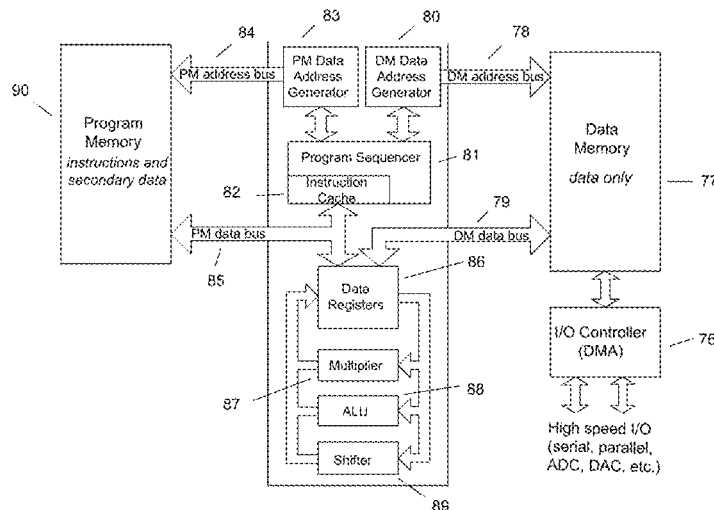
(57) **ABSTRACT**

In some embodiments, an apparatus for acquiring, processing and transmitting physiological sounds, which may include acoustic sounds from at least one organ in a biological system, may include a sensor for acquiring physiological sounds. Analogue signals representative of the physiological sounds are converted into an electrical output. The electrical output is converted to digital data. A processing unit processes the digital data in a manner selected by a user.

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510(k) Submission—Personal Telemedicine Module, Oct. 9, 1997, pp. AMD005631-AMD005787, American TeleCare, Inc., Eden Prairie, MN, US.

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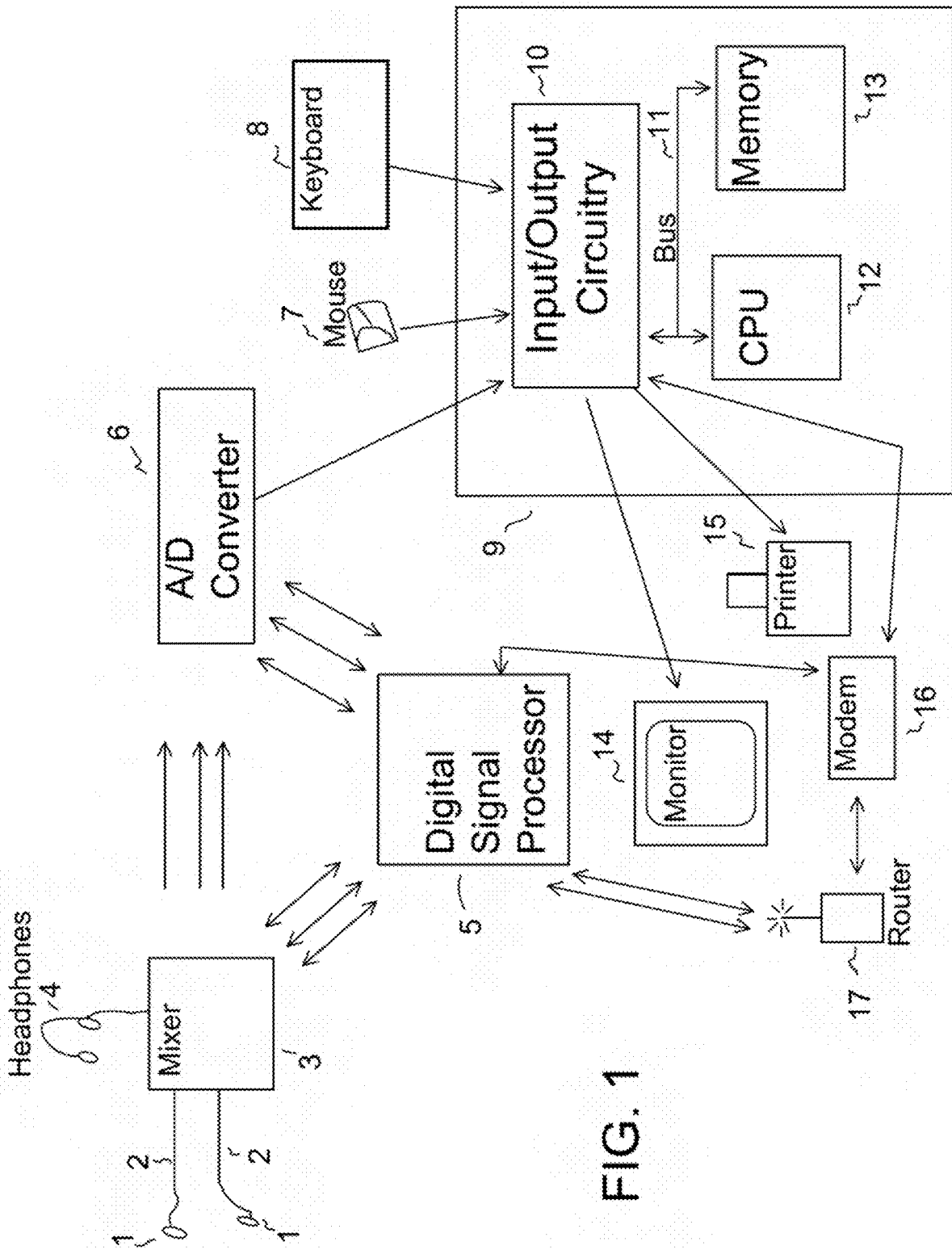


FIG. 1

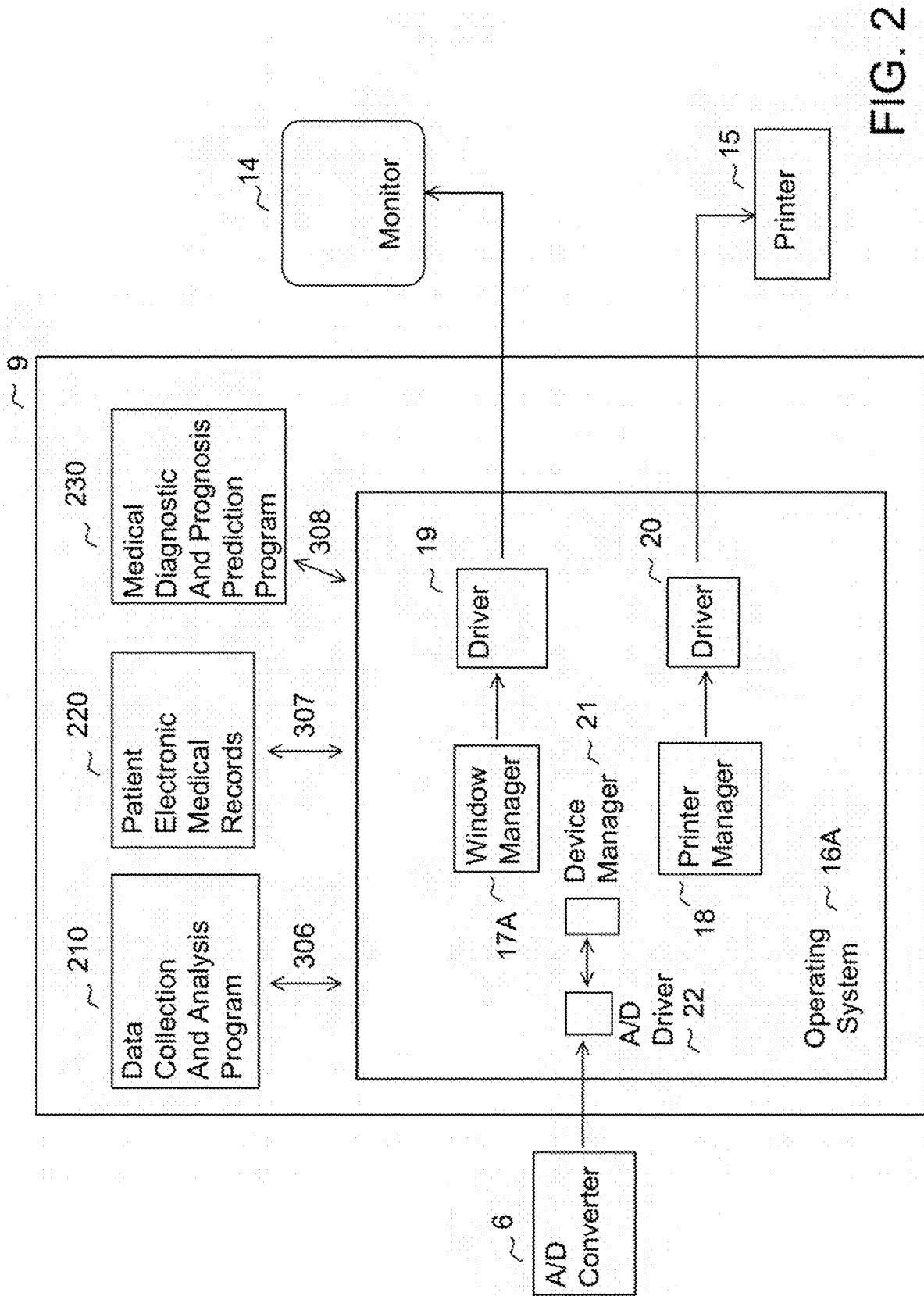


FIG. 2

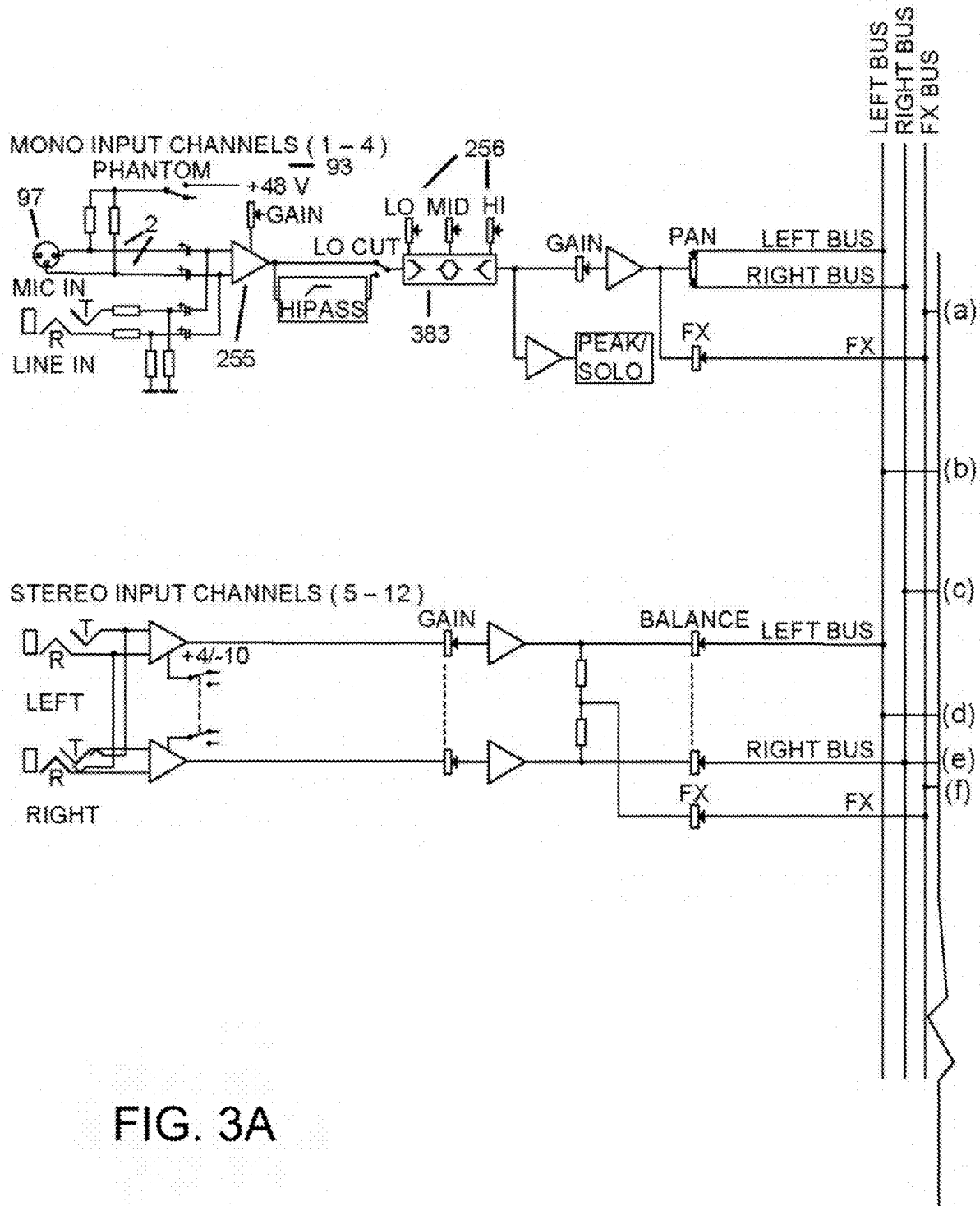


FIG. 3A

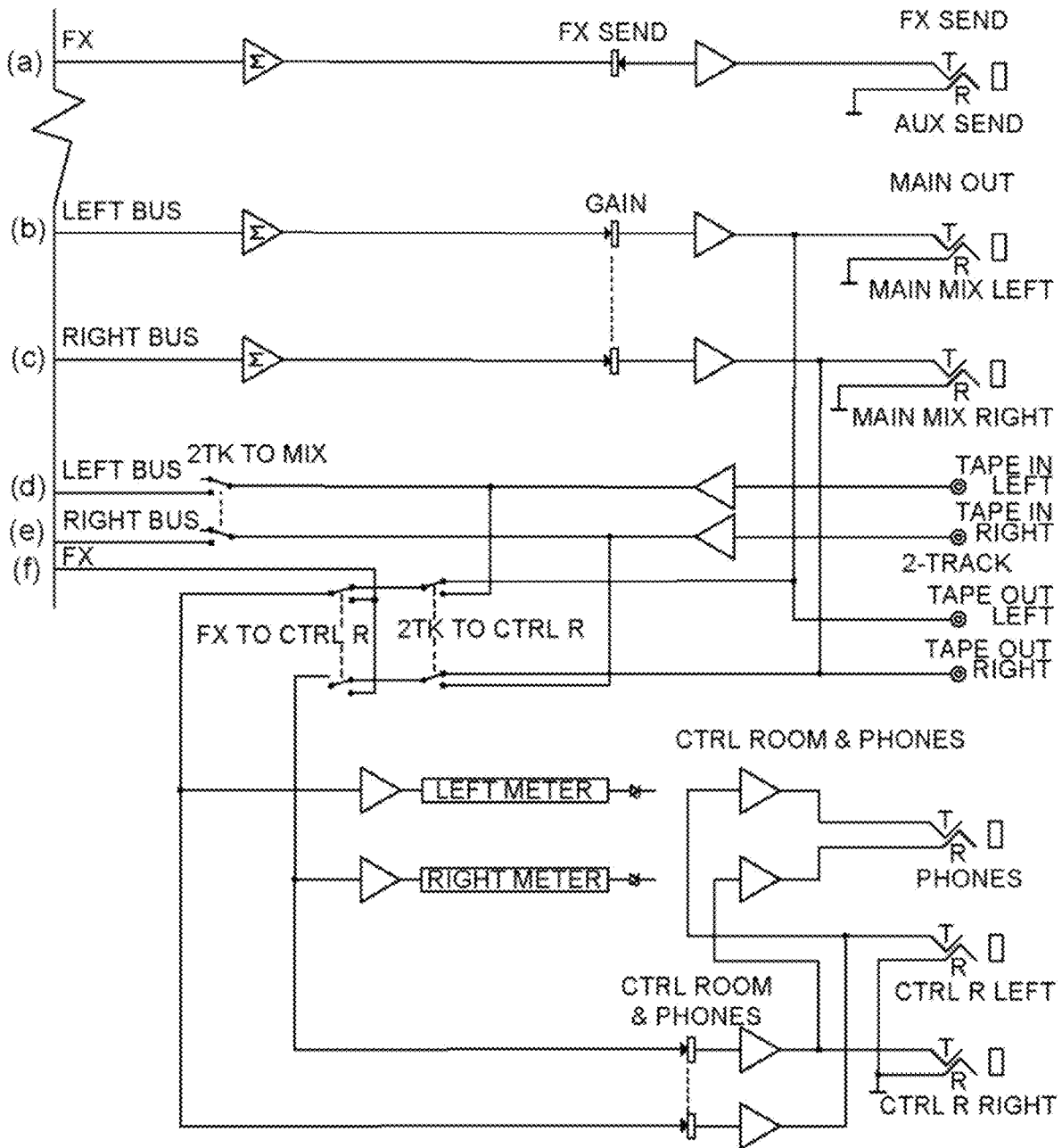


FIG. 3A(cont.)

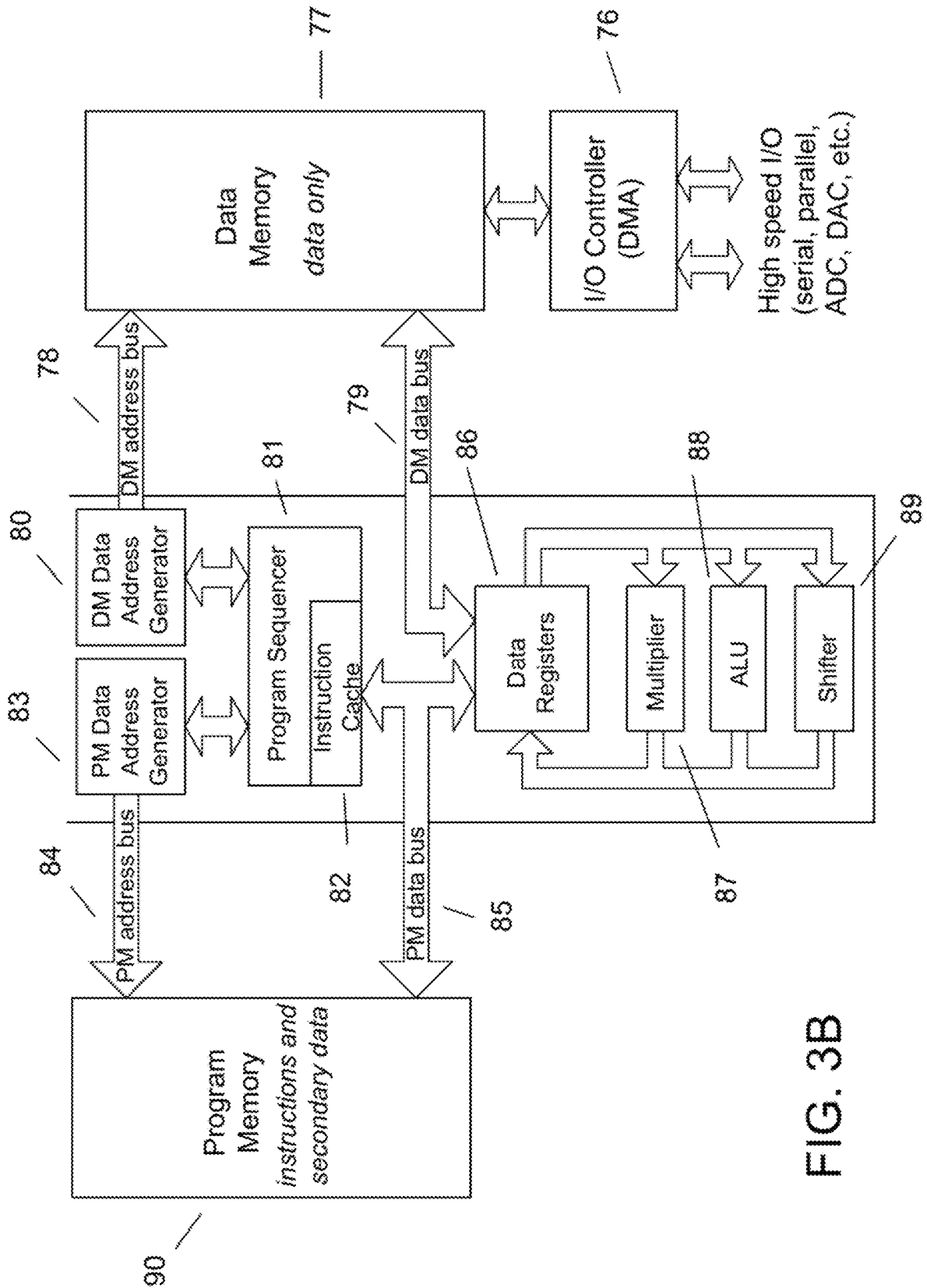


FIG. 3B

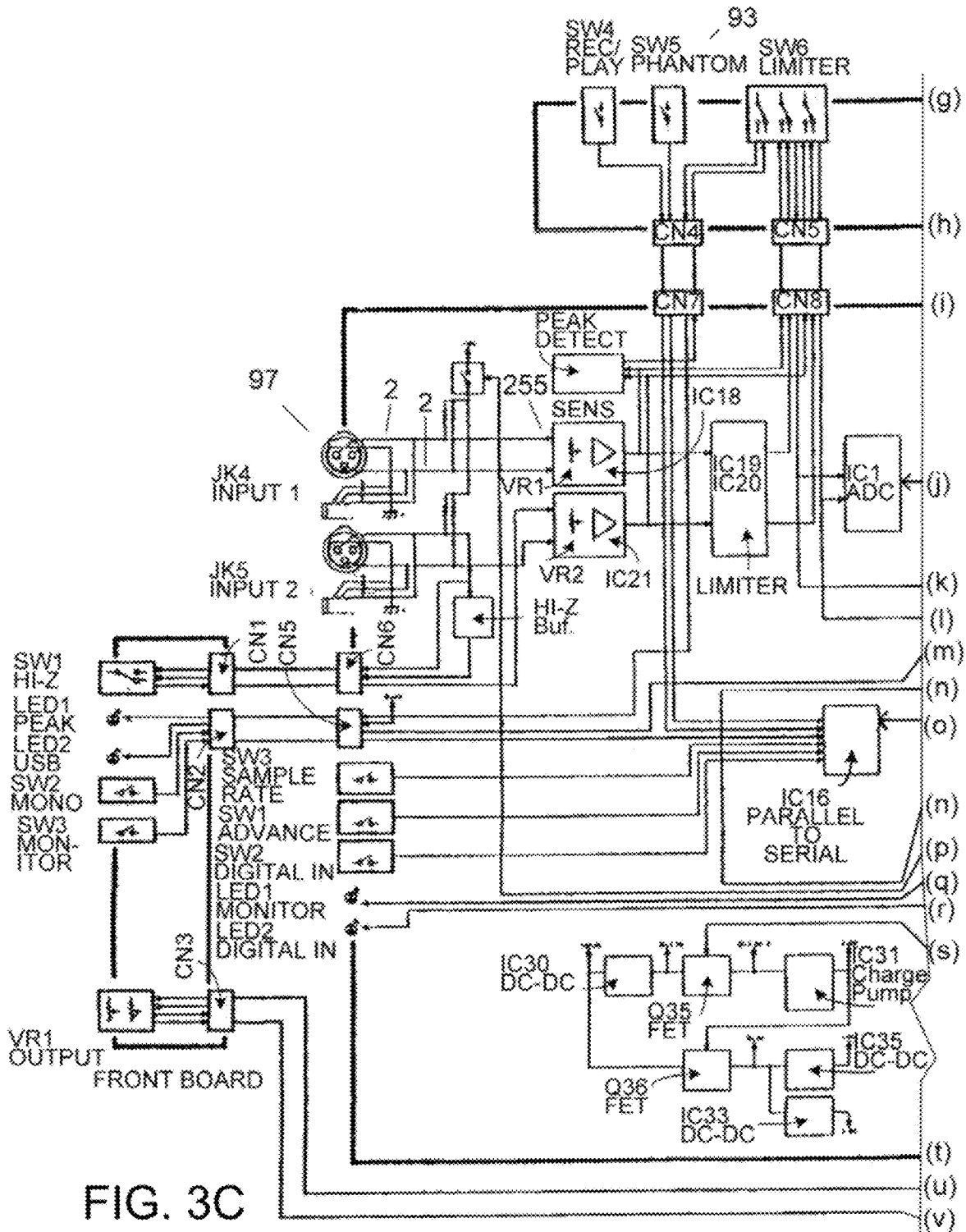


FIG. 3C

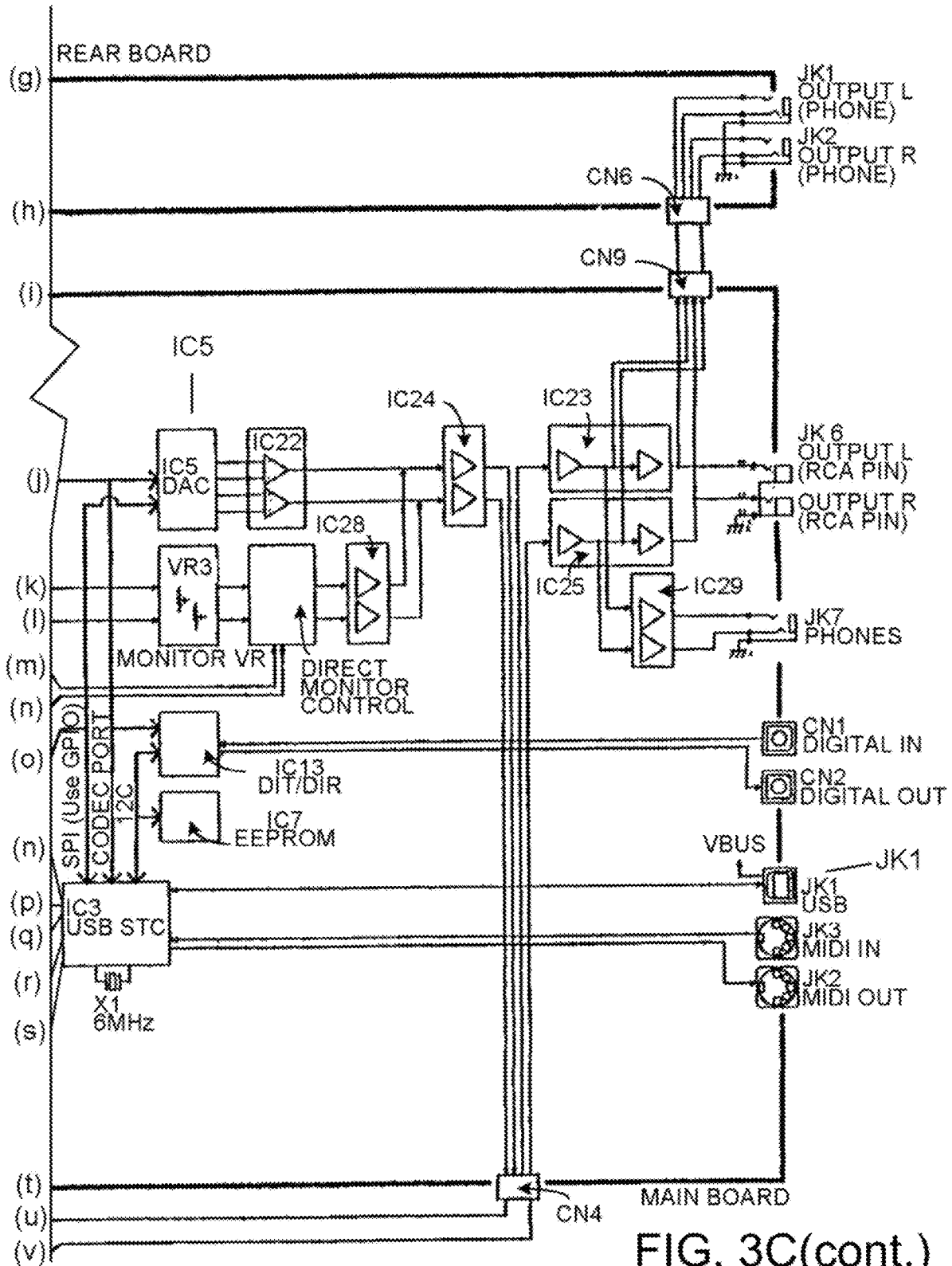


FIG. 3C(cont.)

FIG. 4A
GEQ ← 612

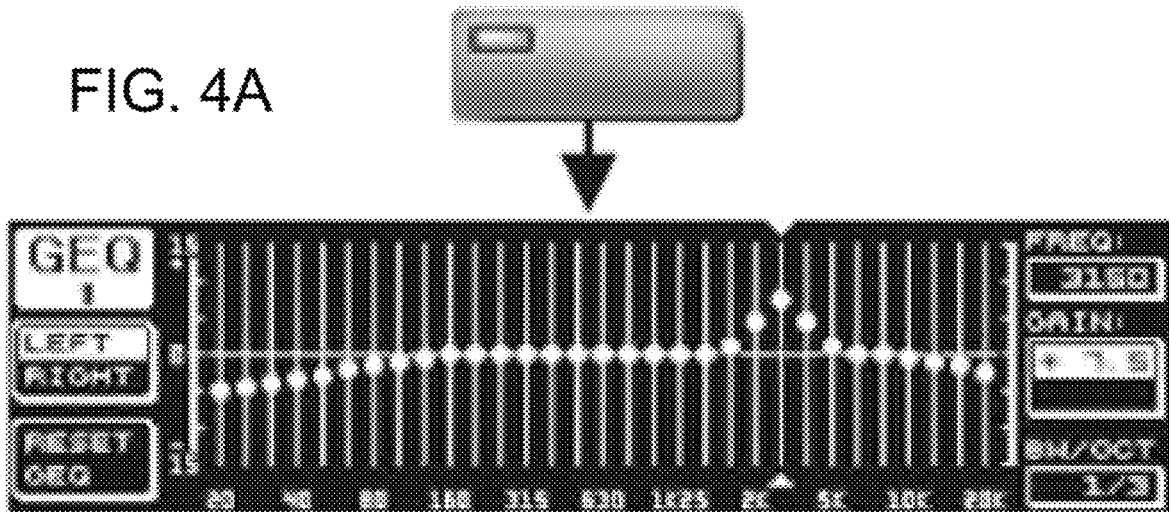
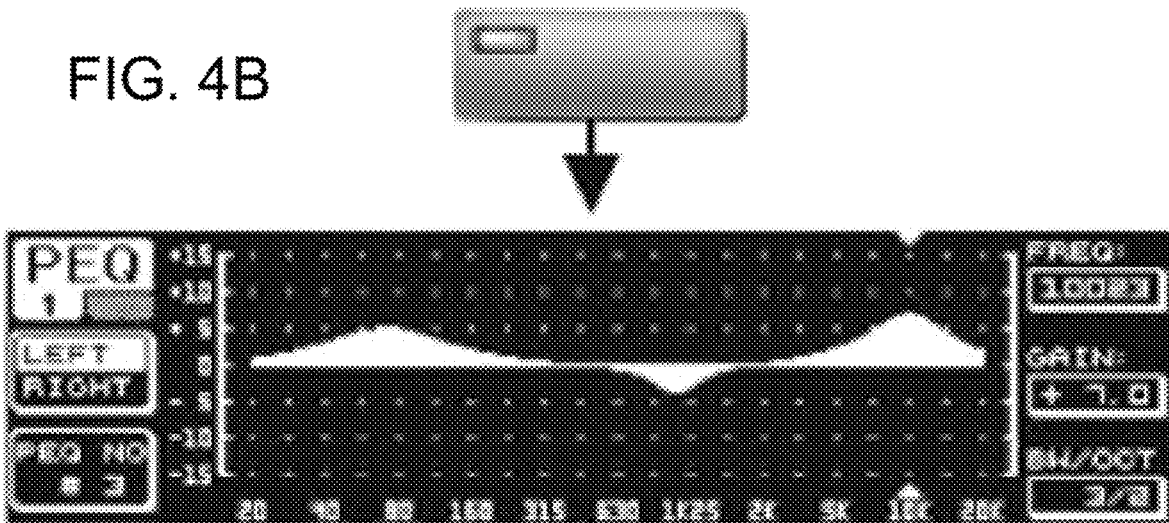


FIG. 4B
PEQ ← 613

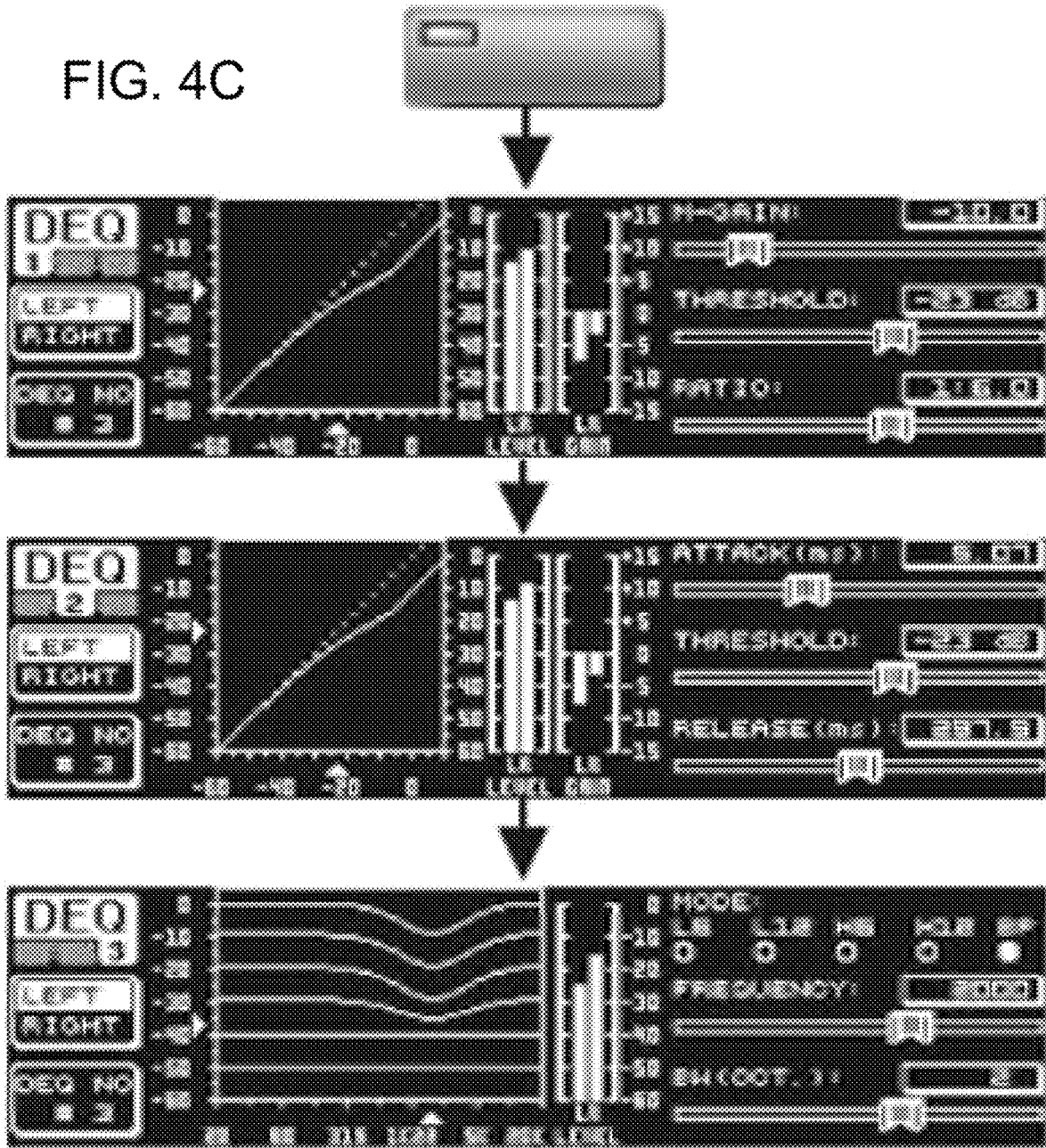


The screenshot displays a list of parametric equalizer parameters. At the top, the text "PEQ" is followed by a left-pointing arrow and the number "2". Below this is a rectangular control box with a slider. A large downward-pointing arrow leads to the main interface. The interface features a table with the following columns: NO., MODE, FREQ(Hz), BW(OCT), and GAIN(dB). The table contains 10 rows of data. On the right side, there are navigation arrows and a "VALUE:" field with a "PARAM" button below it.

NO.	MODE	FREQ(Hz)	BW(OCT)	GAIN(dB)
1	PARAM	2280	3/4	+ 5.0
2	PARAM	770	1/8	- 5.0
3	PARAM	1180	1/3	- 3.0
4	OFF			
5	OFF			
6	OFF			
7	OFF			
8	OFF			
9	OFF			
10	OFF			

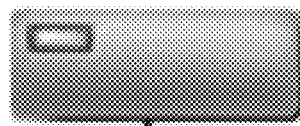
DEQ ← 614

FIG. 4C



WIDTH ← 623

FIG. 4D



WIDTH 1

RESET IMAGE

ASYMMETRY: [Slider] [Value: -21.2]

STEREOWIDTH: [Slider] [Value: 3.4]

ROTATION: [Slider] [Value: -24.7]

WIDTH 2

RESET IMAGE

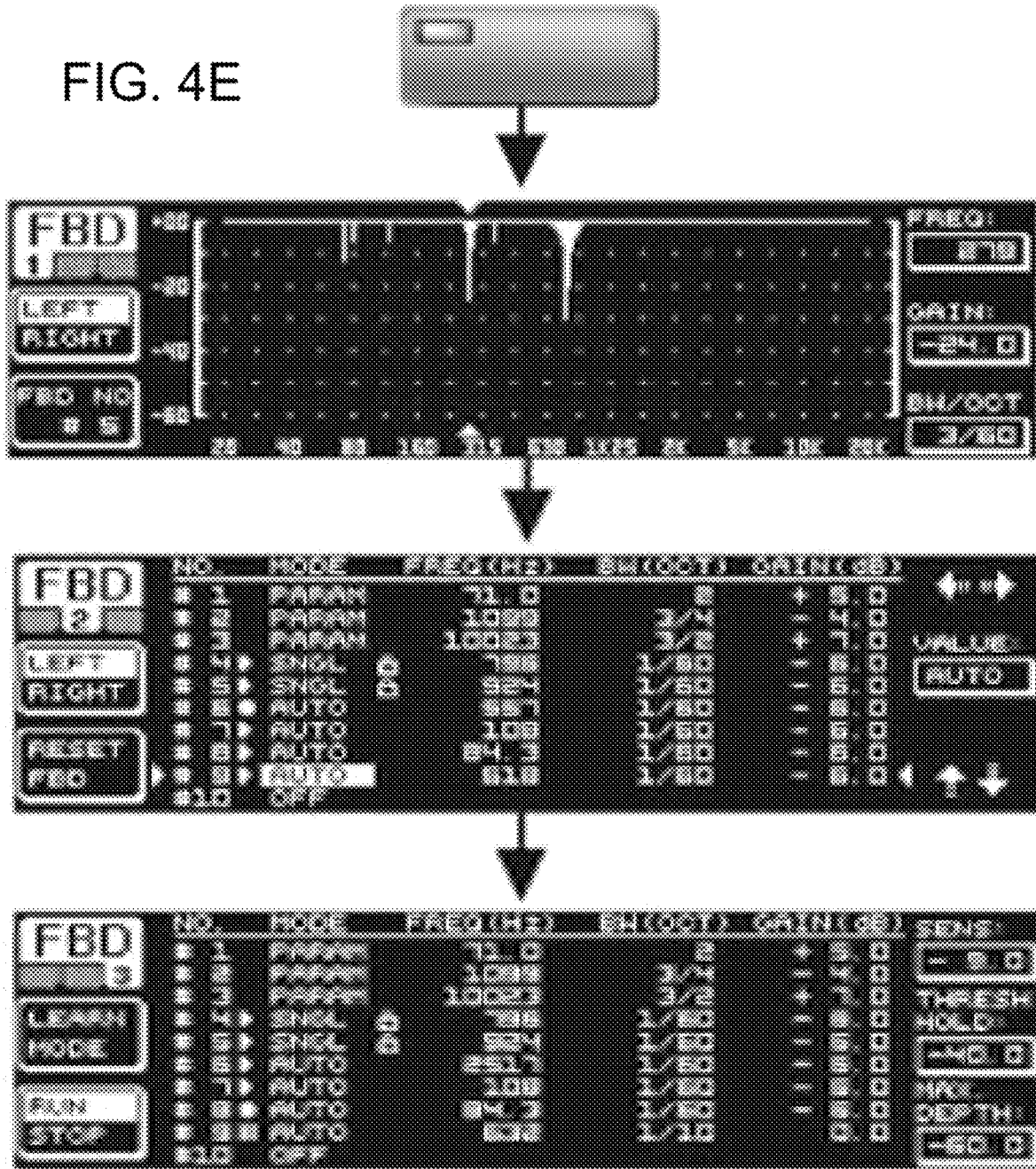
BASS TRIM: [Slider] [Value: 3.3]

FREQUENCY: [Slider] [Value: 200.1]

SHUFFLE: [Slider] [Value: 3.9]

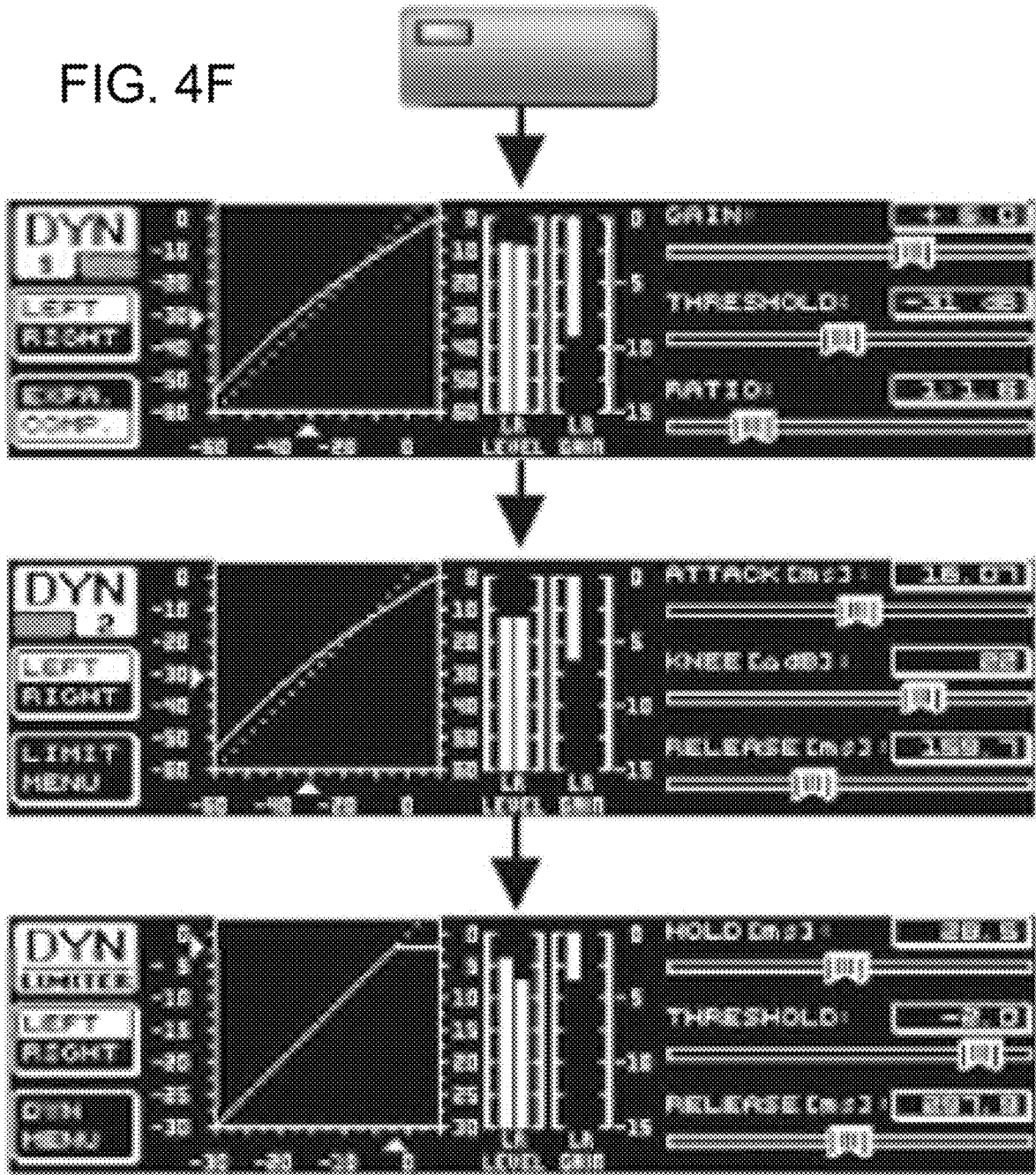
FBD ← 622

FIG. 4E



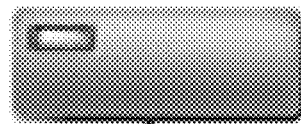
DYN ← 615

FIG. 4F



UTILITY ← 618

FIG. 4G



UTIL 1 GENERAL SETUP V 3.0

CONTRAST	8
CHANNEL MODE	DUAL MONO
EQ-MODE	OPTIMIZED
GAIN OFFSET (EQ)	0.0
RTA NOISECORRECTION	OFF
SHOW MESSAGEBOX	ON
RTA INPUT LINE-LEVEL	88.0 dBu
RTA INPUT MIC-LEVEL	-40.0 dBV/Ps

UTIL 2 MIDI SETUP

MIDI	ON
MIDI CHANNEL	8
SEND CONTROL CHANGE	OFF
SEND PROGRAM CHANGE	ON
SEND SYSTEM EXCLUSIVE	ON
RECEIVE CONTROL CHANGE	OFF
RECEIVE PROGRAM CHANGE	ON
RECEIVE SYSTEM EXCLUSIVE	ON

DUMP EDIT
DUMP ALL

I/O ← 619

FIG. 4H

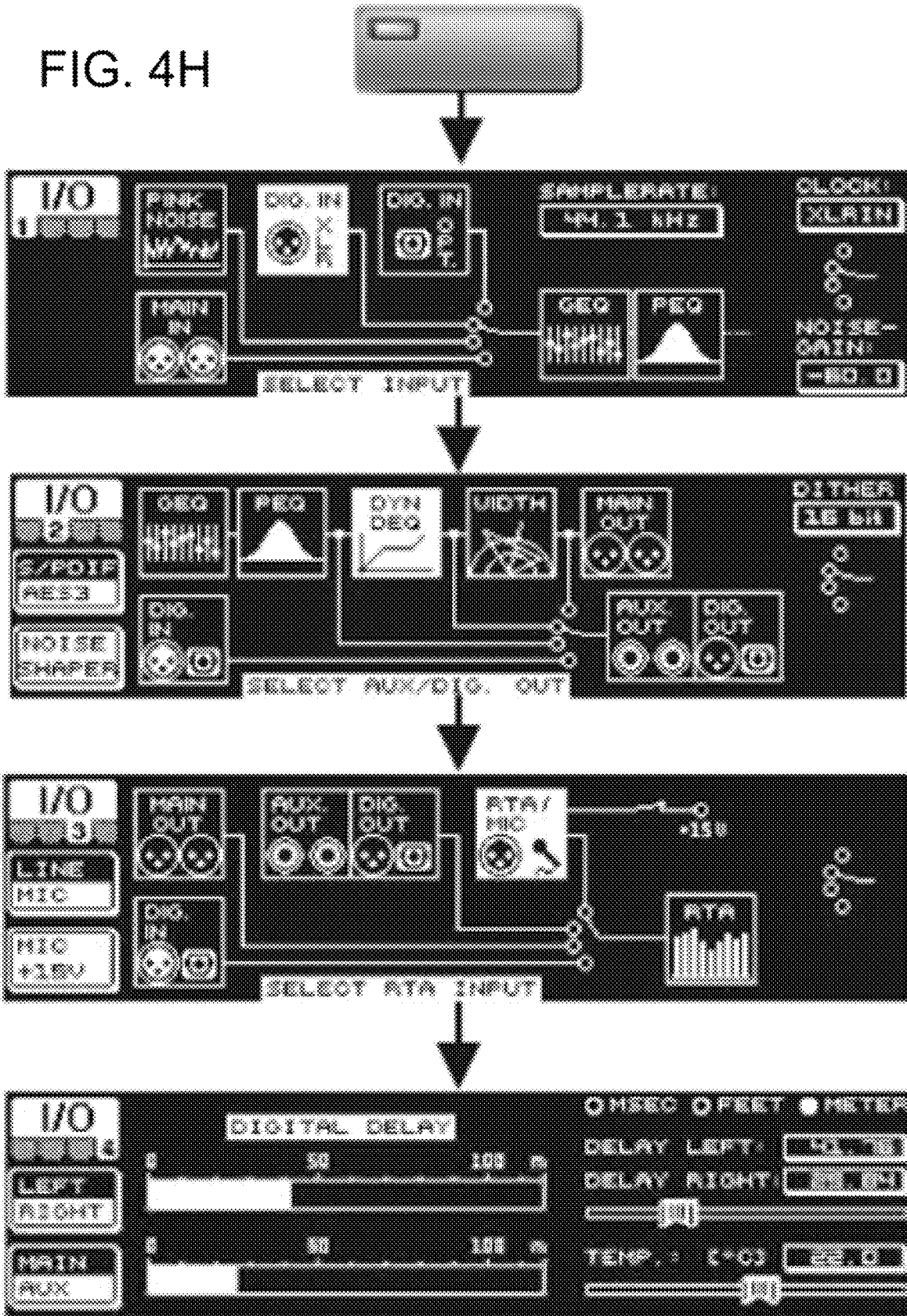


FIG. 4I
BYPASS ← 616

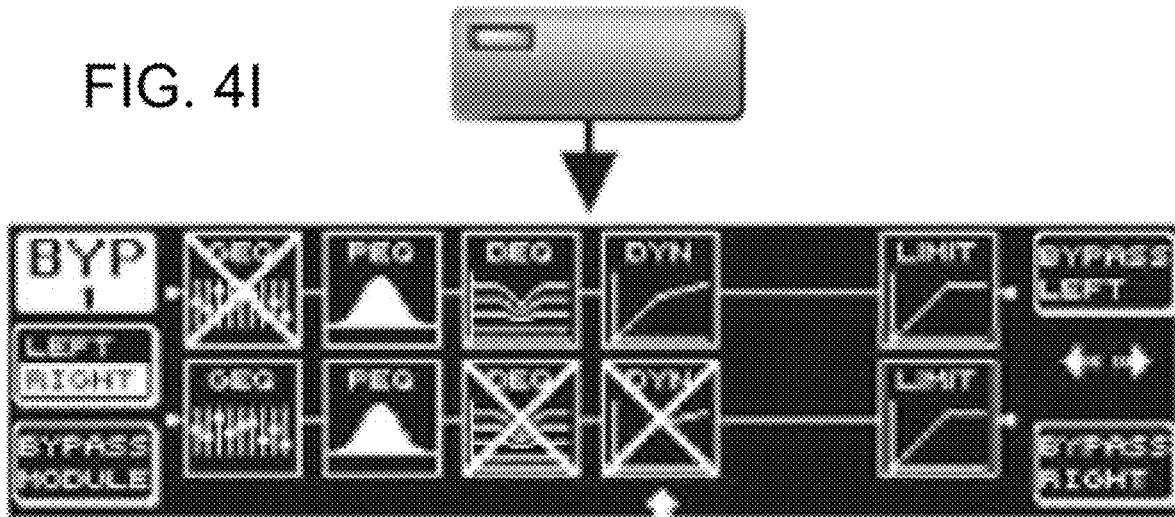


FIG. 4J
MEMORY ← 620

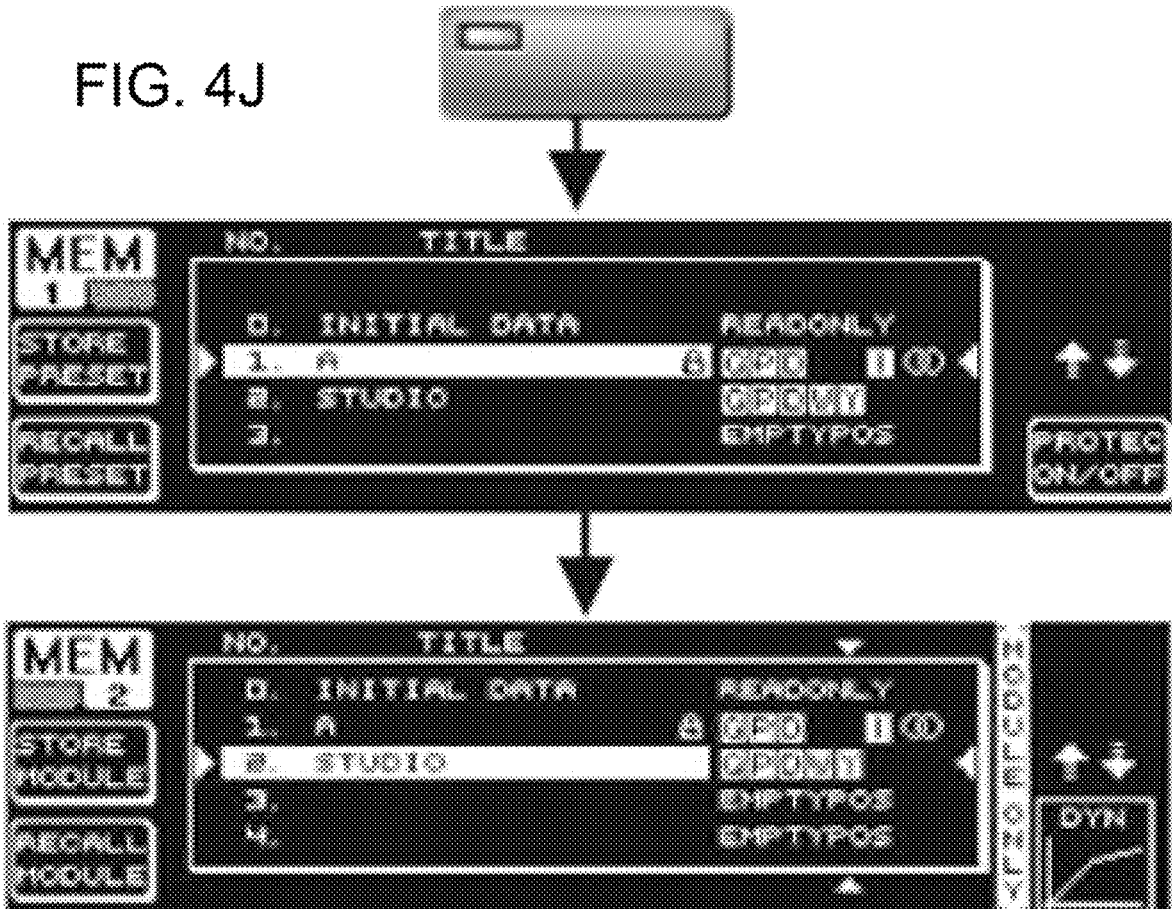
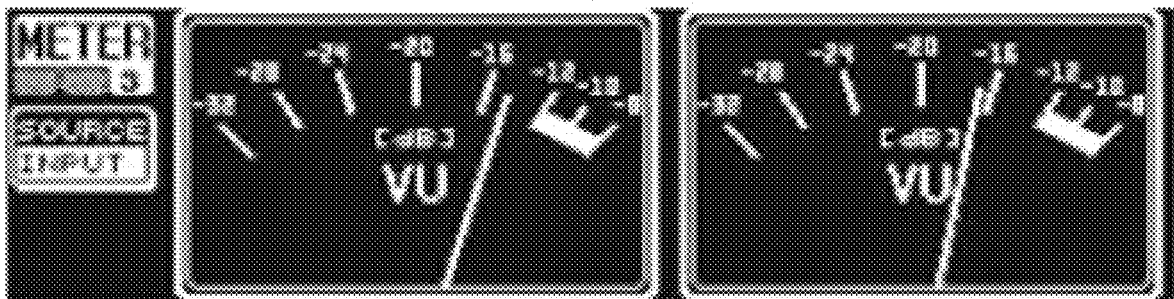
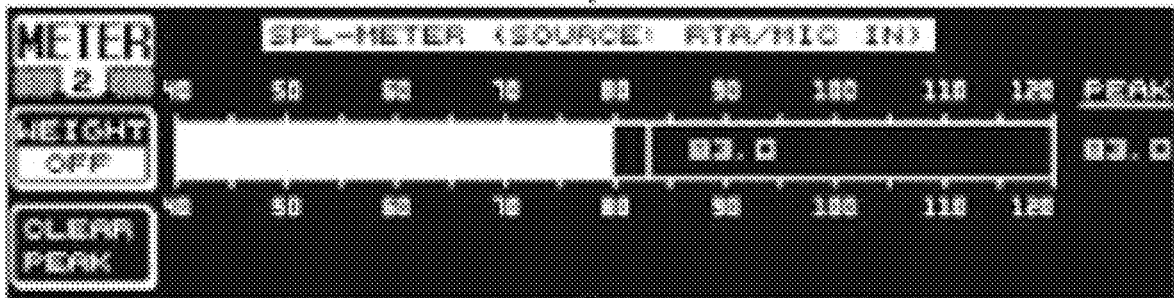
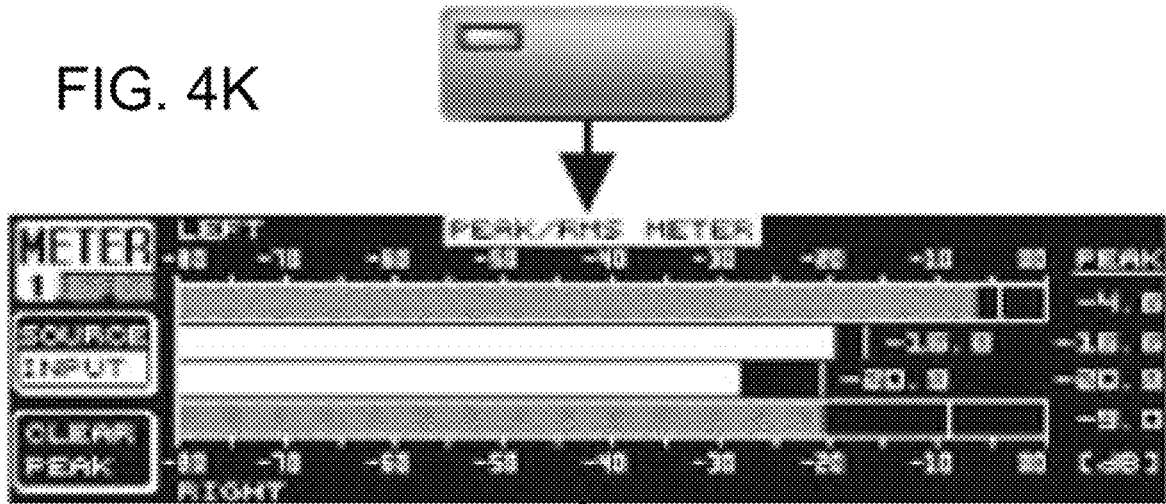


FIG. 4K

METER ← 622A



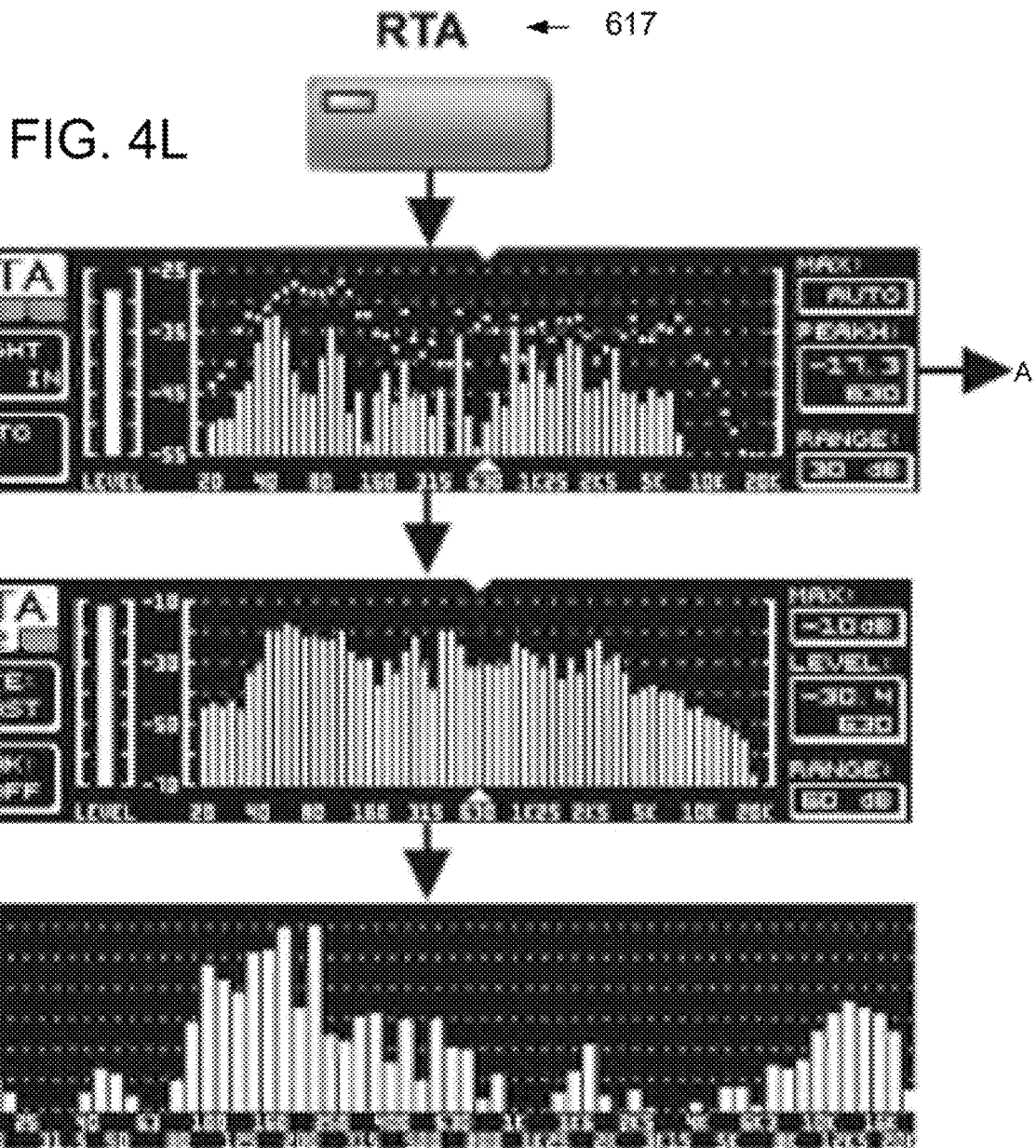
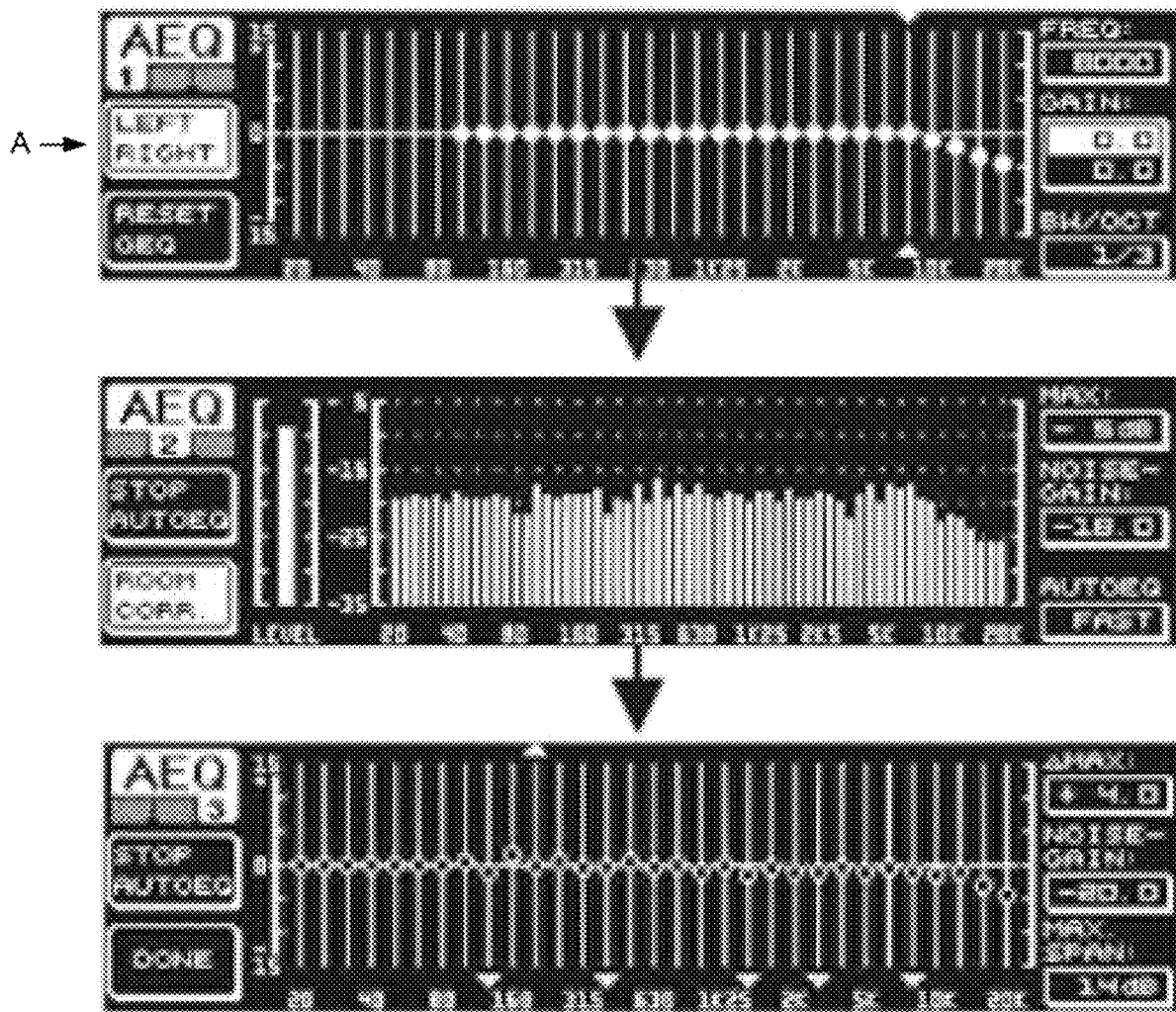


FIG. 4L(cont.)



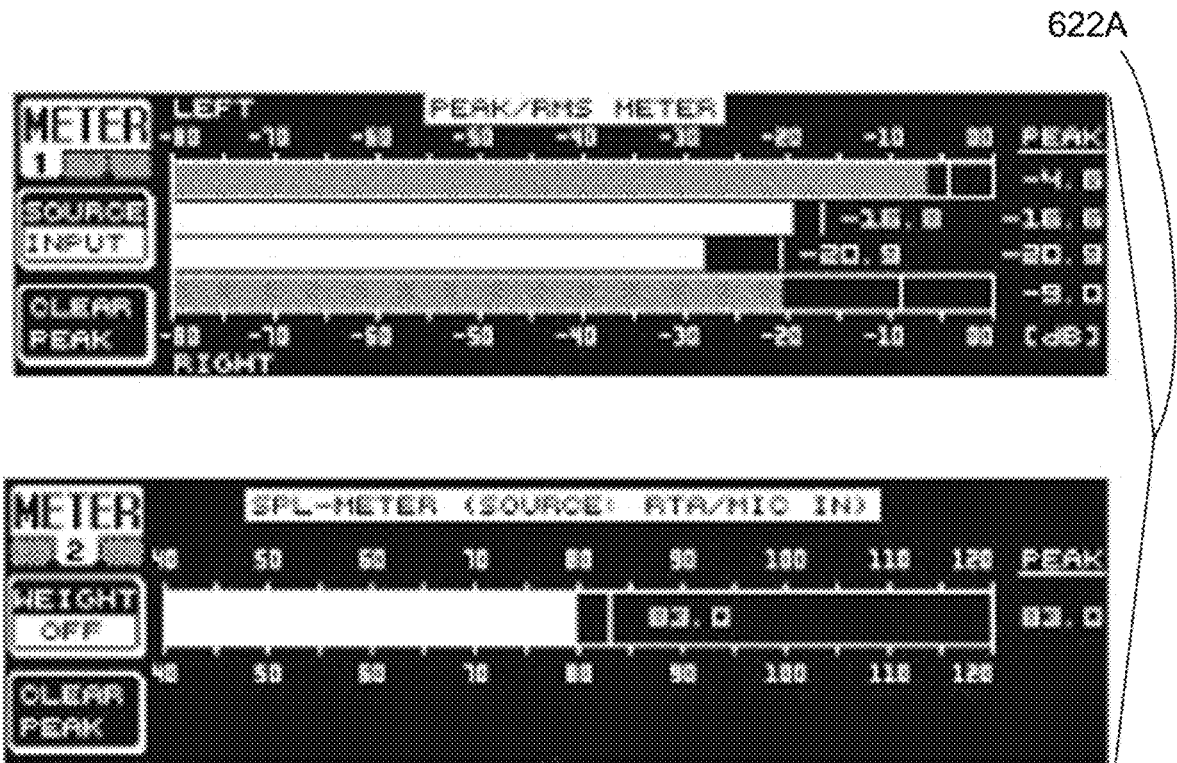


FIG. 5

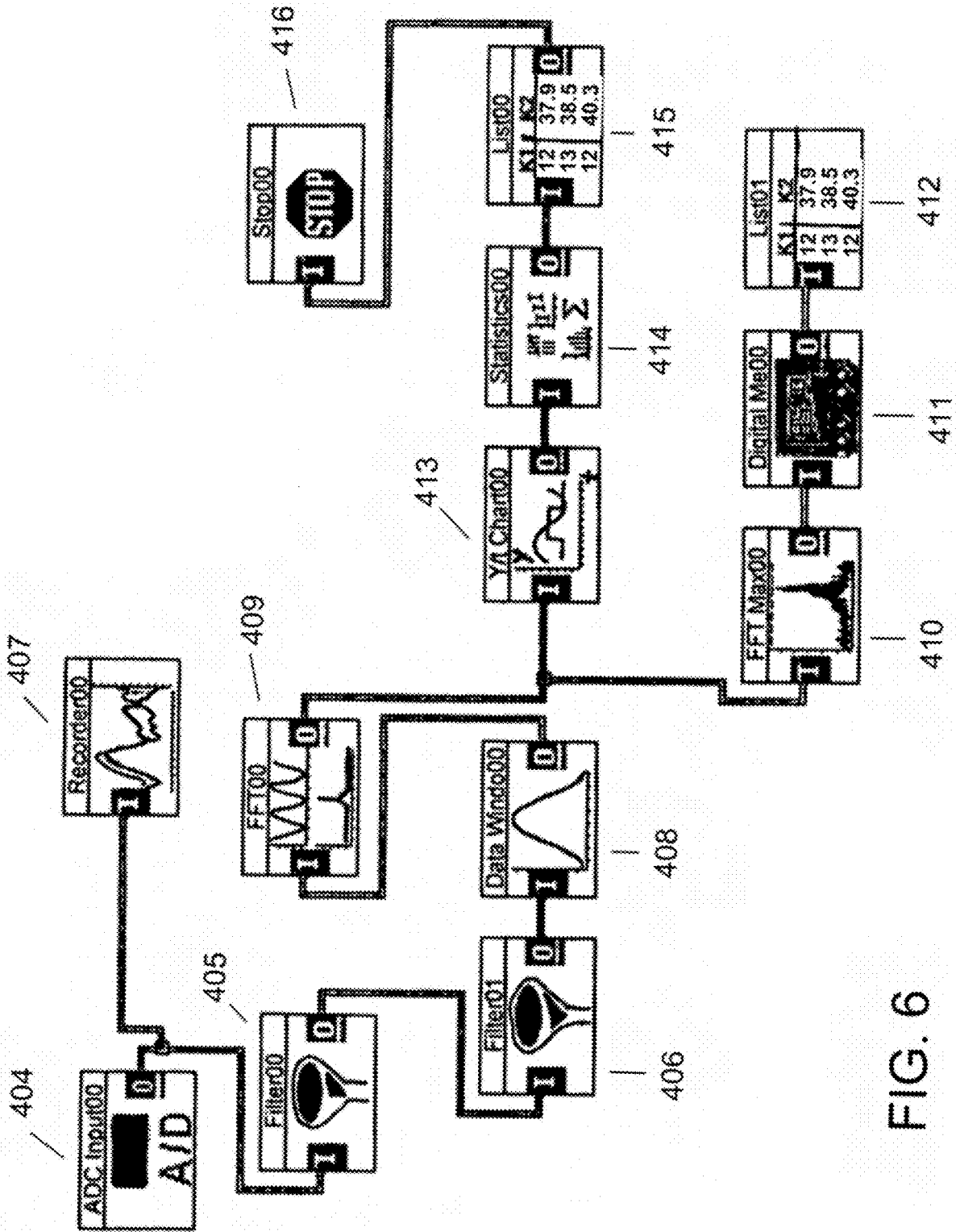


FIG. 6

FIG. 7A

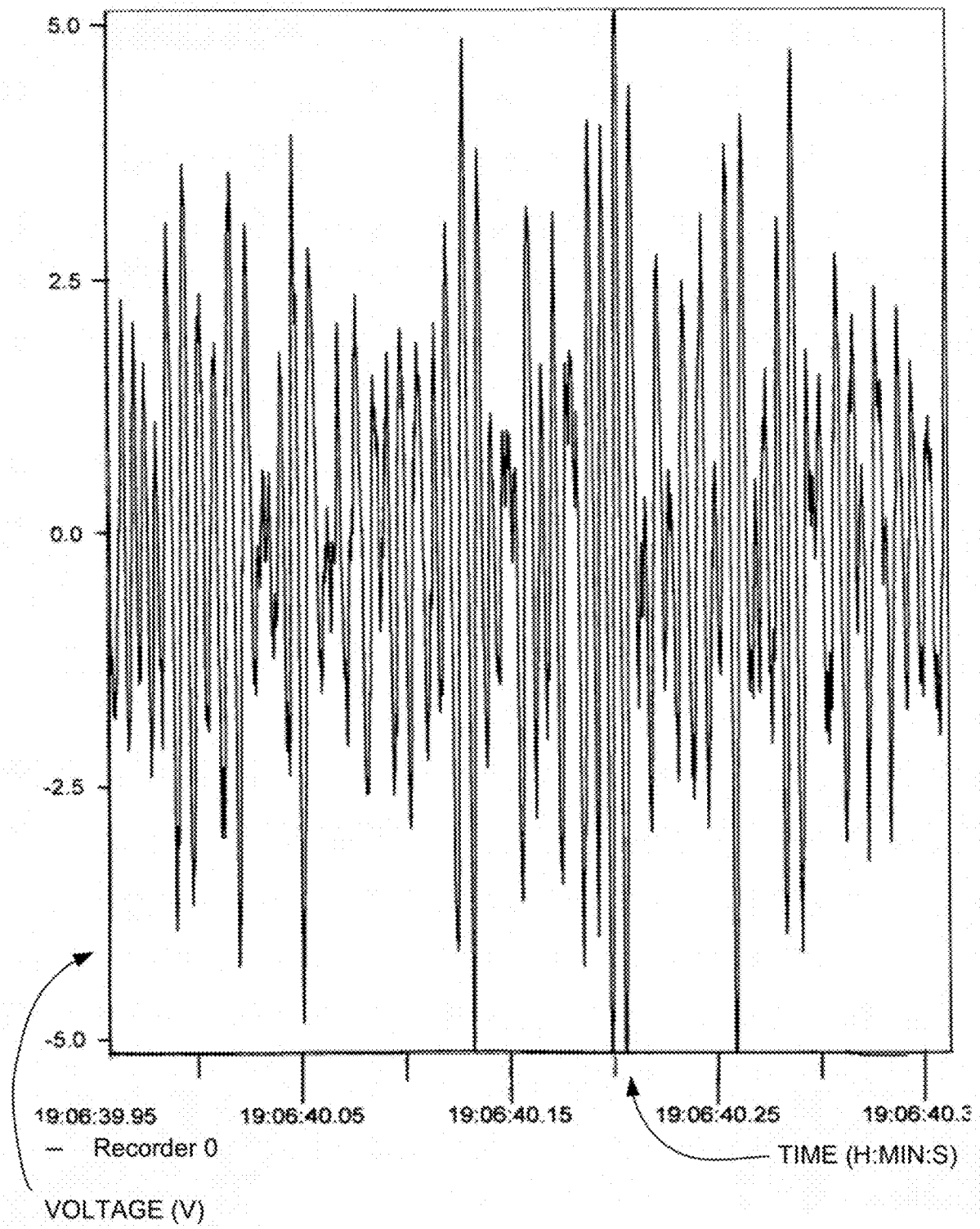


FIG. 7B

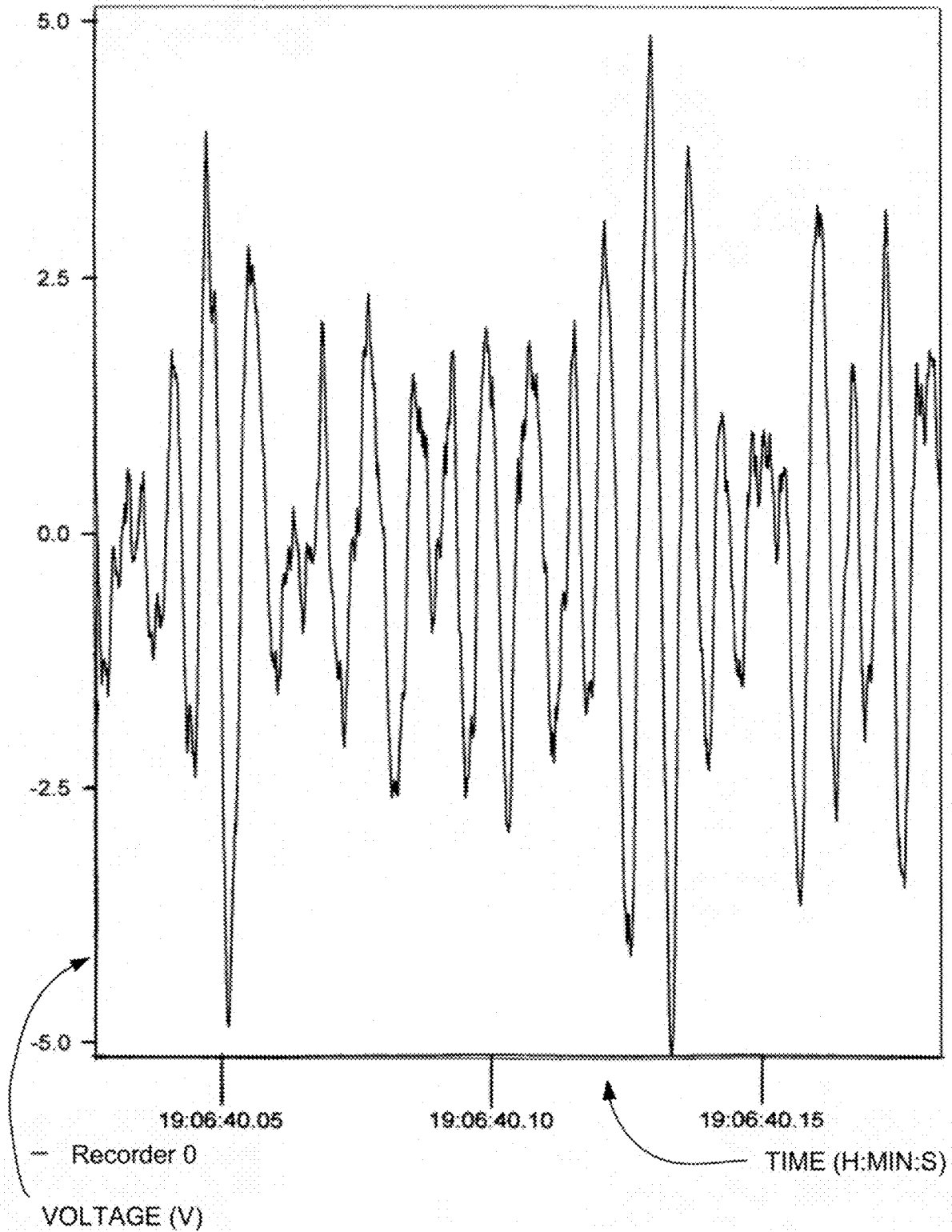


FIG. 8

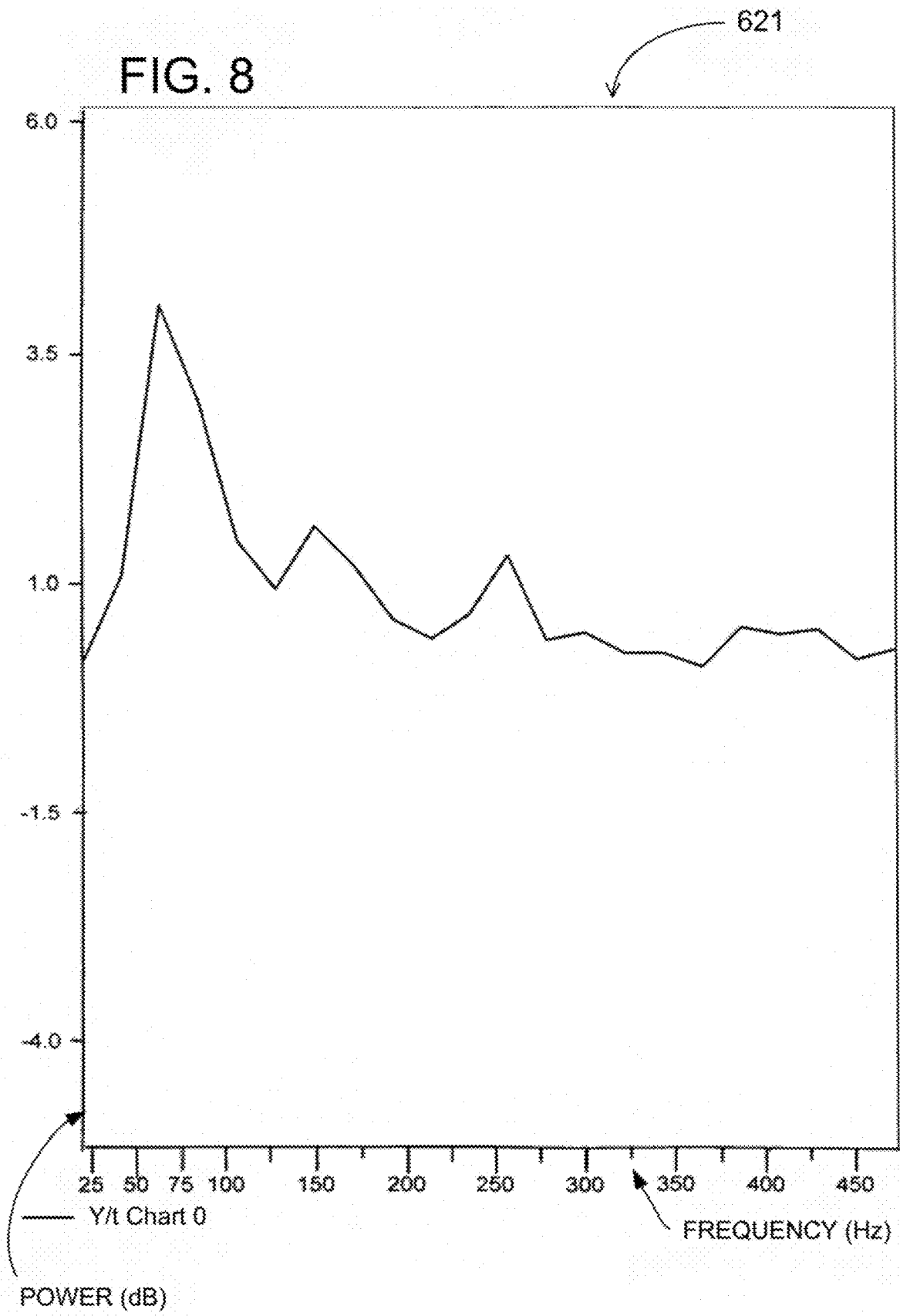


FIG. 9

Number	List 0
0	0.32416
1	0.24833
2	0.26159
3	0.38564
4	0.39383
5	0.27714
6	0.33288
7	0.28556
8	0.36188
9	0.39170
10	0.41769
11	0.37412
12	0.28504
13	0.31108
14	0.30409
15	0.30258
16	0.24723
17	0.30873
18	0.44627
19	0.40087
20	0.33600
21	0.31696
22	0.39488
23	0.38666

FIG. 10

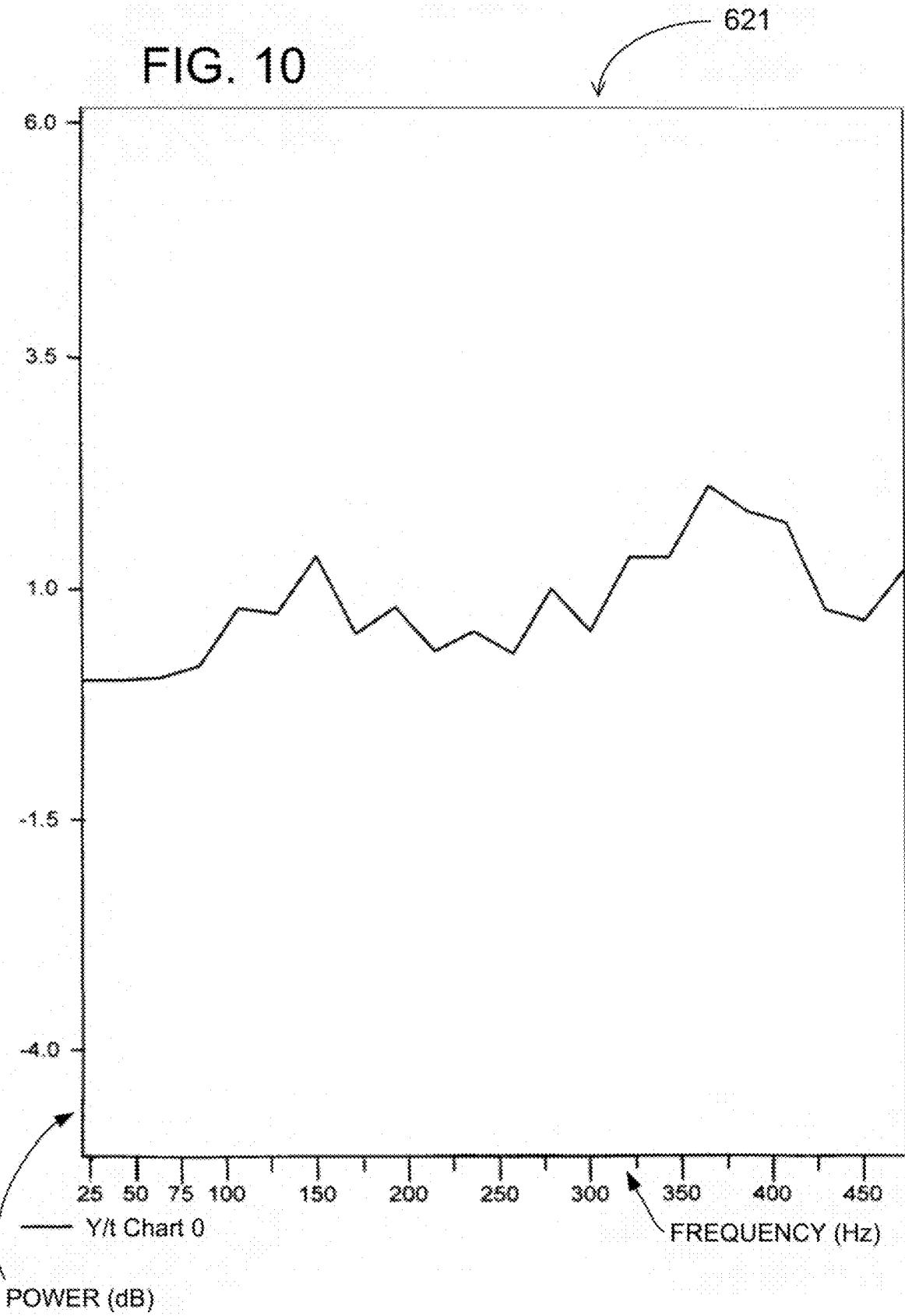


FIG. 11A

Number	List 0
144	0.16453
145	0.19866
146	0.25353
147	0.30213
148	0.27350
149	0.32605
150	0.38357
151	0.38844
152	0.39335
153	0.40621
154	0.36097
155	0.36865
156	0.34936
157	0.35348
158	0.37133
159	0.38622
160	0.37478
161	0.35564
162	0.37702
163	0.36008
164	0.36676
165	0.36367
166	0.34848
167	0.34179
168	0.35888
169	0.31170
170	0.34592
171	0.36733
172	0.35863
173	0.34091
174	0.33474
175	0.36267
176	0.36828
177	0.34860
178	0.35901
179	0.36568
180	0.34046
181	0.33658
182	0.34959
183	0.29098
184	0.33565

FIG. 11B

Number	List 0
185	0.32099
186	0.30145
187	0.34859
188	0.34272
189	0.37439
190	0.32083
191	0.31364
192	0.17720
193	0.29043
194	0.34371
195	0.36921
196	0.37567
197	0.38466
198	0.36238
199	0.35867
200	0.34770
201	0.33068
202	0.35571
203	0.29219
204	0.32458
205	0.36456
206	0.34355
207	0.38699

FIG. 12A

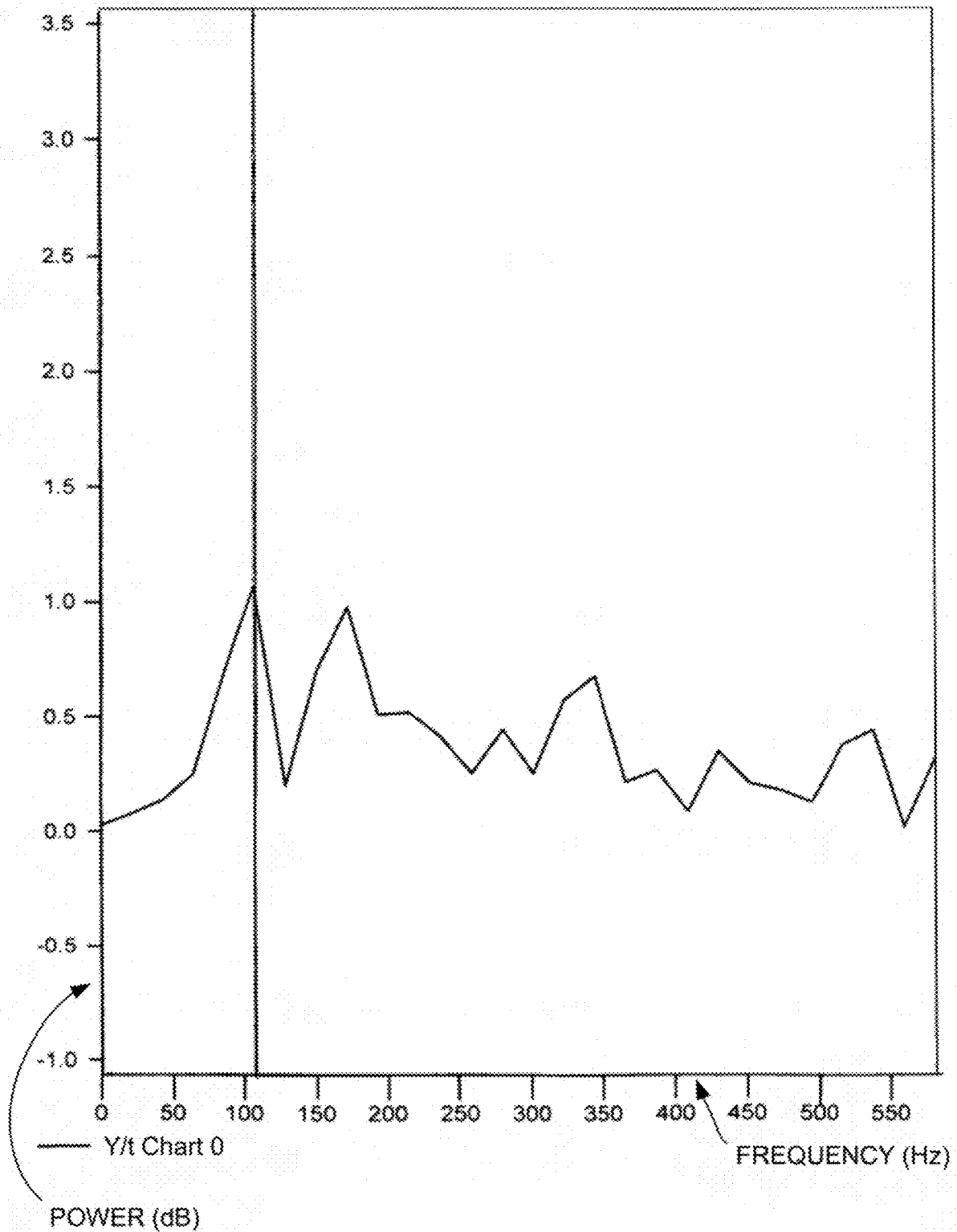


FIG. 12B

Number	List 0
24	0.578
25	1.728
26	1.008
27	0.558
28	0.880
29	0.944
30	1.019
31	0.602
32	0.532
33	0.850
34	1.071
35	1.244
36	0.553
37	0.601
38	0.550
39	0.637
40	1.164
41	0.548
42	0.682
43	1.525
44	2.146
45	1.216
46	0.462
47	0.429
48	0.199
49	0.407
50	0.629
51	0.589
52	0.803
53	0.596
54	0.473
55	0.239
56	0.699
57	1.176
58	1.875
59	0.982
60	0.267
61	0.854
62	1.341
63	0.253
64	0.584

FIG. 12C

Number	List 0
65	1.380
66	1.579
67	0.614
68	0.793
69	0.249
70	0.626
71	0.517
72	0.692
73	0.843
74	0.237
75	0.996
76	0.536
77	0.344
78	1.064
79	1.493
80	0.816
81	0.100
82	0.440
83	1.676
84	0.877
85	0.423
86	0.724
87	1.066

**ACQUIRING AND PROCESSING ACOUSTIC
ENERGY EMITTED BY AT LEAST ONE
ORGAN IN A BIOLOGICAL SYSTEM**

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation of copending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/430,561 filed Mar. 26, 2012, entitled "APPARATUS FOR ACQUIRING, PROCESSING AND TRANSMITTING PHYSIOLOGICAL SOUNDS," which claimed priority to copending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/602,017 filed Nov. 20, 2006 entitled, "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ACQUISITION AND ANALYSIS OF PHYSIOLOGICAL AUDITORY SIGNALS," which claimed priority to U.S. Prov. Pat. App. No. 60/785,357 filed on Mar. 23, 2006, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ACQUISITION AND ANALYSIS OF PHYSIOLOGICAL AUDITORY SIGNALS." All of the contents of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/430,561, U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/602,017, and U.S. Prov. Pat. App. No. 60/785,357 are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

Throughout this application, various publications are referenced. The disclosures of these publications in their entireties are hereby incorporated by reference into this application in order to more fully describe the state of the art as known to those skilled therein, as of the date of the disclosure described and claimed herein.

Auscultation of the lung and heart is probably the most widely used physical diagnostic method in respiratory and cardiac disease. However, due to the limitations of the human auditory system, auscultation has such low sensitivity and specificity that many physicians no longer rely solely on it as a diagnostic tool. Although digital acquisition and analysis of physiologic sounds has the potential to be of tremendous diagnostic/therapeutic benefit to patients, the medical community has been slow to embrace this technology. In order to overcome this obstacle, any system for digital acquisition and analysis of physiologic sounds must be lightweight and easy for individuals without technical expertise to operate and modify. In addition, all generated results must be presented in a format that allows for rapid interpretation and correlation with important physiologic values obtained from other tests.

Physiologic sounds may be captured electronically, processed, and transmitted back to the clinician thus enabling the human auditory system to obtain greater information conveyed by the signal. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,774,563 discloses a device for acquiring physiologic sounds. Electronic circuitry embedded in the device enables the operator to filter and amplify the incoming signal. Furthermore, this device also allows the user to listen to the post-processed signal through implementation of earpieces. However, no plan is described for enabling clinicians of ordinary ability to modify the system. Thus, the effective frequency range measured by this device is 70-480 Hz, which is essentially unalterable, has minimal clinical applications. In addition, this system does not provide a means for digital acquisition/display/analysis of the recorded signal, which serves to severely limit the use of this device in a clinical setting. Other forms of analogous art, which are based on these same principles, share similar disadvantages.

Analogous inventions in the art have depicted devices capable of acquiring, processing and digitally recording/analyzing physiologic signals. U.S. Pat. No. 6,139,505 dis-

closes an electronic stethoscope for the digital acquisition and analysis of physiologic sounds. The device consists of a microphone, which can be embedded inside conventional chest pieces. After amplification and filtering, the signal is transferred to an analogue to digital converter (A/D converter) for computer analysis. The system disclosed contains a modifiable number of independent transducers to record physiologic sounds at any particular location, which the operator desires. The device allows for amplification/filtering of the recorded signal, store these recordings in memory, perform root mean square (RMS) and time expanded waveform analysis, and display data on a monitor for visual analysis/printing. This device is also fairly easy to modify/upgrade/repair and includes a built in program for analyzing respiratory sounds and generating a probable diagnosis based on this information.

However, this device does not disclose a method to enable the physicians to listen to the sound as it is being recorded, but instead, requires them to discern phases of the respiratory cycle simply by inspection of the time expanded waveform. The patent describes a method by which physiologic sound may be processed and transmitted to a computer workstation using analogue circuitry which is bulky and not easily customized thus limiting the device's practical application. Further, no information is given about how this device can be used for higher level analysis (such as performance of Fourier Transformation or wavelet) of the desired signal, only time expanded waveform analysis and RMS of the complete spectrum are illustrated. These quantities give incomplete information regarding the sound and the program is not easily operated/modified by a clinician of ordinary skill. Lastly, no method is outlined by the inventors for reducing the corruption of the data from inadvertent pickup of ambient noise or superimposed signals emitted from other organs in close proximity to the transducer. The probable diagnosis product available with this device is also extremely limited since it provides no quantitative information regarding the degree of functionality of the desired organ system. Although Murphy's electronic stethoscope represents significant improvement from analogous art as a system for the display and analysis of physiologic sounds, the limitations of this device as described above decrease its usefulness in a clinical setting.

Additional devices have been patented which attempt to provide more sophisticated means for mathematically analyzing physiologic sounds and transmitting results to remote locations. One such example can be found in U.S. Pat. No. 6,699,204, which illustrates a device for recording physiologic sound using multiple sensors that are secured to a patient via a harness. Physiologic sound can be recorded by the sensors and relayed to a processing station for filtering/amplification using analogue circuits. The signal is then transferred to a sampler Ech (sound card) for digital recording via analogue circuitry or modem (not shown). With the aid of a specialized calculation manager (Matlab®) for example, the device can evaluate a set of transformed intensity levels, each associated with a predetermined sound frequency and means for storing each transformed intensity level in correspondence with an associated frequency for the purpose of displaying these intensity levels, transformed on the basis of frequencies as a spectral representation of the auscultation sound.

The device depicted by Kehyayan et al. is a further improvement over analogous art since it provides an accurate spectral representation of the auscultation sound as the intensity varies with time. However, a physician of ordinary ability cannot be expected to have the technical expertise

necessary to easily operate and/or modify this analysis program in order to examine a wide array of physiologic sounds. Also, no plan is outlined by the inventor for preventing extraneous sounds (from ambient noise or sound emitted from other organs) from influencing the results displayed on the spectral plots. Lastly, the spectral plots contain too much information for a clinician to interpret in a timely manner. Thus, it is unlikely that the invention proposed by Kehyayan will be useful in a practical setting, and thereby widely embraced by the medical community.

SUMMARY

Various embodiments of the present invention are generally directed to acquiring, processing and transmitting acoustic energy data.

In accordance with various embodiments, acquiring, processing and transmitting acoustic energy data is provided. A sensor for acoustic energy is utilized to convert analogue signals into an electrical output. The electrical output is converted to digital data. The digital data is processed by use of a processing unit. Transmission of the digital data is initiated over a wireless network. Electrical current is supplied to the processing unit through a battery.

These and other features and advantages which characterize the various embodiments of the present invention can be understood in view of the following detailed discussion and the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 provides a general overview of an exemplary embodiment disclosed.

FIG. 2 is an illustration of the computer station component of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3A illustrates a block diagram of an embodiment of the signal conditioning station.

FIG. 3B illustrates a block diagram of the digital signal processor described.

FIG. 3C is a block diagram of elements utilized in data conversion and transfer incorporated within an embodiment.

FIGS. 4A-4L illustrates a variety of operations which may be performed on the acquired data by the digital signal processor.

FIG. 5 illustrates a display of the RMS values for the incoming signal (ambient noise) received from the test microphone. These values can be helpful in quantifying the effect of ambient noise on the calculation of the RMS values of the desired signal.

FIG. 6 is a flow chart of the data collection and analysis program. Each icon represents an operation which is performed on incoming data and selecting a corresponding icon can modify these operations.

FIGS. 7A and 7B represent time expanded waveforms of physiologic sounds.

FIG. 8 is a graphical representation of the power spectrum density calculated using the Fast Fourier transformation from an incoming data stream representative of physiologic sounds received by the transducer positioned over the heart.

FIG. 9 depicts the sequential display of RMS values calculated from the PSD after processing for heart sounds. This data may then be used to assess the degree of functionality of the target organ.

FIG. 10 depicts the PSD calculated from tracheal breath sounds using the FFT.

FIGS. 11A and 11B depict the sequential display of RMS values calculated from the PSD after processing of the tracheal breath sound.

FIGS. 12A-12C depict the sequential display of values corresponding to the maximum frequency 12A and corresponding intensity 12B/12C from the desired portions of the PSD after processing of the incoming signal from the heart. Data is displayed as it is obtained from each incoming block.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

It has been proven that organs in the human body emit characteristic physiologic signals when they are functioning in the absence of pathology.

One of the main obstacles to widespread acceptance of electronic stethoscopes is that these devices are too cumbersome, and also, too complicated for health care professionals to operate in a professional setting. A compact, customizable device may be useful. But most important, the device will be an improvement over analogous art by providing a simple interface which allows medical professionals with limited technical background to easily manipulate vital parameters such as block length, overlap, sampling rate, low/high pass filtering, adjusting the Fast Fourier Transformation (FFT) and RMS analysis to cover any component of the frequency spectrum, and applying data windows without the need for computer programming knowledge.

It may be useful to boost the accuracy of recording physiological sounds by providing the physician with an efficient method of eliminating background noise (which is either present in the ambient environment and/or emitted by other body organs in the vicinity of the transducer) from the desired signal in real time. Accomplishing this task will not only lead to greater accuracy in the measurement of physiologic sounds, but it will also allow the device to operate with a greater degree of autonomy when compared to analogous art.

Lastly, acoustic signals from human organs occur over many different frequency ranges (depending on the specific organ and any pathology present) and are often of minimal intensity. Therefore, detecting differences in these signals between normal physiologic and pathologic states over a finite time interval for any given organ requires a system of mathematical analysis with greater sensitivity than that described in many versions of analogous art. The device may provide a means for adjusting the frequency band in the Power Spectrum Density (PSD), which the RMS values are calculated from. The PSD results from performing the FFT on the digital data corresponding to the audio signal.

As noted above, this disclosure relates to a system for recording and analyzing physiologic sounds to provide the clinician with information relating to functional status of the organ being examined. This information may provide clues, that when combined with other elements of a diagnostic workup (history, physical exam, lab tests, medical imaging, etc.) may facilitate the diagnosis of various disease states (pulmonary disease for example). Consistent with other forms of analogous art, the system includes a plurality of transducers, such as microphones embedded in small rubber tubes coupled to a thin plastic diaphragm(s) which may be placed at pre-selected sites on the patient using either light pressure or a harness of some type. Physiologic signals of interest vibrate the plastic diaphragm, which transmits the sound by moving air molecules in the tube. The transducers detect these sounds and convert them into electrical signals. The system contains a preamplifier that not only increases

the intensity of the incoming electrical signal, but also polarizes the transducers with an electromotive force (preferably 48 Volts) applied equally to both inputs to the sensor with respect to ground (phantom power). In order to provide this polarizing potential high voltage commercial alternating current is converted to high voltage direct current. This voltage is applied to same wires that carry the audio signal. Since the preamplifier can supply such high voltage (unlike many computer sound cards available commercially) the apparatus and method disclosed can make use of transducers with higher signal to noise ratios than those used in analogous art. Furthermore, portability may be maximized by supplying the phantom power through a alkaline, lithium-ion or other rechargeable battery.

The system also includes a digital signal processor for conditioning the signal (filtering, gating, limiting, or excluding background noise). In an embodiment of the invention, analogue circuitry or a digital signal processor employing Super Harvard Architecture (SHARC) can be added for additional filtering, expansion, compression or conversion of the processed signal back to sound energy thereby enabling the operator to hear the altered sound in real time. After processing, the analogue signals generated by the transducers are converted into digital data and transferred to a computer workstation. In order to increase the portability of this device, digital data may be transmitted to the workstation over wireless internet. A further advantage of utilizing a SHARC processor is that optimal settings for detecting sound from a variety of sources may be stored in memory for instantaneous recall by the operator. These aforementioned settings which are programmed into the SHARC processor may enable the claimed invention to acquire properties of sound transmission which are identical to a conventional acoustic stethoscope. This is important because acoustic stethoscopes remain popular in clinical settings due to the fact that a tremendous amount of research has already been done with them and the steadfast hesitancy among healthcare professionals to abandon their use of these devices.

The computer station includes a microprocessor, input/output circuitry, and random access memory for data storage, one or more input devices (such as a keyboard or mouse), a modular interface with many different graphical displays of incoming data, and one or more output devices (such as a printer, monitor or modem for transmission over the Internet).

Executing on the computer is an application program constructed from a set of modular elements synthesized using a graphical programming language. The application program collects the data and organizes it into discrete sections (blocks) before moving it through a series of modules. By clicking on any specific module with the mouse, the operator can set the sampling rate, block size and overlap. Furthermore, the operator may elect to further high/low pass filter the data digitally or apply a mathematical window analogous to FFT processing in order to minimize distortion of calculated results.

After breaking the signal into multiple blocks (which correspond to discrete time intervals) and then pre-processing these blocks, the program calculates the power spectrum density of the portion of the signal contained in each block using the FFT. After calculation the computer displays the results graphically as a plot of Intensity vs. Frequency. These results are updated continuously as the PSD is calculated anew for each incoming block and the results of the previous block are saved in memory.

As the PSD is calculated for each incoming block, the computer may exclude portions of the PSD that are outside

the selected thresholds specified by the operator. This is possible because the program may contain a trigger, which enables the operator to exclude portions of the spectrum, which are not of interest with a simple mouse click. Once the PSD is determined, the program calculates the root mean square (RMS) value of the signal in the frequency band(s) chosen by the operator. The computer performs this calculation on each incoming block and displays the data as a list during the time of operation. This method is highly advantageous to the clinician since it takes a very complicated quantity (the PSD of each block that gives information about the power of all frequency components in the block) and converts it into a simple quantity (RMS), while still relaying the necessary information about the signal to the clinician. Secondly, by performing these calculations on each incoming block of the data, the properties of the signal outlined above can be analyzed as they vary over time. The clinician can then use this information about an organ's spectral characteristics to assess its degree of functionality in a quick, inexpensive, accurate and non-invasive manner. The analysis program illustrated can be used either as a stand alone application or in combination with a number of additional program elements which may include patient's electronic medical records. As a result, this system has the potential to dramatically improve efficiency in the healthcare system and clinical outcomes for patients.

FIG. 1 provides an overview of the sound recording and analysis system of the present invention. This system includes a transducer **1**, such as an analogue condenser microphone, which can be placed at various sites around the patient to listen to sounds emitted by different organs. It should be understood that the system could be expanded to include additional transducers **1** if desired so that data from multiple sites can be collected concurrently. To isolate the sensors from external sounds (and thereby improve signal to noise), they may be embedded in the tubing/chest pieces of conventional stethoscopes. The transducer(s) **1** may be held against the surface of the patient with mechanical pressure applied by the operator, adhesive tape or suitable strapping to prevent movement during the data acquisition process.

Leads **2** extending from the sensors are balanced cables with XLR inputs **97** that connect to a signal conditioning station. A suitable signal conditioning circuit could be the Eurorack 1202, a sound mixer **3** made by Behringer. This station performs many important functions. First, it supplies the electromotive force needed to polarize the transducer **1**. In the preferred embodiment, the mixer **3** converts standard alternating current (120 volts) into direct current (48 volts). It has been proven that to accurately record physiologic sounds, it is important to have a transducer **1** with a high signal to noise ratio and a flat frequency response. These types of sensors may demand high voltages, which are not readily supplied by analogous art that utilizes sound cards built into most commercially available personal computers **9** or batteries.

The voltage is then supplied to the sensor through both XLR inputs **97** equally with respect to ground (phantom power) **93**. The audio signal is transmitted through these same inputs approximately 180 degrees out of phase of each other thereby ensuring a balanced signal. Balanced signals are less corrupted by ambient noise relative to unbalanced ones. Inside the stethoscope tube, sound energy generated from organs inside the body is converted into an electrical signal by the microphone. This electrical signal (which is a representation of the sound) is then transmitted to the mixer **3** though the same leads **2** that supply the voltage in the manner described previously. To further prevent this desired

signal from being corrupted by external electric/magnetic fields, the cables may be shielded. The mixer **3** may have additional ports to receive electrical signal from additional sensors. In addition, phantom power **93** may be supplied via alkaline (such as the ART Phantom Power Adapter), lithium-ion or other rechargeable 9 volt batteries.

Once the electrical signal is received by the mixer **3**, it may be amplified **255** and/or filtered **256**. In the preferred embodiment the mixer contains circuitry **383**, which can act as a high pass filter (80 Hz) **256** and/or low pass filter (12 kHz) **256**, although other frequencies are possible. It should be noted that the invention gives the operator the ability to bypass this processing if they choose. After amplification/filtering, the signal may be sent to a headset **4** where it is converted back to sound energy, thereby enabling the operator to listen to the sound as it is recorded. The signal may also be sent for recording on cassette tapes or it can be sent to a digital signal processor (DSP) **5**. One such example is the DEQ 2496, a digital equalizer with Super Harvard Architecture (SHARC) signal processors **76,77,78,79,80,81,82,83,84,85,86,87,88,89,90** and specialized software, made by Behringer which is depicted in FIGS. **3A** and **3B**.

The digital processor **5** performs the fast Fourier transformation on the signal and displays both the discrete frequency bands and the power of the signal in each band (power spectrum density) **621**, as shown in FIGS. **8** and **10**, for example. One of ordinary skill in the art will understand that the waveforms shown in FIGS. **8** and **10** (as well as other waveforms, such as FIG. **12A**) are merely exemplary, and that the ordinate or Y-axis demonstrates relative values, such as decibel (dB) shown, as well as other measures of PSD, such as, but not limited to, RMS. From here, the operator can selectively amplify/attenuate components of the signal in any frequency band from 20-20000 Hz (similar to an equalizer) **612-615**. Unwanted signal can be excluded by compressing **615** (the processor reduces the intensity of all signal components with a volume that is greater than desired) or expanding **615** (reducing the intensity of all frequency components with an intensity less than that desired by the operator) frequencies detected by the transducer **1**. Of note, the device can function as a noise gate and/or limiter if compression/expansion is performed to a maximum degree. All operations undertaken by the digital signal processor **5** to alter the incoming audio signal can be displayed via LCD, and device operations **612-620** and **622-623** may be saved in memory by device operation **620** for instant recall by the operator at some future time. The adjustment of stereo width function **623** may or may not be necessary. It is understood that specific operations **612-619** of the digital signal processor **5** may cause the invention to acquire properties of sound transmission similar to conventional acoustic stethoscopes. This characteristic of the claimed invention is a valuable attribute, since a tremendous body of research has already been conducted in the analysis of physiologic auditory signals using said acoustic stethoscopes. Secondly, it is well known that such conventional stethoscopes are still widely popular in the market place. Specifically, settings contained in the digital signal processor **5** may allow clinicians to measure blood pressure values, grade cardiac murmurs (I-VI) and listen to other physiological sounds in a manner which correlates well with findings obtained from a conventional acoustic stethoscope. The ability to perform compression/expansion is an improvement over other forms of analogous art since it allows the device to record physiologic sounds from the human body without having to constantly be directed to by the operator.

However, it should be noted that the device might set up so that it is required to be directed by the operator before making recordings.

Furthermore, the digital signal processor **5** contains a test transducer **1**, which can be deployed by the operator if desired. This test transducer **1** may be affixed to body surface or exposed to the ambient environment. The test transducer **1** records sounds from sources that might corrupt the signal being recorded from the organ of interest. This may include noise present in the ambient environment or sound emitted from other organs in the vicinity of the target organ. The power spectrum density **621** of these ambient signals can be used to calculate and display **622A** the corresponding RMS values for the signal as demonstrated in FIG. **5**. The components of the undesired signal, which interfere with the signal of interest, are effectively quantified in real time. The DSP **5** may transmit data directly to a computer workstation **9** for further analysis via cable or wireless internet connection **16, 17**. This is a significant improvement over analogous art because it can be used to remove ambient noise that contains identical frequency components to those of the target organ, thus producing a much clearer signal from the target organ in addition to enabling the clinician to obtain standardized measurements regardless of the noise level present in the ambient environment at the time of measurement. The processing methods may include (but is not limited to) graphic **612**, parametric **613**, digital **614** and/or dynamic equalizers **615**, as well as signal compression/expansion/boosting/cutting and feedback destruction **622** or bypassed altogether **616**.

After this additional processing, the signal from each analogue output is transmitted to an analog-to-digital converter (A/D converter) **6**, which may or may not be part of the computer station **9**. The A/D converter **6** converts the processed audio information into a digital data stream for transmission to the workstation **9**. One advantage of employing a SHARC processor **5** is that digital data may be transmitted to the computer workstation **9** over wireless internet **16,17**. This process can be achieved by coupling the SHARC processor **5** to a modem **16** with a WiFi PC card (not shown). Digital data acquired during stethoscope operation may be transferred to a WiFi Access Point/Router **17**, and afterward, sent to a modem **16** via CAT5 cable or WiFi USB adapter.

The sampling rate used in digitizing the data may be adjusted by the operator and should be greater than 44.1 KHz with a bit rate preferably greater than 24 bits per sample. The A/D converter **6** is preferably multi-channel which may contain an additional preamp such as the Edirol UA-25 sold by the Roland Corporation. FIG. **3** is a schematic of all of the hardware components which comprise the preferred embodiment of the invention (components for transmission of data over a wireless network are not shown). FIG. **3A** illustrates a first portion of a first schematic connected to a second portion of the first schematic, illustrated in FIG. **3A** (cont.), through lines (a)-(f). FIG. **3C** illustrates a first portion of a third schematic connected to a second portion of the third schematic, illustrated in FIG. **3C** (cont.), through lines (g)-(v). A suitable workstation **9** may be a personal computer of the E-machines series as sold by Lenovo, comprising a microprocessor **12**, input/output circuitry **10**, and memory for data storage **13**, one or more input devices (such as a keyboard **8** or mouse **7**), a modular interface with many different graphical displays of incoming data as depicted in FIG. **6**, and one or more output devices such as a printer **15**, monitor **14** or modem **16** for transmission over the Internet. As shown in FIG. **1**, input/output

circuitry **10**, microprocessor **12**, and memory for data storage **13** are interconnected via bus **11**. However, it should be understood that other models may be substituted. These computers are controlled and coordinated by operating system **16A**, such as Microsoft Windows XP or other system. The operating system **16A** may also comprise a window manager **17A**, printer manager **18** and additional device managers **21** in addition to one or more device drivers **19,20,22** in order to allow the computer workstation **9** to interface with hardware components.

Digital data from the A/D converter **6** is transmitted to input/output (I/O) circuitry **10** of the computer via USB cable JK1. FIG. 2 illustrates the interaction of software elements on the computer workstation **9** with the application programs **210,220,230** and operating system **16A** relationships shown by arrows **306,307,308** via system calls. The program (FIG. 6) is organized by a series of graphical icons that are provided via specialized data acquisition software such as DASY LAB 9.0, a product manufactured and sold by Capital Equipment. Each icon, constructed using a graphical programming language, represents a command(s) to the workstation **9** to perform. This program **210** is fully customizable since simply inserting/deleting icons in the flow diagram can make new programs. All commands given to the analysis program by the clinician are accomplished via simple keyboard **8** entries or mouse **7** "clicks". Thus, knowledge of computer programming languages (which many health care personnel do not possess) is not a required prerequisite for proper operation of the instant device.

Prior to first listening to the sound the clinician chooses the sampling rate by clicking on a tab marked "experimental setup." The A/D input icon **404** receives data via I/O circuitry **10**. The Recorder Icon **407** displays the time-expanded function of the incoming signal illustrated in FIGS. 7A and 7B in accordance with the description set forth in U.S. Pat. No. 3,990,435. The clinician then clicks the Filter icons **405,406** in order to select frequencies where the signal can be high/low pass filtered digitally. Some examples include digital high/low pass filtering, application of a windowing function to incoming data analogous to PSD calculation, adjustment of sample rate, block size, degree of overlap and recording time. Through the use of these icons, the clinician may also determine the characteristic (Butterworth, Bessel, etc.) and order of the digital filter. The clinician will click the Data Window Icon **408**, to select the desired block length, appropriate mathematical window to fit the data with, and determine the degree of overlap (if any) between successive blocks. The FFT icon **409** in the program **210** instructs the computer to calculate the FFT on the portion of the signal represented by each block. The Y/T Icon **413** enables the clinician to view a display of the PSD on a monitor **14** for each block after it is calculated as illustrated in FIGS. 8 and 10. By clicking the FFT max icon **410**, the clinician can specify the frequency range within the PSD where both the frequency of maximum intensity and its magnitude may be calculated as illustrated in FIGS. 12A, 12B and 12C. These quantities may be displayed by the icon marked "Digital Meter" **411** or List icon **412**. By clicking the Trigger Icon, the clinician can determine which frequency components of the PSD will be excluded from the RMS calculation (not shown).

Since different body organs emit sound in different frequency ranges, the ability to adjust the frequency range is vital if one hopes to construct a single device that can be used to analyze sounds from all of the different organs (not just lung). The Statistics Icon **414** instructs the computer to calculate the RMS value of the signal in the desired fre-

quency range set by the digital high/low pass filters **405,406** or Trigger Icon in the specified range. The List Icon **415** displays the RMS value sequentially as it is calculated from each incoming block as shown in FIGS. 10 and 12. Additional modules may be added to the program **210** for the purpose of determining the magnitude of the change in RMS values with respect to time at a given anatomic position. These RMS values, either as displayed by the List Icon **415** or when combined with additional analysis programs **220, 230** on the workstation **9**, give the attending physician a mechanism for comparing the intensity of physiologic sound recorded by the sensor in any desired frequency range and over any duration of time.

In operation, the sensors **1** are affixed to any part of the body surface according to the discretion of the clinician. The system is then initialized and data is transmitted to application program **210**, as the patient inhales/exhales, sound is converted to audio signals which may be amplified/filtered/processed before being relayed to both the clinician and the application program **210** in the computer workstation **9**. At any instant in time (if the physician hears an interesting sound) the physician can start the digital recording by clicking the Recorder Icon **407**, a green arrow in the upper left hand corner of the screen. After the signal of interest is no longer audible, the physician may stop recording by clicking the red square icon or specifying the duration of recording via the "Stop" icon **416**. The computer recording may be influenced by the DSP **5** via compression/limiting **615** or equalization **612,613,614** as described above. After recording is complete, the clinician may click the list icon **415** to obtain a columnar display of the desired RMS values. Review of this list may give the clinician valuable information regarding the degree of functionality/pathology present in certain organs (lung, heart, bowel, etc.). The settings and/or outputs of the PSD (calculated from the Y/T icon **413**), Time Expanded Waveform **407**, FFT Maximum **410**, Filters **405,406** and List **412,415** can all be saved in memory **13**, printed on paper via printer **15** or transmitted via modem **16** to another computer **9** though the internet. It should be understood that additional icons may be added to the program in FIG. 6 if additional data manipulation is desired. In addition, program settings for analysis of auditory signals from two or more different sources (organs, ambient noise, etc.) such as the heart and trachea (FIGS. 9 and 11) may be combined, thereby enabling the operator to analyze discrete frequency bands within a signal. For instance, if an observed physiologic sound is composed of sounds from the trachea and heart superimposed on each other, the operator may combine modules from FIGS. 9 and 11 into a single program that will separately analyze the signals from each source simultaneously. If there exists overlap, additional methods may be deployed to separate out the overlapping frequency components of the two or more sources.

Lastly, data generated from this analysis program **210** may be integrated with numerical/text data contained in a patient's electronic medical records **220**. The integration of data among these programs **210,220,230** can be directed by an operator using a mouse **7**, keyboard **8** or other input. U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,944,821 and 6,154,756 demonstrate two such methods for performing said integration of data contained on multiple program elements. Additional software programs **230** may combine data from the analysis program **210** and electronic medical records **220** for the purposes of assessing target organ functionality, characterization of pathology if present, and generating accurate predictions regarding the degree of functionality of the target organ system in the near future.

It is to be understood that even though numerous characteristics and advantages of various embodiments of the present invention have been set forth in the foregoing description, together with details of the structure and function of various embodiments of the invention, this detailed description is illustrative only, and changes may be made in detail, especially in matters of structure and arrangements of parts within the principles of the present invention to the full extent indicated by the broad general meaning of the terms in which the appended claims are expressed.

What is claimed is:

1. A system for acquiring and processing physiological sounds comprising:
 - an apparatus comprising:
 - a single sensor configured to convert an analogue signal into an electrical output representative of said physiological sounds;
 - an analogue to digital converter operatively coupled to said sensor, wherein said analogue to digital converter is configured to convert said electrical output into a stream of digital data;
 - a serial to parallel converter operatively coupled to said analogue to digital converter, said serial to parallel converter configured to convert at least a portion of said stream of digital data into a parallel output; and
 - a display device configured to display a plurality of icons, wherein said plurality of icons displayed on said display device is configured for customization by a user through insertion of an additional icon in said plurality of icons displayed, and wherein the apparatus is configured to initiate a recording of said physiological sounds by interaction of said user with at least one icon in said plurality of icons displayed.
2. The system of claim 1, said apparatus further comprising:
 - a digital to analogue converter operatively coupled to said serial to parallel converter, said digital to analogue converter configured to convert at least a portion of said parallel output into a second analogue signal for transmission over a wireless network.
3. The system of claim 1, said apparatus further comprising: a processing unit operatively coupled to said analogue to digital converter, said processing unit configured to compute a mathematical transform on at least a portion of said parallel output.
4. The system of claim 3, wherein said mathematical transform is a fast Fourier transformation.
5. The system of claim 1, further comprising: said display device configured to display information comprising a vital sign.
6. The system of claim 1, wherein said physiological sounds are sounds generated by an organ in a frequency range up to 20,000 Hz, and wherein said sensor is one sensor of a plurality of sensors and at least two sensors of said plurality of sensors are configured to convert said physiological sounds into a plurality of corresponding electrical signals.
7. The system of claim 6, wherein said plurality of sensors comprises at least three sensors.
8. The system of claim 1, wherein said apparatus is characterized as a first apparatus, and further comprising a second apparatus operatively coupled to said first apparatus, said second apparatus comprising:
 - an electronic memory configured to store a signal representative of at least a portion of said parallel output; and
 - a second processing unit coupled to said electronic memory, said second processing unit configured to retrieve from said electronic memory and process said

- signal representative of at least a portion of said parallel output into a processed signal.
- 9. The system of claim 1, wherein the physiological sounds are ambient noise generated by an organ in a frequency range up to 20,000 Hz.
- 10. The system of claim 6, wherein at least one sensor of said plurality of sensors is configured to be positioned on a body surface.
- 11. The system of claim 7, wherein at least one sensor of said at least three sensors is configured to be positioned on a body surface and wherein said physiological sounds are sounds generated by an organ in a frequency range up to 20,000 Hz.
- 12. The system of claim 11, wherein said physiological sounds comprise ambient noise.
- 13. The system of claim 5, wherein said vital sign is a heart rate.
- 14. The system of claim 10, further comprising an electronic memory for storing a signal representative of at least a portion of the plurality of electrical outputs generated by the plurality of sensors.
- 15. An apparatus comprising:
 - a port configured to be operatively coupled to a single sensor, wherein said single sensor is configured to convert physiological sounds into an electrical signal;
 - a corresponding analogue to digital converter operatively coupled to the sensor, wherein said analogue to digital converter is configured to convert at least a portion of said electrical signal into a stream of digital data;
 - a serial to parallel converter configured to convert at least a portion of the stream of digital data into a parallel output;
 - a memory configured to store at least a portion of the stream of digital data; and
 - a display device configured to display a plurality of icons, wherein each icon of said plurality of icons displayed respectively correspond to at least one operation of a plurality of operations that said apparatus is configured to perform, wherein the plurality of icons displayed on said display device is configured for customization by a user through insertion of an additional icon in said plurality of icons displayed, and wherein the apparatus is configured to initiate a recording of said physiological sounds by interaction of said user with at least one icon in said plurality of icons displayed.
- 16. The apparatus of claim 15, further comprising a parallel to serial converter operatively coupled to the serial to parallel converter and configured to convert at least a portion of said parallel output into a transmission serial output, wherein said apparatus is configured to send said transmission serial output across a network.
- 17. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the network is a wireless network, the apparatus further comprising a digital to analogue converter configured to convert at least a portion of said transmission serial output into an analogue signal for transmission over said wireless network.
- 18. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said physiological sounds are sounds generated by an organ and comprise ambient noise, the apparatus further comprising a filter which is configured to filter ambient noise from said at least one stream of digital data prior to conversion of serial output into said parallel output.
- 19. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein an entirety of the stream of digital data is stored in said memory.
- 20. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said memory is configured to store an electronic medical record and said display device is configured to display at least a portion of said electronic medical record.