

The Most Significant Amplifiers

The May/June 2011 "The Absolute Sound" magazine had a probing topic. What are the MOST SIGNIFICANT amplifiers that have been built? It's an endless discussion. After all, who do you want behind the plate? I'll take Josh Gibson. But it would be tough to argue with Johnny Bench or Roy Campanella, wouldn't it?

An advantage we dealers have over magazine guys is that a lot of *production amplifiers* go through our mitts. We don't just see one amp, cherry picked for a reviewer. We see PRODUCTION amps go into the field. If they have problems due to construction or design flaws- we see them. We have to deal with customers to repair them and make them right. Since we've been around since the 70s, we also see how people "live" with their amps. Are they really happy with them? Do they keep them a long time?

In general, I think TAS did a better job with the amps than with their speaker choices. They look at tubes more romantically than I do. I had to be RESPONSIBLE for the failures! I think they missed a few deserving candidates.

To begin, here is their list:

Dynaco ST-70
Phase Linear 400/700
ARC D150
McIntosh MC275
Levinson ML-2
Marantz 8B/9
Krell KSA-50/KDA-100
Threshold 400A/800A
NAD 3020
ARC 600/610T

My Alternative List

Bryston 4B

We can easily make a case for the 4B being THE BEST amp choice on the list! It was the first amp of enormous power (200 w/ch) and bone crushing bass. Transient attack was outstanding and the excellent reliability, which is now legendary, really made it stand out from its competition. Bryston offered a great early solution for driving hungry speakers like the Maggies, DQs and Acoustats. Bryston made the B&Ws get up and dance with ease. Bryston had no fear offering a 20 year warranty. Keep in mind, people were blowing up Phase Linears and Dyna 400s like mad in the 70s!

GAS Ampzilla

It was a high powered amp (200 w/ch) that enjoyed great popularity from the mid 70s to early 80s. It wasn't nearly as reliable as the Bryston, but it sounded solid and its biggest problems were with its meters- not the sound.

Audire Forte

Audire's Forte came out about 1980. It had (125 w/ch) bass warmth & musicality. It didn't have quite the leading edge speed of Threshold, or the ability to drop barbells on the floor like Bryston. But for under a grand, it was special.

Hafler DH-200

At just over \$300 for a kit (100 w/ch) the DH-200 allowed a real taste of the high end. The matching preamp was \$200, so for \$500, you could step into real separates while most of the market was buying poor receivers.