

# ***The Most Significant Speakers***

For a number of years I've had a "Hall of Fame" section of products on my site. I recently added a bunch of photos to spice it up. It was fun to do and reminded me of what were mostly old friends.

An advantage we dealers have over magazine guys is that a lot of *production speakers* go through our mitts. We don't just see one pair of speakers, cherry picked for a reviewer. We see PRODUCTION speakers 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 speakers. Are they really happy with them? Do they get the most out of them?

The September 2010 "The Absolute Sound" magazine had a probing topic. What are the MOST SIGNIFICANT speakers that have been built? It's an endless discussion. After all, who do you want in right field? I'll take Henry Aaron because I'm a Milwaukee guy. But it would be tough to argue with Roberto Clementi, wouldn't it?

The TAS staff did cover a lot of bases. You can see why they chose what they chose. But I think they missed the broad side of the barn with a few speakers, so I want to throw my two cents into the ring.

To begin, here is their list:

Quad ESL  
AR3A  
Rogers LS 3/5a  
Wilson Watt  
Magico Mini  
DQ-10  
Tympani 1-D  
IRS  
KLH 9  
Advent  
MLB 101  
K-horn

## **My Alternative List**

Magnepan

To start, I don't think TAS's #1, QUAD, should be near the top of the list. It was a rattle trap of parts, that while innovative, broke down like a model T. Interesting? Yes. Innovative? Yes. Terribly unreliable, breakable and frustrating? Yes!! In my judgment the poor reliability disqualifies it from the top tier. While interesting..., it had way too many problems.

There's no way we can't put Magnepan at the top of this list. Magnepan, whether Tympani or single panel offerings, were tremendously more reliable than the Quads. The Maggies had better bass and could be driven much harder too. It's exciting that Magnepan is back on top of the speaker world today with new models like the MG 1.7 and MG 3.7!

I would point to the Tympani 1-D as the first speaker that really got it all together. We have to mention the \$500pr MG-1 of 1977. It was affordable, a reasonable size, could be driven by a reasonable amp, and was very reliable. When Magnepan introduced the MG-3 with true ribbon, it moved into the new world order.

## B&W 801 & 802

Holy history of hifi! How can the magazine boys overlook the 801/802? These were not only great selling speakers to the true audiophile community, they were also revolutionary for their time.

They had different drive elements, actually built by B&W, in different chambers (of different materials like the Fibercrete mid head), including an open air tweeter, and blended with a sophisticated crossover network.

While almost everyone else in the cabinet field was BUYING DRIVERS from various sources and screwing them into a baffle (they still ARE in 2011 by the way!), B&W was not. Further, I sold many pairs of 801s/802s. Hundreds! My customers were, by and large willing to place them where they sounded good, and get a lot out of them. They imaged well so you could place them flexibly and sit almost anywhere in the room. I just visited a friend who still has a pair of vintage 802s (1978) and was thrilled with how well they have stood up!

People loved the 801s & 802s. They came back and thanked us for encouraging the purchase. They brought their friends in to buy B&W. 801/802 proved to be the most loved speakers after purchase, hands down.

## ESS AMT-1

The Heil tweeter (1971) was truly innovative! There was nothing close until Magnepan came out with the True Ribbon Tweeter in the 80s. No, please don't bring up that obnoxious plasma tweeter. The AMT-1 had the sparkle on top- and the boom at the bottom. Yes, it boomed. But look at the other early cabinets on this list, AR3A, Advents- thud city! And their tweeters are laughable by Heil or B&W soft dome standards.

The AMT-1 is also exceptional in that it was affordable high end at \$700pr. They were efficient enough that they could be driven by the 60 w/ch receivers of the day. Hearing "Dark Side of the Moon" on AMT-1 in the early 70s- pretty cool stuff!

## Polk Ten

At \$600pr the Polk Ten was a working man's classic. With high efficiency and dynamics, the Ten (and also the 7) could be driven by anything and sing. We sold bazillions with NAD's 3020 and did so proudly. The Ten used modified Peerless drivers with rubber surrounds-plastic cones, and clobbered the competition of the day, Advent & EPI. The Ten deserves to be on this list because it gave so much good performance to the "average" guy who wasn't a diehard hifi guy. Many Polk Tens are still in service 30+ years later. Literally ALL the Advents and ARs on the magazine list are dead- unless people chose to go with a re-foam and replacement tweeter repair. Those foam surrounds didn't last very long.