

guest editorial...

In this issue we conclude our year-long Thirtieth Anniversary celebration with an all-new interview with founder Harry Pearson, and, in HP's Workshop, the perfect capper to the year's festivities—Harry's own list of the ten "most influential" audio products of the last thirty years. In HP's words, it was perhaps the most difficult article he's been called upon to write—and, in my opinion, it is one of his best. I cannot imagine a more judicious list.

However, HP was perforce limited to the selection of a mere ten products—and, as he readily concedes, many others played important roles in shaping the course of high-end audio. That got all of us thinking: What would we have put on a Top Ten Most Influential Audio Components list?

Were I doing such a list, I'd have been tempted to include the original Quad ESLs, not only groundbreakingly wonderful in their own right but among the most significant high-end loudspeakers made, in that virtually everybody and his uncle held them up as the standard to beat (and some still do) for midband realism. Being an analog kind of guy, I would also have given serious consideration to the Rabco SL-8E tonearm, which launched a thousand linear-tracking high-end tonearms, and whose various descendents are still with us today. And speaking of analog, though Harry rightly acknowledges the seminal importance of the Koetsu moving-coil cartridges, he did not mention the Supexes, which were how most of us first sampled Koetsu moving coils and which, despite their euphonious coloration, sounded lower in noise and grain and higher in detail than anything we had previously heard.

Other products that would have tempted me are: the Dyna line of electronics, which, in both tube and solid-state, set the standard (still unmatched) for affordable high-end gear for better than two decades (Dyna made some excellent little speakers, too); the AR 3-A and the KLH Model 5, surely the granddaddies of all relatively compact cone loudspeakers; the early KEF and IMF transmission-line loudspeakers, not just for their sound but for their use of matched plastic mids and woofers, which launched the move away from paper to more esoteric, higher tolerance, and arguably better-sounding driver-materials, and for their highly-tuned cabinets; the Marantz Models 7, 8e, and 9—classics that kept tube-lovers warm during the dark night of solid-state and that were, like the Quad ESLs, the benchmarks by which tube gear was judged; the direct-to-disc recordings of Sheffield, Telarc, Reference, M&K, etc., which did so much to raise the quality standard of high-end software; the SETs (Audio Note, Wavelength, LAMM, etc.) and OTLs (Futtermans, AirTights, Atma-Spheres, Joules, Tenors, etc.), which together have created a fairly large and active high-end submarket, not just of amplifiers but of speakers designed to work well with such amps; and, if contemporary products are allowable, the EMM Labs DAC6e, which certainly will set the standard for all future high-rez digital playback devices.

I don't know that I would swap any of my picks out for the ten on HP's list—they are pretty damn good. But I would be tempted to add some of them to it. What would you add?

We'd like to encourage you to take this question seriously. Write in to our Letters section and tell us what would have made your Top Ten list of the most influential audio components of the past thirty years. It should make for an interesting and lively forum.



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