

Richard Sequerra: Tuning In

David Lander | Apr 26, 2009

Richard Sequerra was born in 1929 and raised in various parts of the US by his mother, who worked for the Department of State. By the time he was 20, he had launched a freelance career that has since spanned a wide range of technologies. During a stint at Marantz in the 1960s, he worked with Sidney Smith on that firm's famed Marantz 10B tuner, which was sold from 1964 through 1970. Subsequent products have included the Sequerra 1 tuner and the Metronome 7 loudspeaker, originally produced by Sequerra's firm Pyramid and now hand-assembled by its creator, who offers the most recent version via his [website](#), for less than half what it cost through retail channels when Sam Tellig praised it in the July 2007 *Stereophile*. Sequerra's newest transducers—a self-amplified nearfield speaker and matching subwoofer designed for Internet music listening—remain in prototype form; he hopes to sell or license the designs rather than manufacture and market them himself.



David Lander: What led you to the career you've pursued for six decades?

Richard Sequerra: The technical stuff started when I was probably three. By the time I was four, I had a chemical laboratory—I was very interested in chemistry at that time. And I've always been interested in electricity, electronics, mechanics. So I had the background of a generalist, and I covered almost all of the scientific disciplines that were available at a simple level at an early age. By nine or ten I was already doing all of this stuff. I dropped out of college—I wasn't interested. I have lectured at universities. I was offered a job at Harvard, but they couldn't pay anything. New York University, when I got out of the army, wanted to give me a job, but they couldn't pay enough. I didn't realize then how bad the pay was in academia.

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Lander: By age 20, you had begun working on what were then advanced audio projects: an automated tape-to-disc recording system for a firm called the Dubbings Company; an early automated device that would allow Hudson Radio, a New York City audio store of the era, to compare component systems for customers; a hi-fi loudspeaker system for an off-Broadway theater in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. Then you were drafted. Tell us a bit about your army service.

Sequerra: I was given this battery of tests and called into a major's office. He said, "What would you like to do?" I said, "I beg your pardon?" He said, "Here's a list. Pick something from the list that you'd like to do." So I looked at it and came to motion-picture sound recording. I said, "How about this one?" He said, "No, we want you to teach microwave or radar—we want you to teach." I said, "You told me I could do whatever I want. I want motion-picture sound recording," and he said, "Well, there's a caveat. We might send you overseas into battle." And I said, "I still would like motion-picture sound recording." So that's what I did.

Lander: The Korean war was then in its last six months. Were you in fact sent there?

Sequerra: No. I was lucky.

Lander: Your career has had an unusually wide compass, and your curriculum vitae lists clients from the Atomic Energy Commission to Union Carbide, as well as inventions that include not only home and pro sound equipment but sophisticated lighting devices for varying applications, the electrode for a high-performance automotive spark plug, and even a microkeratome, a device for eye surgery. But you've habitually worked freelance. Why?

Sequerra: I'm a very difficult employee to have. I wind up running everything. I've never been fired, but I always go into a place where the job is this big [*raises open palms with a space between them*] and I make it that big [*pulls hands apart to double the space*]. And I do it all. I wind up really running the whole shebang.

Lander: In the 1950s, when Telefunken was still recovering from the effects of World War II, you helped orchestrate their entry into the US market. What, specifically, did you do?

Sequerra: I was the technical interface between Telefunken and the American market. I also set up their service facilities. They were one of the

major German electronics companies, along with AEG and Siemens, but a lot of people refused to buy anything from Germany then.

Lander: From there you went to Pilot Radio. What did you do at Pilot?

Sequerra: I needed more fundamental background in manufacturing and engineering, and Pilot was one of the last manufacturing companies in Long Island City. I made a decision that I wanted to learn about that kind of thing—how things are made—and for the first time I went into a large organization. There were about five engineers, and there were technicians, and there were draftspeople. There was even a woman whose only job was to make blueprints at the blueprint machine. And there was the factory. They did their own sheet-metal work, and they made their own chassis and cabinets, so I learned how to do sheet-metal design and sheet-metal fabrication. I wound up learning a lot of things about manufacturing—how you set it up, how you do it, how you set up the test equipment to monitor what you're doing. I also designed all the loudspeakers for Pilot.

Lander: Loudspeakers have been a specialty for you over the years. Though people today may not be familiar with your ribbon speakers, they've included the T-1, which was adopted for use by MIT, Bell Labs, and B&K. [Sequerra has posted a [paper](#) of his covering ribbon speakers on his website:]

Sequerra: I was at Pilot the first time I was published as a speaker designer, which was in *Audio* magazine. And I made test equipment for Pilot. So that was a very productive three to four years. Then, I finally had a run-in with the plant manager, who wanted me to do something, and I said, "I'm not going to do it." He said, "Yes, you are," and I said, "No. I quit."

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