



“... magnificent ... solid as a block of steel ... dead quiet ... completely imperturbable.”



BY WES MARSHALL

One year ago this month, Roger Kanno reviewed the Anthem Statement D1 surround-sound processor, one of the most ambitious products to emerge from the buyout of Sonic Frontiers by Paradigm. The D1 benefited directly from the research muscle of Paradigm's Advanced Research Center, which pumped a lot of time and money into building the best product possible. Then they brought it in at a civilized price. Four months later, Roger reviewed their top-of-the-line multichannel power amplifier, the P5. He found it to be one of the very best multichannel amplifiers available at any price. Again, Anthem delivered something near the state of the

art for a rational price. The D1 and P5 ended up as Home Theater & Sound's joint Products of the Year.

CARS AND DANCERS

Anthem's Statement line includes two series of power amps, A and P. The top-of-the-line P5 and P2 (the numbers denote the number of channels) are huge amps with enormous power reserves. The A5 and A2 have some brawn themselves, but think of them as Porsche Boxster S's to the P series' 911 GT2's.

The A5 arrived double-boxed and carefully packed in ways that should thwart even

the most aggressively sociopathic UPS driver. It weighs a healthy but not back-breaking 57 pounds. At first glance the A5 looks as if it means business — not in an industrial way, but artistic and capable. Think of it not so much as the Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Gene Kelly of amps: elegant, nimble, casually neat. Its smooth black lines flow into a useful set of handles on the front panel (the A5 is also rack-mountable, on request). Noticeably absent are any lethally sharp heatsinks; the A5's sinks are neatly positioned in the middle of the unit, their sharp corners hidden by the steelwork.

PRETTY PARTS

Pop the Statement A5's top and you'll see numerous innovations and, where good design already existed, the best parts implemented with intelligence. While the signal path is pretty simple, the parts reflect smart design and wise expenditure of funds. Forty bipolar output devices — eight per channel — likely allow the A5 some headroom for its rating of 180Wpc. The toroidal power supplies are particularly quiet, with inaudible hum and a claimed signal-to-noise ratio of 120dB (A-weighted to full output, as specified by Anthem). Those of us who've dealt with power amps that love to eat fuses because the fuse strangles the power output on peaks will be happy to see a sophisticated circuit breaker that reads several of the A5's internal workings and shuts the amp down if it's in danger. Unlike a fuse, the breaker is not in the signal path, so it doesn't degrade the signal. Finally, for those giant whams! in your favorite film, the A5 uses 150,000µF of filter capacitance.

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Outside, on the back, each channel has two input connectors, a gold-plated RCA and a balanced XLR, and the A5 has built-in circuitry to recognize which input you're using. Speaker connections come with three-way, oversized binding posts. These are gorgeous pieces of industrial design with clear, easy-to-grip plastic collars and hefty holes for large-gauge wire. A switch on the rear gives you three ways to turn the power on: using a trigger, automatically when a signal is sensed, or manually, using the button on the front panel. That plain, modern-style front button is something of a jarring note planted in the middle of all that beautiful black, but it feels substantial and made for life. Five blue, dimly lit LEDs indicate that each channel is operating and provide a stylish final touch.

Installing the A5 was as easy as anything could be that weighs 57 pounds. The speaker connections are wide and easy to grip, and the input connectors are stout and accept being pushed around. One interesting point: The heatsinks ring quite noticeably, especially when you're spinning the lugs on the speaker binding posts open or closed. A rap with a screwdriver produced the same resonance. This may or may not be a real-world problem, but the flaw would be simple to fix and would remove any concern that the ringing might introduce noise. Other than that, everything was elegantly simple.

I try to approach reviews without knowing the price of what I'm reviewing. It's a holdover from my other job of reviewing wine. I find that knowing the price of a bottle of wine, no matter how hard I try to avoid it, influences my assessment. So I do the same with electronic gear. After examining and setting up the A5, I guess that it cost something around \$4000. I was a little off. It costs \$2499 USD.

A HUGE SOUNDSTAGE

I don't know if my review sample had been broken in before I received it or if the A5 just doesn't need break-in. In either case, it sounded great straight out of the box — relaxed, powerful, with a huge, deep soundstage. Perhaps the A5's dead silence added to the resolving ability at the far corners of the soundstage. In any case, it was clean and clear all the way.

The first DVD in the slot was *House of Flying Daggers*. I have the Region 3 copy, highly recommended for its killer DTS soundtrack, especially the “Dance of Echoes” chapter, where pounding percussion jumps all over the room. The A5 did exactly what it was supposed to, sounding steady and unruffled while conveying the full power.

In the HBO-HD version of *Man on Fire*, Trent Reznor's score moved on a dime from gentle sounds to beating and exploding synths. Again, the sound was pure and convincing.

Switching to a music-oriented DVD, *The Little Prince* sounded magnificent: full-bodied and with great depth and instrumental definition. Throughout, composer Rachel Portman calls for tinkly instruments such as glockenspiel and xylophone, the percussive leading edges and delicate trailing sounds of which the A5 reproduced beautifully.

Finally, I switched to Naxos' justly famous DVD-Audio recording of Paul Daniel and the Bournemouth Symphony's performance of Vaughan Williams' *Symphony No. 1, A Sea Symphony* [Naxos 5.110016]. This ranks with Orff's *Carmina Burana* for opening-minute bombast, yet it also has interludes of floating, pastoral beauty. Again, everything was rich and burnished within that deep soundstage.

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Switching back to my own amplifier showed the difference. With *A Sea Symphony* DVD-A there was a greater sense of strain and less of the feeling of endless headroom that showed up on crescendos with the Anthem A5. My amplifier also shortened the soundstage and left a more claustrophobic feel. In the parlance of days gone by, the Anthem had tube-like smoothness, while mine had a more mechanical, transistor-like sound. The difference in construction probably had a lot to do with it. Taking the top off mine showed lots of plastic parts and those problematic fuses. Over the years I've had the amp, I've changed those fuses dozens of times. And even if they'd never failed, the very idea of those little wires inside the fuses blocking my amplification path has always irked me. As I replaced the top, I looked longingly at the Anthem's circuit breakers. Maybe someday.

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CONCLUSION

Power amplifiers are the offensive linemen of home theater: No one notices them when they’re perfect, and everyone notices them when they aren’t. Designing a piece of equipment such as the Anthem Statement A5 multichannel power amplifier must be gratifying and frustrating at the same time. You have to wonder how many people will notice all the loving care that obviously went into the A5’s design and implementation.

Well, I noticed. This amp is solid as a block of steel, dead quiet, and completely imperturbable. Given the quality of the parts and the intelligence of the design, it’s a bargain at the price and highly recommended.