



“ ... FANTASTIC ... EXTRAORDINARY ...
sets a new standard of excellence.”

BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Mysteriously, the promotional materials for the Anthem Statement D2 surround-sound processor mention nothing about sound. What gives?

The eight boldfaced bullet points include “Four HDMI Inputs” and “Leading-Edge Format Video Conversion.” In fact, every paragraph on the page has to do with video. Am I reading a sales sheet for a plasma TV? No, I am looking over the press release for the new Anthem Statement D2 surround-sound processor. The entire document concentrates on video switching and processing. A surround processor is

supposed to be about sound, right? Focusing solely on its video capabilities seems like touting a VCR's ability to display the time.

Of course, I am taking this extreme position merely to make a point. (If it works for such greats as Wilde, Voltaire, and Ann Coulter, why can't it work for me?) As any home theater aficionado knows, video capabilities have become an important part of a surround processor. After all, several of the latest processors have circuitry that converts all incoming video into high-definition signals that can be output on an HDMI digital video cable. This way, you need run only a single HDMI cable between the processor and your video display, and you never need change inputs on the display.

But the performance of this circuitry greatly affects the picture. It can degrade sharpness and introduce annoying artifacts, such as jagged edges on curved and diagonal lines, and moiré effects appearing in striped or patterned areas. We have tried two surround processors with video upconversion to HDMI, but neither aspired to state-of-the-art video performance. The D2, however, uses the latest VXP Digital Image Processor chipset from Gennum, which in theory should make it competitive with the finest stand-alone video processors.

It's almost a shame that Anthem put so much effort into the video because the D2's audio features are also extraordinary. My favorite is the room resonance filter. Every

room has at least a couple of frequencies at which, for acoustical reasons, it makes deep bass notes boom out. The D2 lets you eliminate the boom where it's worst. Just activate the built-in test tone to find the frequency at which the bass sounds boomy, then use the filter to attenuate the sound at that frequency. You can adjust the filter frequency, depth, and width in 1-hertz increments. Although this feature may sound overwhelmingly technical, it's actually quite simple to adjust and fun to experiment with—and you don't necessarily need to use test equipment. I find that my ears are perfectly capable of finding the boomiest frequency in my room (which happens to be 40 hertz), and determining that 9 decibels of attenuation and a 5-hertz filter width sounds about right.

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Then there are the little things like subwoofer phase and polarity adjustment. Almost all subwoofers have their own controls for these, but if your sub is concealed in a cabinet, it will prove much easier to make your adjustments through the D2's onscreen menu. You can also set separate lip sync delay for each source, which will come in handy if you see lip sync errors with your digital TV tuner but not with your DVD player, as is the case in my system. And you can feed video and stereo audio to two extra rooms.

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The video options may overwhelm even an Imaging Science Foundation-certified technician—which I can say with authority because I am such a technician and the D2's video setup menu overwhelms me. Check this out: The D2 includes 42 video output

format options, including 1080-line progressive at five frame rates, and every other high-definition and digital TV resolution extant. It also features several computer-friendly resolutions, up to 2048 by 1536 pixels. You can set various color and video data output formats and perform aspect-ratio control. Fortunately, I find I can leave most of these settings at the factory defaults; all I need to set is resolution, and you can easily determine the best resolution for your video by consulting your video display owner's manual.

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Converting 480-line interlaced video from a DVD player or a TiVo to 1080-line progressive high-definition HDMI is a tough task. We use various test DVDs to determine a video processor's ability to do this. Even most high-end video projectors and plasma TVs flunk at least one of our tests. But with every test I can think of running, the D2 performs flawlessly. The picture looks extraordinarily detailed and I never notice a single video artifact, whether I set the D2's output for 1080p to feed a Brillian LCoS rear-projection TV or for 720p to feed my Sony video projector. Video geeks will be ecstatic to learn that the D2 properly deinterlaces 1080i signals; for non-geeks, that means a more detailed picture from most network and cable HDTV programs.

“... detailed and natural ... makes returning to a lesser processor feel like going back to a standard-definition TV after you have owned an HDTV set.”

I feel certain the D2 will earn a fantastic reputation as the first surround processor that totally eliminates the need for an external video scaler. Yet I fear many will overlook its other outstanding quality: sound. In my comparisons, the D2 sounds better than every other processor I have on hand—and, I feel safe saying, every other processor I have reviewed, with the possible exception of



one, which cost \$15,000 when we reviewed it a number of years ago. I often find the distinctions among surround processors subtle; the higher-end models usually sound better but don't make their inferiors seem unpleasant. But the D2's sound is so much more detailed and natural that it makes returning to a lesser processor feel like going back to a standard-definition TV after you have owned an HDTV set.

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You may have divined from the above text that the D2 has one flaw: complexity. We noted this same problem in our recent review of another brand's top-of-the-line audio/video receiver. Both of these products offer so many features, adjustments, and

connection options that it is easy to get lost in their on-screen menus, wondering where to find the adjustment you want, and perhaps even forgetting what you wanted to adjust in the first place. Of course, this problem is easily solved: Have a custom installer program an AMX or Crestron touchscreen to control only the D2's essential functions, and shove the D2 into a closet where it is safe from prying fingers.

I should also mention the accompanying Anthem Statement amplifiers: the P5 five-channel amp (which the company supplies with my D2 review sample) and the P2 two-channel amp. Both are hulking conventional (i.e., non-digital, non-switching, heat-generating) amplifiers putting out 325 watts per channel. Although the P5 is just an amp, not a tenth as sexy as the D2, I find it can easily drive any speaker in my possession to ear-splitting levels, and it sounds smooth doing it. However, it weighs 130 pounds and measures more than 22 inches deep, so you'll need a heavy-duty rack and a deep equipment closet to accommodate it.

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