



“AS GOOD AS IT GETS ... shockingly transparent ... pinpoint specific ... blueprint precise ...”



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AS GOOD AS IT GETS?

The idea for this review was born several months ago when I received Anthem's initial press release for the Statement D2 THX Ultra2 Certified multichannel controller. What caught my attention was the fact that the Statement D2 promised edge-of-the-art audio performance plus no-holds-barred image processing functions to rival those of any standalone scaler on the market.

Anthem's concept was to build on the established audio and video switching strengths of its award-winning Statement D1 controller, adding a very high-powered onboard image processor to create the ultimate "do-all" controller. Press releases, of course, always paint products in glowing terms. The real proof comes in seeing how components perform under real world

conditions. Now that I've had a chance to live and work with Statement D2 in the TPV Audio Lab, I am pleased to report that all of Anthem's press-release superlatives turn out to be justified—and maybe even understatements. In fact, the Statement D2 is handsdown the finest controller I've ever tested, for reasons I'll outline below. The first thing Statement D2 users will notice is the controller's apparent build quality—the way its high-quality jacks, switches, controls and chassis panels are fitted together. Even before it is fired up, the Statement D2 gives strong visual cues that let you know people who care about craftsmanship have built it. The next thing A/V enthusiasts notice are the D2's nearly limitless set-up options—an impression reinforced by taking a spin through the Anthem's set-up menus.

SET-UP OPTIONS GALORE

Let me say this: The Statement D2 offers detailed, multi-layered configuration options in places where other controllers don't provides a sub-menu where you can dial in center channel EQ adjustments to compensate for sound reflecting off screen surfaces, precisely varying EQ adjustments in proportion to the size of your screen. Likewise, the D2 provides an elaborate sub-menu to help you identify and then filter out the main low-frequency resonance peak of your room. The list of detailed touches such as these goes on and on. The good news is that there is almost nothing the D2 can't do, but the bad news is that you may feel like you need a pilot's license in order to fly the thing. The fact is that many of the D2's set-up options presume a fairly

high level of technical expertise on the user's part, meaning this is perhaps not a product A/V newcomers should attempt to configure without expert assistance. Once set up, however, the D2 is quite easy to operate for both novices and veterans alike.

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The D2's image processing capabilities are impressive, yielding spectacular on-screen results. The D2's imaging board is driven by a Gennum GF9350 VXP digital image processor that can convert standard or high-definition video signals to virtually any resolution standard desired, up to a resolution of 1920 x 1080p at 60 Hz. The Gennum device also provides 10-bit, per-pixel image processing, motion-adaptive de-interlacing, "dynamic directional interpolation" to eliminate jaggies, extensive noise reduction and detail enhancement features, plus film mode detection for all SD and HD inputs. In practice, this means you can plug in virtually any video component, from old-school VCRs to the latest HD DVD or Blu-ray disc players and expect to see image quality improvements. And you do.

“... spectacular on-screen results ... was blown away by the sharpness and smoothness of the images ... crisp and distinct ... breathtaking depth and dimensionality ... I've never seen DVDs look better than they do when played through the D2.”

KILLER IMAGE PROCESSING

At set-up time the D2 lets you choose your preferred video output (typically component video or HDMI) and then specify the native resolution of your display. From that point on the

D2 transcodes and digitally enhances all incoming video signals for optimal performance with your display. I configured the D2 to output the 1920x1080i HDMI signals favored by our JVC reference display and then played the challenging Silicon Optix HQV test disc through the D2, using a DVD player set to produce 480i signals. In response, the D2 cleanly transcoded incoming signals from 480i to 1080i, passing virtually all of the HQV tests without a hitch, showing only minor glitches on the difficult HQV "jaggies" 1 and 2 tests. In fact, the D2 exhibited substantially better image processing performance than I've observed when running HQV tests with stand-alone DVD players.

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As a more practical, real-world test, I played the famous "Echo Game" scene from *House of Flying Daggers* and was blown away by the sharpness and smoothness of the images the D2 presented. Through the D2, the intricate, brightly colored interior latticework of the Peony Pavilion, which ordinarily looks a bit blurry, appeared crisp and distinct, giving the scene breathtaking depth and dimensionality. Apart from viewing experiences involving scary-expensive outboard scalars, I've never seen DVDs look better than they do when played through the D2.

TELL-ALL SOUND QUALITY

Sonically, the D2 is an absolute delight, both for music and movies. The controller's overall sound is exceedingly transparent and revealing, edging out the already excellent Sunfire TGP-5 in both respects. Listening to the D2 is much like listening to a fine (and I mean very fine) high-end audio component, meaning that tiny, ethereal, almost subliminal details become easy to hear. One small precautionary comment, however, is that the D2 can and does expose shortcomings, if any, in ancillary system components. Through the D2, imaging and soundstaging are pinpoint specific and blueprint precise, so that you can tell in an instant where performers are positioned



onstage, and know with certainty what the acoustics of recording venues are like. I put on the Fiedler! Boston Pops recording of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* [RCA Living Stereo, multichannel SACD], and marveled at the way the Anthem captured the sheer size and scale of the orchestra and showed how the sounds of the various orchestra sections reverberated within the hall.

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The D2's DSP-driven Dolby PL II, DTS Neo:6, and proprietary AnthemLogic surround modes sounded nearly as transparent as the controller's Analog Direct modes, which is unusual given that most DSP-driven surround modes introduce a certain amount of sonic "hash." The AnthemLogic modes in particular should find favor with audiophiles, because their sound is much like that of a high-end stereo system, but with the wraparound imaging that only a great surround system can provide.

On movie soundtracks, the D2 proved a revelation, bringing layer upon layer of hidden sonic detail to light. Just for fun, I put on *King Kong* and was astonished to discover new elements of the soundtrack I had never heard before. In "The T-Rex Battle" scene, for example, I noticed that key jungle sound effects are clearly positioned in the surround channels, and that sounds of Ann racing through dense vegetation leaves ripping, rocks clattering, branches and vines breaking, and her labored breathing heighten our sense of terror as she flees the giant flesh-eating dinosaurs.

The point is that the D2 provides a rich palette of sonic details and in the process pulls viewers into the movie experience as few controllers can.

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The bottom line is that Anthem's Statement D2 is an extraordinary AV controller. Though a handful of uber-controllers bearing five-figure price tags might offer slightly higher performance in certain areas, the expensive-but-worth-every-penny Statement D2 is, for all practical purposes, as good as it gets.

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