



“... exhilarating ...
delivered fantastic results ...
absolutely stunning ...”



BY CHRISTOPHER ZELL

Following in the footsteps of the D1 Preamplifier Processor Tuner that I recently reviewed, Anthem also augmented the Statement line of electronic components with two series of amplifiers, the lower-powered A2 and A5, and the top-of-the-line P2 and P5. Once again, the design goal for each of these units is to offer the ultimate in performance, with Anthem inviting comparisons to any and all comers, regardless of price. This past summer, I received a huge carton on my doorstep containing the five-channel P5 multi-channel power amplifier, which I immediately inserted into my reference home theater system.

DESCRIPTION

Physically, the P5 is a behemoth, weighing 130 pounds and measuring 9-3/8 inches high by 19-1/4 inches wide by 22-1/2 inches deep. The overall appearance is less imposing than one might expect because of the elegant black fine-grain aluminum cover, gentle curves on the front panel, and extruded aluminum side handles. There are no fuses in the amplifier, with protection provided by line breakers which can be reset via push buttons located on the top panel in front of the ample ventilation slots. The rear panel accepts XLR balanced inputs, as well as

unbalanced RCA plugs. Each channel has an independent input type selector switch, which I left in the unbalanced position throughout the review. The custom-designed, oversize gold-plated output binding posts were beefy and versatile, as I would expect on an amplifier of this quality. With a power consumption rating of 3600 watts (340 watts idle), the P5 necessitates dual IEC power cord sockets located on the right side of the rear panel to achieve full power output. To avoid overloading your home's AC power, Anthem directs the user to connect each power cord to a different branch circuit.

Fortunately, this was not a problem for me, since there are two separate circuits available on opposing walls of the reference home theater room. Unfortunately, this may not be the case in many rooms as there are seldom two independent circuits readily available.

The P5 (as well as the P2) is a modular design, each channel a replaceable, powerful, independent monoblock amplifier rated at 325 watts into an eight ohm load, with intra-channel frequency response matching. Technically, Anthem purposely over-designed the P5, making it an extremely robust amplifier with a number of innovative proprietary features. Each channel has two separate power supplies, fed from separate transformer windings, and 14 bipolar output transistors to minimize the power dissipation on each device. Large, computer-optimized heat sinks on each amplifier channel eliminate the need for cooling fans. This may not seem important at first glance, but it allows the P5 to operate noise-free, not adversely contributing to ambient noise at your listening seat regardless of its location.



These speakers are not an easy load, especially when driven to reference levels, but the P5 always sounded like it was cruising throughout the review period. Besides being brutally powerful, the P5 was also light on its feet, delicate and detailed where appropriate as it waited patiently to explode dynamically when reproducing upcoming musical transients. I was not able to pinpoint any trademark “sound” of the P5, which is exactly as it should be with a reference amplifier.

“... realistic and live ... power to spare ... waited patiently to explode dynamically when reproducing upcoming musical transients ... I was not able to pinpoint any trademark “sound” — exactly as it should be with a reference amplifier.”

“... delivered fantastic results ... unrestricted power ... effortless and uncompressed ... also light on its feet ... delicate and detailed where appropriate ... very three-dimensional ... as clear as I have ever heard ... a powerhouse that maintains musicality and accuracy at any volume level at any time.”

SET-UP

Once I unboxed the P5 onto the carpeted floor of my listening room, I was unable to move it around myself until I walked it onto a wood base, which I was then able to slide into position without inducing a hernia. Needless to say, when trying various loudspeakers with the P5, I brought them to the listening room containing the amplifier, and not vice versa. For the majority of the review, the P5 drove the front three channels and the surrounds, although for a time I bi-amped the main left and right loudspeakers, leaving the fifth amplifier section to power the center channel. Bi-amping produced spectacular results, but this would rarely be necessary or even sonically noticeable with most of the loudspeakers I am familiar with, given the Anthem’s huge power reserves.

PERFORMANCE

I find it very difficult to describe the sound of the reference quality, ultra-powerful P5 amplifier. Music and soundtrack sequences were as realistic and live as the source permitted. With power to spare to drive just about any loudspeaker load I can imagine, the P5 delivered fantastic results up to the considerable limits of my reference loudspeakers’ capabilities.

As is usual with any new component inserted into my multi-channel system, after a few weeks of casual usage, I begin the real evaluation process listening to two-channel sources in stereo mode. Lately, for reasons I will not bore you with, I have gravitated toward an assortment of classical music performances. One spectacular release from my favorite classical label, the “budget” Naxos, is Phillip Feeney’s score for the first ever ballet version of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (Naxos 8.553964). Because of my perhaps misguided childhood fascination with *Dracula*, this CD is exciting to me both musically and topically, despite the disturbing images I cannot help but conjure of *Dracula* in tights. The emotionally charged first act covers Jonathon Harker’s trip to, and subsequent imprisonment in, Castle Dracula in Transylvania. The tempo builds throughout, with an ominous tension that is even evident during beautiful, melodious sections. The P5 easily displays the power of Manchester, England’s Northern Ballet Theatre’s full symphony orchestra. The soundstage was very three-dimensional, with the percussion, bells, etc. extremely clear and crisp, correctly placed behind the wind and string instruments. This entire act was wonderful through the Anthem, the soloists rising beautifully above the orchestra, while the strings remained sweet without any added harshness, despite my preferred high listening levels. The final crescendo builds to a frantic, raucous frenzy, all the while staying clean, effortless and uncompressed through the Anthem P5 amplifier.

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The P5 did equally well with high resolution sources, particularly multi-channel recordings such as the SACD version of *Roxy Music's Avalon* (Virgin Records). For those who dislike an aggressive surround sound mix, be aware that this disk uses the surrounds as direct sources on many occasions. The title cut, "Avalon", begins with exceedingly clear percussion, guitars and keyboards, followed by Brian Ferry's vocals which startlingly appear front and center, his distinctive waver and vibrato as clear as I have ever heard. "Take a Chance With Me" is typically the first surround sound demo cut I unleash on guest listeners, becoming a near-religious experience, especially when listening in a dimly lighted environment. The introduction sets an indescribable atmosphere as it swirls around the listening space, sharply focusing into a front-dominated interpretation once the main theme and vocals commence. Additionally, the P5 imparts a weight on this cut, helping to make it powerful but still clean.

I have enjoyed numerous DVD movies and concerts through the P5, none more impressive or shocking than Kevin Costner's *Open Range* (Buena Vista Home Video). Composer Michael Kamen's atmospheric soundtrack and the various sound effects are impressive throughout, but this all pales in comparison to the exhilarating, climatic gunfight. The absolutely stunning crack, percussion and visceral impact of the firearms, and especially the shotgun through the P5 mated with my reference speakers, must be experienced to be fully appreciated. There is nothing like unadulterated power to make a good action film realistic and affecting.

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Although I consider myself a long-time fan of Canadian rockers Rush, for some reason I waited until recently to purchase their concert DVD *Rush in Rio* (Coming Home Studios, Anthem Entertainment). Having attended numerous Rush concerts over the years, including a recent engagement in San Diego, I am well aware of their virtuosity and power in a live setting. Although no home theater can actually match the multitude of massive stage monitors at a live concert, Neal Peart's drums are authoritative and exciting on this disc. The energy of older, classic songs such as "Tom Sawyer", "YYZ" and "The Trees" is stirring; they simply rock through the Anthem. This is the first concert DVD that has actually pulled my teenage son into the room and kept him interested, which is a testament to the P5's abilities and musical muscle.

DOWNSIDE

One significant downside is the necessity for two separate branch circuits for AC power. This is not a typical configuration in most residences, so it may require some additional electrical work to provide additional circuits. However, this will be a requirement for any high-powered home theater amplifier that claims to provide a true total of 3800 watts. As far as performance is concerned, I have a hard time stating any downsides with the P5. A final issue I have is logistical in nature. Positioning the P5 is no easy task because of its bulk, and the need for ample ventilation limits its ability to be placed in tightly cramped quarters.



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CONCLUSION

To garner full accolades, an amplifier must provide it all: unrestricted power and the ability to sound pure and detailed, yet sweet and transparent. P5 is a larger than life amplifier, both physically and sonically. The overall feeling of massive reserves and the illusion of effortlessly cruising was always evident, lending the listening experience a sense of enjoyment and ease, along with a complete lack of listening fatigue. Say what you will about low-powered amplifiers with reputations for sweetness of sound, but give me a powerhouse that maintains musicality and accuracy at any volume level any time. Although I realize that the price is not exactly an insignificant sum, I consider the Anthem very reasonably priced. With great confidence, one could purchase the Anthem P5 multi-channel amplifier for a home theater system and be set for the foreseeable future as far as high powered, quality amplification is concerned.

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