



“... performed flawlessly ...
incredibly versatile and rock-solid
... amazing clarity and immediacy.”



BY BRYAN DAILEY

The Statement A5, little brother to Anthem’s top of the line Statement P5 multi-channel amplifier, has many of the best qualities of the Anthem flagship powerhouse in a smaller, less pricey package. From the sleek black brushed aluminum face with blue accent lights outside to the Advanced Load Monitoring (ALM) technology inside, it doesn’t feel like corners were cut, yet this feature-packed 180 watts per channel amplifier is well priced. For two-channel enthusiasts, a two-channel version of this amp, appropriately named the A2, is available for even less.

The design philosophy behind the Statement line of amplifiers is “keep it simple”: use as few parts as possible, use the best quality parts available and keep the price within the Earth’s atmosphere. Although there is a laundry list of features that make the Statement A5 and A2 amplifiers unique, to the lay person, the end result is one of the easiest-to-set-up-and-use amplifiers that I have ever had the pleasure of auditioning.

Although Anthem pride themselves on having “simple” amplifiers, there is no shortage of technology packed into this

baby. Rated at 180 watts per channel into eight ohms (200 per channel for the A2), the A5 features massive toroidal power supplies, oversize convection-cooled aluminum heat sinks, mirror-imaged frequency-response channel matching and a no-fuse design. An outstanding signal to noise ratio of 120 dB allows for incredible detail in music and sound effects in movies that are mixed at very low levels.

A5 amplifiers each have eight bipolar output devices per channel in the amplification stage, which allows for a

large reserve of power. This is important when watching action movies with large explosions or listening to music with large, rapid crescendos.

On the outside, the A5 is beautifully built, with smooth black curved front corner panels flanking a black brushed aluminum faceplate. Weighing in at 57 pounds, the A5 is light enough for most able-bodied adults to move it around while installing it in a rack, cabinet or on the floor. I recently had the comparably-priced but much heavier Adcom GFA-7805 five-channel amplifier in my system and the almost 40-pound weight difference made installing the A5 a pleasure rather than a chore. A reset switch, five gold speaker wire binding posts, five rows of XLR and gold RCA jacks and the power cord plug round out the back panel.

At its core, the Anthem A5 shares many similarities with the previous Anthem MCA series. The MCA amplifiers are noteworthy performers as well, but many found their boxy silver design a little cold cosmetically. Unlike its big brother P5, the A5 automatically senses which type of input is being used and switches internally, saving you the hassle of having to flip a series of switches should you decide to change from one type of cord to another. I have seen installers put a system together only to find that one of the channels in the loop isn't working. On other amps, one of the switches might be set to the wrong type of input, but this may not be obvious, so before you know it, the homeowner or installer is scratching his or her head, wondering if perhaps one of the amplifier channels is blown out. Assuming all of the cords are properly plugged in, this should never be an issue with the A5's auto-input-sensing capabilities.

From a practical standpoint, the A5 has a nice feature that allows the amp to remain on, but when no signal is passed to the amp for 20 minutes, it automatically turns off. When you fire up your system and send an audio signal to the amp, it automatically turns on. There are two other options for turning the amp on, including the standard on/off switch and a 12V trigger that would be controlled via the 12V output from a preamp. I will admit that I am terrible about turning off my gear, so I opted for the auto-off setting. This surely has saved me some dough when my electrical bill comes each month by not accidentally leaving the amp on all day long when I'm not home. There is a small delay when the amp turns back on, which means you may see picture on your TV a few moments before sound kicks in when you power up your system, so don't start cranking the volume knob if you don't hear your music or movie immediately. It only took me doing this one time to quickly learn a lesson in patience.

A modular interior design makes repairing the amplifier much easier, as the damaged channel can be removed for repair or replacement. This may not sound like a huge selling feature, but things can and do happen to even the best-made audio/video gear and the moment something goes awry with an amp and it has to be pulled out of a system and boxed up for shipping, you'll be wishing you had a modular system like the A5. After obviously unplugging the power cord, the top cover can be removed with a Philips screwdriver and the malfunctioning channel can be removed and replaced or repaired. In the meantime, the amplifier can still be used, minus the missing channel. If you had a surround system and one of the channels on the amplifier died, you could simply

wire up the front, left and right channels to three of the functional channels and unplug the two rear/surround speakers and at least have a system while you are taking care of the one channel that is not working. With Anthem's reputation for reliability, I don't foresee needing to deal with this any time soon, but knowing how easy it is to take care of should the situation ever arise is a good feeling.

I was able to audition this amplifier with a few surround sound systems, including a complete RBH MC Series system, Energy's Connoisseur and Anthony Gallo Acoustics Micro satellite speakers. The primary system for this review is the RBH set-up, consisting of a pair of WM-24 left and right wall-mounted speakers, the MC-414 MK II center channel and a pair of MC-615-70 in-ceiling speakers. After connecting the XLR outputs of my Anthem AVM 30 to the amplifier inputs and then connecting my XLO speaker wire to the large and solid posts on the back of the amp, I was in business. Moving out the old amp took more time than getting this one in the batter's box.

"... as the bullets seemingly flew around my living room and explosions were shaking my walls — I was in no danger of running out of gas with the A5 ... details were reproduced with amazing clarity and immediacy — as was the dialogue ... I was never even close to pushing the amp to its limits, while the sound was still clean and precise."

THE MOVIES

Team America: World Police (Paramount), the latest feature film from *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, is a high-budget spoof of horrible action movies like *Pearl Harbor*, *Thunderbirds* and *SWAT*. It stars one-third-scale animated marionettes and features a host of musical numbers and, at its climax, some huge explosions that make the soundtrack to *Top Gun* seem tame by comparison. Parker and Stone's band DVDA provides *Team America's* battle song "America - F**K Yeah!" right before an aerial dogfight with North Korean Air Force planes. The planes on screen may be on wires, but the sound effects are right out of a Michael Bay blockbuster. The Anthem A5 was given a workout as the bullets seemingly flew around my living room and explosions were shaking my walls. With my moderately-sized home theater speakers, I was in no danger of running out of gas with the Anthem A5 powering them. The ominous action movie musical score underlying the scene is intentionally clichéd, featuring orchestral crescendos, horn runs, strings section accents and tympani rolls. All of these details were reproduced with amazing clarity and immediacy, as was the dialogue as the characters have discussions amongst themselves a la the Death Star sequence at the end of *Star Wars*.

While Ben Affleck was learning how to play poker and gallivanting around town earning the nickname Bennifer, his buddy Matt Damon was busy making one of the most underrated thrillers of 2004. In *The Bourne Supremacy* (Universal), espionage and

betrayal traverses the globe as Damon's Black Ops agent Jason Bourne is being hunted by both the FBI and a terrorist organization who want to frame him. In the scene in Munich Germany where Bourne sneaks into a fellow agent's home to confront him and find stolen information, the low noise floor of the A5 with its (reported) 120 dB signal to noise ratio made a welcome addition to my system. No music plays for a long period of time and only the subtle sounds of cars passing outside, doors slowly opening and soft footsteps can be heard. Lesser amps lose detail at low levels like this. The beauty of the Anthem is that I can keep the volume at a decent level and still hear these soft sounds. Then, when the action intensifies, I'm not scrambling to find the volume control to turn it back down. With some noisier amplifiers, you sometimes have to be your own mixing engineer.

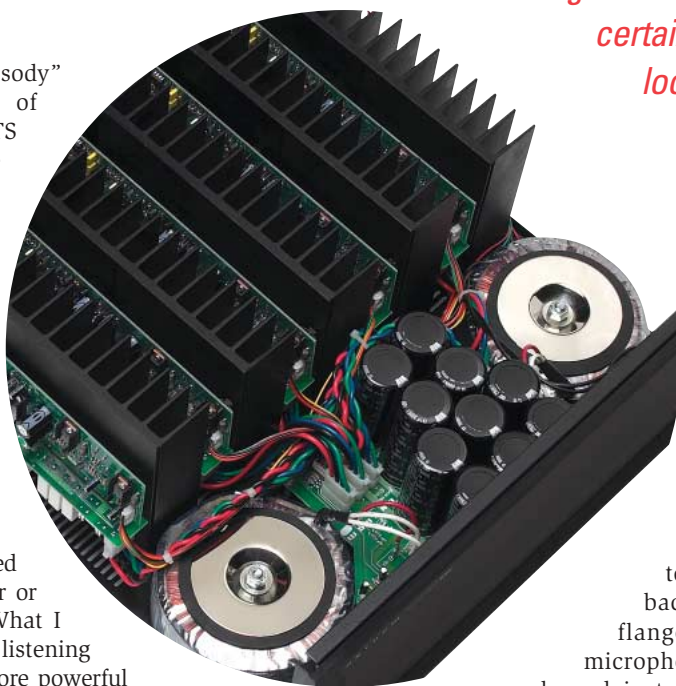
THE MUSIC

Queen's tune "Bohemian Rhapsody" from the DVD-Audio release of *A Night at the Opera* (DTS Entertainment) is still one of the best go-to tracks when you want to show your surround sound music system off to a 5.1 newbie. You all know the song unless you have been living on another planet and they didn't have copies of *Wayne's World* on DVD there. It's so familiar that I could just lay back and see if the amplifier did anything to the sound of the song that distracted, or perhaps made it more sonically interesting compared to the Adcom GFA-7805 amplifier or the high-end Integra DTR-10.5. What I noticed about the Anthem after listening to the song with the slightly more powerful Adcom amp was a more even frequency response across the board. It didn't bring up the lows as much, making it seem bright in relative terms. I have heard the A5 referred to as a "bright" amp, but what I think people mean by this is, as the volume is increased, since there isn't a big bump on the low end, it makes the amp seem to be accenting the high range. I didn't feel a big bump in any frequency with the A5 in the loop. Brian May's self-made guitars have a tone that is all their own and you don't want to go putting an amp in your system that makes them sound a little like Fender Strats or Gibson Les Pauls. I wanted it to sound like Brian May and, with the A5, that is exactly what it sounded like.

System of a Down makes, bar none, the hardest, most aggressive Armenian heavy metal music around and it still blows my mind that mainstream alternative rock music radio stations have embraced their unorthodox, non-Western melodies and syncopated rhythms. On System's newest album *Mezmerize* (Columbia Records), they pay tribute to what they think of George Bush's war in Iraq on the song "B.Y.O.B." As guitarist and backing vocalist Daron Malakian screams, "Why do they always send the poor?" at a volume

and pitch that might break glass, the song busts into a riff so intense that I feared the amp might explode. This two-channel track thunders along and, on what could easily be a mix that is too intense and breaks town, the Anthem A5 was able to provide plenty of juice. Metal can prove a tough test for an amp and speaker system to reproduce accurately. However, the A5 performed flawlessly. As with the Queen track, it did not bump the high end and a high crossover level on my sub filled in the low end from my smallish RBH on-walls.

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THE DOWNSIDE

It's hard to pick fault with a product that is engineered so well and gives so much performance for a relatively reasonable price. Some might argue that the A5 does not have enough power, but for my small living room system, I felt like I was never even close to pushing the amp to its limits, while the sound was still clean and precise. I'd like to see the XLR inputs on the back of the amp have the small flange pieces that you see on microphone inputs. Also the spiral bound instruction manual seemed a little lower on the quality side compared to the rest of amp and box as far as presentation is concerned, but the information contained in the manual is top notch so really the A5 does not have much that I can knock.

CONCLUSION

The impression that I am left with after running this amplifier in my system for several months is that it is incredibly versatile and rock-solid. I don't have to think about it and it doesn't impose its own will on my music and movie soundtracks. It does everything as good as I had hoped at this price point and it certainly doesn't hurt that it looks pretty damn good.

I did find the neutrality of the A5's sound to be a bit of a blessing and a curse. It's engineered so well that it allows the speakers and your source components to do the work, as far giving your music system its distinct flavor. Some amps, like the much pricier Krells, are famous for their rock and roll flavor. The Anthem is a little better behaved and might not stir the Jimi Hendrix in your soul, but it might just bring out your inner Lenny Kravitz.