



“Wow, what a sense of power and size.”

Published Since 1995  
**SoundStage!**™

BY JOHN CROSSETT

**Sound** "Presentation is in the forward, vivid, and detailed camp"; the PVA 2 "brings the music right to you—there's no having to aurally search for musical information via this amp"; yet the PVA 2 "presents the detail on your recordings in a musically coherent manner, never sounding hyper-resolving in the process."

**Features** "The power comes from two NPN and two PNP bipolar output devices per channel, which allow for a power output of 105 Wpc, both channels driven into 8 ohms, and 140 Wpc into 4 ohms"; there is a "three-way switch that allows the PVA 2's owner to decide how he wants to power up the amplifier: ... manual, trigger, and auto."

**Use** "If you have speakers that love power, the PVA 2 offers plenty for their consumption."

**Value** "A solid (state) recommendation for friends who desire good sound but have no intention of becoming hardcore audiophiles or spending more than they have to."

I have a number of friends who would like to have better sound than that offered by the majority of rack or mini systems available today but who don't want to tie up too much money in the process. Whenever they've asked me what they can do to solve this quandary, I never have answers for them—that is, until now.

SoundStage! gave Anthem's TLP 1 pre-amplifier/tuner a Reviewers' Choice nod due to its uncanny ability to allow the essence of the musical signal to flow through. But it also has enough features to satisfy the budding audiophile—at an easily affordable price. But what could I

recommend to use with the TLP 1 to power an audio system? I found the answer by turning once again to Anthem, a division of Paradigm Loudspeakers. The PVA 2 stereo power amplifier strikes an almost synergistic balance between performance and value, and compliments the TLP 1 perfectly.

#### NUTS AND BOLTS

The PVA 2 is an extremely attractive piece of audio gear. It measures 17 1/4" W x 5 1/4" H x 11" D, tips the scales at a respectable 26 pounds, and its cost is very reasonable. It has a brushed-silver aluminum faceplate that's adorned with a small Anthem logo in the upper left, a power button in the lower right, an LED in the bottom center, and three milled lines across the very bottom. Once past the faceplate, you'll notice that there are no heatsinks visible. While each amplifier

section is mounted on a double-sized heatsink designed to handle two channels each in Anthem's PVA 5 and PVA 7 amplifiers, they are not exposed, which helps make the PVA 2 a compact, easy-to-move piece. (Just make sure you keep it up off the carpet, to allow air to move through the chassis for ventilation.) Internally, the power comes from two NPN and two PNP bipolar output devices per channel, which allow for a power output of 105 Wpc, both channels driven into 8 ohms, and 140 Wpc into 4 ohms.

*"... vivid, and detailed ... It brings the music right to you—there's no having to aurally search for musical information via this amp ... if you have speakers that love power, the PVA 2 offers plenty for their consumption."*

On the back, there are gold-plated input jacks and—in the one outward bow to cost consciousness—plastic-nutted five-way speaker binding posts. The PVA 2 also comes with a removable IEC power cord. Another interesting feature is the three-way switch that allows the PVA 2's owner to decide how he wants to power up the amplifier. Choices are manual, trigger, and auto. Manual simply means you turn the power on and off via the power switch. Trigger allows for the use of a 3.5 mm mini jack connected from the amp to the triggering device (most likely your preamp) and have the amp turned on by that component (this is easily done with the Anthem TLP 1). Auto allows the amp to power up automatically as soon as it senses an input signal from the preamp. While I don't consider these features essential, I do feel that they offer the buyer some added convenience and flexibility that will add to the PVA 2's value. Finally, as should be the case with less expensive components (but sadly isn't in many cases), most of the money spent on the PVA 2 went inside toward better sonics and not just to make its appearance look spiffy.

I slipped the Anthem PVA 2 into place atop my homemade sandbox, which rests on a slab of finished granite on my floor. I then connected Alpha Core TQ2 interconnects (I also tried a pair of DH Labs BL-1s) and MI2 biwire speaker cables, powered the unit up, and allowed a week or so for it to burn-in before settling down to listen seriously. One point of note: Neither the PVA 2 nor its sibling, the TLP 1, was at all sensitive as to whether or not the cables were shielded or unshielded—there was nary a peep out of either unit. It's nice to see Anthem paying attention to preamp output and power-amp input impedances. This makes life easier for users, giving them one less thing to think about.

## ROAD TEST

From my experience, the price-performance curve levels off much more quickly with power amps than with any other type of audio equipment, but in this regard, I doubt you'll find much to fault about the Anthem PVA 2. It's possible to gain more sonic refinement, more fully fleshed-out instrumentation, more low-level detail, additional power reserves, and a wider, deeper soundstage, but only at a much higher price.

The most noticeable characteristic of the PVA 2 is that its presentation is in the forward, vivid, and detailed camp. It brings the music right to you—there's no having to aurally search for musical information via this amp. Also, if you have speakers that love power, the PVA 2 offers plenty for their consumption. I heard no compression or other nasty behavior via the PVA 2 through my Magnepan MG1.6/QR speakers. The background you hear the music arrive from is more charcoal gray than pure black, but again, for the darkest of backgrounds you'll be shelling out far more green than the cost of the PVA 2. And, unless your system is extraordinarily resolving, I doubt you'll find this to be an impediment to your listening pleasure.

I listened to a lot of different music throughout the course of reviewing the PVA 2, and I found that the power the Anthem amp has available came in handy on rock music I love, such as Mountain's *Nantucket Sleigh Ride* [Windfall LP 5500] or Little Feat's *Time Loves A Hero* [Warner Brothers LP BS 3015] as played back via my VPI HW19 Mk IV/modified Rega RB300/Clearaudio Aurum Beta S vinyl playback rig. Rock really needs all the power it can get to drive it along, and the PVA 2 has enough to satisfy even the most power-hungry listener. Given the seemingly adequate power reserves, the bass was good, albeit a tad woolly and not as deep as I've heard. Anthem, to their credit, seems to have recognized this and lessened the treble's prominence a touch, making for a more balanced, and thus more listenable, presentation. This goes a long way in making the PVA 2 enjoyable over the long haul.

*"... musically coherent ... Listening to Paul Gonsalves' tenor sax solo ... I heard his breath flow through the instrument as well as got a sense of his fingers on the keys."*

The Anthem PVA 2 presents the detail on your recordings in a musically coherent manner, never sounding hyper-resolving in the process. Listening to Paul Gonsalves' tenor sax solo from the Duke Ellington album *Jazz Party In Stereo* [Classic/Columbia LP CS 8127], I heard his breath flow through the instrument as well as got a sense of his fingers on the keys. However, that very last bit of detail and the complete sound of the recording venue are diminished somewhat. Another example of this was when I slipped Patricia Barber's *Cafe Blue* [Mobile Fidelity UDSACD 2002] into my Sony SCD-CE775 SACD player. On the track "Ode To Billy Joe," the initial transient of the finger snaps were extremely sharp but lacked ultimate fullness, bloom, and decay. It's the resolving of these micro details that will serve to remind you that you're not listening to a mega-bucks state-of-the-art amp. Still, considering the quality of the sound the PVA 2 produced and its modest price, I can't really fault too much about its performance.

*“How did the PVA 2 stack up with big music? ... Wow, what a sense of power and size. I could easily hear each section of the orchestra, each in its own space, amidst a nice, wide soundstage ... The music just flowed.”*

I love listening to vocal music whenever I'm auditioning a new piece of equipment, and two singers I usually turn to are John Prine and Carmen McRea. Prine has a distinctive, cigarette-stained voice that shifts between singing and talking depending on the song and requires a certain amount of flexibility from an amplifier to reproduce it correctly. I pulled Prine's *Bruised Orange* [Asylum LP 6E-139] out and heard him singing, right there in my listening room. His voice was just as I've heard it a hundred times before—Prine sounding like Prine, just a bit more gaunt than I was used to with my reference amp. McRea, on the other hand, from her CD *Carmen Sings Monk* [Bluebird/Novus CD 09026-63841-2] had all vocal intonations intact. I connected instantly with the music, despite a slight lessening of the ambient differences between the live and studio tracks.

*“The PVA 2 stereo power amplifier strikes an almost synergistic balance between performance and value, and compliments the TLP 1 perfectly.”*

How did the PVA 2 stack up with *big* music? For an answer to that, I pulled out my copy of Mahler's 5th Symphony as conducted by Benjamin Zander [Telarc 2SACD-60569] and played it back through both the Sony and my new Marantz 8260 SACD players. Wow, what a sense of power and size. I could easily hear each section of the orchestra, each in its own space, amidst a nice, wide soundstage. All the instruments' tones were fairly well intact, with only a bit of haze keeping me from hearing every last iota of color. The music just flowed. There was a lack of really firm, deep bass, the kind that would have helped anchor the orchestra's sound. However, the PVA 2 easily resolved the sonic differences between the two SACD players, with the Marantz coming out well ahead in overall refinement. The PVA 2 handled all the music I played through it with equal aplomb. I never felt I was being deprived of the essence of the music. The intelligence of its design tradeoffs allowed me to simply sit back and relax, falling into the music—not being kept at arms length. That's an important feature, one that will aid the high-end neophyte in hearing what it is we audiophiles have been raving about.

## THE COMPETITION

All components change the sound of the system they're inserted into. That's a fact of audio life, and it was with the Anthem PVA 2. When stacked up against my almost-four-times-the-price Sunfire Stereo amp, the shortcomings of the PVA 2 became a bit more obvious than when just listening to the Anthem amp on

its own. Still, I couldn't help but be impressed by just how much quality sound is available on the cheap.

The main differences were in the areas of perceived frequency extension, overall refinement, and a sense of unlimited power. While none of those attributes comes inexpensively, with the PVA 2, it quickly became apparent that it's possible to invest far less in a power amp today while still getting closer to its state-of-the-art siblings than was possible just a few years ago. With its easy, well-balanced sound, the PVA 2 begs the question, When is close enough good enough?

*“With the PVA 2, Anthem has once again demonstrated that they plan to continue defining affordable high-end performance. The highest compliment I can give the PVA 2 is that it always allowed me to lose myself in the music—and isn't that what we listen for in any component?”*

## CONCLUSIONS

With a price:performance ratio that is hard to beat, the PVA 2 has become the answer I've been looking for: a solid (state) recommendation for friends who desire good sound but have no intention of becoming hardcore audiophiles or spending more than they have to. Anthem has once again found a canny balance between strengths and weaknesses and created a power amp that far exceeds expectations. The PVA 2 is good enough to be the long-term power plant for non-audiophiles, while at the same time allowing an aspiring system builder to budget more of his or her funds on other links in the chain (such as front-end components or speakers) and still wind up with a very good-sounding, highly enjoyable system.

With the PVA 2, Anthem has once again demonstrated that they plan to continue defining affordable high-end performance. The highest compliment I can give the PVA 2 is that it always allowed me to lose myself in the music—and isn't that what we listen for in any component?