



“ ... the P2 RULES ... ”

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**SoundStage!**™

BY JASON THORPE

**SOUND**

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**FEATURES**

“The P2 is dual-mono from the power cord on, with each channel’s circuitry contained on a modular board”; “employs Anthem’s Advanced Load Monitoring, which ... monitors temperature, current and voltage output in order to protect the amplifier in the unlikely event that the safe operating area of the 14 bipolar output transistors is exceeded.” “While Anthem

says that the P2 produces 325Wpc into 8 ohms, it’s also rated at 500Wpc into 4 ohms, and 675Wpc into a punishing 2-ohm load.”

**USE**

“No matter how hard I drove the P2 (and I drove it *very* hard indeed at times), and despite the lack of external heatsink fins, it stayed cool to the touch — so cool that it rarely ever became warmer than the ambient temperature.”

**VALUE**

“The Anthem Statement P2 amplifier ... looks set to redefine the concept of value in the audiophile world.”

I sometimes find myself wondering if the concept of value has any meaning in high-end audio. My co-workers at my day job, who serve as my reality check, vacillate

between amusement and outrage when I tell them that I’m currently evaluating a \$3000 power cord, or that I’ve just laid out a grand on a new phono cartridge. Sometimes — heck, fairly often — the money spent on audio products doesn’t seem to bring you very much in return, especially when the object of discussion is an ancillary component that doesn’t actually generate much of a signal.

But even audio laymen understand power amplifiers. They comprehend, on an instinctive level perhaps, the relationship of watts, weight, physical size, and price. If I tell Terry, my co-worker at the *orifice*, about, say, a 50Wpc integrated amp that sells for \$600, he innately performs a calculation in his head which informs him that, yes, this is a reasonably good deal. Should this hypothetical amplifier weigh more than 30 pounds, he’ll believe that it’s an even better value. However, were I to mention in passing that I’m considering

buying a pair of 7-watt tube monoblocks for several thousand dollars, I would receive a blank stare, perhaps followed by a sobering smack in the chops.

*“You should hear what all that beautiful power can do with your speakers!”*

Of course it’s not that clear-cut, as high power combined with high mass and low cost doesn’t necessarily mean that the resulting product will sound good. But hey, it’s something to go on, and if that combination *does* happen to be worthy of the *high-fidelity* handle, then all the better. Unfortunately the heavens rarely align, and one or more of the aforementioned parameters is usually sorely lacking. There are plenty of high-powered, good-sounding amps that happen to be big and heavy, but unfortunately they generally cost an arm and a leg. So I have to say that it’s pretty darn newsworthy when a company releases a large, powerful, *affordable* amplifier.

*“... large and powerful ... subtlety mixed with iron-fisted control ... smart and sophisticated ... most engaging ... I was often simply bowled over by the depth, intensity and control ... low frequencies were always correct — and relevant to the scale of the music.”*

It just so happens that as I write this I’m looking at the conjunction of those three parameters, which have coalesced into a product that also happens to sound really good. That product is the Anthem Statement P2 amplifier, which from where I’m sitting, looks set to redefine the concept of value in the audiophile world.

#### WHAT WE GOT HERE ...

The Anthem Statement P2 is a large, heavy, powerful solid-state amplifier that retails for a most reasonable price. Large? How about 9-3/8" H x 19-1/4" W x 22-1/2" D. Heavy? It’s a robust 75 pounds. Powerful? How does 325Wpc strike you? While there are certainly a few other amplifiers that can pack this kind of punch for this kind of money, the only ones I know of are from mass-market firms and can be limited by the impedance of the speakers that they are able to drive. It takes a hefty power supply to produce sufficient current for driving low impedances, and power-supply components are expensive (they also add weight, which is part of our equation, right?), which is why reasonably priced solid-state amps are rarely recommended for use into loads lower than 4 ohms. The P2, on the other hand, is rated as stable into any impedance, even a dead short, while running at full output. While Anthem says that the P2 produces 325Wpc into 8 ohms, it’s also rated at 500Wpc into 4 ohms, and 675Wpc into a punishing 2-ohm load.

The P2 isn’t just large and powerful — it’s also smart and sophisticated. The Statement P2 employs Anthem’s Advanced Load Monitoring, which, the company claims, monitors temperature, current and voltage output in order to protect the amplifier in the unlikely event that the safe operating area of the 14 bipolar

output transistors is exceeded. Anthem claims that the ALM circuit is totally non-invasive, as it operates outside of the signal path. There are also no fuses in line with the DC rails. Instead, circuit breakers are employed on the AC line and are activated by the ALM. Above and beyond its penchant for self-perpetuation, the P2 was designed from the ground up for ease of servicing and circuit integrity. The P2 is dual-mono from the power cord on, with each channel’s circuitry contained on a modular board. It’s this modularity that made it possible for Anthem to stretch the P2 into its big brother, the five-channel P5. All Anthem had to do was add more modules to the same chassis.

*“... exceptionally neutral ... unerringly delivering the subtleties, nuances and harmonic delicacies — without editorializing ... really good extension and control ... seriously slamming bass.”*

Anthem didn’t skimp on the ergonomics or features in order to bring the P2 in at a low price. The binding posts are substantial and solid, the cover and faceplate are made from aluminum, and the power cord is removable. Input connections offer the choice of single-ended RCAs or balanced XLRs, although the P2 isn’t a fully balanced design — only the input stage is balanced. Taking a page from powered subwoofers, the P2 can be powered up automatically whenever it senses an input signal. With the simple flick of a switch on the rear panel you can choose between trigger-on or manual activation via the front-panel switch.

The P2 is far too big to mount in my conventional audio rack. I placed the P2 on the floor between my speakers, as I wasn’t confident that the laminate flooring I’d recently laid over top of the slab in my basement would handle the stress if I placed the P2 on Black Diamond Racing cones. Besides, the P2 is so solid and heavy that I doubt it’s resonating very much as it squats there looking ominous.

*“... midrange and treble — shine when digging in to get that last little drop of spit and ring from the trumpet ... or the crunching, attacking edge of an electric guitar ... incisive clarity ...”*

#### SYSTEM CONTEXT

The P2 saw extended duties with a wide variety of partnering equipment. It drove Ascendo System Z-f3 and Focus Audio FS-888 speakers, as well as my own Hales Transcendence Fives. Pre-amplifiers included the Emotive Audio Poeta, Song Audio SA-1, FT Audio’s LW1 passive unit, and my Sonic Frontiers SFL-2/SFP-1 Signature combo. For a short while at the end of the evaluation period, a Blue Circle BC3000 Mk II preamp provided the signal. The sources were analog-only and varied among a Pro-Ject RPM 9 turntable, Michell Gyrodec with modified Rega RB300 tonearm, and my Roksan Xerxes/Artemiz/Tabriz combo. Cables for this exercise were Analysis Plus Solo Crystal Oval 8 speaker cables and Acoustic Zen Matrix interconnects. Power cord responsibilities were shared between

GutWire Power Clefs and Cardas Hexlink. All of the electronics were plugged into my Chang Lightspeed 6400ISO power conditioner. For a comparison amplifier, I used the now-discontinued Musical Fidelity A300cr.

*“... precise ... accurate ... crisp and articulate ... jazz, chamber and symphonic music just flat-out rock through the P2 ... full and realistic ... perfectly arrayed ... charmingly realistic ...”*

Interestingly, no matter how hard I drove the P2 (and I drove it *very* hard indeed at times), and despite the lack of external heatsink fins, it stayed cool to the touch — so cool that it rarely ever became warmer than the ambient temperature. My cats have a disconcerting habit of vomiting up hairballs in the most inconvenient places, and since the size of the P2 precluded placing it in my equipment rack, I was concerned about the possibility of one of the little rats depositing a load into the guts of the amplifier. As a preventative measure I placed a couple of magazines over the top of the amp, and even with its vents thus obstructed the P2 never became even remotely warm. Later in the review period, I placed several GutWire NotePad damping contraptions on the top cover, which had the same protective effect and also served to damp the top plate, which otherwise rings like a bell when tapped.

#### VELVET HAMMER

The P2 is an exceptionally neutral amplifier; it doesn't add any richness, but neither does it sound sterile. Instead, the P2 walks the middle line, unerringly delivering the subtleties, nuances and harmonic delicacies of music without editorializing or manipulating the signal that it's amplifying.

*“... the P2 rules, with a feeling of ease and power ...”*

While this description of the P2 doesn't sound very exotic, it's one of the highest compliments that I can pay to an amplifier. For the duration of the P2's stay in my system, the hardest work on my part consisted of trying to find a fault that I could lay at its feet. In fact, it took a conscious effort on my part to even *notice* the P2. My system sounded fantastic through numerous equipment changes, and I just sort of took the amp for granted, instinctively *knowing* that it was doing good work, regardless of how menacing it looked. Retrospectively analyzing the ebb and flow of equipment as it cycled through my system, it's clear to me that the consistently high sound quality that I've been the fortunate recipient of over the past few months is in no small part due to the Anthem P2's contribution.

But, of course, you want specifics. Let's start with Massive Attack's *Protection* [Wild Bunch 7243 8 39883 1 0], which is a record that it's just not possible to play at low levels, and one that typifies the personality of the Anthem P2. *Protection* starts out subtly, luring you in with soft, lyrical and subtle vocal and instrumental lines. But boy, does this album build! Its densely interwoven tapestry of soul, R&B and trance climbs in intensity without giving notice of its intentions, until you're on the edge of your seat, subliminally gyrating from the hips down as you get caught up in the groove.

When I played this album the P2 simply doled out the juice required to *get the music moving*. Yeah, sure, most any competent amplifier can do that, especially one that has the ample current reserves of the P2. But the bruising amplifiers of my experience don't usually specialize in reproducing tricky, groove-oriented music such as that generated by Massive Attack. In my experience, the rhythmic subtleties of tracks like “Three” are usually best handled by small, integrated British amplifiers, which are light enough on their feet to track this start-stop torture test without overwhelming the music with excessive damping.

The Anthem amp backs up this rhythmic ability with a firm grip and *really* good extension and control in the lower registers, which translates into some seriously slamming bass. Of all the amplifiers that I've had in my system, the P2 is the first one that well and truly controls my Hales speakers as if it's got them by the glands. This isn't overtly noticeable, heavy-handed bass that I'm talking about here. Instead, it's subtlety mixed with iron-fisted control, which results in a most engaging listen. We all think we want *more* bass, but in actuality it's *better* bass we're after, and this is what the Anthem P2 delivers. Never overdamped, and never sloppy, the P2 has the power to render works large and small with delicacy and realism. With music as diverse as Duke Ellington and Rage Against the Machine, the bottom end consistently had both the guts and subtlety required to engage me and draw me into the music.

While I was often simply bowled over by the depth, intensity and control of the bass, the P2 never overdid it. Low frequencies were always *correct* and relevant to the scale of the music. A case in point, Duke Ellington's *Blues In Orbit* [Columbia/Classic CS 8241] is richly atmospheric music. There's a latent power that's reliant on the music's subtle dynamic shading, and the Anthem amplifier was able to excavate this with an uncanny ease. The restrained *blat* of the trombones in “Three J's Blues” is low in level, but it's well delineated and absolutely gravid with meaning. The P2's bass prowess breathes life into these low-key but meaningful musical events.

Did you notice that I mentioned Duke Ellington and Rage Against the Machine in the same paragraph above? The P2 encourages such musical juxtapositions. An amplifier that's refined enough to dredge up the nuances in *Blues In Orbit* could easily fall to pieces or sound flaccid while slamming out violent metal at levels loud enough to incur an embolism. Not so the P2. While they're not abrasive, the P2's midrange and treble are very slightly forward, and that's a trait that allows them to shine when digging in to get that last little drop of spit and ring from a trumpet, or the crunching, attacking edge of an electric guitar. “Know Your Enemy,” from Rage Against the Machine's eponymous LP [Epic ZK 52959], is one of my all-time favorite hard-rock anthems, and its anti-establishment message, while not 100% convergent with my own politics, makes up in enthusiasm for what it lacks in eloquence. Although I'm not the angry young man I used to be, Rage Against the Machine can still get my dander up, but only when played really loud. The P2's incisive *clarity* did the trick, and when cranking the Hales speakers to some rather high levels, the big surprise was the lack of grain in the upper registers. At the volume I was playing this album, any upper-midrange or treble hash would most certainly have driven me from the room or sent me lunging for the volume control. Rock on and save the whales!

My use of “incisive” in the last paragraph may have set off some alarm bells, as you've no doubt seen it used as a euphemism for

*bright*, which is audiophile anathema. The P2 is definitely, truly, righteously *not* bright. Got that? Admittedly there's no way you'd mistake the P2 for a tube amp, and I, being a big tube fan, was very happy using the P2 with both the Emotive Audio Poeta and Song Audio SA-1 tube preamplifiers for the very slight amount of tube sweetening they provided. But after I returned these preamplifiers to the manufacturers, I hooked up the FT Audio LW-1 passive preamp in order to determine exactly what the P2 was bringing to the party, and I was happily surprised to find out that even with this most neutral of preamplifiers the P2 never crossed the line to brightness or etch.

*“... there's a huge dose of emotion in this work ... P2 communicated it faithfully ... fully relaying the scope and scale ... harmonically correct ... imaging and soundstaging reap significant benefits.”*

Cowboy Junkies' *The Trinity Session* [Latent Latex5] never fails to take my breath away. The music on this album inhabits the most enveloping acoustic imaginable, with the Trinity Church, located here in my hometown of Toronto, providing a huge backdrop. The foot stomps in “Postcard Blues” were firmly anchored in this enormous soundstage, with bass that felt as if it had subterranean origins — such are the low frequencies of the Canadian pressing of this classic recording. But what was especially neat was the harmonica that's interspersed through this track. This instrument is played with such a piercing shriek that it freezes my cats in their tracks, convinced by genetic memory that they're being dive-bombed by a giant, primordial owl. I've listened to this track hundreds of times, and if a component should contribute *any* harshness, this harmonica is rendered unlistenable. The P2 performed admirably here, giving weight to the foot-stomps without contributing additional boom, faithfully rendering the large-scale acoustic of the church, and refraining from overly traumatizing my pets.

At times the P2 can present a bit of a lean character, and at others it seems to almost verge on lushness. However, these mutually exclusive traits were almost completely dependent on the equipment that was feeding the amp, leading me to the conclusion that it's pretty darned neutral, which I get the feeling was the goal that the designers at Anthem had. Late in the review period I swapped over to a Shelter 501 Mk II moving-coil cartridge, and the P2 faithfully rendered the signal passed to it by this superb transducer. The 501 Mk II is very slightly on the rich side through the midrange, and the depth of image that it can project left me speechless. Rimsky - Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, performed by Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony [Classic/RCA LSC 2446] has some exceedingly delicate passages, including one with a very faint and high-pitched triangle that's precisely located in the left channel. The P2 placed this slightly forward of the plane of the speakers, while retaining — if not accentuating — the rest of the orchestra's image depth. There's a huge dose of emotion in this work, and the P2 communicated it faithfully, fully relaying the scope and scale of the orchestra, and certainly not skimping on the full-bore power of the more dramatic passages. Regardless of the partnering equipment, the P2 comes across as harmonically correct, and its imaging and soundstaging reap significant benefits.

## SHOULD YOU BUY ONE?

If you're coming to the P2 directly by way of a lush-sounding tube amplifier and have speakers that don't require gobs of power, you may not be thrilled by the P2's neutral tonal balance. However, you also might end up with a shock. I've been a committed tube-head for the last decade, and I found myself more than pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoy music as presented by the P2.

Direct comparison with the Musical Fidelity A300cr power amplifier — which outputs a healthy 250Wpc, and has proved to be a great-sounding unit — showed that the British amplifier has a slightly more reticent upper midrange and treble, which comes with the expected trade-off of decreased high-frequency air. The A300cr also has a very slightly richer midrange, which may well comfort the listener who is coming to the solid state directly from tube city, but the ever-so-slightly leaner P2 counters with tighter bass and a more precise, accurate grip on the midrange and its attendant imaging. It's give and take between these two amplifiers as far as tonal balance goes, with the Musical Fidelity amp playing a bit more on the warm and loose side, versus the crisp and articulate Anthem. I must stress, however, that there's no way you could call the A300cr *romantic*, and you'd be just as wrong if you assumed that the P2 is *analytical*. These are very small differences, but they are differences nonetheless, so report I must.

*“... a large, powerful, affordable amplifier ... that also happens to sound REALLY GOOD ... from where I'm sitting [it] looks set to redefine the concept of value in the audiophile world!”*

Image-wise, the P2 is crisper, with a sharper delineation of the outlines of instruments and voices, whereas you get a bit more *body* with the A300cr. Jazz, chamber and symphonic music just flat-out *rock* through the P2, with a full and realistic spread of instruments perfectly arrayed in front of you in a most charmingly realistic manner. Blues and reggae, on the other hand, swing just a little bit in favor of the A300cr, as its more propulsive way with timing ekes some extra swagger from electric bass and highlights the chunka-chunka bounce of electric guitar.

With a pair of speakers more sensitive than the Hales Transcendence Fives, the balance *may* shift slightly toward the A300cr for its very slightly more relaxed and rhythmic presentation. However, with the Hales speakers it's no contest — the P2 rules, with a feeling of ease and power that the smaller British amp just can't match. In some ways this result surprised me, as I never really noticed that lower-power amplifiers couldn't quite get it up when driving my Hales speakers. With amps like the 45Wpc Audio Aero TransTrac, the Hales speakers have always sounded smooth, detailed and dynamic. However, it took the additional juice of the P2 to show me just how much performance was lurking under the surface. My experience with the Ascendo System Z-f3 confirmed my suspicion that sometimes you just *need more muscle*. Each time I upped the current to these astonishing German loudspeakers, this progression ending with the P2, they rewarded me with tighter bass, silkier, more extended highs, and deeper imaging. As with cars, it seems that sometimes there's just no replacement for displacement.

To sum up this comparison, these are both wonderful amplifiers, but they sound slightly different, and while the A300cr is still a good deal at the price, the P2 simply smokes it in the value department by giving you more power for less money.

### CONCLUSION

I imagine that it was a significant undertaking for Anthem to bring the Statement P2 stereo amplifier, and its multichannel brethren, to market. Even if you ignore the high machining and build quality of the P2, the material costs alone would seem to make its existence an unlikely proposition. Add in the fact that it's built here in Canada — not in China — and I bet you wouldn't be far wrong if you guessed that Anthem would be losing money on each one (and you can't make that up on volume)!

However, because Anthem is a division of Paradigm, it has the backing of a large corporation and the efficiency, buying power, and engineering know-how that comes along with it. I would think that the start-up design and tooling of the P2 would be quite expensive, and the low retail price would mean that Anthem is expecting to sell a fair number of them in order to recoup these costs. If my experience with the P2 is any indication, Anthem should have no trouble finding homes for *many* of these amplifiers.

The Anthem P2 is an extremely high-powered, well-built amplifier that doesn't inflict its own personality on the sound. You should hear what all that beautiful power can do with *your* speakers.