



“... simply spectacular ...
multichannel audio of the highest order.”



BY ROGER KANNO

Anthem and its parent company, Paradigm, are on a roll. Anthem recently introduced the AVM 30 surround-sound processor, which improves on the award-winning AVM 20 at a price lower than its predecessor's. The Anthem Statement D1 surround-sound processor is even more impressive, and Paradigm's new Reference Signature line of speakers is earning rave reviews.

To complement these new processors and to provide the high-quality amplification required to get the most out of the Reference Signatures, Anthem has introduced several new power amplifiers in their Statement line of electronics. I was provided the Anthem Statement P5 five-channel power amplifier as part of a top-of-the-line Anthem-Paradigm home-theater system that included the Statement D1 processor and Paradigm Reference Signature speakers, the S8, C5, Signature ADP, and Signature Servo subwoofer.

THE ULTIMATE STATEMENT

The first thing I noticed about the Anthem Statement P5 is its size and mass. It weighs 130 pounds, and its shipping box would not easily fit into the hatch of my car — I solicited the help of a coworker with a strong back and a pickup truck to transport it. Many large audio/video components have warnings on the packaging that recommend they be moved by two people, but with the P5 it was a necessity. Along with the P5's enormous mass comes a rock-solid build quality that, while not necessarily an indication of sonic performance, will instill the utmost confidence in its durability.

The P5 is a multi-mono design, each channel of amplification residing on a separate circuit board with its own heatsink and, more important, its own power supply. This minimizes the interference between channels for enhanced performance and ensures that all channels

can simultaneously be driven to their maximum rated output. The major drawback of this type of design is the added cost of providing sufficiently large power supplies so that each channel can independently deliver its rated output. Because of the need for these large separate power supplies, there are relatively few mono-design multichannel amplifiers on the market. Those that are available typically have lower output ratings than similarly priced amplifiers that share common power supplies and can shunt power as required to any channel — which is why such amps' power ratings are often specified for only one or two channels driven. However, the P5 is rated at 325Wpc into 8 ohms, 500Wpc into 4 ohms, and 675Wpc into 2 ohms, all channels driven. The P5 is said to be stable down to a short circuit at full output. Judging by these power ratings and its tremendous build quality, you begin to get an idea of just how serious an amplifier the P5 is.

“Like the P5 itself, the sound was big and bold ... the band’s wonderfully tight playing was positioned precisely in the huge front soundstage ... sound of the choir filled the entire acoustic space ... harmonizing — sounded gorgeous ... showed off the P5’s ability to present an extremely quiet background and the simple beauty and emotion of vocals with minimal musical accompaniment.”

In addition to its high-power output and size, the P5 sports many high-quality design features. Fourteen bipolar output devices are provided for each channel, as well as a proprietary Active-Load Cascoded Complementary Feedback Input Stage, which uses eight hand-matched bipolar input devices; heat-shrink tubing is applied to each input pair to improve thermal tracking. The circuit boards — two-layer designs with thick, 2-ounce copper traces — feature extensive use of power and ground planes to reduce interference.

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The P5 has no fuses in its DC rails — the amplifier is directly connected to the power-supply capacitor bank, which is intended to keep output impedance very low and make more power available to the amplifier. Another sophisticated feature is Anthem’s Advanced Load Monitoring (ALM) circuitry, which constantly monitors the output devices for temperature, current, and voltage to ensure the P5’s long life. Anthem claims that ALM is “totally non-invasive,” engaging only in the most extreme circumstances, to protect the amplifier from damage.

Two separate power cords are provided; Anthem recommends they be connected to different 15A circuits. While SoundStage! managing editor Jeff Fritz may have in his home multiple 20A circuits specifically for power amplifiers, the P5 seemed to work just fine with both cords plugged into just one 15A circuit in my listening room. Power on/off options can be set to Trigger, Manual, or Auto mode; the last turns the P5 on when it senses an input signal, and shuts it down 20 minutes after the signal is no longer detected. Both RCA and XLR inputs are provided (including switches to attenuate the XLR inputs by 6dB) as well as a relay trigger input and output on 3.5mm mono jacks. The XLR input stage is described as being “fully balanced,” which Anthem claims reduces interference to provide the lowest level of noise and hum possible.

SINGING THE ANTHEM

A DVD that has been getting a lot of playing time on my system is *An All-Star Tribute to Brian Wilson*. Filmed live at Radio City Music Hall, this great-sounding disc features fantastic performances by some well-known artists, as well as by Wilson himself. The band, the Wondermints, is the one featured on Wilson’s wonderful-sounding *Live at the Roxy* [DVD-Audio, Rhino R9 73928]; they sound just as good on this recording. The musicians were spread evenly across the front speakers, the P5 placing them exactly where they should have been in the soundstage. This is not a perfect recording, but it captures the energy of the performances with surprisingly good fidelity for a live concert DVD.

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“Good Vibrations,” sung by Ann and Nancy Wilson, of Heart, is one of several highlights on this DVD. Backed by classically trained baritone Jubilant Sykes, the Boys Choir of Harlem, and the Wondermints, the Wilson sisters give a triumphant performance that brings the crowd to its feet. Like the P5 itself, the sound was big and bold; the band’s wonderfully tight playing was positioned precisely in the huge front soundstage, and the sweet sound of the choir filled the entire acoustic space. The more understated performance of Carly Simon, David Crosby, and Jimmy Webb harmonizing on “In My Room” sounded gorgeous, and showed off the P5’s ability to present an extremely quiet background and the simple beauty and emotion of vocals with minimal musical accompaniment.

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The Blue Man Group’s *Audio* [DVD-Audio, Virgin 77893 9] is one of my favorites for dynamic and immersive multichannel music. “Rods and Cones” sounded surreal through the P5 — the wraparound soundstage was totally enveloping, sounding as if one of the BMG’s big PVC drum kits was placed squarely in the middle of my living room. Although the P5 made the massive drums sound extremely taut and controlled, it was the little things it did that made me sit up and take notice. The various PVC instruments

and drums sounded distinctly different from one another; even at very high levels, subtle changes in the overall volume and of individual instruments were discernible as the music built to an incredible crescendo. Buried deep within the mix were small details, such as the crystalline sound of cymbals, that were startlingly clear, even amid the intense drumming and the guttural growl of an electric guitar.

“... a level of performance far beyond what is normally available at this price ... a spectacular combination for both multichannel and two-channel sound ... one of the very best multichannel amplifiers currently available ... I am not aware of anyone else who offers this level of performance in such a massively built multi-mono design and at this price.”

The P5's exceedingly clean sound, quiet background, and neutral character were even more apparent on stereo recordings. Everything sounded immediate and real on Johnny Cash's *American IV: The Man Comes Around* [CD, American 4400770830]. The guitar on the title track was incredibly tight and defined, and the piano's deep bass notes were powerful, seeming to reach down lower than I had ever heard without sounding boomy or unnatural. The stark arrangement of "Hurt" was incisive without becoming overly aggressive; even at the end of this track, where less capable amps can sound distorted and compressed, the P5 held everything together with amazing composure. Recordings with reference-quality sound, such as Diana Krall's *The Girl in the Other Room* [SACD, Verve B0002293-36] or Daboa's *From the Gekko* [CD, Triple Earth TRECD115], were simply spectacular, with razor-sharp imaging, dynamics, and all of the other hallmarks of a true high-end amplifier.

COMPARISON

I have been fortunate to have recently had three outstanding multichannel amplifiers in my system: the Simaudio Moon Aurora (five-channel version), the Bel Canto eVo6, and the Anthem Statement P5. Although each amplifier had, to some extent, its own "personality," they were actually more similar than not. As you might have guessed, the P5 was the most powerful of the three, and sounded it. Its grip on the bass frequencies and ability to snap images into focus and lock them in space was uncanny. The 200Wpc Aurora was not far behind it in terms of grip and authority, but it sounded ever so slightly darker; and the eVo6, although rated at only 120Wpc, held its own against these two more powerful amps with only a minor decrease in subjective power and control.

Some may prefer the slightly warmer Aurora and the eVo6, while others might favor the marginally more transparent P5. However, the differences in sound quality were very minor; each amplifier produced multichannel audio of the highest order. Where the P5 will distinguish itself from the competition is in its incredibly robust build quality and its prodigious power output, which should allow it to drive even relatively inefficient speakers to home-theater-approved levels. Although many competitors offer

excellent-sounding multichannel amplifiers that are also very powerful, I am not aware of anyone else who offers this level of performance in such a massively built multi-mono design and at this price.

CONCLUSION

Like the amazing D1 processor, the P5 is a superb addition to Anthem's line of Statement electronics. Neither product is inexpensive, but they offer a level of performance far beyond what is normally available at this price; together, they made a spectacular combination for both multichannel and two-channel sound. I lavished a great deal of praise on the D1 in my review, but the P5 – with its high power output, incredible build quality, and first-rate sound – is just as deserving. It should be considered one of the very best multichannel amplifiers currently available.