



**“ABSOLUTELY STELLAR ... FEATS OF NEAR
MAGIC ... PERFORMED BEYOND MY
WILDEST EXPECTATIONS.”**



BY JEFF VAN DYNE

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Anthem has long been a leading maker of A/V processors, beginning with the AVM 2 and its incredibly popular successor, the AVM 20. The AVM models had levels of flexibility, build, and sound quality that had previously been unheard of at their prices. I was so impressed with the AVM 20 that, a few years ago, I bought one for my reference system. Since then, regular software updates from Anthem have kept my AVM 20 current enough in most important respects that it's one of the few components I own that I haven't felt the need to replace. At the price, the AVM 20 was also relatively expensive by my standards, but its quality and longevity in the ever-changing market of surround-sound processors presented an incredible value over the long haul.

Not content to rest on their laurels, Anthem began to investigate the possibility of raising their AVM processors and PVA power amplifiers to even higher levels of sound and visual quality. And so the Anthem Statement line was born. The familial resemblance of the AVM and Statement processors is no accident. Basing your new high-end processors on one of the most successful designs ever marketed is just good business.

The D2, the second processor in the Statement line, is distinguishable from the D1 primarily by the addition of a high-end video processor to its list of features. Those of us who know Anthem

have known that a video processor was in the works for some time. Well, it was worth the wait. (If you own a D1, the D2's video processor is available as an upgrade that essentially updates the D1 to D2 status.)

Not all video processors are created equal. If you currently rely on the scaling engine in your TV or DVD player, you're almost certainly not getting the most out of your display device. This is where a true high-end video processor, such as the Gennum VXP-based one in the D2, comes into play. Yes, you can buy DVD players that have decent built-in scalers, but even many high-end players don't do all that

good a job of scaling standard DVD up to high-definition resolutions. Many D2 owners use as a transport a DVD player that outputs a clean 480i digital signal, and forgo an expensive DVD player altogether. One of the great things about the D2's video processor is that, unlike a high-end DVD player, the D2 transcodes and scales to your display's native resolution all S-video, component, and HDMI video signals.

"... outstanding ... it doesn't get much better than this ... audio evolution at its best."

SETUP

I installed the Statement D2 in my dedicated home theater, along with an Anthem PVA 7 and three NuForce Reference 8.5 power amplifiers, driving a set of Paradigm Studio 100 speakers. A Toshiba HD-A1 HD DVD player, a Sony SAT-HD200 DirecTV receiver, and an Oppo OPDV971H scaling DVD player were plugged into the D2's HDMI inputs. The D2's HDMI output fed a Panasonic PT-AE900 projector. I also plugged an older JVC SVHS VCR into the Statement D2 via an S-video cable; the D2's video processor significantly improved (though not nearly to hi-def level) the quality of the few old VHS tapes I still have around.

"... transparency and openness ... three-dimensional soundscape ... ability to squeeze every last ounce of performance out of a recording."

As with the AVM processors, setting up the Statement D2 for optimal performance can be a very involved and time-consuming process. This has nothing to do with difficulties with the user interface, which is quite intuitive, but with the sheer number of parameters that can be adjusted to optimize a system's overall performance. The audio feature set of Anthem processors has been well described in previous reviews of other models, and remains much the same in the D2.

The D2's video features are also extensive. The Picture menu includes options for color space, film mode, detail enhancement, noise reduction, and, for each source component, individual settings for brightness, contrast, color, and tint. That last group is useful for correcting variations among the various source components that will be feeding signals to the display. There are also settings to adjust the threshold for motion-adaptive deinterlacing, correction of the all-too-common chroma bug, and an array of settings for tweaking the performance of the analog-to-digital converter used to translate S-video and component signals for HDMI output.

The Crop menu adds settings to control pixel cropping and other frame-specific settings. The Scale Out menu lets you set stretch and letterbox/pillarbox modes, zoom, and to set the scaler to bypass mode. The Output menu includes Frame Lock functions for those (currently) rare displays that are able to handle both video and film frame rates. There is also a series of gamma-correction options that I think are better left to professionals.

"... noticeably reduced motion blur on moving images ... could considerably sharpen my projector's picture without adding any visible edge artifacts ... did a remarkable job of scaling ... will breathe new life into your collection of SD DVDs."

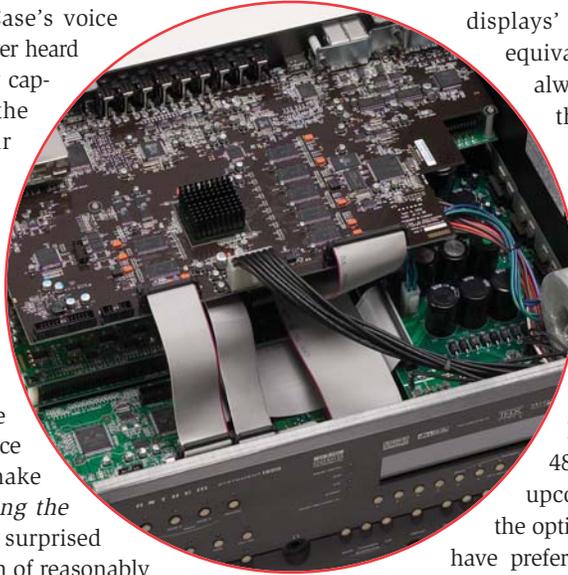
The good news in all this is that, except to correct for level differences among sources, in most circumstances the Statement D2's default video settings will work exceptionally well. It turned out that my system did benefit from some minor tweaking of a few of these settings, but I'll get to that later. As with the Statement series' plethora of audio settings, it's likely you'll never use most of the video settings, but those you will use may strongly affect your viewing experience.



LISTENING AND VIEWING

One of my favorite new CDs of 2006 was Neko Case's *Fox Confessor Brings the Flood* [Epitaph 67772], which manages to be traditional rock music without sounding like the same old tired stuff. The recording quality is a notch above standard, and the D2 showed it to good advantage. There's a note of transparency and openness to Case's voice in "Maybe Sparrow" that's almost never heard in today's rock recordings but is nicely captured here. With the Statement D2 in the loop, there was even more air around her voice than I'm used to, and it was more firmly locked into a specific spot in a three-dimensional soundscape.

Whatever I might think of the Dixie Chicks' political views, I fully respect their right to voice their opinions, and reject attempts by the country-music establishment to silence them. That alone was enough to make me consider purchasing their *Taking the Long Way* [Columbia 80739]. What surprised me was that the album is a collection of reasonably well-crafted and recorded pop country songs that were beyond my expectations. No, I don't think it's the best album of this year, but it's probably one of the best pop country CDs I've heard in some time. Even the best system can't reproduce what's not on the CD, so I was a little stunned to hear, on the title track, decent soundstage depth and a natural quality to the acoustic guitars. I'm under no illusions that this is an audiophile-quality recording, so I have to attribute a good deal of this performance to the Statement D2's ability to squeeze every last ounce of performance out of a recording.



I wasn't greatly surprised by the ability of the D2's video processor to handily outperform those in the HD-A1 and my projector, but I expected to at least have to look hard to see the improvements. What did surprise me was the D2's Detail Enhancement and Noise Reduction settings. Most displays' Detail Enhancement controls seem equivalent to a Sharpness control in almost always adding unwanted artifacts. I used the D2's Detail Enhancement only because I was trying to examine every aspect of the processor's controls, but I discovered that with careful tweaking I could considerably sharpen my projector's picture without adding any visible edge artifacts.

To check out how the Statement did with well-mastered standard-definition DVDs, I piped *Serenity* into the D2 at 480p via HDMI from my Oppo OPDV971H upconverting DVD player. This was not the optimal situation for the D2, which would have preferred a 480i digital signal so that it could do the deinterlacing itself. However, the \$149 Oppo 970 — which, as noted in the introduction, outputs 480i digitally through its HDMI jack — does a more than respectable job of deinterlacing, and makes a nearly ideal DVD transport for the Statement D2. At any rate, the D2's video processor did a remarkable job of scaling the output from *Serenity* and many other SD DVDs from 480p to 720p. In the best instances, the picture from a reference-quality DVD, such as the Superbit version of *The Fifth Element*, was close enough to hi-def to make me wonder if HD is even required. Of course, standard DVD can't maintain a high enough bit rate across an entire disc to hold that level of picture quality, even with an outstanding video processor such as the D2, but it sure will breathe new life into your collection of SD DVDs.

The Statement D2's ability to process SD over-the-air and satellite feeds was more variable. The D2 was able to perform feats of near magic given anything better than a feed of marginal quality, but even the best processor needs something to work with. It seemed to have decent luck with some OTA signals and the better DirecTV feeds, but often there just weren't enough data available in the original signal to create a decent 720p picture. I blame the D2's failure to perform on some programs entirely on DirecTV, which these days compresses the signal on some channels so much that they must be coming close to achieving cold fusion. Hopefully, this situation will improve later this year, when the folks at Dish Network complete their satellite launches and move to MPEG4.

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Moving on to film, first up was the HD DVD version of *Mission: Impossible III*. I've been a huge fan of the Toshiba HD-A1, warts and all, from the day it came through the door. However, the early firmware releases of this model had horrible 1080i to 720p conversion. Even the latest release improves the conversion only to the rough equivalent of what my Panasonic projector does on its own, which is nothing to write home about. Switching the Toshiba back to 1080i output and letting the Statement D2 perform the conversion to 720p noticeably reduced motion blur on moving images in this hyperactive feature.

COMPARISON

The Statement D2's sister product, the Anthem AVM 20, has been my home-theater audio reference for a few years now, so my expectations of the D2 were high. While the audio-processing features of both products are very similar, the Statement ups the ante partly by using higher-quality parts: Wima and Nichicon capacitors in some circuits, and the latest and greatest AKM DACs and ADCs. It also upsamples and oversamples all six channels, which increases the sample rate to over 24kHz. At this rate it's relatively easy to filter out any distortion induced by the digital signal processing. In short, if you think you can hear a difference between the straight analog signal and the processed one, you're hearing things that aren't there. While the AVM 20 is an excellent processor, the Statement D2 improves on its soundstage depth, transparency, and immediacy — no small feat when you realize that the AVM 20 is one of the most highly regarded processors of the last few years.

Setting up a fair comparison of the D2's video processor was more difficult — my collection of equipment doesn't currently extend to outboard video scalars. What I did have on hand was the highly capable Oppo OPDV971H upconverting DVD player, which has embarrassed many far more expensive players. The Oppo passes nearly every benchmark with ease, and, when fed a well-mastered DVD, produces a picture that looks very close to HD. That said, there's room for improvement — the Oppo's overall scaled picture can be a little soft at times, and

I see occasional processing artifacts. This is where the power of a true graphics processor, such as the Gennum VXP in the Statement D2, can come into play, adding processing capability that isn't feasible in a budget-priced DVD player. The D2's added processing power paid dividends in nearly flawless scaled DVD images that were noticeably sharper and more free of artifacts than what the Oppo could do on its own.

"... an absolutely stellar video processor that performed beyond my wildest expectations."

CONCLUSION

Since I purchased my Anthem AVM 20, nothing has entered the house that has given me any reason to consider replacing it — until now. As an A/V control center, the Anthem Statement D2 improves on the AVM 20 in nearly every respect, and then adds an absolutely stellar video processor that performed beyond my wildest expectations.

At the price, few could ever consider the Statement D2 "inexpensive," but my long experience with the AVM 20 leads me to conclude that, for the discerning audio/videophile, the Statement D2 will prove an outstanding value. If you've got the green, it doesn't get much better than this. The Anthem Statement line is an example of audiophile evolution at its best.