



AVM 20

“They’re freaking awesome.”

E-GEAR

BY MIKE MCGANN

VOL. 3 • NO. 1

We finally reached the point where PCs have become disposable. I knew this as I rolled out of Best Buy with my \$399 PC (with a 17-inch monitor, no less). Having personally spent more than \$4,000 for a computer just a few years back, I know it can be frightening to invest a lot of cash in the newest technology only to see it become out of date right before your eyes.

So it seems do the people at Anthem. If the name rings a bell it’s because as part of Sonic Frontiers, they are the electronics side of the company that brings you Paradigm speakers. Much like Paradigm’s speakers, Anthem gear has been known as strong performing, high-end gear. While Paradigm has a

large loyal following, Anthem hasn’t gotten the publicity or attention that some other brands have gotten. It might just be time for that to change.

We managed to get our hands on the new AVM 20 preamplifier/processor (the replacement for the recently discontinued AVM 2) which throws a ton of new features into the mix, including 7.1-channels, channel level control for your DVD-A and multi-channel SACD discs. Maybe best of all, through simple software updates that you can do, and less simple hardware upgrades (including new processors and an IEEE 1394 card) that your reseller or installer might need to perform, it has the ability to cope with

virtually any new audio format as long as it doesn’t ask for more than seven main channels and two subwoofer channels. We also managed to get the brand new matching PVA 7 seven channel amp.

Both the preamplifier and the amp are available in black or silver. Sturdy doesn’t begin to describe both the left and build quality of both these units. While I won’t linger much on the details of the amp, it sends 125 watts per channel into an 8 Ohm load one channel driven (105 watts per channel, all channels driven), has an intelligently laid out back panel with lots of room for you to plug your speakers and cables (unlike a lot of multichannel amps), a patented signal-detected auto-on mode and of course the usual DC trigger.

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Under almost any other circumstances, the PVA 7 would shine. As good as it is, it's completely overshadowed by the AVM 20. Aside from all the features, some of which are too numerous to mention here, Anthem has bundled it all with a wonderfully simple user interface. Power users can set the smallest detail, even choosing bipole/dipole surrounds versus direct radiating (that kills the delay, as it isn't needed).

All of the on-screen menus are sensibly laid out and fairly easy to navigate. Custom installers (it supports two full-function zones in addition to the main surround zone) will appreciate how easy it is to customize (all of the inputs can be renamed) and do so quickly. All the settings can also be password protected from the roving teenager who thinks bass is killer. One other majorly cool feature: the AVM 20 can switch any kind of video up to 1080 progressive, with twice the bandwidth of most high-end pre-pros. It will be a very old piece of gear before 1080P is obsolete.

I zipped through the setup fairly quickly and had no problems getting everything sounding fabulous. My DVD-Audio player acted a bit oddly as I tweaked the channels, something I've never been able to do before with a pre-pro. Enjoying a number

of DVD-A discs, I was able to trim the bass (which previously seemed a bit too much) and was shocked at the clarity and detail I heard with the Anthem. Playing Natalie Merchant's *TigerLily*, the DVD-Audio player had never sounded nearly so good.

After a quick gear change, switching in a Zenith DVD-video player, my tests resumed. Dolby Digital and DTS were nearly as impressive, with the PVA 7 lacking nothing in dynamic range, and delivering more of the clarity I'd heard from the DVD-A. Stereo was equally fabulous, with excellent detail and soundstage. If someone put a gun to my head to find something negative, I'd probably whine that the backlit remote is a tad confusing to use with tiny buttons, all of which seem to have multiple functions. A unit with a small LCD, the norm in the class, might make things a bit easier. Frankly, I only bring it up so people don't think I had overdosed on happy pills while writing this review.

In case you hadn't picked up my feelings on Anthem's latest creations: They're freaking awesome. For not much more than a high-end receiver you can step way up in class. The AVM 20 is flat out the best value I've ever seen in a pre-pro and the PVA 7 amp is a perfect match. If you've been waiting for amazing, yet affordable separates, the time is now and the brand is Anthem.

ANTHEM AVM 20 PREAMPLIFIER/PROCESSOR/TUNER

- Fully software and hardware updateable
- Just about every input known to man
- Simple on screen menu • Switches 1080P video

ANTHEM PVA 7 SEVEN CHANNEL AMP

125 watts per channel into 8 Ohms, one channel driven



AVM 20 REAR PANEL