



TLP 1



PVA 2

“WARNING: ANTHEM GEAR MAY BE ADDICTIVE.”



Your guide to affordable high-performance audio

BY ERIC HETHERINGTON

I've always used integrated amplifiers—not only because I then needed to buy one less interconnect, but because they also save space, which was always at a premium in my New York City apartment. Now that I've made the move from city slicker to suburban dad, I've got space to spare and can finally explore separates.

The TLP 1 preamplifier-tuner and PVA 2 two-channel power amplifier are the entry-level models in Anthem's line. The TLP 1 shares the good looks of Anthem's AVM 20 multichannel preamp-processor-tuner, but its features have been scaled down for a two-channel system. The PVA 2 is the 125Wpc stereo sibling of the five-channel PVA 5 and seven-channel PVA 7 amplifiers. But don't mistake "entry-level" with compromised value, quality, or sound. The

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FEATURES AND SETUP

The TLP 1 and PVA 2's beautiful brushed-silver enclosures make them a pretty stylish couple. The TLP 1 comes with a simple FM/AM antenna and a universal remote from which you can control all of its features, as well as those of your DVD player, VCR, or satellite box. While the PVA 2 is pretty straightforward, the TLP 1 has several features that greatly increase its value as a tuner and preamp.

The front of the TLP 1 has a large control knob, a small display, a headphone jack, and several small buttons that control all of the preamp-tuner's functions. The display usually shows which source, volume

setting, and station frequency have been selected. The front-panel buttons are arranged logically, although having larger buttons for the functions used most often would have been helpful.

Starting on the TLP 1's left side, there are rows of three buttons each for input selection, and a seventh for selecting the recording path. The input buttons' labels—which include DVD, VCR, and Aux-Sat—indicate that Anthem expects the TLP 1 to be used in an audio/video system.

The next item to the left is the headphone jack, which provided adequate power for my Grado SR60s. This is followed by the display, and under it, two rows of buttons. The first row includes the tuner's station presets and seek function. The second row begins with

one button for balance and display brightness, three tone controls, and ends with the Mute and Contour buttons. At the end of the display are two buttons for tuning the radio, and last is a large control knob, which can be used to change volume, tune the radio, and set adjustments.

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The TLP 1’s tone and volume controls are rather sophisticated. You can set the treble and bass for each of the six inputs and the TLP 1 will remember them. This is convenient, particularly if one source (a cheap VCR, perhaps) needs more tone-control help than the others. The Contour function helps set the tone controls for low-level listening: You’ve probably noticed that when you listen at lower levels, you’re less able to hear certain frequencies. This isn’t necessarily a problem with your hearing, it’s just how the human ear works. The TLP 1’s Contour feature sets the treble and bass to compensate for this natural hearing loss, and makes low-level listening more like what you hear at higher volumes. Purists can defeat the tone controls so that the input signals bypass them. You can also set different volume levels for all of your sources, so you don’t have to worry about volume fluctuations as you preview different sources.

The TLP 1’s rear panel is almost as full of features as the front. There are two 3.5mm mini-jack inputs (one for a relay trigger, one for an infrared input), five inputs, two line-level outputs (for recording or sending the signal to a second speaker zone), two subwoofer outputs (one full-range, one low-pass), and two outputs for the power amplifier (one full-range, one high-pass). Dual outputs for the subwoofer and amplifier means that the preamp is ready to be used with full-range speakers, with or without a subwoofer—or with smaller satellite speakers accompanied by a sub. If you can use your subwoofer to set a crossover level, then send it the full-range signal; if not, use the TLP 1’s low-pass output.

The PVA 2 has a single green LED on the bottom center of its faceplate and a power button on the lower right. It’s attractive as power amps go, but if you find an out-of-the-way place for it, you won’t miss it. Anthem says to make sure there’s at least 12” of space above the PVA 2 for proper heat dissipation, but I had it running for hours at a time and it never got warm. The amp’s rear panel has left and right inputs, two speaker binding posts, and a receptacle for a power cord. One thing to note about the binding posts is that while they’re obviously of high quality, their positive and negative terminals were too far apart for the speaker cables I’ve been using, which are terminated with dual banana plugs.

There’s also a switch to select between Manual turn-on (requires you to turn the amp on from its face), Auto (the amp automatically detects when a signal is present), and Trigger (you can connect the amp to a preamp via a 3.5mm mini-jack, which will trigger the amp to turn on when the preamp is turned on). If you use the Auto or Trigger settings, the LED on the faceplate will glow red when the

amp is in standby mode, green when it’s operating.

Setting up the TLP 1 and PVA 2 was a breeze: I paired the combo with Axiom M3ti and Quad 21L speakers, the Sony SCE-775 SACD player, a Pro-Ject 1.2 turntable with Oyster cartridge, and a Rotel RCD-1070 CD player. Add a pair of Analysis Plus Solo Crystal Oval interconnects and Kimber speaker cables, and I was ready to go!

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TRIAL

The TLP 1’s tuner section was much better than the tuner in my Harman Kardon AVR-100 home-theater receiver, pulling in more stations clearly and sounding much better. The HK sounded shrill and anemic by comparison. I could get more FM stations on my Rotel RA-02 tuner, and it picked up AM signals better, but the difference was slight. Radio geeks might care that the Anthem lacks RDS, but that won’t be a sticking point for most. (When I first got the Rotel, I had fun checking various stations’ text messages with RDS, but that quickly wore off.) The Rotel’s richer sound made instruments and voices sound fuller, but if you, like most people, use your radio for casual music listening or talk shows, then the TLP 1 should serve you well.

“... the Anthem’s crisp presentation allowed me to hear each distinct voice as they interweave through the piece ... I could place the voices in different locations ... fast and dry ... very enjoyable sound ... sharply detailed and focused ... a fast, clean, clear presentation of whatever I threw at them.”

I tried the TLP 1 with both music and movies. I usually send all audio signals from my DVD player to my receiver via a digital connection, so I took out a spare pair of interconnects and connected the analog outputs to the TLP 1. While I preferred the 5.1-channel mix to the Anthems’ two-channel presentation, the TLP 1 and PVA 2 sounded better than my receiver by a long shot. Dialogue, sound effects, and film scores were much less congested, and there was much more air around all of the competing sounds than with the Harman Kardon. I sampled *The Matrix* next. As I watched Neo and Trinity enter the building to save Morpheus (chapter 29, “Lobby Shooting Spree”), I could hear many more distinct gun, bullet, and shell sound effects than with my receiver. If you don’t have room or don’t want the hassle of six or more channels, the TLP 1 and PVA 2 make an excellent two-channel home-theater alternative.

When I listened to the Tallis Scholars' rendition of Thomas Tallis's *Spem in Alium* [CD, Gimell CDGIM 006], the Anthems' crisp presentation allowed me to hear each distinct voice as they interweave throughout the piece. The Anthems did a good job in the imaging department as well, though the images were slightly flat: I could place the voices in different locations, but they seemed to all be the same distance from me. When I played more contemporary music, such as Erin McKeown's fine new *Grand* [CD, nettwerk 30307 2], the Anthems seemed fast and dry—overall, a very enjoyable sound, but, as with the Tallis piece, there was a lack of real three-dimensional heft. The baritone sax on McKeown's "The Taste of You," for example, didn't seem to be the right size.

Overall, the Anthems gave a fast, clean, clear presentation of whatever I threw at them. For their price and intended audience—someone wanting a flexible two-channel audio/video system—the Anthems are hard to beat.

"... the TLP 1 will deliver everything you could possibly need to tailor your system just the way you want it and the PVA 2 will give you all the power you could possibly want ... stylish ... sophisticated ... could be the heart of your audio/video system for a long time ... the Anthems are hard to beat!"

COMPARISON

Along with my Harman Kardon home-theater receiver, which the Anthems crushed handily, I had the Rotel RA-02 and the Rogue Audio Tempest integrated amplifiers. For its price, the Rotel is a good buy, but it was easy to hear that spending the extra money for the Anthem combo would not be in vain. The Rotel has no tuner, lacks the TLP 1's sophisticated volume and tone controls, and the Anthems offered more resolution and crisper sound.

The Rogue Audio Tempest had a much fuller, warmer sound, and was able to more convincingly project a three-dimensional soundstage. However, the Rogue costs almost \$1000 more than the Anthem combo, it has no tuner, and it's really a minimalist's machine: no tone controls or fancy volume-control settings, and a remote with only two buttons: volume up and volume down.

The Anthem products, on the other hand, can take on many more tasks: They let you tailor the sound with tone controls, listen to the radio, control your whole system from the remote, and listen through headphones. For most people, the Anthems' good sound and array of features will come up the winner.

CONCLUSION

This Anthem TLP 1 and PVA 2 could be the heart of your audio/video system for a long time. They provided a sharply detailed and focused presentation of whatever I sent to them, faltering only when compared to a product costing much more. With all its features, the TLP 1 will deliver everything you could possibly need to tailor your system just the way you want it, and the PVA 2 will give

you all the power you could reasonably want. The sound is enjoyable with music or movies.

If you want a two-channel audio/video system, check out the Anthems. Ever since I sat down to listen to them, I've been eyeing Anthem's AVM 20 and PVA 5 for my home theater. Warning: Anthem gear may be addictive.