



# Anthem MRX-1120

**R**egular readers will know that we're big fans of Anthem's AV receivers, not only because they're built like the proverbial Sherman tank and offer a full array of sensible features, but also because they come equipped with the marque's sophisticated room correction system.

ARC extracts the best possible performance from the receiver in the context of a specific room and speaker set. More about that a little later.

The MRX-1120 is the flagship of Anthem's current MRX AV receiver line-up. Cosmetically, it's near identical to the MRX-720 we reviewed a while back, but it's slightly heavier, and as the rear panel will confirm, it offers a full 11-channel complement of channels, compared to the seven of the MRX-720.

The output per channel is the same at 140 watts into 8 ohms for the fronts, and 60 watts/channel for the remainder, but the MRX-1120 does benefit from a generous toroidal transformer.

The facilities are also mirrored: multi-channel pre-output set, quad-core DSP, and a full house of inputs spanning HDMI, analogue and digital interfaces. On the video front, the Anthem is right up there at the cutting edge, offering UHD 4K 50/60 pass-through, 4.4.4 chroma subsampling at 4K/60, HDR and BT.2020 Colour.

Digital-to-analogue conversion is via 768 kHz/32-bit DACs, with all digital source signals upsampled to 32-bit depth. Additional facilities include DTS Play-Fi compatibility, a built-in FM tuner, as well as IP control and an RS-232 interface for custom installations.

As already mentioned, the silver bullet in the Anthem arsenal is the Anthem Room Correction system, which uses a specifically calibrated USB microphone to measure and plot the acoustic properties of a room, and then sets levels, delays and response curves to optimise performance. It allows a level of optimisation simply not offered by other systems – and it makes a massive difference to the final sonic performance.

Using ARC doesn't involve rocket science, despite the inherent complexity and sophistication of the system. The ARC software is Windows-based, and the laptop needs to be connected to the same network as the MRX-1120. The on-screen instructions are easy to follow, almost guaranteeing positive results.

Setting up the receiver itself is even simpler. ARC takes care of almost everything except for dialling in the distances of the speakers from the listening positions. A neat, clear graphical user interface provides intuitive access to the full suite of features.

These include input allocation, naming, configuration and activation – i.e. you can switch off those inputs you don't need. If all the channels are not needed, for instance in the absence of height-based channels for Dolby Atmos or DTS:X, they can be allocated to a separate zone.

Firmware updates are via USB on the front, with files on offer on the Anthem website, which allows the addition of upgrades and new features if and when they become available.

The MRX-1120 was hooked up to our usual Atlantic Technology 7.1 surround speaker system, with an Oppo BDP-95EU providing the AV source signal via HDMI. Visuals were presented by an Optoma HD80 DLP projector.

My copy of the original *Eric Clapton's Crossroads Guitar Festival* concert is on DVD, which only offers the older DTS 5.1 soundtrack, but the MRX-1120 never allowed this to handicap it, or to get in the way of the music, which features an excellent production and impressive directional precision, linked to a an overall sense of balance and musical realism.

The Anthem displayed ample reserves and headroom, and never sounded even remotely stressed, even when pushing the volume envelope to near-discomfort levels. Channel integration was exceptional,





ensuring that the surround sound image was seamlessly and believably projected.

Compensating for small differences in recordings was easy, thanks to on-the-fly, remote control-based adjustments for channel level, as well as bass, treble and balance trim. The sound was crisp and perfectly defined, with plenty of fine detail to add overall credence and believability to the music.

The delivery was powerful and succinct, but only to the benefit of the music – the MRX-1120 never sounded too forceful or overbearing, its iron fist carefully tempered by a velvet glove of musicality.

The Anthem was as at home with Dolby Digital as it was with DTS, although the latter seemed slightly more precise, more dimensionally defined. On the other hand there was a fluidity to the sound with Dolby Digital that was particularly appealing in the music context.

John McLaughlin's tribute to Alvin Jones was a good case in point: his rapid-fire guitar riffs sounded smoother, and were delivered with greater empathy, but weren't as dimensionally accurate.

Moving on to more recent material, the MRX-1120 revelled in the sonic challenges

of portraying the tension and the drama of the final battle between Peter Parker and the giant lizard in the last part of *The Amazing Spiderman*.

The soundtrack was presented with a rich and powerful assurance that added substance and realism to the viewing experience, aided by extremely accurate, dimensionally believable SFX steering across the surround soundstage. Dialogue was projected with clarity and intent, and the smooth integration of the surround channels created an immersive, absorbing movie experience.

The talents of the MRX-1120 extend to stereo performances – an area some AV receivers struggle with. On Melody Gardot's *The Absence* (Verve CD), the Anthem easily replicated the richness of tone and the generous imaging, while also paying close attention to nuance and detail.

The MRX-1120 does everything movie and music-wise abundantly well. Loads of muscle and headroom make short work of even taxing soundtracks and effects, while surround decoding and staging is precise and three-dimensional. There's enough oomph to fill big rooms, and for those

with a yearning for object-based surround, Dolby Atmos and DTS:X are also catered for.

In short, a worthy flagship of Anthem's excellent MRX AV receiver range.

Deon Schoeman

## VITAL STATS

Channels .....	11.2
Power output ...	140 watts per channel into 8 ohms (front channels) 60 watts per channel into 8 ohms (remaining channels)
Surround sound formats...	Dolby TrueHD, Dolby Atmos, DTS-HD Master Audio, DTS:X
DSP chips.....	Quad-core
Audio DAC .....	768 kHz/32-bit differential output
Frequency response ....	10 Hz – 31 kHz (+0, -0,25 dB)
Signal-to-noise ratio .....	110 dB
HDMI inputs/outputs.....	8/2
Analogue audio inputs ...	5x stereo RCA
Analogue audio outputs..	11.2 pre-out, stereo line-out, stereo Zone 2 out
Digital inputs/outputs ..	2x coaxial RCA, 3x Toslink optical / 1x Toslink optical
Connectivity ....	Ethernet, 802.11 Wi-Fi
Dimensions (HxWxD) .....	165 x 439 x 375 mm
Weight .....	14,5 kg

### Verdict

Anthem's flagship AVR offers all the bells and whistles, including loads of channels, object-based surround and more. ARC room correction is the real cherry on top. One of the very best.

Price ..... R86 995

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OUR RATING: 90/100

