

Over the last couple of years I've looked at a number of products from US loudspeaker manufacturer Blue Sky, covering their System One, ProDesk and MediaDesk systems for this magazine. Blue Sky have made a success of the satellite-and-sub configuration in both stereo and surround with metal dome LF drivers and built-in amplifiers offered at competitive prices, thanks to Far East manufacturing, and sounding good too. System One revealed musical detail I hadn't previously noticed in my reference CD collection, and I said at the time that although my own PMC AML1 active speakers had the edge-sound-wise I could buy a complete 5.1 surround System One set-up including bass management and still have significant change left from the cost of stereo AML15. All the Blue Sky speakers I've reviewed so far have been intended for use in the near or midfield, but I've been following for a while with interest the company's progress to market with their new mid/farfield monitor, Big Blue,

another local studio, and also to my reference CDs – Simon was very taken with the degree of 'truth' exhibited in the Big Blues' playback, where in parallel with my System One experience he noticed details not previously evident even in familiar material on the studio's usual monitors. Certainly the improvement in clarity wrought by moving from a two-way passive to a three-way plus sub active configuration was very marked, with the role of the separate mid driver being especially noticeable in contributing to a pleasantly three-dimensional yet accurate aspect of the sound and imaging.

Further listening pointed up the fact that there was very little hype to the presentation: no part of the sonic range was recessed or stuck out unduly, and we left the individual band level adjustments flat as audio already had that 'rightness' to it which often points to good monitor design and room integration. Another indicator of this is whether recording flaws show up as they should, certainly



BLUE SKY BIG BLUE LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM

and its accompanying sub. Now final design tweaks have been completed and the system is available to the world at large, does it live up to expectation?

Overview

The Big Blue SAT12 is a three-way triamplified active design in a box measuring HWD 28-inch (711mm) x 15-inch (381mm) x 17-inch (432mm including heat sink). Drivers are a 1-inch (24mm) tweeter – the same unit seen elsewhere in the range, a new 4-inch (96mm) hemispherical midrange and a 12-inch (288mm) hemispherical woofer as used in the company's SUB 12. Onboard amplifiers are a dual 200W for the woofer and midrange, together with 100W for the tweeter, contributing to a stand-alone ± 3 dB frequency response of 45Hz to 30kHz; although this a respectable measurement and the SAT12s will work well without a sub, for those who need more extension in the lowest octave an 80Hz high-pass network is included so that the SUB 15 or SUB 12 and BMC (bass management controller) can be brought into play for a response to 20Hz. Additional controls on the satellite include provision for full- and half-space compensation along with LF, MF and HF level trims and input gain control. The SUB 15 Universal is the recommended low-frequency box for this system and consists of a 15-inch (381mm) driver in a 20.75-inch (522mm) x 18-inch (456mm) x 20.63-inch (516mm) enclosure with a 1000W amplifier – multiple subs are also possible.

In Use

At my request a Big Blue 2.1 review system with SUB 15 was delivered to a local Essex studio, High Barn in Great Bardfield (www.high-barn.com). No strangers to the leading edge (the studio was the first in the UK to install a Yamaha DM2000 digital desk) house engineer Simon Allen set up the two satellites on stands and located the SUB 15 to the right of the console as space wouldn't allow a more central location. This placement didn't appear to cause imaging or other sound issues, though we quickly agreed that the sub's 30Hz mode sounded better than 20Hz in that particular room given its medium size. We listened to sessions recorded both at High Barn and at

the case here: recordings with problem areas had them displayed with a precision bordering on the ruthless, the flipside being that great productions, such as George Massenburg's work on Lyle Lovett's *Joshua Judges Ruth* album, revealed their pre-eminence in obvious contrast. We found the Big Blues' dispersion to be very wide with a large sweet spot, possibly thanks to a diffraction absorber built into the front panel, and that there seemed to be plenty of power in reserve – the system will play adequately loud for the majority of applications without compression. About the only downside that came to light on a later session when Simon was EQing a soloed bass drum was that the name badge on the sub's grille had a slight tendency to rattle at higher volumes.

Conclusion

Simon and I concluded that the Big Blue system gave a rewarding listening experience along with a potential for doing top-quality work. The approach which Blue Sky have adopted, building on previously successful principles while creating a product for a higher price point and market sector, does them credit and I have no doubt will pay off before long. This is surely a must-audition for midrange and larger studios, whether new or seeking to replace existing loudspeakers: although not cheap, I believe Big Blue will prove difficult to ignore. **AM**

THE REVIEWER

Nigel Palmer has been a freelance sound engineer and producer for over 20 years. He runs his CD mastering business, Lowland Masters (www.lowlandmasters.com), from rural Essex where he lives with his family and two dogs.

INFORMATION

📞 Blue Sky Big Blue Satellites and sub £2110 + VAT each; £6330 + VAT for a 2.1 system.

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