



Blue Sky ProDesk

BY LORENZ RYCHNER

Satellites and a sub form an impressive desktop monitoring system

A relative newcomer to the field of studio monitors, Blue Sky came onto the scene late in 2001 with the Sky System One, which consists of two Blue Sky SAT 6.5 biamplified satellite speakers and a single 200-Watt powered Sub 12 subwoofer. The new ProDesk is downscaled from that earlier system in size and power output, but made of the same materials and with much of the same design philosophy.

Two active biamped nearfield monitors, model SAT 5, and an active subwoofer, model Sub 8, make up the ProDesk 2.1 system, listed as being “specifically designed for critical mixing and monitoring on the desktop.” The owner’s manual also states that the company philosophy is “to design each product to represent the highest ratio possible of performance to cost.” A street price of just barely under \$1k (for the trio—the boxes are also available individually) raises expectations. Will the ears have it?

The satellites

The SAT 5 cabinets are made from solid 0.75" MDF with 1" front and rear baffles. They each weigh 24 lbs. and are quite small and slim at 10.88" x 6.62" x 10.23" (HxWxD). They should fit in just about anywhere, although the equilateral triangle setup is recommended (speaker-to-speaker distance equals both ear-to-speaker distances), with the tweeters at ear level and no obstructions between listener’s head and speakers. The boxes have cutouts on the underside for stand mounting and come with the right screws for OmniMount type 75 brackets.

The 0.75" tweeter is a dual concentric diaphragm with an integral waveguide, a hard pointed nozzle sticking out from the center that does the job not only of helping dispersion but also of protecting the tweeter from tactile accidents.

The 5.25" woofer has an exposed and protruding outer ring that feels delicate and seems awfully vulnera-

ble—there is no grille or other protection, so caution is advised. The boxes are fully shielded and ready for close proximity to computer monitors.

The rear of the SAT 5 contains a substantial heat sink above the socket for the detachable AC cable, fuse and on/off switch. Above the heat sink is a red power status light, an XLR balanced input, an 80 Hz Filter in/out toggle switch, and a continuous-acting Gain knob that goes from the maximum of REF at 12 o’clock down to -21 dB and beyond all the way to OFF. REF is listed as yielding 90 dB SPL at 1 meter from a 200 mV -7 dBu pink noise signal with a bandwidth of 500 Hz to 2 kHz.

The sub

The Sub 8’s enclosure is also made from 0.75" MDF with 1" front and rear baffles. It weighs 48.5 lbs. and is substantial but not unwieldy at 13" x 16" x 13.37" (HxWxD). The speaker element is an 8" hemispherical woofer behind a cloth grille.

The rear has a similar arrangement to the satellites: heat sink, AC socket, power status light, fuse, and power switch. Then there are XLR in and out connectors for the left and right channels, plus a pair of Sub In and Sub Out XLRs for ganging additional subs (at full bandwidth to about 200 Hz) or for signals from an optional external bass management controller. The sub has no highpass filter, since it is designed to work with the SAT 5 and its 80 Hz filter; there is an 80 Hz 24 dB/octave low-pass filter after the pass-through.

Amps and routing

Each SAT 5 has two power amplifiers, both rated at 60 W into 4 Ohms, with an internal crossover at 1.8 kHz and the already mentioned 80 Hz low cut for use with the Sub 8. The sub amp is listed as 100 W.

Recommended hookup involves a pair of XLR cables from a mixer's monitor outputs to the sub's L+R inputs, and another pair of XLR cables from the sub's L+R outputs to the SAT 5 inputs. The highpass filter on the SAT 5 must be active (switch IN) to let the sub handle the lows while each SAT 5 takes care of the range from the upper lows to the highs.

Listening to the SAT 5

I decided to acquaint my ears with just the voice of the SAT 5 before involving the sub, so I defeated the highpass filters and fed the SAT 5 inputs directly, bypassing the sub. I'm glad I did. I heard enough bass on much of the listening materials I brought up; in fact I heard more bass than from similarly sized speakers that were not designed to team up with a sub.

But let's start at the top, with cymbals and brushes, always a good test for any tweeter. The little guy in the SAT 5 delivered honorable performances on intricate program material. I tried to trip it up with brutal biting brass attacks from various contemporary big band recordings and from percussion samples, but the transients wouldn't smear or break up. Anne-Sophie Mutter's splendid 1993 violin showcase (*Carmen Fantasie*, Deutsche Grammophon 437 544-2) was delivered in all its in-your-face star turn glory, leaving no doubt as to what string a passage was played on, and showing plenty of rosin in passages where the soloist is digging in.

Voices stand out on this speaker, so much so that I felt I had encounters of the personal kind across a coffee table with ladies like the assertive

Vanessa Carlton and the freewheeling Erykah Badu. No complaints here. Guitars had bite when needed, and pianos had a sheen in instances where I didn't remember them sounding as full yet bright.

While I wasn't focusing onto the low end at that stage, I was just thinking that it was sufficiently rich and deep for a speaker of this size when Erykah Badu began asking for a rimshot (Track 1 on *Baduizm*), reminding me that I'd better fire up the sub if I wanted to enjoy the massive bass on her tracks.

Listening to the full system

It didn't take long to hook up the additional cables to the sub that I placed on a desk-high tablet behind the computer desk, to avoid floor-induced bass boom (pointy "feet" are supplied to de-couple the cabinet from whatever surface it stands on). I turned on the high-pass filters on the SAT 5 boxes and set all gain knobs to REF. I was delighted to hear absolutely no mush in *Baduizm* track 4 ("other side of the game"), a mix with sustaining low bass and sustaining dense keyboard chords, a combination that can embarrass many a speaker.

I rounded out the listening sessions with Gary Garritan's orchestral strings and other samples, and with sounds from works in progress. After many hours of continuous listening I detected no listener fatigue, for which I am grateful.

Conclusions

I can recommend this system to any recording musician, and especially to those who need highly accurate monitoring in physically confined spaces and



in the vicinity of computer equipment. The overall sound of this system is open and forward, bringing out voices with distinction. The placement of the sub is not critical, although some experimentation with positioning is recommended. When placed favorably, the sub combines sonically very well with

the SAT 5 boxes for a seamless sonic integration. There is none of the exaggerated sonic heft from the sub that we sometimes hear from systems where the addition of a sub may have been an afterthought. To answer my own question from this article's preamble: Budget allowing, the ears definitely have it.

Price: \$1195

More from: Blue Sky International, 200 Sea Lane, Farmingdale, NY 11735. 631/249-1399, fax 631/753-1020, www.abluesky.com.

