



May 2002 Keyboard Magazine
POWERED MONITORS
 by Ken Hughes

blue sky Magazine Reprint **bs80051a**
 Reproduced From **Keyboard Magazine**
 Product **Sky Sytem One**



Powered, integrated subwoofer and satellite monitor system.

Pros: Smooth, non-fatiguing highs, clear, focused mids, strong but balanced bass reproduction. Attractive price. Techy look.

Cons: System requires a fairly large room to really show its subsonic stuff.
 Blue Sky, 631-249-1399, www.abluesky.com
 \$1,595

1. Smooth mica-filled polypropylene cones (sourced in China and made exclusively for Blue Sky) look spacey, sound wonderful.
2. Danish tweeters have a wide dispersion pattern that helps enlarge the “sweet spot.”
3. Power amps aren’t centralized in the sub; each component houses its own.
4. System is THX pm3 certified. Skywalker Sound ordered over 40 systems.
5. Satellites feature threaded inserts for OmniMount brackets; subwoofer’s inserts accept spiked or rubber feet.

Vital Stats Chart

Satellites	
Power	100W (high)+ 100W (mid) into 4 ohms
Components	custom 6.5” mica-filled polypropylene hemispherical woofer cone, tweeter with dual concentric diaphragm and integral wave guide
Controls	input gain, power switch
Audio I/O	XLR input
Subwoofer	
Power	200W into 4 ohms
Components	custom 12” mica-filled polypropylene cone
Controls	sub gain, phase reverse, auto mute on/off, power switch
Audio I/O	L/R XLR inputs; L/R XLR crossover outputs, XLR sub in/out
Dimensions/weight	
Satellites	12”H x 8”W x 10-1/4”D, 27 lbs.
Subwoofer	18”H x 16”W x 20”D, 62 lbs.

**REPRINTED
MAGAZINE
ARTICLE**

If you produce hip-hop or dance tracks in a smallish space, you've likely struggled with the problem of how to get the right amount of bass into your mixes so they sound bumpin' anywhere you play them back. With typical nearfield monitors it can be really difficult to put the right amount of subsonic energy into your mix. Maybe you've tried adding a subwoofer, and got even weirder results because the sub and your nearfields weren't necessarily designed to go together. Blue Sky aims to change all that with the concept of "2.1" monitors, systems designed from the ground up as integrated sub-and-satellite (two sats + one sub = 2.1) systems.

Setup

The Sky System One is easy to set up, and the manual provides some helpful diagrams and tips for getting the best imaging and balance. Signals enter the sub first. They're passed through the active crossover and then to the left and right outputs, which connect to the satellites. The system is factory-calibrated, so that everything's theoretically balanced at full gain. The frequency response of your room, however, may not be ideal, and to help with that an expanded setup guide details how to use an SPL meter, realtime analyzer, and pink noise generator to optimize the level and phase of the sub relative to the satellites. Our review system was from an early production run. One of the satellites was prone to overheating and thermal shutdown due to a manufacturing error. Blue Sky rushed us a randomly-selected replacement unit and we experienced no further problems.

Sound

At first the high end seemed hyped compared to the Tannoy Limpets and Genelec 1030A's I'm used to. After long listening and mixing sessions, though, my ears were less fatigued than usual. The highs aren't hyped, they're just more open and detailed.

You'd expect to get monstrous bass from a system like this, at least compared to a conventional pair of nearfield monitors. What you actually get is just way extended bass response. One of the things I listened to was Thomas Dolby's recent self-release *Forty*. It was recorded live and mixed and mastered in home studios. I was curious to see if the System One would reveal any sonic mayhem in the nether regions that the mix monitors had hidden from Dolby and his engineer, Matt Levine. As it turned out, there wasn't any mud down there, but there was some amazing sub-bass energy on "One of Our Submarines." In my little Keyboard workspace, it made my eardrums flutter.

In Use

Using the Blue Sky system to listen to some of my own mixes and some CDs I know well, and to actually do a mix on, I learned a lot. With some of the CDs, I heard things I hadn't heard before. The openness of the high end makes reverb easier to hear, and as a result some of the tracks took on a slightly more ambient quality, which was a little surprising. When I mixed on the system, I found myself adding even less than the barely audible amount of verb I usually use. Even that seemed like too much, and it made an audible difference when I played back the mixes on other systems. I heard background noises on a vocal track I'd never noticed before. Vibrations from my front door opening and closing while the red light was on could be heard, or rather felt, for the first time. A whole new world of artifacts and unwanted sonic goobers was subtly revealed by the System One. I was thrilled. And crushed.

My workspace here at Keyboard is quite small, and my home studio isn't much bigger. I was unable to take best advantage of the subwoofer in either space; bass wavelengths are longer than the dimensions of either room. In the 15' x 25' Keyboard sound lab, though, it was another story! It was there, working after hours when the building is quiet, that the thumps and bumps in my tracks made themselves known. I suspect most Keyboard readers work in smallish spaces, and the price of this system brings it within reach of the bedroom studio. While the Sky System One would be a killer choice for rooms 15' x 25' or larger, we spare-room studio guys might want to wait for the smaller ProDesk system, coming out soon at an even more affordable \$1,195. It'll feature an 8" sub that won't overpower smaller rooms and 5-1/4" satellites with the same high-frequency drivers as on the System One.



Conclusions

Using the Sky System One was an eye-opening experience. I've heard comparable audio before, but not at these prices. I really liked having the extended bass response; my mixes sounded less bass-heavy because I wasn't trying to compensate for the comparatively puny bass response of the Tannoys at home and the Genelecs at Keyboard (neither of which exactly suck).

I also appreciated the open sound of the upper end of the spectrum. Vocals sang out clearly and with nice air, without being harsh or strident. Acoustic pianos and guitars sparkled with a little extra life, and hi-hats and cymbals sizzled pleasingly.

The System One's sound quality isn't unprecedented, but it costs about \$1,000 less than its nearest rival, a superficially comparable but not purpose-designed sub-and-sat setup. And even then, it's arguable that the other system isn't a true competitor, not having been designed from the outset as an integrated system. To approach the smooth, round, pleasing, seamless nature of audio emanating from the Sky System, you'd have to spend a lot more. Before you take the stance that 2.1 monitoring is just marketing hype, audition a Blue Sky System One or ProDesk.

Ken Hughes has a few blue sky plans of his own about reconfiguring his home studio. Most of them begin: "Step one – Win lottery."

Copyright 2002 by KEYBOARD MAGAZINE.
Used by permission.

In a policy of continuous product development, blue sky international reserve the right to change features and specifications without notice. copyright ©
blue sky International, 2002. All rights reserved.