

Blue Sky

MUSIC TECH MAGAZINE
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ProDesk Active 2.1 monitoring system

With so many new small studio monitors to choose from, you may find your judgement becoming clouded, but **Dave Foister** looks straight ahead and sees nothing but Blue Sky...



ProDesk: The attractive and substantial design of Blue Sky's new monitors is certainly matched by their performance – they produced exceptional results in all our tests.

Kit ProDesk Sat 5/Sub 8 active 2.1 monitoring system

Manufacturer **Blue Sky**

Price **£825**

Contact **Sonic Distribution 01582 843900**

Web **www.abluesky.com**

In an age when everyone with a decent soundcard and a CD burner can produce results comparable with professional studios, the only components where vast differences still exist are transducers – the parts which turn sound into electricity and back again. However, even that's changing. With quality microphones now becoming more and more accessible, it's really only loudspeakers which remain immune to the digitising and cost-saving trends that have made everything else so much more affordable. Proper studio monitors still cost big bucks, and finding anything in a compact real-world form that approximates to their accuracy and revealing nature is difficult.

Blue Sky is a US outfit that's wading into the crowded monitor pool with a portfolio of products which covers stereo and surround monitoring, with a unified approach to the problems. The literature regularly refers to 2.1 monitoring – not quite such a familiar nomenclature as 5.1, but common enough in domestic applications. Fundamental to the whole range is the use of active monitors, with purpose-built power amps on board and advanced electronic crossovers.

Blue Sky makes much of its use of BOO design technology. BOO stands for Binary Organic Optimization, and is an approach to system and circuit design that uses the concept of evolution to determine the optimum configuration for a given set of drivers. The big stereo (2.1) system that has been developed from this is called Sky System One, but the same technology is used, and the same requirements addressed, in a smaller package they have called ProDesk, claiming essentially similar performance with a lower output capability and with slightly smaller boxes.

These monitors could transform your working environment...

Active monitors are becoming increasingly popular in most applications, and the Blue Sky Sat 5 and Sub 8 combine this approach with the satellite-and-sub configuration to good effect. Built of substantial MDF panels and finished in silver grey, with exposed drivers in the main pair, the system looks good and certainly feels substantial enough to do the job. The driver complement is revealed starkly on the front panel, and comprises a proprietary mid/low unit, with its unusual inverted dome appearance, along with a Danish tweeter featuring a bullet-shaped projection in the centre, which looks like it wouldn't appreciate rough handling.

The back of an active box always bristles with hardware that looks a little out of place on a loudspeaker cabinet, and the Sat 5 is no

exception. Almost half of it is taken up with the amplifiers' heatsink: with two 60W amps in here, proper cooling is required. Input is via an XLR for line-level signals, and there's a calibrated gain control which sits below it to match the system to your desk's monitor output level.

On the test system, this runs at standard line level and nearly blew the windows out as soon as the desk's monitor control was nudged up with the Sat 5's knobs in their Ref position. It ended up with them down at -21dB for volume settings in line with the usual monitor setup. Of course, there's also an IEC

mains input connector with associated fuse and switch. Strangely, the On LED is at the back as well.

While the pair of Sat 5s sit in a normal nearfield or desktop position, the Sub 8 has to be found a home somewhere out of sight. However, since it's acknowledged that it's virtually impossible to localise the kind of frequencies that come out of a subwoofer, it should be fine sat on the floor behind the desk or under it, over in a corner – in fact, anywhere that's out of the way. That said, the manual sensibly points out that room resonances will affect its apparent output, depending on where you put it, so a little experimentation may be required.

It's obviously much bigger than the Sat 5s, largely because it contains an 8-inch driver

and provides enough space for it to work in, but it's still surprisingly compact. Unlike the satellites, it has a grille over the driver, but that doesn't look like it would offer much resistance to a stray foot, so you'll need to position it with care, particularly under the console. It too has a large heatsink (to cope with its 100W amplifier) and considerably more connectors since the entire monitor signal has to be fed through it and out to the satellites in order for it to extract the sub-bass information.

Because of this, it has stereo Input and Output XLRs, and also Direct In and Out connectors for hooking up a second Sub 8, if required. Unlike the bigger system, the Sub 8 doesn't incorporate the necessary high-pass filter to remove the bottom end from the feed to the satellites, and a switch on the back of the Sat 5s can be used to roll off everything below 80Hz. This allows the Sat 5s to be used as standalone speakers (without a sub) simply by switching the filter out.

The ProDesk system delivered to us was brand new because it needed an hour or two to run in before it was delivering its best. This created a slightly unfavourable first impression, but that was soon dispelled when the components settled down to produce a hugely impressive result. The monitors that usually reside in our test kit are so good that few others can come close to them, but with the ProDesk setup this wasn't the case – they were used throughout sessions, and were easily of comparable quality. One particular test session involved a room full of percussion, including two orchestral bass drums, which really put them through their paces – the sub did a spectacular job of moving lots of air around, without pulling the image away from the main pair.

Fitting in nicely with Blue Sky's sensible recommendation that you set the system up using material you're really familiar with, we tested the monitors with a compilation of recorded extracts that we use as a standard performance test. Everything on there passed with flying colours, from the difficult hi-hat that all too easily goes thick and edgy, to the big bass drum in the *Rite of Spring*, clear vocals and massive orchestral sounds with precise localisation of everything in the image. Overall, a very impressive performance. These are genuine, real-world monitors and could, quite literally, transform your desktop working environment and the results you can expect from it.

Yet more good news comes in the form of Sonic Distribution's loan scheme which enables you to try the Blue Sky monitors for free. Give them a call for details. [MTM](#)

MTM summary

Key features

- .75-inch tweeter and 5.25-inch hemispherical woofer
- Dual 60W power into 4 Ohm
- THD and noise rated at 0.1% at 1kHz
- Sensitivity levels are 200mV=90dB SPL at 1m
- Frequency response is +/-1.5dB 200 to 10kHz +/-3.0dB 20 to 20kHz

Why buy

- Superb sound
- Ample power
- Excellent imaging
- Convenient space-saving format

Walk on by

- Slightly complex setup
- Could be susceptible to accidental physical damage

Verdict

ProDesk gives you a trustworthy, big sound from your desktop that leaves conventional small speakers in the shade. With its sub so well integrated with the satellites, this is a seamless sound with plenty of extension at both ends of the spectrum, and the kind of transparency that's essential for accurate monitoring. Well worth looking at for quality monitoring in restricted space, with a performance that really belies its size.

