

BLUE SKY

SKY SYSTEM ONE

SUBWOOFER INCLUDED

by Rusty Cutchin

The audio industry has set off an explosion of choices in powered monitors. This is the third set we've covered in three months, with many more on the horizon. Not only are new speakers arriving at our door almost daily, but the shift to surround setups means a studio owner has to factor subwoofers into the mix, both literally and figuratively. Also, manufacturers have started developing monitors with 6.5" drivers and touting their bass-reproduction abilities as evidence that they can be used either alone or with a sub while still providing effective full-range monitoring.

Not Blue Sky International. The new company respectfully pooh-poohs the idea that a subwoofer is optional today, because more and more consumers are installing 5.1 surround home theater systems, and music producers are creating club like environments in their studios. Once you hear the Sky System One, you'll wonder why you thought you could do without a subwoofer.

BASS NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT

The Sky System One features the Sat 6.5 powered satellite speakers and the Sub 12 powered subwoofer. The system can form the basis of a 5.1 surround setup, but is completely viable as a stereo system on its own, providing a monitoring scheme that Blue Sky

labels, logically enough, 2.1.

The Sat 6.5's provide 100 watts each to their drivers and 200 watts to the Sub 12. A distinctive solid-silver cone on the 6.5 handles the midrange frequencies, accompanied by a unique protruding cone for the tweeter. (It looks fragile, but it isn't.) Save for the nameplate, these are the only components on the front panel (There are no ports in the cabinets, because they're not designed to be used without the sub.) In contrast to almost all other powered monitors we've looked at recently, the power indicator is on the rear panel, which will render it invisible in most small studio setups. Although a built-in auto-mute circuit on the Sub 12 will kick in after 15 minutes of inactivity, cutting the output to all speakers, the power amps will still work. A rear-panel heatsink was noticeably warm after being left on all weekend, compared to its powered-off mate. Use a power strip with indicator light to turn the monitors off when not in use.

The rest of the rear-panel layout is mercifully simple, featuring a balanced XLR connector, a power switch, power cable receptacle, and fuse cap; and a gain pot, which full up is referenced to 200 mV = 90 dB at 1 meter. The pot cuts gain down to 0 dB.

The Sub 12 is a front-firing unit that provides similarly basic setup and operation—two XLR inputs for the left/right output of your mixer, two XLR outputs for the Sat 6.5's; and dedicated Sub In/Sub Out connectors. These last are for use with an external bass-management controller when the Sub 12 (or



two Sub 12's) is part of a larger surround system. The left and right inputs feed highpass and lowpass filters crossed over at 80 Hz, which in turn feed the drivers of the Sat 6.5's and Sub 12, respectively. Switches to disable the auto-mute function and reverse phase as well as the all-important Sub gain pot round out the Sub 12's rear panel.

SOUND SIMPLICITY

The Sky System One is characterized by three qualities: smart design, easy setup, and great sound. As one who has never been satisfied with the sound of 6" drivers and felt annoyed by the need to integrate subwoofers into the studio, I welcomed with open arms the simplicity of setting up the Sky System One. Set up the mains, plop the sub down between them on the floor (Blue Sky's recommended starting point), connect the board to the sub and the sub to the satellites, turn 'em all on, and adjust the sub to taste. In most cases, that'll be it. You can, of course, get out your RTA and adjust from there, though if you move the sub outside the vertical plane, you might need the phase switch.

But with a minimum of setup worry, you'll have an excellent monitoring system, because the System One sounds great. You'll get crisp, clean highs and enough power to pump hip-hop through the neighborhood or to drop in sound effects for that Concorde documentary. But don't just take my word for it. According to Blue Sky, Skywalker Sound installed over 40 Sky System Ones to provide consistency from studio to studio. That alone ought to be enough to bet your bottom dollar.

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