

REVIEWS



Yamaha, KRK, Blue Sky Monitor Systems

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SMALL POWERED STEREO MONITORS augmented by a single powered subwoofer offer some distinct advantages to the modern home studio. The stereo pair can fit nicely on the desktop while the sub can be tucked away under the desk or in a side space. Pro and semi-pro desktop monitors in this group are magnetically shielded, so they don't adversely affect computer monitors. And replacing your current monitors with this kind of system will give you a good start on a full-blown 5.1 surround system, which may very well be what every studio has in the future.

The three compact systems by Yamaha, KRK, and Blue Sky that have made their way into *Home Recording's* studio over the last couple of months share these features and two others—they sound very good and require a minimum of fuss to get you up to speed and right to work. Choosing one system to buy among them will boil down to your ears, your budget, and your work habits.

YAMAHA MSP5/YST-SW305

Yamaha's MSP5s are worthy successors to the company's discontinued NS10M monitors. The midrange and high-frequency reproduction of these monitors is classic Yamaha sound—crystal clear and undistorted (without the NS10's infamous need for modification by tissue paper). If you haven't heard the amount of bass that speaker

designers are getting out of small cabinets with drivers under 6", these will amaze you. Incorporating the recommended SW305 subwoofer into the mix creates a system with enough bottom and power (101 dB SPL @ 1 m) to tackle hip-hop in a bedroom. The amps provide 40W to the 5" low-frequency driver and 27W to the 1" tweeter with a crossover frequency of 2.5 kHz.

The MSP5s use two small front ports to aid bass response. Slide switches on the rear panel



The SW305 subwoofer contains dual 8" drivers and features front-panel controls for volume and HF cut. The controls are at the top of the unit, making it easily adjustable from a chair when the unit is positioned

a desk. Together, the MSP5s and SW305 sound great, with a deep bottom that avoids muddiness, a pristine high end, and enough power to blast your neighbors out of a sound sleep without requiring a forklift to load the system into your studio.

One potential drawback to a heavy-use studio: Although it's an excellent sonic match for the MSP5s, the sub was designed as a consumer product, and offers only two phono-plug inputs to access the built-in 200W power amp. Yamaha provides Y-cables and adapters to pass the stereo signal on to the MSP5s. It's a fragile setup, limits the distance you can impose from the speakers to the sub, and forces you to use the unbalanced inputs on the MSP5s. But overall, the cost-effectiveness, sound quality, and versatility of this system make it a must-hear option.

subsonic filter removes low-frequency info below 32 Hz, making the LF amp function more efficiently. Amplifiers provide 15W to the tweeter and 30W to the woofer.

The rear panel houses the input and power cable connections, plus a screwdriver preset control to set input gain from +6 dB to -30 dB. A Neutrik combi connector accepts balanced XLRs or TRS plugs, or unbalanced 1/4" cables.

The S8 subwoofer also uses the distinctive yellow woven Kevlar cone material. Its 100W amplifier is augmented with a variable low-pass filter (50-130 Hz @ 12 dB/octave) and a phase switch for adjusting the crossover frequency and polarity to match various satellite monitors.

KRK V4/S8

No cabling concerns affect KRK's V4/S8 tandem (or the Blue Sky system described below). When these babies are hooked up, you know you've got a pro-level system. With a +4 dBu signal, the V4s will give you an SPL of 104 dB with one 4" driver in each main monitor and one 8" speaker in the sub cabinet. This is a stunning output from cabinets this small, but volume alone is obviously not going to drive a buying decision. The good news is that the accuracy and clarity of KRK's high-end systems are designed right into the V4/S8 combination.

The V4, which is ported through a slot at the bottom of the front baffle, features a 1" soft-dome tweeter and a 4" woven Kevlar bass/midrange driver. The tweeter and LF center domes are vertically aligned. The crossover point is 1.7 kHz. A 12 dB/octave

CONTACT

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If there were a spec for the sound quality-to-footprint ratio, the V4/S8 system would win hands down. The system has been compared to true reference monitors, and it's hard to dispute that characterization. You get what you pay for, though. The total price of two V4s and an S8 comes in at just under \$1,850, but if you're doing serious work in a tight space, you'll likely feel that the quality of this system more than justifies the cost.

BLUE SKY PRODESK

If there's a middle ground in this area, the Blue Sky system occupies it. A true 2.1 system, Blue Sky's ProDesk comes as an integrated three-piece design.

The SAT 5 bi-amplified speaker features a cast-aluminum frame, 5.25" woofer, and a .75" dual concentric diaphragm tweeter with wave guide. Each speaker is powered by a 60W amplifier with a computer

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optimized electronic crossover, and has a listed frequency response of 80 Hz–20 kHz, +3 dB (200 Hz–10 kHz, +1.5 dB). On the rear panel there is a power switch, gain control with LED power indicator, 80 Hz highpass filter switch, and a balanced XLR input.

The Blue Sky Sub 8 features a cast-aluminum frame, 8" woofer with a 2" voice coil driven by a 100W amplifier with a frequency response of 30 Hz–200Hz (+3 dB). The Sub 8 has a built-in 2.1 bass management system with an 80 Hz lowpass filter matched to 80 Hz highpass filters in each satellite. Rear-panel functions include right/left I/O, sub I/O (for connecting multiple subwoofers), and sub gain and power LED in addition to the power switch and fuse holder.

The ProDesk system is a compelling choice. Besides easy setup of the system (the only adjustments would be engaging the highpass

filters on the satellites), Blue Sky offers some unique extras. The SAT 5s come standard with wall-mounting inserts, and the Sub 8 features a remote control port, for use with an optional Functional Volume Control (FVC), giving computer-only recordists easy desktop control over total system volume. Most important, the ProDesk system sounds great—it has a flat frequency response, good stereo imaging, full, rich bass without murkiness, and enough power to handle any kind of production needs in a tight space. It was tough to hear the slight improvement in detail afforded by the KRK system.

ALL IN ALL

I would have no problem at all mixing on any of the three systems described here. They each provide solid, reliable monitoring while being very distinct. The Yamaha system, which could be construed as having the most "standard" studio sound, is also the funkier, with its mismatched connection between sub and satellite. Its sub is also an "add-on," meaning the same frequencies are being produced by the MSP5s. But if you use higher-quality cables and adapters than those provided by Yamaha, this is an excellent system for the money.

A more difficult choice, and the one I personally would have to make, would be between the KRK and Blue Sky systems. KRK's first-rate sound quality and reputation make the V4/S8 tandem the clear choice for the semi-pro project studio with limited operating room. But I am a sucker for a good deal, and the ProDesk's combination of value (its list price is \$650 less than the KRK system), sound quality, and features can't be ignored. Yes, its pricing benefits from the system being manufactured in China, and Blue Sky is the new kid on the block, so repair and parts considerations have to be factored in. But several pro studios have adopted the company's flagship Sky System One, and it looks like the Sky's the limit at this writing. That's a combination of factors that sells me every time. 🎧🎧🎧

I WOULD HAVE NO PROBLEM AT ALL MIXING ON ANY OF THE SYSTEMS DESCRIBED HERE. THEY EACH PROVIDE SOLID, RELIABLE MONITORING.

more than styx

BadMama BigGruv
ChooChoo Mistake
KeltCope Little Suzi
Ethreal Ballade
Simple Pop Swingin' Jack
Tommin Tribal
Junglehard Junglemellow
Shuffle Silnky Witness

If you need rock loops, you couldn't do a whole lot better than these; they sound great, cover a lot of ground, and offer the variety necessary to find a good fit for a song.

-- Thad Brown

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