

Definitive Technology

ProCinema 800 Speaker System

For years, Baltimore's Definitive Technology has produced phalanxes of tall, imposing, powerful floor-standing towers. Nevertheless, the eyes of the company founder Sandy Gross always seem to take on a special twinkle when he sings the praises of his latest pint-size production, which suggests he gets a special buzz out of squeezing the most from the leastest — like the ProCinema 800 array seen here. Not pint-size, exactly (quart-and-a-half would be closer), but impressively small nonetheless, Definitive's latest ProMonitor 800 satellite design employs an unusually located passive radiator firing straight up to help the bantamweight speaker produce enough low-frequency output to

"reach" and blend with a subwoofer effectively. The same technique is found in the matching center channel, in doubles.

"A must-hear ... very pleasing and surprisingly high-end sounding"

SETUP

Definitive sent a pair of their inexpensive fixed-height stands for the front speakers, which worked fine in my room. The ProCenter went on a stand below my 50-inch Samsung's screen. It has no tilt adjustment built in, and only one rubber foot (the front edge has molded-in hard feet), but I dialed in the substantial uptilt I need using a couple of stick-on feet I had lying around. The ProMonitors for the surround channels went on my high shelves flanking the listening position, angled back to bounce off the rear wall as I usually do with direct-radiating surrounds.

Acoustical balancing was a bit more involved. First, I found that all three front speakers benefited greatly from a little tilt: Rocking them back on their heels several degrees made important improvements, opening and defining the upper mids and airing up

the treble. Proper adjustment of the subwoofer level and crossover also proved absolutely critical. After initial meter balancing, the system sounded a bit disappointing: heavy in the mid-bass and not particularly impressive down low. What a transformation was won by an hour or so of fiddling! I finished with a superb blend almost entirely free of boom or bloat, and with surprisingly deep-bass extension. But too much sub level (or too high a crossover) and the Definitives could sound "woofy" or a bit bloated (and the sub would localize); too little or too low and they could become gaunt.

Small differences of even 1 dB in sub level made very obvious changes, as did experimentation with crossover settings. I settled on 75-Hz crossover from my flexible processor, with 6-dB high-pass and 24-dB/low-pass curves — which, as it happens, is pretty much what Definitive's own circuits yield if you use the sub's speaker-level inputs instead of the LFE/line connection I employed. The fixed 80-Hz filters of many inexpensive receivers, which use 12-dB/24-DB per-octave filter slopes, should also work quite well.

"this is a marvelously high-value system"

MUSIC PERFORMANCE

A brief session with the ProMonitors playing full-range alone confirmed that they don't produce enough bass for satisfying sound on their own — but that nonetheless they play amazingly loud without obvious distress. These are strictly satellite speakers, but they do go lower and louder than I've had guessed on sight.

With the system tweaked and tailored, I started as usual with stereo listening, finding a generally neutral, open sound with a slightly warm cast to male

The Short Form

Snapshot

A must-hear for those who insist on a very small, accessibly priced system.

Plus

- ⚡ Excellent overall tonality.
- ⚡ Good bass output, extension.
- ⚡ Surprising volume potential.

Minus

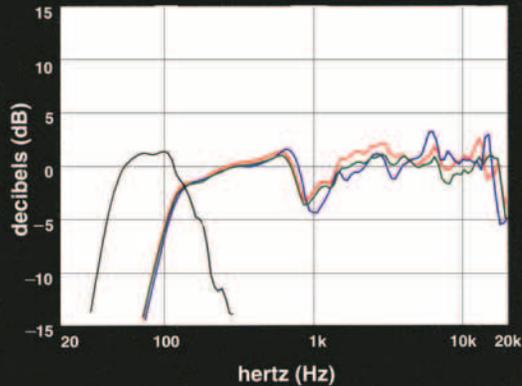
- ⚡ Needs careful setup. (But don't they all?)
- ⚡ Center shifts tone at off-axis seats.

Price \$1,099 (AS TESTED)



Test Bench

Full lab results at soundandvisionmag.com/deftech800.



L/R 124 Hz to 18.2 kHz ± 2.9 dB Surround 124 Hz to 18 kHz ± 2.7 dB
Center 120 Hz to 16.1 kHz ± 4.0 dB Subwoofer 44 Hz to 150 Hz ± 2.3 dB

This system has smooth response blemished primarily by a depression centered just below 1 kHz. The subwoofer's high-frequency response to 150 Hz mates well with the limited bass of the upper-channel speakers. It has good low-end extension for a small sub, delivering true 25-Hz output, but only at 76 dB, revealing its dynamic limitations. It averaged 95 dB from 25 to 62 Hz, and put out 103.7 dB max SPL at 62 Hz, all at less than 10% distortion. — *Tom Nousaine*

“pleasant, easy-to-listen-to ... open and airy ... plenty of heft”

vocals and a pleasant, easy-to-listen-to treble that was open and fairly airy without excess bit or sizzle. Clean, well-recorded CDs like Ani DiFranco's *Relieve* were very pleasing and surprisingly high-end-sounding, with modest depth, some genuine transparency, and considerable more weight and impact from the below-50-Hz region than I'd expected. The solo acoustic bass was tight and realistically woody, but still had plenty of heft for its occasional ventures below 60 Hz or so. The Definitive system also displayed arresting clarity on stuff like the explosively compressed, crystalline Dobro (or whatever that is) that enters, startlingly, a bit later.

The ProMonitors (and ProCenter, for that matter) could play cleanly far louder than expected — about as loud as plenty of much larger small-bookshelf speakers I've heard. In fact, their tweeters ran out of headroom (resulting in hardness and “shriekiness”) at about the same time as their woofers (flatulating, and “tup-tuping” on transients), which is quite rare among mini-sats of this size. And since Definitive's tweeter is no slouch, this was rather loud indeed.

“a tight, well-integrated ‘screenstage’”

MOVIE PERFORMANCE

The little Definitives' performance on even demanding soundtracks was, if anything, even more pleasing. *Collateral* may be no *Citizen Kane*, but it's an expertly made movie in technical terms, and the

ProMonitors handled it with relative ease. From moderate to fairly loud volume — say, about 6 dB below commercial-cinema reference level — I never once came out of the story because of a sonic shortcoming.

The ProCenter did a great job on dialogue, and as the system's music-and-effects keystone player (the center is always the most important speaker in any movie-surround system). It made an excellent tonal match to the ProMonitors, producing a tight, well-integrated “screenstage.” On the other hand, it demonstrated moderately audible tonal changes when heard from more than about 30° off-axis, becoming slightly muffled and hollow-sounding on many male voices (a common effect of “lobing” response from closely spaced dual woofer/midranges). And like the ProMonitors, the center proved quite sensitive to vertical aiming: As I've mentioned, to keep sounds evenly bright, I had to tilt it up a good bit on my low stand.

“played unexpectedly loudly and cleanly”

I was also very happy with the ProMonitors at the rear corners. When angled well back to reflect sound from the rear wall as I've described, the little 800s worked particularly well for plain, non-dipole 2-way surrounds. (Truly small 2-ways like these always seem to work well in this configuration, probably because their small-diameter mid/woofers are sufficiently wide-dispersion to avoid the “beaming” that might otherwise help the ear localize them.)

Despite its diminutive, roughly 6-gallon form (smaller than a Texan's lid!), the ProSub 800 proved a worthy support. This little sub produced ample, reasonably even output considerably lower than many inexpensive 8-inchers (about 35 Hz or so), rolling off fairly quickly below that point. And it played unex-

pectedly loudly and cleanly: The Definitive would become a bit “grumbly” at very high levels, but thanks no doubt to intelligently engineered limiting circuits, I had to push it to ludicrous settings well beyond THX-reference from the overall system to elicit gross rattles or thumps. It had plenty of bottom for thumping of *Collateral*'s climactic club scene, which indeed the full system delivered in fine, loudly enveloping, smoothly claustrophobic fashion. That

“I don't think you can do very much better.”

said, the ProSub 800 doesn't have the bottom-octave grunt for fully cinematic deep-bass — the near-infrasonic content of a T.rex footfall or the underpinnings of the ram's-horn calls of those War of the World's thingies — but it does impressively just the same. (Reality check: This is a \$399 subwoofer. And there's a 10-inch ProSub 1000 [\$499] that might well do better still.)

Bottom Line

This is a marvelously high-value system for smaller rooms — and even some not-all-that-small ones. If you've simply got to have really small and (by serious home theater standards) really cheap speakers, I don't think you can do much better. **SAV**

Key Features

ProMonitors 800

⚡ (\$250/pair) 1-in. dome tweeter; 4¹/₂-in. mid/woofer; 4¹/₂-in. passive radiator; 8³/₈-in. high; 4 lb.

ProCenter 1000

⚡ (\$200/pair) 1-in. dome tweeter; (2) 4¹/₂-in. mid/woofers; (2) 4¹/₂-in. passive radiators; 5-in. high; 8 lb.

ProSub 800

⚡ (\$399) 8-in. driver; 8-in. passive radiator; 300-watt RMS amplifier; 12¹/₂ x 14¹/₄ x 13¹/₂-in.; 41 lb.

⚡ Finish: Gloss-black, matte-white, silver. Subwoofer: black ash or white vinyl.

DEFINITIVETECH.COM :: 410-363-7148

Definitive Technology[®]
The Leader in High-Performance Loudspeakers[®]

11433 Cronridge Dr. • Owings Mills, MD 21117
(410) 363-7148

Visit us at www.definitivetech.com