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## Focal XS Multimedia Sound System Review

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Many audiophiles are very familiar with the Focal brand and its legendary Utopia series loudspeakers. Now it's time to introduce everyone to the new Focal XS Multimedia Sound System. Don't be fooled by the iPod integration that has permeated everything from running shoes to bathroom accessories. This is not your father's desktop audio solution. Focal designed a very nice looking 2.1 desktop system with great features and sound quality to match. iPod sync and playback, internal USB DAC, and an analog input are all part of the new Focal XS Multimedia Sound System.

The Focal name is not placed on just any product. The XS system is 100% Focal and not a run-of-the-mill desktop audio system from a big box retailer. From the moment I removed the speakers from the box I knew this was a high-end audio solution. The speakers are 2.2 lbs. and the subwoofer is a substantial 18.5 lbs. The design is reminiscent of something out of Cupertino with its jet black and anodized aluminum finish coupled to solid metal speaker stands. Continuing with the stylish looks Focal includes a magnetic remote control with the XS system. This allows the remote to stick on to the metal speaker stands keeping your desktop very clean. Focal did not leave any compatibility issues to chance. It has supplied eight adapters with the XS system for several generations of iPods. The new iPhone 3G works perfectly and it's completely controllable via the included magnetic remote. Not only can the XS system playback and control an iPod, it allows the iPod to sync with iTunes while charging the battery as well. Simply touch the Sync / Audio button on the back of the speaker base and toggle between playback and synchronizing the iPod. The convenience of this feature should not be overlooked. Any product that enables us to remove a sync cable from our desktop is a winner in my opinion. Control, charge, playback, sync ... sweet.



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The rest of the 2.1 XS system is equally impressive. A built-in Burr-Brown USB DAC allows a simple plug n' play driverless connection. I would have said driverless install, but there is nothing to install with this system. It's really as simple as it gets. Opposite the USB input is a 3.5mm mini-jack analog input. You never know when you'll need an analog input. A turntable, cassette deck or the old eight-track player from your parent's attic may need the full Focal experience. The XS system contains three amplifiers integrated into the subwoofer enclosure. Two thirty watt amps for the desktop speakers and a seventy watt amp for the subwoofer itself. The subwoofer has a nice level adjustment knob on the rear so you can make the sub work in almost any environment.

The main system volume can of course be adjusted with the remote or directly at the base of a speaker. The desktop speakers contain two drivers. One 3" paper cone midbass driver and a 3/4" mylar dome tweeter. The subwoofer contains a 6" paper cone woofer firing down toward the floor and ported through the front of the sub cabinet.

The Focal XS system is exactly what Focal says it is. A high-end multimedia solution with unique features and fabulous sound. This is not an ultra-micro Utopia desktop system priced in the stratosphere. However the sound from the \$599 Focal XS is more than pleasing. I've never heard a 2.1 desktop audio system that sounds better than the XS. I did have a little trouble integrating the subwoofer with the satellite speakers, but after few tracks of vastly different music I got the sub level right-on and the sound was great. If I were pressed to find an area that Focal could improve with the XS system I would say the speakers are a tad bright. A high-end audio desktop solution for less than \$600 could be expected to have a few more flaws. Sure \$599 is not inexpensive, but in high-end audio circles \$599 usually doesn't go very far. Many Computer Audiophile readers don't own a single piece of gear that retails for less than \$600. In fact \$600 probably wouldn't cover the sales tax on many of their components. No judgments, just putting the price of the XS system into perspective. The imaging is unreal with these speakers. I've had Branford Marsalis' album Trio Jeepy on repeat while writing this review. The imaging during The Nearness of You still sucks me in every time. Even though the XS system is small and made for desktops I did not let it off easy. My favorite album of the moment (still) is The Raconteurs' Consolers of the Lonely. I double-clicked on the title track and held down the Volume Up button until I thought something bad might happen. Not recommended under most circumstances, but hey someone has to put this system through the wringer. Anyway, the heavy double-tracked guitar and kick from the drums was awesome and unexpected from a desktop system. I didn't damage the speakers at all, but I felt like something should have rattled loose in my listening room.

Over all the Focal XS Multimedia Sound System provides a solid and entertaining listening experience. Don't expect Grand Utopia performance from the XS system, but you can expect it to out-perform everything else in its class. It's time to hand your Klipsch / Altec Lansing / Harmon Kardon 2.1 system down to your daughter and step up to the major leagues with the Focal XS Multimedia Sound System.



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