

Symphony OS 2006-05 Beta (act 5)

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[4]I've always followed SymphonyOS with great enthusiasm. I admire folks who march to a different, or even moreso, their own beat. Symphony has always done that. They have few rivals for the title of Most Unique Desktop. Each release builds more and more excitement as things begin to shape up and improve. Symphony OS 2006-05 BETA is upon us and just like its predecessors, it's still different and ever improving. This time they have some great new features to introduce as well as some underlying code changes to announce. All this comes together to provide the greatest Symphony OS yet.

Even the boot splash is new and improved. This time featuring a lovely blue background with the Symphony Logo and matching the gdm background and desktop wallpaper. The cheatcodes include: debug, copy2ram, floppy (which enables floppy automounting during startup), and memtest. The boot itself is text output, but one might notice a bit of a change. I still spot linuxlive startup script output, but it doesn't seem to be booting a knoppix clone. This is because Symphony is now based on Debian unstable. It boots in good time detecting hardware as it goes. In short order, one is greeted by a new theme-able GDM login manager. Again matching the whole Symphony 2006-05 theme, it looks great. To avoid confusion, they have listed the default username and password as well as the root password in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. Log-in as symphony and admire the great looking desktop.



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The desktop might be somewhat familiar to you, but this time we have the lovely new wallpaper mentioned earlier, but

also the desklet widgets are updated for a more defined appearance and distinctive look. The desktop still features the 4-corner menu system, from which you can navigate to other broad menus. As per usual, we have an icon in the upper right corner that takes us to a Files desktop. From here we can easily navigate thru our Favorite Locations, New & Recent Files, and Tasks. Under Favorite Locations there are the default folders of My Files, Documents, Music, Pictures, and Downloads. Under Tasks, we have a link that allows us to Browse Files. In the lower right corner is the TrashCan.



In the lower left-hand corner is an icon for opening the Programs desktop. On there we find menu boxes for Favorite Programs, All Programs, and Tasks. Under Favorites we have as default Web Browser (which is Firefox), Email (Thunderbird), Instant Messenger (gaim), Terminal, and Desktop Manager. Under All Programs is the listings for all applications installed. And under Tasks we find Run Programs and One-Click Software.



On this desktop we've found at least two new goodies to examine. The Desktop Manager and One-Click Software. These are a couple of the nice major improvements hinted at earlier. The Desktop Manager is as the name implies, and it allows one to configure their desktop to a more personalize or customize appearance and functionality. Inside the Desktop Manager are categories for setting up or changing Desklets & Launchers in any of 9 pre-designated areas, the Background Image, and editing your Favorite Programs and Favorite Locations menus.



As you can see some of the desklets already enabled include Yahoo News and Newsforge news feeds as well as Favorite Programs and Favorite Folders. Of particular interest is the desklet for Google search, which works great by opening up Firefox at your search terms's [google results page](#) [13]. Some of the others included in the dropdown menus to choose are weather and a battery monitor. The weather applet is easily configured by clicking edit, which brings up a dialogue box for you to input your city and state abbreviation. No obscure weather station or zip codes needed. You can also click for forecast, which opens firefox to wunderground weather forecasts for your chosen area. The only glitch experienced here was trying to disable the battery applet that I started. It wouldn't go away for me.



The next thing we can edit is our Background Image. Symphony comes with several nice images we can use, or you can browse to a wallpaper of your own to use. Make your choice and click the clock applet to refresh the desktop.



For now editing your Favorite menus consists of an editor. The screen hints at bigger and better things to come in the future. I suffered a bit of a glitch here as well. When I discovered the Email menu item was incorrectly linked, my attempts to edit it failed. The Desktop Manager goes blank when pressing Apply Changes and doesn't update the menu. But you can launch the Email app from the Run dialog or from a Terminal by typing thunderbird.



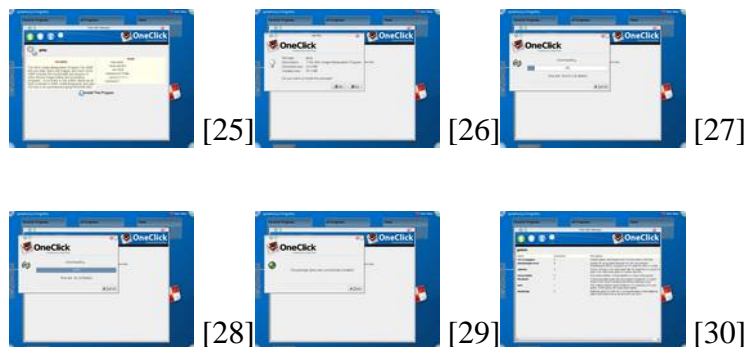
At the bottom of the Desktop Manager are two more links. One is Install a New Desklet and the other is Download new Desklet. The Install a New Desklet is a broken link and Download new Desklet opens the symphony discussion forum where new desktop desklets are introduced and discussed.



Which brings us to the other exciting new feature on the Programs desktop: OneClick Software. OneClick Software is an application installer with a nice gui that downloads the software file, installs it and puts an entry in the All Programs menu. It features a browser to peruse several categories of software including Games, Internet, Graphics, Multimedia and Utilities. Some of games include Frozen-Bubble and ace-of-penguins. Under Internet you can find kopete, xchat, and nvu. Multimedia has xmms, amarok, and audacity. Graphics include gimp, inkscape, f-spot and blender. Under Office is openoffice.org, gnumeric, gnucash, and abiword. And there's lots more. There is even an About (or Information) link and a search, although the search wasn't functional at this time.



All one needs to do is click upon the name of the application they'd like installed and a downloader begins. After it finishes downloading the app, it installs it and let's you know it was successfully completed. Then one finds a menu entry for it. I tested this process with gimp and it went without a hitch. My newly installed app even found its way onto my harddrive install.



Since I've let the cat out of the bag, in the upper left corner is our Computer icon which bring you to a "Computer" screen for navigating and configuring your system. On this desktop we find a list of Devices, Settings, and Tasks. Settings include Desktop Manager and Configure Login Screen. Tasks are Install Symphony OS to the Hard Drive, About My Computer, and Shutdown.



This Beta brings a functional hard drive installer! In the past we've tried it and it came so close, but this time it worked great. Having dropped the knoppix-style installer, Symphony's all new harddrive installer is easier than ever. Like all Linux installs, you're going to need partitions. Cfdisk is launched if you still need to take care of that and once you tab and enter to quit, the installer continues. It asks 4 simple questions - Source (Symphony CD):, Install Symphony to:, Write MBR to:, and Installation Method. The Source is easy. In fact, it's already filled in for you. Install Symphony to: is the partition on which to install and Write MBR to: either hda or hdb. The Installation Method defaults to Real (Recommended). This is where it installs Symphony to your hard drive like any other Linux system. The Live method is untested and says it's for a compressed image to a USB Mass Storage Device or small disk. I chose Real. Click next and it goes to town. It takes about 10 minutes at most to install and then you can click Close. At this point you can boot your new Symphony OS hard drive install.

It worked great here. The only glitch seems to be after boot the partition is reported as hda1 even though it installs and boots wherever you intended. All partitions are mounted by default, but you'll notice your chosen install partition isn't listed. So, it's a mislabel or a link left over from the livecd, but it doesn't affect any functionality that I've been able to find yet. Now you can launch OneClick and start building your system to your liking.

Among the previously mentioned included apps is VLC. Video Lan Client is a media player that I most commonly use for video files. In testing here, Symphony's included version played avis, bins, and mpgs with no problems. That's always a plus!

In conclusion, Symphony OS is coming right along. They have improved their interface appearance and functionality to a great extent. They have now added a software installer that makes obtaining and installing your favorite apps as easy as click, click, click. The Desktop Manager is a very promising and exciting utility that enables one to setup their desktop more to their own tastes. And of course, finally a working hard drive installer. The whole package is showing such promise and is quite exciting to test. It is still in Beta, so not everything is perfect, but it's getting there. In fact, it's music to my harddrive.

Related Links:

- [Symphony OS Homepage](#) [40].
- [Download Page](#) [41].
- [Order a CDROM from On-Disk](#) [42].
- [More Screenshots](#) [43].
- [My First Article on SymphonyOS](#) [44].

Here is an excerpt from the [announcement](#) [45] that outlines the new features:

- **The OneClick software Installation System** - A simple tool which can be used free of charge to install software from the [OneClick software store](#) [46]. The OneClick software store is a front end for GUI applications in the Debian Unstable repository. The OneClick client, while designed for Symphony OS will soon be released as a deb package, making it available to all debian based distributions and providing a user friendly method of software installation.
- **Debian Unstable Base System** - A major change for the project is the move away from the [KNOPPIX](#) [47] base system used in previous releases. 2006-05 is based purely on [Debian](#) [48] unstable with only minor changes made to accommodate the needs of the project and branding.
- **Linux-Live** - Symphony OS 2006-05 BETA is shipped as a LiveCD with a hard drive installer. The LiveCD and Hard drive installer are made possible by the great work of Tomas Matejicek of the [Linux-Live](#)[49]and [SLAX](#)[50]projects.
- **Multiple Scripting Language support** - Some minor changes in the Orchestra server code base are going to make a major difference for developers. Orchestra applications using the .orc file extension can now be written in any scripting language that includes a shebang (#!/usr/bin/something) line.
- **Multiuser** - The 2006-05 BETA release is also the first release to be truly multiuser. The system loads to the [GDM](#) [51] login manager and allows different users to have different desktops and settings just as any other standard Linux distribution does.



[52]

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