

Playing With Dragonflies, A Mouse, And A Big Blue Ball By Ralph Sappington

If you read any music or recording magazines you have undoubtedly seen ads for the B.L.U.E. (Baltic Latvian Universal Electronics) microphones with names like the Dragonfly, The Mouse, The Baby Bottle and the Blueberry. The design of the microphones suggest that they belong in a modern art museum and endorsements from such luminaries as Socrates, Leonardo Da Vinci and L.V. Beethoven, "Sounds great, I think", only feed your curiosity. I was extremely curious when the box from B.L.U.E. arrived at my studio. Inside I found 3 Dragonflies, a Blueberry, a Mouse and A Blue Ball. Now owning a studio in Billings Montana (yes, we do have electricity in Montana) means you record a wide variety of projects and the month of August was full of very different recording situations.

First on the schedule were a string trio, two violins and a cello. I used two Dragonflies in the classic stereo pattern and I was amazed at the sound. First of all I had to reduce the gain on the inputs from my usual mike choice, second the crispness encompassed the entire tonal range and delivered a very warm sound without using expensive mike pre-amps. These are large diaphragm, cardioid condenser mikes that use class A discrete circuitry, read no circuit boards, and are comparable to Neumann and AKG mikes that retail at much more than the \$1,095.00 MSRP.

The second project was the Magic City Blues Festival, a large two-day event featuring national acts like Koko Taylor, Dr. John and George Thorogood. We were doing the multitrack recording and providing a stereo feed for public radio and with a little convincing Production Manager, Brook Hovland, agreed to use the microphones for both the recording and live sound of the festival. Actually, I gave him the very cool B.L.U.E. t-shirt and that did the trick. We used the same Dragonflies that miked the string trio as drum overheads and another Dragonfly for the snare and hi hats and not only was the Production Manager happy, he asked, "can you get me a couple of these!"

The Blue Ball came into use at another outdoor event where the drums of a funk/Jazz group were miked using all B.L.U.E. mikes. I was told that this odd blue ball, about the size of a softball, was perfect for bass drums so along with the dragonflies on the overheads and snare the Ball went on the bass drum and wow what a punch it had! Now stay with me on this, the Blue Ball is a phantom powered dynamic mike. If you record or run live sound you are saying to yourself, "a what?" Yes, phantom powered. Like your old favorites the Shure SM-57 and SM-58 this is a rugged dynamic mike that can take a punishing amount of SPL's (sound pressure levels). What makes these mikes tough also leads to a set of problems, chiefly tonal consistency. The phantom powered circuit in the Ball's output stage maintains a 50- ohm load across the entire frequency spectrum giving you the sound you are hearing acoustically. The \$279.00 retail price is worth every penny for the amazing mike. I used it on a bass drum a few days later in the studio for the recording of a jazz quartet and the drummer commented how clear his bass drum sounded even when he was just touching it to keep time. He also made me turn it down. I also used the Mouse on the trumpet and it delivered a sound that I could only compare to the

Neumann U47. It was the classic large diaphragm sound that I thought had a tube mike sound but not at the \$3000 to \$5000 price you would pay for a great tube mike. The \$1699.00 list price make this the one mike to buy for small studios. I tried it with vocals and strings and had the same beautiful results.

Several days later I had a session for an opera project that is ongoing in my studio. This time nationally known opera singer, Douglas Nagel, was recording several Italian arias and the mike of choice was the Blueberry. This solid state cardioid condenser really could handle the loud volume that Doug could produce as well as capturing the subtle soft sections of the pieces. I ran it direct in without any compression! At \$1295.00 list it is an affordable mike for small studios and it comes in a cool, cherry wood box.

Over the month I used the B.L.U.E. mikes in many situations from live sound to intimate recording and would recommend them to you for any of your sound needs. A church would benefit from having a pair of Dragonflies on hand for overhead miking and the Blue Ball would come in handy time after time. Touring musicians, have a couple of these mikes on hand when you hit venues that just don't have great mikes and solo guitarists if you have spent the money on a great guitar, mike it with a great mike. One, or optimally, two Dragonflies on a great instrument make the difference.

I would play with these mikes anytime, it's too bad I need to send them back! But if I sell...