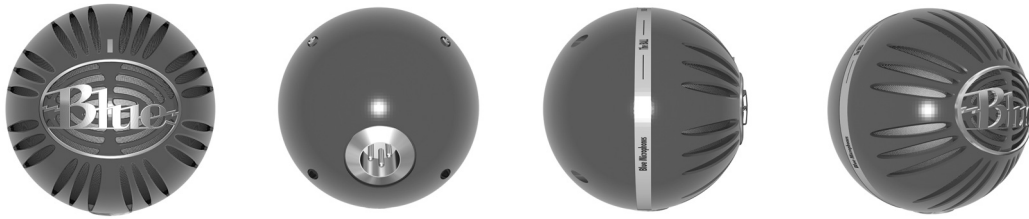




## BLUE Ball Microphone



**W**ell, it's a good thing that BLUE (which stands for Baltic Latvian Universal Electronics) Microphones has such a good sense of humour because when I first received their latest product, The Ball, for review my initial reaction was laughter. Then I felt a bit guilty. I shouldn't really be laughing at this microphone. The manufacturer has obviously spent a great deal of time and research on the microphone and like the old saying goes, "Never judge a book by its cover."

After getting over my initial response, I started to read the product information and it became obvious that the people at BLUE Microphones expect people to laugh at first. Proof of this is that the product brochure includes fictitious reviews by Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci. So, I didn't feel so bad after all.

Now that you know my first reaction, let's get down to the nitty gritty. The Ball is a phantom powered, dynamic cardioid microphone (more on this later) and it is in the shape of a ball about the size of a five-pin bowling ball (hence the laughter).

BLUE has built a great reputation over the past few years for making some of the most unique condenser and tube condenser microphones on the market. They are best known for The Bottle, which they introduced in 1997, and its less expensive predecessor The Baby Bottle, introduced in 2001. The Ball is BLUE's first attempt at designing a dynamic microphone and in typical BLUE fashion they have done it with pizzazz.

The microphone is being sold as an all-in-one package that is suitable for both live and studio use. They recommend the use of The Ball for anything from vocals to strings, drums to horns. While I am sure that BLUE's claims that this microphone will work on almost anything are true, I am also sure that it will, like all microphones, find its niche. I was able to try The Ball on a couple of different sources and found it to sound quite nice on vocals and acoustic guitar.

As for The Ball's use as a live sound microphone, I am quite confident that it will work in a live environment. The output gain is quite high and the microphone can definitely

handle high SPL levels. I didn't get a chance to try it out in a live environment but with its tight dynamic polar pattern and high output I'm sure it will work beside a loud stage monitor. The only drawback for live sound use that I see is The Ball's size. In a live sound environment, space is often a major concern and I think that the physical size of The Ball will be an impediment to most live sound engineers.

Now for a bit of technological information: I mentioned earlier that The Ball is a phantom powered dynamic microphone. Now to most of us this is a bit of an oxymoron. Phantom power and dynamic mics don't usually go together. Well, the people at blue have found an interesting way of supplying a consistent resistance to the microphone capsule. This resistance is provided by a discrete Class-A amplifier that is phantom powered. This simple amplifier provides a consistent 50-ohm load across the entire frequency spectrum. When using a normal dynamic microphone, this resistance varies over the frequency spectrum due to the fixed impedance of the microphone pre-amplifier.

I realize that was a bunch of technical "gobblygook" but the bottom line is simple: The Ball sounds better than the average dynamic microphone because a consistent load is supplied to the entire frequency range. Now, this is a bit of technology that makes perfect sense to me and no doubt other manufacturers of dynamic microphones will take note and start using this same type of technology in their designs.

All and all, I found The Ball to sound quite good. It is one of the better sounding dynamic microphones I have heard in a few years. And the best part is it's good for a laugh as well. Don't worry, BLUE Microphones, we're laughing *with* you and not *at* you.

The manufacturer's suggested retail price is \$279 US.

For more product information, contact: Diffusion Audio Inc., CP 142, St-Sauveur des Monts, PQ J0R 1R0 (450) 227-3818, FAX (450) 227-9477, sales@diffusion-audio.com, www.diffusion-audio.com.

### Manufacturer's Comments

Each Monday night, for the last 15 years I have played the game of softball. While playing catch one night with the softball I was taken by the simplicity of the shape. This is where The Ball was born.

Next came the practical question, what type of microphone performance and sound character was needed in the BLUE line of microphones. I was reminded of the dynamic microphones of the 1960s that I had previous experience with in recording drums and bass amplifiers. The bottom end was prominent in the upper bass frequencies of 75-125 Hz. This made the bottom end cut through on small speakers systems and created a warmth to the tracks I had recorded on many of the albums I had been involved with. The cavity shape of the four-inch round Ball helped to deliver this very sound.

In playing around with an active circuit to equalize or amplify the Capsule we discovered the inputs of most consoles had impedance matching problems with dynamic microphones. By correcting this problem with our own circuit, we stumbled on a presence of sound that took us totally by surprise. We were delighted with not only the bottom end but the detail in the midrange and upper frequencies that led this particular microphone to excel in live PA types of applications as well.

The BLUE line of microphones is based on experiences that my partner, Martins, and I have been through. The shapes, names, colour and sound evoke an understanding of how we hear and look at the world. Each and every one of us is unique in our own right – we look at our designs as an extension of who and what we are.

— Skipper Wise, BLUE Microphones