

TEST

SUPERLUX DRK-B5C2 DRUM MIC SET

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Looking for that real drum sound but working to a tight budget? **Daniel Duffell** reckons this new line of drum mics from Superlux might be the answer to your prayers...

DRK-B5C2 DRUM MICROPHONE SET

Manufacturer **Superlux**

Price **£351**

Contact **SCV London,**
020 8418 0778

www.scvlondon.co.uk

MUSIC TECH MAGAZINE
Excellence Award

Getting a great drum sound is a slippery business – there are simply so many factors to consider. It's an art that can take years of trial and error to learn, and no amount of theory will give you the experience you need to know precisely where to place a mic, how far from a drum it needs to be and so on. One drum kit and a single set of microphones can yield dozens of different recorded drum kit sounds, while that same combination can also produce live drum kit sounds. And when you throw into the equation different drummers and how they play, it's no wonder the subject can be daunting and frustrating. So, arming yourself with a decent set of microphones – the responses of which you can learn to predict – can save you an awful lot of grief.

If you know the story well you'll also know that you can never have enough great-sounding mics. But what makes a good drum mic? Well, the key thing is that it will take high SPLs (sound pressure levels) without distorting and produce the 'right' sounds from a drum kit, played the way the drummer likes to play. This may sound like an evasive answer, but drum mic'ing is one of those incredibly subjective areas.

By any other name

You may not recognise the Superlux brand name, but you'll probably be familiar with the manufacturer's 'other works'. Yes, this is one of those Far Eastern OEM manufacturers which has been busily producing equipment for other companies and now decided it's time to put out the fruits of its labours under its own brand. The name may be new but behind it are many years of experience in product development and manufacturing (apart from anything else, this usually offers the advantage of dramatically reduced cost).

But what of the mics themselves? Well, so far Superlux

The DRK-B5C2 Drum Mic Set is a great solution for both performing and recording.



doesn't appear to be an advocate of the 'flat frequency response' approach to mic design. The company is firmly rooted in the 'mics should have their own unique sound' school of thought. So you'll either love them or loathe them. We believe you'll absolutely adore them...

The kit, the whole kit and...

The B5C2 package on offer here is a seven-piece set presented in a plastic foam-lined carrying case (three- and five-piece kits are also available). The set consists of a kick drum mic (PRO-218A), a pair of condenser mics (PRO-268A), a triplet of 'all rounders' for toms/percussion/instruments (PRO-228A) and a snare mic (PRO-288A). The PRO-228As have integral mounting clips, the 218A is supplied with a basic rubber shock-absorbing clip and the rest of the range have removable clips. All the

clips have removable brass rings, making them compatible with different size stand mountings. They don't offer the convenience of mounts which fasten directly to the drum rims, but at this price that can hardly be a criticism.

The bodies of all of the mics are cast metal and painted an attractive metallic blue, while the head shells are foam lined and appear to be very solid. The designs include several nice touches such as rubber rings around the head shells of the 228A to cut down contact noise if you happen to put them down on a hard surface – although, of course, this is unlikely to be a problem in drum mic'ing applications. All the pins of the XLR connections are gold plated. Internally, the mics are constructed mostly from plastic, but they're solid nonetheless. Overall, the mics feel very tough and should easily withstand the punishment of life in front of a drum kit – even on stage. Very impressive indeed at this price.

RELATED TECHNOLOGY

Opening gates

If you work with live drums a lot it's worth learning about gates. For live work, a quad (four-way) gate unit will serve you well. Careful adjustment can produce greater isolation (and therefore control) over close mic'ing and also adds punch.

Before we look at each mic in turn, we'll address how the mics tackle the frustrating problem of feedback. Overall, the range displayed good feedback rejection properties and we experienced no difficulties whatsoever when we put them through their paces. In fact, nothing short of pointing them directly at (and quite close to) the speakers would induce them to whine at all. Handling noise was also very acceptable, although again, this isn't going to be a major concern in drum mic'ing applications.

The low down

PRO-218A

Type: **dynamic**

Polar pattern: **supercardioid**

Freq response: **20Hz–10kHz**

Max SPL: **170dB**

Impedance: **45Ω**

Arguably the most difficult instrument to get right is the kick. The problem is that when you slide a mic in through the front bass drum head, you're exposing it to some intense SPLs. A good kick mic needs to

condensers, they also have a broader dynamic range than the rest of the set. They exhibit a great overall frequency response that gently rolls off a little of the low end, remains flat through the mids and then adds another gentle high-end lift.

They'll take a substantial amount of volume before distorting, which makes them absolutely ideal for their role. As a stereo pair swung high up over the kit, they do an awesome job of capturing not just the cymbals, but the overall sound of the kit. They exhibit a fairly tight response pattern, so if you point them at one particular element of the kit they will highlight it. This can be an advantage in some applications, but it does mean that you have to take care over where they are placed.

Up close and personal

Once the kick drum and overhead mics are in place, the role of the rest of the mics is to provide the detail. With the overheads capturing the general ambience of the kit, you'll want your close mic'ing to

broad mid-range response makes this a very versatile mic indeed and one which should prove particularly useful on stage.

A little cracker

PRO-288A

Type: **dynamic**

Polar pattern: **supercardioid**

Freq response: **80Hz–20kHz**

Max SPL: **140dB**

Impedance: **500Ω**

The 288A has all the attributes you want from a dedicated snare mic. It's physically much smaller than the rest of the range so it's just right for positioning in that notoriously tight spot under the hi-hat.

The frequency response drops everything in a smooth arc from around 800Hz and lifts gracefully from about 1kHz to a strong peak at about 5kHz. It delivers a distinctive and penetrating sound that always remains smooth – a joy to the ears.

Final mix

Used in combination, the Superlux DRK-B5C2 set produced a particularly coherent, detailed, dynamic and very strong drum sound. What's better is that achieving this proved to be an almost effortless process, particularly in skilled hands. These mics are very similar in performance to many other specialist drum models on the market, but at this price they're unrivalled. **MTM**

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capture the sound of the drum – and the noise of the beater 'slapping' the head – while avoiding the effects on the diaphragm of the booming sound present inside the shell.

To this end, the 218A incorporates a spring-mounted diaphragm and a brilliantly sculpted frequency response curve. This slightly boosts the very low end between about 50Hz and 80Hz, dips the mid range in a curve at its lowest frequency (around 200Hz) and then adds a wonderfully punchy peak at around 6kHz. The resulting sound has plenty of tight, low-end 'welly', a clean mid-range and a considerable punch. In short: instant gratification.

Way up high

PRO-268A

Type: **electret condenser**

Polar pattern: **supercardioid**

Freq response: **50Hz–20kHz**

Max SPL: **140dB**

Impedance: **200Ω**

Dynamic range: **115dB**

The 268As, being condensers, require phantom power – although they'll be happy with anything between 9V and 48V DC. Being

highlight the immediate punch of a drum kit and/or the nuances of a drummer's performance, and this Superlux range does it with considerable flair.

Stuck in the middle

PRO-228A

Type: **dynamic**

Polar pattern: **supercardioid**

Freq response: **50Hz–16kHz**

Max SPL: **150dB**

Impedance: **300Ω**

The supercardioid pattern basically means that a mic captures the sound from in front of it, rejects anything at 90 degrees to it and picks up a small amount from behind it – which makes it ideal for close-up work. The frequency response of the PRO-228A has a steep(ish) bass drop below about 70Hz, then provides an almost flat response – there's just a little rise to it – all the way up to about 3kHz. The high end has a distinctive lift that gives the sound a nice edge to it without being at all harsh. The mic behaves well under high pressure and is not so sensitive as to give isolation problems. The

METHOD SPOT Over and under

A basic, yet effective, way of recording a drum kit uses just three mics: place a pair of decent condensers in front of and slightly to either side of the kit – as high in the air as you can get them – aimed roughly at the drummer. The idea is to record the overall sound as it comes off the kit rather than pointing the mics at any individual drum. By gradually experimenting with the position, distance and direction of the mics, you should be able to achieve a good balance of the sound of the whole kit. A little patience may be needed but it can be done.

Remember, a drum kit is effectively a single instrument and we're trying to make a good stereo recording of one. It should be necessary to add only a kick drum mic for additional low-end punch. Hard pan the condensers left and right and place the kick drum signal centrally in the stereo field. You should find it works best in large spaces, where 'slapback' from walls can be avoided.

SUMMARY

KEY FEATURES

- Seven-piece drum mic set
- Two electret condensers
- Three 'all-rounder' dynamics
- Kick drum dynamic
- Snare dynamic
- Fitted carrying case
- Dual-size stand mounting clips

WHY BUY

- Detailed sound reproduction
- Immediately usable, versatile sound
- Well constructed
- Good for both studio or stage use
- Fantastic value
- Sturdy, convenient carry case

WALK ON BY

- Condenser 'electret' design means no polarity switching

VERDICT

If you need a set of drum mics make sure you try these out. The quality of both sound and construction is exceptional for the price.

