The Brickblaster Pro

By Nook**Schoenfeld**

L ast week, I found myself in need of a compact yet high output LED source. I needed to fit four individual light sources inside a 10-foot tall birthday cake that could effectively light dancers perched on top of this scenic element. The fixtures needed to be small enough to sit in a tiny space, yet powerful enough to actually light the models from underneath through a Plexiglas floor. A friend suggested I demo this new product from a company called The Black Tank, and they were glad to come to my rescue. They shipped me eight Brickblaster Pros to use for the gig.

Eight Fixtures, One Case

The fixtures arrived in a stealthy, seemingly indestructible Pelican travel case. I was astonished to open the lid and see that all eight fixtures, several additional yokes, various diffuser lenses and cables all fit in a 30-pound case that I could carry anywhere with one hand. The RGBW Brick is a small 4-inch, 50-watt black cube with 16 3-watt LEDs. It produces 1200 lumens in an infinite array of colors.

I could run these bad boys through DMX (8- or 16-bit) or in two different stand-alone modes. The 5-pin XLR (in and out) connectors on the back made it simple to connect data to the lights, and the intuitive user interface, buttons and LCD panel made it easy to change the settings. The 110VAC input has a Neutrik PowerCon connector, and they plug right in the wall; no extra power supply is needed. Each fixture came with a single yoke on it. But I noticed some other yokes of different sizes in the travel case. They have designed these fixtures so that they can be put in linear or stacked arrays. There is a rod that goes between the yoke handles on each side of the cube. You simply unscrew the T-handles and replace the rod with a longer one, re-attach the T-handles, and now you have a multiple-cell fixture. You can focus the two cubes at different angles and still have control of each through DMX or by one of the stand-alone modes. There is a really cool video on the homepage of the website (theblacktank.com) showing a lot of the features. In the online video, I noticed that there is a larger yoke where you could put a bunch of these puppies in a row as well as a stacking bracket to form two rows of lights in case you want to form a quadrant. If needed, you could even design your own mounting for them or build them into set pieces. Brilliant packaging.

"Tungsten Fade"

I hooked all eight of the fixtures to a console and individually addressed each using the LCD panel. I noticed a smooth linear intensity as I drove the colors individually to full and back. Unlike other LED fixtures on the market, there is absolutely no severe drop off in intensity when I lowered the output to zero. Even when I ran them at 10 percent intensity, I could cast a glow on a subject. I also noticed something they call "tungsten fade." I placed a few of these in the three different tungsten fade settings, grabbed all the colors and ran them to full power. The fixtures set to various tungsten fade settings had a lag, while the ones without adjusted like any other LED fixture; they popped on, blinding me, as they are freaking bright. I waited a few seconds for my eyes to adjust and then pressed the clear button to release the DMX command. The four fixtures not in tungsten fade blacked out instantly while the others faded with various lag times. It seems the guys at the Black Tank have developed the perfect theatrical attribute for LED fixtures. They fade on and off just like a tungsten lamp would. If you needed a bunch of Fresnels and LED sources to fade with the natural time of a tungsten fixture, these are the perfect fixture for that application.

Without diffusion, from 10 feet away, the light from each cube filled a space of approximately three feet. In a small envelope, I found three soft plastic diffuser gels, stamped 20, 40 and 60 degrees. Four small thumbscrews secured the protective acrylic on the front of the fixture, and no tools were necessary to change beam angles. It took less than a minute to install a 20 degree lens and double the width of the beam with really no noticeable drop in light output. The 40 and 60 degree lenses spread the beam further but there was some drop in lumens. They no longer totally blinded me when I stared at the source, which makes these great for use with cameras on cycs as well as in architectural or storefront window applications.

Mix and Match

The LEDs are mounted on a board and they can be swapped out for maintenance, replacement, or to allow you to match the color and output level of old and new fixtures as LED technology changes without buying a whole new fixture. You can get RGB and amber LEDs instead of white, or they can be all one color if you just want, say, a huge bright blue light or all neutral 4100 Kelvin white. Or you could just have red and white LEDs to match the local sports team colors. To take it a step further, the Brickblaster Pro can be purchased in custom color or white LED configurations and also comes standard as a tunable "white only" fixture where half of the LEDs are "warm" (2700 Kelvin) and half are "cool" white (6500 Kelvin). With this fixture, the Kelvin temperature can be adjusted using the LCD without a console.

The fixture has two stand-alone modes that allow you to set the fixture to a fixed color or a color wash. The "color wash" mode cycles through the entire color spectrum by modulating between the colored LEDs. The duration can be controlled, and there is an offset feature to make an array look like a moving rainbow, delaying the color between each Brick. In both the color wash and fixed color mode, the Brick outputs real DMX to the next fixture, so it's not a typical master/slave configuration. This also allows for synchronization with other lighting DMX fixtures without a console. I also noticed that when I unplugged them, they retained their settings. This allows you to mount these on a timer without a console and have them come on in the same manner everyday.

Another cool feature is that you can remove the outer shell and yoke and paint them custom colors. For example, in a museum, you could paint it to look like dirt and feathers to blend in with the surroundings. Or The Black Tank could anodize the case for a shiny metallic look, in almost any color, if so desired.

Last night, 50,000 people celebrated my boss' birthday party in a stadium. I had 150 large-format moving lights on the band. On each side of the stage were two pole dancers atop some giant birthday cakes. The only constant light on them were the four Brickblaster Pros I had wedged into tiny spaces between the cross braces holding the faux cake together. The lights cut through perfectly, and I could not have found a better product for this application. Without the need for an outboard power supply and a list price of only $780 per cube, they are a righteous purchase for any situation. **PLSN**

Brickblaster Pro from The Black Tank

What It Is: Color changing LED fixture
Pros: Nice built-in effects; tungsten fade mode and compact size versus massive output is ideal for most situations
Cons: Recommended for indoor use only at this time
How Much: MSRP: $780 per cube