

BLUE Baby Bottle

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Every microphone created by Baltic Latvian Universal Electronics (BLUE) is a work of art, visually as well as sonically, so it's hardly surprising that the company prefers designations such as Dragonfly, Kiwi, Cactus and Bottle, rather than model numbers.

BLUE's latest is the silver and sparkly black-colored Baby Bottle. Billed as a smaller and less sophisticated version of the company's flagship, multi-capsule, tube Bottle, the Baby Bottle does look like a diminutive version of its parent, but the two are actually quite different. For starters, the Baby Bottle is not a tube mic; it employs solid-state, Class-A discrete circuitry with a transformerless output. The Baby Bottle has a fixed-cardioid pickup pattern and significantly greater sensitivity than the Bottle.

The Baby Bottle uses an edge-terminated, single-membrane, large-diaphragm capsule. The hand-built and hand-tuned capsule is constructed using a 6-micron mylar film, sputtered with a combination of (99% pure) 24-carat gold and aluminum, tensioned to a custom brass backplate. As with the Bottle, the capsule is enclosed within a lollipop spherical grille. Optional are a Baby Shock shockmount and a Baby Pop metal-mesh windscreens. The mic includes a velvet pouch and a classy cherry-wood box. As an added bonus, the manual is well-written and full of useful information.

I used the Baby Bottle on several sessions, usually with an Aphex Dual 1100 discrete Class-A tube preamp, but also with the pre's in my Yamaha 03D digital mixer for comparison. JBL LSR28P near-fields were used to monitor the direct signal and playback (ADAT and Digital Performer).

The first thing I noticed was that the Baby Bottle is extremely quiet. (Self-noise is rated at 5.5 dB, A-weighted.) The next thing was the mic's very high output level, considerably hotter than a typical large-diaphragm condenser, providing lots of additional headroom. Sonically, the Baby Bottle has a very full, rich sound, with a little bump (at approximately 2 kHz) that slightly emphasizes upper mids. The pickup pattern is fairly wide, with a very gradual loss of level as you get further off-axis.

I used the Baby Bottle to record two female vocalists. The first voice was not particularly rich or resonant, and though the mic sounded very natural, it emphasized the already too prominent upper mids. On the second richer voice, the Baby Bottle sounded considerably beefier, delivering a warm but clear sound that made the vocalist sit up and take notice. The Baby Bottle sounded even better on male vocals, picking up the most subtle articulations and textural nuances, while simultaneously delivering a full and well-balanced sound. However, the proximity effect increases significantly at around 1 inch from the grille, so deeper voices need to be careful when working close-in.

Next, I recorded several acoustic instruments. The Baby Bottle sounded great on both steel and nylon-stringed acoustic guitars, particularly when placed slightly off-axis and a few inches away from the sound hole. The steel-string sounded especially nice, with an

ideal balance of lows and high mids, and just the right amount of finger sound that adds presence and realism. The mic also sounded quite good on autoharp and nickleharpa (an Eastern European bowed instrument that uses levers to fret its many strings), both of which can be difficult to record because of their complex harmonics.

The Baby Bottle also handled a variety of hand percussion instruments quite well. One instrument in particular — a ceramic doumbek with an unusual combination of high rim sounds and a massive bottom end — was captured wonderfully, with both sounds blended in perfect proportion. Last, but not least, the Baby Bottle did a fine job on electric guitar. When placed against the grille of a Rivera R-112, it performed equally well on both clean and distorted settings, and placed about a foot back, it sounded fantastic, with just the right blend of air and punch.

At \$649, the Blue Baby Bottle is a tremendous value. It is an extremely versatile and beautifully made microphone that's built to last, and sounds as good as large-diaphragm condensers that cost much more. If you are unfamiliar with BLUE microphones, then check out the entire line to hear what all the fuss is about — and you might as well begin with the Baby Blue.

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