

BLUE Baby Bottle

A mic that sucks? 'Au contraire', gurgles Andy Stewart.

Some people say they came from outer space, others believe they were magically pulled from a surrealist landscape. I myself was undecided when I first walked past a glass display case containing the rare creatures. The BLUE microphone range stopped me in my tracks. Here was a company taking classical microphone design techniques and splicing them with a cross between modern architecture and Salvador Dali. Not content with conservative microphone names or shapes, BLUE has dragged us all kicking and screaming into a future that possesses more colour and imagination than anything we've seen before.

BLUE is an anagram of Baltic Latvian Universal Electronics. This company has developed a range of microphones that are as sonically expressive as their appearance. With seemingly no regard for current fashions, this Latvian company has created some of the most outrageously designed, superb sounding microphones on the market. From the Dragonfly to the Blueberry, the Cactus to the Bottle, this eclectic family has a collective I.Q. of a HAL 9000 supercomputer. They're a weird mob, but right up there with the best microphones the world has to offer.

The youngest member of this crazy bunch is the Baby Bottle. Unlike its Patriarch, the 'Bottle', (which is a veritable valve masterpiece), this little tike is a solid-state, Class A fully discrete cardioid condenser microphone, whose capsule rides atop its base like a golf ball on a tee. A word of warning – unlike the 'Bottle', whose heads are interchangeable, the Baby Bottle's head is fixed and cannot be unscrewed or swivelled in any direction! I know this for a fact because within seconds of placing it in the hands of Rick 'I-can-break-anything' O'Neil, my Baby Bottle was snuffed out – the two main wires connecting the capsule to the circuit board severed by a flick of his wrist... In his defence though, it shouldn't be quite so easily broken you'd think. But that aside...

Contained within the Baby Bottle's spherical grill is a handcrafted, gold and aluminium sputtered large-diaphragm capsule that sounds superb. Stringed instruments and vocals are captured with a richness and smoothness that is rare indeed. Unlike so many microphones on the market today, the Baby Bottle possesses an eclectic blend of presence and polish, capturing sound with a silky clarity that craves little or no treatment – well, maybe a touch of bottom-end. The presence of the midrange is inescapable, rendering most vocal EQs irrelevant, and intrinsically providing vocals with the necessary 'cut' required to remain visible in a mix without ever becoming harsh or shrill.

When compared to a wide variety of microphones from the past and present, the Baby Bottle revealed its credentials unambiguously. Placed up against quality microphones such as Neumann's U47 Fet and U67 Valve, Microtech Gefell's MK71, Oktava's 012 pencil condenser, AKG's ubiquitous

C414 and others in the BLUE range – the Dragonfly and the Blueberry – the Baby Bottle held its head high. A test of this type is by no means scientific and tends only to reveal why a wide collection of microphones is so desirable: there are many great sounding mics in the world nowadays, and like vocalists, they all sound different. But interestingly, the Baby Bottle was the quietest of them all, had the highest output (which is of benefit to those with noisy mic pre's) and offered more characterful midrange than many of the classics. Again, there seemed to be little or no reason to patch in an EQ to add life and character; it was already there...

The Baby Bottle had less bottom octave than the Blueberry (which seemed to spread its wings wider than its sibling), possessing more extreme highs and lows, and producing an exceptionally smooth and classy tone. The Gefell and the AKG were more clinical sounding than 'the Baby' in the same way that an ATC speaker is more 'accurate' than a Tannoy for example. The Neumanns were Neumanns and the Octava was as silky as ever. Amongst this esteemed gathering the Baby Bottle revealed itself to be a refined, smooth-sounding, and characterful microphone.

Unlike some of its brothers and sisters, the Baby Bottle is a little on the fragile side and needs to be handled accordingly. Any microphone of this kind sporting an exposed headstock requires a little more care than your average mic, but the sonic benefits of this design make it worthwhile. The microphone comes in a cherrywood case, and includes a swivel mount that screws to the base. There are also some funky accessories including a Baby shockmount and Baby pop filter to complete the picture.

The Baby Bottle is an impressive little addition to an extensive and elite family of microphones. The BLUE range has been conceived and realised like no other on the planet. 'The Baby' is the cheapest of them all, but there's nothing 'cheap' about it. It blows a good deal of its expensive rivals away, and is a serious contender in any studio situation. Rare amongst new breeds of microphones, the Baby Bottle competes admirably with some of the best mics in the world, and arguably has them for breakfast!



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• Studio Connections
Phone: (03) 9874 7222
Email: studioc@netlink.com.au
Web: www.bluemic.com

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• \$1,295; \$1,630 (includes shock mount and pop-shield)