

by Russ Long

JZ Microphones Black Hole BH-1

This striking multi-pattern microphone offers versatile, high-end performance.

In many ways, Latvia has become the Germany of the 21st century when it comes to microphone design and construction. First there was BLUE Microphones, then Violet, and now JZ Microphones. JZ's flagship product — the Black Hole BH-1 microphone — has several unique features and has generated somewhat of a buzz since its introduction last fall. Naturally, I was anxious to see how the mic fared in the real world.

| FEATURES

The Black Hole condenser microphone is a visually stunning matte-black mic with a large rectangle opening — a “hole” — in the body. The 203mm x 51mm x 28 mm mic has a frequency response of 20 Hz – 20 kHz, and although it is much lighter than it looks, it appears to be solid and well made. A small switch inside the opening selects the mic's pickup pattern (cardioid, figure-8, or omni). I'm sure this isn't the case, but the switch location, labeling and feel has the appear-

ance of being an afterthought. Typically a multi-pattern microphone incorporates a single condenser capsule with dual front and back diaphragms, but the Black Hole design uniquely places two identical 27mm capsules back to back, combining the output of both to create its various patterns.

Also distinctive to the Black Hole is its capsule design. Instead of the usual thin, uniform sputtering of gold over the diaphragm's surface, the BH-1 uses a patented variable-sputtering process. With this process, a proprietary alloy mixture is placed in a pattern of irregularly sided circular shapes surrounded by areas that don't have any coating at all. The Black Hole's design incorporates discrete, Class-A electronics that provide low noise performance (7.5 dB, A-weighted, DIN/IEC) and an output impedance of 50 ohms. The mic requires +48V phantom power for operation and it has a dynamic range of 127 dB. Included with the BH-1 is a beautiful wood case that is magnetically held closed (and, for my taste, is slightly too difficult to open). The case provides perfect storage for the mic and its spring-loaded shock-mount.

| IN USE

My initial use of the Black Hole was while multitracking a live concert for gospel artist David Phelps. There were several songs that required capturing several people singing a cappella around a single mic. The BH-1 seemed like — and proved to be — the perfect choice; the mic sounded wonderful. The voices were smooth, uncolored and sonically pristine, and the cardioid's rather wide response worked well with the vocal ensemble.

A few weeks later I used the mic to record a beautiful-sounding Taylor 514-CE acoustic guitar and, once again, had fabulous results. The shock mount is an amazing little device that not only acoustically isolates the mic, it

also allows for very versatile placement making it easy to use in cramped or awkward situations.

While recording Nashville session ace Gary Burnette's electric guitar during a tracking session for Universal Music, I used the mic (set to omni) as a room mic while close miking the cabinet with a Royer R-122 and had fantastic results. The microphones complemented each other perfectly. Later I used the BH-1 to close mic a guitar cabinet. The results were decent and usable, but nothing overly impressive; I wouldn't count this as one of the mic's strengths.

During another tracking session I found that the BH-1 does a fine job capturing room ambience while tracking drums. I ended up rolling off a bit of the top end and squashing it with a Distressor, but the end result was great.

All of this said, I anticipate that the majority of people who purchase the BH-1 will be using it to record male and/or female lead vocals, so I anxiously tested the mic in both of these situations; I found it to work well in each case. The mic is extremely detailed and smooth and has a very subtle proximity effect. I recorded backing vocals with four singers with the mic set to omni and was amazed at the smoothness and consistency of the mic at every position.

I was discussing the BH-1 with a producer friend, and I found myself describing it as a solid-state Sony C-800G without the top-end hype. Actually, when I use the mic along with the LaChapell 583s tube mic pre — the mic pre that I found to perfectly complement the BH-1 — it actually sounds very much like the C-800G.

| SUMMARY

The Black Hole's \$2,295 price tag surprised me at first, as I was expecting something in the \$1,500 – \$1,800 range. However, after using the mic for several weeks, I think the large price tag is easily justifiable. The mic is a perfect option for anyone looking for a versatile high-end mic that will work well in almost any situation. If the BH-1 is out of your price range, the newly released Black Hole SE is a single-pattern (cardioid) version of the mic available for \$1,895.

Russ Long, a Nashville-based producer/engineer, owns The Carport recording studio. He is a regular contributor to *Pro Audio Review*.



FAST FACTS

APPLICATIONS

Studio, project studio, broadcast, post production

KEY FEATURES

Condenser; cardioid, figure-8, or omni patterns; back-to-back, uniquely-placed dual 27mm capsules; patented variable-sputtering process per diaphragm; discrete, Class-A electronics; 50 ohm output impedance of 50 ohms; 127 dB max SPL; wood case; spring-loaded shock-mount

PRICE

\$2,295

CONTACT

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