

KEYBOARD short takes

Aguilar DB 900 Tube Direct Box

Pros: Fabulously fat sound. Low noise floor. Robust construction. Sounds great after a short warm-up time.

Cons: No speaker-level input for direct feed from an amplifier head.

Bottom Line: Fat, tubey sounds with audiophile smoothness at a reasonable price.

Aguilar, 800-304-1875, www.aguilaramp.com

\$529

Direct boxes are invaluable recording tools in situations where using a microphone or the line input on a mixer is not appropriate. For example, plugging a synth into an amp and miking the speaker cabinet will result in a noisier signal than if you just fed the synth's output directly into a mixer. And due to suboptimal impedance matching, plugging instruments such as electric guitar and bass directly into a mixer can result in dull, lifeless sounds.

A direct box solves these types of problem by converting a synth's or guitar's high-impedance, instrument level output to a low-impedance, mic level output. This allows you to plug the output of the direct box (or "DI box") directly into

a mixer's mic input, thereby properly matching the impedance of your instrument's output to that of your mixer's input.

The Aguilar DB 900 tube direct box, like most DIs, offers a simple and straightforward interface. A high-impedance unbalanced 1/4" jack accepts your synth's output. A balanced male XLR output is provided for connection to your mixer's (or outboard mic preamp's) mic input. A high-impedance unbalanced 1/4" output is also provided for splitting the signal out to an amplifier. You can then mic the amp and return the signal to a separate mic input on your mixer, to use in combination with the signal from the DB 900's balanced output. A ground-lift switch (for eliminating hum from ground loops) and rear panel power switch (with associated LED) complete the feature set.

Noticeably absent is a speaker impedance input for a direct feed from an amp head. This isn't such an issue for me; however, others might consider the omission a shortcoming.

The DB 900 is solidly built and offers a low noise floor. Everything I patched through its all-tube audio path sounded big and fat, while retaining clarity and a smooth tone. My Juno-106 analog synth sounded smoother and



warmer than ever before. The DB 900 also delivered soothingly warm, liquid, bell-like tones from my '62 Strat. And my Kramer Pioneer electric bass never sounded so burly and burpy, spewing forth fat, rich, round notes that delighted my ears.

My only gripe is that the DB 900's output is a little on the weak side. According to Aguilar, the DB 900 uses a Jensen transformer on the output, which matches the standard mic level of -20dB. I found I needed to boost my mixer's mic preamp's gain up higher than usual to get a hot record level. But the DB 900 delivers the goods where it matters most, imparting fat, smooth tones to everything it touches. I highly recommend you check it out. MICHAEL COOPER

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