MIX
Professional Audio and Music Production

Lauten Audio LT-381 Oceanus Dual Tube Condenser Microphone

FIELD TEST

by Barry Rudolph

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Lauten Audio's Oceanus tube condenser microphone makes an immediate bold statement by virtue of its hefty size (3.5x7.5x3.6-inches; 5 pounds), innovative design and great sound. Oceanus uses two tubes--a military/scientific grade pentode NOS 6J1 (6AK5W) wired as a triode for the capsule amp and a 12AU7 (dual) triode output stage. The mic's internal construction is good: a circuit board is hand-wired to two tubes encased, side by side, in an aluminum heat sink that makes up the back half of the mic's body. This design also makes the Oceanus more impervious to RFI but precludes users from easily changing the tubes.

The Oceanus uses a 31.25mm (1.23-inch) dual-diaphragm capsule using a gold-sputtered, DuPont Mylar diaphragm that's edge-tapped. The internal shock-mount houses the capsule in a rubber material and suspends it from a surrounding ring. There are nine polar patterns are switchable on an external power supply. The power supply is world power ready and connects to the mic using a 20-foot Gotham Audio cable with 7-pin XLR connectors.

In The Studio

To see where Oceanus sits in reference to well-known microphones, I used it along with other mics to double-mike acoustic guitars, grand piano and spoken word vocals. For a minimal signal path, I used no buses, EQ or compression, and patched a '70s vintage API mic preamp directly into a Pro Tools HD 192 I/O at 96 kHz/24-bit.

I set up an AKG C 451 EB and the Oceanus in cardioid pattern in three different positions on a Martin D-28 acoustic: 12th fret, over the sound hole, and back at the bridge. I kept the mic distance at about 14 inches. The differences in the recorded sound were typical for those placements, and in the bridge position I preferred the Lauten mic to the brighter AKG because the Oceanus has a thicker sound and portrayed the brightness commonly associated with the bridge position in a lush and smooth way. When placed over the sound hole, which typically sounds boomy, the Oceanus was too "fat" while the AKG's brightness made up somewhat for the boominess. Equalization would be required to get a usable sound with either mic in this position.

The differences were less noticeable when the mics were over the 12th fret. Both mics had good brightness but the Oceanus was smoother and softer--less abrasive. The Oceanus does a better job of picking up subsonic frequencies; guitar body handling noises, thumps and A/C rumble can be factors.

For a monaural grand piano recording, I used a DPA 4011 measurement cardioid next to the Lauten directly above the hammers at middle-C. I preferred the percussive nature of the sound when the mics were at about 12 inches away. The Oceanus picked up as much detail as the DPA—including pedal noises, room sound and reflections from the open lid. The DPA was duller in the highs—the Oceanus was rounder, capturing the entire range of the keyboard more evenly.

For a spoken word recording, I set up a vintage AKG C 12 next to the Lauten. Both mics required pop screens and large stands with sandbags weighing down the bases as insurance policies; I had my voice talent speaking 10 inches away. The C 12 sounded "scooped out" in the midrange while the Lauten had more "guts" in the middle. The C 12 is wrong for this application but, since I know this particular mic very well, it established a good reference point for me.

My biggest surprise came at another studio where I recorded a female singer using a less expensive signal chain. Her songwriting partners in their home/project studio normally use an AKG C 414 B XL II, an Aphex 107 Tubessence mic preamp and Aphex Expressor compressor. I tweaked and used the same chain but substituted the Oceanus and was amazed at the improvement in the sound of her vocals. She sounded more present, very slightly brighter, rounder, clearer and real sounding with absolutely no electronic "tint." The Oceanus' big capsule, with its broader pickup patterns, helped my singer sound more "on mic," even though she often wandered off.

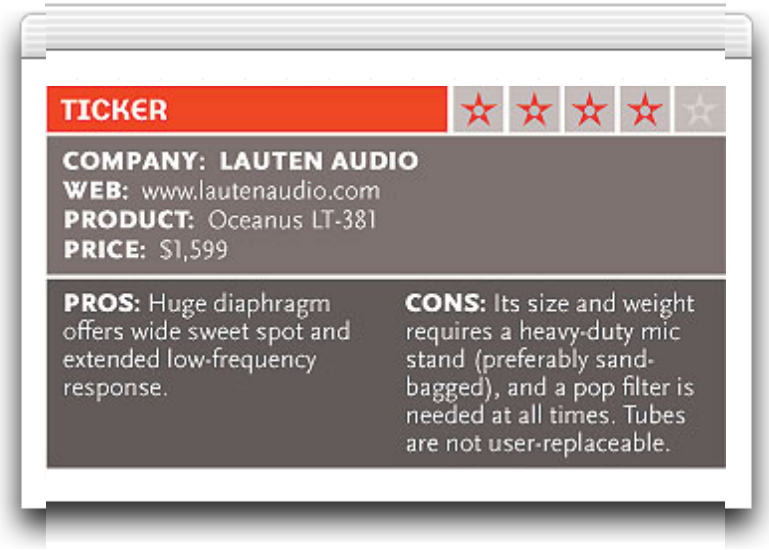
For the verses and choruses I used the figure-8 pattern and, for a bridge rap section, I went with cardioid using the proximity effect to fatten her sound. Having the pattern switch back on the power supply is great for this studio chicanery. You can change patterns "on the fly" without loud pops or major changes in gain, so I used gaps in the vocal performance to switch.

Since I normally like for vocalists to be inches from the mic’s diaphragm, figure-8 was my favorite pattern--it picks up the right amount of ambience, is not as "fat" as cardioid or omni, and has less proximity effect. I found omni a little duller than the other two patterns but not as dull as the C 414 when we A/B’d a previous recording of the same singer.

The Lauten Oceanus LT-381 was a pleasant surprise having equaled or bettered my usual mic choices in typical studio

recording applications. Although primarily a vocal microphone, it is my new first choice for an all-around workhorse mic in the studio. It ships in a cushioned bamboo case, along with shock-mount, power supply and cables that come in an aluminum clad, lockable foam lined suitcase.

Barry Rudolph is an L.A.-based recording engineer. Visit his Web site at: WWW.BARRYRUDOLPH.COM



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