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Brauner Panthera Condenser Microphone

by [Barry Rudolph](#)

FIELD TEST

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The Brauner Panthera (\$2,319) builds on the trademark sound of the company's VMA and VMX mics. Every microphone is entirely handcrafted--including the capsule--and sturdily built, featuring a nickel-plated brass case. It will take a healthy 142dB SPL and offers 83dB (1Pa/1kHz-cardiod) signal-to-noise ratio.

PHANTHERA KIT

The Panthera comes in a swank, foam-lined aluminum carrying case with a 16-foot Vovox cable that has gold XLR Neutrik connectors. Also included is an elegantly designed shock-mount that holds the mic in an elastic suspension basket. The mic is held tightly in a pair of captive "C"-shaped rings using an interference-fit method that requires neither screws nor clamps. Remove the mic by gently prying it out of the rings; there's no need to reposition the mic body as the mount swings and locks to any position by way of a clutch-operated lever. Brauner is developing an alternative, more streamlined mounting system that will make it easy to place the Panthera in tighter spots--such as within drum kits or under the closed lid of a grand piano.

Opening the mic requires a 1.5mm hex wrench (supplied) to drop the mic's assembly out of its case. The mic is phantom-powered, uses an FET amplifier and employs an output transformer. Inside is a neatly laid-out circuit board suspended between two metal rails. A two-position DIP switch on the mic's circuit board lets you change gain to either -3 or -6 dB. It comes set to 0dB gain and I found no need to fiddle with these settings during a session--it is not intended for user adjustment.



The capsule uses a 6-micron-thick, gold-deposited, polymer diaphragm (exclusive to Brauner) in a dual-sided, single-plated version of the VMA capsule. Diaphragms around 6 microns thick seem to a capsule "sweet spot" because they are thin enough for a good high-frequency response, yet thick enough to avoid the inherent problems with fragility and consistency found in thinner diaphragms. The capsule is center-tapped connected using a standard back plate that is acoustically optimized to Brauner's voicing preferences. It also has an internal shock suspension.

MIKING VOCALS AND MORE

In the studio, Phanthera was easy to set up and position. The 1.5mm wrench also tightens/loosens the swivel joint in the shock mount if you can't place the mic stand directly in front of the source. I recorded two different female vocalists at two different studios. In both studios, I discovered that the Phanthera puts out a tremendous amount of level-- it's a hot mic, and when recording loud sources like drum kits and guitar stacks you will need to use your preamp's attenuator.

In the first studio, I used a Manley EQ 500 tube mic pre followed by a Tube-Tech CL 1B compressor and no equalization. The Manley unit has no attenuator but it can go down to 0 dB of gain. I used 20 dB of gain at the most for my quiet to medium/loud songstress, who sang four inches from the grille, which was protected by a pop screen. Immediately, I noticed the minimal proximity effect with this mic--which is usually a deal-breaker for the producer-- but this time he was okay with her mic distance.

The sound was extremely clear but not overly bright--it had more of a "clinical" sound inferring accuracy and sharp focus. Its cardioid pattern is wide and very forgiving-- I rarely heard any difference as my singer moved from side to side or up and down in front of the mic. In tone, I liked that the mic was consistently clear and warm, no matter how loudly or softly she sang, nor how high or low.

This is an extremely quiet microphone and I could start to hear the noise floor of the signal chain before the mic's noise floor.. If I increased the pre-amp's gain to easily capture very soft "thrown away" bits or off mic, vibey adlibs, there was no added noise.

The second studio had more modest gear: an Aphex 107 Tubessence preamp followed by an Aphex Expressor. The second singer was much louder with a more strident, brassier tone, which caused me to set the 107's gain all the way down to the 18dB position. Again, without EQ, the mic sounded excellent and the singer remarked on its warm tone--she was ready to buy it! The Phanthera captured her sound accurately, stridency and all, without overloading or adding shrillness.

At a third studio, I recorded 1955 Martin D-18 and 1952 Gibson J-200 acoustic guitars. I used no EQ with an API 512C preamp set to around 30 to 40 dB of gain, depending on whether my player was strumming or fingerpicking. I tried three mic positions, all about 10 inches away: directly over the hole, at the 12-fret position and back over the bridge. Each of these miking positions produced the results I expected from these classic instruments, but in contrast to a smaller-diaphragm condenser the sonic differences between those positions were less perceptible. If your guitar player hates exactly "staying on the mic", the Phanthera will capture his sound with a warm, full range sound and with no muddy mid-range buildup when playing loud barre chords.

Next, I placed the Phanthera over a small Slingerland drum kit. I was surprised at how balanced and clear the kit sounded. The cymbals sounded natural but not crispy, and the toms were present and sounded thick with plenty of stick attack. I could add a kick drum mic for presence and I'd have a simple mono drum recording on two tracks! This application and the resulting sound reminded me of drum sessions in which I've used two Brauner FET Phantom mics as overheads.

PHANTHERA FAN

The Brauner Phanthera performs solidly as a studio workhorse. It's excellent for all sources and excels at recording vocals when a high dynamic range and extra sensitivity are required, such as in quieter voice-over sessions or in Foley work. It makes a great first-time, high-end microphone investment that will pay dividends every time you use it.

Brauner Microphones, dist. in U.S. and Canada by Network Pro Marketing, 951/272-3465, www.networkpromktg.com, www.braunerusa.com.

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



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