

Brauner Phanthera

A new product from Brauner is always an exciting proposition for microphone cognoscenti. With usual restraint **JON THORNTON** believes it to be a bit phanthastic.

IT'S NO SECRET that I'm a huge fan of Dirk Brauner's products, in particular those at the more affordable end of the spectrum. Reviewing the original Brauner Phantom was one of those jaw-dropping (and budget-busting) moments that ultimately led to both a Phantom C and the variable pattern Phantom V finding their way permanently into the microphone cupboard.

But, like many things in life, the initial thrill is tempered somewhat with familiarity. And although the Phantoms still remain in my top 5 of 'go-to' microphones, there are occasions when you find yourself wishing for a little more guts to their sound – that doesn't mean they are gutless, just a little too smooth sounding and natural for some applications. Stick a perfect vocal in front of either of them and they'll deliver all day long, but if a voice is a little on the thin side, or needs just that touch more definition in the mid-range, there's little in the way of colouration to the sound to be had.

Enter the Phanthera (UK£950+VAT). I know, a slightly odd choice of name, but we'll forgive it that for the time being. The accompanying documentation is a little light on technical detail, and a little heavy on some strange prose likening the microphone to a 'grand wild cat'. The short version is that Brauner has attempted to replicate the sonic character of his highly rated valve microphones in an entirely solid-state design. Sounds just what the doctor ordered...

At first glance, the Phanthera looks very similar to the Phantom but putting them side by side reveals quite a few differences. There's still the same solidly engineered body and accompanying snap to fit shockmount, and the diaphragm assembly looks nearly identical to the Phantom C internally. The head-grille is finished in black rather than silver though, and there's a curve to the top of it that's vaguely reminiscent of a U47. The whole thing ships in a compact aluminium case, complete with shockmount and Vovox mic cable.

Polar pattern is fixed cardioid and you don't get any pad or filter options here so it's plug and play time. There was really only one choice to put the Phanthera up against at first and that was the Phantom C. Both are fixed pattern

cardioids and both clearly have some shared DNA so the first order of the day was the bread and butter of large diaphragm condensers — vocals.

It's immediately apparent that the tonal difference

between the two microphones is significant — even starting a good 12-inches away. The Phanthera is immediately a little darker sounding, and this difference is accentuated the closer in you get to the microphone. There's a definite increase in the chest sound of the voice, and the proximity bump of the Phanthera is every bit as workable as the Phantom, solidifying the sound nicely and progressively without sounding too boomy. In addition to this, worked close — just a little before the proximity lift becomes really obvious — and the Phanthera reveals a tiny bit more gravel in male vocals, and more of the 'catch' in a female vocal. It's a very different effect from the usual midrange presence lift, as it seems to pull definition from a voice without adding that slightly nasal quality. Interestingly, with no EQ dialled in, both vocalists preferred the sound of the Phanthera in their headphone mixes by some margin.

Moving on to acoustic guitar, another favourite task for the Phantom, and the differences in tonality were still evident but perhaps not quite as noticeable. The Phanthera retains the phenomenal transient response of the Phantom, which gives a wonderful realism to plucked string sounds and percussion, and there's still a great sense of HF extension, so that even reasonably close to the guitar there's a good deal of air and space around the instrument. Maybe the Phanthera sounded a little softer in the very high registers than the Phantom, but this could equally be the slightly more solid sounding low-mids.

On paper, both of the microphones appear to have a nearly identical specification in terms of sensitivity (35mV/Pa) and self-noise (11dBA) — a nice high output and quiet enough for all but the most critical applications. So quite how the difference in response has been achieved is something of a mystery — although some email correspondence with the company seemed to suggest that it was largely down to component choice in the electronics rather than any change to the capsule.

The Phanthera is billed as sounding like a valve mic but without the thermions, so does it deliver? In some ways, the sound is reminiscent of many valve designs — certainly in the sense that there's a texture to the low-mid and mid range harmonics that seems to pull character out of a voice. But in other ways it sounds extremely modern — it doesn't have the silkiness and the early roll-off in the high frequencies that some of the Soundelux range exhibit, for example, instead opting for a much more detailed, though never unflattering sound.

I guess the acid test is whether I should be making space in the mic cupboard, and I am slightly tempted. Mainly because the Phanthera seems like the perfect foil for the Phantom — they complement each other well and between them would cover most eventualities. The Phanthera isn't going to suit every voice though, so as a standalone choice I'd advise some careful auditioning first. ■

PROS Usual Brauner build quality; quiet; adds a lot of character to some voices; a hint of valve warmth without any mush.

CONS Currently only available as fixed pattern; still can't quite get used to that name...

Contact

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