

## Brauner Phantom C, March 2004

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A FET VOCAL MIC THAT OFFERS DEPTH FOR MILES Brauner has a reputation for building ultratransparent tube mics with very low self-noise and high sensitivity. Recently, the Germany-based manufacturer shifted direction with its first solid-state mic, the Phantom C (\$1,750 list) [cardioid condenser](#).

Despite its moderate price (relative to that of other Brauner mics), it's obvious that no expense was spared in the construction of the Phantom C. Its cylindrical brass body (the same used in the Brauner Valvet and Valvet Voice microphones) weighs a hefty 19.4 ounces. Inside the head grille is a 1-inch-diameter, 6-micron-thick diaphragm. Included with the mic are a sturdy shock-mount and foam-lined aluminum carrying case. The mic and its accessories convey outstanding build quality.

The only corners cut are in the mic's feature set. The Phantom C is cardioid-only and lacks any sort of pad or low-cut filter. Considering the mic's robust 28mv/Pa sensitivity, the omission of a pad can be problematic when miking loud instruments with a padless preamp. But the mic's high output, hushed 9dBA self-noise and stout 142dB maximum SPL (for 0.3% THD) ratings guarantee a stellar [dynamic range](#) and barely existent noise floor at the mic's output. The Phantom C's response is stated to be 20 to 22k Hz with no  $\pm$  tolerances given. Current draw is specified to be a hefty 4 ma.

The Phantom C's intricate shock-mount is more than just a standard-issue gizmo. A pair of semicircular aluminum rings—stabilized by three vertical struts—is suspended by beefy elastic bands inside a pair of larger, similarly constructed rings. The mount can rotate both vertically and horizontally through almost 180 degrees of arc. A clever ratcheting mechanism on the mount's stand adapter locks the mount in place.

**PHANTOM C IN SESSION** Recording male lead vocals, I compared the Phantom C to my Neumann U87A using my Millennia HV-3D 8-channel preamp and Apogee Rosetta 96 A/D in the recording chain. The Phantom C delivered far more nuance and depth than the U87A, lending a striking sense of realism to the track. While the high end was also more articulate on the track recorded with the Phantom C, it nevertheless sounded natural and unhyped. Both mics reproduced roughly the same amount of bottom end overall, but the Phantom C's bass response was smoother, exhibiting less of a hump in the upper bass. I won't give away my U87A anytime soon — it's an outstanding mic with a unique character that flatters in many applications — but I was floored by how much depth and nuance the less-expensive Phantom C reproduced.

Results were equally impressive on female vocals miked at seven inches from the Phantom C and recorded through the Millennia HV-3D/8 and Rosetta 96. The mic delivered enough bottom to round out the singer's timbre, and highs were detailed without sounding sibilant. The Phantom C lent beautiful midrange resolution without sounding “hard” or glaring. Once again, the depth of the recording was outstanding.

Next up was a seven-piece Latin band. I used the Phantom C to record timbales, which were mounted above the floor tom in a trap set. (The drummer played the timbales and traps simultaneously.) I placed the Phantom C behind and above the drummer's right shoulder, 2½ feet above the timbales and angled 45 degrees downward to face them. The sound was

spectacular, needing only moderate boost in the top octave to make the timbales cut through a dense arrangement. I missed having a mic pad for this application, however, as I used the Phantom C with the Millennia HV-3D/8, which has no pads and produces a minimum of 8dB gain, and a MOTU HD192 I/O box, which has no calibration trims. With this setup, I couldn't avoid hitting 0 dBFS on some peaks in Digital Performer. The track sounded fine, though, as there was no audible capsule or other distortion.

On another session, I used the Phantom C to record a cajón, a large wooden cube with a circular cutout that is played with a technique similar to how congas are played, except the musician sits on the box. Although the spectral balance was excellent, the Phantom C didn't have the lightning-fast transient response I was looking for. My small-diaphragm DPA 4011 was a better choice. The Phantom C was also not the best choice to record acoustic guitar arpeggios, as the mic reproduced a bit too much bottom end and was not quite fast enough to capture the intricate detail that I was after. Considering the mic is tuned for recording vocals, this was no surprise.

**WRAPPING IT UP** The Phantom C is an outstanding vocal mic offering excellent results in some instrumental applications. Of all the subjective qualities a mic might bring to a recording, depth is the most elusive. Brauner provided the Phantom C's sonic signature with a sense of realism usually only heard in far more expensive microphones. The Phantom C sounds transparent yet big, articulate yet smooth. Add high sensitivity, low noise, wide dynamic range and affordable pricing to the mix, and the Phantom C is a winner.