

A lower price tag doesn't necessarily make for a lower quality microphone, SIMON TILLBROOK discovers with the Lauten Clarion.

The array of microphones that keeps getting released into an already somewhat crowded market place is mind-boggling. In the last few years the number of low cost, but really quite good, offerings from the Far East has made some question the justification for more expensive examples.

For me microphones are a part of the audio chain on which I am not prepared to compromise, but I have always understood the argument put forward with such limited budgets to work to.

frequencies. When I looked at the supplied documentation, this was confirmed with the frequency chart for figure-of-eight showing a slight drop off after about 6-7kHz.

The tonal qualities of this FET microphone are very pleasing. A solid full range sound with good depth, but it is the high end where the focus is. There is a natural smoothing of the sibilant frequency areas without being too dramatic. With percussive sounds, you still have a good level of high-end transient attack, but with slightly rounded corners.

LAUTEN CLARION FC-357

FET Microphone

With this in mind, I found it of great interest to have the opportunity to test a microphone handmade in the United States by Lauten Audio, with a rather interesting price tag, the Lauten Clarion FC-357.

Overview

The Lauten Clarion FC-357 is one of four microphones in Lauten Audio's range which includes both pencil and tube designs.

The FC-357 is a solid-state pressure gradient dual-diaphragm FET condenser microphone.

The Lauten Clarion FC-357 is quite a beast as it is machined from a single piece of brass and, contained in the mesh dome on top, is a 1.1-inch dual-diaphragm capsule. Unscrewing the bottom plate of the FC-357, and sliding off the outer body, you can see the attention to detail and quality of the components used. All circuits and capsule are easily accessed and detached for good serviceability.

The Lauten Clarion FC-357 has very low inherent noise of less than 15dB(A) and can withstand a maximum SPL of 130dB.

With a dual-diaphragm condenser microphone, you get the three standard polar patterns of omni-directional, cardioid, and figure-of-eight, and these can be selected using the three-position switch on the body of the microphone.

One other three-position switch found on the body of the FC-357 is a pad/gain selector. You can either apply a -10dB pad, a somewhat familiar facility, or more unusually a +10dB gain, more on this a little later. There is no low cut filter on the microphone.

The Lauten Clarion FC-357 is presented in a flightcase, where the microphone is housed in a sustainably-sourced wooden box alongside the supplied accessories of a foam pop shield and a heavy duty full suspension cradle.

Use

When setting up the Lauten Clarion FC-357, you get a sense of the overall build quality, which is noticeably very good indeed. The suspension cradle supplied with the FC-357 itself is a substantial piece of kit, and needs to be with such a weighty microphone.

Running through the three polar pattern options with the FC-357, the omni and cardioid settings exhibit very little difference in overall tone, but a little more of an open pickup with the omni setting, as you would expect. When set to figure-of-eight, which is a nice tight configuration, there is a noticeable rolling off of the higher



The Lauten Clarion FC-357 is a very flattering microphone when it comes to vocal use. This is a microphone that introduces some colour to the sound with its smooth highs, and thus rounds off many sibilant vocals producing a warm but present feel.

As I mentioned earlier, the Lauten Clarion FC-357 has a +10dB gain option switchable on the body. With good low noise levels, this is a very usable feature and is designed to allow you a higher output level from the microphone and therefore less gain from your chosen preamp. So you can exaggerate the sonic attributes of the FC-357 by altering the balance between microphone and preamp.

This gain feature translates well into general use and gives you another tonal balancing option into your recording chain.

Whether it was vocals, close instrument, or room miking, the FC-357 always gave very usable pleasing results. I especially liked the natural roll off to some vocals and ambient miking of percussion in some bright rooms where you can exploit the FC-357 high frequency tone.

Conclusion

The Lauten Clarion FC-357 is a good all round microphone with very pleasing sonic attributes that you would expect with an FET design with very good build quality and attention to detail.

When you factor in the price, the FC-357 looks remarkable value, especially when you consider the accessories supplied in the box. **AM**

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INFORMATION

① GB£459.00 (inc.VAT)

Ⓐ Lauten Audio, 4960 Almaden Expwy., 228 San Jose, CA 95118, USA

① +1 877 721 7018 (ext.704)

Ⓜ www.lautenaudio.com

Ⓐ UK Distributor: The Audio Professionals, Unit 320, The Wenta Business Centre, Colne Way, Watford, Herts, WD24 7ND

① +44 (0) 1923 693770

① +44 (0) 1923 693757

Ⓜ www.audiopros.eu

THE REVIEWER

SIMON TILLBROOK is the Principal Music Tutor at Islington Music Workshop in London. The rest of his time is spent as a freelance engineer, mainly in the USA.