

Lauten Audio Eden-LT386

The new flagship tube microphone makes music for **JON THORNTON**.

Lauten Audio have been in the microphone business for some eight years now. They entered the fray at a time when, in their own words, a new brand or model of microphone seemed to launch every week or so. A significant proportion of this flurry of new microphones seemed to major on emulating classic or vintage designs in either looks, sound or sometimes both — but Lauten founder Brian Loudenslager decided on a different approach. With a small team, he set out to produce a high quality, versatile and original sounding studio microphone from a blank sheet of paper. The result was the (no longer available) Horizon microphone.

Eight years down the line, and the range has expanded and moved on — both in looks that are more “classic” when compared with the Horizon, and in the range of models and price points. Broadly speaking the family is split into two ranges, the more affordable Series Black and the premium Signature Series. The Eden LT-386 is a recent addition, and the flagship of the Signature Series (MSRP: \$3,999).

Despite the “blank sheet” philosophy, the key ingredients here are familiar ones. The Eden is a large diaphragm, multi-pattern tube condenser design. Centre stage is a 31.25mm edge-terminated dual diaphragm capsule, tuned specifically for this particular microphone. A modern (JJ Electronic) EF806S tube sits at the heart of the electronic side of things, coupled to a custom-wound output transformer. Externally, the Eden is a hefty beast, with a chassis that is both wide and tall, topped by a very shiny nickel-plated basket. The main body is finished in a muted grey/green, utilising a modern ceramic coating process to provide a finish that succeeds in looking both classic and modern at the same time.

Adding to the heft is the supplied shock-mount, which is unusual by virtue of being semi-permanently attached to the mic (the supplied hard case has a cut-out that accepts the microphone mated to the mount). Lauten do mean semi-permanent — it will come off, but releasing and attaching it involves the use of a small hex screwdriver to slacken or tighten a couple of small bolts. Finished in the same very shiny nickel plating as the basket, it underscores the overall feeling of sturdiness and tank-like build quality. There are some nice touches here too. The front of the mount is open, making close positioning to sources easy, and a flip-flop tab on the locking nut for the swivel joint makes it easy to tighten securely whatever the position.

Returning to the microphone itself there are three, three-position slide switches arrayed in a triangular distribution below the basket area — two accessible from the front of the microphone and one from the rear. The first of these, unusually for a modern tube microphone but harkening back to some classic designs, is the polar pattern selector, with omni, fig-8 and cardioid patterns offered. The second slide switch is effectively a two stage HPF — although Lauten refer to the different selections as “Kick-Shaper” and “Vocal-Shaper”. The final switch, located at the rear of the microphone is something of a Lauten signature — the multi-voicing switch. This selects one of three voices (each with independent signal paths internally) for the microphone — Neutral, Gentle or Forward.

The inclusion of this option, and the references to the HPF settings as Shapers are both clues that the brief for the Eden is very much based on designing a microphone for its musical character rather than perfect tech specs. Not that in many ways these aren’t wholly respectable. Self noise, for instance, is quoted at <20dBA and

it does sound at least that quiet in use — very impressive for a tube design.

Connection to the supplied compact power supply is via a 5-pin XLR (remembering that the pattern switching is done on the mic, so not the usual 7-pin connection). The manual recommends a 30 minute warm up time — but after leaving things to settle down for five minutes impatience set in, and I didn’t notice any significant changes in either tonality or noise as the session progressed.

An initial walk around the microphone with spoken voice on the cardioid pattern, with voicing set to Neutral gives a sound that’s quite weighty and dense at the low end, but not muffled at all, with plenty of mid-range detail that sounds natural rather than hard. Off-axis response is very balanced up to the 45° point, and proximity effect comes in gradually and adds weight rather than bloom to the sound. Switching to the Gentle voicing softens out the mid range ever so slightly, whilst the Forward setting opens up the top end significantly, but doesn’t add harshness or exaggerate sibilance at all.

Sung (female) vocals sound very “pretty” indeed with this microphone — and it does a great job of thickening up a slightly thin sounding voice — it’s the mid-range detail that’s really working here, but the low end always sounds controlled. Comparing two very different sounding female vocalists — one with much more of a “belt” than the other — was a good test for the voicing permutations on offer. There’s actually more at play here than just the multi-voicing switch, as combinations of this, the HPF and the polar pattern all seem to work very collaboratively together to give a broad and useful variation to the tonal pallet. Some of the changes are very nuanced, but others more startling — although this is very dependent on the source. On acoustic guitar, for example (a Taylor GS Mini that a colleague was keen to try out), switching to Gentle on the Omni setting with the HPF off gave a scale to the sound that belied the size of the instrument. With female vocals, changing from Neutral to Gentle was a very nuanced change, but Forward with the HPF at its second stop was almost like auditioning a different microphone.

Whilst Lauten maintain that their designs are “clean sheet” and not intended to emulate any existing designs, comparisons are of course inevitable. That’s actually quite hard to do, given the surprisingly varied tonal possibilities on offer here. At its core (and perhaps unsurprisingly given the basic ingredients) a 251 springs most readily to mind. But, depending on the source, this can morph more towards a C12 or, say, an M149 — it really is that flexible. In the last few months I’ve had the chance to evaluate a number of microphones with similar tonal flexibility, albeit achieved in very different ways. And whilst they all have their unique strengths, to my ears the Eden LT-386 does it in the most organic, musical way of the bunch. My first experience with the brand definitely won’t be my last. ■

PROS Fabulous build and finish; quiet and clean but not clinical sounding; flexible and musical tonal palette; never sounds harsh or strained.

CONS Semi-permanent shock mount not quick to remove if necessary.

Contact

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