

Interview: Emmy® Award-Winning Composer & Recording Artist Michael Whalen

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PhantomFocus Master Engineer Series eChair™ - Raven Chrome

Ergonomic comfort and stylish looks

REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

Seven years ago I met a chair that changed my life, and today, we are looking at the next-level version, designed and distributed exclusively through Carl Tatz Design's PhantomFocus division. Please welcome the PhantomFocus Master Engineer Series eChair.

What Are You Sitting On?

That simple question was how I began my ErgoLab Stealth PRO Chair review in our November 2017 issue. I would guess that the answer has not changed much. Your "studio chair" was probably just lying around, a hand-me-down, or perhaps a garage sale find. Or maybe you purchased it cheaply at your local big box office supply store.

I know I sound "judgy." Still, while many of us think nothing of spending money on expensive studio gear, what we sit on during our hours-long sessions is often an afterthought.

I sense that some of you are poised to let me know that you purchased one of those famous big-buck chairs that all of the pros use, and that's awesome! The Herman Miller Aeron is a great chair. I have two of them myself. So, what is so special about the chair on review today? I'm glad you asked.

Bringing the Stealth Story Into Focus

The roots of the PhantomFocus eChair can be found in the ErgoLab Stealth PRO Chair, an adaptation of the VIRTU line of executive chairs designed for dentists and medical professionals—who also spend a lot of time performing tasks in a seated position.

Designer Steve Knight adapted said medical chairs for studio and front-of-house engineers, and the Stealth PRO chair was born. So, how do Carl Tatz and PhantomFocus enter the picture? By aesthetically taking an already successful and well-designed chair to the next level.

The best analogy I can think of is an Avalon is a really nice car that sits at the top of the Toyota line. At the same time, the Lexus ES 350—technically the same body and platform—rides better and has a nicer upgraded interior and accouterments. The Lexus and PhantomFocus eChair are premium models. With the latter, you can expect upgraded, more eye-catching materials.



Meet the eChair

The PhantomFocus eChair has six variations. There is a stunning Silver Mesh (white) Porcelain model, Silver Mesh Chrome and Raven Chrome. These first three feature a standard seat and a small 18" x 4" contoured lumbar-style backrest. A second Raven Chrome variant adds the option of a larger seat.

The final two offerings are billed as the Master Engineer Series. This variant swaps the smaller backrest for a larger, slightly more traditional backrest that measures 16" x 13" and offers a 4" outward bow that maintains proper back support.

The Master Engineer Series is available in Raven Chrome only, with a choice of regular or large seat options. I am reviewing the Master Engineer Series Raven Chrome model with a black (regular) mesh seat and larger executive backrest on a matte-chrome hydraulic body tube and legs.

Getting Zen About It

A few things aim to set the eChair (and Stealth PRO) models apart from the competition. The first is known as ZenWave Technology. This comprises a high-strength fiber-reinforced body frame with precise yet variably tensioned mesh webbing designed to optimally disperse your weight as you sit while easing stress on your pressure points.

I've Got an Angle

The second major factor of the design is its adjustments and angles. As I pointed out in my previous reviews, these are not designed to be lounge chairs where one kicks back and relaxes with their feet up. Instead, the Stealth PRO and eChairs are

designed for work where one is hunched forward, in our case, over a keyboard and mouse, a mixing desk or even a piano keyboard.

There are three adjustment levers on the bottom of the eChair. One is for height. The second controls the seat's tilt, tilting farther forward than back. The final lever controls the angle of the backrest. The backrest is attached to the seat, so it's essential to consider and adjust both simultaneously to find your perfect fit.

You will find detailed instructions in the box and videos online to help you do so.

Don't be surprised if the first few times you sit in your new chair, it takes you a bit of time to get used to the experience, as it retrains you to sit with proper posture.

Sit Down and Get to Work

As someone who has been using a Stealth PRO executive model for the past seven years (still going strong), I believe the PhantomFocus eChair is a beautiful upgrade. I love the look of the chrome finish and can already attest that it's pretty resilient and easy to dust and keep clean (you get cleaning instructions with your chair as well).

Like most furniture these days, some assembly is required out of the box. You will find Carl's personal setup suggestions in the box and videos online to help you do so, and it should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes.

The five splayed legs of the chair sit on smooth, gliding, heavy-duty plastic rollers, and there are also a pair of adjustable arms (height and width) that can even be removed if one wants to play guitar seated in an eChair.

Years of Experience

Earlier, I made the hyperbolic statement that this series of chairs changed my life. Let me qualify the statement. I have had a herniated L4–L5 disk for 20+ years. With seven years of experience with this chair line, I can say it has more than helped keep the discomfort at bay, and I do a lot of sitting both at the studio and in my home office/edit suite, so an ergonomically comfortable chair is vital to me.

Another thing I like about the PhantomFocus eChair is its compact size. It takes up much less space than most other big, cushy, comfy, lounge-style desk chairs, and did I mention the eChair feels so much better on your back?

Final Thoughts

I was and am still an unequivocal fan of the Stealth PRO line, and I think the next-level aesthetics of the PhantomFocus eChair add increased value to an already stellar seating option.

The PhantomFocus eChair will run between \$699 and \$849 based on the color and style. This is well in line with other high-end seating options and, again, in my opinion, a much better choice than the \$99 to \$300 options you will find at your local office supply store.

Whatever chair you choose, do not compromise proper posture and back health. I think picking a proper studio chair may be almost as crucial as acoustically treating your room—seriously. ➡

A final fun fact: the Master Engineer Series eChair is the only chair to ever be nominated for a NAMM TEC Award, and the eChair of your choice is included as part of the PhantomFocus Monitor System in the Carl Tatz PhantomFocus MixRoom, which we reviewed in our November 2021 issue.

Price: \$849 (model reviewed)
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