



Photos: Neil Rogers

# Vanguard Audio Labs V1S+Lolli

## Stereo Microphone Set

With no fewer than eight capsules and a full complement of accessories, this stereo mic kit from Californian newcomers Vanguard offers versatility, quality and affordability in abundance.

### Vanguard Audio Labs V1S+Lolli \$1199

#### PROS

- A well-built and considered modular system of mic options.
- Lolli capsule has a neutral but 'musical' sound.
- Smaller capsules offer lots of flexibility.
- Case, shockmount and stereo bar are all solid and good quality.
- Looks nice.
- Excellent value.

#### CONS

- It can be a bit fiddly to get the small capsules out of the case.

#### SUMMARY

Vanguard Audio Labs have produced a hugely versatile modular kit of microphones that includes four small-diaphragm capsules of different polar patterns along with a striking-looking and innovative large-diaphragm option. The V1S system would not only be an excellent way of starting a microphone collection, but it would also find its way onto plenty of recordings in an already well-stocked studio.

#### NEIL ROGERS

Vanguard Audio are a small company based in Upland, California, and their first microphone was released as recently as 2016. Their output until now has exclusively been around the theme of large-diaphragm capacitor mics: the V13, which is a multi-pattern tube microphone, and the V4 FET-style design, which is also available in a stereo version (the V44S). For review here, however, is an intriguing microphone package which is their take on the modular small-diaphragm 'pencil'

capacitor mic format. The V1 System (or V1S) offers a selection of capsules that can be swapped out to achieve different polar patterns and tonal options depending on your needs in a recording session. There are four different packages available in this modular format, with the most basic being a single microphone with four different 22mm capsules. I was lucky enough, however, to have the most comprehensive package to play with for this review — the V1S+Lolli kit, a stereo set that includes two lots of V1 mics, a pair of shockmounts, the four small capsules, a stereo bar and also

a pair of large-diaphragm 'Lolli' capsules that can also be used with the pencil-style microphone body. I had a good variety of recording sessions booked in when the V1S kit arrived at my studio and the whole system saw plenty of use over the review period.

## First Impressions

The V1S kit is all housed in a single pinewood storage case and, as well as looking and feeling very nice indeed, you can't help but be impressed by the sheer amount of stuff you have in front of you when you first open the box! The mic bodies themselves are deep red or 'Pinot Noir' in colour, with the surrounding metalwork finished in polished nickel, and the mics fit nicely in the very solid-feeling VSSM shockmounts. The eight small-diaphragm capsules are all housed in two banks of four down the side of the case which, although looking neat, might trouble those of us with larger fingers in the middle of a busy session. Also included is a bar for stereo applications and, last but not least, the very shiny-looking large-diaphragm Lolli capsule option. The whole package looks very tasteful and has that solid feel of quality that can often be missing on lower-cost microphones.

When I first looked at the bounty of capsules in front of me my first thought was to wonder how easy would it be to swap the capsules in and out, and if I could imagine myself quickly auditioning them in the context of a real recording session. Everything seems nicely engineered, however, and it was a matter of maybe 15 seconds to remove a capsule and get a new one in place. The first session I tried one of the mics on was a cello recording, on which I decided to try the large Lolli capsule in combination with a ribbon mic. With the mic positioned about 12 inches back, and just below where the bow meets the strings, I was impressed with how neutral and balanced the V1 sounded. I don't use the term neutral in a negative way at all, as this was a great-sounding instrument being played well, and I wanted a mic that just did its job of capturing what was in front



The large-diaphragm Lolli capsule.

of it. It also compared very well against the ribbon mic in terms of being sympathetic to any harsh bowing noises coming off the strings.

Staying with the same capsule, I got to try the mic on a couple of male vocalists, which confirmed what I initially thought: this mic/capsule combination doesn't push the top end too much, as many modern microphones do. This was especially good for one of the singers, who I know can be quite sibilant. Sometimes when I'm trying a new mic I put another more trusted option up as well just to be sure, but I quickly had no problem using the V1 on both sessions and I would describe it as a smooth-sounding, no-frills mic that should work well with plenty of vocalists. On a side note, I had more than one client comment on how "cool" the mic looked with the Lolli capsule, which, although not at all helpful when it comes to mix time, certainly doesn't do any harm.

## A Plethora Of Options

Taking a look at the range of smaller 22mm capsules next, there are four options: cardioid, hypercardioid, wide cardioid and omnidirectional. I do quite a lot of acoustic guitar recording at my studio so that's something I would want this kind of mic to do well. With this in mind, I used an acoustic guitar to directly compare the capsules to try and get a feel for what the different options might provide. The mic was pointed towards the 13th fret of the guitar and about 10 inches back. I should mention I normally might have it a bit closer than that on this particular guitar but the low-end seemed a bit too much. It was noticeable straight away, however, that all the capsules

offered a slightly different tonal option, with the omni sounding a little brighter and the wide cardioid bringing out more of the lower mids of the instrument. The standard cardioid option was my favourite here, as it captured a nice balance of the strings and the body of the guitar. The hypercardioid sounded broadly similar but a bit more focused, while the omni capsule sounded more 'open'. This variety should be very useful and, as you would expect, the different polar patterns also provide varying degrees of directionality.

Next up was a session with a large group of singers recording some backing tracks for a musical, and I set up a stereo X-Y configuration using the 22mm cardioid capsules.

The stereo bar does precisely what you need such a tool to do, and I positioned the mics centrally about five feet back from the singers. I also had a spaced pair of omni mics further back in the room, but the X-Y setup had a much nicer sense of 'left to right' and, overall, did an excellent job, along with being nice and quick to set up in what was quite a chaotic session. The same X-Y configuration also did a very respectable job as overheads on a drum kit. I was left asking myself why I don't use pencil mics more often on drums as the detail captured was very noticeable, as was how 'full' the snare and toms sounded.

## Final Thoughts

This was my first experience with any of the Vanguard products and, as you can probably tell, I was impressed. Thinking back to when I started my studio with just a few microphones, a kit like the V1S would have turbocharged my mic locker, and if you're looking to quickly get a range of microphone options to cover a variety of recording applications, then this could be a real winner. The large-diaphragm option would more than hold its own against some more expensive mics on vocals, and the four different 22mm options provide not only control over room sound and bleed, but also give you a nice palette of different tonal flavours. Bags of flexibility, well built, good looking and sensibly priced — what's not to like? **///**

## Hear For Yourself

I've prepared a number of audio files that demonstrate the V1S+Lolli mics in action. You can hear them at <https://sosm.ag/vanguard-v1s>.

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