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0 09281 03050 8

VOL. THIRTY-SEVEN  
 NUMBER EIGHT  
 MAY 2024  
 USA \$5.99  
 CANADA \$5.99

RECORDING The magazine for the recording musician

MAY 2024

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# Vanguard Audio Labs V24

*A stereo tube mic of the highest order*

## REVIEW BY PAUL VNUK JR.

The V24 from Vanguard Audio Labs is a dual-capsule stereo tube condenser microphone based on, but not strictly a clone of, perhaps the most famous (and ultra-rare) stereo tube mic of all time, the AKG C 24.



## On the Vanguard

Based in Montclair, CA, Vanguard Audio Labs is known for its V-Series of microphones featuring impressive sound, a first-rate build quality and a stunning high-gloss, deep burgundy, "Pinot Noir" finish. Ranging in price from \$499 to \$1,299, Vanguard mics also sit on the affordable side of the scale.

In designing the V24, Vanguard took a no-holds-barred, price-be-damned approach to crafting what, in their own words, is "the crème de la crème of stereo microphones."

The mic's foundations can also be found in the Vanguard V44s gen 2 stereo FET condenser (reviewed in May 2019)—an impressive stereo mic in its own right.

## The Inspiration

The AKG C24 was released in 1959 with a pair of vertically stacked CK12 capsules, each with nine independent polar pattern options. The top capsule could be rotated 180 degrees to accommodate numerous stereo miking configurations. It was essentially a stereo C12, in regard to the capsule and pattern implementation, but the tube moved to a cathode-bias circuit like an ELA M 251 (a CK12-based mic made by AKG for Telefunken).

With fewer than 800 made in total, finding a working condition C24 will set you back upwards of \$25,000 or more.

## Enter the V24

The Vanguard Audio Labs V24 is not intended to be a C24 clone. The goal was to use the C24 design as a starting point and then update, modernize, and improve the design and components.

The V24 starts with a stock 10.63" x 2.05" Vanguard V44s chassis, which is stripped of its wine-inspired finish. The raw stainless steel body is hand polished with a #4 grained finish before being rebadged and laser engraved. The mic's internal bracing and the swiveling capsule turret—a modification of the V44S platform—are machined locally in California.

## 12 x 2

Inside, you will find a pair of matching CK12-style capsules with 1.04" diaphragms made for Vanguard by BeesNeez in Australia. These capsules live behind an open-weave grille design (like the V44S), which offers what Vanguard calls an "open-air" voicing with minimal reflections.

For a tube, Vanguard supplies a NOS GE 5-star 6072, along with a second, extra cryogenically treated modern Electroharmonix 12AY7/6072.

Additionally, you will find audiophile-grade components such as PRP resistors and more—most of which are cryogenically treated to increase

stability, longevity and lower the noise-floor. The circuit flows into a pair of Cinemag T14 transformers based on the Hauf T14 transformer used in the original C12, C24 and 251. According to Vanguard, the larger core of the Cinemag T14 offers an improved and extended low-end response compared to the C12, C24 and 251. Vanguard also updated the circuit design to help eliminate the -25dB crosstalk of the original C24.

## Two Voices

On the mic's body, you will find a pair of 2-position low-pass filter switches—one for each capsule. This low-pass filter allows you to engage or disengage the capacitor-based high-end filtering initially used on a 251 to tone down the sparkly C12 top end. This means the V24 offers a choice of both a C12 or 251 flavor per capsule.

## Spin Me Round

The rotating turret mechanism on the original C24 was finicky at best and often prone to failure. The V24 uses a precision machined punched-steel mechanism with a smooth glide and firmly locking steps. The mechanism offers seven detented positions (15 degrees each) with a maximum 120-degree throw.



# REVIEW

## Vanguard Audio Labs V24



### Jam-Packed Power Supply

The redesigned matching brushed stainless steel power supply is equally, if not more, custom than the mic. Its robust, heavy and solid enclosure is fully machined in eastern Pennsylvania. The switches and I/O are protected by a slight, 3-sided overhang. Two red 9-position pattern switches (one for each capsule) offer Omni to Cardioid to Fig-8 with multiple steps in between covering hypercardioid and super-cardioid positions.

Next is a multi-pin cable input followed by top and bottom XLR outs for each capsule. A third XLR output offers a phase-reversed copy of the top capsule output. This allows you to record Mid-Side stereo signals directly to three channels in your DAW with zero channel copying, phase flipping or signal decoding necessary.

### The Kit

The V24 comes in a high-quality Pelican-style case made in California by SKB with a thick multi-pin Neutrik+TMB cable, a wooden mic storage box and one of the company's high-end C-style shock mounts.

### In Use

As a stereo mic, the V24 is insanely versatile. As with my V44s gen 2 review, this mic is adept at quick and painless M/S recording, X/Y, Bluelien and more. It can be fun to experiment with room sounds, group vocals and more with each capsule set to Omni with

the mic at a full 120-degree position—it's like super Omni. One of my favorite uses was on drum overheads, where it was easy to zero in on the perfect width with the capsule spread and tightness with the polar patterns. I also like the V24 on stereo acoustic guitar, three-piece horn section, room mic duties and even stereo lead vocals.

I don't do much classical recording, but I can easily hear how the V24 would make a tremendous orchestral room or section mic.

### Sound of a Classic

Of course, the big question is, how does it sound? I tested it alongside a current production AKG C12VR, a Chandler Limited REDD microphone (which exhibits a beautiful clear 251-school top end) and a Neumann M49V (for quality comparisons, more than sound).

The V24 hung proudly with them all. The sound was full, rich and clear, and regardless of distance, whether 2" or 10', its sound and imaging never collapsed or became weak or grainy as can some cheaper mics.

While I cannot empirically say, "Yes, this sounds just like a real/vintage C12 or 251," I have experience with both mics in question, and the V24 is unquestionably in the family. The V24 just sounds that good.

The only sobering reality of the V24 is its price, which places it in the same echelon as the mics mentioned above. Vanguard notes that every V24 is made

by hand in small runs. Every connection and component is hand-soldered at the company shop in California, and each mic takes about 60 hours of labor to build.

### Wrap Up

The Vanguard V24 is a very special microphone on so many levels. It easily fits in the C12/251 school of sound, and it does so in a wide variety of stereo configurations, something with which the team at Vanguard should be quite proud! If you have ever dreamed of or lusted after an AKG C24, you need to check out the V24. I genuinely regret sending it back, and I miss it already. ➔

**Price:** \$8,999

**More From:** [vanguardaudiolabs.com](http://vanguardaudiolabs.com)



## In Memoriam Ken Avant

As I was writing this review, I sadly learned of the passing of Ken Avant. In addition to being a microphone designer with 50 years of history in music and our industry, Ken was a co-founder and one of the principal mic designers at Vanguard Audio Labs.

I first met Ken when he launched his previous eponymously named microphone company many years ago and I always enjoyed our conversations. I still remember getting a great big bear hug from Ken after reviewing the first generation BV-1 mic in February 2010.

A few weeks ago, Ken, who was incredibly proud and excited, sent me a link to his latest album. Rest in peace, Ken. We at RECORDING extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and coworkers at Vanguard Audio Labs.

Check out Ken Avant's *Whispers and Stories* at [kenavant.bandcamp.com/album/whispers-and-stories](http://kenavant.bandcamp.com/album/whispers-and-stories).