

# Warm Audio WA-251

**JON THORNTON** finds history repeating itself — in a good way

There's a curious sense of history repeating itself here. Warm Audio offer a range of re-imaginings of classic microphone designs, and one of the first was a recreation of an early AKG C414. To do it justice, Warm developed its own version of the famous 'Brass' CK12 capsule employed in the early versions of that Austrian classic. And just as that CK12 capsule found its way from the C12 to the C414 and then to the Telefunken M250 and M251, Warm Audio's version has re-appeared in its latest model.

The WA-251 is Warm's take on probably one of the most revered classics of all time, and certainly one of my all-time favourites — the Ela M251. Whilst the original 251 certainly shared a lot of its microphonic DNA with the C12, the slight differences in circuitry, head grille and mesh design were more than enough to give it a character all of its own.

Out of the box, Warm's take pays more than a nod to the form factor of the original.

With a cream coloured, enamelled body and a bright

metal head grille, the WA-251 is unmistakably close in looks to its inspiration. One significant difference is the lack of the polar pattern selector integrated into the microphone body — a feature that really differentiated the original microphone from the C12. Instead, this is switched on the supplied PSU (just like the C12!), with the expected cardioid, omni and figure-8 patterns offered in fixed steps.

Internally, Warm has tried to use components that stay as faithful to the original as possible, given that many of them have long ceased production. A JJ 12AY7 tube sits at the heart of things, with Wima and Solen capacitors and a US-manufactured Cinemag output

transformer. A quick peek inside shows solid construction and internal wiring.

The PSU connects to the microphone with a supplied Gotham Audio 7-pin cable, and also included in the kit is a suspension mount. This is one of those affairs that circles the mic body and tightens to grip it with some fold-over catches. It looks like it might be inspired by the original — but you can take authenticity too far. In practice it's a bit fiddly and isn't wholly confidence inspiring. And whilst the microphone itself is supplied in a nice wooden box, the rest of the kit has to make do with cardboard packaging — which doesn't quite give the sense of occasion you'd expect for a microphone like this.

## Does it pass the smile test?

These whinges are quickly forgotten though when you set the microphone up and simply talk through it. It's unlikely

that any two original Ela M251s would sound exactly the same (I've only ever had the pleasure of using one once), but I've also spent a fair amount of time with other recreations or 'inspired by' designs from the likes of Soundelux and Mojave Audio. And whilst they all undoubtedly sound slightly different, there's an overarching character to the 251's sound that comes flooding back when you hear it again, and one that always brings a smile to my face. The WA-251 passes that smile test

with flying colours.

Initially tasked with female sung vocals, the WA-251 was auditioned against some other valve-based mics: a Neumann M147 and an AT4060. Whilst not overly noisy, the WA-251 did seem a touch noisier than the other two. Past experience with 251 types would have suggested to me that the WA-251 would walk this particular shoot out — but actually it was the Neumann that won out with this particular vocalist. The WA-251 certainly has that slightly

mellow, honey-like quality that I'd expect — but also seems to have a touch more HF brightness than I'd have expected or remember from similar microphones.

## Larger than life

On sung male vocals, though, it was a different story. The WA-251 delivered a terrifically solid sound — even when not set terrifically close to source it had that slightly larger than life quality. In some ways, it almost sounds slightly compressed here (in a good way), and dare I say it, 'creamy'. So there you go — once again a 251 recreation has me sounding like a wine taster. But I have to say that the 'match' to male and female vocals is almost the exact opposite to my experience with other 251 recreations.

Whilst many prospective users will view the WA-251 chiefly as a go-to vocal mic, it's also worth giving it an outing on other duties. So, set to omni and set a little forward of a minimalist drum kit — somewhere between a room mic and a mono kit mic — and that smile is back on my face again. Bingo (or should I say Ringo?) That same solidity, warmth and slightly compressed nature to the sound really delivers the goods here.

And then there's the price. Let's not even consider the stratospheric price that originals are commanding — but even measured against other 251 recreations, the WA-251 does represent great value for money. With a street price of around £830 it's not cheap — but it is significantly cheaper than offerings from other manufacturers. Yes, it might not have a fancy case (although arguably it deserves one), but it's clear that in building to that price, the money has been spent where it matters. **T**

## resolution/VERDICT

**PROS** Captures some of that 251 magic convincingly; very well priced; good build quality.

**CONS** Sounds a touch brighter than some other 251 replicas; shock-mount a little fiddly; deserves a decent case for the whole kit.

[www.warmaudio.com](http://www.warmaudio.com)

/ WA-251 with supplied shock-mount