

Insights: Cinematic Strings 2.0 – A String Library For the Rest of Us!

By [Jose Herring](#) / May 11, 2012

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[Cinematic Strings 2.0](#) a Kontakt 5 based library working with both the free Kontakt 5 Player and the full version of Kontakt 5 is without a doubt one of the most impressive string libraries on the market today. For a complete overview of Cinematic Strings 2.0 please read Peter Alexander's excellent SonicControl Insights article from May 3rd, 2012.

One of the most difficult things that I've found to do with any string library is slow, expressive melodic writing. And, in hearing MIDI mock-up after mock-up from composers all around the world, I can hear that it's a problem for many. The problem stems from lack of ability to use a particular library due to complexity of the library to a library just having the wrong sound for melodic expressive playing. So right out of the box I wanted to see if Cinematic Strings 2.0 could easily handle the slower more intimate pieces.

The Setup

To start, setting CS2.0 up in my template hosted in Vienna Ensemble 5 Pro took minutes, not days, thanks to the cleverly designed patch list. It was a pure delight to see this 20 gig library wrapped up in five patches taking up only 5 MIDI tracks in my DAW. Having used other libraries where just the 1st violins alone take up ten or more MIDI channels I was ecstatic. Deleting older patches that I no longer needed after installing the library, CS2.0 actually made my template smaller track wise—a first! I quickly saw that this library was probably going to become the go-to library due to its ease of use, setup and sound quality. I won't have to go digging through 20 violin patches with cryptic geek names that don't even fit properly on the screen. With CS 2.0 if I want violins, I just have to find the violin track.

The Music: *Largo*

[Largo \(all mics\) vibrato MP3](#)

Rather than go into a blow by blow of how *Largo* was created, I'd rather give you a brief summation of the things that I found while creating the piece that make CS2.0 a seriously great strings library.

The simplicity and ease of use of the library shouldn't be taken for CS2.0 being a "lite" or featureless string library. This is a full-fledged serious contender that has a lot to offer on the same level as all the major string libraries. This library being a favorite of more than a few top tier professionals I know, and with the list price of \$499, even the budget-minded composer has access to a set of top quality strings samples—that statement isn't just marketing hype, *it's the absolute truth*.

I fell in the love with the sound of CS2.0. The sound of the strings suited *Largo* well. Not just the recording quality, but the expressiveness of the samples. Each sample had a life-like musical quality that instantly reminded me of real string players. The hall sounds beautiful, giving the strings that expressive musical ethereal quality that reminded me of very fine orchestral recordings. CS2.0 was going to be able

to pull off the level of musicality that I would demand for a piece like *Largo*. So I wanted to see if CS2.0 would respond musically in a way that a live ensemble would.

Thinking Like a Musician

CS2.0 gives you the option of the notes fingered in a high position on the instruments or a lower position. From the front panel of any patch, toggling back and forth between high and low I could hear that the high position would work well for my piece. The high position achieves that expressive tight sound where all sections blend well together for a cohesive full strings sound. The lower position also sounds wonderful and would have its use in achieving that wide strings sound, but for such an intimate piece as *Largo* I needed a tighter more intimate sound that the high position really provides.

Since I was using the high position I was able to achieve something that I can rarely achieve with samples. I was able to bring the violas *up in unison with the 1st violins* [Note: See *Professional Orchestration 2A* for examples] to reinforce the melody. The high position yielded a similar enough quality between the violins and violas that they blended seamlessly rather than being two distinctly different sounds.

Next I needed more control over the vibrato of each section. Turning the vibrato control on in the advanced menu and assigning it to any continuous controller gives you control over vibrato intensity. This is one of those features that is crucial to expressive playing. I couldn't have been happier with the results, as the piece then gained a level of expressiveness without having to over do it with the dynamic crossfades (cc1). So with CS2.0, I was able to achieve swells of expression within a dynamic layer without adjusting cc1. Vibrato control is another expressive layer adding life and realism to your sampled mock up.

(One trick is to assign vibrato control to the same fader as dynamic control (cc1). Then as you ride the fader to louder velocities, so does the vibrato intensity increase. It's a useful trick when in a hurry, but separating the vibrato control on to its own fader or knob gives you more control, so I placed vibrato control on a knob sending cc14.)

Connection of notes is a major concern in any sampled mockup. Great care has to be taken into making sure that notes in a phrase, line or melody connect up in the most musical manner. Without this musical connection it becomes a dead giveaway even to the lay person that you're using machines—the kiss of death on a job, destroying the illusion that you actually had real players (or that they actually had money for the real thing).

Again in this area CS2.0 does a stellar job. The speed of the legato transition is control via velocity. This control brings yet another level of musicality to your virtual strings productions. You do have to be a little careful. Velocity also triggers a staccato sample that sounds simultaneously with the sustain notes. If the notes don't overlap triggering the legato transition, then the stacc sample is triggered when playing a velocity over 60 and is quite noticeable. This stacc overlay can be turned off in the advanced menu but, I found it very useful for adding a little attack to certain notes even in slow expressive writing by leaving the overlay on.

The Mics

Though CS2.0 comes as a mutli mic position library, the library defaults to a prearranged mix without loading the individual mic positions. This saves a lot of ram. With the Kontakt buffers set to 60 I was easily able to write, mix and program *Largo* using CS2.0 with just under 2.5gigs loaded into the buffers. Though I have 24gigs in my system, I was pushing the limit with what I already had. So,

CS2.0 fit painlessly into an already full template.

when I completed the writing and programming of *Largo*, I cleared some unused patches of my template and loaded all the mic positions. Having close mic control gave me a more clear and upfront strings sound that I needed for *Largo*. But in all honesty, I've played both the mix mic versions and the mutli individual mic versions of *Largo* for people and nobody has complained about the sound of either one. I'm confident that in a pinch the mix mics would do just fine in a final production.

The mixed mics though require nearly 8 gigs of ram. If you're running it on a standard hard drive like I am, you'll even need to bump up the default buffer to avoid drop outs during denser arrangements. Thus for maximum efficiency of use of the mutli mics I would recommend getting a good SSD for CS2.0.

A Couple of Things to Watch For

A weakness, if you want to call it that, is that CS2.0 extreme upper dynamic layer seems to be boosted in loudness. So care has to be taken when the slider is up that the entire strings sound doesn't go dynamically beyond what a full orchestral tutti would be, sometimes even clipping the output buss of my DAW. I handled this by keeping the dynamic fader (cc1) lower than the full amount limiting the upper dynamic range.

Another weakness is that some of the samples do tend to get a little noisy. I noticed this at first, but by the time I added tiny amounts of reverb and then added a little bit a tape saturation, the noise level became totally unnoticeable. Kind of added to the realism of being recorded in a hall, but then again I've never been too keen on totally silent noiseless samples. If I can't hear a bit of noise, I get to feeling like I'm working with samples rather than having the real thing which kills the creative mojo.

All humor aside, CS 2.0 is a great, great library. Developer Alex Wallbank's vision of an easy to use powerful library capable of handling the most demanding professional jobs is fully realized in CS2.0. With the quality of this library, I stopped calling *Largo* a "mock up" and came to realize that using samples isn't just a replacement for the real thing but a creative medium all its own. One should demand the same level of exactness and musicality from your virtual orchestra as you would demand from a real one. Only then can one do convincing work with samples. Whether you need to deliver a finished musical work or you need to give a virtual representation of real orchestral strings,

CS2.0 can deliver.

This article was previously published at SonicControl.tv