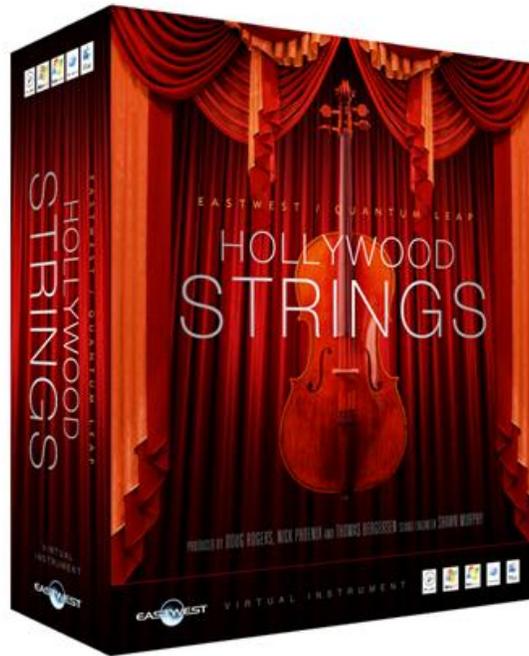


Hollywood Strings – A First Consideration

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / January 18, 2010

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On January 14, after months of waiting, music technology journalists, along with the general public, were finally given a glimpse of EastWest's new [Hollywood Strings](#) library in the PLAY player via [video presentation](#) that could either be viewed online or downloaded to your hard drive (click the Videos tab on the [Hollywood Strings](#) page).

Hollywood Strings is the first string sample library to be recorded in a Los Angeles recording studio, specifically EastWest Studio 1, which prior to being purchased by EastWest, has boasted many a string ensemble being recorded within its walls with Frank Sinatra and others. So the studio HS was recorded in already has a long-term demonstrated track record for achieving a quality string sound.

Consequently, a key feature for HS (*Hollywood Strings*) is its studio sound vs. the concert hall sound in EW's *Quantum Leap Symphonic Orchestra*.

HS's studio sound provides composers with another choice as to which string ensemble recorded in which space do we want for the piece we're working on. I use the word "piece" because it's too easy to box *Hollywood Strings* into a specific genre when it has capabilities in virtually any musical genre.

The string ensemble size is 16-14-10-10-7 making it a large orchestral string section. The library has the strings recorded in their seated positions using this stage layout: Vlns 1, Vlns 2, Violas, Cellos with Basses behind the cellos. According to the presentation, Violins 2 are independently recorded.

Divisi for this library has been achieved through a unique mic placement technique (described by co-producer Nick Phoenix in the video presentation) allowing for *div a 2*.

There are three different methods by which divisi can be achieved in a string section. Per the presentation, it appears the method used by EW is, from the conductor's position, dividing the strings so that players to the left side of the music stand play the high part while the players on the right side play the low, or inner, part.

In the presentation, Mr. Phoenix used the term *first chairs* to describe players on the left side of the music stand. The use of the term *first chairs* should not be confused with that term as used by *L.A. Scoring Strings*, which refers to the soloist for each section.

It should be noted that according to co-producer Nick Phoenix, *Hollywood Strings* have modeled muted strings. This means that the sordinos included with *Hollywood Strings* were not recorded with mutes on the strings. Instead, the *Hollywood Strings* interface creates a muted string effect. "We recorded real sordinos in HS, but they were only for analysis and comparison to the regular recordings," explained Mr. Phoenix on the [VI-Control.net forum](#).

Comments on the Overall Presentation

By way of background, on January 6, 2010, members of the press (including myself) received a written invitation to attend a live demonstration of Hollywood Strings on January 13 at the EastWest facilities.

Unfortunately, because of the number of journalists that didn't come to NAMM this year, that meeting was canceled and replaced with this video presentation, which was made available to both the press and the general public on January 14th. On January 15th, a revised presentation was posted.

Observations and impressions here are from the revised video. Just to restate, the revised video is the *only* information journalists have at this writing with which to write about *Hollywood Strings*. Consequently, I've posed a number of product feature questions that this first introduction to *Hollywood Strings* didn't cover.

After months of waiting for what promises to be a game changing library, I confess, I was somewhat let down by the video presentation (which EW calls a tutorial). With so much time available before formal product launch, it would have been good for EW to produce, using Keynote or Power Point, a basic 5-10 minute overview that could also be posted on YouTube. *Hollywood Strings* has a number of features and string bowings not found in other libraries, and its approach to recording with a Decca Tree all point to the need of a presentation modeled along the lines of, *The Making of...* especially with a product name like *Hollywood Strings*.

About my Comments on the Hollywood Strings Library

My comments take into account that this is an unfinished library not shipping until mid-February. I look at the video as *things to come*, understanding that the programming is still being worked on. That HS was originally scheduled to ship on January 13, 2010 and has been deferred until mid-February indicates the immensity of the library.

Remarks are pegged to timings (minutes: seconds) in the revised video presentation.

2:56 – Slur Runs – compelling feature especially with five mic position choices.

3:19 – The dream – load a patch, play chords in the left hand and a melody in the right so that it sounds like finished music. A program is displayed labeled “Tommy Williams” (?). Is this a preset? A custom program? Some explanation is in order. Re: Mr. Phoenix’s comment that the demonstration at this point was on a feature that’s never been done before. This also needs a little explanation. Plenty of composers in the past and present have used a program usually labeled *All Strings* to quickly knock out a cue with chords in the left hand and the melody/theme in the right hand. So I’m not sure what Mr. Phoenix means when he says, “It’s never been done before,” and then refers to, “unthinkable power.”

4:12 – Cello Legato Monster Patch – If I’m understanding this correctly, what EW has programmed in the *Monster Patch* is comparable to the concept behind several of the Vienna Instruments programs where all the basic expressive articulations are within a single program (patch), including up bow/down bow in the demonstration. If I’m understanding this correctly, this is an awesome programming achievement, and I’d like to know if there are equivalent patches for the violins, violas, and basses.

5:43 – Mic positions – Mr. Phoenix used the *Cello Legato Monster Patch* as the basis for demonstrating the five mic positions. While brief, you certainly see the great options available with this feature. It would have been useful to have a one-sentence explanation for each mic position demonstration to clarify better what you’re hearing, especially for those who are recording novices and unfamiliar with a Decca Tree and how it works.

6:47 – Mic Mixing With Reverb – Impressive. Certainly allows an ease for using HS with other libraries, and certainly with HS alone. Since there are no direct woodwind, brass and percussion libraries recorded to match HS, it would be useful for EW to provide some template setups for *QLSO*, *StormDrum 2*, *Gypsy*, *Quantum Leap Pianos*, and *Ministry of Rock*, so that you can have a ready-studio orchestra post-installation built entirely of EW products.

6:58 – Full Strings Patch – This was demonstrated both open and muted. It was performed live at the keyboard by Thomas J. Bergersen, one of the co-producers. Though brief, you get the idea. Quite lovely. However, the program displaying in the browser is *Violas Sus RR Omni*. So which program was it we were hearing?

8:05 – This is a demonstration of the First and Second Violins in octaves (Vlns 1 – Vlns 2) using what Mr. Phoenix called a *Violin Performance Legato*. A different group of players were recorded for each of the sections. This combination is most frequently used when Violins 1 are in the Medium through Very High registers with Violins 2 in the register an octave below. I’m impressed with this demo. String octaves are a major writing technique, and they’re a major technique in film score writing. This can be a very difficult technique to do with samples, and even though we’ve only heard a little portion, EW seems to have captured this.

9:07 – 2nd Violins Shorts Mod Speed Patch – Mr. Phoenix didn’t say, and I couldn’t tell from listening to the *Marcato Shorts* if whether the shorts, all activated by the Mod Wheel, are with an arco string program so that on the same patch, you can go back and forth between arco and a particular “short” depending on the melody’s needs. If not, it would certainly be great to have such a program so that you can have a fluid string line on a single track. Least impressed with *Staccato-on-Bow* in this example. Otherwise, impressive.

10:40 – This demonstration uses multiple programs but only one program displays in the browser, *1st Violin Legato (1)*. Very good demonstration.

12:58 – Divisi – Good explanation of their recording approach.

15:46 – Measured tremolo – Demonstrated the program and the mic'ing. Good feature.

17:06 – Tremolo controlled by mod wheel. Good.

Audio Demos

There were two audio demos by Mr. Bergersen, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the presentation. The first demo was *Hollywood Strings* alone and the second was *Hollywood Strings* mixed in with a full electronic orchestral mix.

My questions really come from the second demo.

Was this HS with only QLSO or was this HS with Mr. Bergersen's other libraries mixed in? If it's with QLSO and other PLAY products exclusively, then those having QLSO will see immediately how their investment can be enhanced. If it's with other libraries mixed in, then we have an excellent example of *Hollywood Strings*' blendability. If it's the latter, it would be most useful to have some explanation of what was used and how the mix was achieved.

Pre-Ordering Considerations

At this writing, *Hollywood Strings*, listing at \$1699 and shipped on a hard drive, can be pre-ordered at a \$200 discount off list. As a fellow composer, I believe the question is, "For what you're writing today and what you think you might be writing in the next year, do you think having *Hollywood Strings* will add to your ability to earn income?"

If the answer for you is, "yes," then by all means consider pre-ordering.

Installation – *Hollywood Strings Diamond Edition* comes on a hard drive that is not to be used for streaming the samples. Fair enough. But what we need to know is can HS be split over multiple drives? Should the library be spread across a couple of computers?

Other – We need an explanation of what, "multiple finger positions for all sections including open strings," means and how to use it.

Conclusion

There are two elements to me that are game changers with *Hollywood Strings*. One is the need to really understand string instrumentation and string arranging/orchestration techniques to fully get the most out of this library. The other is having the instruction to understand how to mix *Hollywood Strings* alone with the Decca Tree (as demonstrated in the video) and, then applying that knowledge to working with other libraries in your collection.

As composers, we need to realize that this is a *musical* game change. It strikes me that with *Hollywood Strings* the emphasis may shift from discussions about editing and envelopes, and endless discussions on eq'ing strings, to the joy of writing and creating, to having the kinds of musical discussions arrangers, orchestrators, and composers typically have with each other.

This is new. And it's about time.

NOTE: Post publication we found a post on the Soundsonline web site stating that the samples used by Mr. Bergersen in the second demo *Hollywood Strings* mixed with other libraries.

Peter Lawrence Alexander is the author of the Professional Orchestration series which has been endorsed by winners of the Academy®, Grammy®, Emmy®, BAFTA®, G.A.N.G., Telly®, and AVA Gold® Awards.

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