

SPAT - Part 2: Positioning the Strings and a Flute

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / April 4, 2012

With SPAT, you can create your own scoring stage.

In this second look at [Ircam Tools SPAT](#) (with thanks again to Daryl Griffith), I'm starting off with a procedural issue – placing the strings, and when or should you use SPAT in that process.

I'm starting from the practical position of those owning libraries where the strings are pre-panned and are spatially placing instruments to work within that scenario.

Hollywood Strings Gold and LASS (1.5)

The first thing I did was to use my “ever” secret weapon, the Vienna Suite’s Power Pan, and view the spatial placement of both HS and LASS, both of which I found to be positioned similarly. With SPAT you need to know this because SPAT’s default setting is panned to center.

Therefore, if you’re going to use SPAT for any orchestral mixing purpose, you have to discover the panning by section for each fixed position library first, and *then* set SPAT up for that for that individual position.

LASS Violins 1



LASS Violins 2



LASS Violas



LASS Cellos



LASS Basses



LASS 'n SPAT

Below is a picture of LASS (LA Scoring Strings) and SPAT. Here's what you're seeing. First, to repeat, SPAT's default position is panned to center. In the screen capture below, looking to the right, you see the Input and the Output. The Input is reflecting the LASS Source signal showing how it's panned to the left (the yellow 1).

The Output on the right reflects SPAT's default position.

So using Azimuth (stage left or right), you position Yellow 1 for the left channel output, and then with Yellow 2 for the right channel output.

Repeat the process for each string section.



Repositioning a Fixed Place String Section

I tried several tests with this, and my conclusion is that in the beginning, it's best to work with the fixed strings as they are, and then use SPAT to place the rest of the orchestra around them. Or, if you have a solid knowledge of the other string seating positions, you can experiment with different setups.

What About Miroslav and the Vienna Strings?

As is well known, both libraries have to be positioned since they're recorded in the center position. Since Daryl Griffith works mostly with the Vienna Strings, I asked how he positioned them. His very reasonable answer was that using Nuendo, he positioned them using Pan.

He also expressed the observation that when placing a string section with SPAT, it could sound smaller. I experimented with this and found that you can indeed shrink the sound by pushing the strings away from the Conductor. In other words, with SPAT, the further away from the conductor you move, the smaller

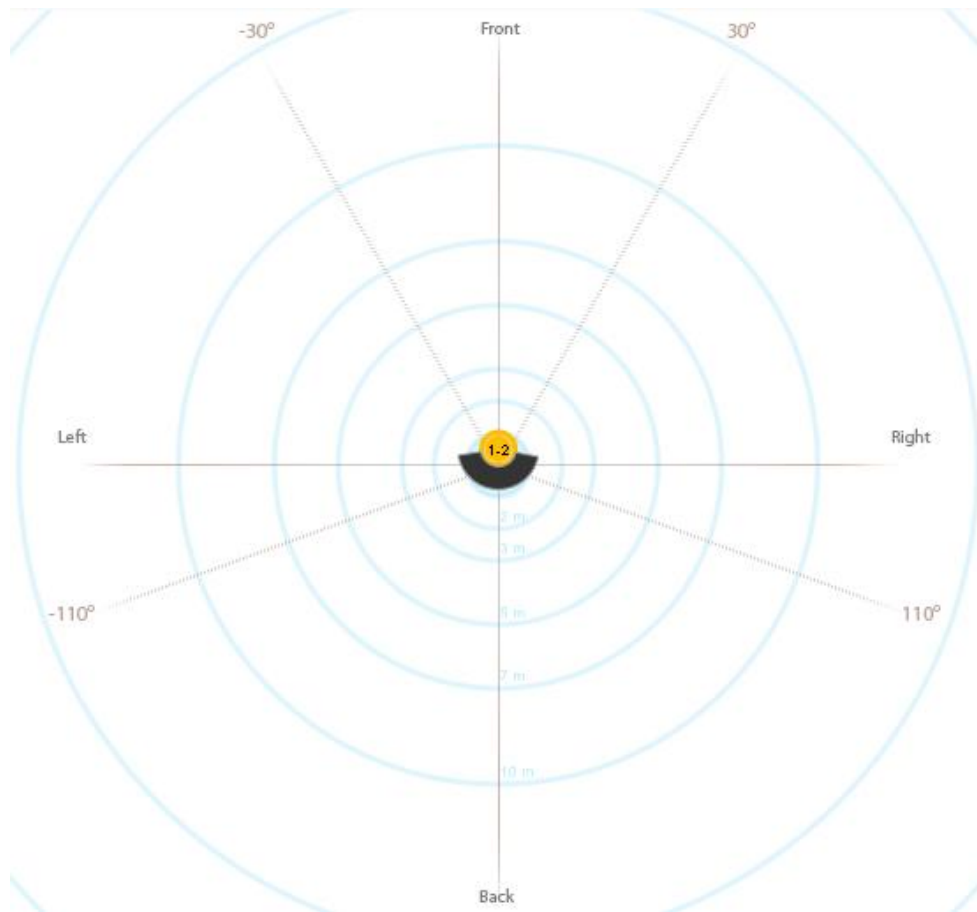
the sound. You're not "widening" the string section by giving it more space. There are sliders under *Perceptual Factors* that do give you play room in this area.

However, you can still use SPAT to position either library in whatever string seating arrangement you want, as you can Hollywood Strings and LASS.

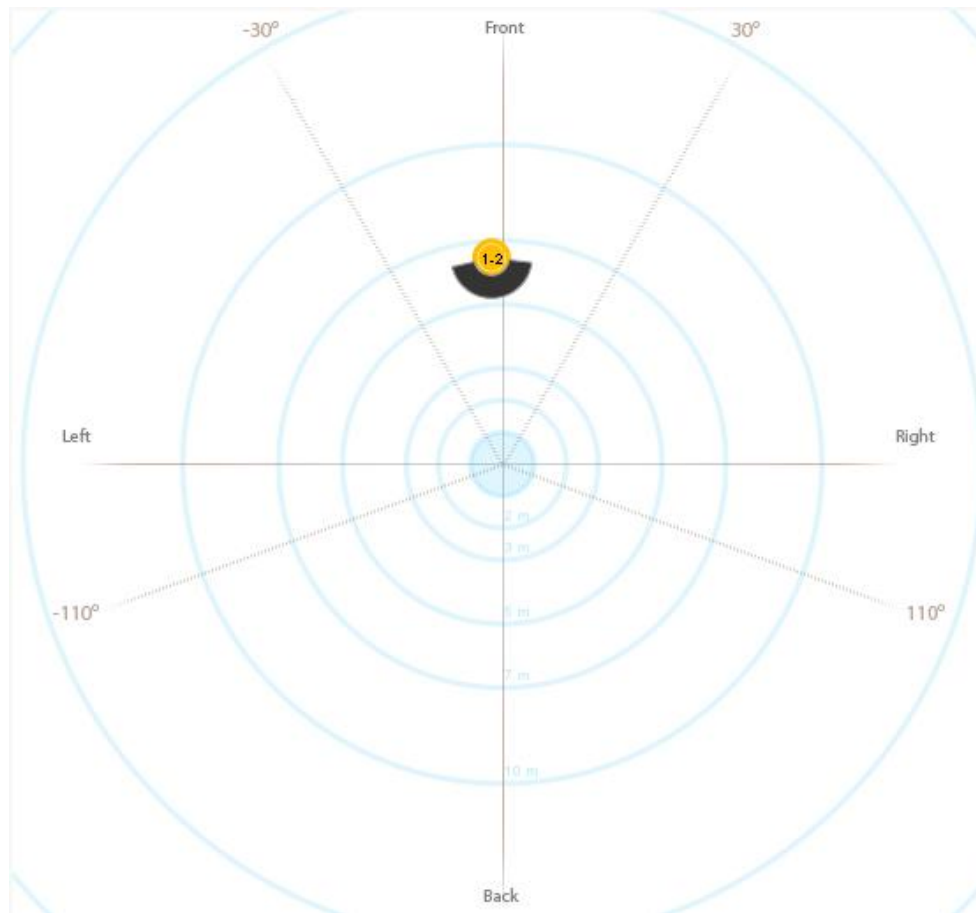
Placing the Vienna Flute

Placing the Vienna Instruments, Sample Modeling, Mojo Horns, Ministry of Rock, Gypsy, and so on, is very easy. You just have to develop a little "mouse" technique with SPAT and you're good to go.

Needless to say, insert the Vienna Flute 1 in a track and then insert SPAT. You have to click to get the grid with the Conductor's head and the speakers, and then using the mouse, enlarge your working space. Below is a screen capture of Flute 1 in the "in your face" position.



Using the mouse, I dragged it deeper into the back of the stage and set it a little left of center where Flute 1 would sit in the orchestra. As I moved Flute 1 back, SPAT proportionately lowered its volume. Slick feature.



To Verb or Not to Verb, THAT is the SPAT Question

Given what a composer working in film, TV and media must have for an orchestral template, and the time restraints they have to work in, my view after only 20 hours of usage and experimenting is that you need to disengage the SPAT reverb for a big ensemble template and strictly use SPAT for spatial placement.

This is why I think it's really crucial when getting SPAT to buy the complete IRCAM Tools Bundle, where you get the full version of Verb, which you can *easily* put on a send! And! Verb is a beautiful sounding reverb in its own right.

Setting Up Your Own Scoring Stage With SPAT

This is really the end result of what you can accomplish. But to really accomplish it, you need some scores and recordings.

The first thing some need to understand is that in a live recording session, there is no such thing as a film score orchestra seating plan. You set up the full orchestra on a scoring stage with the same consideration as a live concert. In a live concert, seating placement is also spatial placement.

Let's look at the screen capture below from YouTube of Michael Tilson Thomas conducting [Ein Heldenleben with the London Symphony Orchestra](#). Here I've captured the brass seating positions along with the harps and percussion. Looking left to right, you have eight French Horns, and to the right, are the trumpets. Strauss wrote this for five trumpets. Behind the trumpets next to the timpani are the trombones and two tubas (tenor and bass tuba as noted on the original score). Though not pictured here, woodwinds are positioned in front of the French Horns, left to right starting with the flutes, of which the score calls for four plus three bassoons and a contrabassoon!



So there is the spatial placement by seating arrangement. And depending on which brass and woodwind libraries you have, you can use SPAT to create a similar setup.

But!

Depending on micing and other considerations, where did the recording engineer place them in the mix?

Because so many reading these reviews want to be film composers, I suggest you get MTT's DVD *Keeping Score: Mahler*, which while recorded on stage, is recorded in a manner similar to a Hollywood film scoring session complete with spot mics. Here you can get the score and with headphones, listen to the orchestral placement and mark the score as you go.

Using the same recording and score, you can now begin testing to create your own scoring stage setup.

The work on many of these SACD's is done by recording engineer Andreas Neubronner. [Follow this link to RME](#) to learn more about the recording of Mahler Symphony #8 which was done using RME hardware and Sequoia recording software.

Now, if Mahler isn't to your liking, get a John Williams score and matching CD and follow the same procedure.

My teaching point here is that there are many seating arrangements depending on the ensemble size. What you can capture with SPAT is stage positioning, dynamic relationships, coloring (bright to dark), and presence. And then comes the reverb to shape and design your room.

For The Working Composer

With SPAT you have more than a tool of spatial positioning. You have a tool enabling you to create your own scoring stage.

Because SPAT is a plugin, it can work with all the libraries in one way or another. Additionally, because you can turn the reverb off in SPAT, you have the whole range of reverbs and convolution reverbs open to you.

One thing I feel I need to point out. This is a professional tool. It's designed for music, post, and other film needs. It's not a mass market product that's going to move a million units or more. So it is expensive.

But if you're operating in a seriously competitive arena, consider SPAT, because it's a serious problem/solution tool.

Download the Demo

Rather than take my word for it, download the demo from Flux and see for yourself. Click the link and download [IRCAM Tools Free Trial](#). An iLok account is required.

[Alexander Publishing](#) is a dealer for SPAT.

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