

Insights: Berlin Woodwinds – First Thoughts

By Peter Lawrence Alexander / September 6, 2012



Last night and tonight I downloaded and installed the new [Berlin Woodwinds](#) from Orchestral Tools. What follows is my first “Christmas morning” reaction after going through all the instruments.

Overview

Berlin Woodwinds is the first sample library to offer a complete orchestral woodwind section allowing the composer to write for up to woodwinds in 2s (meaning 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets and 2 bassoons), with doubles (Piccolo and English horn). There’s also a third flute.

BWW is different from other libraries where at most 2 flutes or 2 oboes might have been recorded, but not multiple players to create a complete symphonic section.

Previously, if you wanted two of anything, you would either have to use the transposition trick with one instrument to create the second, or use the same instrument from a different library and hoped they matched in stage position and room sound.

BWW’s approach eliminates this time consuming action.

From a writing/production perspective, it’s not just that you have multiple players per woodwind family, it’s that you have totally *different* players within each woodwind family. As you play through each family (flutes, oboes, clarinet, bassoon) you hear how different one player sounds from another on the same instrument! And for me, this is a good thing because if you’re doing a piece with one just one flute, for example, you can now “audition” to see which player “performs” the part the best for overall sound and for blending with whatever string and brass libraries you’re now using.

Thus, BWW offers a decided writing/production advantage that’s worth your consideration.

Instrumentation

There are three flutes allowing for an expanded section, plus piccolo.

There two oboes plus English horn.

There are two clarinets, three clarinets recorded in unison, but no bass clarinet.

There are two independent bassoons, but no contrabassoon.

Therefore, to complete the BWV woodwind section, a bass clarinet (usually doubled by Clarinet 2) and contrabassoon (usually doubled by Bassoon 2) are needed. My understanding is that these two instruments are being recorded in September 2012. Meanwhile, if you have the full version of Kontakt, you'll find a lite version of a bass clarinet and contrabassoon in the Factory Library.

That said, in terms of orchestral writing, what's been recorded is more than adequate for most writing situations. Woodwind sections do expand to woods in 3s (Wagner, John Williams) and 4s (Mahler). If extras are needed, one can use the [transpose trick](#) (for oboe, clarinet or bassoon), reinsert a BWV instrument for the third part, or use an instrument from another library.

I should point out that many of the woodwind combinations outlined in Professional Orchestration 2B, [Orchestrating the Melody With the Woodwind and Brass Sections](#), are totally doable with BWV.

Installation

The installation using Continuata was smooth and elegant. My download speed on Comcast Cable averaged 1.7MB per second which was still about a 10 hour download.

I have only one critique. In the PDF instructions in one place it says to copy the Articulation Performer folder to the Native Instruments folder, and in another place it says to move it. Copy and Move are two different functions. So this instruction needs to be clarified. The actual procedure is that you can either copy or move the files only into the NI Pictures folder. Once done, this is how the Artic Performer looks:



For those new to all this, I think it's worth mentioning that if the customer already has the free Kontakt 5 player, that it needs to be updated by using the Service Center installed on your computer. It's a small point, but it's a small amount of text that adds to the simplicity of installation.

Training

One should not think they're going to "feel" their way through on learning BWW. You need to print out the PDF manuals and articulation list and keep them handy. They are necessary to work with.

[Training videos](#) have been posted on the Orchestral Tools YouTube Channel.

Sound



My total focus for this first round were the solo instruments. I played through all the articulations in Flute 1 to get a sense of them and then for the rest, just played through the legato and sustains.

My "Christmas morning" sense is that this is a significant library with many, many advantages. I compared Flute 1 in BWW to the Flute 1 in VSL's Woodwinds 1. My take at this point is that the sound is radically different. I don't think I can say one is better than the other because it depends on the writing situation. VSL's Flute 1 is much more a solo flute approach whereas BWW, where you can certainly use any of them for flute solos, is more a team, sectional approach. As you go through each of the instruments, I think you'll find the same thing: they all work as solo instruments, but blend well as a team (section).

But that's the big benefit of Berlin Woodwinds isn't it? With BWW you're getting a woodwind *section* with multiple instruments per section, whereas with every other sample library, you're getting *individual* woodwinds. If you're wanting to write for a section, with other libraries, you have to *create* the section, but not with BWW. Berlin Woodwinds is section ready.

None of the other libraries are.

And that is a huge time saving advantage.

YOUTUBE VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/99sLgz1UhaE>
(Hendrik Schwarzer: [BWW] Chapter IV: Articulations Performer)



And with Kontakt, BWW has, with its Articulation Performer, pushed it to begin emulating Vienna Instrument features. The above video needs to be watched carefully, and you definitely need to take notes to get the procedure down. Beyond the video, Orchestral Tools does need to put out a more detailed step-by-step PDF showing you how to setup an instrument so that you only need one insertion per track.

The Artic Performer is a major feature of BWW and should be treated as such.

I want to briefly discuss doing the recording in the Teldex Studios.

For me, the good news is that it's not overly ambient. So for me it's easier to get it to blend with other libraries. Trying to use words to describe the BWW/Teldex sound is very difficult, but I would describe it overall as clear and bright.

So you will need a touch of reverb. I have the Vienna Suite and while noodling used its Convolution Reverb with its Teldex IRs. So to have an IR of the studio in which BWW was recorded and I thought was a great match as I thought it brought out the timbres quite nicely.

Legato

This has been strongly talked about on various forums. I think the legatos overall are quite good. I compared BWW to comparable VSL legato patches and I think BWW stands on its own.

As Far As I've Gotten

For my Christmas morning observations, this is as far as I've gotten. I'll report more after I've spent more time with BWW. But overall, I have to say that this is a pretty neat library with lots of features that professional "commercial" writers can take positive advantage of, as can those who want to do more legitimate orchestral writing because now you have a ready-to-go section to write for. Berlin Woodwinds has lots of positive advantages even for those who have no ambition to write for a full symphonic ensemble, but who want some really cool woodwind sounds. It's an all Kontakt library and it's easy to learn and get into.

BWW was provided to Sonic Control for review. BWW is only sold direct by www.orchestraltools.com.

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