

String Essentials 2

By Peter Lawrence Alexander / August 10, 2008

Now that NAMM 2008 is over, we're going to consider a really beautiful string library that's been seriously overlooked since its initial release by [Best Service](#) in Germany: String Essentials 2 by Peter Siedlaczek.



Peter's work extends back to the Roland sampler days when he created a number of programs, often not bearing his name, but often used. He's probably best known for creating Advanced Orchestra (although he's done a number of other sampling CDs including Smart Violins, Orchestral Colours and Classical Choirs).

With SE2, Peter has hit new territory in string beauty and usefulness packaged at an irresistible list price of \$399. Compared to some other string libraries out there that are much higher priced, I have to say it, String Essentials 2 is the new workhorse for independent string libraries.

For this article, I tested SE2 with three works:

- Princess In the Tower from the film Richard III by William Walton (available from iTunes)
- Troyte from Elgar's Enigma Variations (from Professional Orchestration Volume 2A)
- The Lion's Royal March from Saint-Saens Carnival of the Animals (from Professional Orchestration Volume 2A)

Princess in the Tower is four-part harmony with the basses doubling the cellos. Troyte has Violins 1 and 2 in unison with a separate part performed by the violas and cellos in unison, doubled in places by the basses an octave below.

With Carnival of the Animals, The Lion's Royal March, violins 1 and 2 plus violas are in unison while the cellos and basses are in octaves on a separate line.

How Recorded

SE2 was recorded in a large studio with three different mic positions:

Normal – According to the manual, Normal is recorded with neutral mic positioning

Dry – recorded with a number of close spot mics

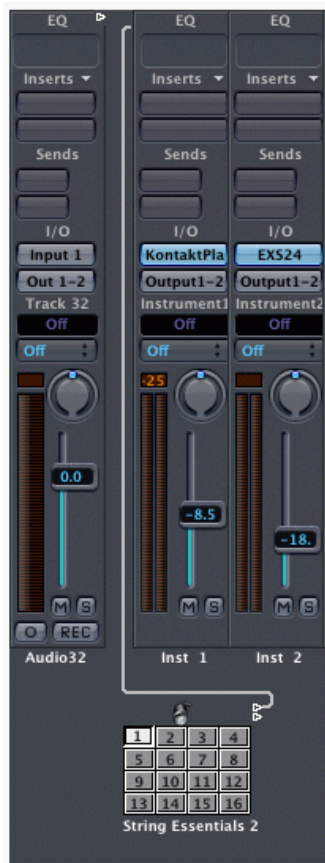
Ambient – captured with two spaced apart mics capturing the studio ambience.

Other than this, there's no stage setup diagram to show you, nor is there a list of mics used. Nonetheless, what you have is a studio sound, not a hall sound. Something I like about the studio sound, which I'm looking forward to hearing EastWest do with the new string library they're recording for 2009 release, is that it blends much easier with other independent libraries. And now that I'm doing more work in 2008 and beyond with vocalists, this is a real consideration.

SE2 doesn't limit you to a style of music. Some say library A is best with classical while library B is best for film. SE2 can work with any genre, including pop.

Surround Sound. Surround sound can be created by using both the normal and ambient positions. I didn't have time to try this for Part 1.

Applications. Because it's a studio sound, SE2 should work well with Fab Four, Ministry of Rock, all the Vienna woodwinds and brass, WIVI brass and woods, and Synful, especially the solo strings.



Repeated Notes. The manual goes into detail explaining how to set this up.

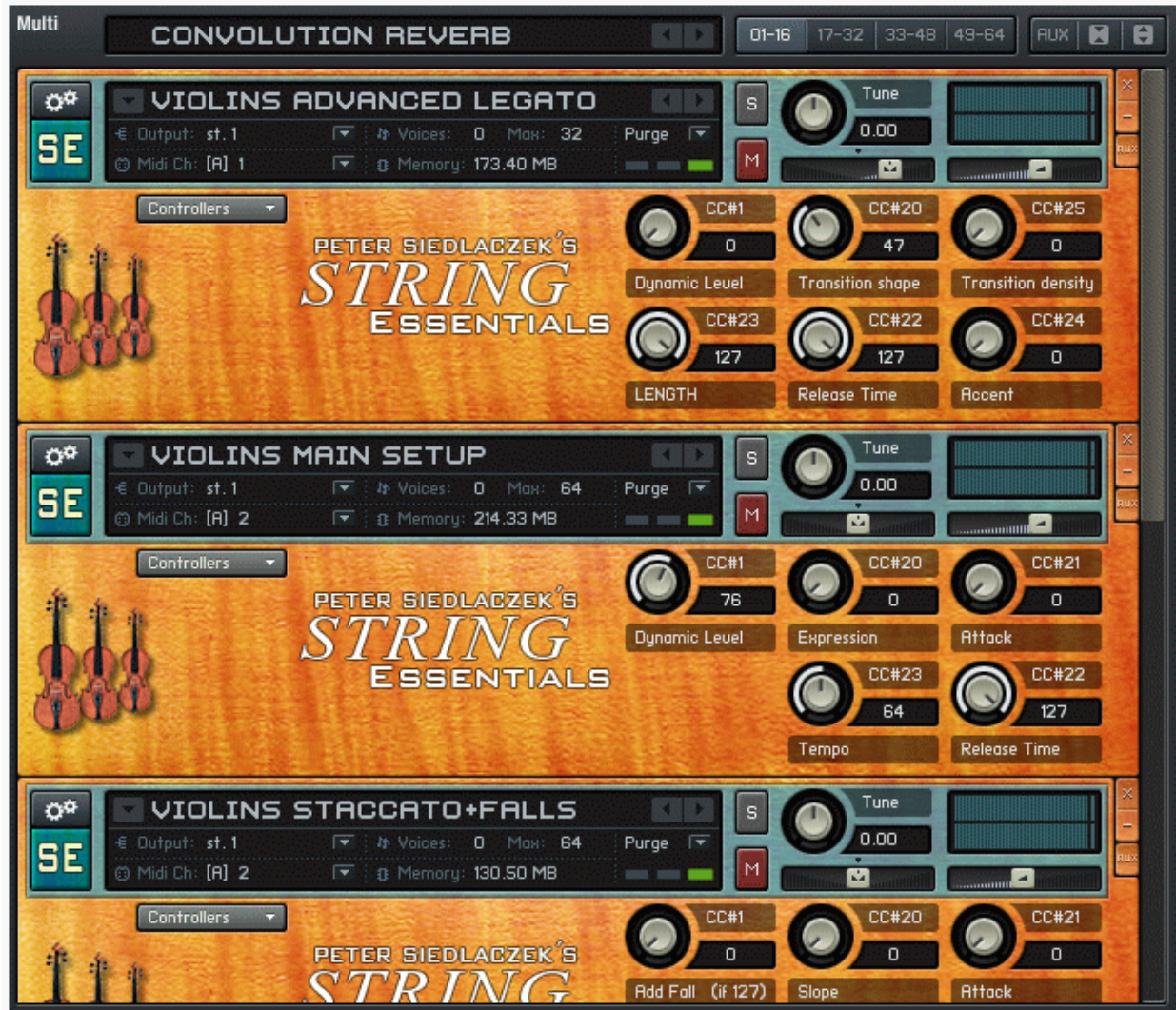
How Panned. SE2 was recorded in the center stage position, giving you the freedom to create alternate seating arrangements. In each example, I set the strings with a European seating plan having violins 1 on the left and violins 2 on the right. I put violas and cellos between them and kept the basses centered.

Setup

I installed this on Power PC G5 with Logic 7.1.1. SE2 is housed in a Kontakt 2 player. Unfortunately, the actual installation didn't follow the manual, nor the PDF from Native Instruments. So, a lot of wasted time double checking.

Once installed into Logic 7 (this condition, thankfully, no longer exists in Logic 8), you initially can use one instance of SE2 per track. If you want the program to work multitimbrally, you can package up to 16 instruments to function as an ensemble. But to do this, you have to set up a multi instrument inside Logic. It's not hard to do, just completely undocumented. Native Instruments does have a two-graphic tutorial in their Knowledge Base. To access it, you have to first register. Unfortunately, the tutorial needed a few more steps and screen shots to be really complete. So time was spent Googling, which for this feature seems a common thing to do.

Each mic position has three components: Legato, Main Setup, and Staccato. A word about this; to set up a complete string section, you need all three. Main Setup has keyswitches. For staccato, you'll either press A1 or A0 on the MIDI keyboard. But if you don't have Staccato loaded, you won't hear it. So you have to set the Staccato and the Main Setup to the same MIDI channel. In the setup below, I have the Legato violins on channel 1, Main Setup and Staccato on channel 2. In all, I have 15 instruments taking up 10 MIDI channels.



Here it is in the Logic Arrange window. With this approach, I've set up a template that gives me a full string section inside Logic with access to string programs in a separate computer.



Audio

Logic is designed to have one virtual instrument per track. It will eat up resources to do it this way with SE2, but you do have easy control on audio routing.

If you set up the way I did, you have a pair of stereo outs. This means that within a single instance of the K2 player, you're submixing, potentially, an entire electronic string section. Again, this isn't an issue for Logic 8, but if you haven't yet upgraded, be aware.

Also with this setup, any volume fader in a K2 track acts like a master fader for all the rest. So you have to do your volume settings (and panning) for SE2 inside the K2 player.

For reverb, you have a full panoply within the K2 player.



However, to route effects to each instrument, you do so through the Aux setting, which is virtually unfindable and unreadable.

Once you click Aux on the unreadable white on gold background, the Aux Sends for that instrument appears. For fun, I selected the convolution reverb and set it at -10dB. I thought the convolution reverb served SE2 well.



Using Other Reverb With String Essentials 2

In Logic, I experimented with Platinum Reverb and maybe 60 different programs inside Logic's Space Designer convolution reverb. One thing that's apparent, is that you have to be very judicious in selecting reverb for SE2 because the right "verb" gives it a beautiful warm tone, while the wrong "verb" can create a really metallic-sounding string section.

This article was previously published at SonicControl.tv