

SONiVOX Releases New Virtual Instrument Beating Tascam to Market

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / August 10, 2008

On a late Friday afternoon in July 2008 a press release from Al Joelson, marketing manager at [SONiVOX](#), scooted around the Internet announcing that they had a secret inhouse development team that had developed, “a universally compatible player technology that focuses on intelligent MIDI performance, intuitive interfaces, and the highest sonic fidelity.”

Further down the press release was, for our industry, this pregnant statement, “The first releases from the SONiVOX MI software team will be affordably priced downloadable virtual instruments for Mac and PC (VST, RTAS, AU, Stand Alone).”

It’s no industry secret that SONiVOX worked out a licensing agreement with TASCAM on their GVI player for MUSE, a killer program designed for both Mac and PC, that, while useful for composers, really shines for song production. GVI was also used for SONiVOX’s initial entry into downloadable programs. The PC version of Muse and SONiVOX’s downloadable instruments have been out for some time, but the Mac version of Muse is still not out, nor the Mac versions of their downloadable programs as SONiVOX is still waiting for TASCAM to finish GVI for Mac.

With this press release, without openly saying so, SONiVOX, an American company substantively smaller than either Tascam or their publicly traded parent, TEAC, has beaten the Giant to market by creating their own dual platform player for both PC *and* Mac with product ready for shipping by late July early August.

This is the real story hidden between the lines: American innovation ain’t dead yet, Jack. And when we want to get something done, get out of the way, we’re gonna do it. Reading between the lines, literally, the unwritten story is that SONiVOX started late, and finished early in its software development.

This makes SONiVOX the fourth American company to break off from licensing another company’s program to create their own. Others making this move include EastWest with their PLAY software instrument and Spectrasonics.

Per the press release, all of the existing downloadable product from SONiVOX will be moved into this player., which as yet is unnamed.

Years ago, Japanese quality control was held in the highest esteem. The message was that we Americans were QC flakes. We needed to emulate our cousins across the Pond in the other direction. If you were employed in the Fortune 500 back then, you beat yourself for your innovative failure by reading *The Book of Five Rings* which is all about the art of fighting.

And if you were serious about getting a pay raise, you read *Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge*.

My guess is that the book SONiVOX read was called, *My Bottom Line*. It's a quarterly masterpiece generated by your CPA firm containing all kinds of financial stats and numbers, and with it, the continued disappointment, emotionally and financially, of not seeing Tascam get to market with a Mac version of GVI so that SONiVOX could release dual platform products, just like the other guys in the neighborhood.

Never forget that software development is very much a relationship thing. You bet on people you believe in along with the promises they make to you. You expect software to be late, that's the nature of the beast. But you also expect those you believe in to also finish the job.

Like it or not, and as harsh as it is to write, Tascam didn't finish the job. It doesn't matter why they didn't finish. It doesn't matter who was responsible in the programming department for not finishing. It only matters that they didn't finish.

What message does this send to smaller sample developers who, not able to afford Native Instruments fees for a Kontakt player, or Steinberg pricing for the HALion player, looked to TASCAM as a viable solution to get their own visionary ideas into the marketplace with a dual platform program?

Best seller *In Search of Excellence* advised business leaders to, "stick to your knitting." This meant, don't venture out into areas of business beyond your expertise. And that's exactly what TASCAM did. TASCAM is a hardware company. You build a box, ship the box, sell out of the box, then create a new box.

Software doesn't work that way. Software is like a human being. It grows and develops and takes on a personality all of its own. Software doesn't really have a new box. It has updates that mark the product's growth and development. At version 1.0, it's a toddler looking for its sea legs. By 1.5 it's steady and walking. And by v2.0, it's racing around the kitchen. We grow with it. But we also teach it and give it direction through our feedback and comments and praises and critiques.

So it's a joint venture all around between the OEM, the developer and the customer. If the OEM and developers are open with their communication and receptive to comments, a strong bond of trust builds.

And when that happens, the product grows in wisdom, strength and profitability.

But Tascam didn't do that. That, too, is a story worthy of *Fast Company, Inc.*, or *Business Week*, especially since TEAC is publicly traded on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. This failure to get GVI Mac to market, and it is a marketing failure, is a blight to their bottom line because of what they won't be earning. Ultimately, the blame must be focused where it always should be focused, with the top corporate management, the Prez's, the VP's, who really didn't get it.

It's understandable.

Having a heart for software is different from having a heart for hardware that utilizes software. They are two totally different experiences.

But at least TEAC TASCAM tried. You can give them that. And by all accounts, GigaStudio 4 on the PC is a fine product built with quality.

Yet, here's the other *but*. You can't build trust by shutting down your support forums because, as a former Tascam employee said to me, it was discouraging the Tascam employees. And you can't build trust by being turtle-like and withdrawing into your shell and putting out the, "No speaka da English" sign.

If customer comments over quality control were discouraging the Tascam employees, did anyone over there ever stop to think how the customers must have been feeling, who, after investing in the software, also invested in computers and audio and MIDI hardware to get the thing working?

The hue and cry of customers and system integrators was the same: tell us the specs so we can build a machine that works.

Their response was the classic line composers are still hearing today, “Because PCs have so many options it’s difficult to...”

I don’t need to tell you rest. You already know the story. It’s a long train of let down and disappointment that needed leadership, not enlightenment.

I checked three different forums to see if there was any buzz on the announcement. I found one thread where the main theme of conversation was, “why would you want your own player?”

Joelson responded.

This player screenshots released with the press release are of our new DVI player (Downloadable Virtual Instrument) which will replace the current DVI player. It will be Standalone AU VSTi and RTAS. Most of these products like the current DVI’s will continue to range in price from \$9 to \$99

The Software team will make different UI’s for the bigger products depending on what their functionality calls for. In other words we are not developing one player for all, but different players for different things.....

Regarding why.....

1. We’ve gotten endless requests from users and retailers for us to release our products in their own players.

2. Being in control of one’s own destiny is very preferable to having to be dependent on others. (I should’ve put this first)

I can expand on #1, “because they’re tired of getting the tech support runaround of bouncing back between *two* companies to get *one* answer.”

From other programmers I can expand on #2, “because these guys [pick a company] don’t listen and respond to us the way they did when they first started. It’s just better to do it ourselves.”

This is starting to sound like that great Agatha Christie mystery novel, *And Then There Were None*.

The background to the SONiVOX *coup de etat* is worthy of a story in *Fast Company, Inc.*, or *Business Week*. And we’ll get it told here.

I spoke to Al Joelson within minutes of receiving the press release and asked whether or not this new product would be multitimbral or one sound/program per instance. The answer, for downloadable programs, is one per instance. The jury is still undecided for larger projects.

Except for this press release, there are no other details. Since the as yet unnamed player is still in development, I’m making some requests that I hope SONiVOX and other developers will consider, too. If you agree, disagree, make your thoughts known at the bottom of this column.

1. Please DON'T give us another multitimbral product like Kontakt. Instead, please imitate Apple's EXS24 and Vienna's Vienna Instrument player with a player that loads with one program/sound/instrument (or whatever you want to call your version of it) per instance. While it takes more "up front" time to learn the Vienna Instrument, the end result is a speedy work approach. The practice of having one articulation per track is now ancient. Please, get modern, and manage your customer's time better.

Also, at least with Logic 7 and 8 (I can't speak for DP so someone else will have to do that), setting up multitimbrally is a colossal waste of time. Next week I'll be posting screen shots to demonstrate my thesis. You can avoid that by developing this simple single-instance approach.

2. For the Mac, can you please develop along the lines of the EXS 24 so that your players can access as much RAM as there is in the system? For this to happen now with other players, we have to use SoundFlower. I'm not unappreciative of SoundFlower, but I don't want to base my writing and recording career, which has deadlines, around a freeware program that no one wants to support because it *is* free.

3. Talk to us about RAM and Polyphony. Are you streaming? Loading into RAM? If you're streaming, talk to us about polyphony on 7200RPM SATA drives and the faster 10K and 15K drives. If 7200RPM is good enough, please say so. As Jeff Laity of TASCAM pointed out, once you're out of polyphony, it doesn't matter how much RAM you have.

4. Please make the player READABLE. 50% or more of your customer base wears eyeglasses or contacts. Vision tests recommend keeping the monitor at least 24" away from the eyes. If you can't read the text at that distance on a standard 17" to 19" monitor, please make it bigger, or even better, put in a control so that we can enlarge the type size ourselves.

5. If you're including your own convolution reverb, could you please allow the user to route the 'verb so that other instruments in the mix can also use it? This would be a great time saver. It also eliminates time wasted trying to match reverbs.

6. Could we please just have ONE graphic user interface? The great advantage of Kontakt and the Vienna Instruments is that once learned, it's LEARNED. You're not relearning for every variation in the marketing plan. In some cases that limits development, while in others, it opens up new ideas. But the one thing it does is keeping your customers productive and not endlessly looking up some new feature in the manual, hoping to find it.

7. Could you please test, or find testers, so that it works in Finale and Sibelius, too? Great opportunity for your orchestra. But right now, if you're not an NI product, then getting any orchestra module to work effectively in those programs is yet another time waster. Your dealers will also appreciate this because it opens new doors of revenue from tens of thousands of customers who don't want to learn sequencing.

8. Could you please add PC system developers to your beta team? Or, please don't be cheap, send out some NFRs (they ARE tax deductible) so companies building PCs can work with you in the testing process.

These are just eight small items. There are more that we've covered in previous articles.

But here's what every sample and software developer needs to remember – right now, sales are sliding. There's buggy stuff from sample players to sequencing programs. There's little to no standardization.

Now that all the major companies have moved to having their own proprietary players, there are multiple learning curves and computing standards, not just one or two.

This takes a toll on both work flow and understanding how to plan for and buy for your studio, which wastes time. And time IS money. Your customer's money who don't have to spend it with you.

Let he who has ears, hear.

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