

Insights: Storm Choir II

By [Jose Herring](#) / May 22, 2014

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After reviewing Storm Choir I last year, I'm pleased to have the opportunity again to review some newer releases from [Strezov Sampling: Storm Choir II](#) Sustains and Staccatos and "Ah" Legatos.

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As with all the reviews I do, I focus mainly on a single production to get a feel of how a product will work in a "real world" situation. So, please forgive if I don't give you a lengthy blow by blow of all the features. I usually find that pretty tedious and boring anyway. This review focuses on the successes and trials that I faced using the product, as is.

One of the things I look for is, do the patches immediately start suggesting musical applications when playing. And the men and women sustains did.

Opening the patches up revealed multiple dynamic layers. So even though Storm Choir 2 suggests FFF bombast, it is capable of a lot of dynamic variation. A big step forward from the previous SC.

Starting on my piece, I knew I wanted full choir. Though the library is organized in men and women voices and not SATB configuration, getting a full choir was not an obstacle. The polyphonic nature of the patches allowing me to use two voices for women and two voices for men on two separate tracks. In the future though I would love to see actual separation of the sections to get a true SATB choir.

Moving on to the spoken syllables. Opening the performance tab on the patch gives you access to the syllables.



Setting my women and men in different instances of Kontakt on instrument tracks, allowed me to open up both instances side by side and drop in the same syllables for each instance. After doing this I was ready to get going. And for the record it's taken me longer to write about what I did, and for you to read it than it took me to get going in SCII!

The setup is drop dead easy and the results are immediate.

Given the size of the patches (averaging 1gb for two mic positions) I was a little concerned that streaming from a standard 7200 drive would be a problem and I'd have to use my SSD. As it turns out, streaming from a standard HD presented no problems at all and could easily take everything I threw at it and probably more.

There are seven mic positions – Close, Section, Decca, Outrigger, Balcony, Rear Overheads, and Mixed – with a handy mixer to balance the mics and a one button unload for each mic position to save on ram when not utilizing a particular mic.

I quickly audition the mic positions and chose two that I liked and mixed them to my taste. I probably could have delved into a deeper mix with the mics, but I was happy with what I was hearing, so it was time to write!

Working with Syllables

You have two options for working with syllables which are the main sound building blocks of SCII. The Phrase Engine allows you to load up 24 recorded syllables and it cycles through them from beginning to end and repeats round robin style. Or, you can trigger each syllable using keyswitch which you can trigger via a predefined configuration or you can use the “learn” function to define your own KS.

For my piece I chose to cycle through the syllables automatically. The Phrase Engine also can be brought to the beginning of the sequence via keyswitching, and it's a good idea to experiment with finding a good place to restart the engine just to keep the men and women on the same syllable while composing.

On Working With Singers

Though this library is of course not as capable as a real choir, it does offer a glimpse into what it is like to work with a choir. I found myself often thinking of the real thing and then being pleasantly surprised when SCII could pull off a convincing performance. Having multiple vowel sounds would help in this tremendously. Hopefully that's something that the guys at Strezov could develop further. Which leads me to the vowel they do offer.

Ahhhh Legatos

Not to short change this offering, but as the name implies, it's a vocal library consisting of the “Ah” connected by a quite convincing legato. I found the ah legatos to be one of the most pleasing “ah” libraries out there. My hope is that in the future Strezov incorporates other vowels and vowel sounds and combined with the consonances one can switch back and forth between consonances and melismatic vowel sounds. This combination would make SCII fairly complete in delivering at least a good portion of what a real choir can do. And, I know what you're thinking, “but it can't do words”. Well, if you're like me, I can never understand what a choir is saying anyway, so the illusion of words works just as well for me.

Also, I was a little disappointed that SC2 lacked a real ‘p’ layer for the Ahs. I really like the choir to get in the piano dynamic range and even a whisper quite range.

My Thoughts

After working with SC2 I found it quite a nice and workable package. The sustains and staccatos work well for the trailer and film market. Don't let the small section sizes fool you. These singers can belt it out when needed to cut through a mix and yet surprising can deliver a fairly delicate performance as well without losing the emotion or drowning in digital soup which seems to plague many sample libraries.

One shortcoming is that the men are singing at a slightly lower pitch than the women. Raising the men overall by 2 cents solves some of the tuning issues but not all. I ended up for safety sake only raising the men by 1 cent. In the end I found that the tuning discrepancies didn't really bother me. Maybe they should bother me more, but after years of listening to my wife's church choir, the tuning issue is perhaps something I've gotten less sensitive to.

Using the "stack feature" layers in a unique recorded sample take making your 6 women or men to 12 respectively. Though you can double up with a unique recorded take for the men and women, I turned off the stack feature as it added too much in the way of digital noise (aliasing) for me and I also liked the tone of the singers without the additional take.

All in all, I think that you'll find many uses for SCII that many other choir libraries really can't do well yet. And in combination with other fine libraries this one rounds out a much needed market niche. Namely, it works well, it works fast, gives the illusion of real singers and just all around sounds great.

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