

Vienna Instruments Special Edition

By Peter Lawrence Alexander / August 10, 2008

Since its original release last Spring, the [Vienna Instruments Special Edition](#) has added to its repertoire the Vienna Ensemble (covered in an earlier review) and most recently, the opportunity for individuals to expand the SE by direct downloading value-priced expansion packages direct from the Vienna site, bypassing both distributors and individual retailers. Vienna has also added a number of packages for direct sale via downloads including pizz jazz bass, soprano voice choirs, and several other libraries. You can see these at the [Vienna site](#).

Installation

The only real thing I dread about the VI product line is the installation process. I've written about this before, but it bears repeating again. The installation documentation is subpar and the procedures are cumbersome because you're going back and forth between Syncrosoft and the Vienna web sites to register the key, register the library and then install the library. I counted roughly 10 steps in the process. What's needed is a didactic list. The online tutorial gives you most of the information but it leaves out steps.

I feel this is an important sales point because as of this writing, only Sibelius 5.1 has a template for Special Edition. By contract, Finale only works with Native Instrument products. By freezing out Vienna, MakeMusic (parent company to Finale) has now given Sibelius (owned by Avid) a clear shot at the collegiate market, a place where many of us in music in Los Angeles and other "towns" came from.

Those of us coming out of colleges to make our way in the Entertainment Capitol of the World know by experience that our former teachers are not exactly tech savvy. Tech "chicken" would be more like it.

So installation must be simple, clearly laid out, step-by-step with screen shots. If you disbelieve me, go to the Vienna forum and see how many posts there are regarding downloading and installing the new libraries. The more concerns "newbies" see, the more they shy away and wait before spending.

Since neither EastWest nor SONiVOX have any templates available for Sibelius at this point, Vienna has an open door with no obstructions – for now.

The installation time took, on the DVD player in my computer, about four hours. My DVD player is three years old.

Once installed, I checked around for a Special Edition manual. None was included, not even on the DVD with installation software. As a longtime user, I knew exactly where to find it on the Vienna site, but someone new will take longer to find it.

And, you need the manual. Without it, finding your way around is just unnecessarily slow.

Vienna has the opportunity to really explode in sales in 2008, but to do so, it has to pay attention to this area. And if they need to spend a few hundred dollars to get someone to rewrite the install instructions, they should spend it, because they'll make that money back by both sales and time gained by staff not answering the same questions over and over.

System Note

SE is installed on an older TrueSpec system with Antec case using the Frontier Sierra/Dakota combination MIDI/audio package. The Dakota is connected by ADAT to the ADAT in of the MOTU Traveler. Monitors used are the KRK VXT 8s which reveal everything. Thanks to the folks at KRK for letting me keep them to do this review.

Musical Thinking Behind Special Edition

At first glance it's not very apparent what can be produced with Special Edition, which is why I feel Mr. Tucmandl, president of VSL, should have had more time put into the sales copy.

For example, the inclusion of the oboe d'amore to me at first was an extravagance. But when I began studying Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*, I realized the breadth of what can be accomplished with SE, even with limited articulations. Even though Bach wrote it for solo soprano, for demonstration purposes Vienna could still use the new Soprano choir to "ah" *Wie wohl mein Herz* scored for Oboe d'amore and organ/continuo. Or even better, hire a soprano to perform it to pre-recorded tracks, thus demonstrating how well Vienna works with vocalists. So far, there's been no orchestral demo posted with any library backing a live singer.

(You can get the score from Dover and download the entire work quite inexpensively from eClassical.com).

The inclusion of the Bosendorfer piano, standard in other libraries, is a good move. This was my first hearing of it. Playing a Hanon keyboard exercise in octaves demonstrated that it does well in octaves and its sound holds up in the upper register. Since many compositions are written for Piano and... the Bosendorfer should hold up well combined with any solo instrument in the collection. Another handy feature for schools is that the Bosendorfer is strong enough to be the piano for a piano lab. All the student needs is a good MIDI keyboard with good finger action and he's set. Practice at home with headphones.

By acquiring some additional trombone articulations along with the new pizz solo bass, a large number of jazz ensembles can be set up especially given the excellent vibraphone included in the collection.

I also hadn't heard the full collection of saxes. Get a wind controller and wail! There's no reason a competent jazz writer couldn't pull off Super Sax (1 tpt, 5 saxes, rhythm), the Four Brothers sound (3 tenors and a bari), Glenn Miller (clarinet, alto, alto, tenor, tenor), the Gazelle sound (alto, tenor, bone, bari), 5 horns (tpt, alto, tenor, bone, bari).

What this all suggests is that it's great, and necessary, to read what's included in the library. But, I think it's equally important to point out the number of ensembles possible within the collection.

The Articulations

Reading the website, one isn't exactly sure what articulations you get. I checked and you get all the basic articulations you need to get going, on average from 4-6 per instrument depending on the family of instruments. This is more than enough to learn MIDI editing and recording. I noticed in the strings octave setups for violins-violins, violins-violas, violas-cellos, cellos-basses. Depending on how performed, the upper strings can have a very Copland-esque sound. In the woodwinds there's Piccolo – Flute 1, Oboe – English Horn (a favorite of Ravel), Bb Clarinet – Bass Clarinet, Bassoon – Contrabassoon. They did a great job balancing these combinations.

As a shameless plug, you can see all these combinations and more in [Professional Orchestration 2A and 2B](#).

Disappointments

Not many, but a few. No ride cymbal in the percussion. I thought the included Appassionata articulations were weak. Right now, this is the workhorse string library on the market, and it might have been a good idea to have pizz, sustain, detache, and legato to be consistent with the rest of the string library. Even with a slightly higher price, I think it would have been wise to make the Chamber Strings part of the standard collection. This would have given the user solo, chamber and orchestral which enables the library to be fairly compared against a couple of other packages similarly priced which are set up this way.

Surprises

I was very pleasantly surprised by the Bosendorfer and would be interested in reviewing it. There's not a lot of "buzz" about it. It has a great feel and with a good keyboard controller, there's no reason why you couldn't practice piano with it. The solo horn and the horn ensemble is a great combination with the 8-horn ensemble available in the expanded edition. The celeste is a gem, I especially liked the soft celeste. I have the Konzerthaus Organ but never installed it. Now I'm inspired to. The availability of the cembalo for Baroque is a great add.

Joys

The Flute 1 and French oboe to me are really glorious, even with the reduced articulations. The soft celeste is a delicious color.

Academic Package and Pricing Needed

Since Vienna is already doing direct downloads, I think they would be well advised to create an academic download package that includes the chamber strings, saxes, pizz bass, and basic sopranos (counterpoint), but leaves out the muted brass, the ensemble sounds, oboe d'amore, etc. Those could be part of a separate download package.

Conclusion

The standard collection of the Special Edition is a great place to start and, with the inclusion of the Vienna Ensemble mixer (free) and the opportunity to expand Special Edition with value-priced downloads, is a great opportunity. The addition of the Vienna Ensemble mixer eliminates the criticism that the library is difficult to pan, because it's not when you use VE. If you're skilled in writing for jazz ensembles, then updating to the Expanded Edition to get the saxes and the muted brass is a good idea. Unlike other jazz-oriented libraries, you don't need to learn to program, you just need to learn how to work the Vienna Instruments player. And you get a big sound. The inclusion of the Chamber Strings in the expanded edition gives a writer the capability of producing Sarah Brightman-type arrangements (big band with small string section), although here, buying the Appassionata Strings I is in my view, a good career move. The inclusion of the Oboe d'amore and Bass Horn, as I learned from Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*, expands the colorist's pallet in positive directions, opening new doors for production and live performance that heretofore were closed to writers because of the heavy price to buy in. In all: a good investment for a great library.

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