

The Vienna Suite: Prelude to a Review

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / February 20, 2011

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The Vienna Symphonic Library's (VSL) [Vienna Suite](#) is a powerful, 64bit native set of nine effects for both Mac and PC. The street price is \$599US but you also need a separately purchased Steinberg Syncrosoft key for copy protection. The Vienna Suite can be bought as either a boxed set or download. The nine effects in the Vienna Suite are:

- Convolution Reverb
- Equalizer
- Master Equalizer
- Limiter
- Compressor
- Multiband Limiter
- Power Pan
- Exciter
- 120 band analog modeled spectrum analyzer

THE BUYING SITUATION FOR COMPOSERS

One of the chief competitors to the Vienna Suite, along with the Sonnox Plug-ins, IK Multimedia T-Racks, and other third party effects suites, are the effects suites that come standard with Cubase, Digital Performer, Logic, Samplitude, Sonar, Reaper and other sequencing/digital audio programs.

Then there's Altiverb from Audio Ease. For film/TV/game composers, this has been the go-to product for convolution reverb because it has IRs from places we who work or have worked in L.A. know: Todd AO, Paramount, Fox, Westlake Studio, UMRK, the Cello Studio which is now owned by EastWest, and the L.A. Philharmonic Disney Hall.

Consequently, the competition is stiff. For Vienna, it's a little stiffer since so many of the excellent Vienna demos over the years have been done with Altiverb making Altiverb the go-to library for Vienna users.

So now we have the Vienna Suite, which I fear has been eclipsed by the remarkable success of the Vienna Ensemble PRO. I say, "I fear," because of the cost and development time that's gone into the Vienna Suite. And even with the release of MIR Pro late in 2011, all of the effects in the Vienna Suite will still be a needed part of the composer's sound shaping arsenal.

NOT FOR VIENNA ONLY

Of the few reviews Vienna Suite has received thus far, all have mentioned, and rightly so, the sheer number of presets for the Vienna Instruments library. This could make you think that the Vienna Suite is mostly for Vienna users.

So let's address this.

There are still lots of composers with the original Vienna libraries and GigaStudio. There are still lots of composers who bought the Kontakt/EXS versions of various Vienna libraries. And there are, from what I've heard on the street, something like 250,000 installs of Logic on the Mac with a special set of Vienna Instruments tucked inside the EXS24 folder, but not labeled VSL.

Then there's the license agreement between Native Instruments and Vienna and the clearly labeled Vienna library that comes with the full version of Kontakt. Next, is the Vienna *Epic Orchestra* that ships with every copy of Vienna Ensemble PRO.

Conclusion: *There's a whole lot of Vienna out there!*

And all of those customers are radically supported with the Vienna Suite. Click here to download the [Vienna Suite Presets List PDF](#) from Beat Kauffmann. They're awesome.

Then there's the biggest part of the market – the non-Vienna crowd.

Sadly, there's not been a lot of "buzz" on this item and you don't find too much chatter about it on the various forums (I searched. There ain't much.). But among those who *do* have it, the comments and product loyalty are exceptional. In short, I haven't seen a single negative post about the Vienna Suite.

What I've read is that users consistently state that it produces a great sound and it places a very light "hit" on the CPU.

THE DOUBLE EDGED SWORD OF DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION

Read down the list of EQ presents for orchestra. What a collection! All I can say is, “Wowsers!” But then a question arises, “But how well will these presets work with the only libraries I own, especially strings?”

That is the question we must answer because it’s the question not addressed on the Vienna Suite web site and rarely within the Vienna forum. This question has arisen across the *forumsphere*. And so what’s happened is that the emphasis is on the presets, and not on the individual Vienna components themselves to see how they perform with other libraries, particularly the convolution reverb.

To this point, Daniel James wonderful article on how he mixes L.A. Scoring Strings (LASS) with Symphobia (see Recording Articles section) is the kind of thing Vienna needs here – a type of before and after examination along with an understanding of the concert hall IRs that those of us outside Vienna simply don’t know sonically, thereby requiring that we learn their sound and compare it to current offerings with other convolution IRs we do have, even if that’s just Space Designer in Logic. And if Space Designer is the only convo reverb we have, then which Logic IRs are best for orchestra given the bazillion IRs that come with it?

This is not a wonky question.

Reverb, whether algorithmic or convolution, shapes the sound of your work. And let’s be honest, some sample libraries sound better with some IRs than with others. Let’s go a step further as composers and acknowledge that lots of sample libraries sound great with Lexicon PCM 90s that you can still find on eBay.

So yes, we must consider the Vienna presets for the Vienna instruments, but we must also compare their impact on other libraries because that’s what we composers need to know before we plunk down the credit card one more time.

This is the double-edged sword: *you can’t just do demos with your own libraries, you have to show the possibilities with your product and other libraries because that’s how composers work in the real world.*

MY REVIEW METHODOLOGY FOR THE VIENNA SUITE

With nine components, you must have multiple reviews to do the library justice, especially the FORTI/SERTI impulses created by Ernest Cholakis of Numerical Sound.

Here’s how I’m proceeding.

Logic comes with a number of samples that you can load from the EXS24 un-effected, or with effects. To start, so that you the reader have a fair comparison to work from, I’ll select a group of these pre-fab programs from the Logic Library. You’ll hear them dry (un-effected), with the Logic setups, then with the Logic setups replaced with the Vienna Suite.

From there, we’ll proceed to before and after comparisons of the presets with both Vienna and non-Vienna sampled instruments.

Next, we’ll apply Vienna to LASS, Symphobia, and a few others, singly and in combination to see what we get.

Finally, we’ll give Ernest Cholakis’ FORTI/SERTI impulses a thorough checkup.

But not all at once!

DOCUMENTATION

I would say that the manual, though brief, is a solid menu-driven information approach to learning the suite. Vienna instructional videos [are posted here](#). It also needs more info because if you're not "high end" with convo reverb and editing the files (as many are not) then some of the feature descriptions will go over your head.

The Vienna vids blur the line between demo and training, but after viewing them, my response was, genuinely, "me want."

However, as a non-engineer, I wanted more. So the videos did their sales job.

WRAP-UP

Well, this is it. I'm stopping for now. I've cited the sales situation and my testing approach. So now, off to research and test.

I'll be back!

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