

ProjectSAM: Orchestral Brass Classic

By Peter Lawrence Alexander / January 17, 2009

The truth about ProjectSAM Orchestral Brass Classic.



About the time the big orchestral libraries were being released, there were these three guys at music school in the Netherlands who wanted to be film composers. Being adventurous lads, they decided that rather than sell candy door-to-door to work their way through college, they would do something easier, like raise the money to rent a big concert hall (which today still remains nameless) and record trumpet, trumpets, trombone, trombones, French horn, French horns, tuba and Cimbasso (which is not a recipe for a kind of avacado dip). Then, after recording, they'd release them in a variety of formats at a price that no doubt looked like big money to college students.

Flash forward to the good ole USA.

Big sample developers are dropping \$250K and more to record big libraries, and all of a sudden, these, these, college kids are selling a product el cheapo (to American pricing) that's being used by just about every major composer in Los Angeles.

And, lo, ProjectSAM recorded it. And people came.

After a while, almost every composer interviewed by a music tech magazine would be asked what libraries they used, and along with all these top dollar libraries the words ProjectSAM appeared.

David. Meet Goliath.

Yes, it's true, three college buddies were trumping the major libraries. But why? How?

Well, a teacher of Economics 202 might offer the quick answer that price was obviously and clearly the dominant factor, because compared to everything else, one ProjectSAM library cost less than sushi at a fashionable Encino restaurant (but not Woody's Barbecue Emporium in Waco).

Well, that's how the economists in the music industry would have viewed.

But, there is a more accurate answer. The three friends that make up ProjectSAM had the ears and the recording skill to capture a sound often referred to as the Hollywood sound, which is really a misnomer since the so called Hollywood sound is easily heard in Mahler's *First*, *Second*, *Fourth*, and *Fifth Symphonies*, Holst's *The Planets*, Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* or *Don Juan*, Wagner's *Parsifal* or *Flying Dutchman*, and other large dramatic works.

It was this sound from the classics that was adopted by Hollywood film makers and it came to be known as the Hollywood sound. Orchestrally, that was the sound they captured. It was big. It was dramatic. It was powerful.

It was Hollywood.

So what you have in the ProjectSAM *Orchestral Brass Classic* are those sounds, re-edited in a Kontakt 2 player format, and greatly expanded to include all their brass libraries:

- Solo Trumpet
- Trumpet section (open and muted)
- Piccolo trumpet
- Solo French horn
- French horn section (open and muted)
- Solo Trombone
- Trombone section (open and muted)
- Bass Trombone
- Cimbasso
- Tuba

Everything is recorded in two mic positions. Close is recorded the mics a little over six feet from the instruments. Stage is recorded seven meters away or just under 30 feet. You can have the instruments with or without the release tails (which add the sound of the hall the instruments were recorded in). Use the switch under Settings to turn this on and off.

You can now have simulated legato, repetitions, and octaver, enabling you to play in octaves without repeating samples, thus eliminating a common problem called *phasing*.

The First Consideration: To Have or Not to Have

So, I suppose the first consideration is whether or not you should take the plunge and order ProjectSAM *Orchestral Brass Classic* at a time when some full orchestral library prices are being heavily marked down.

My sense is yes. And that's because no one brass library, or string library, or woodwind library, or percussion library, can fill the musical needs of the writer. Each library has its own sound and characteristics.

When I compared *Orchestral Brass Classic* to the Vienna brass that comes with Kontakt, I found that OBC had a slighter larger, fatter, darker tone. To make the comparison, I sequenced in Logic the opening four bars of Ravel's orchestration of *Pictures At An Exhibition, Promenade*. This is a tricky passage because it's written for seven-part brass harmony.

Trumpets – 3 parts
French horns – 4 parts
Trombone
Tuba

One of the things you have to be careful of in multipart writing when sequencing brass, is that you can get a buzzing sound. That's the nature of sampling. You can get away with two-part vertical harmony within a section, but once you start adding harmony the buzzing sound emerges – when you're using a single library.

The cure is using a second and a third library so that rather than layering two instruments on top of one another, you mix them so that company A is on part 1, company B on part 2, etc.

If you don't do this, you get what I call the *car horn* effect. It happens with every library. To avoid that, get a second library. The best sounding and most economical choice is ProjectSAM.

Buying Point – even though the library was recorded yesterday, it holds up today.

The Second Consideration – Mixing Inner Harmony Parts

My first test was simply layering Kontakt's Vienna Version and ProjectSAM. The way the two libraries are recorded, you have to mix them carefully. When the two solo trumpets are layered together, it sounds more like a unison trumpet section. That's not common. Usually you get a bigger trumpet sound. So when layering, watch the volume and velocity edits.

My next test was mixing the two on inner harmony parts.

What a great sound! This produced a very powerful brass section. And again, I was only using the solo instrument sounds.

ProjectSAM blends so well, you get to make the choice of which library should be on part 1 (usually the melody). When the Kontakt Vienna Solo Horn was on part 1, I achieved a very bright brass section. When ProjectSAM was on part 1, it was slightly darker.

The blending advantage for the professional writer is that no one's going to listen to your work and go, "I got that library, too." No, they'll all be wondering how you got that sound.

Brass Section Sound

I went through every sectional sound. Generally, a sectional sound is designed for unison writing. But sometimes a "sectional" sound doesn't sound too sectional. So you have to listen and test to see how a sectional sound does on three- and four-part harmony. On their own, ProjectSAM sectional sounds are elegant and noble, and can work as a section if desired. But I wouldn't push them over three parts.

For an aural comparison, if you want to know what a French horn unison section sounds like go and listen to the first movement of Mahler's *Symphony #1* which employs six French horns.

Third Consideration – Effects

This is one place where the Library shines. You get wonderful effects for each section, plus tuba and Cimbasso. You can't recreate these effects in MIDI. They have to be recorded by a live section, and they did it. Depending on the section you get slides, textures, clusters, intervals, glissandi and phrases.

Some of my favorite programs are the DYN. Using the Mod wheel you cross fade dynamics. To my ear, these programs are excellent and provide the most natural sounding Legato when the Legato switch is turned on.

MOD programs switch articulations.

Phrases are repetitive rhythms to be used in unison or vertical harmony. Most common to all the instruments are the repeated 16th notes.

Minor Critiques

In the PDF manual that's auto installed, it would be good to have a list of each of the programs and where the velocity switching takes place. It drives me nuts having to figure this out by trial and error. And it's easy to enough correct with an extra PDF on the ProjectSAM web site.

My other critique is a combination ProjectSAM/Native Instruments issue in that the K2 player, regardless of who it's licensed to, is poorly documented. Being on Logic, there are issues with programs being setup multitimbrally, and here, I think it's long overdue to have a basic instruction set showing how to do that. Given the money Native Instruments charges developers for licensing the K2 player, the company can do a better job of developing competent instruction without "assuming" that all users are at a pro level.

I work on an older Dual G5 2.7Ghz system with 4GB of RAM running Logic 8. When I tried opening *Orchestral Brass Classic* inside K3 on my system, K3 broke the programming on some instruments. This may not happen on other systems, but it did on mine.

Why It's a Buy

When you look at the features included with *Orchestral Brass Classic*, these exceed the features found in the fuller orchestral libraries and the Vienna which comes with Kontakt and Mach 5. With ProjectSAM, you have an expanded vocabulary for writing where each library complements the other. Given a street price of \$349US, this is a no-brainer purchase that will pay for itself over and over for years to come.

This article was previously published at the SonicControl website.