

Insights: VSL Woodwinds 1

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / August 11, 2012

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With this summer's release of three new woodwind ensemble libraries, I thought it worthwhile to re-examine the Vienna Symphonic Library's *Woodwinds 1* which uses the Vienna Instruments player, recently updated to 2.0 (see below). Later on I'll touch on *Woodwinds 2*.



Instrumentation

- A - String patches
- B - Woodwind patches
 - 31 Piccolo
 - 32 Flute I
 - 01 SHORT + LONG NOTES
 - 02 DYNAMICS
 - 03 FLATTER + TRILLS
 - 10 PERF INTERVAL
 - 11 PERF INTERVAL FAST
 - 12 PERF TRILL
 - 13 PERF REPETITION
 - 14 PERF UPBEAT REPETITION
 - 15 FAST REPETITION
 - 16 GRACE NOTES
 - 17 SCALE RUNS
 - 18 ARPEGGIOS
 - 19 MORDENTS
 - 98 RESOURCES
 - 33 Flute II
 - 34 Alto Flute
 - 35 Oboe I
 - 36 Oboe II
 - 37 English Horn I
 - 38 English Horn II
 - 39 Clarinet-Eb

VSL Woodwinds 1 comes with four solo instruments and four unison woodwind sections. The four instruments are Flute 1, Oboe 2, Bb Clarinet, and Bassoon.

The unison sections are: 3 Flutes, 3 Oboes, 3 Clarinets, and 3 Bassoons.

There are two groups of samples that you either purchase separately or as a package. This is Basic (labeled as L1 within the Vienna Instrument's player) and Extended (labeled as L2 within the Vienna Instrument's player). For copy protection, a Vienna Key is required.

Articulations

To the left is a screen capture from my system of the Flute 1 Patches articulations group.

Customer Service

In looking at all the developers, VSL has perhaps the best thought out customer service, which includes training, of all the developers. This includes the manual, audio demos with MP3s/MIDI files/extra patches, and a forum dedicated to the Vienna Instruments, separate from the Vienna Instruments player.

The Manual

Usually, and with good reason, I complain about the documentation of many new libraries being limited to 2-3 pages of actual instrument. That is not true with Woodwinds 1 (or any of the libraries) as you get a 166-page manual that really demands being printed out and placed in a 3-ring binder. You need this information as it contains important information about layers, repetitions, arpeggio contents, and much more. The manual for just the Woodwinds 1 library is 166 PDF pages which you'll need to print out. I usually do mine with 3-hole punched paper and a 3-ring binder. I also keep a PDF copy on a hard drive, but after a while my eyes want the printed page away from the monitor.

Audio Training

Not to be overly critical, but I don't think that VSL "toots" its own horn enough. In what I define as audio training, the VSL customer is quietly taught how to do effective MIDI mock-ups with VSL instruments, one instrument at a time.

Simply put, no other developer does this.

In many cases you get an MP3 demo, a MIDI file of the performance, and not infrequently, a bonus .fxp file or two to expand your Vienna patch list.



Woodwinds I		
Woodwind quartet	Christian Kardeis	0:39
Summer Music	Samuel Barber	3:00
A Springtime Caper (Clarinet)	Guy Bacos	2:50
The Moonlit Dance	Maarten Spruijt	1:35
Woodwind ensembles cluster	Christian Kardeis	0:24
Woodwinds tremolos	Herb Tucmandl	0:17
Fantasiestueck for clarinet	Robert Schumann	3:25
Clarinet arpeggios	Christian Kardeis	0:15
Bassoon sonata - 2nd mvt.	Camille Saint-Saëns	3:07
Shintoku Forest Wind (Flute)	Guy Bacos	3:24
Flute virtuoso	Christian Kardeis	0:22
Pan (Oboe)	Benjamin Britten	2:31
Syrinx (Flute)	Claude Debussy	2:47
Il barbiere di Siviglia	Gioacchino Rossini	5:10
Woodwinds Quartet Trio	Herb Tucmandl	1:58

The screen shot above is from the Woodwinds 1 "Demos" page on the Vienna website and it shows some of the MP3s available to download covering each instrument in the package and the ensembles (unseen). There's also a 2-minute video training demo on the clarinet created by composer Guy Bacos.

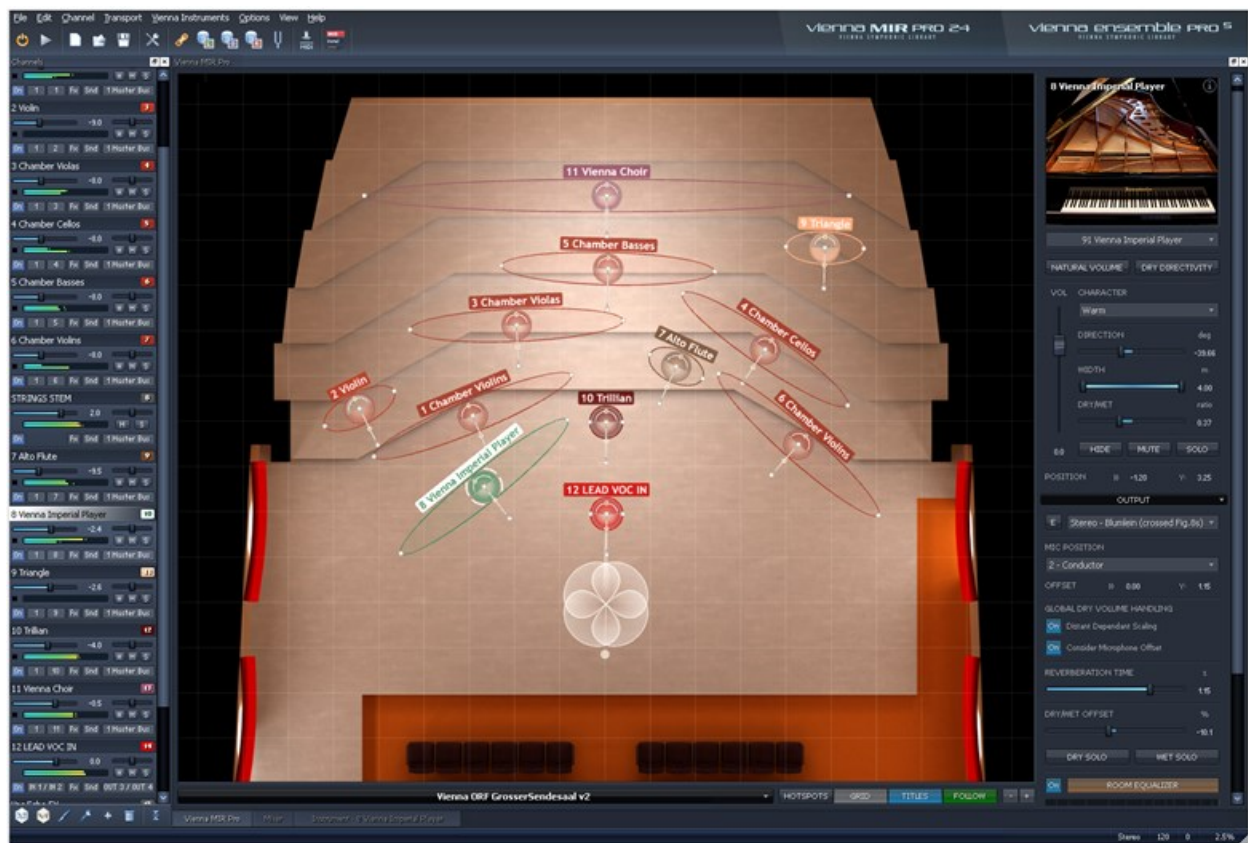
Spatial Placement

Spatial placement is about positioning a sound, with Vienna an orchestral instrument sound, stage left to right and stage front to back. Spatial placement is part of the mixing process and with VSL you have to place your instruments where you want them versus working with libraries

where the instruments are already pre-placed/pre-panned for you. In the past, many Vienna demos were done using Altiverb which enables the end user to use a convolution reverb and to spatially position a sound.

With the release of the Vienna Ensemble PRO, introduced Power Pan which came into its own in the Vienna Suite. With Power Pan, in literally seconds, you can position or reposition a sound from any company stage left to stage right and adjust its stereo width. To adjust stage front to stage back, Vienna introduced Ernest Cholak's FORTI/SERTI convolution reverb solution which takes advantage of the Vienna Suite's Convolution Reverb.

During this time came MIR, then MIR 24 (requiring Vienna Ensemble PRO 5), and soon, MIR: The Plug-in (no date of release has been announced). Vienna describes MIR as a new way of mixing. With MIR (see screenshot below) you literally drag your instrument into the onstage position where you want it. There's no worrying about placing stage left to stage right, or stage front to stage back, you just place it.



I emphasize these aspects of spatial placement because it's been said that Vienna is difficult to mix with. And some have said that because of the Silent Stage where Vienna records (it seems everyone has an opinion about this), and that the sounds are dry and not more ambient (because they are "dry" you have more flexibility in shaping your sound).

However, given the number of resources I have available from Vienna and Ircam Tools with SPAT, these critiques, from my perspective, are not so big.

Vienna – Old?

This seems to be the newest critique popping up. I don't know that I can concur with it because the whole library has been recorded 24bit, and what continues to give Vienna its edge and flexibility are the vast number of articulations recorded per instrument and the Vienna Instruments player.

You can come to this library, spend some time learning about it, load up a preset and get going. But if you come to Woodwinds 1, or any Vienna library, with a good grasp of instrumentation basics per instrument, you'll be astounded at what you can setup to quickly produce your music. To achieve that, you do have to commit some dedicated time to learn the Vienna Instruments player and to experiment with truly, the vast number of articulation choices you're given. As with any sample library, you do have to put some time into learning it. But essentially, once you've learned the Vienna system for articulations and the Vienna Instruments player, you understand how to approach the entire library. After that, you're just auditioning programs to pick the ones your project needs.

One important point about Vienna's learning curve. At one time, because of its completeness, it was the longest to learn. But no more. I've reviewed most of the new string and brass libraries that are now seriously feature rich. You just need to understand that no matter whose library you buy, you have to spend time learning it. From my perspective, it doesn't take any longer to learn Vienna Woodwinds than any other woodwind library. And when you compare players, the Vienna Instrument's player is a step ahead of the others.

In terms of learning Vienna, I would start by just playing with the patches to hear how they sound and then, beyond question, get happening on the Vienna Instruments Player to learn how to assign controllers and to work with the crossfade (xfade) feature. Others will probably have a different starting point, but I think this will serve you well.

Producing With Vienna Woodwinds 1

Most obvious is looking at my score and determining my instrumentation. Am I using a woodwind section with just one player from each family, or do I want a basic woodwind section in twos or even larger? In teaching orchestration, my general advice (unless you're a pro) is to start with the full string ensemble and the solo woodwinds as your starting point and build from there. If you want a Flute 2, you need Woodwinds 2. For a second oboe, clarinet and bassoon, your options are to use a different program for the second instrument, an instrument from another library, or you can attempt the transposition trick (by tuning the sample down 1-2 steps, then transposing the MIDI up 1-2 steps in your sequencer – or vice versa).

Now, from your score, what articulations are you writing for? You can use the presets or you can create your own, which many do. I prefer to start from an orchestration perspective by either finding a preset that works, or picking from the basics: legato (which one), staccato, repeated notes, grace notes, and mordents.

Next for me are the effects: arpeggios, runs, special accents (sfz, etc), flutter tongue, and so on.

Once you've found what you want, you can then create a very simple matrix so that one, maybe two tracks in the sequencer cover the articulations you need for that woodwind instrument.

Inputting Your Lines

There are three methods of line input: live performance from the keyboard, step time, and using a MIDI wind controller. Which you use depends on you. Step time is slower, for sure, but check

out the amazing demos by Jay Bacal all of which were step timed in. I mention this so you know that you **don't** have to be a piano performance major to evoke a truly great sound out of the Vienna Instruments. But one point worth considering is that not infrequently, a piece is produced using a combination of live keyboard performance and step time, regardless of the library. There are just lines that woodwinds can perform that are not idiomatic for the piano. So for those lines, step time is the answer.

Woodwinds 2

The instruments in this collection complete the Woodwind's collection: Piccolo flute, Flute 2, Alto flute, Viennese oboe, English horn (Viennese), English horn (French), Clarinet in Eb, Bass clarinet, and Contra bassoon.

Again, these are all single instruments, and with an actual orchestra, these are the instruments that would often be doubled by the second player in that family (Flute 2 doubles on Piccolo, French Oboe 2 doubles on French English horn, Clarinet 2 doubles on Bass Clarinet, and Bassoon 2 doubles on Contra bassoon). So if you're writing for a standard orchestral woodwind section in 2s, you'll need to work out a solution for Oboe 2, Clarinet 2, and Bassoon 2.

The Sound

You'll notice that I've left the sound for last. The reason is that I think the quality of Woodwinds 1 (and 2) speak for themselves, especially when you listen to the VSL demos and download the MIDI files to test with other libs out there. I know this upsets some people, but I bought these libraries directly because of the sound achieved by Jay Bacal in his demos. And when I found out that he step timed everything, I was more impressed, not less impressed.

On advice from Jerry Goldsmith, I learned long ago to think of myself as a composer not a _____ composer (fill in the blank). Because of the number of articulations recorded, as demonstrated on the Vienna demo pages, anything from the *Rite of Spring* to a solo Flute performance like Debussy's *Syrinx*. And for production assistance, I have plenty to download and study from the VSL site with which to learn how to approach more adventuresome works.

Not having the woodwind equivalent of Dimension Brass is a drag because it would be great to build a woodwind section in 2s, 3s, and 4s within the same library to maintain sound and production continuity.

Overall, Woodwinds 1 is a very high quality library that sounds beautiful, takes a tad to learn with the Vienna Instruments player, but in the end can pay great sonic dividends to the sound of your music.

This article was previously published at the SonicControl website.