

**SAMPLE LIBRARIES YOU NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT FOR CREATING**

CINEMATIC ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

A BUYER'S GUIDE

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Sample libraries. There are so many out there vying for our cash. So we must be selective. How do we know which ones are the best for what we want to accomplish?

In this guide, I'll list and describe my favourite sample libraries in order to create convincing & realistic cinematic orchestral music. Libraries that sound lush, full, and authentic, without much tweaking needed to make them sound good. Please keep in mind that all my suggestions are subjective choices, and that you should trust your own instincts when listening to demos and watching walkthroughs.

Without further ado, let's jump in.



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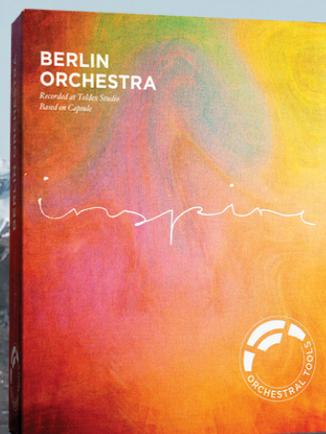


ALL-IN-ONES

FEATURING ALL ORCHESTRAL SECTIONS
IN ONE CONVENIENT PACKAGE

ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Berlin Orchestra Inspire
399€

This package features selected ensembles and solo instruments from OT's renowned Berlin series. With full orchestra, string, woodwind, brass, and percussion patches featuring fantastic tone, this is a perfect library for those who want a taste of OT's full offering at an affordable price. It contains 18gb of samples (9.3gb compressed) and can run on a laptop with 8gb RAM.

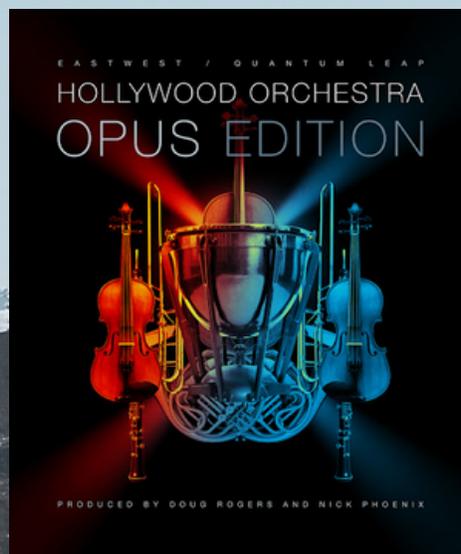


EASTWEST: Hollywood Orchestra Opus Edition

\$20/month or \$995

Yep, this one's a biggie. A revamped version of the original Hollywood Orchestra, this beast contains all you'll need for cinematic orchestral writing. Truly comprehensive, you'll need 1TB of free disk space to hold this behemoth.

It contains all the orchestral sections, including harp and solo violin/cello, so you won't be left desiring once you dive into this package.



SPITFIRE AUDIO: Albion ONE

\$449

This library, recorded in AIR Studios in London, features all sections of the orchestra in ensemble form. In addition, booming percussion and custom-made loops makes this package an enticing choice for those interested in sound design. It is a larger library (87gb of samples), so ensure you have the hard drive space to download smoothly.

The subsequent Albion offerings are more niche, specializing in various styles of film scoring.



ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Metropolis Ark 1

549€

Similar to the Albion series, OT's Metropolis Arks represent the very essence of the 'epic orchestra'. However, the sound is even more aggressive, upfront, and is captured with extreme detail and nuance. MA1 in particular is designed with LOUD in mind. It's even larger than Albion ONE (160gb of samples), and for good reason.

It contains legato, orchestrated sections, and unique instrument combinations (4 contrabassoons, 3 bass trombones, and 3 tubas, to name a few).

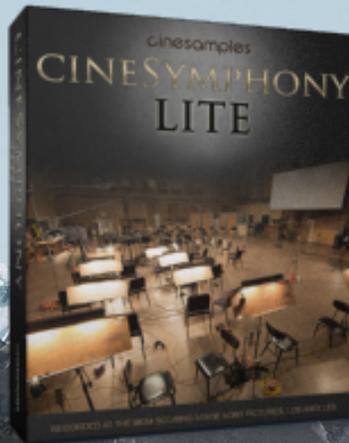


CINESAMPLES: CineSymphony LITE

\$399

CineSymphony LITE is known for its beautiful Hollywood tone, being quite intuitive and user-friendly, while clocking in at 2gb in size. Seriously! Dedicated towards students and professionals using mobile rigs, this library is a powerful sketching tool that will inspire you straight away.

Check out Cinesamples' live composition video on YouTube using this library when you have a moment. You'll see how effective it really is.

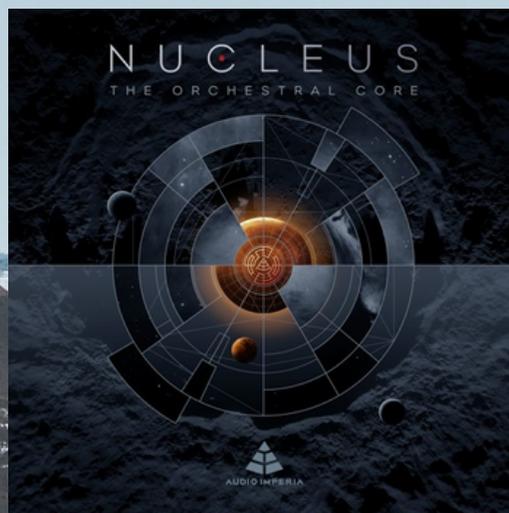


AUDIO IMPERIA: NUCLEUS

\$449

The new kid on the block, Nucleus features the typical orchestral sections & choir, with corresponding soloists for strings, woodwinds, and brass. The solo oboe is something special.

It ships with a classic mix and a modern mix: the classic lends itself well to more traditional scoring, while the modern mix introduces some higher frequencies and caters itself well to hybrid/trailer music.



SONUSCORE: THE ORCHESTRA

299€

Perfect for driving, rhythmic, and upbeat music, Sonuscore's offering features anything from practical instrument pairings to fully orchestrated patterns for quick and easy arranging.

The tone is slightly darker in nature compared to the above libraries, is quite lightweight (10gb), and is seriously innovative. Check this out if you need some driving rhythms to give your music a lift.



PIANO

THE ULTIMATE SKETCHING TOOL

Cinesamples: CinePiano

\$399

If there's one library that I use to sketch out my pieces every time I sit down to write, it's CinePiano. Recorded at MGM, this library features a beautiful wide sound that sounds instantly classic and cinematic.

Not only that, but this library ships with 4 patches, each serving a unique application: CinePiano, Classical, Cinematic, and Rock Studio Grand. They're all useful, depending on what you need. Don't pass this one up!



NATIVE INSTRUMENTS: NOIRE

\$199

Packed with an intimate and gorgeous sound, it doesn't get much better than this for those looking for a beautiful piano with sound design capabilities.

One of my favourite features is the ability to layer a sub bass underneath for a fuller bottom end.



CINESAMPLES: PIANO IN BLUE

\$99

One of my favourite pianos for intimate jazz settings, this piano was actually used for Miles Davis' 'Piano in Blue' album.

With tape saturation, multiple microphone positions, and a warm sound out of the box, this library is niche, but very effective in the right circumstances.



SPITFIRE AUDIO: ORIGINALS FELT PIANO

\$29

Sometimes, the simplest instruments are the most effective for certain scenarios. Spitfire's felt piano does exactly that, and is perfect for emotive, relaxing, and reflective scenes where a gorgeous and full sound is required.

Very affordable. Check it out!



STRINGS

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF
CLASSICAL FILM MUSIC

CINEMATIC SERIES: Cinematic Studio Strings
\$399

This is one of the most popular string libraries on the market today, and for good reason. For years, composers have been searching for a lush, soaring, and affordable string library that handles John Williams-style melodies with ease, and this delivers in spades. The legato system is seriously impressive, although it does feature some delay. Make sure you adjust this in your DAW before or after recording your lines.



ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Berlin Strings

840€

Yep, your eyes are not tricking you. This beast of a library boasts a price tag to match, but oh boy do I like it. The tone of the Teldex Scoring Stage is beautiful, the smaller section sizes allow for a detailed sound while pulling off the traditional symphonic string sound without difficulty, and the number of articulations is quite astounding.

You have the ability to morph and crossfade between different articulations, apply true legato to any long articulation, and more using the CAPSULE system. Be warned however: this library uses a lot of system resources.



ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Berlin Symphonic Strings

549€

'Another string library from Orchestral Tools! You can think of this one as the larger-sized version of Berlin Strings. The reason I say this is because it ships with larger string sections, resulting in a warm and full sound.

This library also features 3 styles of legato (melodic, pattern, and rapid) to cover all styles of playing. The cellos and violas are the standouts in my opinion, and you can purchase individual instruments from SINE as you wish. Worth checking out!

**BERLIN
SYMPHONIC
STRINGS**

Recorded at Teldex Studio

STREZOV SAMPLING: AFFLATUS CHAPTER 1

799€

Another big beast of a library, Afflatus Chapter 1 Strings is essentially 30 string libraries wrapped into 1.

Recorded with real performances in mind in different playing styles, this is one of the greatest tools for inspiration when you're feeling stuck.

While this is expensive, and not really regarded as a workhorse library, Afflatus Chp. 1 Strings will surely kickstart your compositions and provide you with plenty of options when needed.



PERFORMANCE SAMPLES: Vista

\$339

Vista does one thing, and one thing only. However, it does it beautifully.

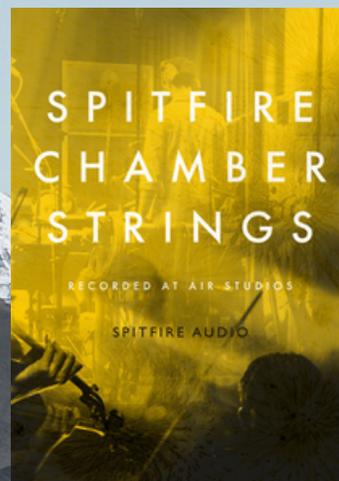
Marketed as a legato-only library featuring larger-than-life sounding chamber strings, Vista is a gorgeous package that I love to use as a layer on top of an existing arrangement. The passion and emotion that oozes from every note is remarkable, and if you need a library that does this, definitely give this one a look.



SPITFIRE AUDIO: Symphonic / Chamber Strings \$799 / \$699

Spitfire Symphonic Strings features the best players in London, recorded in AIR Studios, in traditional film score section sizes. This results in a large, wide, cinematic sound that sounds great for foundational work and anything requiring a big full sound. Comes with a load of articulations as well.

Spitfire Chamber Strings is the most sought-after library for chamber strings. It's detailed, nimble, and layers well to create larger section sizes.



CINESAMPLES: CineStrings CORE

\$499

Recorded at Sony in Los Angeles, this Hollywood-flavoured library features crisp short notes and passionate sustains. The legato system was recently updated, adapting to your playing speed in order to create convincing melodic lines.

While the tone is fabulous, you may find that the sustains are not as flowing and romantic as you'd like. In any case, the library is super simple to use and delivers 'that' sound.

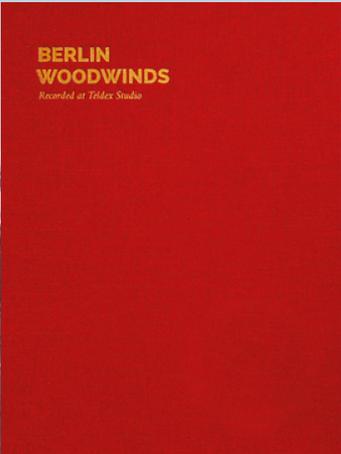


WOODWINDS

UNDERAPPRECIATED,
BUT SO BEAUTIFUL

ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Berlin Woodwinds Revive
649€

This library is my absolute go-to woodwinds library. It truly set the standard of how woodwinds should be captured for detailed part writing. It ships with piccolo, 3 flutes, alto flute, 2 oboes, english horn, 2 clarinets, and 2 bassoons. With legato, runs (recorded/playable), and a host of other common articulations, you'll more than likely find everything you need to create detailed woodwind orchestrations right in here.



BERLIN
WOODWINDS
Recorded at Tides Studio

CINEMATIC SERIES: Cinematic Studio Woodwinds

\$399

This comprehensive library features excellent legato, multiple dynamic layers, and a warm expressive tone suitable for any layering/soloist purposes.

I typically use this library when I want a soloistic sound that fits in the mix beautifully and plays well with all the other instruments. Containing the basics plus alto flute, english horn, bass clarinet, and contrabassoon, you can't go wrong with this affordable package.

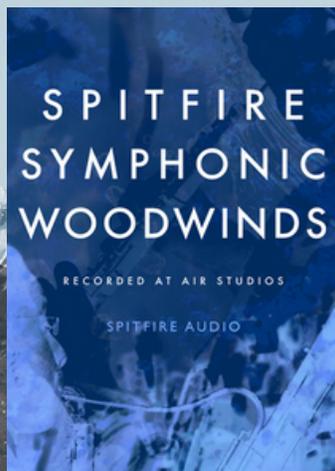


SPITFIRE AUDIO: Symphonic Woodwinds

\$599

A rival library to Berlin Woodwinds, this package contains soloists and ensembles of 2 players, so you can easily create your own sections by layering them together. This library also contains some extra woodwinds not found in BWW, including bass flute, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, and contrabassoon.

The sound is naturally very wet (being recorded in AIR), so you may want to bring in the close mic for more detail. In any case, Spitfire have done a wonderful job in putting together a collection of colourful-sounding woodwinds.

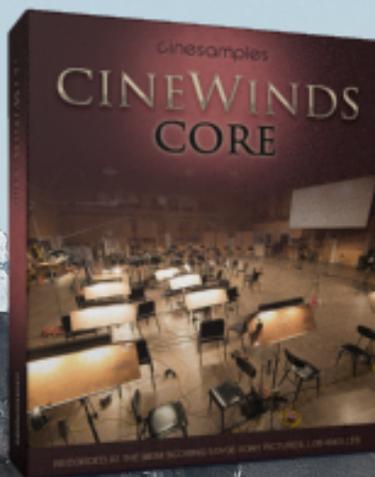


CINESAMPLES: CineWinds CORE

\$349

Another soloist-featured library in CineWinds, these players have been captured beautifully once again at Sony, so if you're looking for soloist-sounding woodwinds that will have no trouble taking the spotlight, this may be the library for you. It's warm, full, and very characteristic.

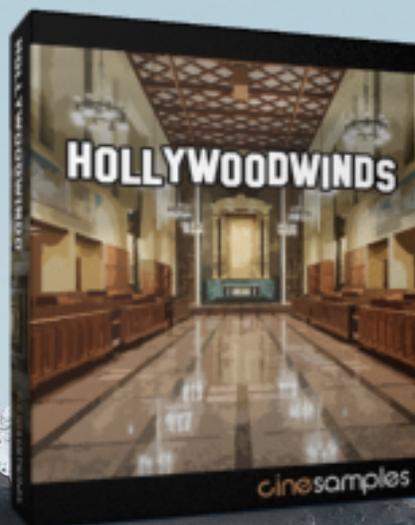
The PRO expansion contains doublers, as well as ethnic winds for additional colours.



CINESAMPLES: Hollywoodwinds

\$199

At this price, this library is an absolute steal. From its launch a decade ago, HWW has been heard in feature films, jingles, and everything in between. Its most notable features are the tempo-synced runs in various modes, textural patches, and FX. No other library captures the tone of John Williams woodwinds quite like this library.



BRASS

FROM THE WHISPER QUIET
TO THE ROARING LOUD

CINESAMPLES: CineBrass CORE & PRO

\$399 each

One of the first libraries to establish the sound of bold cinematic brass, CineBrass has become a staple in nearly every composer's toolkit. The room is really the standout feature here: the Sony stage adds this filmic gloss to the brass that elevates it in a gorgeous way.

If you asked me what library you should choose to recreate the Star Wars theme, I would point you to this one, without a doubt.



CINEMATIC SERIES: Cinematic Studio Brass

\$399

Following the highly successful CSS, Alex Wallbank's return features a set of orchestral brass samples highlighting buttery-smooth legato, extreme playability, and immense dynamic range. Recorded with multiple dynamic layers, the crossfading is relatively seamless, enabling you to create your own swells with ease.

You won't find every articulation under the sun in this library, rather, you're equipped with the most commonly used one to get you up and running. For classic cinematic scoring, you can't go wrong with this.



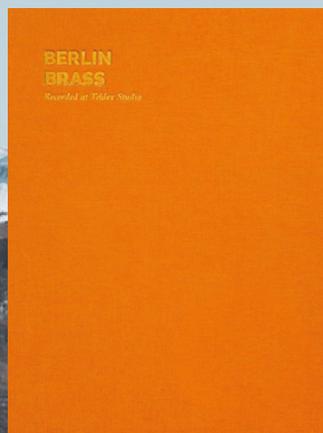
CINEMATIC
STUDIO
BRASS

ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Berlin Brass

799€

You probably see the pattern here. Orchestral Tools make libraries at top-shelf prices. However, I'm not listing their products in this guide to show you the most expensive options; I genuinely love the sound of the brass in this library. The legatos are smooth, the Teldex scoring stage works beautifully for brass, and once again, multiple instruments per section were recorded for flexible part writing. Most brass libraries feature one solo french horn, Berlin Brass has 4.

This library excels at the quieter dynamics. For my higher dynamic brass lines, CSB and CineBrass fill in the gaps that BB leave.



ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: JXL Brass

749€

Working with Tom Holkenborg (Junkie XL), Orchestral Tools recently developed this library as a one-stop shop for your cinematic brass needs. From detailed solo instruments to a huge 12-horn ensemble with the quietest pp to the loudest fff, this library has you covered.

You have the option of purchasing individual instruments from the OT website, as this library runs in their SINE Player.

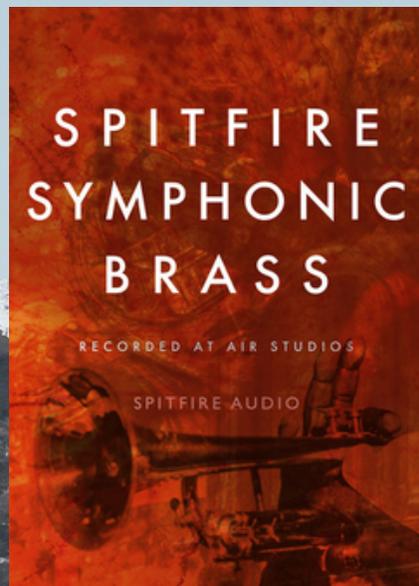


SPITFIRE AUDIO: Symphonic Brass

\$699

Like SSS and SSW, Spitfire Symphonic Brass was recorded at AIR Studios, and features the same cinematic sound found in major blockbuster film scores recorded at AIR.

In addition to the traditional brass instruments, SSB also contains bass trombones, contrabass trombone, contrabass tuba, and cimbassi. This package is a solid choice for those looking for some additional colours and techniques in addition to regular brass.



PERCUSSION

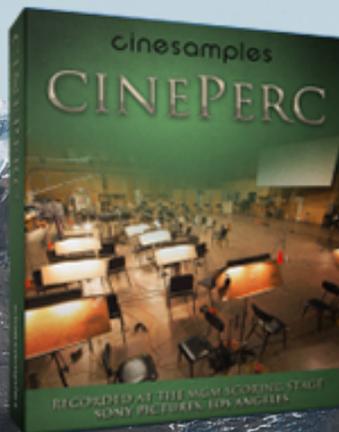
RHYTHMIC DRIVE,
IMAGINATIVE COLOURS

CINESAMPLES: CinePerc

\$699 each

This behemoth of a library (formerly 4 separate libraries) contains everything from traditional orchestral percussion to epic hits, a drum kit, and much more. You'll notice that this library is LOUD. Very bombastic, and really fills in the frequency spectrum.

If you use this library, be sure to balance the patches with your other instruments so they sit comfortably with each other. You'll enjoy the results, I promise.



HEAVYOCITY:

Damage 2

\$399

A perfect blend of punchy acoustic percussion and sound design options, Damage 2 gives you everything you need for organic and hybrid cinematic percussion. It's really a wonderful complement to traditional percussion libraries, because you have the ability to twist and mangle every source sound exactly how you like it.

Trust me, if you're looking for your first percussion library and want to write music like JXL, Hans Zimmer, or 2SFH, this is more than worth a look.

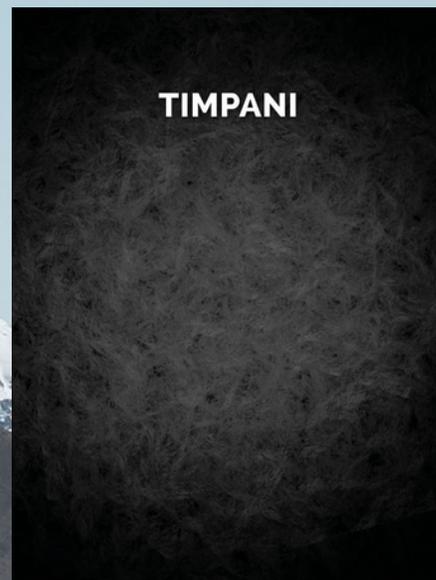
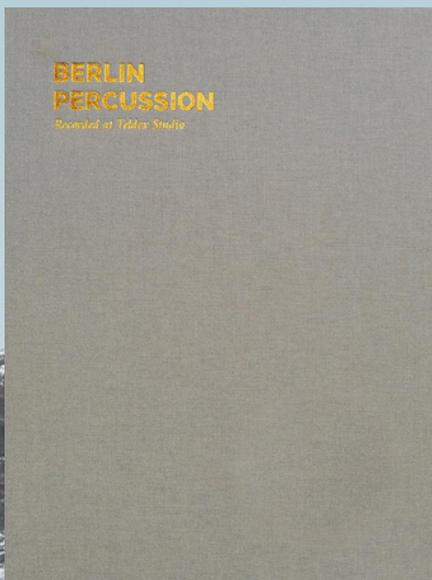


ORCHESTRAL TOOLS:

Berlin Percussion & The Timpani

499€ / 125€

Another classical-oriented library in the spotlight here. It's deep-sampled: 7 snare drums, 4 bass drums, and more give you plenty of options to set up your own percussion ensembles. The timpani are available as an expansion pack, but they sound incredible, and are recorded with a variety of different mallets for maximum flexibility and choice.

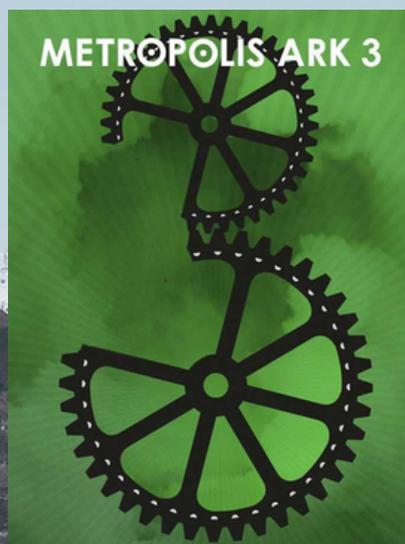


ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Metropolis Ark 3

549€

Metropolis Ark 3 is a percussion-based library focused on acoustic trailer music. As a result, large drum ensembles were recorded, 3 timpani players, cymbal ensembles, trash/metal percussion, and many more were captured.

In addition, the other orchestral sections performed in a percussive manner, resulting in various short articulations, repetitions, and atonal clusters, ideal for action/thriller film scoring.



HARP

TINKLING BEAUTY

CINESAMPLES: CineHarps

\$249

The main harp library I use, this comprehensive package includes 3 individual harps, plus effects, glissandi, and many other patches to take your harp writing to the next level. It features a gorgeous sound from the Sony Scoring stage.



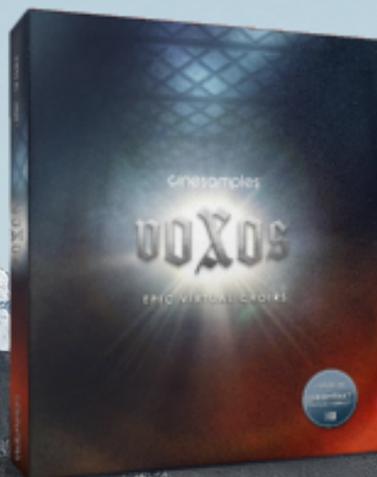
CHOIR

MANKIND'S MOST
PERSONAL INSTRUMENT

CINESAMPLES: Voxos

\$499

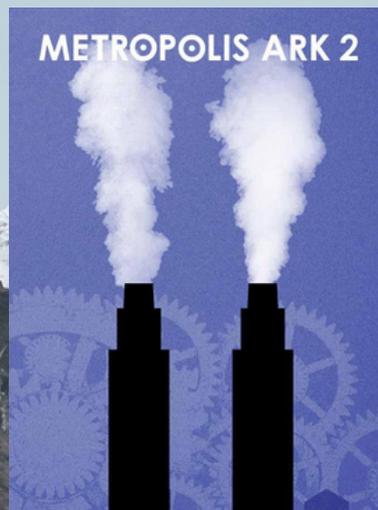
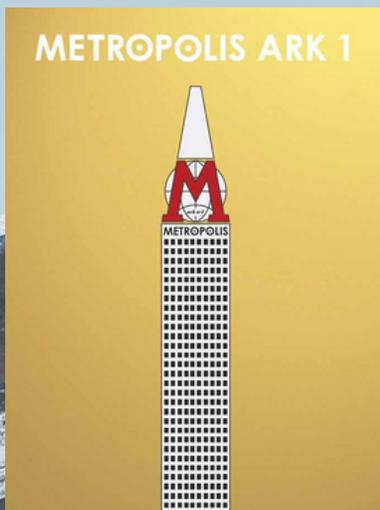
This virtual choir library contains men, women, and a boys choir, along with multiple recorded syllables so you can create your own vocal phrases. The dynamic range is quite impressive, and sonically ranks among the best choir libraries out there. If you need a workhorse epic choir library, this is a great choice for you.



ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Metropolis Ark 1/2/4

549€ / 599€ / 549€

Each of the listed Metropolis Arks contain beautifully recorded choirs. MA1 features a full women choir and men choir, with legato and staccato (triggering random syllables). MA2 ups the ante with a children's choir, which sounds heavenly. MA4 rounds things off with a 3-piece women and men choir, for more detail and intimacy in your choir writing. There are a few choir effects included here, but the primary intention is to enhance your orchestral productions with the included choir sections.

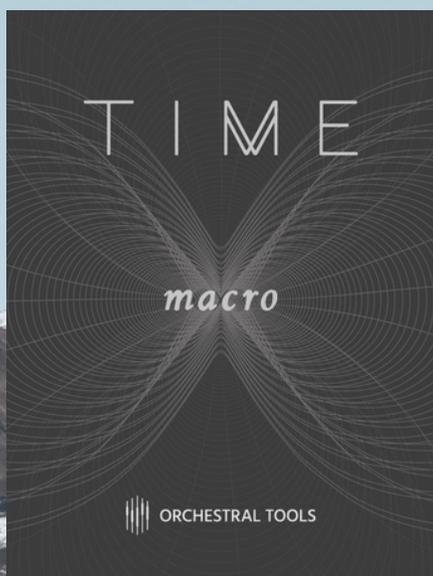


ORCHESTRAL TOOLS: Time Macro/Time Micro

349€ each

The standout feature of the choirs included in Time Macro & Time Micro are the unique articulations performed by these groups. Swells, clockwork noises, zzh and nnh sustains, pitch slides, and many more are to be found here.

While Time Macro contains larger ensembles of singers, Time Micro has 3 women and 3 men, resulting in an intimate and detailed sound.



SOUND DESIGN

BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL

SONUSCORE: Elysion

229€

The companion library to The Orchestra, Elysion is a sound design-focused library that was recorded in a traditional way, by sampling electronic sounds like an acoustic instrument. The result is very flexible, and uses the same engine found in The Orchestra. You can stack and manipulate multiple sounds together for fun and inspiring results.



ETHNICS

EXPLORING THE WORLD

Strezov Sampling: Jade Ethnic Orchestra

479€

The largest and most comprehensive ethnic library on the market is no doubt Strezov Sampling's JEO.

Featuring a Chinese orchestra, as well as some other instruments from neighbouring regions, this library contains most of what you would need to mockup a convincing Chinese-style piece. Check it out!



Orchestral Tools: Phoenix Orchestra

499€

Similar to Jade Ethnic Orchestra, Phoenix is a library featuring mainly Chinese instruments recorded in a pristine and characterful manner.

It's dryer and more detailed than Jade in terms of sound, but a little reverb will put it into your virtual room nicely. Purchase instrument individually on OT's website!



UVI: World Suite 2

\$299

The efforts of UVI don't go unnoticed. Upgrading their original World Suite with new instruments, this comprehensive library contains 369 instruments from all over the world, including some loops and sound design options for your musical pleasure.

As far as I know, the legato is scripted, which allows the library to stay at a manageable size while offering you a wide selection of instruments.



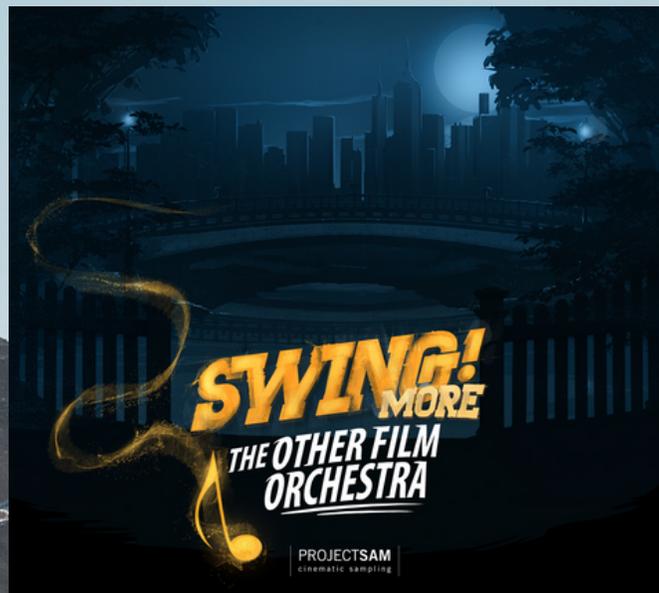
JAZZ & BIG BAND

GOTTA LET LOOSE

ProjectSam: Swing and Swing More!

\$339 / \$459

These libraries are the standard when it comes to big band swing in sample libraries. Featuring soloists and ensembles, not to mention some wacky cool instruments you can pepper into your tracks, these libraries are some of the most authentic I've heard.

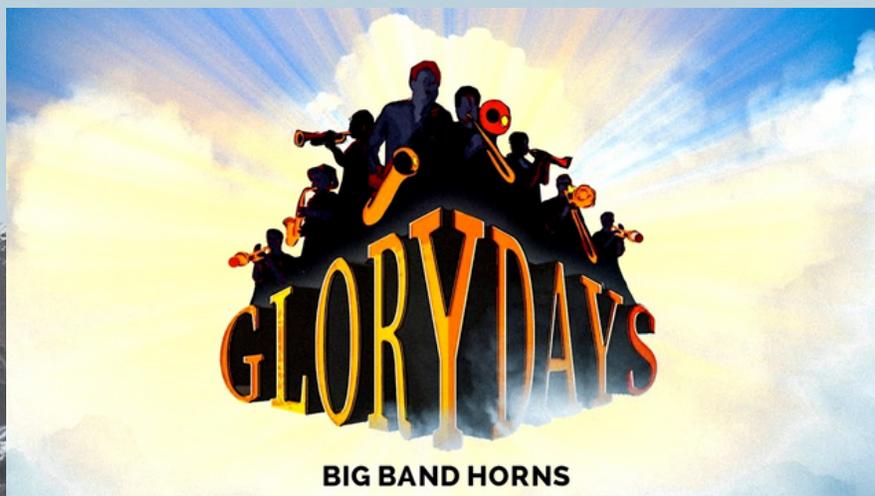


Orchestral Tools: Glory Days Big Band Horns

599€

If you need individually sampled saxophones, trombones, and trumpets played in a big band style, this is the library for you. With a number of articulations and idiomatic mannerisms, GD can provide the punch, attitude, and sound you need to give your tracks that extra flare.

It is on the pricier side, but it's worth the extra flexibility and control. If you're a dedicated arranger in this style, this is the library for you.



Vir2: Mojo 2.0 (\$499)

If you're on the hunt for individually sampled jazz horns with attitude, Mojo 2.0 must just be a good fit for you!

This library now contains 17 different patches (including simulated mutes and improved legato), shooting it up to the top of the list when it comes to big band and funky horns.

Like the others, it's a relatively large library (100gb), so make sure you have enough hard drive space!



Straight Ahead Samples: Birth of the Trumpet

\$130

This library is incredible. Featuring a brand new technology where the engine analyzes your performance to choose the best samples for your phrase, the results can be absolutely stunning.

If you're looking for an exposed trumpet that can handle lead lines with ease and grace, this library might just be for you. Check it out!

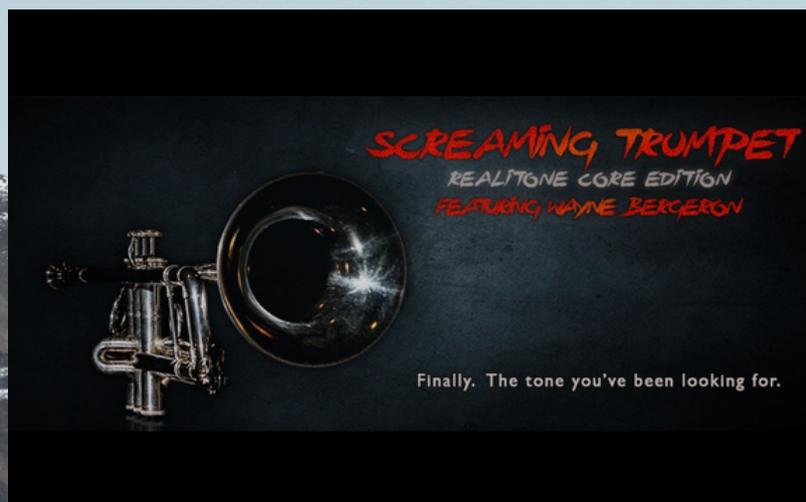


Realitone: Screaming Trumpet

\$100

This specialized trumpet library gives you that instant big band sound that lead trumpets are known for. It features Wayne Bergeron, one of the top lead trumpeters in the industry, and as you'd expect, the sound is impressive, the wealth of articulations is massive, and it's VERY playable.

Check out this library if you want to upgrade your big band sample chops with a flexible lead instrument that'll cut over the rest of your band.



Well, that's it! These are all the sample libraries that I trust will equip you with the necessary tools to create beautiful orchestral music.

Let me sum this up:

- If you are dabbling in the world of orchestral music and want to explore your options without investing too heavily, consider one of the all-in-one libraries.
- If you are experienced in orchestration and want to be able to write individual parts, look into the dedicated section libraries (Berlin, Spitfire, and Cinesamples to name a few).
- Your ear is your best judge. Listen to plenty of audio demos, and decide what you really need for your own music.

That's all! I hope you learned something from this guide. Please enjoy your lifelong music-making journey!



Additional Resources!

In-depth training: <https://www.christophersiu.com/store>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/ChristopherSiu>

Discord community: <https://discord.gg/gY5E4nu6y2>

Vi-control: <https://vi-control.net/community/>

