Insights: Vienna's MIRx Brings Mixing Simplicity to VSL Libraries

By Peter Lawrence Alexander / September 9, 2013

For the first time, Vienna owners now have the same joy as those with fixed position libraries, and then some.

With additional insights from VSL's Dietz Tinhof

After writing an article on the release of MIRx, I was delighted when Vienna sent me the MIRx bundle to review. As a long time Vienna owner (10 years), I can tell you that after just a few minutes my emotions ranged from Wowie! Zowie! to abject relief. For the first time, Vienna owners now have the same joy as those with fixed position libraries, and *then some*. At the bare minimum, MIRx can be described as a tool that automatically spatially places your instruments once you've determined which room you want your Vienna ensemble to sound in. So in one step, spatial placement and reverb implementation per instrument. To this, an additional group of positions are available if you want to create a different seating arrangement. So you have a standard position plus alternates custom designed for each venue.

As I wrote previously, MIRx also enables you to position the newly created *virtual* 2nd Violins for a full string section for Chamber Strings, Orchestral Strings, Appassionata Strings, and, the new Dimension Violins. This feature is also available to create two additional virtual trumpets and two additional virtual trombones for a full brass section, expanded woodwinds, and so. By virtual, this means no new samples were used, but rather, the second violins, and second-third brass were created through programming.

About this, Dietz Tinhof said, "Personally I would suggest to use, e.g., a combination of Appassionata (or Orchestra) and Dimension Violins for the First, and a different combination (like Orchestra and Chamber Violins) for the Second."

At a price point of around $100 per venue, this is a great feature giving you the option of not having to mess with the transposition trick to expand the solo instruments to create multipart voicings. As you add these additional instruments, MIRx also positions each appropriately for you per venue.

The positioning per venue is an important feature. Since each room sounds different, stage positioning is custom to each individual venue to get the best sound possible. So, no canned answers here! Everything is custom designed for you.

However, MIRx goes one step beyond that. It has a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) that those who really know orchestration will thoroughly appreciate because of the sheer amount of time it saves when mixing sans an engineer.

This USP is called *Natural Volume*.

You could think of it as Engineer-in-a-Box (really, Dietz-and-Herb-in-a-Box since VSL's Dietz Tinhof worked out the Venue setup, instrument positioning and pre-EQs, and Herb Tucmandl, who performed on cello with the Vienna Philharmonic, worked out the Natural Volume settings).

What natural volume does, with a single box check, is to balance the orchestral ensemble doing the Dynamic Equivalents for you. Of course, some tweaking is required here and there (you know, season to taste).

Said Mr. Tinhof, "For a better general understanding, from VSL's perspective, our actual USP is: Offering multi-positional, multi-directional, "source-conscious" samples of real halls."

The graphic below helps tell the story. To the far left is a grid. At the center bottom of the grid you see a black dot. That's the main microphone position. But as Mr. Tinhof explained, "it happens to be the one called 'Conductor' in all three Venues." The object with the oval is Violins 1 and how it's placed in the Large Hall. Placement can change depending upon the room you select.

Reading left to right, you see Natural Volume which I've checked. You cannot alter this. If you want to do it yourself, uncheck it and set volume levels as you normally would. Look for *Pre-EQ* which I've also checked. Again, this is a special setting unique to the instrument and the room. It's totally optional if you use it. But once selected, you go with Mr. Tinhof's ears! Next is Dry/Wet. This is standardized at 50% on loading, but you can change it at any time.
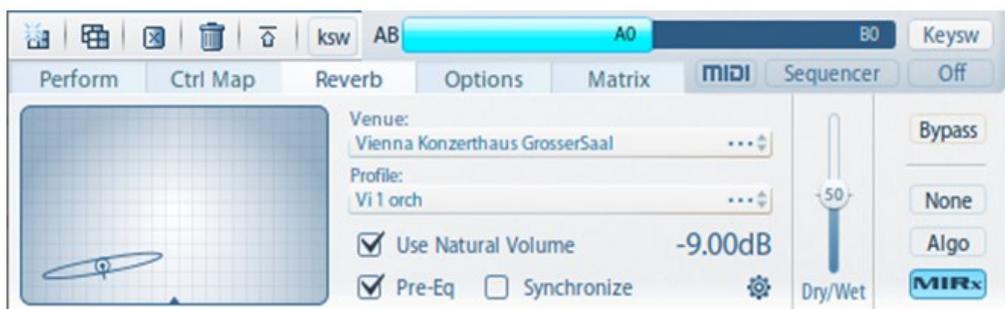
One observation about Dry/Wet. If you just want to use MIRx for spatial placement so that you can use a different reverb, you can. In this situation, insert the instrument into the Vienna Instrument Player, then bring Dry/Wet down to 0 and select whatever reverb you want. While you can do this, I think it's best to keep some of the room verb up, even if it's just 5-10%. Overall, depending upon the room, 50% may be too wet, so test between 30% and 40% (depending on your project) if 50% feels too wet for you.

I also want to point out the difference between the setting of Wet/Dry on the Basic Page and on the Advanced page under the Reverb tab.

Said Mr. Tinhof, "This looks like a glitch, but VSL's software engineers point out that the former value is the MIDI-equivalent of the latter (which just shows a percentage). A MIDI controller reaches from 1 to 128, thus 63 is the center value for a fader which is meant to be remote controlled."

THE THREE DIFFERENT VENUES
Mr. Tinhof has implemented this feature in three different rooms, which VSL calls *venues*. I'm listing the three venues below with my impression of each.

Berlin Teldex – A slightly dark studio color that to my hearing compared to other soundtracks yields a film score sound. It also enables VSL to fit/blend well with many Kontakt libraries. If you could only afford one, and you have a lot of Kontakt libs, I'd consider this one.

Mozart Hall – Compared to other soundtracks, sounds to me like a smaller studio sound. Think Smecky, Abby Road 2 as examples. Once the mix is completed, you can add a larger room on the mains whether it's a hardware reverb or virtual. If you have a lot of EW libs recorded in what was once know as Cello Studio 1, I think this is a good one to consider for getting VSL to work well with EW.

Large Hall – As the name implies, it's big! To me this is a bit more like Abbey Road Studio 1.

Said Mr. Tinhof, "It's worth noting that both the Mozart Hall and the Grosser Saal (Large Hall) are derived from the famous halls of the Vienna Konzerthaus."

THE STRINGS SETUP
The setup used for all three venues is what's called the European setup. Here you have Violins 1, Violas, Cellos, Violins 2, and Basses centered. This setup combined with Natural Volume pre-balances the section for you.

HELLO, MORSE!
In the screenshot below, you'll see my template using the Teldex MIRx for an ensemble mimicking ITV's *Morse* as scored by composer Barrington Pheloung.
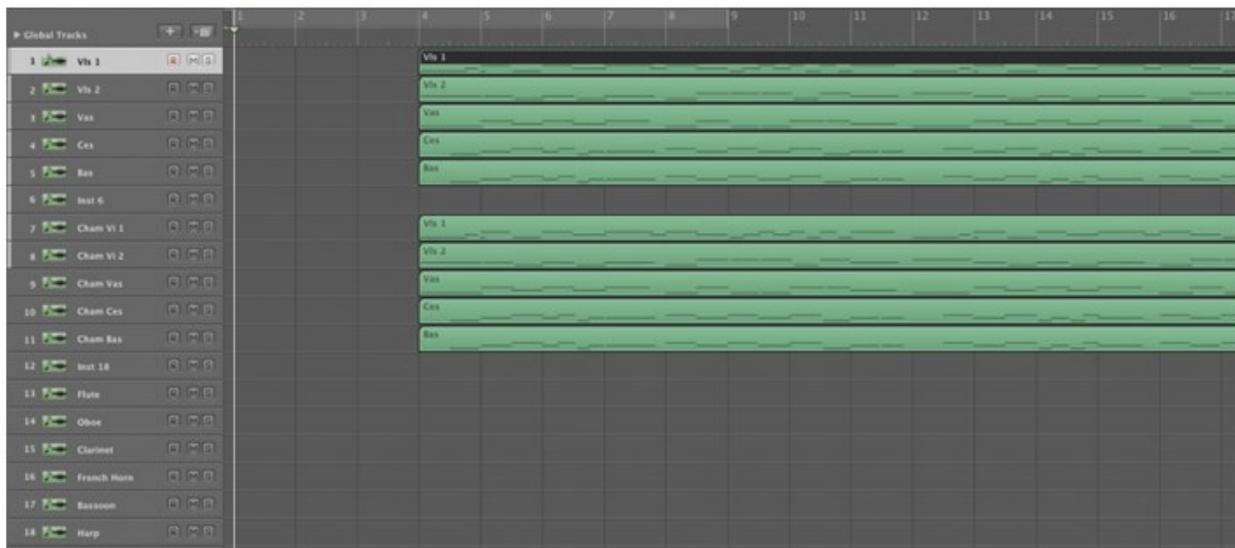
For testing purposes, my strings are the Orchestral Strings 1 and 2 supported below by the Chamber Strings. Rather than "layering" the two ensembles within the Vienna Instruments player (which it's designed to let you do), I decided to set up each library independently so that each stringed instrument had its own MIRx setting. If I had done Violins 1 + Chamber Violins 1 in one instance of the Vienna Instruments, I'd be limited to one (1) insertion of MIRx, and that would be for the Orchestral Strings, not the Chamber.

If I use each Library independently, without layering, then I can use new resources within MIRx to setup my own divisi strings.

For the woodwinds, I'm using a single instance each of Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, French horn, and Bassoon. Finally, the harp, and here I'm using Harp 2 because I think it has a slightly softer sound.

All of this is setup in Logic and I'm not even using Vienna Ensemble PRO so far.

In summary, what MIRx gives the VSL user is elegant simplicity for sound, setup, and mixing.

DO YOU NEED ANYTHING ELSE BESIDES MIRx?
This is a very common question. I would say for the beginner who wants to have the least possible to do with mixing, start here. You *will* have to do MIDI editing and adjust dynamics as with any library. But in the very beginning, that's it. You can place your emphasis on creating while getting a professional sound along the way. If all you have is one Vienna string library, then stay with the "virtual 2s" until you expand. I've tried them for each lib including Dimension Violins, and the sound is excellent.

For myself I want a little more, and this is where Vienna Suite with FORTI/SERTI comes in handy. A real "secret weapon" within FORTI/SERTI are the TILT Filters which help to transform Vienna in such a way that no one knows you're using VSL.

Vienna Suite comes with its own Convolution Reverb which includes additional IRs for Teldex. This makes it easier for Vienna to work well with other libs. Also, at some point, an independent Teldex library will be released by Peter Emmanuel Roos that will import into the Vienna Convolution Reverb.

If you're just starting out, it's not necessary to go the Vienna Suite-FORTI/SERTI route. Instead, I suggest focusing on building your library, getting Vienna Instrument Pro, and at least one MIRx to get going.

Now, you'll notice I didn't mention MIR Pro. That's because I don't have it. But from what I've read, MIRx looks like a great starting point before making the leap to MIR.

CRITIQUES
I have two.

In the manual, Natural Volume only gets a few paragraphs. This is such an important feature, I think it merits its own video. I also feel the same way about the Synchronize feature. It's just not clear in the manual.

Also, for virtual orchestral mixing purposes, for me, it would be useful if VSL published the RT60 of each venue. This would make it easier to know which venue to select when mixing VSL with other libraries.

CONCLUSION
In all, this is an incredible breakthrough for the Vienna folks. Speaking for myself as a longtime Vienna user, I'm genuinely thrilled with the results I'm getting and how quickly I'm getting them. As an example, balancing a string section with multipart vertical harmony *is* hard work just to get everything to sit right, and blend, without something sticking out, calling attention to itself. MIRx

solves that problem for me. The strings blend. It's a beautiful sound and I could *not* have done it better. That's why I said that having MIRx is like having Dietz-in-a-Box! MIRx is NOT a gimmick. It's a well thought out mixing solution.

MIRx should help open the doors for new customers, including educators since spatial placement and room selection is handled in a few mouse clicks. And for existing customers, the world of mixing with Vienna, as I have happily discovered, just got really simple. And better. MIRx delivers a professional sound.

The rest is up to you.

This article was previously published at the SonicControl website.