

Mac PC What is it? A sample-based orchestral instrument PRICE: £399

CONTACT: IK Multimedia UK, 01223 234414 WWW.philharmonik.com INFO: SampleTank owners can purchase for £279



On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
Hear the beautifully crisp and organic sounds of the Miroslav Philharmonik in the Tutorial files folder

IK MULTIMEDIA computer music PERFORMANCE Miroslav Philharmonik

The ubiquitous SampleTank 2 engine gets another outing – how does it fare when it's packed with orchestral sounds?

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: Pentium III/Athlon 733MHz (Intel Pentium 4/Athlon 2.4GHz recommended), 512MB of RAM (1GB recommended), Windows 2000/XP, RTAS, VST or DXI compatible host application

Mac: G4 667MHz (G4 1.25GHz recommended), 512MB of RAM (1GB recommended), Mac OS X 10.2.8 or later, RTAS, VST or Audio Units compatible host application

TEST MACHINE

PC: Carillon AC-1 2.4GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, Windows XP SP2, Cubase SX 3.01

Miroslav Philharmonik is billed as an 'Orchestra and Choir Workstation', but it's perhaps better described as a comprehensive classical sample library in a custom interface. It makes sense to create special versions of sample playback engines (such as HALion, Kontakt, and SampleTank) as they enable companies to copy-protect their expensively-produced libraries and combine them with a dedicated user interface that's perfectly suited to the sample content. Miroslav Philharmonik is powered by a custom version of SampleTank 2.5 and features a reverb effect that's specially designed for

classical music.

Although installing the software is comparatively easy, the copy-protection system is unusually over-the-top. Miroslav Philharmonik is protected both by a Syncrosoft USB 'dongle' and an internet-based software registration procedure. If you use another Syncrosoft-protected product (such as Cubase SX), you can reclaim a USB port by moving your Miroslav Philharmonik license across to the other dongle, but you'll then need to reauthorise the software – which is rather annoying, to say the least. Even if you use the original dongle, you're still required to carry out

reauthorisation when using the software on another computer.

A classic revisited

In all fairness, IK Multimedia do have a lot to protect here. The original Miroslav Orchestral Sample Collection is a very expensive classical sample library, and Miroslav Philharmonik contains the whole thing. On top of this you'll also find some previously unreleased material from the original recording sessions in the Dvorak Hall in Prague. This new content has been carefully mapped into additional presets by the engineers at IK Multimedia.

OK, let's get straight to the point:

Miroslav Philharmonik sounds absolutely incredible. From the moment you play your very first notes, it's clear that you've got something very special in front of you. The samples have a warmth and depth that owes less to the recording process than it does the manner in which they were originally performed. Often, the solo violins you'll find in generic sample libraries can be a bit cold and clinical, but this one sounds like it's been played with real passion and feeling and works beautifully when you're trying to create an authentic solo – it stands out and feels like proper performance. This is one of the many reasons why the Miroslav Orchestral sample library has been used in film soundtracks and television commercials the world over.

IK Multimedia, for their part, have added industry-standard synth-style controls so that you can easily modify the sounds to suit your particular taste. You get a switchable multimode filter and two sets of envelope controls – one for amplitude and another for both pitch and filter cutoff modulation. There are also two tempo-synchronised low frequency oscillators: LFO-1 has a delay control for more realistic vibrato and tremolo effects, and is depth-controlled by the modulation wheel on your MIDI keyboard; LFO-2 has a pan control for Auto-pan type effects.

The nuts and bolts

The plug-in environment is configured as a 16-part multichannel, multitimbral ensemble with four insert effects per part. You can also apply four system-wide send effects. Naturally, if this isn't enough, you can simply load further instances of the plug-in until you've reached the processing limit of your computer system.

The sample player remained extremely stable throughout our testing process. The only problem we had was that the STRETCH-analysis (see *STRETCHing the boundaries* boxout) for some of the ensembles tended to freeze the plug-in. However, once individual presets had been analysed this problem went away entirely and never came back.

Miroslav Philharmonik contains virtually all of the classical instruments that you could possibly want or need. You get everything from strings, woodwind and brass through to percussion, keyboards and a truly spectacular cathedral organ. You're even supplied with a handy wallchart

STRETCHing the boundaries

Because it's based on the SampleTank 2 engine, Miroslav Philharmonik contains an implementation of IK Multimedia's proprietary STRETCH algorithm. This system uses specialised pitchshifting techniques so that you can avoid the infamous 'Pinky and Perky' effect that you get when you speed-shift samples such as vocals.

The system isn't perfect – it struggles to alleviate glitching and popping on swirling choral ensembles (which is hardly surprising) – but it does help you to create more natural-sounding chordal parts on multisampled instruments.

Since the STRETCH system also has Tempo, Harmonic Preservation and

Harmonic Content controls, it's an interesting creative tool. When used on percussion instruments, for example, you can explore far more tonal possibilities than if you just use standard synth controls. What's more, Miroslav Philharmonik enables you to select the STRETCH algorithm not only for an entire preset but also for specific sample zones within that preset, which is a nice touch.

Although the system needs to perform some sound pre-analysis the first time that you select STRETCH on a particular preset, it only needs to do this once. Thereafter, selection of the STRETCH algorithm is always instant for that particular set of samples.



▲ One, two, three, STRETCH: get perfectly pitchshifted samples using the STRETCH algorithm

MIROSLAV PHILHARMONIK CONTAINS ALL OF THE CLASSICAL INSTRUMENTS YOU'LL EVER NEED

that shows the correct pitch range and spatial placing for each instrument within a concert setting.

It's worth pointing out, however, that all of these instruments were recorded in the standard classical style. The Steinway Grand Piano for example, while ideal for classical pieces, lacks the gritty 'up-front' tone that's usually required if you're producing modern rock/pop tracks.

In addition to the standard 'multisampled' keyboard layouts, you also get some bonus presets of so-called 'menu' selections. Contained within these are trills, crescendos, glissandos and other articulations that you can use to spice up your composition. These are new, and

unique to the IK Multimedia version of the Miroslav sample library.

Pro solution

At £399, Miroslav Philharmonik is not for the hobbyist musician. Then again, this kind of user is unlikely to get the best out of it. In order to create truly outstanding results with the software, you need to be an experienced composer who knows how to get the most out of every instrument that's been sampled.

But even at this price, Miroslav Philharmonik represents great value. Orchestral sample libraries of this quality used to cost the earth, and they never came in such convenient plug-in interfaces. Highly recommended. **cm**

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

Synful Orchestra

cm91 >> **7/10** >> \$479
Uses Reconstructive Phrase Modelling technology. Sounds great; costs too much.

Garritan Personal Orchestra

cm76 >> **9/10** >> £179
Sample-based orchestral plug-in with the Kontakt Player engine

VERDICT

FOR

- + Massive sound
- + Wide range of instruments
- + Expressive and realistic
- + Good value for money

AGAINST

- Limited variation of some instruments
- Some samples are looped inaccurately
- STRETCH can glitch badly

An excellent orchestral sound solution – one of the best on the market, in fact

RATING

