

# EWQL Hollywood Orchestral Percussion

## Sample Library

The final instalment of an ambitious orchestral sampling project sees the completion of EastWest's five-year master plan.

DAVE STEWART

**T**o every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven' (Ecclesiastes 3:1). And so, as autumn shades gracefully into winter in the UK, EastWest's Hollywood orchestral series reaches fruition in the shape of Hollywood Orchestral Percussion. Following the earlier Hollywood Strings, Hollywood Brass and Hollywood Orchestral Woodwinds releases (more details on which below), this completes a production cycle spanning five years, during which time over a million samples were recorded and 90-odd musicians were forced to play the same notes over and over again until the 'Sample Nirvana' of the perfect take had been attained.

We can only guess at the cost of such an undertaking; it's rumoured the studio coffee bill alone would buy you a desirable semi-detached property in Ipswich, but then Hollywood never did do things by halves. In any case, as a result of these protracted efforts and (no doubt) mind-boggling expenditure, buyers can at last get their hands on the complete EastWest/Quantum Leap Hollywood Orchestra, which combines the four individual sections into a bumper package weighing in at over 660GB.

Hollywood Orchestral Percussion (which we'll call HOP for short) has the benefit of relative simplicity: it



was performed by a single musician (the percussionist in a major American orchestra, apparently) and features his arsenal of instruments. In that respect, HOP bears comparison to Quantum Leap's Stormdrum 3 (an enjoyable romp through the personal percussion collection of drummer and ethnomusicologist Mickey Hart), but the difference is that HOP maintains a strict focus on orchestral percussion: it contains no taiko drums or tablas, but there are timpani, orchestral snare and bass drums, cymbals and gongs, hand percussion and a range of tuned percussion instruments, including a celeste. In short, everything you need to program convincing orchestral percussion arrangements, with the samples played and recorded in a style which ticks the requisite 'cinematic' boxes.

For the recording quality we once again have to thank Shawn Murphy, a peerless movie soundtrack veteran with a knack of making instruments sound like they're in the room with you. The other production team members (Doug Rogers, Nick Phoenix and Thomas

Featuring a five-channel microphone mixer and onboard convolution reverb, Hollywood Orchestral Percussion's user interface uses the same design as EastWest's other Hollywood libraries. White keys show the position of mapped samples, with keyswitches marked in blue.

Bergersen) are also present and correct, unity and harmony restored as the difficult birth pangs of Hollywood Orchestral Woodwinds are consigned to the past. Like the rest of the EWQL Hollywood releases, HOP is formatted exclusively for EastWest's Play sound engine, which runs stand-alone and as a plug-in on Mac and PC. HOP requires Play v4.2.2, supplied with the library and available to existing Play users as a free update from EastWest's site. New users will need an iLok security key, which costs around £30.

### Timp Bang Alley

An orchestral percussion sample library must live or die by the quality of its timpani, and I must admit I've been disappointed a few times in the past by the absence of the ear-rending

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» 'bang' I expect to hear from fortissimo timp hits. Happily, HOP's timpani don't disappoint at all, and bang away with the best of them. Spanning the best part of two octaves from C2 to A3 (Middle C being C4), the tims (played with a choice of hard and felt mallets) are presented in handy all-in-one programs which allow instant switching between long, short, flam, roll and crescendo roll performances. In addition, each style has its own dedicated patch.

Another potential pitfall with timpani is the tendency for higher notes to lack the energy of the lower-pitched drums. That 'falling away' doesn't happen here: the tims' long notes (sampled at eight or so dynamics) maintain force and penetration at the top end, sounding fat, clean and resonant right across their range. Whereas the dynamic response of the straight hits and flams is governed by keyboard velocity, the timpani rolls' volume is controlled by the mod wheel, so you can program dramatic swells and diminuendos to fit the tempo of your music. If you're happy to take pot luck with the timing, there's also a set of very effective short, medium and long played crescendo timpani rolls, the longest of which lasts around two seconds.

## Martial Art

A squad of lantern-jawed marines, outsize machine guns at the ready, storm the steps of a moody-looking building, intent on blasting the occupants (whether they be aliens, bearded terrorists or giant spiders) to kingdom come. As any media composer will tell you, such inspirational scenes demand an underscore peppered with orchestral snare and bass drums... and as luck would have it, both are found in abundance in HOP.

Five superbly crisp and bouncy snare drums snap, rattle and roll in the lively acoustic of EastWest's Studio 1, performing a good spread of articulations which includes left- and right-hand hits, flams, rolls and rim shots. I liked the sharp incisiveness of the Ludwig Mahogany snare, while the 'Brass Calf Head' drum from the same manufacturer offers a lower-pitched sound. A set of field drums (large military snare drums) have an altogether deeper and earthier tone, the standout for me being the fabulously named Black Swamp model.

The Stormdrum series cemented Nick Phoenix's reputation as a producer of big, Zimmer-esque (that name again) drums



Hollywood Orchestral Percussion's drum section features (front row) concert toms, (middle row) orchestral snare and field drums, (back row L-R) orchestral bass drum and timpani.

tailored for the big screen, and HOP's Marching Drums ensemble underlines the point. These sub-woofer-shaking unison bass drums are classic blockbuster material. The group only plays four hits, but they'll blow your head off. Although less thunderous, Gretsch and Ludwig orchestral bass drums also pack a stunning low-end wallop.

Bridging the gap between the orchestral and rock worlds is a fine set of eight concert toms. I'd love to have heard mallet rolls on these toms, but their performances are limited to straight hits and flams played with sticks. HOP's drum collection is rounded off by a few strikes on a Native American Taos drum, the sole ethnic drum in the library. This has a deep and resonant tone, and its distinctive splatty attack suggests it was played with 'hot rods' (a type of drum stick consisting of several thin sticks bound together).

## Cymbals, Gongs & Metals

Piatti (clashed pairs of cymbals), ranging in size from 12 to 22 inches, are a strong point. To my ears the 19-inch is the minimum required for the 'big symphonic splash' effect, but the lesser sizes provide a nice contrast and would work well in smaller orchestrations. Bright and triumphant, these cymbal clashes come in a choice of long, short and very short durations, and a handy 'Crash Combo' patch lets you quickly review all the options.

The 'swoosh' of a cymbal crescendo roll is a great way of adding drama to a transition. Six different types are featured in this library, all perfectly executed and sounding excellent, with

the large sizzle cymbal being a good candidate for experimental, jazzy or film noir-ish styles. Unfortunately there are no straight suspended cymbal hits, but I guess you can't have everything. The most dramatic sonority in this section comes courtesy of three great tam tam gongs, the largest of which supplements its massive, portentous beater hits with a mysterious selection of bowed and scraped samples — subtle and spooky.

If you're up for a bit of industrial

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## EWQL Hollywood Orchestral Percussion \$499

### PROS

- A comprehensive menu of great-sounding orchestral percussion instruments.
- Beautifully recorded from five mic positions by a massively experienced, award-winning engineer.
- Surround-ready and 100 percent compatible with the EWQL Hollywood-series strings, brass and woodwinds.

### CONS

- The celeste and vibraphone are awkward to play, and the vibraphone has no tremolo effect.

### SUMMARY

Recorded in the same studio using the same multi-microphone setup as the Hollywood-series strings, brass and woodwinds, EWQL Hollywood Orchestral Percussion maintains the exemplary sonic standard and power of its predecessors. Orchestral staples such as timpani, snare drums, bass drums and cymbals provide an excellent foundation, gongs and metals make a healthy racket, and the large tuned percussion section contains some magical 'ear candy'!

» noise, HOP has a generous selection of clangs, clanks, boings and dings played on anvils, brake drums and, er, railway tracks (let's hope they kept an ear open for approaching trains). I discovered that detuning a railway track hit by 24 semitones transforms it into a low-rent church bell — remember you read it here first! A far prettier effect can be obtained from the library's crotales, a beautifully pure, high-pitched set of tuned mini-cymbals mapped chromatically over two octaves. Operating in the same rarefied pitch zone, the Mark tree (miniature bar-chimes) glissandi sound absolutely exquisite.

### Mallets, Keys & Bells

Given the ubiquity of Thomas Newman's brilliant *American Beauty* score, no manufacturer nowadays would dare to omit marimba from an orchestral percussion collection. HOP's specimen (which spans four-and-a-bit octaves from A2 to C7) is a beauty. I was surprised at how ambient its 'Main' Decca Tree miking sounded, but the Close and Vintage mics

Act	Load	Level	Type
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4.32	Timpani Hrd Lng
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	0.00	Timpani Hrd Sht
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	0.00	Timpani Hrd Flm
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	0.00	Timpani Hrd Rls
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	0.00	Timpani Hrd Crs

The Articulations Control window allows you to adjust the volume of patches' individual articulations. You can also temporarily deactivate any articulation, or unload its samples from memory.

capture the instrument's timbre in intimate detail. There is only one mallet option, which emulates the percussive attack heard in Newman's score when you play it loudly, however, this marimba also sounds satisfyingly 'plummy' at quieter dynamics. In an ideal world there would be an intermediate dynamic layer between the quietest notes (which have very soft attacks) and the layer above (in which a harder attack suddenly kicks in), but this

remains a very playable instrument.

If you need a magical sound to herald a musical entrance, HOP's celeste plays a lovely pair of ascending glissandi, one on the white notes, the other on the black. That's pretty much the extent of the celeste's usable effects, but of course there are also four-octave, gloriously hi-fi multisamples of this delightful keyboard instrument. Sustains and short notes are presented in separate patches, but the downside is that the sustains are programmed to play full length regardless of how long you hold a note. You can get rid of the ringing by reducing the release time on the Play GUI, but the patch ignores sustain pedal commands. This is singularly unhelpful for anyone wishing to play the celeste pianistically, and illogical when you consider the instrument itself has a sustain pedal! This problem is by no means confined to HOP, it also occurs in other percussion libraries.

HOP's vibraphone (which sadly lacks the instrument's trademark tremolo effect) has the same issue; using sustain pedal on its short-note patch accesses

a set of indefinitely sustaining long notes, but you're stuck with a choice between short, muted hits and notes that ring on uncontrollably. Admittedly, a real vibes player has to make the same choice, but since we're in a virtual world here, a keyboard-player-friendly vibraphone doesn't seem too much to ask for: it merely requires a standard long-note patch with sustain pedal capability, something you'd find on any keyboard workstation. That said, this vibraphone sounds very cool.

EastWest are proud of their orchestral chimes (which we Brits call tubular bells), claiming that they mimic the sound of real church bells. Well blow me down, so they do. Cancel my engagements, I'm going to put these samples to good use and spend the next 12 weeks attempting to break the world record for solo bell-ringing changes.

### Shake & Hammer

I was feeling good about our unseasonably mild 2014 autumn, but my mood darkened when the first of

the accursed Christmas advertisements popped up on TV. However, they at least provide a quasi-seasonal context for HOP's sleigh bell shakes, a pleasant,

ear-catching sound which deserves to be unharnessed from its inevitable 'Santa's reindeer' associations. If you listen carefully, a male voice can be heard saying >>

## Hollywood Orchestra Chronology

Work on EastWest's new orchestral library began in earnest in early June 2009. The project was closely bound up with the company's 2006 acquisition of the famous United Western Recorders Studios, but an extensive refurbishment meant it would be three years before the first sample was recorded. Now renamed EastWest Studios, the Hollywood Boulevard complex serves as the recording location for all of the company's sample libraries.

The first instalment in the series was Hollywood Strings: 13 months in the making and containing around 800,000 samples, it was finally released in the summer of 2010. Other volumes followed at irregular intervals, as shown below.

	Full size	Release date
EWQL Hollywood Strings	312GB	2010
EWQL Hollywood Brass	147GB	2011
EWQL Hollywood Orchestral Woodwinds	133GB	2013
EWQL Hollywood Orchestral Percussion	71GB	2014
EWQL Hollywood Orchestra Collection	663GB	2014

The four sections can be purchased individually, or collectively in the form of the EWQL Hollywood Orchestra package, which ships on a 1TB hard drive. (Intended for transfer only, the drive is covered by a limited 30-day replacement policy.) Each library is available in three price-graduated editions: the 'Full Monty' Diamond editions contain 24-bit samples and all five mic positions, Gold editions have 16-bit samples and only one miking, while the budget Silver versions are 16-bit, have one mic position and contain only essential articulations.





Crotales (sets of tuned mini-cymbals) sound as beautiful as they look!

» something unintelligible at the end of one sleigh bell's fourth round-robin iteration. (There you see, I really do listen to all the samples.)

Some sample company guys I know told me that few issues have provoked the ire of their customers more than the absence of triangles in one of their percussion libraries. These angry users should be placated to learn that HOP contains no less than six different-sized triangles, all of which perform single hits and rolls. Muted hits (as featured in Latin American triangle patterns) are not included, but you can approximate their sound by pulling back the release time. HOP's hand percussion also contains a good selection of shakers (ranging



Heavy metal: anvils, brake drum and railway tracks, with some serious-looking hammers.

in size from the small 'egg' type to larger, rougher, more African-sounding instruments), tambourines (both skinned and headless), claves, castanets, wood blocks, ratchets and rhythm sticks, all of which should leave completists with little to complain about.

In the interests of ending this instrument overview with a bang, the last word should go to Gustav Mahler. In the score notes to his *Symphony No 6*, the composer stipulated that the sound of the hammer featured in the last movement should be "brief and mighty, but dull in resonance and with a non-metallic character (like the fall of an axe)." Nowadays the 'Mahler Hammer' noise is achieved by whacking a wooden box with a big wooden mallet, a performance style I know will appeal to the drummers out there. HOP's deafening rendition of this classical racket will shake any lingering wax out of your ear canals, and scare the living daylight out of your listeners.

### General Points

The mic positions used in HOP replicate those employed in the other Hollywood titles: Close, Mid, Main (Decca Tree), Surround and Vintage. Only one of the last two can be heard at a time, a somewhat puzzling restriction in this age of unlimited audio tracks! Listening to the close position in isolation, I found that instruments generally retained their intrinsic power (though naturally less room 'boom' is discernible), which is a testament to the skill of engineer Shawn Murphy. The advantage of the close miking is that it clearly reveals the samples' attack, which

### Alternatives

It's impossible to consider Hollywood-style orchestral percussion without a certain name springing to mind, and **Spitfire Audio's 94GB Hans Zimmer Percussion Vol. 1 London Ensembles** maintains that composer's reputation for big drum sounds. However, since it features a preponderance of world drums and contains no tuned percussion or hand percussion, this library should really be classed as an ethnic/orchestral hybrid. Large, single-hit-based orchestral percussion collections with a similar instrumentation to Hollywood Orchestral Percussion include **Spitfire Percussion** (25GB), **Project SAM's 18GB True Strike** and **Cinesamples' 50GB CinePerc Core (CinePerc Pro** adds more instruments). All contain multiple mic positions, but if you can live with good old stereo, **Vir2 Elite Orchestral Percussion** (19.5GB) and **Vienna Symphonic Library's Percussion** (84GB) are both high-end products, with VSL Percussion's extensive instrumentation giving it an edge.

helps add definition to programmed grace notes, mini-rolls and the like.

EastWest's Play engine can change its spots according to which library it's playing. For example, if you load an instrument from the 'Fab Four' Beatles homage, the GUI skin adopts the familiar look of the iconic Vox AC30 amplifier's grill cloth. The GUI will even change appearance within a single instance of Play when you switch between different libraries. HOP's GUI uses the same creamy beige livery as its companion Hollywood strings, brass and woodwind libraries, which although good for brand



Play's microphone mixer has pan and volume controls for four mic channels — the fourth channel toggles between Surround and Vintage mics.

## Instrumentation

### Drums

- Snare drums (5)
- Field drums (4)
- Orchestral bass drums (3)
- Bass drum ensemble
- Concert toms (8)
- Taos drum

### Cymbals & Gongs

- Piatti (11)
- Suspended cymbals (6)
- Tam tams (3)
- Finger cymbals (2)

### Tuned Percussion

- Timpani
- Marimba
- Xylophone
- Glockenspiel
- Tubular bells
- Crotales
- Celeste
- Vibraphone

### Metals

- Mark trees (2)
- Brake drum
- Anvils (2)
- Railway tracks (2)

### Hand Percussion

- Tambourine (3)
- Triangles (6)
- Sleigh bells (2)
- Claves (3)
- Castanets (2)
- Shakers (7)
- Ratchet
- Slapsticks
- Puilli sticks (2)

### Woods

- Temple blocks (3)
- Wood blocks (6)
- High wood blocks (3)
- Mahler Hammer

Numbers in brackets = different instrument types.

identification, makes it harder to tell the four sections apart at a glance.

Hollywood Orchestral Percussion contains all the main orchestral percussion instruments and omits none of note. If I had to nit-pick, I could point to the absence of smaller drums such as rototoms, boo bams and octabans, which occasionally find their way into modern scores; there are also no Eastern exotica (angklung, singing bowls, etc.), but such non-orchestral items are really the province of the ethnic percussion library.

## Conclusion

EastWest originally made their mark in the orchestral sample world in 2003 with EWQL Symphonic Orchestra, the first full-orchestra library with surround-sound capability. By completing the much larger Hollywood Orchestra project, the company has achieved another first: it's currently the only virtual instrument developer on the planet with two full symphonic collections on its books. For the foreseeable future at least, it's hard to imagine that anyone else would be crazy enough to take on such a task!

Orchestral sample users are spoiled for choice nowadays, and the enduring popularity of the orchestra in film soundtracks has created a thriving market in sample products. Hollywood Orchestral Percussion is second to none: it's straightforward to use, has a comprehensive instrumentation and presents a shining example of how percussion should be recorded. Super-clean, powerful, dynamically responsive and musically on the money, this is a library for professionals that beginners can also enjoy. **///**

**\$** Hollywood Orchestral Percussion: Diamond Edition \$499, Gold Edition \$399, Silver Edition \$199. EWQL Hollywood Orchestra collection: Diamond Edition \$1495, Gold Edition \$995, Silver Edition \$495.

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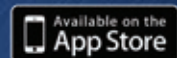
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