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A MUSIC PLAYER PUBLICATION



EASTWEST

Steven Wilson Ghostwriter

BY ROB SHROCK

GHOSTWRITER IS THE BRAINCHILD OF AWARD-WINNING COMPOSER, MUSICIAN, and sound design expert Steven Wilson (prog solo artist and also frontman of Porcupine Tree) and Doug Rogers of EastWest. Ghostwriter utilizes EastWest's new Play 4 engine, which now features a new amp simulator and Echoplex EP-1 delay designed specifically for this library. Going by the name and product description, I initially thought Ghostwriter was going to be a collection of sampled phrases, like many libraries that use the "construction kit" approach to build up soundtracks. That's not the case. With over 60GB of guitars, basses, drums, keyboards, vocals, and a few random odds and ends, Ghostwriter is intended to inspire composition through a collection of dark, moody sounds focusing clearly on rock instrumentation. This is accomplished through the masterful use of instrument choice and effects to create an eerie and sometimes disturbing sonic landscape.

Snap Judgment



PROS Inspiring sounds geared towards TV, film, and game soundtracks with a dark edge. Great collection of guitars and basses with a musical set of articulations. Excellent use of effects for unsettling ambiances and textures. Improved Play 4 engine adds new guitar amp simulator and Echoplex EP-1 delay. Tons of personality.



CONS Specific focus of instrumentation and mood make it a set of very interesting colors rather than a full palette. Drum kit sounds are limited.

Instruments

Ghostwriter's instruments are divided into six folders of Guitar, Bass, Keys, Drums, Vocals, and Miscellaneous. The library is very well organized, and most of the individual instruments have very detailed names that let you clearly know what you're selecting, like "Baritone Marshall Dirty Pwr-Chords" in the Baritone Les Paul folder under Guitars. With so much great content to wade through and learn, this makes it simple and efficient to navigate the library and is greatly appreciated.

By far, the greatest attention is given to the guitars, and it will take some time to explore all the various articulations and sonic creations. The guitars are provided in a myriad of ways, like direct, dirty, heavy, spacey, modulated, driven, re-amped, and so on. Each sound is tastefully created specifically for the instrument at hand, and practically everything is useful in one way or another.

Once you find an instrument and sonic approach you like, you're typically given a number of performance articulations, like sustained (with and without vibrato), staccato, muted, muted staccato, round-robin, and so on. There's a Master patch for each flavor that contains all the articulations in a key-switched version; however, these patches obviously have much larger memory requirements and are slower to load.

There are only three basses included, but they all sound amazing and cover a lot of bottom end territory. The "Tunnel" and "Obliterator" basses are given just a few variations, like normal, fuzz, swell, and filtered. The "Spector" bass is a more developed collection with DI, amp, grunge, edgy, fuzz, re-amped, and reverberant sub-folders. Fingering, picked, sustains, muted, slides and expressive vibrato give you a lot of choices for building some very musical bass parts. Tweaking or adding additional processing from the effects built into the Play engine (EastWest's own sample playback platform, baked into their virtual instruments) gives you a wide berth of bass possibilities from thunderous to unsettling to downright nasty.

The keyboards and vocals are a lot lighter in the choices. Vocals are mostly male or female oohs and ahs, but they've been given some amped, filtered, and ambient variations. Keyboards and mallets are a cool collection of tripped-out Clavinets, pianos, Mellotron strings, celesta, glockenspiel, vibes, Farfisa, and a few other things. They've all been processed pretty heavily and made into something cool and eerie that would fit right into an episode of *American Horror Story*. Bizarre keyboard-based textures are easily found in other libraries and synths, so I understand why Ghostwriter focuses

mostly on the elaborate textures achieved with guitars and basses: It's harder to do this well, and that's the point.

The drum folder is built primarily around two kits, with an alternate snare provided for some patches. You get the kit dry, with gated reverb, run through various mono amps (via the simulator), and with various effects. "Snare 1" usually gives you the options of snares on, snares on and wet, and snares off. "Snare 2" is just an alternate drum with snares on.

I did wish there was more content in the drum department. I understand Ghostwriter isn't intended to be a full drum library; and there are many other great rock drum libraries to be had, including EastWest's own *Ministry of Rock 1* and *2*. But I would have liked more articulations, better cymbals, and a few more kit variations to feel like I had it all covered inside Ghostwriter. The effects and mangled sonic variations provided are really good and creative; however, I'd like to be able to swap out a kick or set of toms, considering you can't individually tweak the envelope or tuning of individual kit elements. I felt everything ultimately had a "sameness" to it that lent itself to simple patterns rather than detailed drum performances that sound real, in spite of the imaginative variations of the effects. Perhaps that was just my experience with it, but I'm looking at it from the perspective of what personally inspires me.

The miscellaneous sounds round out the collection. Across the board, it's evident that a lot of time and effort went into creating these sounds, all with an ear towards coming up with cool things appropriate for the type of instrument in hand. This is where the experience and recording skills of Wilson and Rogers really shine through, as pretty much everything here is useful in some way for this type of genre work.

Amp Models and Effects

In general, generous use of effects is employed to create all these great textures. Some effects are integrated into the samples (like a Leslie) and at other times the effects are added within the Play 4 engine, including the new amp simulator and EP-1 delay.

The amp simulator comes with 80 presets that sound killer. If it were a standalone plug-in, I'd use it. Common amps like Fender, Marshall, Mesa Boogie, Soldano, and Vox are well represented, as are less common amps by Engl, Divided by Thirteen, ToneKing, and Cameron heads. Most models give you different mic choices built into the preset name, like "Aguilar Bass Rig AKG D-112" or "Roland 421." It's not an exhaustive collection

of mic choices, and you can't blend two mic or amp combinations; it's simply a large collection of presets. Other than the Vox AC-30, it's not visually obvious what model of amp you're using. However, they largely sound really good as a way to further mangle the sounds, and each amp model allows you to tweak the drive, bass, mid, treble, and master volume.

The new EP-1 Delay allows you to set the delay time either in milliseconds or sync to your host with a specific beat relation (like a quarter-note). Controls for flutter, drive, echo time, repeats and level are provided. There are no controls for creating panning delays or the sort; again, it's not designed for that. The delay remains in stereo for stereo patches, and it really adds more depth and flexibility to the sounds, overall. Alongside the built-in convolution reverb and SSL modules in Play 4, there's a lot of sound design power in the hands of the user.

Conclusions

Once I understood the approach to Ghostwriter, I was able to realize its full potential as a collection of inspiring sounds. For me, simply going through the sounds would inspire a riff or motif that I could build on quickly.

Creating authentic modern, interesting cinematic textures in this genre is hard work, as it takes a real knowledge of tone and effects to sound masterful. Given Wilson's experience and credits, I felt there was a lot of skill and integrity sitting next to me as I begin exploring the various textures. When you need dark and otherworldly, Ghostwriter is a beautifully sinister collection of sonic colors. 🎧

Bottom Line

Eerie and otherworldly, Ghostwriter marries modern cinematic and progressive rock tones into an unholy union that is ghoulishly great fun.

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