Using Cinematic Studio Series Digital Instruments

Introduction

I created this manual for the Cinematic Studio Series instruments (CS Strings, CS Woodwinds, and CS Brass) to be a simplified introduction and reference document, meant to cover the core features and tools that will likely be 90-95% of what you use in your regular workflow. For more detailed information, please consult the official Cinematic Studio manuals.

Overview

The color and content of the main window may vary from instrument to instrument, but it will always contain the same three sections:

A) **Mixing tools,** where you can set the level of the built-in reverb and set the levels and pan of individual microphones used to record the instrument samples. I recommend keeping the reverb at 0% and using your own reverb through a bus, especially if you are mixing CSS with other libraries in a project. I also recommend using their pre-made mix, which is very well-balanced, rather than playing with individual microphone positions, until you have a specific sound you are looking for.

B) **Articulations**, where you can select the articulation or technique being played. You can reduce the load on your computer by ctrl+clicking (Win) or cmd+clicking (Mac) an articulation you aren't using, which will unload the associated samples.

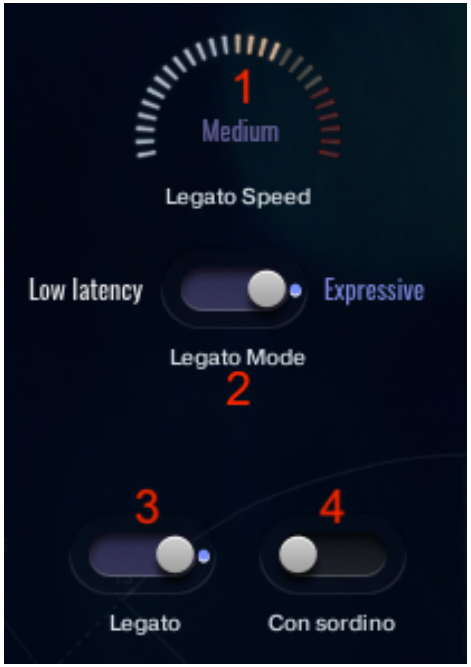
C) **Articulation settings,** where you can adjust how the currently selected articulation functions.

Sustain Articulation

The sustain articulation is probably the best feature of the Cinematic Studio Series instruments, but it is also the most difficult to learn to use. In order to achieve a smooth, portamento transition from one note to another, a musician will begin transitioning before the second note needs to land. CSS, on the other hand, doesn't know what the next note is or when it should arrive until it is played on the keyboard, so there is no way for it to prepare ahead of time. The only solution is to introduce a **delay** between when a note is played and when it sounds, so that there is enough time to create a smooth transition.

This is further complicated by CSS instruments' fantastic ability to control the length of transitions between notes. Playing a note with high velocity (pressing a key hard) will result in a quick transition from the previous note, while low velocity (pressing a key softly) will result in a slower transition. What this means is that the delay between when you play a note and when it sounds is variable, depending on how long or short you want to make the transitions.

Keep a few things in mind while playing legato: transitions only occur when MIDI notes overlap, so be sure to play piano-style legato on your MIDI keyboard. When legato mode is turned on, the instrument is **monophonic**, meaning only the most recently-triggered note will sound, even if many are being played at once. Also, the dynamics of the instrument will be controlled by the modulation wheel, not the velocity, which, again, controls the transition speed. There can be a learning curve to playing this way if it's new to you. Finally, remember that you can always edit the timing or any other parameters after recording, so you don't have to capture it perfectly in recording. Here is a breakdown of the contents of the settings section for the sustain articulation:



1) This meter shows you the speed of the last transition, as determined by the velocity of the last note triggered. You can see in this screenshot that the transition last played was a "medium" speed.
2) This switch allows you to toggle between "Low latency" and "Expressive" legato mode. (These may be called "Standard" and "Advanced," depending on your version.) Low latency mode sacrifices some of the range of transition speed in order to reduce (but not remove) the delay. I do not recommend using it.
3) This switch enables legato mode, allowing the notes to transition from one to another smoothly. The only reason to turn this off is if you are playing multiple simultaneous notes with one instrument. (If you are attempting orchestral realism, think very carefully about why you might do this. If there are two flute parts, it is probably better to use two legato flute patches, each on their own track, than it is to use one flute track with legato turned off.)
4) This switch only exists on Cinematic Studio Strings, not Brass or Woodwinds. It is a digital filter meant to imitate the sound of strings playing with mutes. I personally do not find it to be very convincing, and would sooner use a different string library with actual samples of muted strings if I needed "con sordino."

Staccato Articulation

Like the sustain articulation, staccato notes have a slight delay, but the delay is consistent and therefore can be easily compensated for in the track. When playing staccato, the dynamics are controlled by the note velocity, i.e. the harder you press the key, the louder the note will be. Instead of controlling post-attack dynamics (which would be irrelevant to a staccato patch), the modulation wheel can be used to switch between different staccato samples, much like a keyswitch.

Sfz (Sforzando)	An accented note, separated but still relatively long.
Staccato	Short and separated.
Staccatissimo	More staccato, shorter.
Spiccato	Very short, bow bouncing lightly on the string. For brass or woodwind instruments, this is called “repetitions” and is intended for use in quick repetitions of the same note.

Marcato Articulation

This articulation is another fantastic, unique feature of the Cinematic Studio Series. It is essentially the sustain and the staccato patches combined, allowing you to play a combination of short, articulated notes and smooth, legato transitions. The dynamics of the legato notes are controlled by the modulation wheel, and the dynamics of the staccato notes are controlled by the note velocity. You can combine these to have a note with a sharp, clear attack while still controlling the dynamics of the sustain, but you can also make notes completely staccato by bringing the modulation wheel all the way down, or completely legato by bringing the modulation wheel up and playing very gently. This is a great patch for playing articulated melodic passages on any instrument.

Here are the settings for the marcato articulation:

1) This switch overlays each note with the spiccato articulation, its dynamics controlled by the velocity of the note. Keep this on for clear, sharp articulation.
2) This switch toggles legato mode. It’s best to keep this on unless you’re playing multiple notes at once. (See description in the section on the sustain articulation.)
3) (Strings only) This switch toggles the filter meant to imitate mutes on string instruments.

Pizzicato Articulation

This patch only appears in the string instruments. Like the staccato articulation patch, the pizzicato patch has a couple of other articulations concealed inside of it. Since the velocity controls the dynamics of the patch, the modulation wheel is used to shift between these different articulations.

Col Legno (“with wood”)	The sound of a string being struck with the wooden part of the bow.
Bartok Snap (a.k.a. “snap pizzicato”)	A special pizzicato made by pulling the string back and snapping it against the fingerboard.
Pizzicato	Standard pizzicato, the sound of a string being plucked rather than bowed.

Other Articulations

These are other articulations that appear across various instruments:

Double tongue (brass only)	Quick repetitions of a note locked into a specific tempo. Can be set manually or synced to DAW tempo. Number of repetitions can be chosen with a slider.
Flutter tongue (flute and all brass)	A fluttering or growling sound created by rolling the tip of the tongue while playing.
Harmonic (strings only)	Delicate, high-pitched sustained notes achieved by lightly touching the string with the left hand while bowing.
Measured repetition (woodwinds only)	Quick repetitions of a note locked into a specific tempo. Can be set manually or synced to DAW tempo.
Measured tremolo (strings only)	A tremolo locked into a specific tempo. Can be set manually or synced to DAW tempo.
Muted (brass only)	Sound created when mutes are inserted into the bells of brass instruments. (Can be toggled between short and long notes.)
Tremolo (strings only)	A sustained bowing technique in which the bow is moved back and forth rapidly across the string
Trills (all)	Rapid alternation between two adjacent (separated by whole tone or semitone) notes. You must hold both notes at once to create the trill.
Rips (brass only)	Rising, blasting special effect sound created by brass instruments.

End Notes

The Cinematic Studio Series is very flexible and performable, once you are accustomed to it. Other libraries may have more features, but Cinematic Studio instruments stand out for their ability to be “played,” allowing for very human performances to be created in real time. Spend time learning to use the sustain, staccato, and marcato patches fluidly, and these instruments will become your favorite library.