Erik Ekholm – Knights Of The Apocalypse (Brickwall Audio 2010)

A walk-through on the complete production, from concept to final master.

Knights Of The Apocalypse was initially named "1000 Leagues Under The Sea" and was written for another music publisher, but I decided to rework the cue and add it to my own library, Brickwall Audio. I'm working solely with REAPER 3, it's the most flexible DAW for PC today.

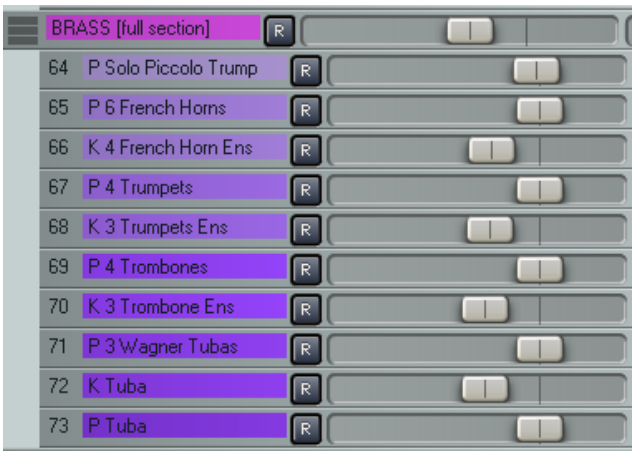
STRINGS

I chose to compose the song in C min, since this is a key that I don't write in normally (I'm more of an E, D, F kinda guy) The time signature was ¾, 150 BPM.

The track started life as a sketch, having arranged only the strings sections. I almost always start a new song arranging only the strings, since they have such a wide range and are the best instrument to "visualize" a full track with.

My weapon of choice was LASS Lite, having the Violins I-II, Violas, Cellos and Basses set up as sections, with a couple of different styles (articulations) set to different MIDI channels.

This way I don't have to create a new track for every style, and I could arrange the sections like you would on a music sheet. What I didn't do with the strings was arrange them divisi (I did that for the brass, butt we'll get to that). When I had the basic song structure arranged, I printed the strings to a 32bit .wav and imported that into my sub-mix group. I then froze the string parts, unloading them from memory.



BRASS

For the brass parts, I loaded up EWQL Symphonic Orchestra and VSL Special Edition.

Since I used 2 different libraries, I arranged the French Horns, Trumpets, Trombones and the Tubas divisi, with the VSL (K for Kontakt) playing the upper notes, and the EWQL SO (P for PLAY) instruments playing the lower parts.

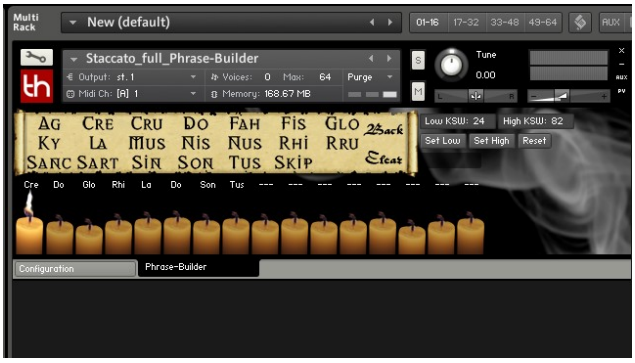
Arranging divisi like this is mostly a matter of personal preference, since I find the VSL instruments to have more impact and stronger attack. It is important to have a sound in the higher registers that really cuts through, otherwise you'll end up with a muddy mess of the entire brass section. After I completed the brass part, I froze the loaded instruments and imported the .wav file into the sub-mix.

CHOIRS

Choirs are maybe the hardest, and most sensitive part of any composition. As humans, our brains and our ears are very well attuned to the sound of the human voice, and it very easy to tell if it doest sound right.

This is the main problem with sampled choirs, however there are new products on the market that are really convincing and have great tone as well!

The choirs in this cue are Tonehammers Requiem, arranged with both the marcatto and staccato phrase builders, as well as a male soloist patch.



Good as the choirs was, I wanted something more to really give the track a sound of it's own.

I decided that I wanted some background whispers together with the male soloist, and as I didn't have anything in my library, I decided to do them myself.

The Tonehammer samples were pretty wet, so I needed to record the new voices in a similar room. As I didn't have any churches nearby (or anyone willing to let me in in the middle of the night recording strange noises) I decided to use the crisp reverb of...my tiled bathroom! Talk about DIY!

I brought out my trusty Zoom hand held recorder, and whispered the syllables Ah-Poh-Kah-Lyp-Sse a number of times. After the recording was done, I cut up the samples, and built my own 4-part instrument in Kontakt. (No you can't have it, sorry :P).

I then continued to arrange the new vocals in 4 parts, slightly pitching them and panning them to give the impression of an ensemble whispering “Apocalyspe” behind the main soloist.

SYNTHS

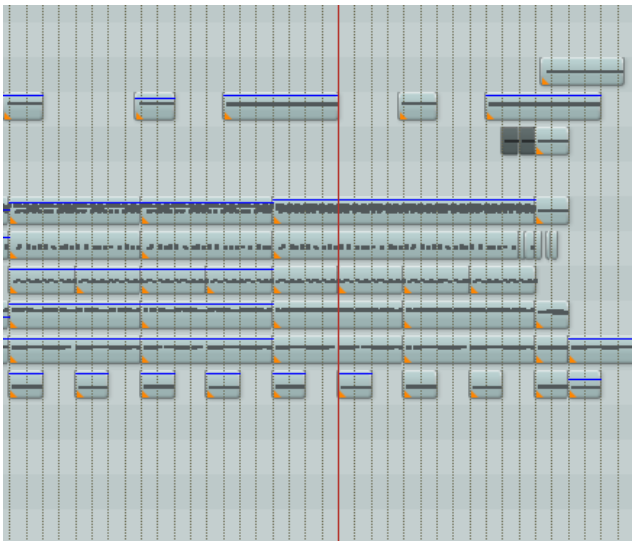
Here I opted for a synth bass-line under the main orchestral bass sections. It was programed using 2 detuned saw waves and a 24db low pass filter, just enough to give it a rumble without actually being audible in the mix.

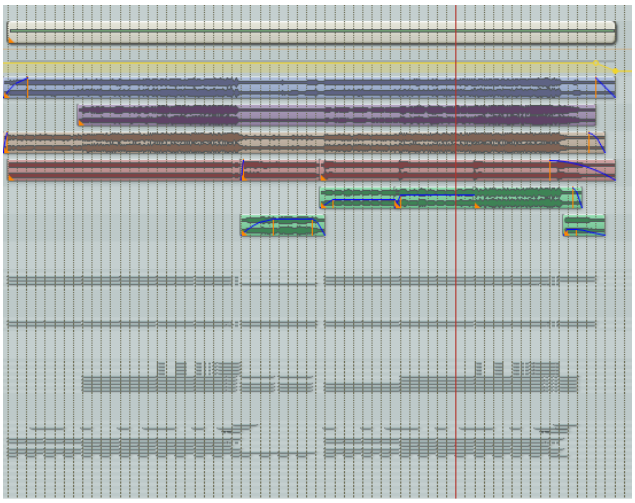
I also added a bell-like ambiance from Evolve Mutations 1, loaded into the Kore Player. Kore has a smaller memory footprint than full Kontakt, so if I don't need to do a lot of tweaking, loading sounds into Kore is preferred. Of course, I couldn't finish the synth parts without using my own instruments in Deviant Atmospheres – the Sub Sonic Booms gave nice accents to some parts of the track!

PERCUSSION
I always spend a great deal of time on the percussion – as a former industrial synth artist, I'm well aware of the fact that weak, lifeless drum parts can turn foul even the most intricate orchestral arrangement.

For this track I loaded up Tonehammers Epic Dohl, Epic Frame Drum, EWQL Stormdrum 2, (Action Toms, Earthquake Ensemble and Dynasty O Daiko) and some obscure Taiko instruments I work with sometimes. I also added some orchestral percussion like Cymbals and Large Anvils.

I had planned to add high hats to accent the large drums, but the percussion section was so full and huge sounding as it was, so I decided it was best not to overdo it.





MIXING AND FINAL TOUCHES
After all the parts (strings, brass, synths, choirs and drums) were ready, printed to .wav files and added to the sub mix group, it was time for final mixing.

Both the strings and brass sections sounded a little weak in comparison to the drums and choirs, so they got some valve-type overdrive, light EQ boost in the high frequencies and some limiting to make them really pop out in the mix! I then added a touch of extra reverb to the strings, brass and choirs to fill the mix with a wall of sound.

I only ever use 3 types of reverb. The first is a long hall reverb, in this case an impulse from the Bricasti M7 IR library by Samplicity. The second reverb is a short hall reverb, also by Samplicity. I mix and match between these two reverbs to get just the space I'm looking for.

On dry solo vocals, I often use algorithmic reverb with very long tails (up to 5 seconds).

Last thing I did, was to add the Hall Noise from EWQL Symponic Orchestra – this is just a looping patch with recording noise. It's small touches like this that gives a song that final sheen and glory!

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