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Free CC0 Instrument Sample Libraries: What Is Public Domain, What Is Only Free, and Where to Start

The best-documented CC0 instrument libraries are VSCO 2 Community Edition, the Versilian Community Sample Library (VCSL), Meta Open Sound's piano and guitars, and Karoryfer's CC0 drum kits. Many popular "free" libraries carry CC BY, CC BY-SA or non-commercial terms, so each file's licence needs checking.

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CC0 SFZ SoundFont free instruments licensing public domain sample libraries

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Several genuinely free instrument libraries are dedicated to the public domain under CC0, meaning no credit, no royalties and commercial use are allowed. The strongest candidates are Versilian Studios' orchestral sets, Meta's piano and guitars, and Karoryfer's drum kits, with FreePats the main source of CC0 SoundFont (SF2) banks. Many other "free" libraries carry licences that restrict commercial use, require credit or forbid redistribution, so the licence has to be checked file by file.

3 GB	5 GB	352	2.3 GB	27 MiB
VSCO 2 CE orchestra (CC0)	VCSL sample set (CC0)	Meta Piano samples (CC0)	Big Rusty Drums (CC0-1.0)	FreePats Upright Piano KW, SF2

How the list was checked

A library is counted here only if its licence is CC0, or an equivalent public-domain dedication, and the developer or repository states it. “Free to download” was not treated as enough. The main test was the wording in the licence file or on the developer’s page. hilbricht.net, which curates open-licence sample libraries, sets the bar that a licence must allow use, copying and modification with no fees or attribution, and it says the licence should be in the downloaded files, not only on a website[5]. The sfzinstruments.github.io catalogue labels each instrument’s licence in a table[13][14]. Sizes and sample counts below are as the developers or catalogues list them; I did not open every archive, so treat them as approximate.

Two terms used below: **CC0** is the public-domain dedication, and **SFZ** is an open text format that maps samples to keys and velocities, loaded by players such as Plogue Sforzando and sfizz. Both are defined at the end.

Orchestral and multi-instrument libraries

The two Versilian Studios sets are the largest CC0 orchestral options. VSCO 2 Community Edition is an open subset of Versilian’s commercial VSCO 2, and the developer describes it as “3 GB of samples… with no rules, no royalties, no limits”[1]. VCSL is a broader project that the developer describes as “an open CC0 general-purpose sample library” that holds unreleased and test recordings, plus light versions of commercial products[3][4].

LIBRARY	DEVELOPER	CONTENTS	SIZE	FORMAT	LICENCE
VSCO 2 Community Edition	Versilian Studios	Strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, harp	About 3 GB	SFZ and WAV	CC0[1][2]
VCSL	Versilian Studios	Orchestral, world and experimental instruments	5 GB, over 4,000 samples	SFZ (for Sforzando) and WAV	CC0[3][4]
Miscellania I and II	Versilian Studios	Hits, rattles, gongs, whistles	Not stated	WAV	CC0[5]
Classical Instruments pack	Signature Sounds	Strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion	46 MB unzipped, 18 recordings	WAV	Labelled CC0 on the page[19]

The VSCO 2 CE page offers an SFZ “vanilla” version, described as the most natural form of the library and recommended first, plus original WAV files at 44.1 kHz, 16- or 24-bit[1]. The SFZ version needs a sampler that opens SFZ files; the developer links to the free Sforzando player. Versilian also sells optional download keys: a **$2.00** Pulse Downloader key for VSCO 2 CE, or **$4.00** for both VSCO 2 CE and VCSL[1]. The keys are optional contributions, not a condition of use.

VCSL is designed differently. The developer says it emphasises pitch accuracy and consistency over many round robins or velocity layers, with most articulations having “a single round robin and two to three velocity layers”, and about **20–75 MB** per instrument in raw WAV[3]. VCSL’s optional Pulse key costs **$2.50**, and the page says about $1,000 has been raised towards a VCSL 2[4].

KEY FINDING

For a complete orchestra, VSCO 2 CE is the more mature choice; VCSL is larger and more varied but is built more like a set of lightweight instruments.

The Signature Sounds pack is small: 18 recordings of notes, phrases and loops, delivered as WAV[19]. Its page labels it CC0, but the download is hosted on MediaFire and the page does not include a licence file, so check the archive before relying on it.

Pianos

Meta Piano is the most clearly documented CC0 piano. It covers 88 keys (A0 to C8) with **4 velocity layers** and **352 samples**, and is listed under CC0 in the Meta repository[6][7]. Samples come as WAV and SFZ, and the release ZIP is 24-bit/48 kHz[6]. The design specification is written so that people can build a sampler in any engine, which is useful if the SFZ map does not suit your player[7].

Osiris Piano, a Karoryfer and Versilian collaboration, is released as CC-0 and needs **Sforzando 1.981 or newer**[10]. It is a quiet piano recorded from a Yamaha C2 with the soft pedal engaged and at half-stick. It has “over 1200 samples adding up to 460 MB even with FLAC compression”[11]. It is a quieter, more intimate sound than a concert grand, and the same developers released a separate Vintage Studio Piano covering the full dynamic range[11].

Scarypiano from Karoryfer is CC0 and 342 MB, with 430 16-bit WAVs and an SFZ mapping. It is a processed derivative of the University of Iowa piano samples, which that university made freely available without restrictions[12][20]. It is a sound-design tool rather than a neutral piano.

FreePats Upright Piano KW is CC0, recorded in a living room on a Kawai upright in 2017[8]. Its best SF2 build is 27 MiB with 2 velocity layers, and the SFZ WAV build is 69 MiB[8]. The small SF2 is only 5.8 MiB[8].

CAUTION

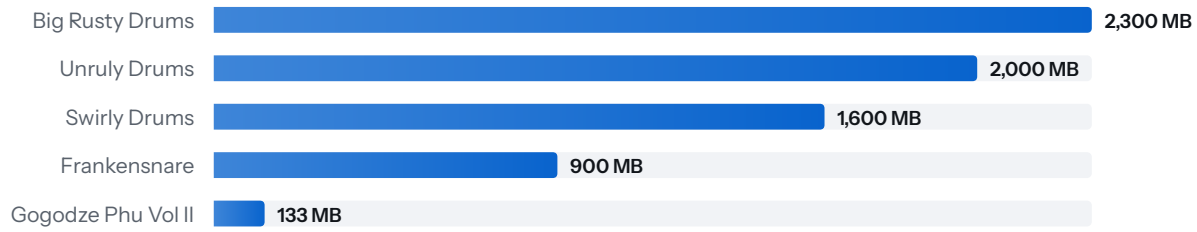
The best-known free grand pianos are not CC0. FreePats lists Salamander Grand Piano under CC BY 3.0 with a 296 MiB SF2 build, and its YDP Grand under CC BY 3.0[8]. Check the licence before using them in a release that must be CC0.

Drums and percussion

Karoryfer's CC0 drum libraries are the largest group of CC0 kits. The sfzinstruments drums catalogue lists five of them under CC0-1.0 [14], and the Karoryfer pages give more detail on three [15] [16].

KIT	DEVELOPER	SAMPLES	SIZE	LICENCE
Big Rusty Drums	Karoryfer	4,400+	2.3 GB	CC0-1.0 [15]
Unruly Drums	Karoryfer	Not stated	2 GB	CC0-1.0 [14]
Swirly Drums	Karoryfer	Not stated	1.6 GB	CC0-1.0 [14]
Frankensnare	Karoryfer	3,500+	900 MB	CC0-1.0 [16]
Gogodze Phu Vol II	Karoryfer	Not stated	133 MB	CC0-1.0 [14]
SM Drums	McLean, Stillwell, Ali	Not stated	2.2+ GB WAV	Listed as "Public Domain" [17]

Download size of CC0 drum kits



Sizes as listed on the sfzinstruments drums catalogue and Karoryfer pages, read 22 October 2026. SM Drums is excluded because it is labelled Public Domain rather than CC0.

Big Rusty Drums is the most detailed. It has "over 4400 samples adding up to 2.3 GB", with sticks, brushes and mallets, rim and shell clicks, and a three-cymbal stack [15]. Frankensnare is a snare-only kit of 17 snare, sympathy and clap sets [16]. Gogodze Phu Vol II, at 133 MB, is the lightest CC0 option in the table [14].

SM Drums is listed in the sfzinstruments catalogue as Public Domain, and its own page offers the WAV samples and a Reaper template [17]. Public domain is not the same legal instrument as CC0, so read the README in the download before assuming the same terms.

Several well-known kits are not CC0. The DRS Kit and Muldjord Kit are CC BY 4.0, and the Salamander Drumkit is CC-BY-SA-3.0 [14]. Those licences require credit or share-alike terms.

Guitars, bass, winds and other instruments

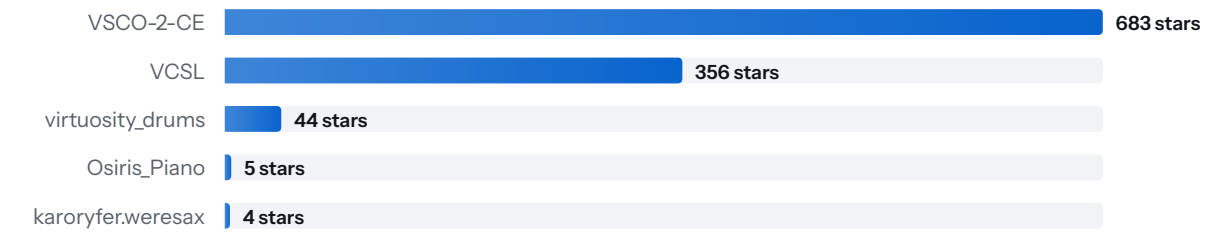
Meta publishes two CC0 guitars alongside its piano. The Nylon Guitar has **348 samples** over E2 to B5, with six string zones and three dynamic layers (two picked, one fingerstyle) [6]. The Steel Guitar has **375 samples** over E2 to C6, with six chromatic strings and three velocity layers [6].

FreePats offers a CC0 nylon-string guitar as a **9.5 MB** SF2, and a CC0 clean electric guitar in **6.3 MB** (small) or **129 MB** (full) SF2, updated in August 2026 [18]. Both suit small projects.

Karoryfer's CC0-1.0 instruments on GitHub include the Black and Blue Basses, Big Little Bass and Weresax [14] [21]. Weresax is an alto saxophone for Sforzando with three instruments (sax, a saxcordion and a synth) [21]. It has a gotcha. The XML bank is digitally signed, so "editing the XML bank will break the ability of Plogue Sforzando to load the instrument with the GUI" [21]. Use the files as they are, or edit only the SFZ.

The star counts below show how widely the CC0 repositories have been taken up. Stars measure popularity, not quality, and are as shown on GitHub when read on 22 October 2026.

GitHub stars for CC0 instrument repositories



VSCO-2-CE and VCSL stars from their GitHub repositories; the others from the sfzinstruments organisation listing. Snapshot as read 22 October 2026.

SoundFont (SF2) banks and players

SoundFont banks are a separate world. The main CC0 SF2 source is FreePats, which offers CC0 and CC BY builds [8] [9]. The best-known General MIDI banks are not CC0. simpleSoundbank's guide, updated 14 October 2026, lists GeneralUser GS as free for any music under its own licence, at 32 MB; MuseScore General under MIT at 206 MB; and Arachno SoundFont as non-commercial only, at 136 MB [18]. For music you sell, Arachno should be avoided.

Players are free for basic use. Sforzando is free and is the player the Versilian and Karoryfer pages recommend for SFZ [1] [10]. simpleSF2 is free to download; the one-time **£9.99** unlock adds multiple libraries in one instance and 16-channel multitimbral mode [18]. sfizz is the open-source option named in several VPO comments [20].

One reader reports that the $3 iOS app isfizz played Virtual Playing Orchestra's performance SFZ files after another iOS player (Audiolayer) produced no sound [20]. This is a user comment, not a test I ran, so treat it as a lead.

Free but not CC0: licence traps

The biggest trap is a library that is widely used and free but not CC0. **Virtual Playing Orchestra** is the clearest case. The site says it has been **downloaded 162,576 times** [20]. Its author says there are "no restrictions on using this library to make music, even for commercial purposes", but the library is built from sources under different terms: Sonatina Symphonic Orchestra under CC Sampling+ 1.0, Mattias Westlund's samples under CC BY-SA 3.0, No Budget Orchestra under CC BY-SA 4.0, VSCO 2 CE under CC0, and University of Iowa recordings under a free-use statement [20]. The author asks that the library not be repackaged or sold for profit, and that credit be given. The site says its licence "should be considered the most recent" if there is a conflict with the files [20]. So it is free to use, but it is not CC0.

The second trap is Salamander, where the sources disagree. FreePats and the sfzinstruments catalogue both list the Salamander grand under CC BY 3.0 [8] [13]. hilbricht.net instead describes a "2022 Public Domain Update" of the Salamander Grand Piano V3 and drum kit [5]. I could not confirm which status applies to the files you download, so the safe course is to read the licence text inside the archive.

Other non-CC0 items are easy to miss:

- **jRhodes3d** (Rhodes piano): samples under CC-BY-NC, with CC0 only for the music made with it [13].
- **LivingRoom Upright Micro**: CC-BY-SA-4.0 [13].
- **Ripped game SoundFonts**: no clear licence, because the sounds came from commercial games [18].

hilbricht.net is blunt about the problem: "Assume people are uninformed, lazy or outright lying when it comes to sampling copyright" [5]. It names FreePats as the only other site it found with similar standards [5].

Timeline of the licence and release dates recorded in this report:

24 Nov 2025 — **hilbricht.net list updated**
Curated list of free, open-licence sample libraries; FreePats named as the only comparable site

14 Jan 2026 — **VCSL LICENSE committed**
CC0 licence file added to the VCSL repository

22 Aug 2026 — **FSBS Electric Guitar updated**
FreePats CC0 electric guitar; one of several 2026 updates

14 Oct 2026 **simpleSoundbank guide updated**

Licence summaries for ten free SoundFonts

Note on the August date: the simpleSoundbank guide says the FSBS guitar was “updated in August 2026”, without a day; the day above is a placeholder and should be read as August 2026 only.

	VSCO 2 CE	VS	VCSL
Size	About 3 GB	·	5 GB
Licence	CC0	·	CC0
Format	SFZ and WAV	·	SFZ for Sforzando, WAV
Samples	About 3,000 (per developer)	·	Over 4,000 (per developer)
Round robins	Not stated	·	One per articulation, typically

Developer pages as read on 22 October 2026. Sample counts are the developers’ own figures.

Where to start

The ranking below is editorial, based on licence clarity, format, size and documentation in the sources read. It is not a popularity or usage ranking.

Free CC0 instrument libraries, as of 22 October 2026

S START…	**VSCO 2 CE** full orchestra	**Meta Piano** WAV and SFZ		
A STRONG	**VCSL** 5 GB	**Osiris Piano**	**Big Rusty Drums** 2.3 GB	**FreePats Upright KW**
B SPECIALI…	**Frankensnare**	**Gogodze Phu Vol II**	**Scarypiano**	**SM Drums** Public Domain label

Ranking rests on licence wording, format and documentation read on the pages cited, as of 22 October 2026. Not based on pick or sales data.

Bottom line

For a CC0 orchestra, start with VSCO 2 CE, and add VCSL for more variety. For piano, Meta Piano is the cleanest CC0 option, with Osiris for a quiet piano and FreePats for a small SF2. For drums, Karoryfer’s CC0 kits cover everything from clean kits to very rough ones. Do not assume that a library’s “free” label means CC0: open the licence file inside the download, and watch for CC BY credit requirements, share-alike terms and non-commercial clauses. Those are the most common reasons a free sample library cannot be used in a commercial release.

Terms used in this document (4)

- **CC0** — A Creative Commons public-domain dedication. The creator waives copyright, so the work can be used commercially with no credit or royalties.
- **Round robin** — Several recordings of the same note, played in turn, so repeated notes sound less mechanical.
- **SF2** — SoundFont, a binary format that bundles samples and presets. It is loaded by players such as simpleSF2 and FluidSynth.
- **SFZ** — An open text format that maps samples to keys and velocities. It is loaded by players such as Plogue Sforzando and sfizz, and is not compatible with SF2.

SOURCES

1 VSCO 2: Community Edition (CE) - Versilian Studios
https://versilian-studios.com/vsco-community/

2 GitHub - sgossner/VSCO-2-CE
https://github.com/sgossner/VSCO-2-CE

3 GitHub - sgossner/VCSL: Open CC0 sample library
https://github.com/sgossner/VCSL

4 Versilian Community Sample Library - Versilian Studios
https://versilian-studios.com/vcsl/

5 List of Sampled Instrument Libraries - hilbricht.net
https://hilbricht.net/foss-sampled-instruments/

6 GitHub - facebookincubator/Meta-open-sound
https://github.com/facebookincubator/Meta-open-sound

7 Meta Piano — Audio Design Specification
https://github.com/facebookincubator/Meta-open-sound/blob/main/systems/instruments/meta-piano/README.md

8 FreePats project - Acoustic Grand Piano
https://freepats.zenvoid.org/Piano/acoustic-grand-piano.html

9 FreePats project - Sound banks
https://freepats.zenvoid.org/

10 GitHub - sfzinstruments/Osiris_Piano
https://github.com/sfzinstruments/Osiris_Piano

11 Free: Osiris Piano – Karoryfer Samples
https://shop.karoryfer.com/pages/free-osiris-piano

12 Free: Scarypiano – Karoryfer Samples
https://shop.karoryfer.com/pages/free-scarypiano

13 Pianos - SFZ Instruments
https://sfzinstruments.github.io/pianos/

14 Drums - SFZ Instruments
https://sfzinstruments.github.io/drums/

15 Free: Big Rusty Drums – Karoryfer Samples
https://shop.karoryfer.com/pages/free-big-rusty-drums

16 Free: Frankensnare – Karoryfer Samples
https://shop.karoryfer.com/pages/free-frankensnare

17 SM Drums - SFZ Instruments
https://sfzinstruments.github.io/drums/sm_drums

18 The Best Free SoundFonts (SF2 and SFZ) — simpleSoundbank
https://simplesoundbank.com/guides/best-free-soundfonts/

19 Classical Instruments Loops Sample Pack (CC0) — Signature Sounds
https://signaturesounds.org/classical-instruments-loops-sample-pack-cc0-free-to-download

20 Virtual Playing Orchestra – Virtual Playing
https://virtualplaying.com/virtual-playing-orchestra/

21 GitHub - sfzinstruments/karoryfer.weresax
https://github.com/sfzinstruments/karoryfer.weresax

22 sfzinstruments - GitHub
https://github.com/sfzinstruments

Researched and written with claude-haiku-5-5, from the sources listed above. Figures are as reported by those sources. Exported November 29, 2026 from https://intel.innerpulse.net/doc/free-cc0-instrument-sample-libraries-what-is-public-domain-what-is-only-free, where the current version lives.