DARK ASCENTS V1.1

User Guide (updated 8/7/19)

Hello + Overview

Thanks for downloading! Dark Ascents is a small collection of glissando violin risers recorded off the cuff with copious amounts of whiskey. Originally meant as a basic group of risers to layer into productions, they became a different animal as time went on. It is, on the surface, an instrument of violin risers and falls - however it's highly encouraged to explore it as an instrument of chaos, especially by tweaking the Main Controls, and diving into the Glitch functions found on the Motion page. This can result in anything from unsettling pitched-down textures, chopped/glitchy madness, to tempo-synced buzzing of electric lights and horrific machinery.

When in doubt, try clusters, mix ascents with descents, and don't hesitate to play with the randomization features.

System Requirements:

There are two versions of Dark Ascents:

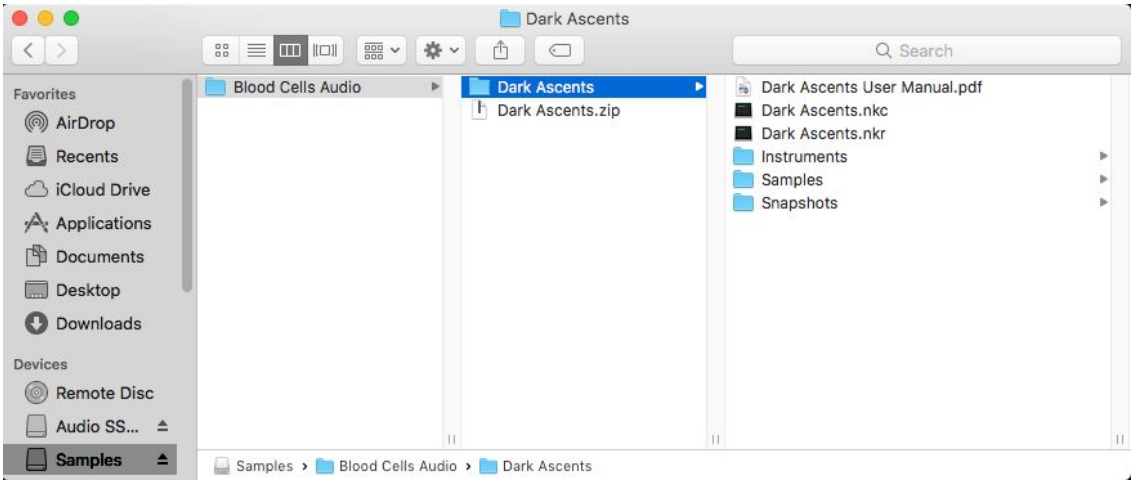
- one is for the *full* version of Kontakt 5.8.1.
- The other is for the *full* version of Kontakt 6 (and beyond).

Either version is available for purchase. If you are currently using Kontakt 5.8.1 and end up upgrading your full version of Kontakt to 6.0, your existing download of Dark Ascents should function without issue. ***HOWEVER***, the version of Dark Ascents for Kontakt 6.0 takes advantage of Native Instruments' Replika Delay - if after you've upgraded Kontakt you decide you want to get the version of Dark Ascents that has Replika, shoot us an email on the contact page (or info@bloodcellsaudio.com). Let us know your name and the email address you used to purchase from either Bloodcellsaudio.com (via Gumroad) or Kontakthub - we'll hook you up.

Installing

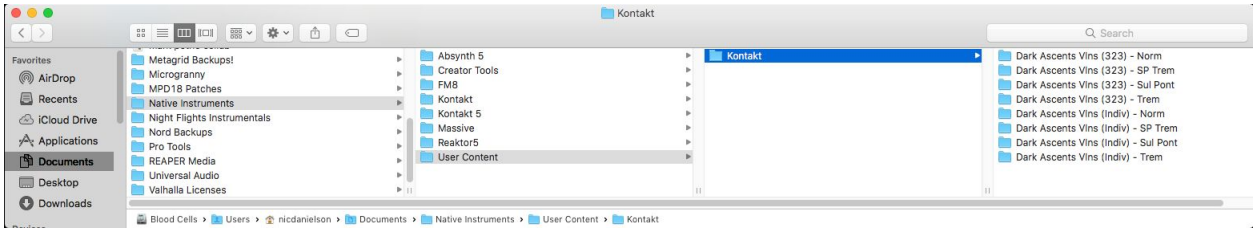
Installing the Downloaded Package

1. Create a new folder called "Blood Cells Audio" in whatever location you store your sample libraries, then simply drop the "Dark Ascents.zip" file into that new folder and unzip it. The ZIP file contains the folder structure you need:

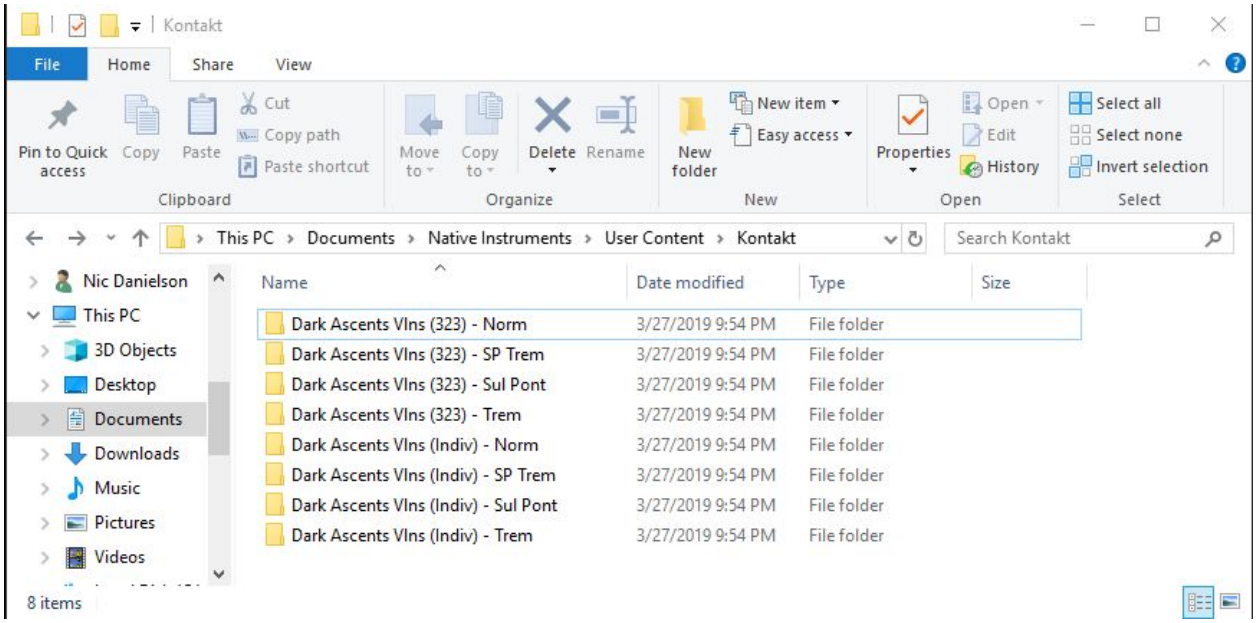


2. Because Dark Ascents isn't encoded by Native Instruments, you'll need to manually move the included Snapshots into the proper folder. While not required to use the instrument, it's highly encouraged you do this. Simply double-click the Snapshots folder included in the Dark Ascents folder structure, then copy/paste the 8 sub-folders into either of the below locations:

   For Mac:
   Macintosh HD/Users/<User Name>/Documents/Native Instruments/User Content/Kontakt



   For Windows:
   C:\Users\<User Name>\My Documents\Native Instruments\User Content\Kontakt

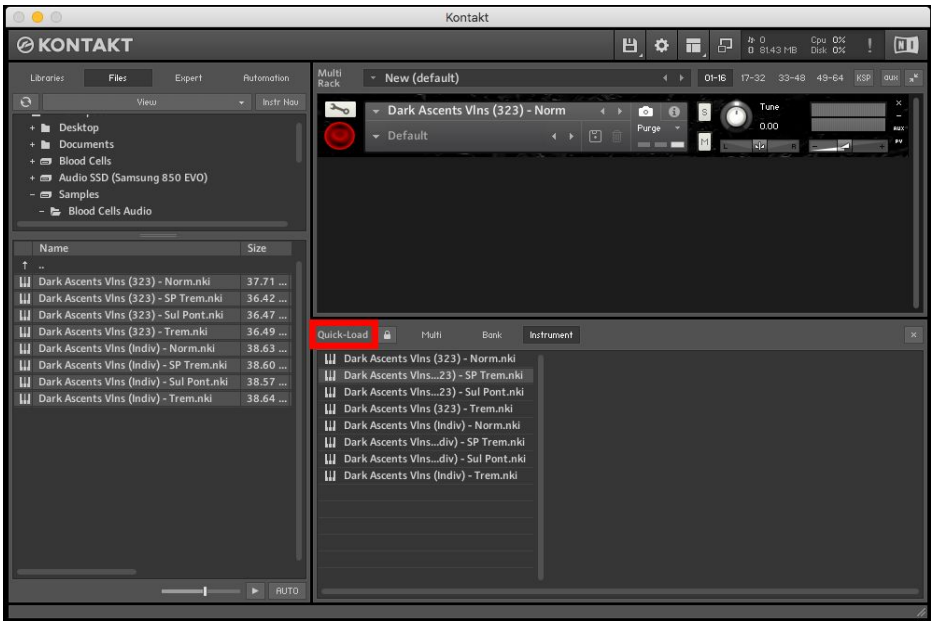


***If you don't have a Kontakt folder inside the User Content folder, open one of the instruments and click the disk icon as shown below. This will instantly/automatically create the Kontakt folder for you within the User Content folder. Following this, paste the 8 folders as described above.**

Loading Instruments into Kontakt

Using the File Browser:
Open Kontakt's Browser window and select "Files". Navigate to the installation location of the Dark Ascents Instruments folder, and drag in the .NKI files you'd like to use from the bottom window.

Using Quickload:
If you're not into having to dig through a typical file structure to find the instrument files, you can use Kontakt's Quick-load feature. Click on the Folder icon at the top of Kontakt (or hit cmd-F on Mac), and select "Quickload". This will open up the Quick-load window at the bottom of Kontakt. Drag the .NKI files from the browser down into the Quick-load window. Now you can always quickly access these instruments from your own custom favorites list, without having to go diving into the browser.



Quick Start

Loading Snapshots

Take advantage of the Snapshots! Each .NKI file comes with some pre-built Snapshots to get you rolling and to show some of what can be done. There are 3 main categories of factory Snapshots:

- Default - this brings things back to basic risers.
- Glitch - Uses the Glitch arpeggiator in the Motion page to make weird things.
- SFX - Some different textures to kick things off.

To access the Snapshots, hit the camera icon, and then the dropdown menu on the left:

Saving Snapshots

Click the disk icon to save your own custom snapshots to the dropdown menu. Saving a snapshot will literally take a picture of the current state of all controls in the instrument. These will be saved along with the factory snapshots in the same location as above. Be sure to give your new Snapshot a unique name, otherwise you may accidentally overwrite the factory Snapshots. Don't worry, it will warn you first.

Helpful Hints

- The Main Controls are visible at all times to encourage tweaking.
    - CC1 is assigned to the Pitch knob.
    - CC11 is assigned to the Sample Start knob.

- Take advantage of the Pan presets to quickly spread things out.

- Remember that most buttons and knobs (except dropdown menus) can be controlled via MIDI automation. Right-click the knob or button to learn. Experiment with this, especially with multiple controls.

- The Glitch Arpeggiator can be used at whatever rate you desire...but it's pretty rad when things are cut up super tight and fast. So don't hesitate to set a fast rate, a short Pulse Width, and let things get grainy.

- Try Automating Sample Start and Pitch while the Glitch arpeggiator is running, especially at fast rates. This can make for some awesomely chaotic stuff, as samples are being re-triggered with every step.

- A note about Sustain Pedal (CC64): When using Dark Ascents in normal non-Glitch mode, CC64 works as one would normally expect. When using Glitch mode, CC64 acts *cooler*. Because Glitch is really an arpeggiator, it's internally generating its own note attacks (based on the note or notes you've played). When the pedal is pressed while the arpeggiator is running in Latched mode, it will catch all those internally generated notes as well and make for some interesting phasey/industrial effects at higher subdivisions. Momentary mode is the same, but note that you do have to keep holding the actual key down for the arpeggiator to continue running - otherwise the arpeggiator stops running and the last note that was triggered will play out as long as the Sustain Pedal is held.

- Mess around. Watch some videos on www.bloodcellsaudio.com. And read the rest of the manual for further details :-0

Instruments:

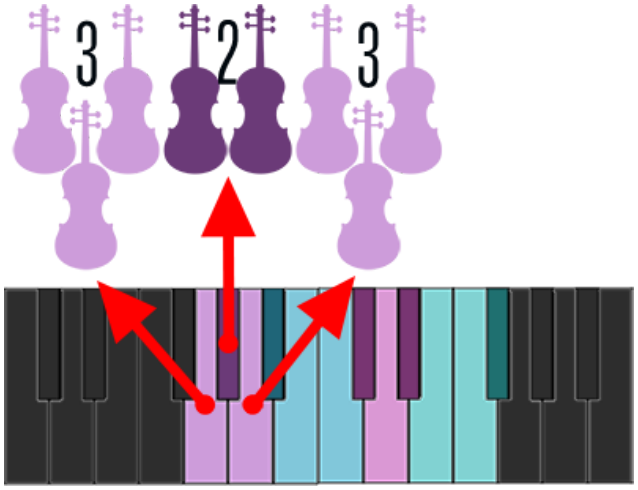
There are 8 instruments included, broken up into 2 broad categories with 4 articulations each.

Each of the 8 instruments includes 32 different ascents, and 32 descents. Each instrument is broken up based on the root note the glissando riser starts on. For instance, those labeled “G Ascents” are glisses beginning on the G string. If you ever need a sanity check on which type of riser you’re playing, look at the “Group” readout in Section 4.2 of “Main Controls”.

“323” Instruments:

Dark Ascents Vlns (323) - Norm
Dark Ascents Vlns (323) - SP Trem
Dark Ascents Vlns (323) - Sul Pont
Dark Ascents Vlns (323) - Trem

With the "323" instruments, each key represents a small section of violins, where the number represents how many violins are layered on a particular key. (e.g. 3 = 3 different violin risers, 2 = 2 violin risers). The idea being to quickly stack things up.
(Hint: use the “LCR Group” pan preset to quickly spread these sections out).

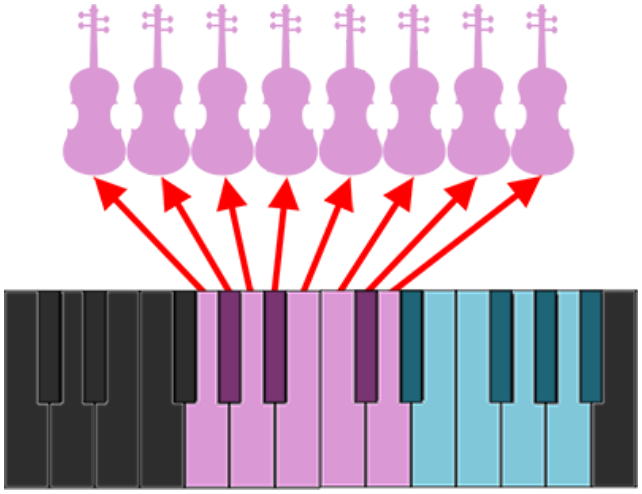


Here’s a full map of the 323s:

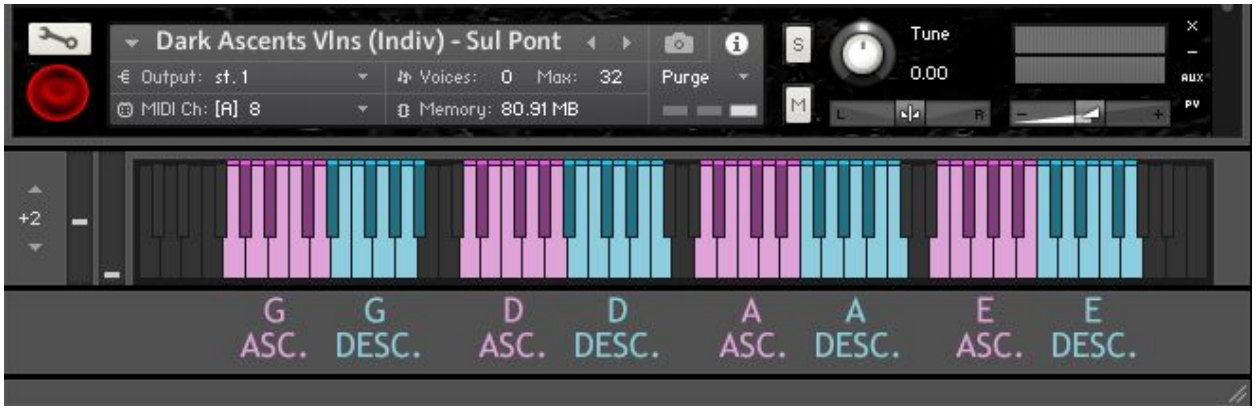
“Individual” Instruments:

Dark Ascents Vlns (Indiv) - Norm
Dark Ascents Vlns (Indiv) - SP Trem
Dark Ascents Vlns (Indiv) - Sul Pont
Dark Ascents Vlns (Indiv) - Trem

For the "Indiv" instruments, each key represents a single violin, so there is finer control over the individual sounds as compared to the “323” instruments.



A full map of the Individuals:



USER INTERFACE

MAIN CONTROLS

These controls are always visible to encourage constant tweaking.

1. Pitch

Pitch Knob (CC1):

- Adjusts the pitch (and speed) of the note(s) being played, with a +/- 3 octave range in semitone increments. A setting of 0.0 is the original unaltered pitch, as recorded. Functionality depends on the state of the Global Button described below.

Global (GBL) Button:

- **GBL On (Global Pitch Mode):** This makes the pitch knob affect all notes across the whole instrument - excellent for automating global rises and declines via CC1. When initially hitting this button, all notes will snap to the pitch of the most recently played note. From here, simply play a note (or notes) and move the pitch knob to your desired global pitch.

- **GBL Off (Individual Pitch Mode)**: Each note can be manually set to its own unique pitch setting. Great for clusters, or pointillistic mayhem. Play the note you want to edit the pitch of, move the pitch knob, and you're ready to move on to the next note if desired. The unique pitch setting is automatically saved along with that note - hitting another note will snap the pitch knob to *that* note's pitch setting. Rinse/repeat and build up a weird mix of pitches/speeds.

(*Hint: try combining different individual pitches with randomized sample start, and play rhythmic patterns on your keyboard)*.

Pitch Preset Buttons:

- There are 2 independent pitch presets available - One for Global Pitch Mode, and one for Individual Pitch Mode...the idea being that you can hit save, then switch between Global and Individual pitch modes without fear of losing any settings. The memory your pitches get saved to is simply based on what pitch mode you happen to be in at the time you hit Save.
    - **Save Button**  **:** Saves your current pitch settings into memory. If you have some settings you like, but want to keep exploring, hit this button before the “digging” commences.
    - **Recall Button**  **:** Recalls your saved pitch settings prior to your ill-fated pitch exploration.

Randomize (?!?) Button:

- Just like it sounds! When in Global Pitch Mode, this will force all notes to the same random position. When in Individual Pitch Mode, this will snap each note to a different random pitch to achieve a quick spread of pitches across all notes. Don’t hesitate to assign MIDI automation to this button and re-trigger it while notes play.

2. <u>Sample Start</u>

Slider (CC11):

- Globally adjusts the sample start time when notes are played, with a % readout. Find a cool spot in the waveform and leave it there...or automate it using CC11.

  Be aware that when setting this beyond 0%, it’s possible you could experience some clicks, as the sample waveform may now be starting/ending at a non-zero crossing. Rather than code these out with built-in fades, it was decided to keep them because sometimes they’re cool. That said, if you hear some displeasing clicks, add a couple ms of attack/decay (Shape section) to nip them in the bud. Just a tiny and inaudible envelope to mitigate it.

  Adjusting/Automating sample start while using the Glitch function sounds rad - be aware that starting at 0% may sound somewhat quiet when used with Glitch, due to the initial slower attack of the samples - there’s simply not much there at the top of the samples. Bump the sample start forward in this case.

!?! Button:

- Randomize the sample start time with each played note. Hit notes rapid-fire, or do some glissando on your keyboard to see what this can do..considering the sample is constantly changing pitch, randomly jumping around within the sample can create some interesting disjointed stutters.

Waveform:

- The waveform display shows the most recently played note. Bear this in mind when playing a cluster - the last note played (even if .25ms later than the rest) is the one that will show. It’s mainly there to give a general idea of just where you’re at in the waveform for reference and timing purposes. *Waveform is unavailable when Glitch mode is enabled (on Motion page).*

3. Panning

Pan Knob:

- Each note can be manually set to its own unique pan setting. Simply play the note you want to edit, then move the knob to the desired position. This setting is automatically saved along with that note - hitting another note will snap the knob to *that* new note's pan setting, and so on. It's possible to create a totally custom stereo space across all the available notes of the instrument. Created a setting you like? Hit the Save (S) Button, Save a Snapshot of the instrument, or save the NKI.

Pan Preset Buttons: There is 1 memory slot available.

- **Save Button**  **:** Saves your current pan settings into memory. Just like with the pitch preset, hit the Save button to give yourself a solid home to come back to if needed.
- **Recall Button**  **:** Recalls your saved pan settings.

Pan Preset Menu:

- Contains some pre-built pan settings for each instrument. Keep in mind these will affect the entire instrument, so if you had custom pan settings, this will wipe them. *When in doubt, hit the*  *button first!*

  323 Instrument presets:
  - Center - Centers every note.
  - LCR Group - Section 1 goes left, Section 2 is centered, Section 3 goes right.
  - L->R 12 - All 12 ascending sections are spread evenly across the stereo field. Same for all 12 descending sections
  - L->R All - All notes in the instrument are spread evenly across the stereo field.
  - F*ck It - Random panning for the entire instrument. A quick and dirty way to spread things around.

  Individual Instrument Presets:
  - Center - Centers every note.
  - L->R 8 - Each colored group of notes is spread evenly L to R. (e.g All G Ascents)
  - L->R 16 - Each group of 16 notes is spread across stereo field (e.g. All G Ascents and Descents).
  - L->R All - L to R across all notes of the instrument.
  - F*ck It - See above.

4.1 Velocity Sense

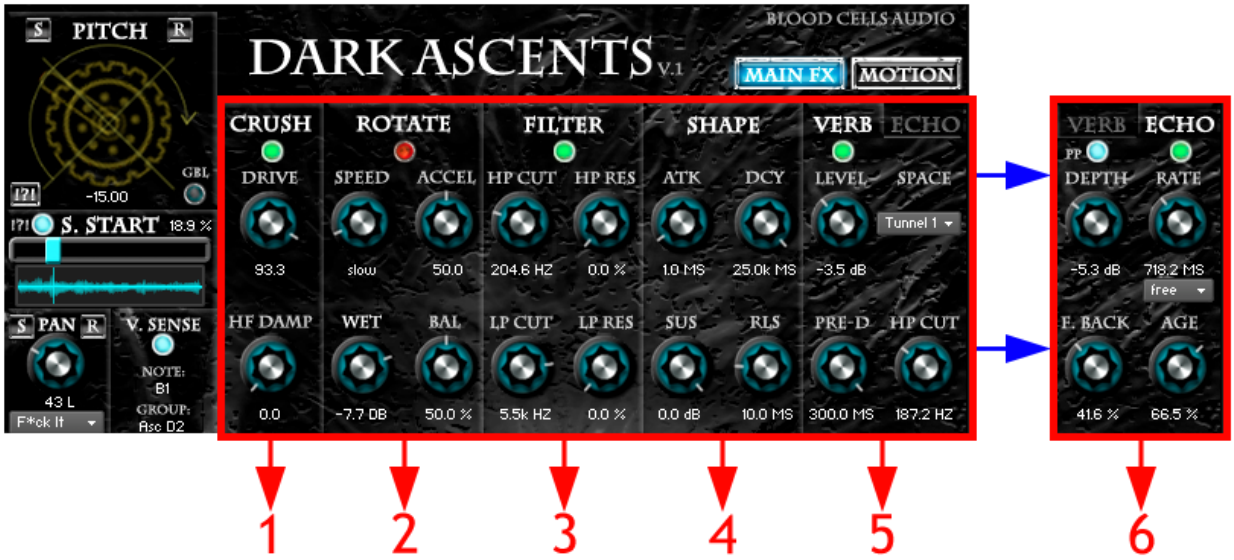
- When on, the instrument will respond to velocity information from your MIDI controller or DAW. For Glitch functions to work best, it's best to leave this on, otherwise you'll lose the interesting level changes that can occur with the curves in the table. When velocity sense is disabled, notes play at full volume, regardless of any velocity info received into the instrument...in this case, you'll want to automate volume (CC7) if dynamics are desired.

4.2 Note/Group

- Displays the most recently played keyboard note, as well as the group name. Group names show if the note is Ascending or Descending, as well as the name of the open violin string the sample uses. E.g. "Desc A2" is the 2nd group of descending glissandos on the A string (again, in reality this is the Ascending sample

reversed to get the occasional weird reversed artifact). Think of it as more of a quick guide for making sure you're hitting the sound you intend.

MAIN FX



1. Crush (Tube Distortion)

- **Drive:** Amount of Distortion
- **HF Damp:** Tame harsh high frequencies that might occur as the drive goes up.

2. Rotate

Rotating speaker emulator...great for accelerations and underwater qualities.

- **Speed:** Fast or slow rotation. Really a 2-way switch in knob form.
- **Acceleration:** The amount of time it takes to change speeds.
- **Wet:** Increase to make the rotation more apparent.
- **Bal:** Adjusts the ratio of spinning tweeter (highs) versus spinning speaker (lows).

3. Filter

Highpass and Lowpass filters, with slopes at 12dB/Octave.

- **HP Cutoff:** As implied by the name, a highpass filter allows high frequencies to pass through the filter. The cutoff is the frequency at which those lower frequencies begin to be well...cut off.
- **HP Resonance:** The amount of additional gain at the cutoff point. Boosting this makes a very narrow and resonant peak at the point of cutoff. Make use of this to pull out interesting harmonic resonances at the cutoff point.
- **LP Cutoff:** A lowpass filter lets low frequencies pass through. Again, cutoff is the frequency at which the high frequencies begin to be attenuated.
- **LP Resonance:** Exact same as above HP Resonance.

4. Shape

ADSR Volume Envelope, triggered with every note.

- **Attack**: How quickly notes fade in.
- **Decay**: Amount of time it takes to fall from max level to the level set by Sustain knob.
- **Sustain**: The level at which the note will play while the note is held.
- **Release**: How quickly the notes fade out after note is let go.

5. Verb

Convolution reverb with 4 custom-recorded spaces.

- **Level:** The amount of reverb that gets mixed with the dry signal.
- **Space:**
    - **Abbey**: A former church converted into a unique performance space. (Huge thanks to the Fremont Abbey in Seattle)
    - **Tunnel 1**: The Wayne Tunnel, a long tunnel on the Burke-Gilman bike trail in Bothell, WA.
    - **The Chapel:** The chapel of a former Catholic school, since converted into a fantastic performance space.
    - **Tunnel 2:** An odd tunnel (with a weird resonance) on the Interurban Trail in Mountlake Terrace, WA.

- **Pre-Delay:** The amount of time before the reverb kicks in. Increase to give initial attacks clarity before they disappear into the wash. This control should ***not*** be automated, as the DSP needs a slight bit of time to process these changes. Automation will result in clicks and pops.

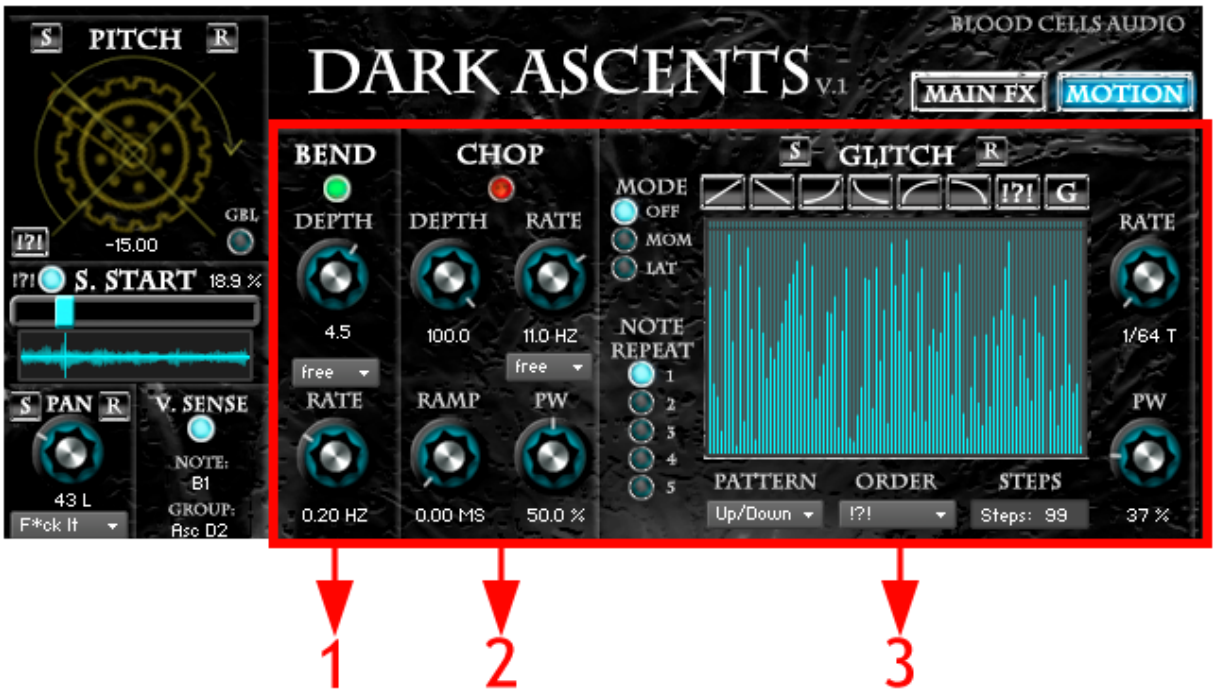
- **High-Pass:** Anything above this cutoff point will pass through into the reverb. Great for eliminating the low/low-mid buildup that takes a reverb from something cool to muddy grossness. Similar to the Pre-Delay, this control should also not be automated unless you love artifacts.

6. Echo

Note: The Kontakt 6 versions use Native Instruments' Replika Delay (in Tape Mode). Kontakt 5.8.1 versions use the standard Delay module.

- **PP:** Ping Pong mode, which alternates the delay repeats between L and R channels.
- **Depth:** The amount of echo that gets mixed with the dry signal.
- **Rate:** Changes the delay rate. Use the dropdown menu to change from free mode (in milliseconds), to a choice of subdivisions that are time-synced with your DAW. *Note in Kontakt 5.8.1, changing the Rate knob while audio is playing will result in some artifacts, as the DSP needs a moment to think. But they can also sound cool if you're into it.*
- **Feedback:** The amount of signal that gets fed back through the echo algorithm...turn it up to get more repeats, down to get something more on the slapback side.
- **Age:**
    - *Kontakt 6* - This is actually controlling not only the amount of Tape Age (the rolling off of high frequencies), but also the amount of Flutter (funkiness in the mechanism that causes little pitch variances). Surreal.
    - *Kontakt 5.8.1* - this controls the amount of high end rolloff that occurs as the repeats go on. A different sort of degradation from Replika delay mentioned above.

MOTION



1. Bend

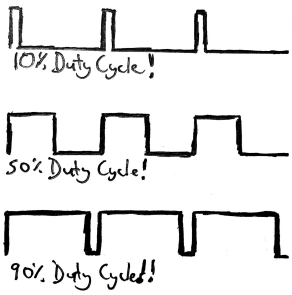
A Sine wave LFO for modulating pitch.

- **Depth**: The amount of apparent pitch bend.
- **Rate**: The rate of the bend. Set dropdown to “Free” to adjust in Hz, otherwise choose a subdivision to sync with your DAW. When in sync-mode, the knob adjusts how many notes make up the duration of a single cycle.

2. Chop

A Square wave LFO for modulating volume (AKA creating stutters).

- **Depth**: The amount of modulation applied to volume.
- **Rate**: The rate of stutters. Rate works the same as above.
- **Ramp**: Causes the stutters to fade in. Set to 0.00 ms for instant stuttering.
- **PW (Pulsewidth):** Duty cycle of the square wave. Turn down for very short note durations, with longer gaps between them. 50% equals a normal square wave with note on/offs of equal lengths. Anything above will result in longer stutter note-on durations with shorter gaps. See below horrible drawing.

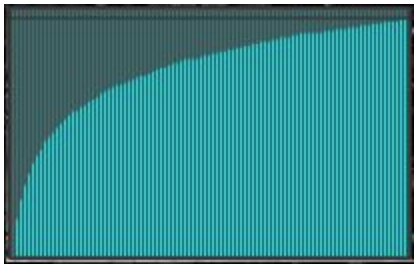


3. Glitch

An arpeggiator geared towards pointillistic random glitches (but can still be "normal").

- **Mode:**
  - Off: Arpeggiator is disabled.
  - Momentary: The arpeggiator only functions when notes are being played from either DAW or MIDI controller. *Use this mode especially while playing back from DAW.*
  - Latched: Arpeggiator continues to run after releasing notes. *Use this mode to operate hands-free while auditioning and tweaking sounds.*

- **Table**: This is the heart of the arpeggiator. Left-click and draw a custom curve, or use the shape buttons to generate one. Each step on the X-axis represents a note-on. The Y-axis is that note's velocity (0-127).

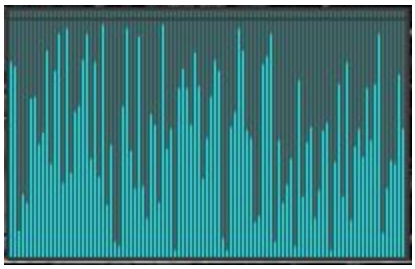


- **Glitch Preset Buttons: There is 1 memory slot available.**
  - **Save Button**  **:** Saves your current arpeggiator settings into memory. This includes the arpeggiator table shape, and the # of steps. Just like with the pan preset, hit the S button to give yourself a solid home to come back to if needed.
  - **Recall Button**  **:** Recalls your saved arpeggiator table and # of steps.

- **Shape Buttons**: Use these to auto-generate a curve in the arpeggiator table. There are 6 standard shapes to get you started. These will auto-fill the table with the selected curve, based on the # of Steps you've selected for the table. Increase/decrease the # of steps in the meantime? Click the curve button again and it will re-adjust to fit the new table length.

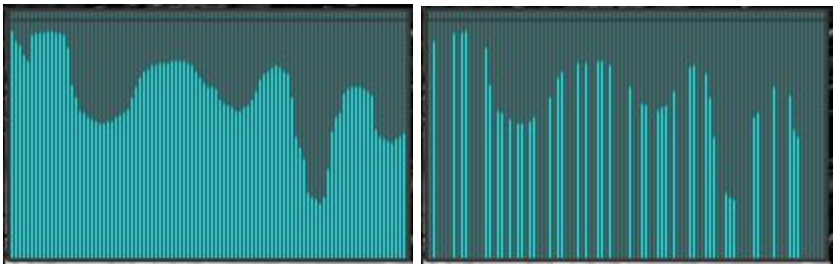
Linear up/down, Anti-log up/down, Log up/down

- **Randomize Button:** The  button will auto-fill the table with random values, with velocities between 0-127. Use this to generate some interesting chaos.



- **Glitch Button:** The  button brings in additional glitches by setting random steps to zero velocity. Especially useful after drawing or auto-generating a curve. At faster rates, this creates a “ripping” sound that is pretty sweet. You can keep hitting “G” to continue wiping out random steps until the table is simply gone.

Pre-glitch *Post-glitch*



- **Note Repeat:** Determines how many times each step in the table is repeated before moving on to the next step.

- **Pattern:** 7 different options for how the arpeggiator plays back the notes.

- **Order**: The order in which the arpeggiator moves through the table. Anything from Forward and Backward, Left to Right, to totally random. This order is displayed real time in the position indicator, at the top of the table.

- **Steps:** Click and drag to choose between 2 and 99 steps. Consider setting to something that makes sense with your meter in the DAW...or don’t worry about and be free.

- **Rate:** Choose a subdivision the arpeggiator should run at. Goes from whole notes (1 subdivision per bar) up to 1/64 triplets (96 subdivisions per bar).

- **PW:** Pulsewidth - or more simply, the length of each step. Functions exactly like the duty-cycle image shown above for the Chop Pulsewidth. *For more pointillistic/grainy sounds, turn this way down*. For longer more “obvious” and sustained sounds, go up.

Changes from Previous Versions

Dark Ascents for Kontakt 6 and beyond:

V1.1 (Released 8/7/19)

- Minor change to Blood Cells Audio credits screen to show version # in lower-right.
- 2 new Factory Snapshots added (Static F*ckery, Electrical Fire)
- Added a “Multis” folder (Contains ALL, 323s, and Indiv Multis).

V1 (Released 7/15/19)

- Initial release, for Kontakt 6 only

Dark Ascents for Kontakt 5.8.1:

V1.1 (Released 8/7/19)

- Added support for Dark Ascents in Kontakt 5.8.1. This involved deleting out the Replika delay, which became available in Kontakt 6, and adding in the standard Delay module from pre-Kontakt 6. All knobs function the same, but “Age” doesn’t include the same warble and degradation of the Replika delay from Kontakt 6. Instead, in 5.8.1 this creates a basic degradation that rolls off the high end as more delay taps occur, which is still cool in my book.

V1 (never existed oops)