

OSTERHOUSE SOUNDS

Presents

Penumbra Strings

A palette of dark hues for modern string writing



Features

- 40 Presets, loadable from built-in preset browser
- 12 articulations: each recorded with 1 dynamic layer, 1 round robin
- Each articulation recorded on 5 different instruments (1 viola, 3 cellos, 1 bass)
- 709MB of samples, compressed NCW

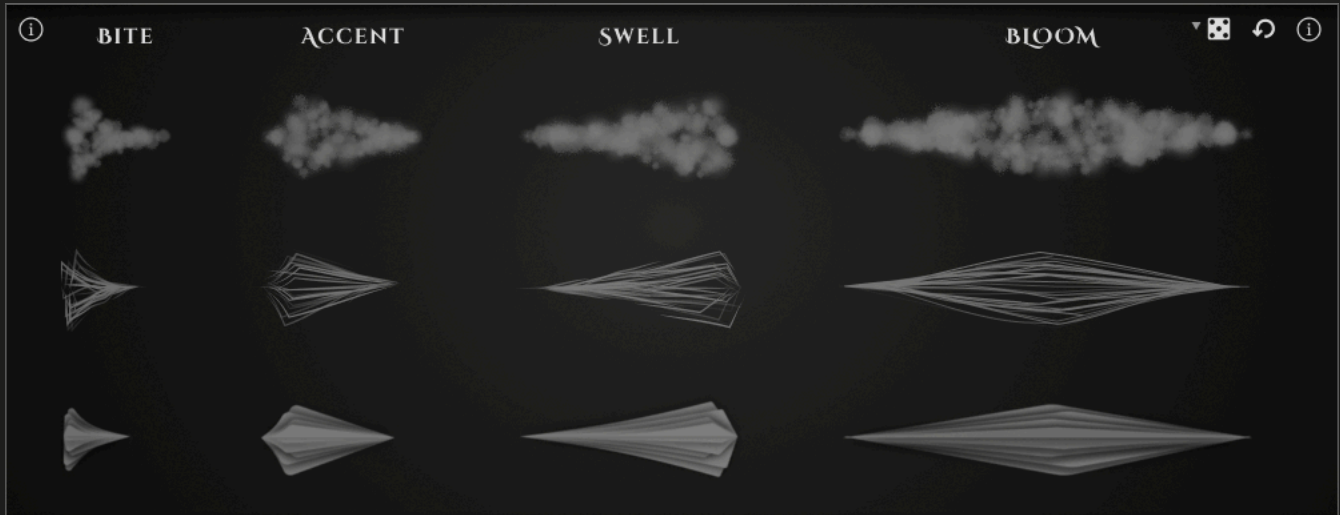
Note: Penumbra Strings requires the FULL version of Kontakt 7.10.9 or higher – it will not work with the free Kontakt Player.

Requirements

- Full (paid) version of Kontakt 7.10.9 or above
- MacOS 15 or greater
- Windows 10 or greater
- Pulse Downloader (with account)

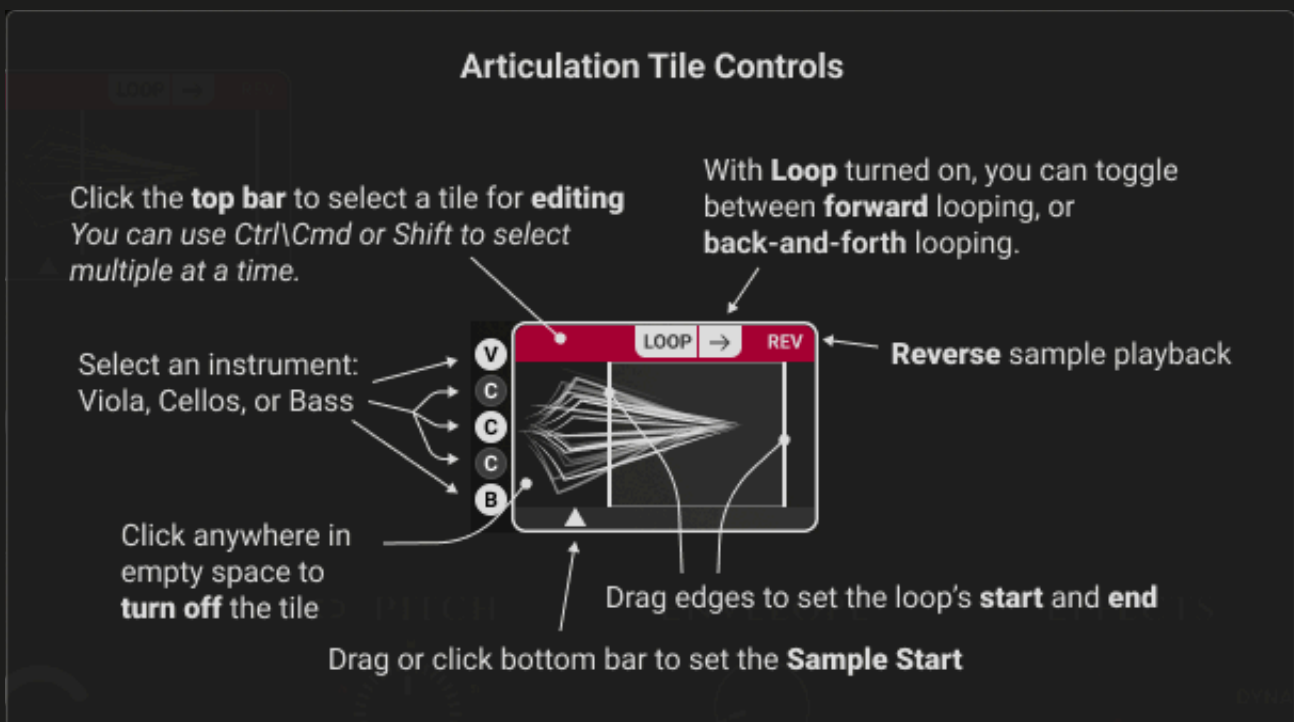
The Articulation Canvas

The main feature of Penumbra strings is its articulation canvas:



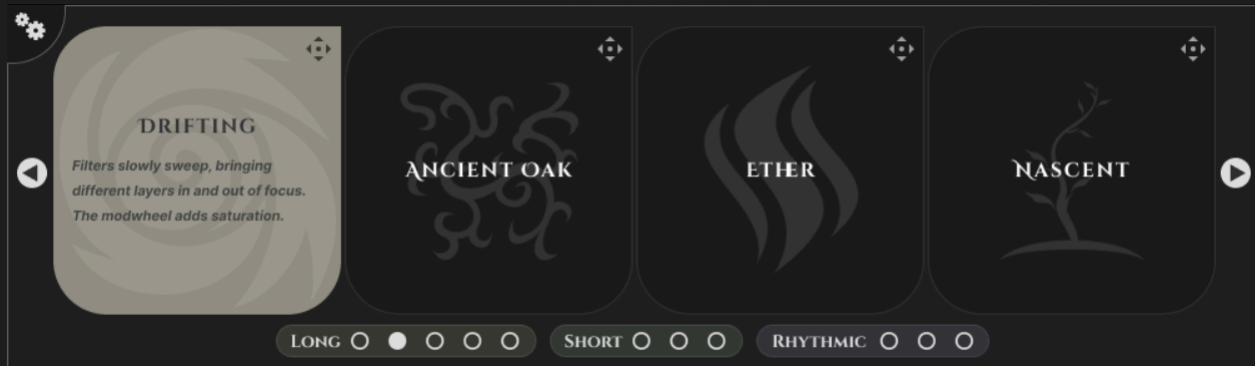
The canvas has 4 types of articulations, ranging in length from percussive staccato to long swells. Each articulation comes in 3 different flavors. The first row is airy and light, the second row is metallic and edgy, and the last row is full and grounded.

Once an articulation tile is turned on, its top bar turns red, and there are some options to choose from. Think of it like a clip in your DAW.



When multiple tiles are selected, an outline indicates which one was selected last.

Presets



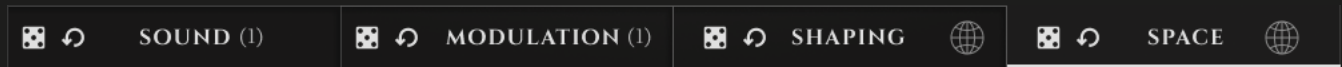
Underneath the articulation canvas is a preset browser. When you click presets, not only will it set the tiles in the canvas above, but it will also load fx settings under the cog. The first page has tutorials, and the next pages are categorized into Long, Short, and Rhythmic presets.

As you browse the presets, be sure to try the modwheel. It does something slightly different for each preset. Also, try turning on different texture tiles for each preset. Their Texture settings and modulators have all been set to be complementary, even though they're off. If you simply need to automate volume, use CC11.

In the upper right corner of each articulation tile there's an icon. Click and drag to bring example midi clips into your project. Some presets sound especially good low and others are great in the high range. Some work well as chords and others are best used one note at a time. The midi clips show each preset off in a way that suits it well. You could use the clips as a jumping-off point for your music too.

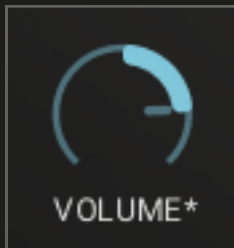
Under the Cog: Tabs

Below the Articulation Canvas, there are 4 tabs. The **Sound** and **Modulation** tabs can be used to adjust the sound of individually selected articulations, and the **Shaping** and **Space** tabs are for master effects, applied over the entire mix.



Shift+click a tab to pop it out over the canvas. It can be handy to see multiple tabs at once.





When you select multiple articulations, the **Sound** and **Modulation** tabs show settings for whichever articulation you selected last (the one with the outline). But here's the thing—your other selected articulations might have totally different settings.

That's where the asterisks come in. They're your heads up that values differ across your selection and if you adjust that knob, all your selected articulations will snap to that value.

It's nice to have a reminder before you accidentally flatten all your careful tweaking.

Sound Tab

Volume — The samples in Penumbra Strings have a wide dynamic range. You could adjust sample starts and loops to juxtapose loud and soft dynamics. Then, using the **Volume** knob, you can have full control over how they mix.

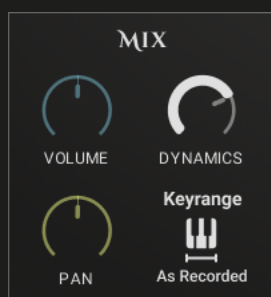
Dynamics adjusts how much velocity affects volume. You could make mellow articulations stay loud no matter what, and then have bright, aggressive articulations only come through when you play hard.

Pan is useful for creating a wider stereo image. You could layer a few textures together and pan each of them differently.

Keyrange can either be **As Recorded** or **Stretched**.

As Recorded — Samples only play within their original recorded key range. This mode is particularly useful when you want to layer multiple instruments across different sections of the keyboard.

Stretched — Any note can trigger a sound. The highest and lowest recorded notes are tuned up or down to fill gaps in the keyboard.



Transpose changes the pitch by playing notes higher or lower.

Tune changes the pitch by playing samples faster or slower. Penumbra Strings doesn't do any time-stretching.



It can be tricky to be precise when changing pitch using knobs, so **Arrows** on either side make it easier to tweak the knobs by one semi-tone at a time.

Dots surrounding the knobs make it easier to jump to different octaves.

The **Link** is useful for shifting formants. If you change one pitch control, the other goes the opposite way. This way the *sounding* pitch always matches the *played* pitch.

Increase **Attack** and **Release** to soften hard starts and stops. This can be especially useful when starting right in the middle of a sample.



Note that the envelope retriggers each time a loop point is hit, which opens up creative looping possibilities. With Release turned up, the sound doesn't cut off abruptly when the loop cycles, and with Attack turned up, the next iteration fades in slowly. So together, Attack and Release can create a crossfade between loop cycles. This could allow you to isolate any part of an articulation and turn it into a sustained pad.

Saturation is applied per voice, meaning each note is processed separately rather than crunching into each other like traditional saturation. Because it saturates so cleanly, the samples seem to morph gradually from acoustic to purely synthesized tones. For such a simple technique, it's a remarkably complex sounding transformation.



When **Dynamic** is enabled, the Saturation effect responds *only* to the original sample's level. If you move the Volume knob, or hit the keys harder, the saturation intensity won't change.

The **High Pass** and **Low Pass** filters have a somewhat gentle slope and they happen before the Saturation.



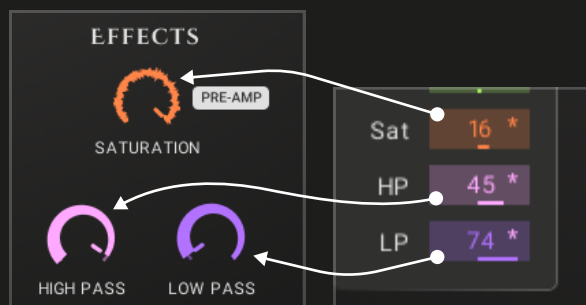
Use the **Sends** to set how much signal goes to the **Delay** and **Reverb**. For the effect settings themselves, visit the **Space** page.

Note that the Delay and Reverb are routed in parallel, rather than serial. This means that echoes from the delay will not have reverb applied to them.

Modulation Tab: Destinations



Each articulation has its own **Envelope**, **LFO**, and **Modwheel** routing. Colors between the Sound and Modulation tabs match up, making it easy to route modulators to any control. Want to modulate the purple Low Pass filter? Just look for the purple sliders in the **DESTINATION** sections of the Modulation tab.



Sound Tab

Modulation Tab

Modulation Tab: Envelope



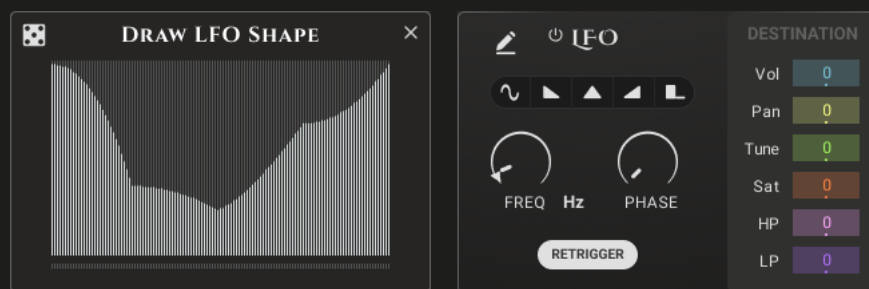
The Envelope retriggers at loop points, just like the Attack and Release knobs on the Sound tab. Here though, you can route that retriggering behavior to any parameter. Instead of just crossfading volume between loop cycles, you can crossfade panning, tuning, saturation, or filtering.

It's handy to have the envelope retriggering at every loop point because it adds periodic movement to sustained sounds without needing additional automation.

The Envelope can also be tempo synced—set Attack, Decay, and Release times to musical divisions that lock to your project tempo.

You can turn off the Envelope or LFO by clicking their titles, and re-enable them by clicking anywhere.

Modulation Tab: LFO



Choose from **5 LFO shapes**, or click the edit icon to draw your own. You can sketch custom curves or hit the dice to generate random shapes.

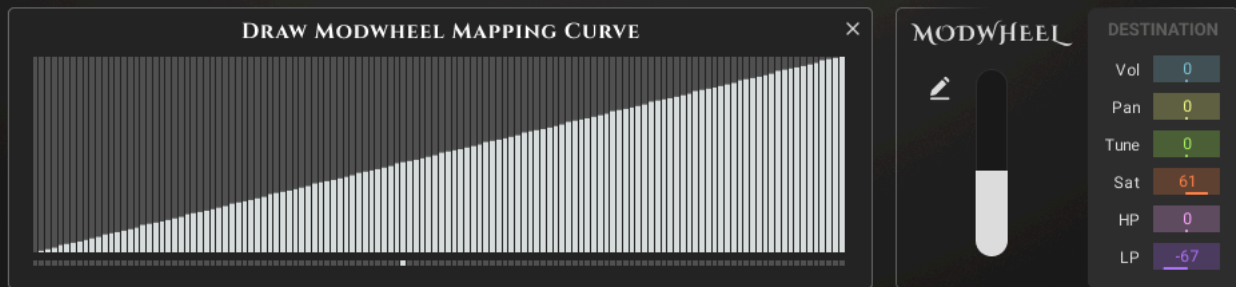
LFO **Frequency** can be free running, or synced to beats. Free running is useful for making slowly oscillating sweeps, while synced LFO's are great for creating sequenced patterns.

The **Phase** knob determines where in the shape each note starts. It can make the difference between a filter that opens right away, and one that waits before sweeping.

Retrigger changes how notes interact with the LFO. With **Retrigger** on, each note gets its own independent LFO cycle. Play a broken chord and you've instantly created layered, polyrhythmic modulation with different notes cycling at slightly different phases.

With **Retrigger** off, all notes share a single LFO, letting you change notes without interrupting the cycle.

Modulation Tab: Modwheel



In most libraries, the developer decides how soft samples will crossfade to loud samples. Here, you choose which samples to blend, and you can draw custom curves to control exactly how they fade together.

And you're not limited to just volume crossfades. You can build expressive control using panning, tuning, saturation, and filtering too. For example, you could map panning so that as you push the modwheel up, articulations spread left and right. Or, you could map tuning so that pitches slide apart in opposite directions to create that horror/avant-garde sound.

If you use the modwheel section a lot, you can trigger all kinds of layered changes in the sound by tying the modwheel to many different controls.

If you just want basic volume control, you can always use CC11

Copy and Paste



There are a ton of controls across the Modulation and Sound tabs! Copy and Paste buttons let you quickly copy all Envelope, LFO, and Modwheel settings between articulations. Who knows, maybe the settings from one articulation will do something new and interesting when applied to another?

Note: you can copy articulation settings between different instances of Penumbra Strings!

Shaping Tab

Shape the tone and dynamics of your overall mix



Super GT is a combination of Saturation and Compression. Because it's applied to the overall mix, notes crunch into each other for a thicker, dirtier texture than what you get from per-voice saturation on the Sound tab.



The **EQ** is here primarily for the presets. Some presets needed taming in the mid-range, while others benefitted from boosting highs or lows to bring out their character. Of course, you can always use your DAW's EQ instead.

Space Tab

Add spatial depth with delay and reverb



The **Reverb** and **Delay** on the Space tab receive signal from the send controls on the Sound tab. The **Reverb** uses Raum, Native Instruments' algorithmic reverb with three flexible modes: Grounded for rooms, Airy for halls, and Cosmic for abstract spaces.

Note that both the Shaping and Space tabs have power buttons for each effect—click these to temporarily bypass effects when you need to isolate what's happening in a busy mix.

TEMPO-SYNCD LOOPING

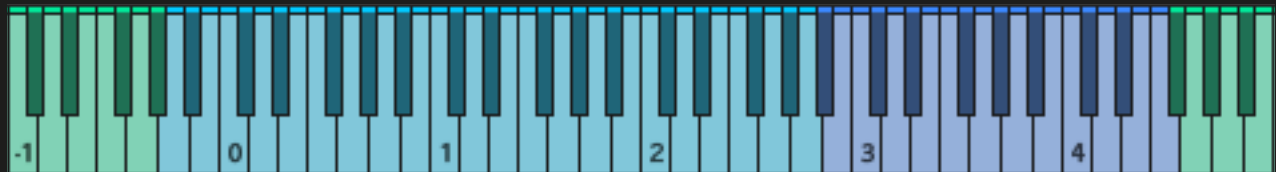


Normally to make loops stay in time, you would need to use time-stretching. Tempo-Synced Looping takes a different approach. Instead of warping the audio, it moves loop points dynamically such that they always end up happening on the beat.

Key Ranges

Bass, cello, and viola all have different sampled ranges.

The key colors show where you can play without samples having to be pitched around.



Blue keys — All layered instruments have recorded samples at these pitches.

Purple keys — Some instruments will be stretched, some won't.

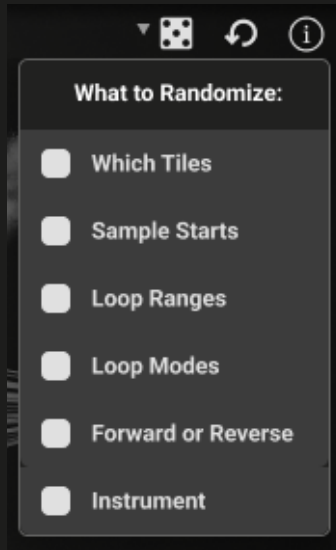
Green keys — All instruments will be pitched beyond their sampled range.

Of course, if you've adjusted the Tune knob on any textures, some stretching will happen no matter what.

Randomization

With so many controls available, randomization becomes a powerful creative tool

Let's first look at the dice for randomizing the articulations canvas.



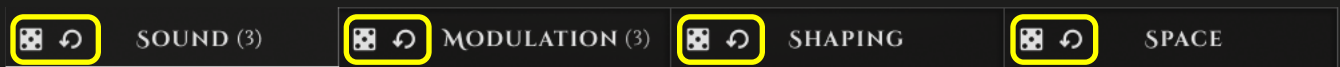
If you click the dropdown next to the canvas dice, you can select what to randomize, then when you click the dice, any selected tiles will have these properties randomized.



If things get too crazy and you just want to start over, you can always click the handy reset button.

Along the bottom there are more dice buttons, one for each tab.

Shift+click them to nudge everything randomly.



The Reset buttons on the bottom have a special function: If you shift-click them, they will reset to the previously randomized state.

One important distinction when randomizing the **Sound** and **Modulation** tabs is that each selected tile will be randomized independently of all the others. If you were to select a bunch of textures then click the dice, you will see that each texture's knobs have a completely different set of random values.



Penumbra Strings

We've covered 6 dice buttons so far, but there's a 7th one hiding in plain sight. If you hover over the title you can see it's clickable, and when you click it, the entire interface gets randomized all at once. The sound you get after that, who knows what it will be? You might want to turn your volume down before playing though!

It ticks all the boxes in the top dice's dropdown menu, randomizes Tempo-Synced Looping, and then does the equivalent of pressing all 4 dice buttons along the bottom.

All the randomization has been restricted to reasonable ranges, but it certainly hasn't been fine-tuned to the point where you can get a useable sound every time. If you want sounds that have been shown more care, try the presets.

Credits

Performing, Recording, Editing, Graphics, Scripting: Ben Osterhouse

