Americana Autoharp

User Guide

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Installation

Step 1: Extract the ZIP File

The first thing you need to do after downloading the ZIP file is to extract Americana Autoharp. Both Windows and macOS can natively extract ZIP files without requiring other software. The entire library is self-contained within this ZIP file, so you can always move the folder afterward to relocate the library anywhere you like.

Step 2: Load in KONTAKT

Next, launch the KONTAKT plugin or standalone application. Then click the button with a disk icon in the top center of KONTAKT's interface and click "Load…". Navigate to the "Americana Autoharp" folder that was created during the extraction process, and open the "Americana Autoharp.nki" instrument that's in the "Instruments" subfolder.

Once the instrument has loaded, you're ready to play Americana Autoharp!

KONTAKT Sample Library Organization

As your collection of KONTAKT libraries expands, it's important to keep them organized. For example, keep them all within a main "KONTAKT Sample Libraries" folder rather than scattered around your hard drive. Backing up the installation files for your sample libraries is also a good idea, although you'll always be able to re-download the library from your account on the Orange Tree Samples website if necessary.

The next step in organizing your sample libraries is in KONTAKT itself. One of the benefits of storing your sample libraries all in the same place is that it makes finding them faster when manually loading them. For KONTAKT Player instruments, the "Libraries" panel acts as a useful shortcut to access your libraries. However, bear in mind that this section is limited to KONTAKT Player libraries only.

Kontakt Browser

Starting with Kontakt 7, a new browser was introduced that allows you to access all your Kontakt Player and non-Player instruments in a single area.

Step 1: Click on the "FILE" text in the top left side of Kontakt's window, and then click "Batch re-save". Then navigate to the library's folder, and click "Open" to initiate the batch resave process.

Tip: If the batch resave isn't visible on the FILE menu, make sure that you currently have rack view enabled by clicking on the VIEW menu, and then select "Rack View".

Step 2: Click on the gear icon in the lower left corner of Kontakt's browser. This is the window that displays all your libraries and allows you to search by developer, library name, etc. If the browser isn't visible, you can get there by clicking on the "LIBRARY" text in the top left corner of Kontakt's interface.

Step 3: In the window that appears, click the "Add" button to add a new custom library folder to the list, selecting the library's folder. Then click the "Rescan" button, which scans for all the instruments inside each of the custom library folders.

Quick Load Panel

Another convenient way to access your KONTAKT libraries is by adding them to the Quick Load panel. This allows you to create shortcuts to your libraries, sorted into any folder/subfolder arrangement you wish. The Quick Load panel can be quickly accessed with a single right-click in any empty area of the multi-rack (the large portion of KON-TAKT's interface that displays the loaded instruments), or by clicking on the "Quickload" option available in KONTAKT's panel menu (the icon of three small rectangles in the top center of the interface). To load an instrument from the Quick Load panel, simply double-click on the patch you wish to load, or drag it into KONTAKT's multi-rack.

What's Under The Hood?

We sampled each of the autoharp's 36 strings with three dynamics and two round-robin. The virtual instrument also includes details like chord button press and release noises, release samples, and the sound of muted strings getting strummed/plucked when playing notes that are currently dampened based on the currently selected chord.

Autoharp players typically try to minimize any extraneous sounds created when pressing and releasing the chord buttons, although it's still an important detail to capture. For that reason, the button noises respond to the MIDI velocity of the chord keyswitches so that you can control how noticeable these nuances are.

Rather than stretching the samples to create a chromatic range of notes, we opted for only making the natural pitches available in order to preserve the authenticity and realism of the virtual instrument. One of the signature sounds of autoharp strumming is the percussive attack of the muted strings getting strummed while the unmuted strings are allowed to sustain. Had the samples been chromatically mapped, the number of muted strings in any given chord would greatly outnumber the unmuted ones, particularly in the low register of the instrument. This would not only detract from the realism of the virtual instrument, but also result in a less pure sound.

Interface

Americana Autoharp's interface offers a variety of settings to alter the sound and playability of the instrument. Be sure to try clicking and dragging on the autoharp graphic, too.
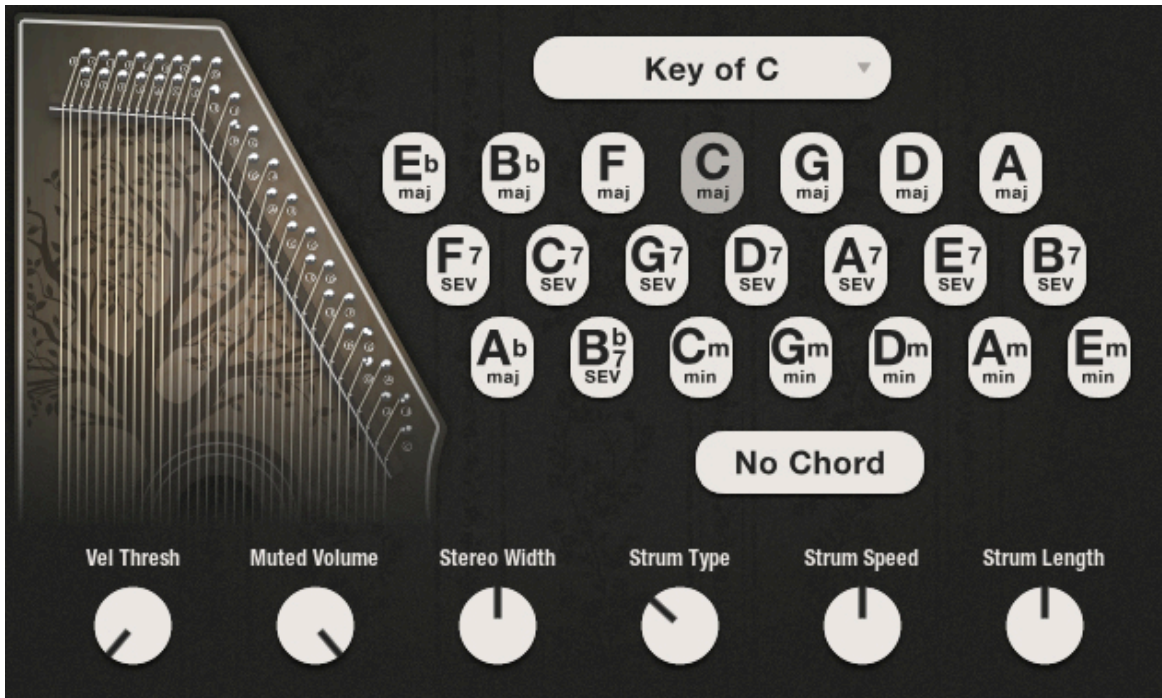
Chord Button Mapping

This dropdown menu lets you select how the chord buttons are mapped on the keyboard. The "All Chords" option makes all 21 chord buttons on the autoharp available, with the major chords mapped in the very lowest MIDI octave, the dominant 7 chords mapped in the octave above, and the minor chords mapped an octave above that.

For a more condensed mapping, there are options to map all the available diatonic chords within a single octave instead. While the "All Chords" option is fine for sequencing with, one of the key-based options is likely more convenient to navigate from a MIDI keyboard.

Finally, bear in mind that due to the autoharp only having 21 chords available, not all keys are available, and even among the available keys, not all the diatonic chords are possible.

Chord Buttons

Selects between different chords, muting non-chord tones while allowing the chord tones to ring freely.

No Chord

This button releases any currently toggled chord buttons, allowing all strings to ring freely. Having all the chord buttons released is ideal when playing single notes, but may not be suitable for strumming.

Vel Thresh

This knob adjusts a velocity threshold value. When playing a note in the main playing range with a velocity lower than this value, instead of plucking the string it releases any currently ringing note on that string. This option is meant for when playing single strings (and not necessarily when playing strumming on the autoharp) by giving you greater control over string muting without needing to use the chord buttons to dampen certain strings.

Muted Volume

Just like on a real autoharp, when a chord is selected and certain strings get muted, those muted strings still technically make a sound when being played. These muted strings contribute to the overall realism of the strums. However, they introduce inharmonics that might be undesirable, so if you want a purer sound when strumming, this control lets you reduce (or completely silence) the volume of the muted strings.

Stereo Width

This adjusts the stereo width of the autoharp for a wider or narrower stereo field. The default value of 50% gives you a very usable, typical amount of stereo width. At 0%, the signal is mono, and 100% gives you an ultra-wide stereo width.

Strum Type

Selects between different types of playable strums that get triggered when playing notes in the main playing range. Here's a description of how each option works:

Single - Instead of strumming multiple strings, this setting allows you to pluck single strings on the autoharp.

Pinch - This strum consists of a pinching motion between the thumb and fingers, almost like a simultaneous downward and upward strum that converge. The current note played in the main playing range determines the highest note in this strum.

Downward - A strum that starts on the note played in the main playing range and proceeds across lower strings.

Upward - A strum that starts from lower strings and ends on the string determined by the note played in the main playing range.

If you need to change the strum type in real-time, you can automate the strum type knob to a MIDI CC by right-clicking on it and using Kontakt's built-in MIDI automation option to assign it to a MIDI CC.

Another route to change between strum types is to use the following keyswitches, which are mapped above the main playing range:

D5: Single

E5: Pinch

F5: Upward

G5: Downward

Strum Speed

Determines the general speed of the strum. At low values, this results in a slower strum, while higher values give you fast, prompt strums. The overall speed of the strum is also slightly affected by the velocity of the note to give you more natural sounding strumming.

Strum Length

This setting determines the general amount of strings that get strummed. Low values give you very short strums that only encompass a few strings, while high values result in strums that cover a large range of strings.

Despite the length of the strum, the currently played note is always used as the basis for either the start or end of the strum, ensuring that you can target melody notes on the autoharp despite the current length of each strum. Bear in mind that the number of strings that get strummed is also affected by the velocity of the note.

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