User Manual for moon.hands

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1. Introduction

Overview

moon.hands is a Max for Live (M4L) device meticulously designed to streamline the execution of automated event sequences within Ableton Live. Leveraging a Gantt-like interface, it allows users to conceptualise and construct Events (blocks) with precision and ease. Events reveal its primary utility which lies in facilitating the triggering of clips, automating track operations, and synchronising complex musical elements in both live and studio environments. Primarily designed as an advanced looper, it can also serve as a scene creation tool. (eliminating the need for extra scenes in Ableton) and a compositional tool to instantly play back arrangements of clips.

By integrating directly into Ableton Live, moon.hands provides unparalleled control, automating intricate tasks like arming tracks, initiating or terminating recordings, and dynamically controlling playback. With its intuitive yet powerful interface, moon.hands is ideal for musicians, composers, and live performers seeking enhanced creative workflows.

Key Features

- **Event Display:** Visual event creation through Events (blocks) on a timeline.
- **Advanced Musical Capabilities:** Facilitates clip transitions and complex looping structures essential for dynamic musical composition.
- **Seamless Integration:** Works seamlessly with Ableton Live's native interface for an uninterrupted workflow.
- **Comprehensive Preset System:** Robust preset management, supporting saving, loading, and exporting configurations for efficient project handling.
- **Independent Event Management:** Events remain unaffected by track order changes, ensuring functionality regardless of rearrangements.

2. System Requirements

- **Minimum Specifications:** Ableton Live Suite with Max for Live enabled, 8GB RAM, Intel i5 processor or equivalent.
- **Recommended Specifications:** Latest Ableton Live version, 16GB RAM, and SSD storage for optimal performance.

3. Installation

Prerequisites Ensure Max for Live is installed and updated within Ableton Live. Confirm that your system meets the specified requirements.

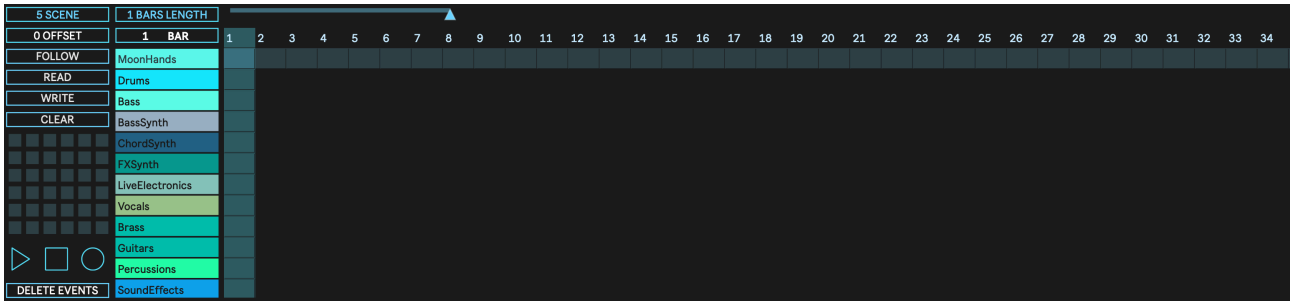
Installation Steps

1. Download the moon.hands device from the official source.
2. Place the file in Ableton Live's User Library for easy access.
3. Open Ableton Live and locate moon.hands in the User Library.
4. Drag and drop the device onto an empty MIDI track to activate it.
5. Save the Live set to integrate the device for future sessions.

4. Interface Overview

General Layout

The interface is structured around a timeline-based Gantt-like framework. Tracks are displayed as horizontal lanes, stacked on the vertical axis, while time is represented along the horizontal axis in Bars. Events are blocks placed within these lanes, facilitating both micro-level adjustments and macro-level planning.



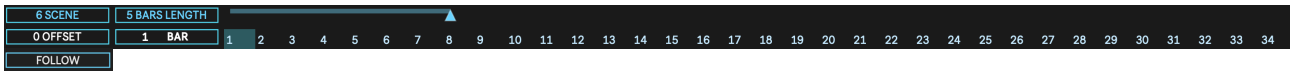
Key Components *(from left to right)*

- **SCENE display:** Indicating the Scene or Slot selected in the Ableton's main interface.
- **OFFSET:** Indicating the number of Bars to offset the vertical playback line.
- **Preset Controls: READ**, **WRITE**, and **CLEAR** buttons for configuration management. Supports internal storage and JSON export storage.
- **Preset Palette:** SHIFT + click to store a new preset.
- **Additional Transport Controls:** Dedicated **Play**, **Stop**, and **Record** buttons for precise operation.
- **DELETE EVENTS button**: Erases permanently all events currently displayed in the Event **Display**
- **BARS LENGTH display:** Indicating the length in Bars for the Event currently created.
- **BAR:** Indicates and inputs the Bar on which the transport line is currently placed.
- **Track Names:** Displays horizontally the tracks presented in the Live Set.
- **Zoom Horizontal Line:** Zooms in and out horizontally.
- **Bar Timeline:** Shows the Bars on the horizontal axis.
- **Event Display:** Workspace for creating, editing, and visualising events.

5. Core Functionality by Section

(*Note: The controls that are coloured white can be adjusted in the moon.hands' interface by the user. The light-blue coloured are displaying information from the Live Set and can be adjusted from the Live Set's main interface).*

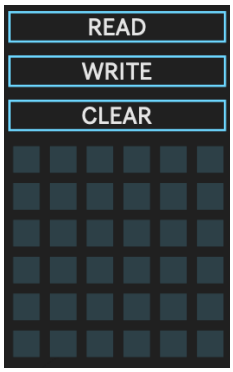
Top Section



- **SCENE:** The Scene display monitors the Scene and/or Slot selection in the Live Set. Every time the user makes a new selection it will update showing the current selected Scene.
- **OFFSET:** The OFFSET number box displayed the number of Bars to offset the transport line and can be adjusted by the user to its preferences.
- **FOLLOW:** The FOLLOW button when enabled will link the moon.hands' transport with the Live Set's main transport syncing the Event Display's view to display the corresponding Events.
- **BARS LENGTH:** The BARS LENGTH display shows the length of the current or last created **Event**.
- **BAR:** The user can input the Bar number to be displayed and selected in the Event Display.
- **Horizontal Zoom:** The Horizontal Zoom line lets the user zoom in and out horizontally changing the visible number of Bars in the **Event Display**, by dragging the triangle horizontally.
- **Bar Timeline:** The Bar Timeline shows the corresponding Bars and is linked to the Horizontal Zoom line. *(Note: by clicking on a Bar number, the user can select the Bar on the moon.hands device. This will NOT update the Live Set's main transport).*

Preset Management

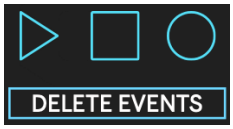
moon.hands offers an advanced preset system that enhances workflow efficiency and project organisation. Presets can store Event configurations, and zoom settings, making it easy to switch between different project states. This makes it very intuitive for the user to experiment with various musical forms with just a few clicks of the mouse. By having a set of clips, the composer can create various forms or use existing ones to create new ideas effortlessly.



- **READ:** Load a JSON file with presets to recall configurations.
- **WRITE:** Export as JSON file for unlimited preset storage across multiple projects.
- **CLEAR:** Deletes all presets from the pallet for a fresh start.
- **Creating a Preset:** *Shift* + *Click* on empty Preset to retain current settings while creating new presets. Presets are automatically saved with the Live Set, ensuring that all configurations remain intact across sessions.

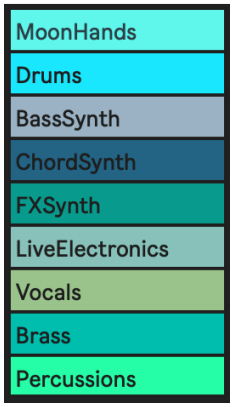
Additional Transport Controls

(Note: This must be used instead of the main transport in the Live Set to ensure smooth performance).



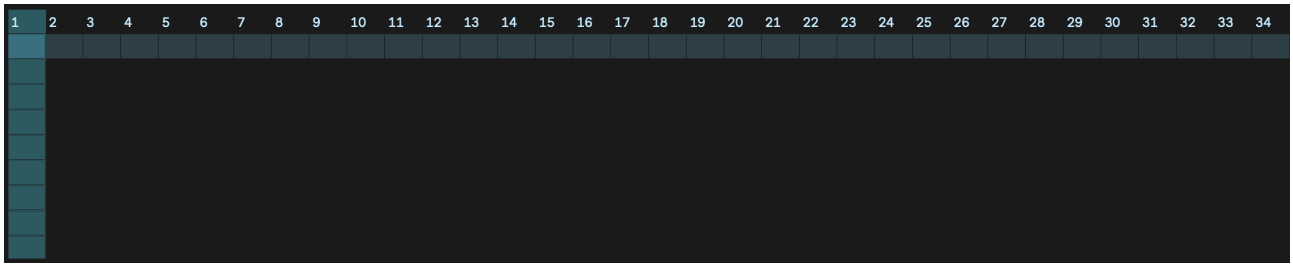
- **Play:** Initiates playback.
- **Stop:** Halts playback and stops all clips.
- **Record:** Begins recording, integrating seamlessly with event triggers. Using these controls ensures precise timing and synchronisation, essential for live performances and complex arrangements.
- **DELETE EVENTS:** The DELETE EVENTS button erases permanently the Events currently shown in the Event Display. (*Note: this action cannot be undone unless the user has saved a preset).*

Tracks Section



The moon.hands device integrates seamlessly with Ableton Live by dynamically synchronising track information, such as names, colours, order, and the addition or removal of tracks. This synchronisation ensures that any updates made within the Live set are reflected accurately within the moon.hands interface. (Note: to finalise these updates and ensure proper alignment, the user must hover over the Event Display part of the interface. This action triggers a re-initialisation process, which guarantees that all changes are accurately captured. This design ensures real-time adaptability while maintaining the integrity of your session).

6. Event Display



The Event Display is a Gantt-like interface that shows the Events represented visually as blocks. The horizontal axis represents the Bar timeline whereas the vertical axis represents the Tracks in the current Live Set. Each event contains critical markers that provide users with essential information.

Creating Events

Click and drag the mouse to define event length.

Deleting Events

Select the event and hit delete on the keyboard.

(Note: the user can clear the Event Display by hitting the DELETE ALL button. This action cannot be undone unless the was previously saved as a preset).

Event Information

- **Dots:** Indicate the event's starting point.
- **Numbers:** Correspond to the associated clip slot or scene.
- **Colour:** The Event colour is linked to the Track's colour and cannot be changed directly. (*Note: Since the Events are not linked to the Tracks if the user changes the colour or the order of the tracks these changes will not appear on the Event Display. To bypass this one can save the Event configuration as a preset and reload it with the newly arranged tracks to reproduce the Events with the corresponding colours).*

ex. Presenting an 8 Bar length Event on the Drums track in the fifth Slot, starting at Bar 1 and finishing at the end of Bar 8.

Zoom and Scroll Features

- **Horizontal Zoom:** Scales the timeline; up to 1000 Bars visible at maximum zoom. (*Note: Detail reduces proportionally to enhance clarity during macro-level composition views).*
- **Horizontal Scroll:** Holding down **SHIFT** while scrolling will scroll horizontally**.**
- **Vertical Scroll:** Navigates projects with more than 12 tracks.

Follow Button and Tracking Offset

- **Follow Button:** Keeps the timeline synced with Live's playback.
- **Tracking Offset:** Adjusts the vertical tracking line by a number of Bars to monitor events before and after playback.

7. Integration with Ableton Live

Syncing Clips and Tracks

Selections in Ableton Live sync immediately with moon.hands. For changes such as track name, colour or order, hover over the Event Display to reinitialise.

Designed to Complement Live

moon.hands adds a timeline (Bar) dimension to Session View, aligning it with Arrangement View. The M4L logo opens the interface, ensuring visibility regardless of track selection.

(Note: Changing track order requires preset saving, clearing, rearranging, and reloading to sync colours).

8. Usage Workflow

Starting a New Project

1. Add moon.hands to a MIDI track.
2. Click the moon.hands logo to open the pop-up window.
3. Create events by clicking and dragging. (Edit by deleting and recreating.)
4. Sync track details by hovering over the Event Display.
5. Save presets with SHIFT + click.
6. Use Additional Transport to start playback.

Basic Use Cases

- **Simplified Looping**: Create loops by setting up events that start and stop recordings or playback of clips at specific times, allowing for repetitive sections in music with ease.
- **Automated Loop Sequences**: Use moon.hands to script complex loop transitions where loops can be added, removed, or altered in sequence, facilitating dynamic performances or compositions where the loop evolves over time.
- **Flexible Scene Playback**: Unlike traditional Ableton Live where scenes must be in line, moon.hands allows you to trigger scenes from any slot or even combine elements from different scenes, giving you more creative control over how and when scenes are played back.
- **Building Complex Arrangements**: Use the Gantt-like interface to lay out your entire composition visually. You can experiment with different clip arrangements, transitions, and structural ideas without the need to rearrange scenes in Live.
- **Experimentation with Structure**: moon.hands is perfect for musicians who want to experiment with different musical forms or structures using a variety of sound clips. You can quickly test how different clips sound in various arrangements to find the perfect fit for your piece.
- **Performance Enhancement**: For live bands, moon.hands can automate the playback of backing tracks, ensuring consistency in performances. Bands can set up events to trigger parts like intros, outros, or specific cues during a song, allowing more focus on live instruments or vocals.

9. Tips for Efficient Use

Optimising Presets

- Save frequently to capture progress.
- Use JSON export for tailored project libraries.

Navigating Complex Projects

- Toggle zoom levels for detail or structural views.
- Scroll vertically for large projects.

10. Troubleshooting

Common Issues and Solutions

- Events starting at Bar 1: Use Additional Transport.
- Tracks not syncing: Hover over the Event Display.

11. FAQs

Q: How do I store a preset in moon.hands for later use?

A: To store a preset, ensure you've configured your events and interface as desired. Then, in the Preset Palette, SHIFT + Click on an empty slot to save the current settings as a preset. This preset will automatically be saved with your Ableton Live set, ready for future sessions.

Q: Can I store multiple presets within one Ableton Live project using moon.hands?

A: Yes, moon.hands allows you to store multiple presets within a single project. Simply repeat the SHIFT + Click action on different empty slots in the Preset Palette for each configuration you want to save. This makes it easy to switch between different setups or musical ideas within the same project without losing any configurations.

Q: Why is exporting presets as JSON in moon.hands beneficial, and how does it affect the number of presets I can store?

A: Exporting presets as JSON files in moon.hands is highly beneficial because it provides an unlimited capacity for storing presets. To export, use the WRITE function in the preset management section to save your current configuration as a JSON file, which you can then import back into moon.hands or any other compatible system, making your workflow incredibly flexible and scalable.

Q: How do I sync track changes from Ableton Live to moon.hands?

A: To sync track changes such as names, colours, or order, simply hover your cursor over the Event Display in moon.hands. This action triggers a re-initialisation, ensuring your device reflects the latest changes from your Live Set.

Q: Can I use moon.hands without affecting my existing Ableton Live workflow?

A: Yes, moon.hands is designed to complement your existing workflow. It integrates seamlessly with Ableton Live, providing additional functionality without disrupting your current setup. However, for optimal use, utilise the Additional Transport Controls within moon.hands for playback and recording.

Q: What happens if I delete all events without saving a preset?

A: Deleting all events with the DELETE EVENTS button is a permanent action unless you have previously saved your configuration as a preset. If you haven't saved a preset, all your events will be lost, and you will need to recreate them.

Q: How can I manage multiple project setups with moon.hands?

A: moon.hands supports a comprehensive preset system where you can save, load, and export configurations. Use the WRITE function to export presets as JSON files, which can then be shared or used across different projects for consistent setups.

Q: Why don't the colours of my events change when I change track colours in Ableton Live?

A: Events in moon.hands do not automatically update their colour when you change track colours in Live because they are independent of track colour changes for consistency. To reflect new track colours, save your current setup as a preset, then reload the preset after making changes in Live.

Q: Can I use moon.hands in a live performance scenario?

A: Absolutely! moon.hands is well-suited for live performances due to its preset palette, which allows for quick switching between different configurations, enabling seamless transitions during your set.

Q: Is there a way to preview events before they happen in the timeline?

A: Yes, use the Tracking Offset feature to adjust the vertical playback line by a number of Bars. This allows you to monitor events before and after the current play position, giving you a preview of what's coming up or what just passed.

Q: Can I recover an event if I accidentally delete it?

A: No, once an event is deleted in moon.hands, it cannot be recovered unless you have saved it in a preset beforehand. Always save your work frequently, especially before making significant changes or deletions.

12. Appendix

Glossary

- **Event Block**: A visual representation of automated actions or events on the timeline within moon.hands. Each block can trigger specific functions like starting/stopping recordings, arming tracks, or playing clips at designated times.
- **Preset Palette**: A collection of saved configurations within moon.hands. This allows users to quickly switch between different setups or musical arrangements by recalling previously saved states of the interface and events.
- **Event Display**: The main workspace in moon.hands where users create, edit, and visualise events. It uses a Gantt-like interface where the horizontal axis represents time (Bars) and the vertical axis represents tracks from Ableton Live.
- **SCENE**: An element in moon.hands that displays the current Scene or Slot selection from the Ableton Live interface. It updates in real-time as you change scenes or slots, providing a reference point for your current context within your project.
- **OFFSET**: A feature that allows users to adjust the timing of the vertical playback line by a number of Bars. Useful for previewing events before or after the current playback position.
- **FOLLOW Button**: When activated, this button synchronises the moon.hands timeline with Ableton Live's transport, ensuring that the view in the Event Display follows the playback position in Live.
- **BARS LENGTH**: A display that shows the length of the currently selected or last created event in terms of Bars, helping users to manage the duration of their events.
- **BAR**: An input where users can manually select a specific Bar on the timeline to focus on or start playback from within moon.hands.
- **Horizontal Zoom**: A control that allows users to zoom in or out on the timeline, adjusting how many Bars are visible at once to facilitate both micro-level editing and macro-level overview of events.
- **Bar Timeline**: Represents the Bars along the horizontal axis of the Event Display, visually indicating the progression of time relative to events.
- **Additional Transport Controls**: These include Play, Stop, and Record buttons within moon.hands, designed for precise control over playback and recording, ensuring synchronisation with the events laid out in the Event Display.
- **DELETE EVENTS**: A button that permanently removes all events from the Event Display unless they were saved in a preset beforehand.

Support and Contact Information

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