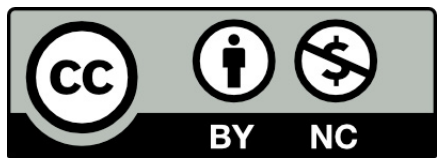
The Uncanny Sequencer

Alternative sequencer for rythm & harmony
for Ableton Live w/ Max for Live

Official documentation by Julien Bayle



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Introduction

Sequencers are *machines able to store & repeat sequences of elements*. Usually, we use the term sequencers for music sequencers.
Indeed, you have here a *music sequencer* in hands in the sense of you have a machine able to produce MIDI notes from its output.

Sequencers are often a big grid inside which you place notes, each note having at two carachteristics: its pitch (which means its frequency, more or less high) & its velocity (often mixed with a volume concept but more meaning the power with which you play it)
The note sits in a slot in the grid, usually name an interval or a time position.
You can play with the grid precision, in order to place each note easily on a 1/2nd or 1/3rd or 1/nth bar position.
But a not placed at some slot is played *everytime*.

With this sequencer, you'll discover a huge feature at the core of its engine: *probabilities*.
You can place a note at some slot plus a probability for this note.
That way, the note will be played, or not.
This is the stronger feature of this machine.

It is a full functionnal Max for Live MIDI FX Device machine useable in Ableton Live.

I'll hope you'll have fun using it both for rythmic & melody part in your composition.

PS: this version is a Creative Commons one that doesn't include any support as the former ones included.

Best wishes,
Julien

Installation

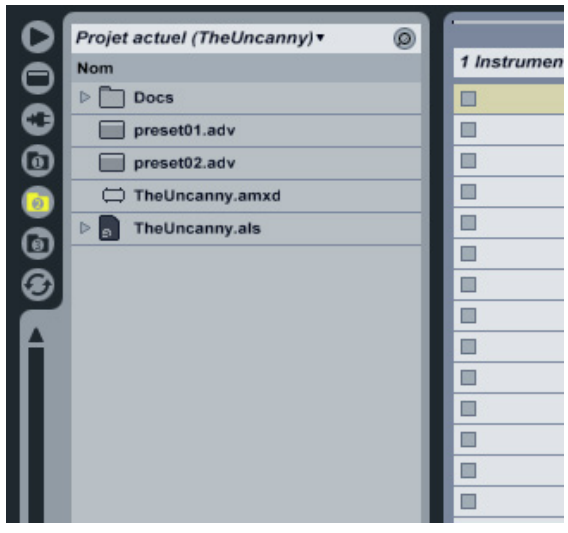
I guess you have just downloaded your device.

You are safe, there isn’t any complex installation process.
You can keep your file into the library, into an external folder, everywhere.
BUT you have to know each liveset will use a reference related to the place where the device was when you chose to use it.

Basically, it means you have to find it a nice place and not to try to move it everytime.
Ableton Live has a nice process feature that can retrieve lost parts quoted as reference in livesets, but it could be annoying for you.

Unzip the file.
You’ll see the device file you have to drag’n’drop into Ableton Live MIDI tracks: TheUncannySequencerV1.0.amxd

I’d suggest you to use the Ableton Live Browser feature to save/use presets and even to grab your device into you liveset.
There is also a powerful Built-In presets bank engine we’ll describe further



Ableton Live’s browser

Global Concepts

(inclure photos device + floating)

First things to know : which type of device is it ?

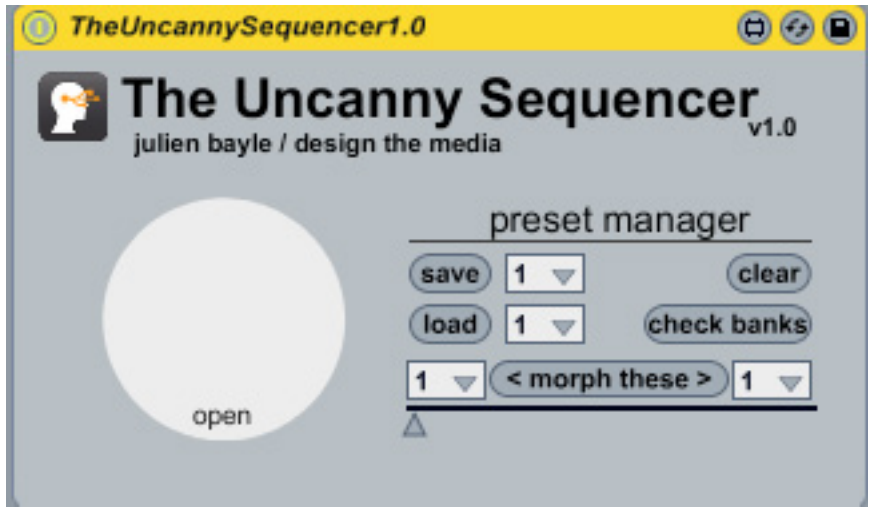
The sequencer is a Max for Live MIDI Fx device.
It means it can process MIDI messages.
In that case, this one fires MIDI Notes.

First things to do : where to put it ?

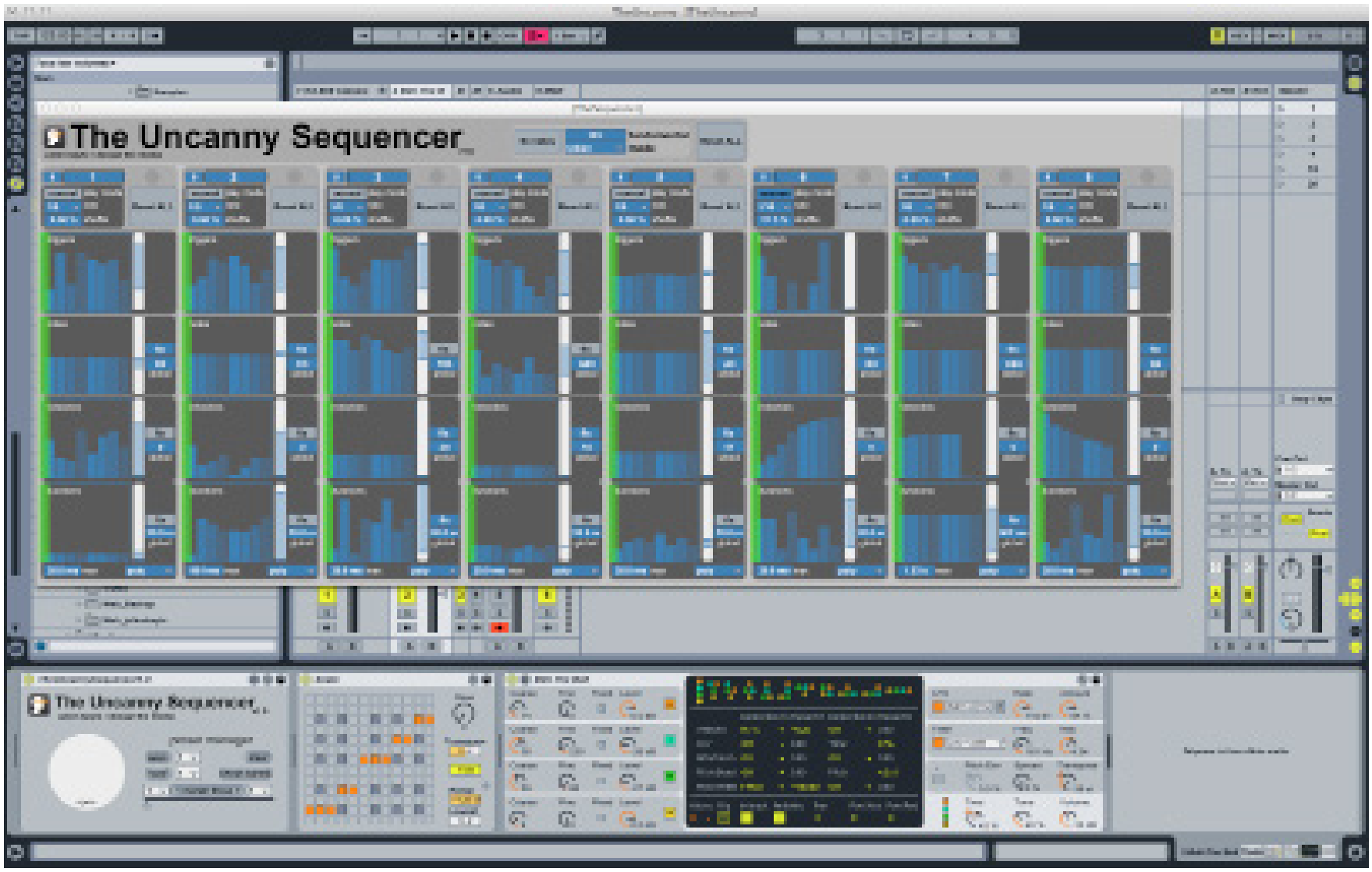
Grab the device into a MIDI track or into the place where there is not yet a track from the folder where you put it considering the choice you made in your installation.

You now have the sequencer in the track.
In order to save place, I designed it as a floating screen collapsible device.

To see the device, you have to click on the big white button on which it is written open the sequencer.



Collapsed view in the Device chain



Floating window over the Ableton Live GUI

First concepts to understand : probabilities ? what ??

A probability is a mathematic concept you probably already know.
It defines the % of risk/chance an event occurs.

If in Marseille there is a 5% risk of rain, it means that on a great number of days N, there would be (5xN/100) days of rain.
A value of 45% means there would be more rainy days than in Marseille.

But don't forget, I didn't ever write: 5 days of rain over 100 days. I wrote on a great number of days.

It means, even if there is a value of 99%, in the real world, it could only happen 1 time over 200 days.
It is a mathematic concept.

So, in our case, it is important.
The core of this sequencer is based on probabilistic triggers.

First global description

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Let's check the GUI first.
That sequencer shows 2 parts.

In the upper part, there are all global controls.
In the lower (but the larger), there are 8 repeated panels.
Each panel is a Channel Unit.

Becareful, *Channel Units* aren't related to *MIDI channel* concept at all.

Each Channel Unit is an element which fires MIDI messages (MIDI notes only, in the v1.0) to the output of the sequencer.
This MIDI messages are processed by the following device in the chain (which could be MIDI Fx or Instrument or Racks of Instruments) or, if there is no device, are sent to the MIDI output of the track according to the MIDI routing of that track.
It means you can also control external devices, software & hardware, with this sequencer from Ableton Live.

In the following, I'll use *channel* word for *channel unit.*

Parts description

The Channel Unit

This element is the most important.
This is the place where you define how a channel will behave.

First block at the top
At the top, on the first line, you can see 3 elements:
- a numbox where you can change the steps number of this channel,
- a blue box where you can mute/unmute this channel,
- a circle blinking each time a MIDI message is sent by this channel.

Then, under this first line, there is another block where there are:
- play mode (it can be normal or reverse ; this is the direction of the play for that channel)
- rate (this is the rate of that particular channel)
- shuffle amount (this is the shuffle for this channel ; more shuffle means, more uncertainty about timing)

Triggers probabilities map

The square box is called a multisliders box.
You can change each value inside by clicking.
You can change the steps number on the first numbox up above and you will see the number bars changing.

This part is the core of the concept.

This is the place where you define each step probability.
A very long bar means the trigger in this step will fire more often than a shorter bar.

You can draw your triggers probabilities map or you can also run a randomization algorithm to make that for you, according to the min & max values you have defined.
This is made by using the range bar on the right of the map.
No need to validate or anything else, just select the needed range containing the randomized values.

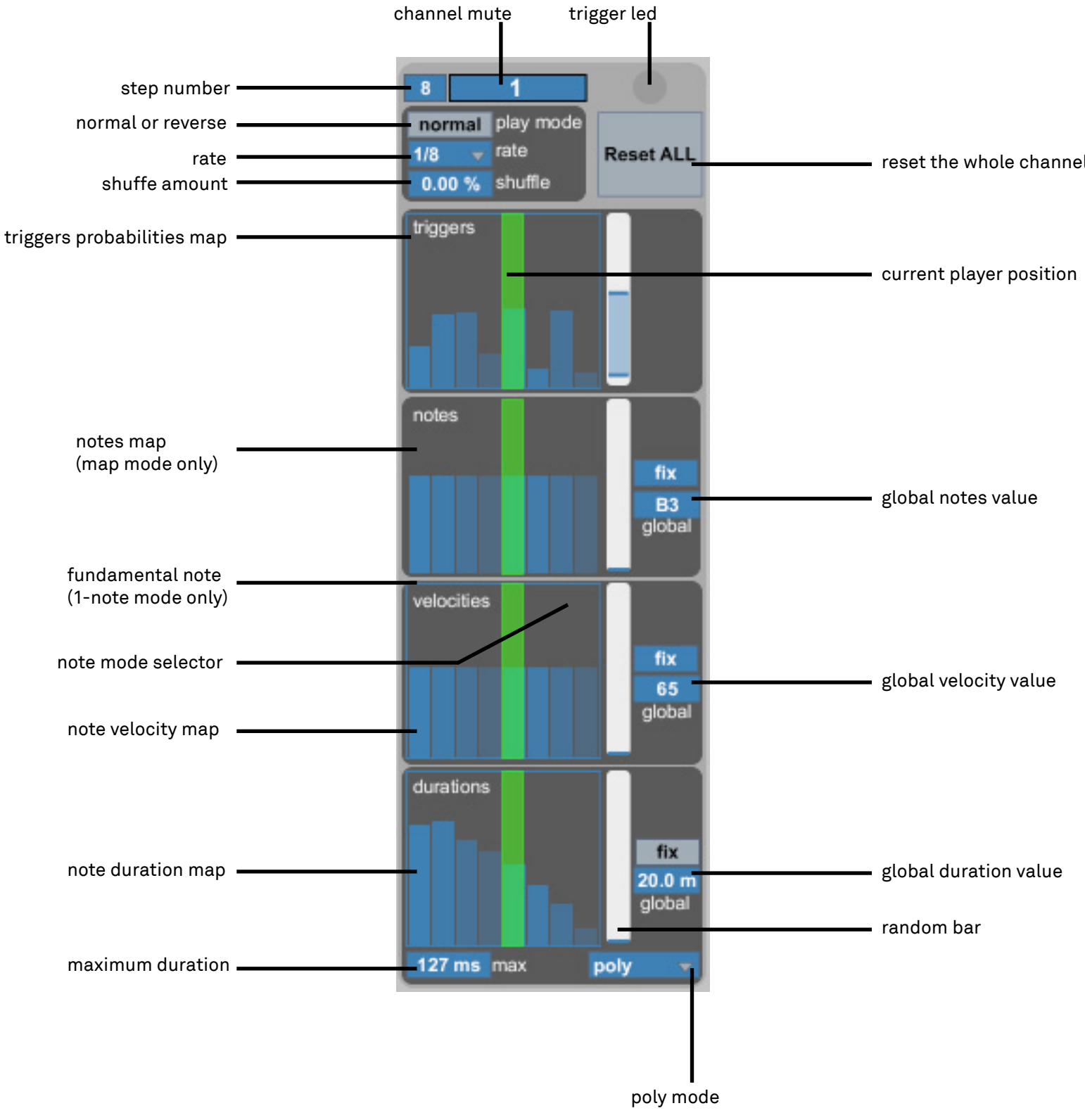
Notes map

The Notes map is placed under the triggers probability map.
Based on the same system, you have the Notes map where you can define which notes would be played in the case the trigger would trigger it, for each step.
You can also randomize them into a range defined with the range bar.

You can easily fix the note by clicking on the fix button and then use the numbox under the fix button to put ALL steps to the same note value.

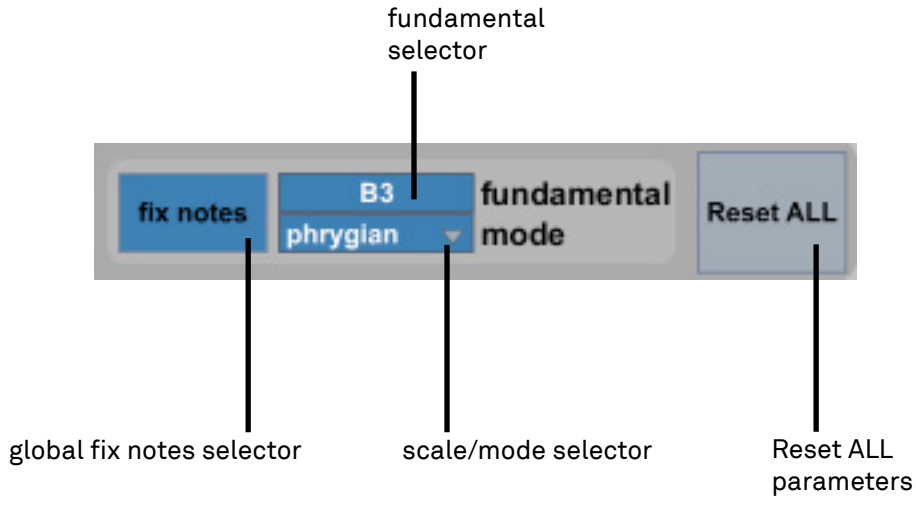
Note velocities map
This map works exacly as the notes map excepted it is related to another MIDI note parameter: the velocity.
You can also use the random bar to define an interval in-between all the random values will be contained.
You can easily fix the velocities by clicking on the fix button and then use the numbox under the fix button to put ALL steps to the same note value.

Note duration map
This map is related to the duration of each note triggered.
You can use the random bar to define an interval in-between all the random values of duration will be contained, but because there is no maximum absolute value for a note duration, a numbox is available to fix the maximum value of the related channel duration map.
It means: if you choose 50ms as the duration max, if you setup your note duration map with ALL values at the maximum, if a note is triggered, then it will last 50ms.
You can easily fix the durations by clicking on the fix button and then use the numbox under the fix button to put ALL steps to the same note value.



The Global Controls

The global controls panel is placed at the top of the sequencer.



The major trick to understand is the *fix notes* selector.
Using it, you can select **ONE NOTE ONLY** per channel.

This is a very new way of sequencing and you'll like it a lot !

It means : controlling a channel equals controlling this special note in your global sequence, making it playing more often, less, more stronger on this step or shorter on that other step.

Using the global control, you can choose the fundamental note, which sits into the *first channel*.
Then, you can select the diatonic mode and you'll see the next 7 notes correctly selected in the channels 2 to 8 according the fundamental in the channel 1

The diatonic mode can be
- ionian,
- dorian
- phrygian
- lydian
- mixolydian
- aeolian
- locrian
- major
- penta
- minor

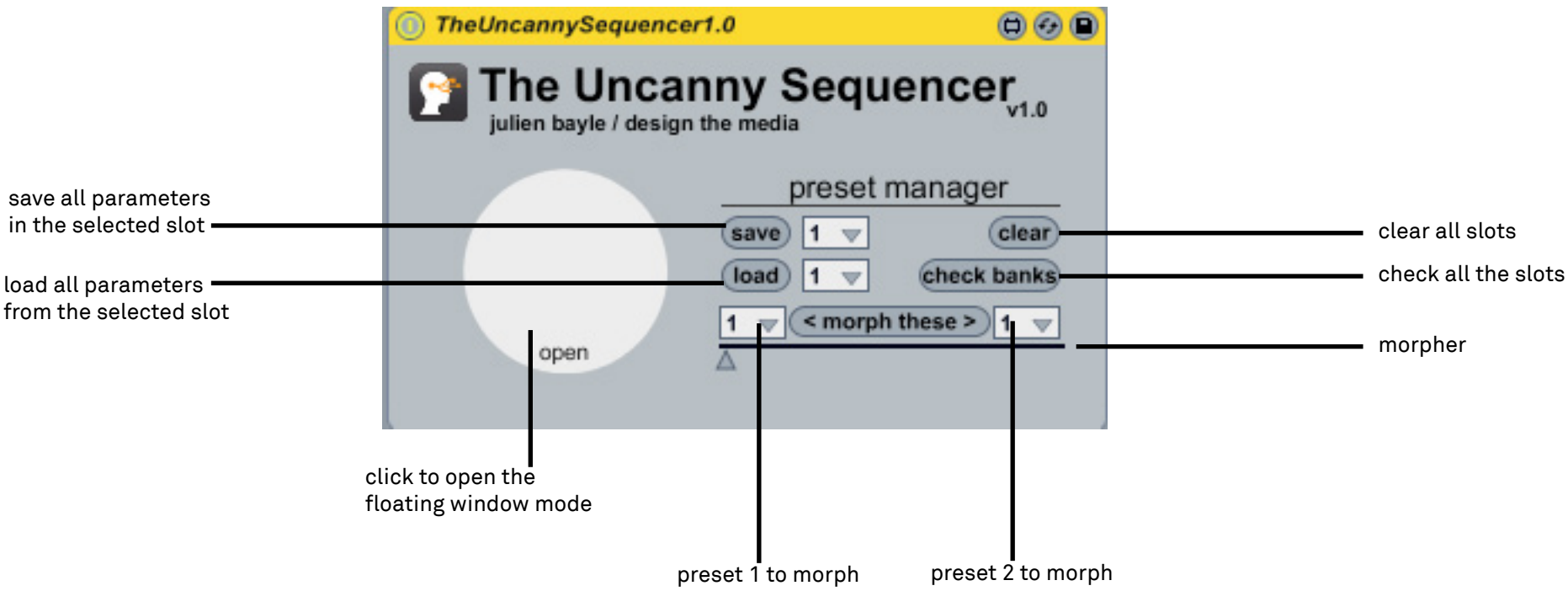
It is a nice way to play melodies, tweaking probabilities of each note (i.e of each channel) to be triggered.

When you aren't in Fix notes, you can play with notes exactly as you can do with the other tables:
putting this step to that note in this channel etc.

At this point, you should have understand this isn't a classic sequencer but a totally new & unique sequences generator, all in one max for live device !

The Presets Bank Engine

The Bank Engine is a powerful tool to save your presets directly



How to save a preset ?
You can save a preset by saving your live set.
If you need to save more than one preset, you can use the Presets Bank Engine.
Select the slot at the right of the save button, then click on *save*.

How to load a preset ?
Select the slot at the right of the load button, then click on load button itself.

How to check if a slot is filled ?
Click on *check banks* button.
You'll see a huge & beautiful table filled (or not) by numbers.

How to morph ?
It is very easy and powerful.
Select the 2 presets in the lists beside the < *morph these* > button.
Then, click on the < *morph these* > button.
At last: play with the *morpher* slider.

If you click on *check banks* button, then you play with the *morpher* slider, you'll see the two slots morphing.
It is cute.

How to use it ?

Rythms design

Here is a nice example of use of this sequencer.
Rythms in Ableton Live can be done in MANY ways, using one track per drum instrument, one track to trigger a drum rack used as a drum kit meaning you use one note per instrument which often mean one note per drum rack slot.
I will show you how to use the sequencer with a drum rack.

Let’s drop the sequencer in a MIDI track, and let’s drop a drum rack in the same chain, after the sequencer

At first, let’s remind us several concept.
A drum rack is a particular rack where each entering notes are sent to a particular slots.
It exist some cases where you can sent the same note to more than one slots ; this is more a workaround and won’t be discussed here.

It means, in our case, we can use the 1-note notes mode for each channels.
It also means the sequencer is a SO nice way to control each sequence visually.
Indeed, a clip contains all notes for all slots, here this is not the case.
You can have all under your eyes.

You have to define each note you want to use/trigger with the sequencer and define them into each sequencer’s channel.

Adjust velocities, then begin to play with probabilities + steps number to create polyrythms and strange quincunx rythmic textures.

Melodies design

If you want to compose strange & beautiful melodies, the sequencer is a pretty nice helpers too.
One of the multiple definition of a melody could be : it is structure containing many successives notes placed in a timeline.

With the sequencer, because each channel has its own timeline (including the number of steps), because you can choose the 1-note mode, you can build melodies.

First, select the 1-note mode for all the channels in the Global Controls.
Second, define & select each note for each channel. A HUGE helper is the fundamental & the mode in the Global Controls.

Because each channel is a note, because each channel has its own timeline, you can choose which note will be more present in your melodies, and when it will be more or less present.

It means you can really build rich & complex melodies which can be in this or that mode with this or that fundamental BUT which never play twice particular notes instead of playing some other notes more often.

The Uncanny Sequencer and The Scale native device

Place a Scale device at the output of The Uncanny Sequencer and it will add some melodic constraints which could be very amazing.
That way, you can choose some uncanny harmony inside the sequencer and you can control the scale outside.

Support

No support given.