

Polyphonic Aftertouch Performance Techniques

Introduction

Polyphonic aftertouch is one of Fourm's most expressive features, offering a direct and nuanced connection between your playing and our analog synthesis engine. It opens up new possibilities for articulation — from subtle dynamics to dramatic gestures — that go far beyond what's possible with other performance controllers.

Because polyphonic aftertouch is still relatively uncommon, there's not much guidance out there on how to use it effectively. That's why we've put together this list of techniques and ideas — and you don't need to be a virtuoso player to get great results. This guide is for anyone curious about what poly AT can bring to their music.

Some of these are specific playing approaches. Others are simple discoveries that emerge naturally once you've spent time with a poly aftertouch keyboard. The goal is to help you get the most out of Fourm, and to show how expressive and rewarding polyphonic aftertouch can be.

List of Techniques

Almost Bi-timbral

Use a patch where aftertouch opens the filter. Play a soft triad with your left hand, while applying firmer pressure to a melody line with your right to bring out a brighter sound. The contrast in timbre can create the illusion of a split — as if you're playing two distinct sounds at once.

Try it with:

06 Sakamo

29 More Than That

Arp Evolutions

Activate the arpeggiator and hold down three or four notes. As the pattern cycles, use polyphonic aftertouch to highlight individual notes by varying finger pressure. With two hands, it's even easier to lean into the note you want to emphasize, making it jump out of the sequence and add dynamic phrasing to the arp.

Try it with:

07 Mod My Arp

72 Plucky Arp (Also try changing the ARP MODE from Random to Down and transpose the keyboard -1 octave)

74 Toms

Arp Evolutions - Additional Notes

This technique gives your arpeggiated pattern a new kind of life — one that evolves dynamically, beyond the typical “hold and sweep the filter knob” approach applied across all notes.

Of course, you can apply pressure evenly across all held notes to create a unified modulation effect. While this can produce the familiar filter sweep, it becomes much more expressive when polyphonic aftertouch is routed to other parameters like amp level or LFO depth as well. It can feel like you're morphing the entire patch — but now with control per key as well.

Try it with:

30 Unisyncerizer (Setting it to ARP MODE Up instead of Seq Note)

Routing aftertouch to pitch can also yield unique results. You'll get ongoing bends on individual notes, adding articulation and movement that feels organic and unexpected.

Try it with:

42 Mini Prophet (Set to ARP MODE Up+Down 1 instead of Seq Note)

Tremolo on High

Tremolo and vibrato can add emotional depth to individual notes, but they often feel unstable on lower pitches. That's why bass guitarists rarely use vibrato, and why wide pitch modulation on low piano-style notes can make the tonal center feel wobbly or unfocused.

Polyphonic aftertouch offers a solution. Try holding a bass note — or a wide tenth — with your left hand, while playing a lead note, interval, or chord with your right. Then apply subtle vibrato or tremolo only to the higher notes using finger pressure. This keeps the low end grounded while adding tasteful movement to the top, creating a more refined and musical texture.

Try it with:

02 Four Keys

04 Eeee Peee

24 Organic Fourm

Pedal Meddle

Alternating bass notes in the left hand paired with rhythmic chords in the right is a staple of many keyboard styles. On larger keyboards, players often instinctively alternate octaves with the left hand to create motion and drive.

Polyphonic aftertouch adds a new twist: use aftertouch to modulate the pitch of the bass note down an octave, creating a pedal tone effect that oscillates beneath your chords. Meanwhile, your right hand can play freely — chords, melodies, or rhythmic patterns — without affecting their pitch. This lets you maintain clarity and separation between bass and harmony, even within Fourm's compact key range.

Try it with:

24 Organic Fourm (Assign Aftertouch to Freq A and B then set the Amount knob to modulate one octave down. Also, try a negative 4th!)

Peddle Meddle – Additional Notes

For added variation, hold a bass note with your left hand while playing a triad with your right. Then shift the triad up an octave while keeping the bass note steady.

Try it with:

42 Mini Prophet

Bass Underlay

On a unison patch — especially for bass — hold a low pedal note with your left hand. Then play short, rhythmic bursts with your right hand over the sustained note. Keep the left-hand note held so the unison action continually returns to the original pitch between bursts, anchoring the sound.

Use polyphonic aftertouch to dig in on the right-hand notes, adding emphasis and articulation without affecting the steady low note. This creates a dynamic contrast between the grounded bass and the expressive accents — a texture that feels more alive than typical unison stabs.

Try it with:

49 Br0 Presh Bazr

Long Release

When playing presets with long envelope releases, global modulation sources like mono aftertouch or a mod wheel can unintentionally affect notes that are still ringing out — often in ways that you don't want.

Polyphonic aftertouch solves this by letting you keep those long release notes untouched, providing a stable sonic backdrop. Meanwhile, you can apply expressive modulation — even extreme articulations — to newly played notes layered on top. This keeps your sound grounded while still allowing for dynamic, per-note expression.

Try it with:

16 Lonely Star

B-Bender Style Pitch Articulation

Guitarists often bend one note while holding others steady — using fingers, B-benders, or pedal steel mechanisms — to create that expressive, twangy guitar sound. You can achieve a similar effect on Fourm by routing polyphonic aftertouch to pitch and setting the bend range to just 2 or 3 semitones, mimicking the pitch shifts common in guitar playing.

Hold two keys and apply aftertouch to just one of them. The bent note moves expressively while the other remains stable, creating a convincing and musical articulation. It takes a bit of finesse to hit pitches accurately across a wide range, but with a carefully tuned bend range, the result is a satisfying and guitar-like phrasing — now under your fingertips.

Try it with:

12 FingerTimbres (Turn off Aftertouch to LFO FRQ and turn it on for FREQ A and B.)

Complex Modulation

Add depth and movement to simple patches by routing polyphonic aftertouch to bring in evolving LFOs per voice. This breathes life into the sound, allowing each note to develop independently and organically. Even a basic patch can feel rich and animated, with subtle variations that respond to your touch.

Try it with:

83 A Square Deal

15 Sensitive Soul

Pressure Play

When routed to filter and amplitude, polyphonic aftertouch allows you to bring in notes using individual key pressure, offering precise control over each note's attack, body, and release. It takes a sensitive touch and a well-tuned keyboard response curve, but the results can be deeply expressive.

To use this technique, position your fingers on the keys before activating the notes. Then, apply pressure selectively to fade notes in or out at different rates. This gives you dynamic control over each voice, letting you shape phrases in a way that feels almost acoustic — like breathing life into each note.

Try it with:

39 Floot (Turn off unison and assign Aftertouch to FILT and AMP, then turn the Amount knob all the way up.)

125 Hyper Duck

34 Cello Requiem (Turn the Aftertouch Amount knob all the way up.)

Subtle Expression

Not every use of aftertouch needs to be bold or dramatic. With more restrained settings, polyphonic aftertouch can add gentle nuance and evolution to a sound. By gradually increasing pressure on individual keys, you can introduce subtle changes in tone — shaping each note with a sense of quiet intention. It's a simple way to make even static patches feel more alive.

Try it with:

86 Echo repeat

66 Slow Fourm

Chord Roll

Polyphonic aftertouch can add a new dimension to chord arpeggiation and strumming techniques. One approach is to roll your hand from the wrist varying the pressure across the keys — a motion that can help trigger aftertouch in a fluid, expressive way.

At the other end of the spectrum, you can apply pressure deliberately to individual notes, engaging aftertouch per key for more precise articulation.

But it doesn't have to be one or the other — combining both approaches can yield expressive results, blending natural movement with intentional control.

Try it with:

08 Fourmer Brass

29 More Than That

Negative Modulation

Polyphonic aftertouch often brings sound elements in — but it can also take them away. Try routing poly AT negatively to parameters like filter cutoff, amp level, or LFO amount to remove elements from the sound, or even silence it entirely.

This shifts the gesture from creating sound to muting it, which can change how you think about playing. Instead of triggering a note, you're controlling its absence — and that can lead to unexpected musical ideas.

Try it with:

48 Jovia Luna

109 Depth Charge MW

Slight Vibrato

You can get a natural vibrato effect by modulating pressure while holding sustained notes. It's not always easy to control pressure evenly just by pressing up and down on the keys — especially for subtle modulation.

Instead, try gently wagging your arm side-to-side while holding the note. This motion naturally introduces slight vertical pressure changes, resulting in a smooth vibrato that feels intuitive and expressive — often closer to what you intended than trying to push a key directly.

Try it with:

12 FingerTimbres

51 Ana-Strangz

LFO Notes

Use a saw-shaped LFO to create a repeating envelope-like modulation, then bring it in selectively using polyphonic aftertouch. This lets you apply rhythmic motion — like pulsing amplitude or filter sweeps — to specific notes of your choosing.

You might use this to build a repeating bass line to solo over, but you're not limited to that. Try layering rhythmic chords over a steady drone or explore any combination in between. It's a powerful way to add motion and complexity to your playing, one note at a time.

Try programming a sound that does this:

1. Press TRANSPOSE down and PROGRAM at the same time to call up a Basic Program.
2. In the MODULATION section, change the blue LFO button to red and make sure the Amount knob is set to 0.
3. In the MODULATION DESTINATIONS section, turn the CUTOFF button red (the cutoff label appears below the button).
4. In the AFTERTOUCH section, turn FILT off and turn LFO AMT on, then turn the aftertouch AMOUNT knob to 2:00.
5. In the LOW FREQUENCY OSCILLATOR section, turn the SAW shape on and the TRI shape off.
6. *If you play a note with aftertouch now, you'll hear a faint rhythmic pattern. Now let's adjust the filter to make that more prominent.*
7. In the Filter section, press the KEY TRACK button so that it lights up.
8. Turn the CUTOFF knob straight up to 12:00.

That's it! Now you have a sound that supports explorations of the LFO Notes technique. From here you can name it and save it to a User Bank program slot or continue to edit it to taste.

Conclusion

We hope this guide has been helpful — but this is just the beginning. As you spend more time with Fourm, we're sure you'll discover even more polyphonic aftertouch techniques that feel uniquely yours.