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Music that Fits in Your Pocket

# Harmonica Foundations

(for a musical life)



with Hal Walker



Harmonica Lessons for the Whole Family

# Special thanks to all the people who made this educational series possible...

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# Introduction

Hello! Welcome to **Music that Fits in Your Pocket -- Harmonica Foundations** (*for a musical life*). If you want to learn to play the harmonica, you've come to the right place! My name is Hal Walker and I've been carrying a harmonica in my pocket for about 35 years now. Over the last 15 years, I've developed a very unique and powerfully effective system for teaching beginners. I'm so pleased to be sharing this method with you now.

My hope is to provide you with a foundation for a *lifetime* of playing the harmonica. I want to get you making real music as quickly as possible and I want to help you express the music that's inside of you. *Whoever you are...*whether you're a kid, a teenager, a middle aged guy like me or a great grandmother twice my age, I created this method for you. For those of you that have no musical experience, you're in the right place. For you non-beginners and even intermediate players, *if you practice the techniques in this series*, your playing will be transformed. New ways of expressing yourself with the harmonica will unfold.

The concepts that I'm offering you here are things that I wish someone had told me back in 3rd grade - when my dad gave me my very first harmonica. These are foundational secrets that I've developed in over 15 years of teaching *mass harmonica lessons* in schools around Ohio. I walk into a school, pass out 150 harmonicas in the key of C and a few days later, every single one of those kids has a solid foundation upon which to build a lifetime of music making.

Thanks to the inspiration of JP Allen and the folks at [www.harmonica.com](http://www.harmonica.com), I'm finally making this method available to the public. Throughout the series, you'll hear me inviting the *whole family* into this process of learning. I want to be clear that I'm using family in the *big* sense of the word. Whoever you are, no matter your age, your musical ability or your cultural background, I'm including you. This method can be used in living rooms, retirement centers, elementary schools, colleges, prisons and community centers. I invite everyone... grab your key of C harmonica and come gather around the big screen. Let's take this musical adventure together.



I confess... I've spent a lot of time sitting in front of the computer watching video tutorials all by myself...it's one of my favorite pleasures. Most likely, that's how you'll engage in this series. It's totally practical and completely acceptable. But I challenge you! Invite a harmonica buddy over to learn with you. Learning a musical instrument with others is such a great way for people of all generations to connect. I offer you this opportunity to invite someone to share in the musical adventure that is ahead of you.

The whole method is based upon one idea-- If you stop to think about it, In all of life, there are really only two choices... breathe in or breathe out. Now, that may be an oversimplified view of life, but in the world of harmonica playing, it's not. The whole system is based upon the idea that for all beginning players, there are really only 2 choices -- **Blow and Draw**. Sometimes I refer to them as "push" and "pull" or "breathe out" and "breathe in." Hear this...

*The first step in learning to play the harmonica is knowing when to blow and when to draw... what it sounds and feels like to blow...what it sounds and feels like to draw.  
We are in the business of making music with the breath.*

For a guy like me, this is exciting information. I love things are simple. I love things that go directly to the core... things that go straight to the heart and the soul. Well, the heart and soul of the harmonica is the breath.... the push and the pull, the blow and the draw.

I'm here to help you find ways to express the music that's inside of you -- the music that lives and breathes in your mind, in your body and in your soul. It's your own music. It's music that may not sound like anybody else's and its music that you may not even have known is in there. Whatever form it takes, I want to help you express yourself-- musically. These are more than just harmonica lessons... these are the building blocks on your path to becoming an artist, a sculptor of sound... a harmonica player

In this series, I offer a clear and profoundly effective method for teaching beginners. When you've completed this series, you'll have the tools to teach another beginner. I encourage you to go out there and find somebody with whom to share what you've learned!

So, are you ready? Let's get started. Get that C harmonica out of your pocket and get ready to play along. Use this companion to clarify along the way. And remember this... "the only way to learn to play the harmonica... is to play the harmonica." It's true!

*Hal Walbre*



# Lesson One

## A Musical Adventure

Lesson One begins with a story and ends with an adventure.

I received my first harmonica in 3rd grade. I learned 2 songs and then spent the next 10 years performing those 2 songs at our annual family gatherings in Birmingham Alabama. I played O Susana and Amazing Grace. I got to where I sounded pretty good on those 2 songs, but I had no idea how to make my own music. To tell you the truth, I don't think I had much of an idea that "my own" music even existed. As a kid, I took 10 years of traditional piano lessons and for the most part, learned that music comes from the written page.

When I went away to college at Northwestern University, I started carrying a harmonica with me on my solo adventures into Chicago. Walking down the city streets, I would improvise. I'd just make it up as I walked along. Through those 10 holes, I played nothing but blows and draws. As I got lost in the city, I was starting to find my way around that harmonica. I'd seek out empty stairwells and parking garages in search of good, live acoustics and big reverb. Avoiding my studies, I was discovering myself as a musician.

Who would have thought that some 25 years later, I'd be making my living as a professional harmonica player, teaching 1000's of beginning students and creating this cutting edge tutorial. You never know, do you?

So, I'm inviting you to go on a musical adventure. Spend a few minutes or a few days or a few months finding out what you can discover on your own. Carry that harmonica with you wherever you go and when you sense that there may be some music swelling up inside of you, break it out and start see what happens. Blowing and drawing, approach that harmonica like a child, hearing the sound for the first time. Breathe into it. Blow and draw. Push and pull. Be patient with yourself and see what unfolds. Then come back and tell us what happened.

**Play Loud. Play Soft. Play Fast.**  
**Play Slow. Play Low. Play High.**

## ... But before you go

- You should have a 10 hole diatonic harmonica. We will all be playing harmonicas in the key of C.
- Pick up the harmonica (harp) in your left hand and find the numbers. When you play, make sure the *numbers are on top*.
- There are many ways to hold a harmonica. When I play, my grip is constantly changing. But to start, I suggest you hold it in your left hand with the numbers on top. Index finger on top... thumb on bottom.
- There are many ways to hold a harmonica. When I play, my grip is constantly changing. But to start, I suggest you hold it in your left hand with the numbers on top. Index finger on top... thumb on bottom.

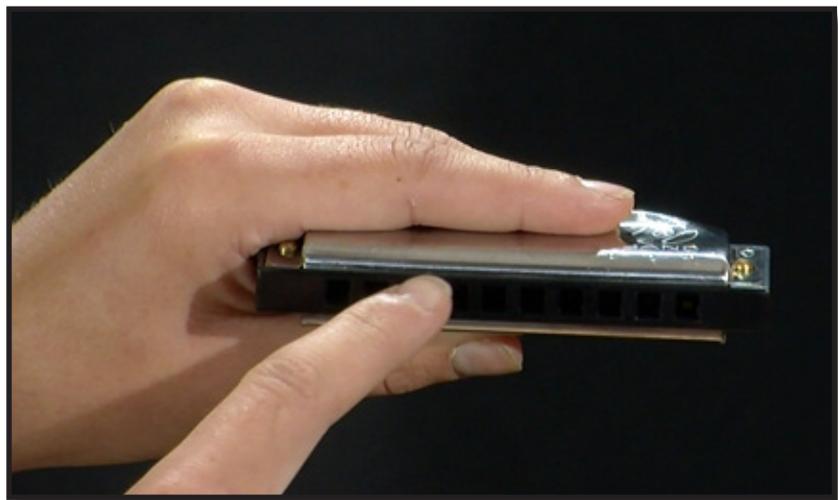


on top. Index finger on top... thumb on bottom.

- The harmonica is not a dainty instrument and it's not an instrument that you share with your next door neighbor. You need to plant that harmonica deep in your mouth. Play with loose lips, a relaxed mouth and cover about 3 or 4 holes.

- My Dad used to say that there are only two places for your shoes. Either on your feet or in your closet. Well, I say there are only 2 places for your harmonica. Either in your mouth or in your pocket. :)

Through play and experimentation  
How much can you discover on your own?



# Lesson Two

## Hand Motions!

As you know by now, Harmonica Foundations (for a musical life) is based upon the breath - the blow and the draw, the push and the pull. Right from the start, we harmonica players are in the business of making music with the breath. All harmonica playing begins with these 2 choices- Blow and Draw.

Our breathing is powered by one of the largest muscles in the body - a huge dome of a muscle called the thoracic diaphragm. At this point, I'd like to make it clear. My name is Hal Walker and I'm here to teach your diaphragm how to make music.

Now, I'm sure that you're eager to start playing and you might think that you can just skip over this lesson called "Hand Motions." Please don't! Of all the practices in this series, I believe what I'm about to share with you to be the most foundational and the most transformative. Hand motions work!

My students begin their study by becoming very familiar with these hand motions. Practicing hand motions, you will progress quickly. Hand motions illustrate the dance of the diaphragm. Hand motions kinesthetically teach the brain what it feels like to blow and what it feels like to draw. For over 15 years, I've been teaching large groups of students of all ages to play the harmonica and I have been blown away by the *effectiveness* of hand motions. No other harmonica method uses them like I do. In fact, I believe in hand motions so much that I'm certain I will drive you crazy with my constant reminders. :)

Before you play any song on the harmonica, you should practice the hand motions. When the hand motions are mastered, playing the song comes almost instantly. You'll see. So here's the rule...

### **Hand Motions at ALL times!**

This is the secret ingredient. This is the one thing that I wish someone had shown me 35 years ago when my dad gave me my first harmonica. Give it a try. See how long it takes for hand motions to transform your harmonica playing.

**The first step in learning to play the harmonica is knowing when to blow and when to draw. Hand motions do a great job teaching that.**

## Important Tips for Good Hand Motions!

- Sit up straight with your hands raised, elbows bent and shoulders relaxed.
- Say “Blo” or “Buh” as you push away. Say “Draw” or “D” as you pull back.
- Hand motions are more appropriately called “arm motions.” The hands stay relaxed, merely following the motion of the arms. There is no need to point with your fingers, just push and pull.
- Try doing hand motions with one arm and then try with both arms together.
  - Try to connect the breathing mechanism to your hand motions. Imagine that you’re pushing a big ball of muscle and air. Feel the push and the pull of the **thoracic** diaphragm. (Notice incorrect spelling in video)
  - Unless you’re illustrating a short, quick attack of breath, your hand motions should not be jerky.
  - Make your hand motions smooth and flowing. Pay attention to the place where the blow and the draw meet. This smooth push and pull of hand motions illustrates smooth “legato” playing.
  - Turn your hand motions into a dance.
  - How musical can you be with your hand motions? How precise? How dramatic? How compassionate? How subtle? How internal? How much power can you create with your hand motions?
  - By practicing hand motions, you can learn without even having a harp with you. When you’re walking along a city street or riding your bicycle one handed down a country road, see how much music you can make with nothing but hand motions and spoken “Blo-d-blo-d-blows.”

Turn  
those  
hand  
motions  
into a  
dance!



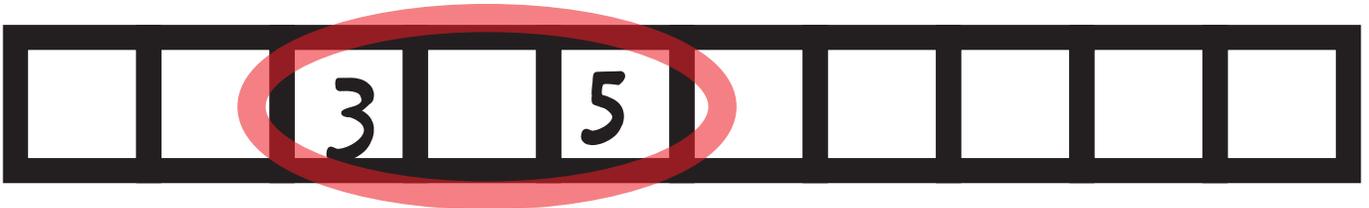
# Lesson Three

## Blow and Draw

OK. It's time to get your lips back on that harmonica. Hold the harp in your left hand with the numbers on top. Your right hand should be free to do hand motions. Breathe from the bottom of your belly. For now, play with loose lips, a relaxed mouth and cover about 3 holes.

**A quick note to Left Handers** -- Some of my left-handed students prefer to hold the harmonica in their right hand and use the left hand for hand motions. Others have no trouble playing the way I do. I encourage you to experiment with both ways and choose which feels most natural to you.

We begin right in the middle of the harmonica -- right around holes #3,4, 5 and 6. Remember, "Loose Lips - Relaxed Mouth - Covering about 3 holes." *Use a relaxed breath and make a big sound.* For



most people, blowing into the harmonica comes very naturally. But "drawing" air in from the harmonica is much less natural. I often compare the "draw" to drinking a milkshake through a big straw. Pull the air up from the milkshake. Try it without your harmonica. Make a big slurping sound while you drink the air in *with a powerful hand motion* drawing toward you.

Most of the lessons in this series have an "I Go then You Go" (IGYG) format. As you imitate my playing, stay with the steady beat and pay attention to the following important points...

- Notice how my hand motions are connected to my breathing.
- Notice how I am "sculpting" the sound with my hand motions.
- Sit up straight and breathe from the bottom of your belly.
- If you get light headed, you can take a break from playing, but keep the hand motions going!

What a great challenge! Restricting yourself to nothing but hand motions, blows, draws and a big mouth covering about 3 holes, *how much music can you make?* How much feeling can you express? How much musical satisfaction can you create? What a cool exercise! Why don't you give it a try. You're brand new to the harmonica and you've got all kinds of music inside of you. How much of that music can you release with only 2 choices? I can't wait to hear how it goes.

**How much music can you make with nothing but two choices ?**

## Blow and Draw

# Lesson Four

## Improvisation

When I was a kid, I took 10 years of traditional piano lessons. At that time, I thought that the music lived on the printed page. Outside of the particular piece that I was working on, I had no idea how to make *my own* music. It wasn't 'till I went away to college that I was introduced to the world of improvisation. I met a guy named Charles Cannon from New Orleans. He had jet black hair and wore black capes and he improvised on the black keys of the piano. He could make up music right there on the spot. I thought it was so cool.

I began finding out that there was music inside of me and I didn't need a piece of paper to tell me what to play. I discovered for the first time something called jam sessions with other musicians and I started carrying a harmonica with me everywhere I went.

A major emphasis in this series is to guide you in finding the music that's within yourself. The harmonica is a wonderful tool for letting that music out. Several times already, I've invited you to improvise music. I've invited you to make it up as you go. I know that this is not easy. At first, it may seem very unsatisfying -- like you just don't know what to do. Keep going anyway and see what happens.

I'd like to introduce you to my 4 insights for improvisation. These are helpful things to think about while you making up music off the top of your head. I've been improvising solo harmonica for a long time and these are things that have helped me. On the video, when Lacey and I do our improvisations, we don't have any written music in front of us and we aren't trying to play songs off the radio. We are attempting in some small way to express the music inside of ourselves with tools that, at this point, are very limited. So far, we really have just 2 choices-- Blow and Draw.

Over the course of this title.. one step at a time, we're gonna be introducing more choices. We'll gradually be opening up the doors of musical possibility. In the next lesson, we'll focus on down and up... later we'll add exciting rhythms with something called the "toot toodley toodles." Pretty soon, you'll be jamming the blues with me backing you up on the guitar. (Stay tuned at [www.harmonica.com/hal](http://www.harmonica.com/hal))



# Hal's Four (+1) Insights for Improvisation

## Insight #1 Keep it Simple

Be willing to keep it very simple. At this point, we are just exploring the push and the pull of the breath. When we keep it simple, we can pay attention to “what it sounds and feels like to blow and what it sounds and feels like to draw.” We can pay attention to the subtleties of the the breath. Again the question arises... how can we turn these few simple choices into expressive music that satisfies the soul.

## Insight #2 Find a Steady Beat

Music happens in time and we humans crave a steady beat. Maybe it comes from listening to our mother's steady heartbeat in the womb. So, before you even start playing, set a beat. Whether it be stepping softly side to side or tapping your toe up and down, make it steady. Whether it be fast or slow, a 3/4 waltz or a 4/4 march, keep it simple. A good way to tell if you have a steady beat is if other people are tapping there toes to your music... Music with a steady beat makes people wanna move.

## Insight #3 When you like something, repeat it!

Repetition is a great tool for improvisation. It feels good to hear something familiar. I remember when my daughter was a toddler, we would watch these shows for toddlers on PBS. The shows were all about repetition and little Hallie liked it. If its constantly changing, it's hard to find something to hold onto. So, when you play a riff, a phrase of music or a Blo-D-Blo-D-Blo that you like, play it again. Play it a few times and turn it into a groove. As you repeat a phrase over and over, let it change slightly and you may find something that you like even better.

## Insight #4 Create a beginning, middle and an end

I have nothing against an all night jam session, but this rule will help guide you as you create music on the spot. This will helps give some form to your improvisation. Along the way, stay relaxed and mindful -- *“hm... how should this piece to start... Ok that's done...now... what should I try next... I'm in the middle now... hm... and how should I wrap this up for a closing...”* -- Or just play all night and stop when the sun comes up. :)

## Insight #5 Don't forget to listen

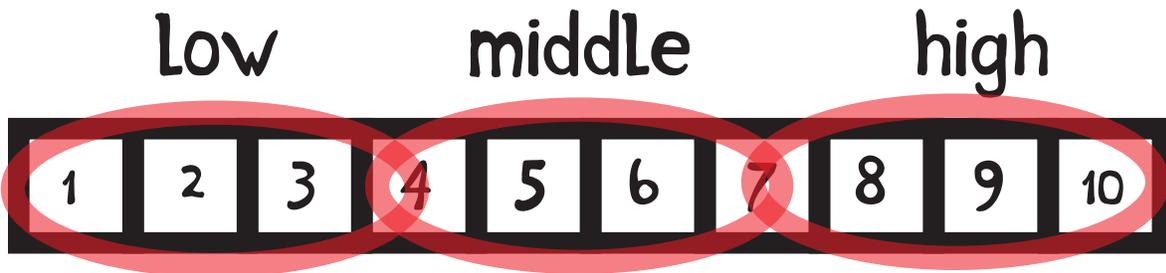
Music is more than a physical experience. It's an aural experience. Listen to the sound that you are making! If you are “jamming” with someone else, make sure that you can hear that person. Possibly more important than what you play is how you listen. And it takes lots of practice.

# Lesson Five

Now that we're familiar with Blow and Draw, it's time to add two more choices....

**Down** and **Up**

Up until this point, we haven't paid too much attention to the numbers on the harmonica. We've been primarily concerned about the push and pull of the breath. Not until the very end of this series will we start thinking about what specific hole to blowing into. For now, let's divide the harmonica into 3 regions.



Let's call holes 1, 2 and 3 Low. We'll call 4,5,6 and 7 middle. 8,9 and 10 will be high. As you play along on the video, you'll have to listen. When I play low, you play low. When I play high, you play high. When I go from low to high, you go from low to high.

## A new dimension to the hand motions - a new complication

At this point, we add a new dimension to the hand motions. We begin illustrating the low and the high with our hands. Low is down and to the left. High is up and to the right. This adds a new complication to our video lessons. Because we are facing each other, the placement of our low and high is opposite. I hope this issue doesn't cause you too much trouble.



The world is opening up to you. Now you have 4 choices.

**Blow**

**Draw**

**Down**

**Up**

# Learning to Lead (a note to teachers)

The great thing about this particular method is that no matter your age or your level of experience, you can lead others in the process of learning to play the harmonica. I have experienced such satisfaction watching elementary age students brand new to the harmonica lead an entire gymnasium full of children in "I Go then You Go" (IGYG) blows and draws, or hand motions. While you are leading others, you are improving your own skills. Leading others develops your sense of rhythm, your improvisation skills, your leadership skills and your overall comfort with this musical instrument. I encourage you -- go find a kid or a friend or a cousin or a grandmother or round up the entire neighborhood and teach them everything that I've taught you so far. When I lead "Mass Harmonica Lessons," I keep in the mind the following tips:

## Keep it Simple!

Keep it very simple. Be sure to offer phrases that are simple enough that you can lead them precisely with clear and accurate hand motions.

## Use Clear Hand Motions

Stand up tall and be very clear with your hand motions

## Keep a Steady Rhythm

Most importantly, when you are leading 4-beat phrases of IGYG music, you must keep the beat moving forward. To practice, try marching around the house counting 1,2,3,4 1,2,3,4 to the beat of your step. It's important that the leader's musical phrase begins on ONE and that the followers repeat the phrase on the very next ONE. Then the leader comes in again on the very next ONE. Don't stop! Get a flow going.

## No Individual Tooting - (N.I.T.)

When I am leading others in short IGYG phrases of music, I insist that they "only play when I'm asking you to play." In order to move the teaching forward, it's very important that after the group plays, it is silent. Not a single toot. In a fun and funny way, I'm very strict about this rule. "You have your entire life to toot whenever you feel like tooting, but in this class, you may only toot when I ask you to toot."

## Offer Breaks for Practice

To counter my insistence that individuals make no sound unless it's with the group as a whole, I offer regular breaks where students can practice on their own. This allows groups (especially children) to explore all the noises a harmonica can make.

# Lesson Six

## Introducing: A Simplified System of Musical Notation

At this point in your playing, you need only be concerned with “when to blow” and “when to draw.” To illustrate this on the page, we will be using two symbols.

**Blow** = 

Blow is a simple dash. Imagine that you’re blowing a single stream of air.

**Draw** = 

Draw is an open circle. Imagine that as you breathe in, your lungs are opening, like an open circle.

## How do I know which holes to blow into?

Good question. At this point, your main concern should be connecting the hand motions to big strong blows and draws. The songs that we will be playing sound good wherever you are on the harmonica, so just do your best to imitate my playing in the video. When I play high, you play high. When I play low, you play low. I encourage you to “use your ears” to determine whether you should be playing low, middle or hi.

Don't let the notation bog you down... at this point

**We're Just Pumping Air**

# The Harmonica **Revolution**

When I started teaching mass harmonica lessons back in the late 90's... I came up with this idea of the Harmonica Revolution of the 21st Century. I imagined large groups of harmonica players marching through the streets - celebrating the harmonica. I actually set a date for the Million Harmonica March on Columbus, Ohio. A million harmonica players marching together playing a simple marching tune -- Turkey in the Straw.

Back in 1998, I would say to my students, Let's meet on May 1st, 2010 on the steps of Ohio's capital... we'll march together and we'll celebrate music. Well, 2010 came and went, but JP Allen and I still talk about making it happen someday. But we're thinking even bigger...

## The "Million Harmonica March on Washington."

During our filming of Lesson 6, Lacey and I even set a date for the march. May 1st, 2020. Of course, 2020 will be here before we know it and this kind of event would take tremendous planning and organizing. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure that I'm the one to make it happen. But you never know...it doesn't hurt to plant a seed :) Who's in?

## Turkey in the Straw

*Turkey in the Straw* is the ideal song for beginners and a great song for marching. Learn this tune and come join in on the march... even its just a *metaphorical* march -- all of us out in the world playing the harmonica, spreading the good word of the harmonica, teaching others what we have learned on the harmonica and making this world a better place.

## Follow these steps to learn your first song

1. Sing the song to get the melody in your head.
2. Sing the "Blo-d-blos" with hand motions.
3. Do not try to play it until the hand motions are mastered!
4. Play with hand motions

# Turkey in the Straw

 do	 your	 ears		 hang		 low
 do	 they	 wob-	 ble	 to	 and	 fro
 can	 you	 tie-em		 in-a		 knot
 can	 you	 tie-em		 in-a		 bow
 can	 you	 throw-em		 over	 your	 shoulder
 like	 a	 Con-	 ti-	 nen-	 tal	 soldier
 do	 your	 ears		 hang	 low	

# Lesson 7

## The Toot Toodley Toodles

Did you know that the tongue is considered to be the strongest muscle in the body? With a little bit of help from the tongue, we can turn big chords, blows, draws, down and up into some serious music. *Tonguing* is the rhythm section of the harmonica experience. With great precision, we use tonguing to add rhythmic interest to our big chords.

- Say, "Toot toodle loo too too."
- Or... "toodle loodle loodle loodle loo too too"

Now.. rather than saying the words, breath these syllables through a blow or a draw. Try it first *without* the harmonica!

## Tonguing and Hand Motions

It's important to note that hand motions are meant to illustrate the BREATH, not the rhythm. In the video, you'll notice that my hand motions maintain a steady flow out when I am blow a long blow of tongue rhythm. Please don't try to illustrate every pulse of the tongue with the hand motions. Just illustrate the push and the pull of the diaphragm.



Create musical power with hand motions  
and the drumsticks of the tongue!

# Lesson 8

## Introducing the Blues

And now for the moment we've all been waiting for... the Blues. The blues is characterized by sculpting the sound as you pull air in from the gut. This is called bending the notes. With strong direct pulls powered by the diaphragm and a slight change in the shape of the mouth, you use a stream of air to dig into that harp and to create a soulful bluesy sound. This is when the harmonica begins to make that ancient cry from the soul.

I first discovered the blues when I went away to college in 1984. I got ahold of Jon Gindick's book, *Harmonica for the Musically Hopeless*. I learned a few riffs and the train whistle and I started wandering around Chicago in search of parking garages and stairwells with reverberating acoustics. I encourage you to go find a stairwell, or a cathedral or a tunnel or a parking garage and start pulling air through your harmonica from the bottom of your soul. Let me know how it goes!

## The Deep Firm Tilt

The harmonica is not a dainty instrument. To get that bluesy sound, I encourage you to put your mouth all over that harmonica. We don't typically share a harp with the next-door-neighbor.

### Deep

- Put the harp deep in your mouth, covering about 3 holes.

### Firm

- With firm lips, create a tight seal so no air escapes around the sides of your mouth.

### Tilt

- Tilt the harmonica down at an angle, planting the holes in the fold of your lower lip.



We harmonica players don't typically share our harps with our next door neighbors

## The **blues** puts the focus on the **pull**

Imagine that the earth is a huge vat of milkshake. Then, pretend that you're breathing in that milkshake through a big straw. With a strong hand motion, pull the cool drink up from the ground and making a big slurpy sound. Then, as you the drink the air, say the syllables "twee twee." Do all this first without a harmonica, then add the harmonica.

With a **big** mouth and **firm** Lips, cover about 3 holes and say...

**Twee Twee**

The circle around the word signifies **DRAW**  
while breathing in these syllables

**Too Too**

No circle around the word signifies **BLOW**  
while breathing out these syllables

With everything that I teach you, try it first **WITHOUT** a harmonica... just breathing.

and remember... **hand motions** at all times

# Hand Motions for the blues

I've found that using hand motions actually speeds up the learning and adds power to the pull. Imagine that you'll pulling the horn of an 18-wheeler as you breath in the *twee twee*. See if you can connect the pull of the hand motion to the pull of the diaphragm. Add tension to the pull like you're pulling a root up from the ground or pulling a kite down from the sky.

## How to hold the harmonica for the blues

Just to be clear, my hold on the harmonica is constantly changing. I use my hands to sculpt the sound. But I will now share with you the basic hold that I use for the train whistle. (The *twee twee*.)



1. Hold the harmonica in your LH with the thumb covering the first couple holds. Fingers fold around the harmonica.



2. Put your left arm in the notch between your right thumb and forefinger.



3. Slide your left hand up and put the right side of the harmonica in that same notch. The thumb covers the top couple holes.

Now, by fluttering your right hand, you can add a **“waa waa”** to the **“twee twee!”**

Then, try singing a falsetto **“woooooo”** into your harp cupped hands for a **“Singing Blow!”**

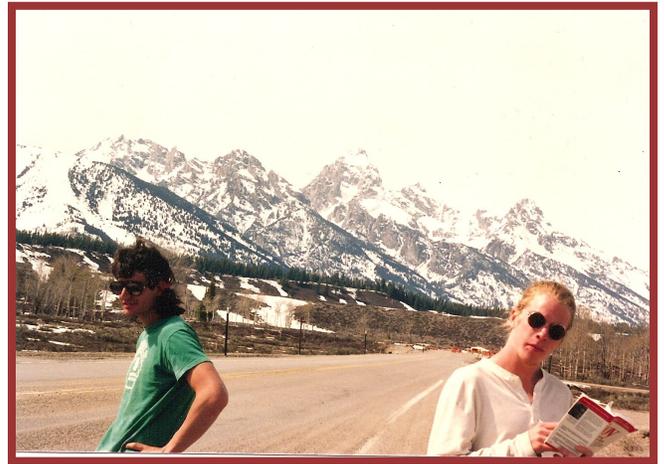
# Lesson 9

## The Tooley Toodles

In the Spring of 1988, I got a call from my friend, JP Allen and he said, “Pack you bags. We’re goin’ on a roadtrip!” It turns out that JP’s uncle owned a cabin up on top of a mountain in Elk River, Idaho. JP and I would spend a couple months up in this cabin roughing it with no running water and no electricity. On the drive out there, we played our harmonicas the whole way. It was on that drive that the “tooley toodles” were born. Playing the tooley toodles across the entire country gave me a solid foundation for playing the blues. With an emphasis on the draw, JP and I pumped air for 2000 miles. Adding some tonguing with the syllables “tooley” and “toodle,” we got that bluesy swing rhythm. Once I could keep the “tooley toodle” rhythm going without thinking about, I started adding single note riffs to that rhythm. Before long, I was a solo harmonica playing. Now I can say that I have a whole orchestra that fits right in my pocket.



The A-frame cabin up above Elk River, Idaho.



Hal and JP on the road

Here’s what the tooley toodles look like on paper. In lesson 9, we build up to this rhythm one step at time and then we go beyond. After this lesson, go find a friend who’s willing to drive you across the country while you play the harmonica the whole way. Now THAT’S a good friend. Thanks, JP!

**Tooley** Toodle **Tooley** Toodle

Remember, if a word is circled, it means to breathe in that word. If a word is *not* circled, it means to blow out the word. IMPORTANT: you don’t *speak* the word, you *breathe* the word. Use your tongue for the “too” and the “dle.” Use the shape of your mouth for the “whee”. (too-whee)

# The Affirmation Blues

Here's a fun little piece that I use to teach the tooey toodles. An affirmation is a word that somehow says, "Yes." This blues jam is an 8-beat phrase that just keeps repeating. At the end of each of repetition, you speak an affirmation. The spoken affirmation releases the air and prepares the hand motion for the next draw.

Step 1: Sing the syllables with hand motions.

Step 2: "Breathe" the syllables with hand motions.

Step 3: Play with hand motions.

*Phase 1 - nice sharp 'T's*

**Too** Too **Too** Too **Too** Ta **Too** (Word)

*Phase 2 - Add a flip of the tongue 'dle' on the blow. (toodle)*

**Too** Toodle **Too** Toodle **Too** Ta **Too** (Word)

*Phase 3 - Add an airy "whee" on the draw (tooey)*

**Tooey** Toodle **Tooey** Toodle **Tooey** Ta **Too** (Word)

*Phase 4 - Add a precise too-dl-lee on the blow and draw.*

**To-dl-ey** To-dl-ey **To-dl-ey** To-dl-ey **To-dl-ey** Ta **Too** (Word)

*Phase 5 - Mix it up.*

**Tooey** To-dl-ey **Too** toodle **To-dl-ey** Ta **Too** (Word)

*Make up  
your own  
affirmations!*

**Here we go,**  
**Suh-weet**  
**Hot Dog**

**That's right,**  
**Far out**  
**Groovy**

**Not bad**  
**Uh-huh**  
**Dig it**

**Good Job**  
**Oh Yeah**  
**Nice...**

# Lesson 10

## The Sesame Street Blues

One of the highlights of my musical career was when I brought about 100 harmonicas into the Mansfield State Penitentiary in Mansfield, Ohio. 100 prisoners and I gathered in the gymnasium and I offered a Mass Harmonica Lesson. At one point, we were in a big huddle in the middle of the gym and I was in the center of this huddle and we were jamming on a satisfyingly syncopated version of the Sesame Street Blues. I can't tell you the powerful feelings that I was experiencing in that huddle. Fortunately at the end of the lesson, I walked out of that place a free man. I'm sad to think that some of those guys are still in there. I was so grateful that for a day I was able to bring some music into the lives of these men.

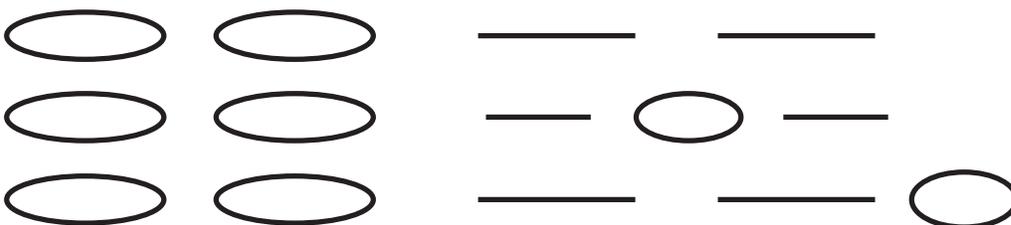
*Phase 1* - the most simple form -- just long blows and draws. Start each note with a "too."



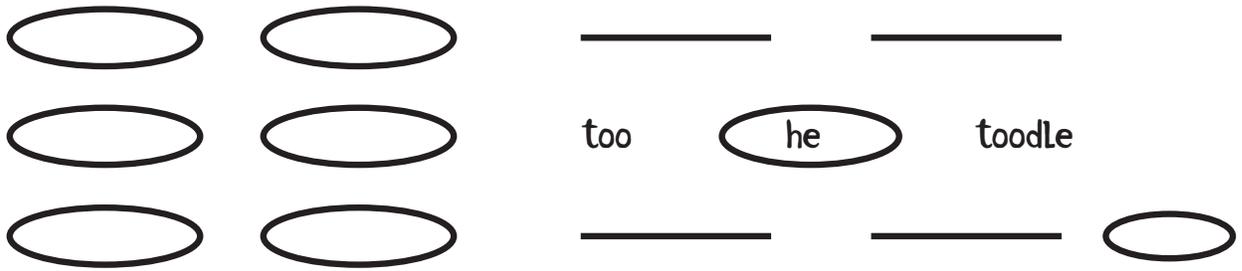
*Phase 2* - Now the long draws and blows are separated by a tongued syllable, "too."



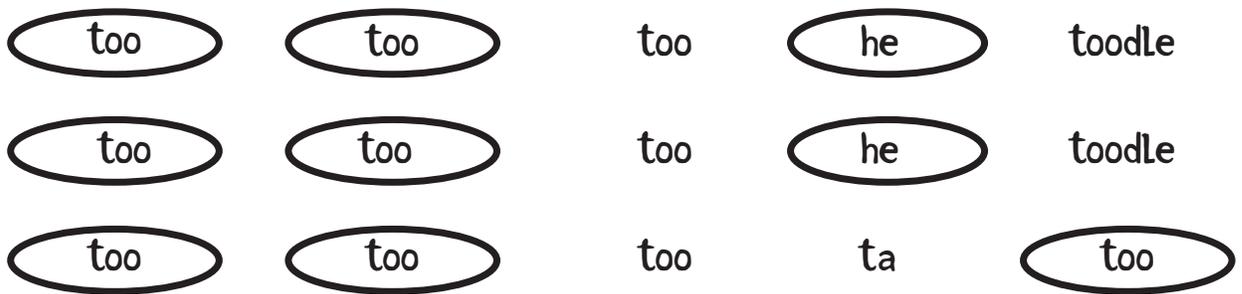
*Phase 3* - Now we add a "hiccup" of a draw in that long blow of the 2nd line.



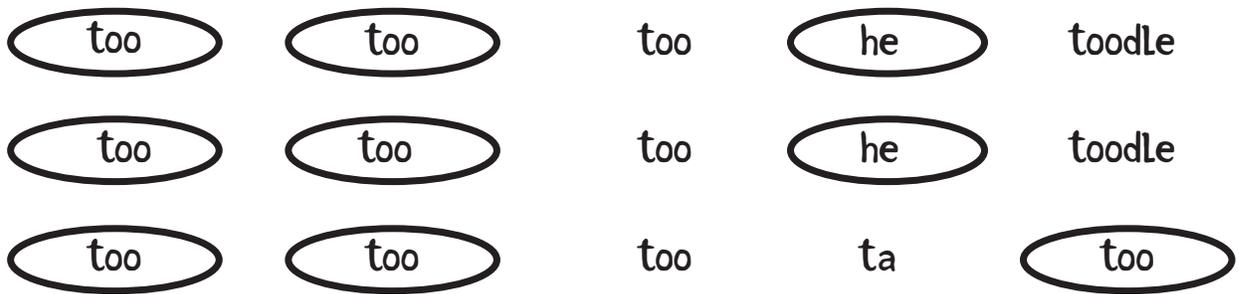
*Phase 4* - Now we breathe some rhythm into the harp with that flip of the tongue, "toodle."



*Phase 5* - Here's what it looks all written out with tonguing.



*Phase 6* - Now we add some "too-ey's" and "too-dl-ees" to change up the rhythm

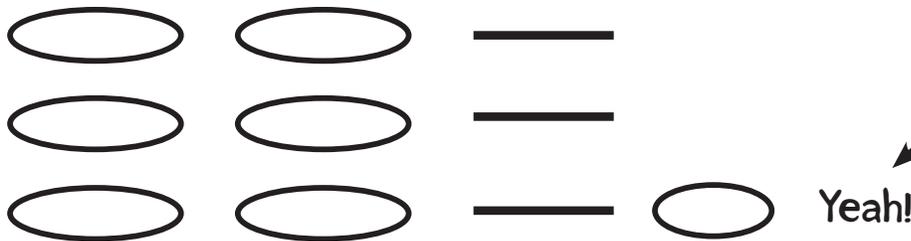


Turn this song into **music**! Cup your hands around the harp, hunker down into that **bluesy** posture, **step** back and forth to the beat and **syncopate** that rhythm until everyone around you is dancing!

# Lesson 11      We Want More Harmonicas!!!

One of my favorite things in the world is to teach a large group of people of all ages how to play the harmonica. In September 2011, I offered a Free Mass Harmonica Lesson in downtown Kent, Ohio. About 50 people showed up on a cold and rainy Saturday afternoon. We painted big banners with the statements, “We Want More Harmonicas!” and “More Music in the Streets.” During the lesson, this chant and blues rhythm appeared and then kept us warm. After a one hour lesson, we marched down to the Haymaker Farmer’s Market in Kent and we created a “Flash Mob” harmonica performance. Just for fun, I challenge you to gather a few friends and family, teach them this blues rhythm with the chant and then march through your town. “We want more harmonicas! More Music in the Streets!!!” :)

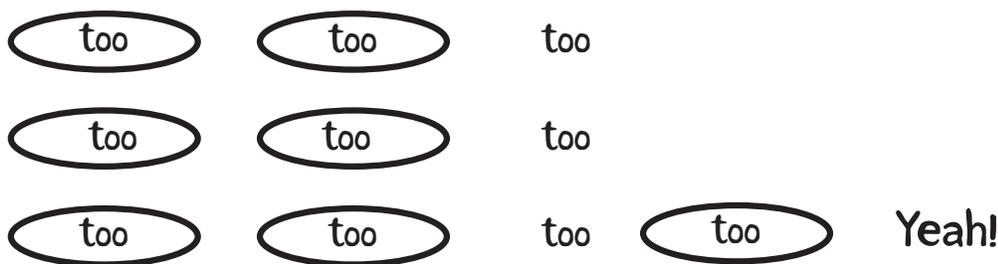
*Phase 1* - Here’s the basic blow-draw pattern.



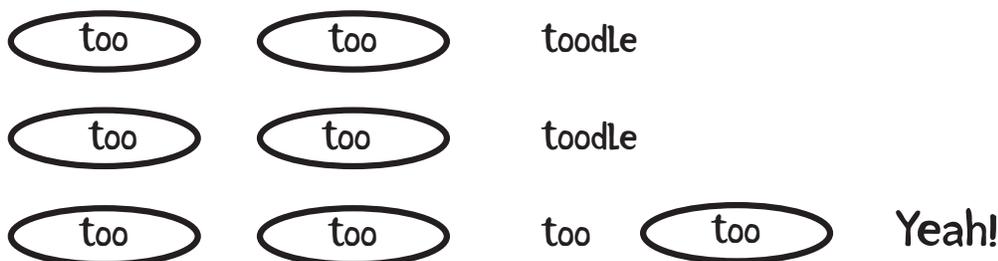
*Important:* While speaking the word, you will release the air and extend the hand motion in preparation for starting again with a draw.



*Phase 2* - Play each blow and each draw with a sharp “T.”



*Phase 3* - Now on each blow, add a quick flip of the tongue with the “dle.”



## Simple Songs

# Lesson 12

I really believe it. The first step in learning to play the harmonica is knowing when to blow and when to draw. For a guy like me, this is exciting information. I love things that are simple...I love things that are broken down to the true core -- like 10 holes and 2 choices.

Our goal is to be able to sing the song of the soul with a harmonica and to let out all that music that's hidden inside of us. But the first step is to develop an internal knowing of *what it sounds and feels like to blow and what it sounds and feels like to draw*. I think one of the best ways to gain this knowing is by playing simple tunes and by playing those tunes musically with shape and feeling.

I challenge you. Use these simple tunes to become a better musician. Think of these tunes as tools for improving your musicianship. You've known the tune *Mary Had a Little Lamb* your entire life, but can you turn it into music. In this lesson, we'll play some of these simple tunes with big chords and dancing hand motions. We'll aim for a full, balanced sound, a sound that starts with the power of the breath and then emerges through the brass reeds of the harmonica.

For each song, we'll follow the same learning sequence:

### Step 1: Sing the words of the song

This is a vitally important step. It's important that you really hear the song in your head before trying to play it. If you are uncomfortable singing or have difficulty matching my pitch, just sing quietly in your head... imagine that my voice is your voice singing. Just do your best, you're gonna be fine. :)

### Step 2: Sing the Blo-D-Blo's with hand motions.

I insist that before you play the tune on the harmonica, the hand motions must be mastered. Over and over, I am blown away by the effectiveness of hand motions. They may not be easy at first, but I encourage you to use them anyway!

### Step 3: Play the Blows and draws in one position.

Stay in one spot -- right around 3,4,5, and 6. Hidden within these big chords is the single note melody of the tune. It's an interesting exercise to listen for the melody of a tune within the big chorded blows and draws.

### Step 4: Play the song moving up and down.

Without any written notation telling us to move up or down, we use our ears to move according to the melody. This is called "playing by ear." When the melody goes up we

Remember: At this point, you are just a  
**Breathing Machine**

## A New Symbol: the Silent Draw

In this lesson, we will encounter a unique symbol called a “silent draw.” When you see this symbol, you do exactly what you would do with a draw, but you don’t make any sound on the harmonica. Pull the hand motion in and pull the breath in, but don’t make a toot. A silent draw usually happens in between two consecutive blows. After playing one blow, you will need refill the lungs and prepare the hand motion for the next blow.

Silent Draw = (  )

The first simple song that we will learn uses the *silent draw*. Notice that each line is played twice! Notice that each time you play 2 consecutive blows, you’re hands automatically illustrate a draw.

## I’m a Little Teapot

       
I’m a lit- tle tea- pot

    
short and stout

      
Here is my han- dle

      
Here is my spout



# How much music can you make?

You've known the song, *Mary had a Little Lamb* your entire life, but have you ever actually tried to make music out of it. Try playing *legato* by connecting the blows and draws. Add a "T" with the tongue on the repeated blows and draws. Create an even tone by using equal amounts of air on the blow and the draw. Create phrasing by playing the song as if you were singing it. End the song with a swooping flair all the way to the top of the harmonica and beyond.

## Mary's Lamb

—	○	—	○	
Ma-	ry	had	a	
—	—	—		
lit-	tle	lamb		
○	○	○		
lit-	tle	lamb		
—	—	—	(○)	
lit-	tle	lamb		
—	○	—	○	
Ma-	ry	had	a	
—	—	—		
lit-	tle	lamb		
○	○	—	○	—
fleece	was	white	as	snow

This one is a little tougher. Notice on the last line of this song, we sing and play just one blow for the 2 syllable word "Over." This is to simplify the blows and draws of the piece.

## I'm a Little Teapot

					
I'm	a	lit-	tle	tea-	pot
					
short		and		stout	
					
Here		is	my	han-	dle
					
Here		is	my	spout	
					
When	I	get	all	steamed	up
					
hear		me		shout	
					
Tip		me		Over	and
					
pour		me		out	

Take your time with this one! Remember, *first* master the hand motions!

# Oh, When the Saints

—	—	○	—	2	3	
Oh	when	the	saints			
—	—	○	—	2	3	
Oh	when	the	saints			
—	—	○	—	—	—	
Oh	when	the	saints	go	march-	
	—		○			
	ing		in			
—	—	○	—	(○)	—	—
Oh	how	I	want		to	be
	—	—	—	○		
	in	that	num	ber		
	—	○	—	—	—	
	when	the	saints	go	march-	
	○		—			
	ing		in			

Here's one to try on your own.

# Twinkle Twinkle

— Twin-	— kle	— Twin-	— kle
○ lit-	○ tle	— star	
○ How	○ I	— won-	— der
○ what	○ you	— are	
— Up	— a-	○ bove	○ the
— world	— so	○ high	
— like	— a	○ dia	○ mond
— in	— the	○ sky.	
— Twin-	— kle	— Twin-	— kle
○ lit-	○ tle	— star	
○ How	○ I	— won-	— der
○ what	○ you	— are	

# Lesson 13

## The Joy of Playing the Harmonica

My harmonica quartet and I were sitting around our rehearsal table last week while our new biggest fan sat in on the rehearsal. With a newcomer in the room our enthusiasm for the harmonica was even more evident than usual. We were talking about the inherent joy in the sound of the harmonica. Our new friend was expressing how the sound just makes him feel happy. We mentioned that part of it is that light-headed feelin you get from so much breathing, but it's more than that. We humans are born with the gift of music and we need to let that music out. Especially in this spectator world in which we live, the harmonica is a great tool for nourishing the musician that is within each of us. Here are some new words to an old tune that say it just right.

### Ode to Joy

Beethoven

Play-ing the har - mo - ni - ca I of - ten feel a cer - tain glow.

5

With this no - tion of hand mo - tions, ev' - ry - thing is draw and blow.

9

Mu - sic comes from deep in the bel - ly deep in the heart and in my soul.

13

In my poc - ket a har - mo - ni - ca will go where - e'er I go.

In my simplified harmonica notation, it looks like this.

# Ode to Joy

—	—	○	—	—	○	—	○	
play-	ing	the	har-	mo-	ni-	ca	I	
—	—	○	—	—	○	○		
Of-	ten	feel	a	cer-	tain	glow		
—	—	○	—	—	○	—	○	
With	this	no-	tion	of	hand	mo-	tions	
—	—	○	—	○	—	—		
Ev-	'ry	thing	is	draw	and	blow		
○	○	—	—	○	(—	○	—)	—
Mu-	sic	comes	from	deep	in	the	bel-	ly
○	(—	○	—)	○	—	○	○	
Deep	in	the`	heart	and	in	my	soul	
—	—	○	—	—	○	—	○	
In	my	poc-	ket	a	har-	mon-	i-	
—	—	○	—	○	—	—		
ca	will	go	where	e'er	I	go.		

# Lesson 14

## What about single notes?

Many beginning harmonica methods start by teaching single notes. They often begin by teaching you how to play a scale. This method is very different.

With the single mission of offering you a *solid foundation* upon which to build a *lifetime* of harmonica playing, at the beginning, we don't worry about single notes. Our focus is learning when to Blow, when to draw and how to breathe. Our focus is learning how to make music with the breath. I implore you, resist the temptation to rush into single notes and you can thank me later.

- Spend some time just chanting *Blo-d-Blo's* with hand motions.
- See how much music you can make with 2 choices and the *toot toodley toodles*.
- Try improvising and experimenting with big powerful *blows* and equally strong and steady *draws*.
- Spend some time learning the blows and draws of every familiar tune that you know.
- *Challenge* yourself to really listen every time the harmonica touches your lips. Challenge yourself to use hand motions in order to sculpt your sound. Turn your playing into a dance.
- **And then**, with a diaphragm that knows how to make music, with an internal sense of when to push and when to pull, spend the rest of your life playing big, round, pure, sculpted single notes.

This method puts you on the path to creating a full, beautiful tone with the harmonica and there's no hurry in this process. Enjoy the process of learning and take your time with single notes.

With all that said, if you've been playing along, you're ready to move in the direction of single notes. In this series, I will give you a brief introduction. When you're ready for more, I encourage to stay tuned to [www.harmonica.com/hal](http://www.harmonica.com/hal) for my upcoming releases that will move you forward in your playing.

**Resist the temptation  
to rush into single  
notes and you can  
thank me later!**

**This method puts you on  
the path to creating a  
full, beautiful tone with  
the harmonica.**

# The Two Basic Approaches to Playing Single Notes

In the world of harmonica playing, there are basically two camps. There are the players that do *tongue blocking* and the players that do *puckering*. Just so you know, I do both. In this method, I present tongue blocking first. Having built a foundation of strong and even blows and draws with big chords, all you need to do now is throw your tongue down on that harmonica. All the power and evenness that you've developed will come through in your single notes. Learning to tongue block now will open up so much opportunity for you in your playing. Just wait. Soon, you'll be adding rhythmical chords and octaves and turning that little 10 hole harmonica into an full orchestra.

I will now guide you through several stages on your way to single notes. It's not easy, but it's well worth the practice.

## Big Chords

We begin by covering about 4 holes. We make a big, even sound. We push and pull from the bottom of our belly. We make sure that each of the 4 holes makes a sounds.



## Messy Octaves

We place the tip of our tongue on our two front teeth. This stops some of the air flow into those 2 middle holes. This is the first stage of feeling the tongue on the harmonica.



## Clean Octaves

We find that sweet spot with our tongue on the ridge between the two middle holes. The sound of the two middle holes is completely shut off. The holes on either end sound clearly.



## Single Notes

We make our mouth a little bit smaller and aim for the right side of our mouth.



## The Next Step in Musical Notation

Up until now, we've kept the musical notation as simple as we possibly could. With a little help from our helps telling us whether to move high or low, a circle and a dash have told us everything that we need to know. But now we start thinking about which specific hole to blow into.

The number that is written refers to the hole on the *far-right side* of your mouth. When you see a plain 5, you can choose to blow a big chord, an octave or a single note. In each case, hole #5 would be on the right side of your mouth. (Please refer to the previous page for illustration.)

A 5 that is circled indicates a draw with hole #5 on the far right side of your mouth.

## The Major Scale

Become very familiar with the layout of the major scale in the *middle of the harmonica*. There are 1,000's of songs located within these 4 holes.

Going up....

4    (4)    5    (5)    6    (6)    (7)    7

Coming Down.

7    (7)    (6)    6    (5)    5    (4)    4

Play this scale up and down. Play it first with big chords, then messy octaves, then cleaner octaves and finally...

...spend the rest of your life sculpting **big,**  
**glorious** single notes from the bottom of your soul.

# Ode to Joy

5 5 (5) 6 6 (5) 5 (4)  
4 4 (4) 5 5 (4) (4)  
5 5 (5) 6 6 (5) 5 (4)  
4 4 (4) 5 (4) 4 4  
(4) (4) 5 4 (4) 5 (5) 5 5  
(4) 5 (5) 5 (4) 4 (4) (2)  
5 5 (5) 6 6 (5) 5 (4)  
4 4 (4) 5 (4) 4 4

# Lesson 15

## Your Graduation Piece

Every harmonica player must learn to play *O Susanna*. I think of it as the quintessential beginning harmonica song. Spend some time with this song and commit it to memory. Next time you're sitting around a campfire, break out that harmonica and have everyone sing along on *O Susanna*.

## But First Some Musical Terminology

In order to follow the notation that is on the video you'll need to understand this musical terminology. Follow the numbers in order (1,2,3,4) to learn these terms one at a time.

### A Song

3. *The Sign*: This is the sign to which you return.

4    (4)    4    6

4. *Fine*: This is where the whole piece ends.

\*

4    6    (6)    6

4    (4)    4    :| (fine)

1. *Repeat*: This is a repeat sign. Go back to the beginning and play it again.

5    (6)    6    6

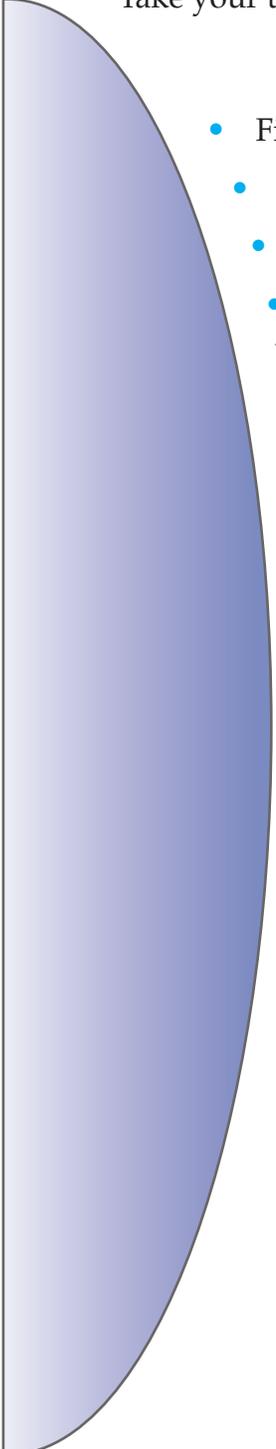
4    6    (D.S. al fine)

2. *D.S. al Fine*: Return to the sign (\*) and play until fine.

# The Process of Learning a Song

Please don't get caught up worrying about the numbers or the musical terminology!

Take your time going through each step of the process of learning the song.

- 
- First sing the song. Make sure you have a sense of the melody in your head.
  - Then, master singing the Blo's and D's with hand motions.
  - Then play the Blows and Draws in one spot on the harmonica.
  - Then use your ears to guide you up and down the harmonica. Listen for that melody inside those big chords.
  - Use the numbers to guide the big chords up and down the harmonica.
  - Add the tip of your tongue to your 2 front teeth and start experimenting with messy octaves.
  - Clean up those messy octaves.
  - Try the song with tongue blocked single notes.
  - Put the song to memory!
  - Offer to play the song when you're sitting around a campfire with some friends or family.
  - Teach someone else how to play the song!

Oh, I come from Alabama.  
With a banjo on my knee,  
and I'm goin' to Louisiana  
Oh my true love for to see;  
It rained all night the day I left,  
The weather it was dry;  
The sun so hot I froze to death;  
Susanna, don't you cry.

O, Susanna, now don't you cry for me,  
For I've come from Alabama  
With a banjo on my knee.

# 0 Susanna

4 (4) 5 6 6 (6) 6 5 4  
Oh I come from Al- a- ba- ma with

(4) 5 5 (4) 4 (4)  
a ban- jo on my knee

4 (4) 5 6 6 (6) 6 5 4  
And I'm goin' to Lou si a- na Oh

(4) 5 5 (4) (4) 4 : |  
my true love for to see

(5) (5) (6) (6) (6)  
O Su- sa- na now

6 6 5 4 (4)  
don't you cry for me

4 (4) 5 6 6 (6) 6 5 4  
For I've come from Al- a- ba- ma with

(4) 5 5 (4) 4 (4)  
a ban- jo on my knee

# Lesson 16

## Where to Go from Here...

If you've played along from the beginning, you now have the tools to create a musical life around the harmonica. I believe it's true. There's a lot of music inside of you and you have your whole life ahead of you to figure out ways to let that music out.

Believe it or not, you are now qualified to teach beginners. It's my hope that you'll take this method and you'll pass it on. Round a up a few people (young and old) and one step at a time, show them what you learned. Use the "I Go Then You Go" technique to teach someone the hand motions, the Blows and Draws and the Toot toodley toodles. Create simple 4-beat phrases for someone to repeat after you. Keep it simple!

This is the way that music lives on. One person sharing what they know with another. Pass on these techniques and take part in moving the harmonica forward in history.

With these foundations planted firmly in your pocket, you can go any direction. Keep experimenting. Keep improvising. Keep doing hand motions. Listen to other players. Find a style of playing that really excites you and go for it! Create your own style of playing.

Finally, let's get together on May 1st, 2020 for a big harmonica party. Maybe we can do it at JP's house in Hawaii. :) And by the way, stay tuned at [www.harmonica.com/hal](http://www.harmonica.com/hal) for upcoming lessons on all kinds of techniques, interviews, performances and lessons.

Thank you so much for playing along. Good Luck!



# We Want More **Harmonicas!** **More Music** in the Streets!

