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AN ALFRED HANDY GUIDE



How to Play the Harmonica

Diatonic or Chromatic



Combines step-by-step instruction with practice songs and reference information on blues & rock harmonica

STEVEN MANUS

How to play the HARMONICA

DIATONIC OR CHROMATIC

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THE DIATONIC HARMONICA

The diatonic harp is most useful in Rock and Blues lead and accompaniment. It is relatively inexpensive and easy to handle, but is limited in the number of notes it can play. It is available in the following keys: C, D, E, F, G, A, B \flat . Pictured is a Hohner Marine Band No. 1896 in C.



THE CHROMATIC HARMONICA

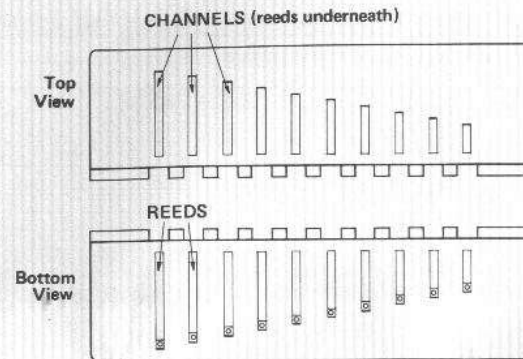
The chromatic harp is most useful for playing melodies and Rock and Rhythm & Blues lead. Expensive, and virtually useless for chords or bending notes, it easily plays all the notes on the chromatic scale. Thus, it is excellent for playing any melody. Chromatics are available in the following keys: C and G. Pictured is a Hohner Chromatica No. 260 in C.



DIATONIC CONSTRUCTION

Pictured is the harmonica stripped of its covering. For each hole there are two channels and two metal reeds (one bottom and one top). The top reed vibrates when you blow (exhale), and the bottom vibrates when you draw (inhale). A 10 hole harmonica produces 20 pitches.

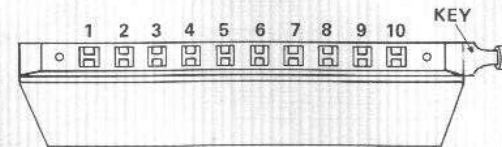
The diatonic harp only plays the notes of the scale without sharps and flats, in other words, "do," "re," "me," "fa," "so," "la," "ti," "do." Thus, a diatonic harmonica in the key of C will play all the white notes on the piano.



CHROMATIC CONSTRUCTION

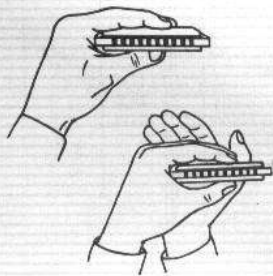
The chromatic harmonica basically consists of two diatonic harmonicas, which produce their sound in the manner described above. Through a set of valves controlled by the key pictured on the right, air is directed to one or the other set of channels and reeds. Thus, each play hole has access to two sets of reeds, one set pitched one half tone higher than the other. Pushing the key on the right sends the air into the reeds that are higher (the sharps).

The chromatic harmonica will play all the notes on the piano, white *and* black keys. Thus, while a diatonic harmonica can play 7 different notes, the chromatic can play 12.



HOW TO HOLD THE HARMONICA

1. Hold in left hand between thumb and fingers. Low notes (holes 1, 2, 3, etc.) on left.
2. Cup right hand over, forming a tight cup. This enables you to produce bluesy, vibrato effects.
3. Chromatic people: hold like above, only use your right thumb to press in the key. (When not playing vibrato, use the palm of your right hand to work the key.)



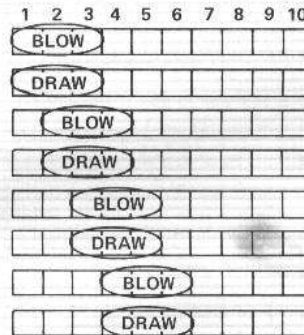
VIBRATO

1. Blow into the two or three lowest notes and quickly open and close the cup, pivoting at the bottom of your palms.
2. Try moving your whole hand, opening and closing the cup. You should get a different sound.
3. Experiment with vibrato and the sounds you get blowing and drawing.



BLOWING AND DRAWING EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Blow and draw into the first three holes (or around there) and go up one hole at a time to the highest three notes. It doesn't have to be perfect, just close.



CONTINUE

HARP CODE

- 4 = Blow into hole 4
- ④ = Draw from hole 4
- 123 = Blow into holes 1, 2 and 3
- ①②③ = Draw from holes 1, 2 and 3



Exercise 2: Try this exercise keeping an even beat. Tap with your foot or count in your head.

Play - 123 123 ①②③ ①②③ 234 234 ②③④ ②③④
 Tap - ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ Continue
 Count - 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

Exercise 3:

Play - 123 234 ①②③ ②③④ 234 345 ②③④ ③④⑤
 Tap - ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ Continue
 Count - 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4

TRY KEEPING AN EVEN BEAT!

PLAYING SINGLE BLOW NOTES

In order to play melodies, or Blues and Rock lead and accompaniment, you've got to play single notes. It's probably the hardest and most important step in mastering the harp.

There are two ways to do it—Tonguing and Puckering. Pick one that's best for you.

TONGUING

This is the best way to play if you'll be playing a chromatic harp.

1. Blow into holes 4, 5 and 6, making a chord.
2. Push your tongue forward against the holes so that only one hole is uncovered and sounds. This can be either to the left or right of your tongue (hole 4 or 6), but pick a side and stick to it.



3. Try to get a single, clear tone.



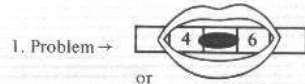
PROBLEMS?

Getting the wrong note?

Try placing the tip of your tongue in the hole (hole 5) next to the one you want to play. Press the side of your tongue against the other unplayed hole.

Getting two notes?

You're not covering both holes.



or

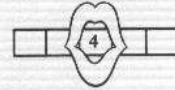


Try moving the harmonica very slightly to the left or right, making sure that you're still blowing into hole 4.

PUCKERING

Whatever the name, many who pick up on the harp play this way.

1. Tighten your lips as if to whistle and blow into hole 4.
2. Try getting a single, clear tone.



PROBLEMS?

Can't get one note?

1. Problem →



Tighten your lips and press them more firmly against the harp.

2. Problem →



A common problem with this method is getting the pucker over the hole. Try moving the harp slightly to the right or left in order to better center your mouth over the hole.

NOTES AND RESTS

Before you can practice any rhythms, you've got to pick up on a bit of musical notation. It's simple and really helpful.

NOTES RESTS (means don't play)

○ = a whole note — = a whole rest
 TAP ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
 COUNT — 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & = 4 BEATS

♩. = a dotted half note
 ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
 1 & 2 & 3 & = 3 BEATS

♩ = a half note — = a half rest
 ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
 1 & 2 & = 2 BEATS

♪ = a quarter note ♪ = a quarter rest
 ↓ ↑
 1 & = 1 BEAT

♫ = an eighth note ♮ = an eighth rest
 ↓
 1 = 1/2 BEAT

♬ = a sixteenth note ♯ = a sixteenth rest
 A sixteenth note = 1/4 BEAT or ♫ = ♬

Simple. Just remember that a beat can be as long or short as you want for each *piece*, depending upon how fast or slow you want the tempo of the song to be.

MUSIC EXERCISES

Exercise 1: TAP — COUNT — 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & = 4 BEATS PLAY —

Exercise 2: TAP ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ COUNT — 1 & 2 & 3 & = 3 BEATS PLAY —

Exercise 3: TAP ↓ ↑ COUNT — 1 & 2 & 3 & = 2 BEATS PLAY —

Exercise 4: TAP ↓ COUNT — 1 = 1/2 BEAT PLAY —

PLAYING SINGLE DRAW NOTES

TONGUING

Do the same thing as you would to blow through hole 4. Try drawing air into your mouth. Try to get a *clear*, single tone.

PROBLEMS?

Don't worry. Most mortals find drawing harder than blowing at first. Stick with it, you'll get it.

Getting two notes or no sound?

1. A major problem is that your tongue tends to pull into your mouth when you draw. Try pushing it hard against the harmonica when drawing.
2. Try adjusting how much of the harp is between your lips. You might find one position works better than others.
3. Try changing the angle of the harp in your lips.
4. **DON'T DRAW TOO HARD!** Sometimes if you try to play too loud the reeds won't sound. Keep it cool.
5. See page 8, "PROBLEMS."

PUCKERING

Do the same thing as you would to blow through hole 4. Try drawing air into your mouth. Try to get a *clear*, single tone.

PROBLEMS?

No sound?

Sometimes when you draw, your cheeks and lips collapse, so no air gets through. Adjust how tight you keep your lips. Sometimes keeping them loose works, sometimes not. The most important thing is experiment until you get that clean tone. Soon you'll be able to do it every time.

MORE MUSIC EXERCISES

SOME SIMPLE TUNES

Start playing these songs slowly at first, until you can play them clearly. (Note: At first it's important you get the notes right, though you should also always try to keep an even beat.)

HOW DRY I AM

Diatonic 3 4 4 5 3 4 4 5 5 5 4 4 4 5 4

Chromatic 4 5 5 6 4 5 6 4 5 6 6 6 5 5 6 5 5

Note: After you can play this one easily, try adding a little vibrato on each of the whole notes.

DOWN IN THE VALLEY

Guitar Acc. C / G C / / / / / G C G7 / / / / / / / / / / / / C / / /

Diatonic 3 4 4 5 4 5 4 4 3 3 4 6 6 5 5 4 4

Chromatic 3 5 5 6 5 6 5 5 3 4 5 7 7 3 4 5 6 5

TOM DOOLEY

Guitar Acc. F / / / / / / / / / / / F / / / / / / / C / / / / /

Diatonic 4 4 4 4 4 5 6 6 4 4 4 4 4 5 6 6

Chromatic 5 5 5 6 5 6 7 7 5 5 5 5 6 6 7 7

C7 / / / / C7 / / / C / / / / C7 / / / / F / / /

4 4 4 4 5 6 6 6 7 7 6 6 6 6 5 4 5

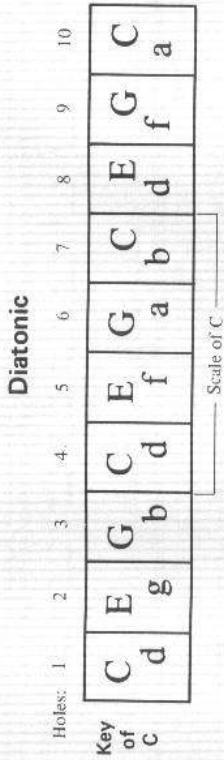
5 5 5 5 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 7 6 6 5 4 5

SOME NOTES NOT SOUNDING?

Try lapping the hole-side of your harp against the palm of your hand after every song. That removes anything jamming the holes.

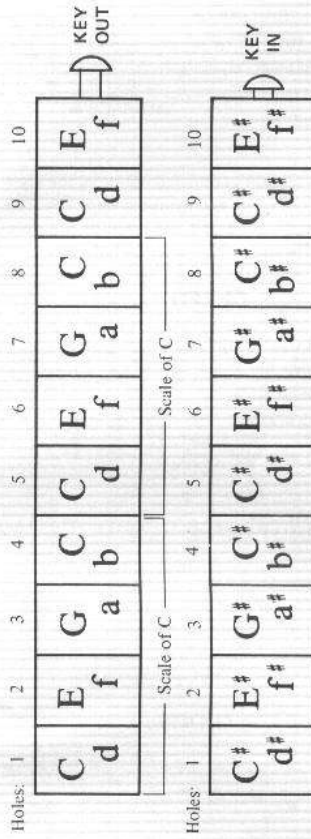
MUSIC AND THE HARMONICA

You might want to know that the notes you've been playing have names. In the diagram below, the blow notes are indicated by capital letters, the draw notes by lower case letters.



As you can see, a diatonic harp in the key of C doesn't play any of the black keys of the piano (sharps and flats) and the only full scale is from holes 4 through 7. The reason the first three holes are weird is to help you play blues.

Chromatic



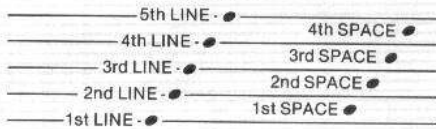
With a chromatic harp you can play every note there is, which is pretty cool. Try blowing into hole 1, then blowing into it with the key pushed in; now draw from hole 1, then draw from it with the key pushed in. Repeat this process with each hole in succession and you will be playing the chromatic scale (though sometimes you will be getting the same note twice).

= sharp. A sharp raises a note a half step. b = flat. A flat lowers a note a half step.

HOW TO READ MUSIC

Since songs have been written out a couple of million years this way, and will probably continue to be for at least the next ten (after that, what's it to you?) it might be a good idea for you to pick up on it. But don't worry, we'll always give you the holes for the songs in this book.

STAFFS



During the evolution of musical notation, the staff had from 2 to 20 lines, and symbols were invented to locate certain lines and the pitch of the note on that line. These symbols were called...

CLEFS

Music has three clefs, the C, F and G clefs. Most music for the piano, guitar and harmonica uses the G and F clefs.



G Clef Notes

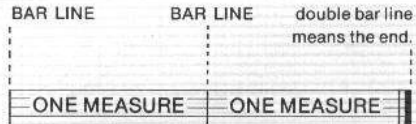


F Clef Notes



MEASURES

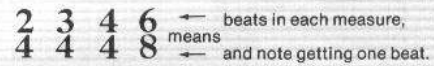
Music is divided into equal parts called MEASURES. A BAR LINE divides one measure from another.



To indicate the number of beats in each measure, we use a...

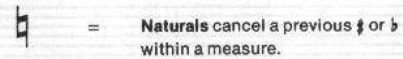
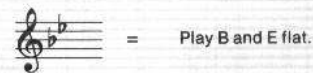
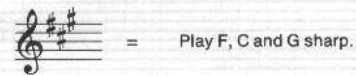
TIME SIGNATURE

The Time Signatures:



KEY SIGNATURE

The key signature, placed next to each clef, indicates what notes, if any, should be played sharp or flat in the piece. Sharps or flats next to individual notes only apply within the measure.



PRACTICE

TUNES

HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN

DIATONIC

Guitar Acc. Dm

SCARBOROUGH FAIR

CHROMATIC

Guitar Acc. Em

PRACTICE TUNES

DIATONIC

SHENANDOAH

Guitar Acc. C

6 4 4 4 4 5 5 6 7 7 6 6 5 5 6 6 6 5 6 5

F Em G7 C Am Em Am G7 C

CHROMATIC

THE COUNTY JAIL

Guitar Acc. G

7 7 7 8 8 7 7 6 6 7 7 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 7 7

G D7 C D7 G

* = dotted eighth note. It receives 3/4 of a beat.

PRACTICE TUNES

DIATONIC

WORRIED MAN BLUES (It Takes a Worried Man to Sing a Worried Song)

Guitar Acc. C

THE ENTERTAINER

Guitar Acc. C

CHROMATIC

PRACTICE

TUNES

WILDWOOD FLOWER

Guitar Acc. C

DIATONIC

(Variations)

PRACTICE

TUNES

CHROMATIC

ST. JAMES INFIRMARY BLUES

Musical notation for St. James Infirmary Blues on page 34. The piece is in 4/4 time and features a chromatic melody. The notation includes a guitar accompaniment line with fret numbers (3, 5, 7) and three melodic lines. Chords indicated are Gm, D7, and Eb7. Fingerings and slurs are shown for the melodic lines.

Musical notation for St. James Infirmary Blues on page 35. This section continues the piece with a guitar accompaniment line and three melodic lines. Chords indicated are Gm, D7, Eb7, and Cm. Fingerings and slurs are shown for the melodic lines.

Part 2

The following section, pages 37 to 47, is for playing blues harp. Generally, only a diatonic harmonica is used, as it is capable of the "bending" and chording associated with the blues sound. Thus, this section is geared toward the diatonic harmonica. However, many blues tunes can be played on a chromatic harmonica and the ones following are no exception. Just read the music and ignore the holes indicated.

THE 12 BAR BLUES PROGRESSION

4 MEASURES OF TONIC
 +
 2 MEASURES OF SUBDOMINANT
 +
 2 MEASURES OF TONIC
 +
 1 MEASURE OF DOMINANT
 +
 1 MEASURE OF SUBDOMINANT
 +
 2 MEASURES OF TONIC
 EQUALS...
 THE 12 BAR BLUES

BLUES PROGRESSION GUIDE

If the TONIC chord (1st note of scale) is...	the SUBDOMINANT (4th note of scale) chord is...	and the DOMINANT (5th note of scale) chord is...
C	F	G
C#	F#	G#
D	G	A
E ^b	A ^b	B ^b
E	A	B
F	B ^b	C
F#	B	C#
G	C	D
A ^b	D ^b	E ^b
A	D	E
B ^b	E ^b	F
B	E	F#

THE BLUES PROGRESSION FOR

"STRAIGHT HARP" (First Position)

When playing "straight harp," use a harmonica tuned to the **same key** as the piece you are playing. In other words, for a tune in the key of C, use a C harmonica, etc.

- 4 MEASURES OF TONIC. **Blow** into holes 4 and 5
- 2 MEASURES OF SUBDOMINANT. **Draw** from holes 5 and 6.
- 2 MEASURES OF TONIC. **Blow** into holes 4 and 5.
- 1 MEASURE OF DOMINANT. **Draw** from holes 7 and 8 or **Blow** into hole 6.
- 1 MEASURE OF SUBDOMINANT. **Draw** from holes 5 and 6 or **Draw** from hole 5.
- 2 MEASURES OF TONIC. **Blow** into holes 4 and 5.

12 BAR BLUES IN C

Guitar Acc. C (Tonic)

Holes indicated are for a C harmonica

5 = a chord. Play both holes at the same time.

(Repeat)

F7 (Subdominant)

C (Tonic)

G7 (Dominant)

F7 (Subdominant)

C (Tonic)

The score consists of three systems of music. Each system has a guitar accompaniment line and a harmonica line. The guitar accompaniment is in 4/4 time and features a steady bass line with chords indicated by circled numbers (5, 4, 4, 4, 6, 5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 4, 4). The harmonica line shows notes and rests corresponding to the guitar accompaniment. The first system is labeled 'F7 (Subdominant)' and 'C (Tonic)'. The second system is labeled 'G7 (Dominant)' and 'F7 (Subdominant)'. The third system is labeled 'C (Tonic)'. A 'Repeat' sign is placed above the second system. A legend indicates that circled numbers 5, 4, 4, 4, 6, 5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 4, 4 represent holes for a C harmonica, and a circled 5 represents a chord where both holes are played at the same time.

THE BLUES PROGRESSION (Second

FOR "CROSSED HARP" Position)

When playing "crossed harp," use a harmonica tuned to the **subdominant** of the key of the piece you are playing. In other words, for a tune in the key of G, use a C harmonica, etc.

CROSSED HARP GUIDE

For blues in the key of...

C	F
D	G
E	A
F	B \flat
G	C
A	D
B	E

- 4 MEASURES OF TONIC. Draw from holes 2 and 3 or Draw from holes 3 and 4.
- 2 MEASURES OF SUBDOMINANT. Blow into holes 4 and 5.
- 2 MEASURES OF TONIC. Draw from holes 2 and 3 or Draw from holes 3 and 4.
- 1 MEASURE OF DOMINANT. Draw from hole 4.
- 1 MEASURE OF SUBDOMINANT. Blow into hole 4.
- 2 MEASURES OF TONIC. Draw from holes 2 and 3 or Draw from holes 3 and 4.

12 BAR BLUES IN G

Guitar Acc. G (Tonic)

Holes indicated are for a C harmonica

C7 (Subdominant)

G (Tonic)

D7 (Dominant)

C7 (Subdominant)

G (Tonic)

THE BLUES PROGRESSION

When playing in the "third position," use a harmonica tuned one step below the key of the piece you are playing. In other words, for a tune in the key of D, use a C harmonica, etc.

THIRD POSITION GUIDE

For blues in the key of... use a harmonica tuned to...

C	B \flat
D	C
E	D
F \sharp	E
G	F
A	G
B	A

- 4 MEASURES OF TONIC. Draw from hole 4.
- 2 MEASURES OF SUBDOMINANT. Blow into hole 6.
- 2 MEASURES OF TONIC. Draw from hole 4 or Draw from hole 8.
- 1 MEASURE OF DOMINANT. Draw from hole 6.
- 1 MEASURE OF SUBDOMINANT. Blow into hole 6.
- 2 MEASURES OF TONIC. Draw from hole 4.

FOR "THIRD POSITION"

12 BAR BLUES IN D

Holes indicated are for a C harmonica.

SUMMARY OF BLUES PROGRESSIONS

STRAIGHT HARP

- Tonic - Blow into holes 4 and 5
- Subdominant - Draw from holes 5 and 6
- Dominant - Draw from holes 7 and 8
or
Blow into hole 6

CROSSED HARP

- Tonic - Draw from holes 2 and 3
or
Draw from holes 3 and 4
- Subdominant - Blow into holes 4 and 5
- Dominant - Draw from hole 4

THIRD POSITION

- Tonic - Draw from hole 4
- Subdominant - Blow into hole 6
- Dominant - Draw from hole 6

DIATONIC NOTE REFERENCE CHART

Harp Key	Notes
C	C, D, E, F, G, A, B
D	D, E, F \sharp , G, A, B, C \sharp
E	E, F \sharp , G \sharp , A, B, C \sharp , D \sharp
F	F, G, A, B \flat , C, D, E
G	G, A, B, C, D, E, F \sharp
A	A, B, C \sharp , D, E, F \sharp , G \sharp
B \flat	B \flat , C, D, E \flat , F, G, A

SAMPLING OF BLUES RHYTHMS

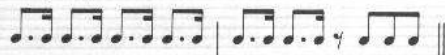
The Standard Train Rhythm



...with an embellishment



...syncopated



Another Rhythm



...with a variation



Still Another Rhythm



...with a different downbeat



...syncopated



One More (slow tempo)



...with a variation



INSTANT CHORD GUIDE

CHORD — Play holes

C Harp

C — ANY SET OF BLOW HOLES

F — ⑤ ⑥ or ⑨ ⑩

G — ① ② ③, ② ③ ④ or ⑦ ⑧

G7 — ③ ④ ⑤ or ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

D Harp

D — ANY SET OF BLOW HOLES

G — ⑤ ⑥ or ⑨ ⑩

A — ① ② ③, ② ③ ④ or ⑦ ⑧

A7 — ③ ④ ⑤ or ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

E Harp

E — ANY SET OF BLOW HOLES

A — ⑤ ⑥ or ⑨ ⑩

B — ① ② ③, ② ③ ④ or ⑦ ⑧

B7 — ③ ④ ⑤ or ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

FOR DIATONIC HARP

CHORD — Play holes

F Harp

F — ANY SET OF BLOW HOLES

B \flat — ⑤ ⑥ or ⑨ ⑩

C — ① ② ③, ② ③ ④ or ⑦ ⑧

C7 — ③ ④ ⑤ or ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

G Harp

G — ANY SET OF BLOW HOLES

C — ⑤ ⑥ or ⑨ ⑩

D — ① ② ③, ② ③ ④ or ⑦ ⑧

D7 — ③ ④ ⑤ or ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

A Harp

A — ANY SET OF BLOW HOLES

D — ⑤ ⑥ or ⑨ ⑩

E — ① ② ③, ② ③ ④ or ⑦ ⑧

E7 — ③ ④ ⑤ or ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

B \flat Harp

B \flat — ANY SET OF BLOW HOLES

E \flat — ⑤ ⑥ or ⑨ ⑩

F — ① ② ③, ② ③ ④ or ⑦ ⑧

F7 — ③ ④ ⑤ or ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

HARP CARE

1. The biggest problem you'll ever encounter with your harmonica is stuck reeds, that is, notes that won't play. While this does not indicate your harp is ruined, often people do ruin their harps trying to solve this problem. The probable cause of the stuck reed is saliva, food, or some other substance caught between the reed and the channel. The best way to free the reed is to firmly tap the hole side of your harmonica against the palm of your hand. In fact, you should do this after every few minutes of normal playing.

If this technique does not work, I would recommend returning the harp to the dealer or manufacturer. Often they will repair the instrument at little or no expense, but *not if you've tampered with it.*

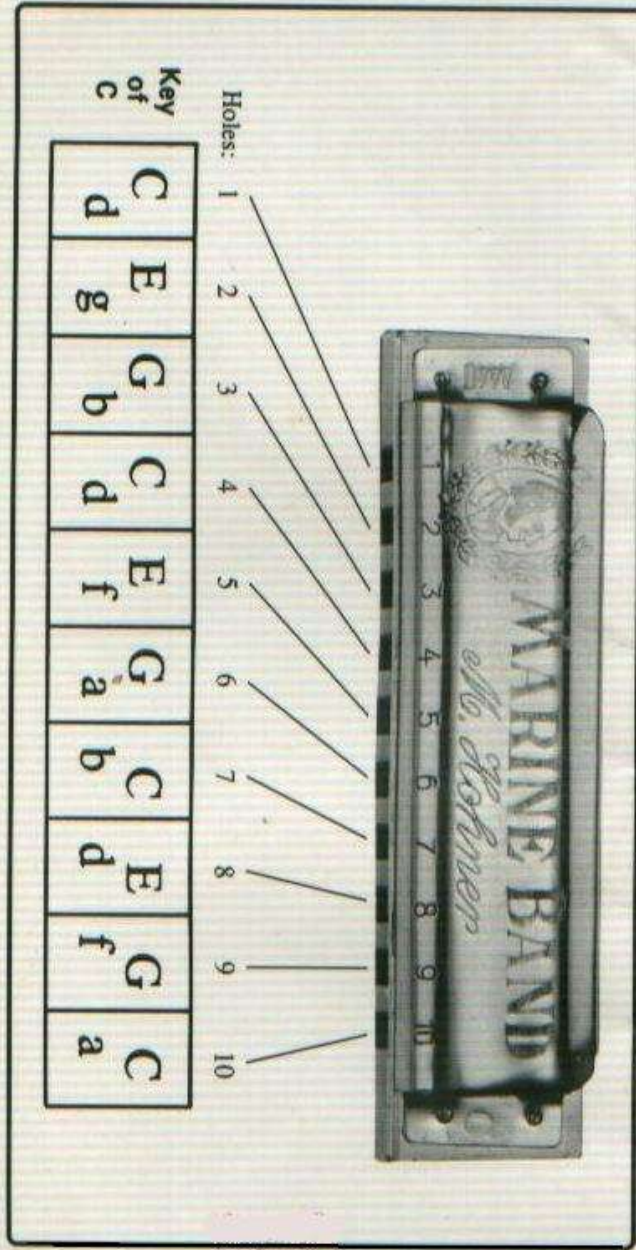
The best way to prevent stuck reeds is to keep your harp clean. Particularly avoid grease and dirt.

2. Many players soak their harps in water to make playing easier. This technique does free-up the reeds and speed up the break-in process. However, manufacturers warn against submerging the harmonica in any liquid, and will not generally repair a "soaked" harp.

A NOTE ON CHROMATIC HARP CARE

Since chromatic harmonicas tend to be quite expensive, it is often cheaper to repair a broken one than to replace it. Thus, it is particularly important that you do not tamper with the instrument, but leave repair to professionals.

\$4.95 in USA



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