



Chromatic for Diatonic Players

Part 7 Split Intervals

by Winslow Yerxa

This time we're going to look at how tongue blocking can help you select harmony notes.

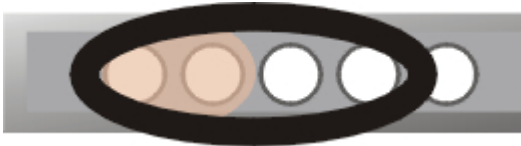
In the last two installments we looked at percussive textures that can be created with tongue blocking and on focusing melody on the left side of the tongue block. This time we put these pieces together, playing notes out of both left and right sides simultaneously.

What's the point of doing this? We need a way of delivering something between a full chord and a naked single note.

A full chord may be more sound than we want. It can be too big and too mushy-even in third position blues with its heavy reliance on the draw chord. And some of the notes in a full chord may not fit with the underlying harmony of the music. A two-note chord may be just right for both texture and harmony, but what if the two notes are not in neighboring holes? By playing a line in split intervals, you can select your note combination at will and beef up the overall sound while still keeping it fairly lean.

Neighbors Near and Far

You can easily create harmony by playing two notes in adjacent holes:



But how do you play two holes that are separated by one or more holes, without having those in-between holes sound as well?

You can use your tongue to block out the notes in between. Harmonica players often call this a split interval-the tongue is splitting a chord apart into two distinct notes.

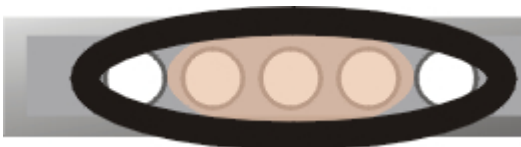
One-hole split:



Two-hole split:



Three-hole split



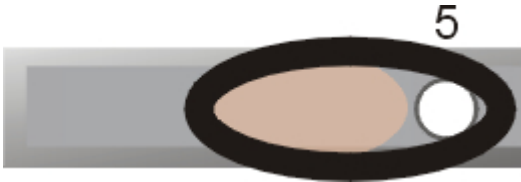
Each split will produce multiple types of harmony intervals-too many to detail here. All we can hope to do in this brief space is give you a way to start producing them-by choice, at will.

Start Where You Already Are - But Where is That?

Everyone is different. You should start with the split that comes most naturally for you. That may be a one-hole split, a two-hole split, or even a three-hole split.

But how can you tell what size of split you're starting with? Let's try a little measuring exercise.

Let's start by playing Hole 5 Draw. Play it with a tongue block from the right side of your mouth. Remember, play a draw note, not a blow note. (Why draw notes? The presence of two blow C's side by side can make it hard to know which hole or combination you're playing.)



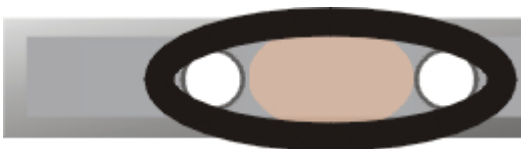
Click here to listen to Draw 5 <[draw_5.mp3](#)>. This is the note you want.

Now, lift your tongue off to sound a chord.



Depending on the number of holes covered by your mouth, you might be sounding one of several chords. Can your ear distinguish the top and bottom notes in the chord? Click here to hear the various combinations you might be sounding. <[chord_cascade.mp3](#)>

Now place your tongue on the mouthpiece and try to let one note sound on each side of your mouth.



Now, pay very close attention to how your tongue is feeling. Does it feel bunched up into a space that's too narrow? Does it feel like it's trying to stretch beyond its ability to cover? If needed, adjust the width of your mouth spread to suit your tongue. But-this is important-make sure your right side continues to play Draw 5. Work with this until you can produce (with at least some degree of comfort) clean single notes on both sides of your mouth.

Now, let's figure out what those notes are. Remember, the note on the right side needs to be Draw 5.

Here is what the different splits will sound like. Each one has Draw 5 on the right side. Listen carefully and figure out which one you're playing:

Click to hear a 1-hole split: <[5draw-1hole-split.mp3](#)>

Click to hear a 2-hole split: <[5draw-2hole-split.mp3](#)>

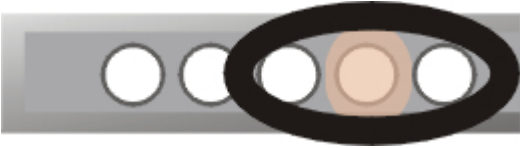
Click to hear a 3-hole split: <[5draw-3hole-split.mp3](#)>

Whichever split you're producing is the one you should progress with for now. Once you get good at that split, work on the next one larger or smaller.

Alternating Breaths

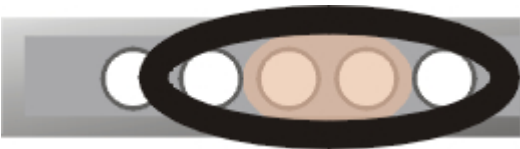
Let's try alternating the draw notes with blow notes. Don't move a thing. Everything (tongue, lips, jaws, and harp) stays **exactly** the same. Just one thing should change-you exhale. Play the draw split, then just change from draw to blow. Don't move anything-just change breath direction.

One-hole split:



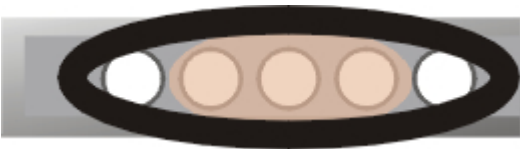
Click to hear it. <[5D-1split-draw-blow.mp3](#)>

Two Hole Split:



Click to hear it. <[5D-2split-draw-blow.mp3](#)>

Three-hole split:



Click to hear it. <[5D-3split-draw-blow.mp3](#)>

Lock and Glide

Now it's time to slide one hole to left and right. Again, nothing changes-not even the breath. Your lips, tongue, and jaw stay locked into the same configuration-but not cemented to the spot. That locked configuration needs to glide smoothly across the mouthpiece. There should be no friction between the harp and your lips or tongue.

One-Hole Split:

Click here to listen to a one-hole block-slide one hole to the right and back.
<[5D-1split-draw-rt.mp3](#)>

Click here to listen to a one-hole block-slide one hole to the left and back.
<[5D-1split-draw-lf.mp3](#)>

Two-hole split:

Click here to listen to a two-hole block-slide one hole to the right and back.
<[5D-2split-draw-rt.mp3](#)>

Click here to listen to a two-hole block-slide one hole to the left and back.
<[5D-2split-draw-lf.mp3](#)>

Three-hole split:

Click here to listen to a three-hole block-slide one hole to the right and back.
<[5D-3split-draw-rt.mp3](#)>

On a 12-hole chromatic there is no move to the left, but on a larger instrument this is possible. Click here to hear it on a 16-hole harp. <[5D-3split-draw-lf.mp3](#)>

Breath and Hole Change

Let's combine hole change with breath change.

One-hole split:

Click here to listen to a draw note in Hole 5 with a one-hole block move to a blow note one hole to the right and back <[5D-1split-bc-rt.mp3](#)>

Click here to listen to a draw note in Hole 5 with a one-hole block move to a blow note one hole to the left and back <[5D-1split-bc-lf.mp3](#)>

Two-hole split:

Click here to listen to a draw note in Hole 5 with a two-hole block move to a blow note one hole to the right and back <[5D-2split-bc-rt.mp3](#)>

Click here to listen to a draw note in Hole 5 with a two-hole block move to a blow note one hole to the left and back <[5D-2split-bc-lf.mp3](#)>

You may be surprised to hear an octave when you play the blow split. This is what you should hear, though. The double blow C's in Holes 4 and 5 mean that Blow 1 and 4 played together will sound an octave.

Three-hole split:

Click here to listen to a draw note in Hole 5 with a three-hole block move to a blow note one hole to the right and back <[5D-3split-bc-rt.mp3](#)>

On a 12-hole chromatic there is no move to the left. But on a larger instrument this is possible. Click here to hear it on a 16-hole harp. <[5D-3split-bc-lf.mp3](#)>

Again, you will hear an octave, just like you did when you changed breath without changing holes. This doesn't always happen, but the doubled C's make it so in this instance.

Playing the Scale

Once you have the most basic moves down, try a major scale up and down. Some of the intervals will sound weird. Don't worry about it and don't let yourself (or any of your body parts acting on their own) try to make corrective moves. Just listen to the result and note what it sounds like.

One-hole split:

↑ 5 ↓ 5 ↑ 6 ↓ 6 ↑ 7 ↓ 7 ↓ 8 ↑ 8 ↑ 8 ↓ 8 ↓ 7 ↑ 7 ↓ 6 ↑ 6 ↓ 5 ↑ 5

Click here to hear it: <[majscale_1split.mp3](#)>

Two-hole split:

↑ 5 ↓ 5 ↑ 6 ↓ 6 ↑ 7 ↓ 7 ↓ 8 ↑ 8 ↑ 8 ↓ 8 ↓ 7 ↑ 7 ↓ 6 ↑ 6 ↓ 5 ↑ 5

Click here to hear it: <[majscale_2split.mp3](#)>

Three-hole split:



This one should not sound weird-It should be a pure octave. If you hear anything else, you're not playing a three-hole split.

Click here to hear it: <[majscale_3split.mp3](#)>

Next Time:

We'll add a couple of new skills for using split intervals, then start applying split intervals musically.

Notation Key

Please visit <http://www.harmonicassessions.com/feb05/ChromaticTab.pdf> for a notation key.