



Chromatic for Diatonic Players

Blues Chromatic, Part 7: Combining the Big Chord Approach with the Slide

By Winslow Yerxa, Mel Bay's HarmonicaSessions® eZine

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Last issue I showed you the basics of the Big Chord Approach to playing blues in D on the chromatic. In this issue, I'll show you ways of integrating the chromatic slide into the Big Chord Approach.

Usually the Big Chord Approach doesn't involve the slide, because you don't want to mess with the big D minor 6th draw chord while you apply tongue blocking techniques to several notes at once. But using the slide raises the pitch of all the notes at the same time. Some of those raised notes may sound good, but others will sound wrong.

So how can you slide with the Big Chord Approach? In this article, I show you how to make it work by being selective about the notes you play.

How I'm Going to Approach the Material

- First I give you a single-note line that you play with a tongue block out of the right side of your mouth. The line will use the slide.
- Then I'll give you the same line in two-part harmony using a **split interval** (see below).
- Finally, I'll show you how you can apply special tongue techniques such as slaps, rakes, and shimmers to the lines you play. For more on these techniques, check out the April and June 2009 issues.

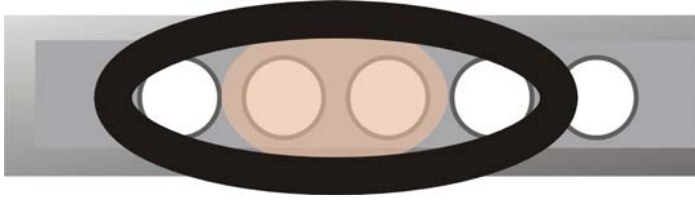
Split Intervals

Part of the characteristic sound of blues chromatic is the sound of two-note harmony created by notes several holes apart. You create these harmonies by playing a **split interval**: You block out the intervening holes with your tongue and sound the notes in the right and left corners of your mouth.

When you play a **one-hole split**, you block one intervening hole with your tongue:



When you play a **two-hole split**, you block two intervening holes with your tongue:



If you want to really study up on splits, check out the April 2006 column from the archives of HarmonicaSession.com. The articles that follow, up until December 2007, go into more and more detail about splits and other special embouchure techniques.

Most of the examples in this article use a **locked split**—you keep the same size of split, such as a one-hole split, locked in place and move it around on the harp. Some of the later articles will occasionally use a **variable split**, alternating between a one-hole and a two-hole split.

Lines with One-Hole Splits

In the key of D, D is the home note, so let's start there. Right below D is C#, a blow note you play with the slide in. Example 23-01 shows some simple moves for getting used to the note C# and playing it with D and C-natural. Click here (visit HarmonicaSessions.com for recorded examples) to listen <23-01.mp3>

23-01

Musical notation for Example 23-01. It is a single line of music in treble clef, key of D major, and 2/4 time. The notes are: D4 (quarter), C#4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), rest (quarter), D4 (quarter), C#4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), rest (quarter). Below the notes are arrows and the number 5: D (down arrow, 5), C# (up arrow, 5), D (up arrow, 5), D (down arrow, 5), rest, D (down arrow, 5), C# (up arrow, 5), D (up arrow, 5), C (up arrow, 5), D (down arrow, 5), rest.

Example 23-02 shows the same line with a one-hole split Click here to listen <23-02.mp3>

23-02

Musical notation for Example 23-02. It is a single line of music in treble clef, key of D major, and 2/4 time. The notes are: D4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), rest (quarter), D4 (quarter), C#4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), rest (quarter). Above the notes are plus signs: D (none), D (+), D (+), D (+), rest, D (+), C# (+), D (+), C (+), D (+), rest. Below the notes are arrows and the numbers 5 and 3: D (down arrow, 5), D (up arrow, 5), D (up arrow, 5), D (down arrow, 5), rest, D (down arrow, 5), C# (up arrow, 5), D (up arrow, 5), C (up arrow, 5), D (down arrow, 5), rest. Below the 5s are the number 3: 5, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3.

An even easier move is to travel between F and F#, as they're both draw notes in the same hole. Example 23-03 gives you four lines to play with using these notes. Click here to listen: <23-03.mp3>

Example 23-06 harmonizes the lines from Example 23-05. Now you can hear and experience why you'd use the slide-in B# draw note instead of the C blow note. Click here to listen <23-06.mp3>

23-06a

Diagram showing fingerings for Example 23-06a. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The melody consists of 11 notes. Above the staff, three '+' signs are placed above the 3rd, 5th, and 7th notes. Below the staff, fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 and arrows pointing down. The fingerings are: 3 (1), 4 (2), 4 (2), 4 (2), 4 (2), 3 (1), 3 (1), 4 (2), 4 (2), 4 (2), 3 (1).

23-06b

Diagram showing fingerings for Example 23-06b. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The melody consists of 11 notes. Above the staff, four '+' signs are placed above the 1st, 5th, 7th, and 10th notes. Below the staff, fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 and arrows pointing down. The fingerings are: 4 (2), 4 (2), 3 (1), 4 (2), 4 (2), 3 (1), 4 (2), 4 (2), 3 (1), 4 (2), 4 (2).

Example 23-07 shows you some lines using G#—this is the same note as the flat-fifth, one of the classic blue notes that's missing when you don't use the slide. Click here to listen <23-07.mp3>

23-07a

Diagram showing fingerings for Example 23-07a. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The melody consists of 11 notes. Below the staff, fingerings are indicated by numbers 5-7 and arrows pointing up or down. The fingerings are: 7 (down), 7 (up), 7 (up), 7 (up), 7 (down), 7 (down), 7 (down), 7 (up), 7 (up), 6 (down), 5 (down).

23-07b

Diagram showing fingerings for Example 23-07b. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The melody consists of 11 notes. Below the staff, fingerings are indicated by numbers 5-7 and arrows pointing up or down. The fingerings are: 7 (up), 7 (up), 7 (down), 7 (up), 7 (up), 7 (up), 7 (up), 7 (up), 7 (up), 6 (down), 5 (down).

Example 23-08 harmonizes those flat-fifth lines with a one-hole block. Click here to listen <23-08.mp3>

23-08a

Musical notation for 23-08a. The staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings and breath marks. The notes are: G4 (down, 7/5), A4 (up, 7/5), B4 (up, 7/5), C5 (up, 7/5), B4 (down, 7/5), A4 (down, 7/5), G4 (down, 7/5), F#4 (up, 7/5), E4 (up, 7/5), D4 (down, 6/4), and C4 (down, 5/3). There are plus signs above the first, third, and fifth notes.

23-08b

Musical notation for 23-08b. The staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings and breath marks. The notes are: G4 (up, 7/5), A4 (up, 7/5), B4 (down, 7/5), C5 (up, 7/5), B4 (up, 7/5), A4 (up, 7/5), G4 (up, 7/5), F#4 (up, 7/5), E4 (up, 7/5), D4 (down, 6/4), and C4 (down, 5/3). There are plus signs above the first, third, and fifth notes.

Examples 23-09a will probably sound normal to you. However, in 23-09b, you're alternating B# with C—and they sound like the same note, just played two different ways. So what's the point? Later, when you play 23-10, you'll hear the answer. [Click here to listen <23-09.mp3>](#)

23-09a

Musical notation for 23-09a. The staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings and breath marks. The notes are: B#4 (down, 6), C5 (up, 7), B#4 (down, 6), C5 (up, 7), B#4 (down, 7), C5 (down, 7), B#4 (down, 6), C5 (up, 7), B#4 (down, 6), C5 (up, 6), and B#4 (down, 5). There are plus signs above the first, third, and fifth notes.

23-09b

Musical notation for 23-09b. The staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings and breath marks. The notes are: B#4 (down, 4), C5 (up, 5), B#4 (down, 4), C5 (up, 5), B#4 (down, 5), C5 (down, 5), B#4 (down, 4), C5 (up, 5), B#4 (down, 4), C5 (up, 4), and B#4 (down, 3). There are plus signs above the first, third, and fifth notes.

In 23-10a, the lower harmony note stays the same while the top note changes. The harmony note alternates between Draw B# and Blow C, which sound like the same note.

In 23-10B, the B#-C note is on top, while the bottom note is the one that changes. This simple effect can make your playing sound subtle and complex.

23-10a

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

4 5 4 5 5 5 4 5 4 4 3

23-10b

↓ 4 ↑ 5 ↓ 4 ↑ 5 ↓ 5 ↓ 5 ↓ 4 ↑ 5 ↓ 4 ↑ 4 ↓ 3

2 3 2 3 3 3 2 3 2 2 1

Lines with a Two-hole Split

Two-hole splits can take special advantage of the **enharmonic notes** on the chromatic harmonica.

Enharmonic notes are notes that are spelled differently but sound the same. On the chromatic, E# and F are enharmonic notes, and so are B# and C. E# has different harmony notes than F, while B# has different harmony notes as C (as demonstrated earlier in Example 23-10). So you can keep one note sounding steadily while the harmony note changes. Paul deLay used this device to advantage in his playing.

Example 23-11a uses the F-E# enharmonic, while 23-11b uses the C-B# enharmonic. Play these as single note lines before you try the harmonized version; it can help you to avoid getting confused. [Click here to listen: <23-11.mp3>](#)

23-11a

↓ 6 ↑ 6 ↑ 6 ↓ 5 ↓ 5 ↑ 5 ↑ 5 ↑ 5 ↓ 5

23-11b

↑ 5 ↓ 4 ↑ 5 ↓ 4 ↑ 5 ↓ 4 ↑ 5 ↑ 6 ↑ 5

23-11c

↑ 5 ↓ 4 ↑ 5 ↓ 4 ↑ 5 ↓ 4 ↓ 4 ↓ 3 ↓ 4 ↓ 3 ↓ 2

Example 23-12 places moving harmony notes against the enharmonics. Again, this is one of the more subtle effects you can deploy. Click here to listen: <23-12.mp3>

23-12a

↓ 6 3, ↑ 6 3, ↑ 6 3, ↓ 5 2, ↓ 5 2, ↑ 5 2, ↑ 5 2, ↓ 5 2

23-12b

↑ 5 2, ↓ 4 1, ↑ 5 2, ↓ 4 1, ↑ 5 2, ↓ 4 1, ↑ 5 2, ↑ 6 3, ↑ 5 2

23-12c

↑ 5 2, ↓ 4 1, ↑ 5 2, ↓ 4 1, ↑ 5 2, ↓ 4 1, ↓ 4 1, ↓ 3 1, ↓ 4 1, ↓ 3 1, ↓ 2 4

Tongue Blocking Effects

With many of the splits in this article, some of the notes you block out will not sound good as part of a chord. This is especially likely for the splits played with the slide pressed in. However, some of the tongue block effects you use with the Big Chord Approach, such as slaps, hammers, and rakes, involve playing all the notes in your mouth. Aside from experimenting, how can you tell whether all the notes will sound good together when you use a particular effect?

I've placed marks above some of the notes to indicate where you should be careful. If nothing is marked above a split, you can use any technique you like and it will probably sound good. If you see a plus-sign mark above a split interval, then be careful, listen to the effect, and judge whether it works or not:

- A slap may work because the discord will be very brief and may heighten the effect.
- A rake or hammer will sustain the discordant note and will likely sound bad.

Next Time

Next time we'll move one more position around the circle of fifths and look at blues in G.

Recommended Book – Basic Blues Chromatic

<http://harmonicamasterclass.com/bc.htm>

Notation Key

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