



New Member of the Seydel Family

“Monster Harmonica Workbench” with Kinya Pollard
Mel Bay’s HarmonicaSessions® eZine

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In a previous issue, I reviewed the Seydel *Blues Black Favorite Harmonica* (Model #15301A with a retail price of \$54.95). Fitted with an aluminum comb and outfitted with tarnish-resistant chrome reed plates, this harmonica scored well in the “played out of the box” category.

Seydel now makes a sealed wooden comb alternative called the *Blues Soloist Pro Harmonica* (Model #11301A with a retail price of \$35.95). Similar to the *Blues Black Favorite* is the unique mouthpiece, featuring oval-shaped holes. This innovation makes for comfortable playing not typically found with wooden comb type harmonicas.



The Soloist's overall dimensions are 4" x 1.125," identical to the *Favorite Black* and similar to Hohner's MS Harmonicas.



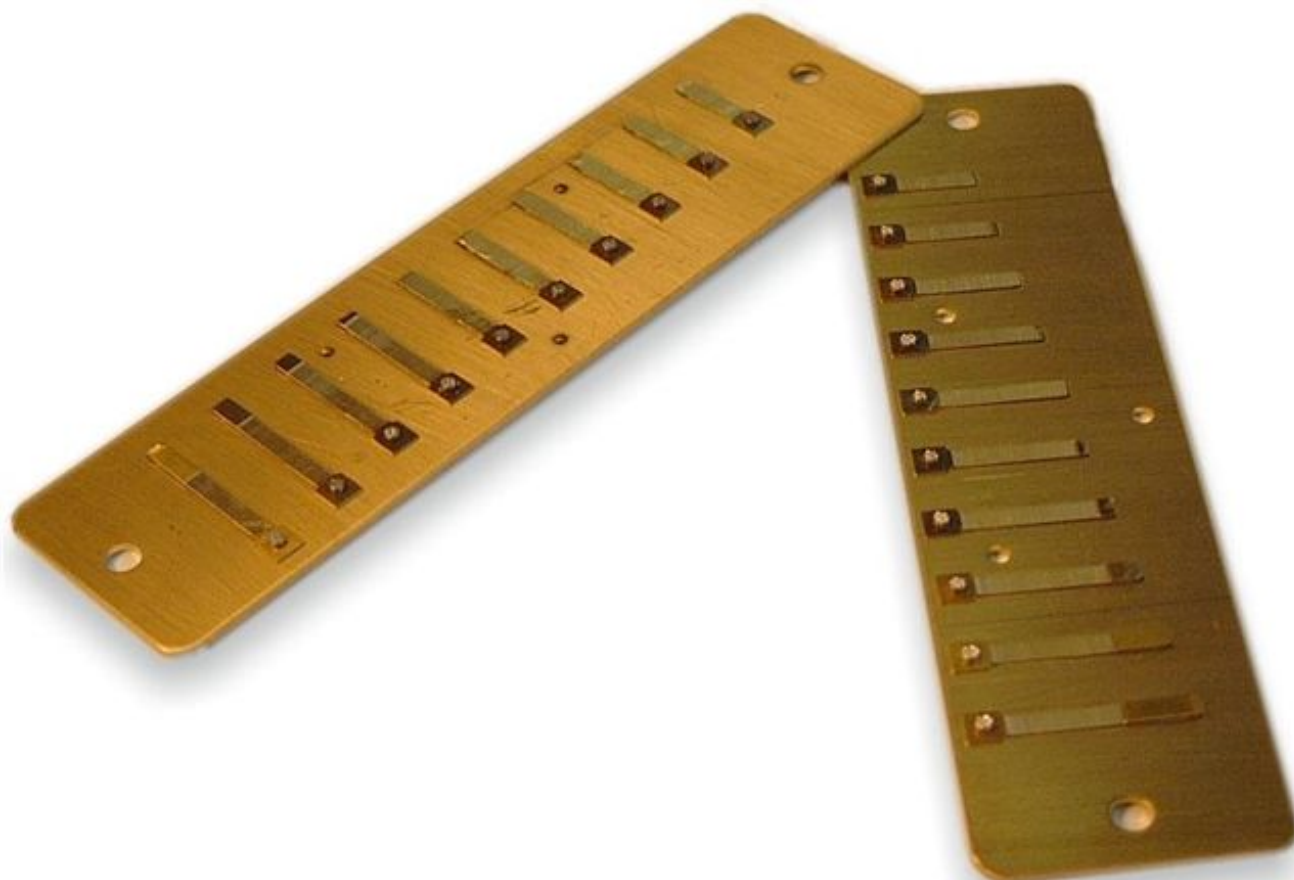
The chrome, flat-end mounted cover plates are not vented. For players who prefer a "traditional" sound (i.e. Hohner Marine Band 1896), simply replace the stock Seydel cover plates with Hohner's Big River. Slotting the cover plate holes with a jeweler's rat-tail type file will help align the cover plate bolts.



Under the Hood

The fit and finish of the *Blues Soloist Pro* wooden comb is one of the finest I have seen in a production type harmonica. Corners are rounded off, making this harmonica comfortable to hold in your hands. Smooth surfaces on both the top and bottom of the comb ensure an airtight fit for a more responsive instrument.

The reed plates are constructed of brass and share the same reeds found on the Seydel *Blues Black Favorite*. Gapping of the reeds was inconsistent on both the blow and draw reed plates, thus compromising the tonality of the instrument and requiring the player to blow harder than necessary.

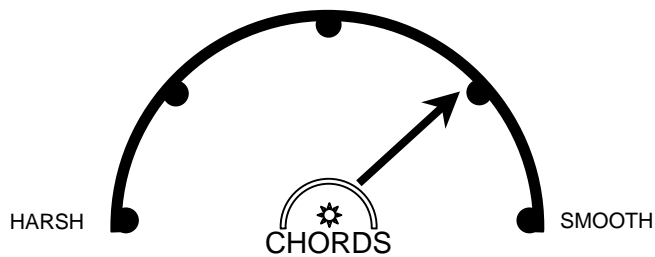
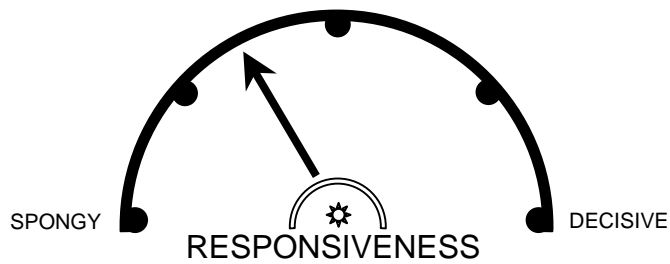
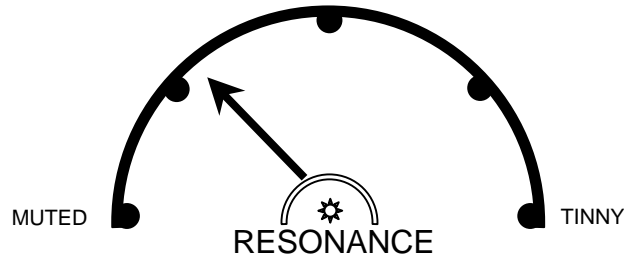


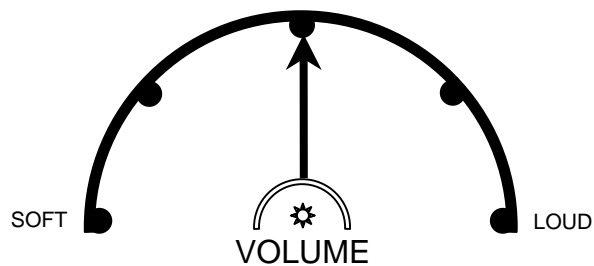
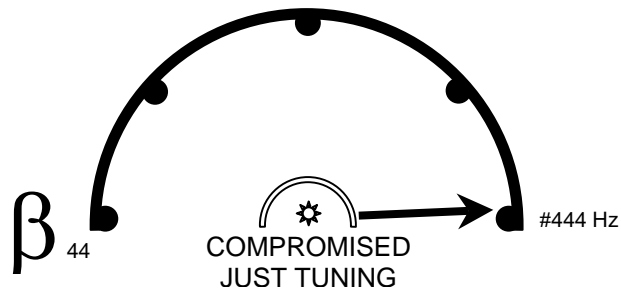
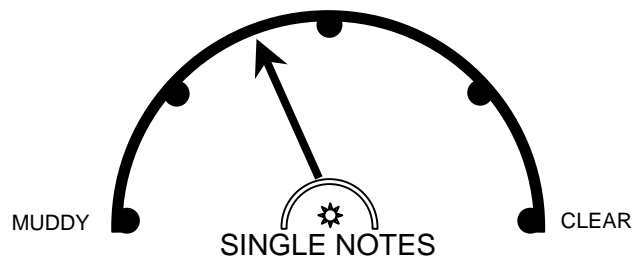
Seydel has machined crescent-shaped divots on the opposite side of the reed plate tip slots. Also known as “tip scooping,” this technique is effective for improving responsiveness of the reeds. To date, I have never seen tip scooping on “out of the box” type harmonicas. Furthermore, I have found better results when the tip scooping is applied to the reed side of the plates.

Test Drive (a.k.a. *the moment of truth*)

The Seydel *Blues Soloist Pro* is not a substitute for a customized harmonica. However, compared to other wooden comb type harmonicas that I have played out of the box, the *Blues Soloist Pro* performed adequately.

The HARPSMITHSM rating system measures the performance of the harmonica in Resonance (muted to tinny), Responsiveness (spongy to decisive) and Tonality (chords, single notes, octaves, tuning, and volume). Here is my assessment of this harmonica.





The Seydel *Blues Soloist Pro* Harmonica that I purchased for this review did not perform as well as I believed it could and should have. I am considering numerous strategies to improve this harmonica, including reed curling, recalibration of offsets (gapping), and possibly sizing the reed slots. In addition, I will swap the reed plates from the *Favorite Blues* harmonica. So many ideas and so little time! Join me next time for the continuing saga of the wayward Seydel.

Stay tuned!

Kinya
The Harpsmith