



Chromatic for Diatonic Players

Blues Chromatic in B

By Winslow Yerxa, Mel Bay's HarmonicaSessions® eZine

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Last time I promised yet another installment of advanced embouchure studies, but I'm having too much fun playing blues chromatic in B.

Did you say B? You mean B-natural, not B-flat? Why B? Why not some more normal key?

Here's why: blues in B on the chromatic has some cool effects that are easy and fun to play.

Now B may seem like a weird key, but Junior Wells and Buddy Guy didn't seem to think so. Mind you, Junior usually used an E diatonic in second position to play in B. But a chromatic? Well, Little Walter did it (on Muddy Waters' "My Eyes Keep Me in Trouble"). And it's far more natural than you might think. If you don't believe me, just click here and listen to this tune called Blue Chrome: [blue chrome.mp3](#)

This is a full-length tune, three and a half minutes long. And it's almost entirely played using the six-note B blues scale, which lies surprisingly well on a C chromatic. We're going to use that one recording for the entire article.

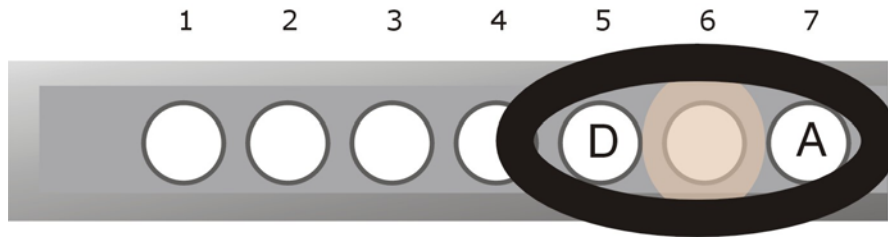
By the way, it's played on a four-octave chromatic, and the entire range of the instrument is used. You can play all these licks and effects on a three-octave harp. But you'd have to move some things up an octave to put them within the range of the instrument.

Here's the B blues scale: B D E F F# A

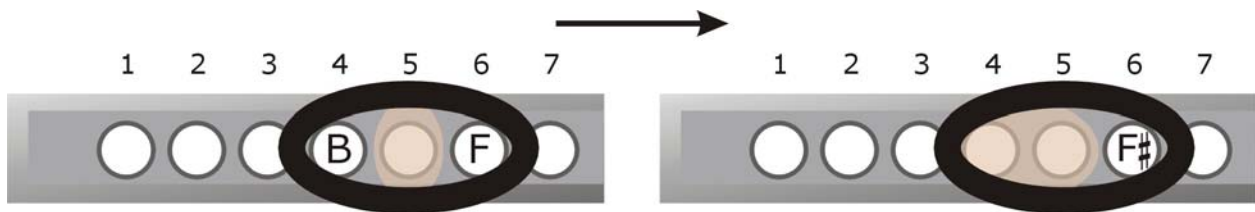
Now look at the note layout of a chromatic:

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
DRAW	Slide In	D#	F#	A#	C	D#	F#	A#	C	D#	F#	A#	D
	Slide Out	D	F	A	B	D	F	A	B	D	F	A	B
BLOW	Slide In	C#	F	G#	C#	C#	F	G#	C#	C#	F	G#	C#
	Slide Out	C	E	G	C	C	E	G	C	C	E	G	C

Next, at 0:52, we start playing a tongue blocked chord. We're blocking one hole in the middle and playing the notes on each side. We start playing D and A together, with A on top. We ride that for a while, bending it slightly and releasing a few times as we hold the pair.



Then we slide one hole to the left. Now we have B and F, with F on top. This sounds very discordant, so we bring the F up to F# by pressing in the slide. But if we leave the left side of the mouth open, we'll get C, which will sound bad. So we close up the left side and only play the F# on the right. The second time we do it, we come to the isolated F# and end up alternating it with the D/A split we played before. On the mouthpiece it looks like this:



Here it is in notation and tab:

At 1:09 we actually go away from the blues scale a little. Let's talk about chords for a moment. This is a one-chord tune, with guitar and bass playing a B7 chord the entire time. The notes in the chord are B – D# – F# – A. If we look at the note layout:

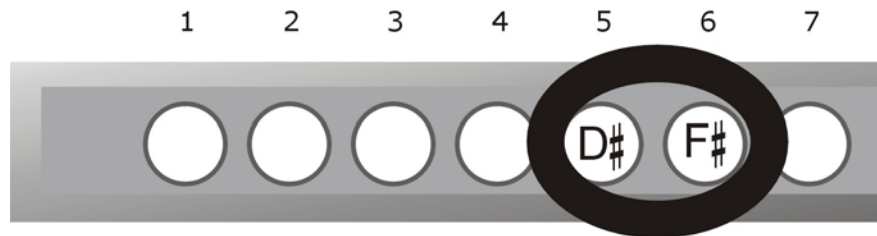
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
DRAW	Slide In	D#	F#	A#	C	D#	F#	A#	C	D#	F#	A#	D
	Slide Out	D	F	A	B	D	F	A	B	D	F	A	B
BLOW	Slide In	C#	F	G#	C#	C#	F	G#	C#	C#	F	G#	C#
	Slide Out	C	E	G	C	C	E	G	C	C	E	G	C

We can see that D# and F# are both slide-in draw notes, while B and A are slide-out draw notes. We can outline the entire chord by alternating between these two groups using the donut embouchure.

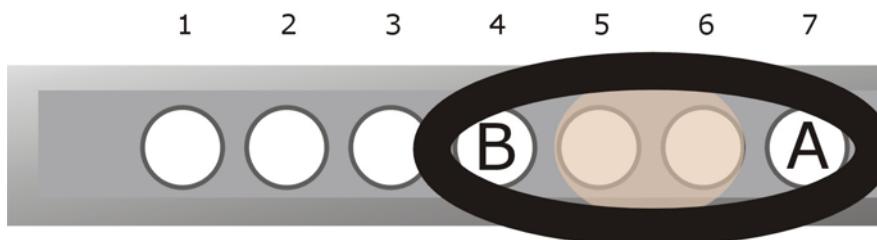
What we hear starting at 1:09 is D# and F# played together in Holes 5 and 6 with the slide. We let the slide out for D and F, then press it back in. We may also go down to B one hole farther to the left. But then at 1:23 we hear the donut.

A donut has a hole, right? The hole is there because it's surrounded by the donut. So this embouchure alternates between the hole and the donut. We play D# and F# in the hole, and B and A in the ring.

The hole:



The donut:



The ring of the donut is actually a split interval covering four holes, with the two in the middle blocked by the tongue. After the donut at 1:23, this split spread migrates one hole to the right, giving us a split with D on the bottom and B on top. Then we move one more hole to the right, with F on the bottom and D on the top. We continue to move around in that area, maintaining the split. We're just playing notes from the B blues scale as a series of two-note chords. Whenever we play F without bringing it up to F#, things sound unresolved, so at 1:33 we finally bring back the F#, as a single note.

At 2:35 we go back to the donut shop for a break after all that fast high stuff. We start with tongue-split chords covering four holes with the middle two blocked out, first a D/B split and then B/A. But then we use the B/A split as a donut and alternate it with slide-in D#/F# in the donut hole.

donut-----, hole-----, donut----, hole----, donut

As the tune fades, we explore the buzz-saw sound of single notes in the bottom octave of a four-octave instrument.

Notation Key

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