



Chromatic for Diatonic Players

Blues Chromatic, Part 5: Key of D

By Winslow Yerxa, Mel Bay's HarmonicaSessions® eZine

February 2009

When you hear blues played on the chromatic harmonica by the great blues players, from Little Walter through George "Harmonica" Smith to Rod Piazza, Mark Hummel, William Clarke, or Kim Wilson, you hear that magnificent, huge D minor draw chord that's like ripe fruit just waiting to be picked. You use that draw chord, along with all sorts of tongue blocked textures and some licks that don't even need the chromatic slide button, and you can make some mighty fine music.

But this time, even though this installment is about blues in D, I'm not going to write about the classic approach. Don't get me wrong, it's a great sound, and I won't ignore it – in fact, in the next issue I'll cover the basics and then show you some new twists on it. But right now I want to show you an approach that will let you dig a little deeper than just that big draw chord. Later, when you come back to it, you'll have the tools to add all sorts of things that weave around it and will let you integrate the classic sounds with your own ideas.

Before starting in on D blues, let's review the way I've been working through a series of keys, one for each issue of HarmonicaSessions.com. Back in February 2008, and again in April 2008, I started with the key of B, then moved on to E and A in the June and August issues. Now we've arrived at D.

Why go through keys in this sequence? Because in the new key, you can use 2/3 of what you learned in the last key because they share two of the three basic chords. Along with those shared chords you have shared licks and scales you can use as well. All this shared material makes it easier to find things to play in the new key because parts of it are already familiar.

Here's a map of the keys in this sequence and their overlapping chords, starting with the key of B:

Key of B		
V	I	IV
F#	B	E

Key of E		
V	I	IV
B	E	A

Key of A		
V	I	IV
E	A	D

Key of D		
V	I	IV
A	D	G

Key of G		
V	I	IV
D	G	C

In case this looks like gibberish, let me recap:

The most important chord in any key is the I chord (as in Roman numeral “one”). The I chord is always built on the home note of the key. In the key of B, the I chord is B. In E, the I chord is E, and so on. The next most important chords are the IV chord and the V chord. Learn to play over those three chords and you can play a huge amount of music in that key – and not just blues. Rock, country and many other styles also use the I, IV, and V chords.

The chart above shows you how two of the chords in B are also chords in E, even though in each key, the same chords have different roles in the I-IV-V scheme.

In the last issue, where we covered the key of A, the I, IV, and V chords were A, D, and E.

Now that we're in the key of D, we carry over two chords from the previous installment, A and D. Our new chord is G. If you want to gain more familiarity with playing over an A chord or a D chord, check out the June 2008 and August 2008 issues.

Getting from D to G

When you play blues in D, the first move from one chord to another is usually from D7 to G7. To do that, you need to find your way from a note in the D chord to a note in the G chord. The smoothest way to do that is to go to the nearest note in the next chord, which may mean moving up, moving down, or sometimes just staying in the same place.

Let's look at the notes in the D and G major chords:

- The D7 chord includes the notes D, F#, A, and C.
- The G7 chord includes G, B, D, and F.

This grid shows how the notes of the D7 chord flow UP to the nearest note in the G7 chord:

D7:	D	F#	A	C
G7:	F	G	B	D

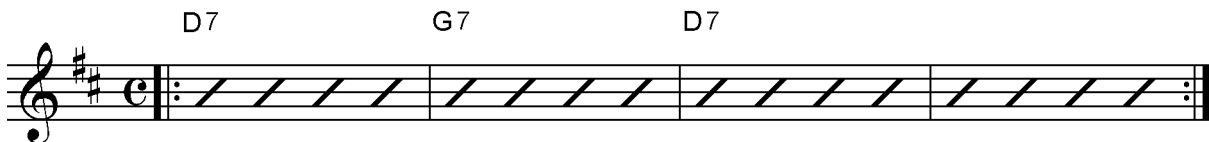
This grid shows how the notes of the D7 chord flow DOWN to the nearest note in the G7 chord:

D7:	D	F#	A	C
G7:	D	F	G	B

Here are the notes of the two chords mapped on a note layout so you can see where you'd make your moves in either direction:

		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

Let's map out some licks that would work going from D7 to G7. Here's the chord progression. It's like the first four bars of a 12-bar blues with an early IV – the IV chord puts in an early "teaser" appearance before its main appearance later on.



Click here: [21-01.mp3](#) (visit HarmonicaSessions.com for MP3 audio files) to hear this progression, and use it to back you as you play the next two sets of licks that go from D7 to G7 and back.

Here is a series of licks that go UP from a note in the D7 chord to a note in the G7 chord.
 Click here to listen: [21-02.mp3](#)

D up to F and back

D7 G7 D7

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

F# up to G and back

D7 G7 D7

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

A up to B and back

D7 G7 D7

3 2 3 4 3 3 4 3 4 3 3 2 3 2 2 3

C up to D and back

D7 G7 D7

4 3 4 5 5 6 6 5 5 5 5 4 3 2 3 4

Here is a series of licks that go DOWN from a note in the D7 chord to a note in the G7 chord. Click here to listen: [21-03.mp3](#)

D stays on D

F# down to F and back

A down to G and back

C down to B and back

Licks on a G chord – Pentatonic Scale

The pentatonic scale is a versatile five-note scale you can use to build licks. If you work out with the pentatonic scale that goes with a chord, you can find licks you've already heard and make up new ones as well. I've shown you the A pentatonic scale in the June 2008 issue and the D pentatonic scale in the August 2008 issue. Now it's time to show you the G pentatonic scale, which includes the notes G, A, B, D and E.

The notes A, B, and D lie in a line as draw notes in neighboring holes, while E and G lie in a line as blow notes in neighboring holes. To play the G pentatonic scale, all you have to is play two blow notes and three draw notes – just start in the right place and change breath every few notes.

		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

Here is a simple exercise for getting familiar with the G pentatonic scale. Click here to hear it: [21-04.mp3](#)

G

1 2 3 3 4 3 3 2 3 3 4 5 6 5 4 3

4 5 7 6 7 7 6 5 6 7 7 8 9 8 7 7

1 2 3 2 3 3 3 3 4 3 4 5 4 5 6 5 6 7 6 7 7 7

8 7 7 7 7 6 7 6 5 6 5 4 5 4 3 4 3 3 3 3 2 3

Let's map out some licks that would work going from G7 to D7. Here's the chord progression.

Click here to hear this progression [21-05.mp3](#), and use it to back you as you play the next two sets of licks that start on G7 and go back to D7.

Here are some licks based on the G pentatonic scale played over the middle 4 bars of a 12-bar blues in D. Click here to listen: [21-06.mp3](#)

Licks on a G7 Chord

For a harder-edged sound over a G chord, you can add F, the 7th of the chord, and also play from the D blues scale. Here are some licks that do that, again played over the middle 4 bars of a 12-bar blues in D. Click here to listen: [21-07.mp3](#)

G7 D7

3

↓ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

3 4 5 6 6 7 7 7 6 5 6 5 4 4 3 3 2 2 3 3 4 3 3

G7 D7

3

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

6 6 5 5 4 3 3 3 3 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 5 5 6

G7 D7

3

↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

7 7 7 6 5 6 5 4 3 3 3 2 1 1 1 1 2 3 4 5 6

G7 D7

3

↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

3 4 3 4 4 5 5 6 5 6 7 7 7 8 7 8 9 9 10 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

Getting from A7 to G7

The last 4 measures of a 12-bar blues in D go from A7 to G7, then back to D. That quick move from A7 to G7 can be tackled by looking at how the individual notes of an A7 chord go to the individual notes of a G7 chord.

A7 UP to G7:

A7:	A	C#	E	G
G7:	B	D	F	G

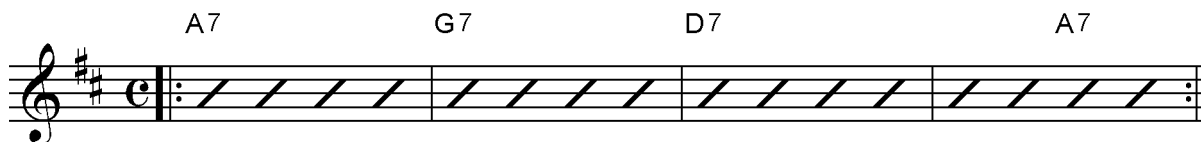
A7 DOWN to G7:

A7:	A	C#	E	G
G7:	G	B	D	F

Here's the map on the note layout of the harp:

		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

Here's a simple form of the chord progression of the last four measures of a 12-bar blues in D.



Click here to hear this progression [21-08.mp3](#), and use it to back you as you play the next two sets of licks that complete the 12-bar verse.

Here are some licks going UP from notes of A7 to notes of G7. Click here to listen: [21-09.mp3](#)

A up to B
A7 G7 D7 A7

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

C# up to D
A7 G7 D7 A7

1 1 1 2 1 1 1 2 2 1 2 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 3 3

E up to F
A7 G7 D7 A7

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

G stays on G
A7 G7 D7 A7

7 6 7 7 6 5 6 7 6 5 7 6 5 6 7 6 6 6

Here are some licks going DOWN from notes of A7 to notes of G7. Click here to listen: [21-10.mp3](#)

A down to G

C# down to B

E down to D

G down to F

Here's the complete chord progression for blues in D. Click here to listen [21-11.mp3](#) and play along using some of the licks you've learned.

D7 G7 D7

G7 D7

A G7 D7 A

Next Time

Blues in D – the big chord approach

Notation Key

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