



Chromatic for Diatonic Players

Part 8 The Variable Split, Basic Moves

by Winslow Yerxa

Last time we worked with split intervals—two notes spaced several holes apart, played while blocking out the intervening holes with the tongue. We ended by playing a major scale while maintaining a split of a fixed size—first a one-hole split, then again with a two-hole split, and finally a three-hole split. The three-hole split consistently produces an octave. However, one-hole and two-hole splits produce musical intervals of varying size. As a result, at certain points in the scale some very strange things happened. If you played those exercises, you probably felt very strongly that the harmony at certain points should have been different.

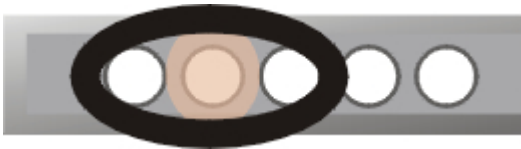
The variable split is a split interval that changes size while you are playing. It lets you choose at will among available note combinations. It is limited only by how wide you can stretch your mouth and tongue—and of course, your inability to blow and draw at the same time or to play slide-in and slide-out notes simultaneously. It's a powerful tool for playing harmonies. It could help with those major scales, and that's one thing we'll be exploring. We'll also look at using variable intervals to harmonize some third-position blues lines and a simple melody.

Getting Started

Let's start with the simplest variable split—one side stays put and the other changes. As you begin, you may find it easier to keep the left side still and move the right side. Or you may find the opposite. With these exercises, you can start with whatever you find easiest, then move to the one that you find harder.

Left Side Stays, Right Side Moves

Start with a one-hole block using Holes 1 and 3:



The blow notes will sound like this: [8-1.mp3](#)

The draw notes will sound like this: [8-2.mp3](#)

Now, play the one-hole block while blowing. Keep Hole 1 sounding and widen your block on the right side only:

The diagram illustrates the transition from a one-hole block to a two-hole block. The top part shows a one-hole block with fingerings 3 and 4. The bottom part shows a two-hole block with fingerings 3 and 4. Below the diagrams is a musical staff with two notes: a quarter note on G4 and a quarter note on A4. Fingerings 3 and 4 are indicated below the notes.

It may take some practice to get this to sound cleanly.

Click here [8-3.mp3](#) to listen.

Now try moving back and forth between the one-hole block and the two-hole block.

The musical staff shows four notes: G4, A4, G4, A4. Each note has fingerings 3 and 4 indicated below it.

Click here [8-4.mp3](#) to listen.

Now let's do the same thing with the draw notes. Start with a one-hole block, draw, and expand on the right side to a two-hole block.

The musical staff shows two notes: G4 and A4. The G4 note has fingerings 3 and 4, and the A4 note has fingerings 4 and 1.

Click here [8-5.mp3](#) to listen.

Now try moving back and forth between one-hole and two-hole block on the draw notes:

Click here [8-6.mp3](#) to hear it.

Now let's try some combinations of blow and draw. Here are two that play smooth harmonies on a part of the major scale:

Click here [8-7.mp3](#) to hear it.

Click here [8-8.mp3](#) to hear it.

Here are some additional exercises in moving between blow and draw:

Click here [8-9.mp3](#) to hear it.



Click here [8-9A.mp3](#) to hear it.

Right Side Stays, Left Side Moves

Start with a one-hole block on Holes 3 and 5:

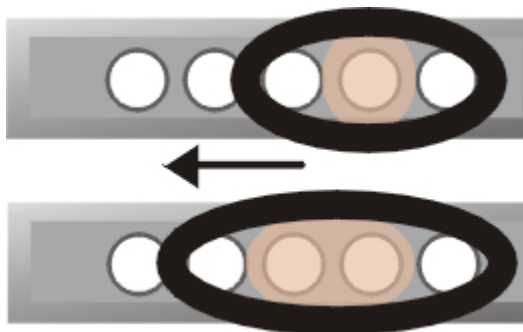


We'll start with the draw notes. In this part of the harp, they are a more reliable guide than the blow notes, as the C in Blow 5 also occurs in Blow 4.

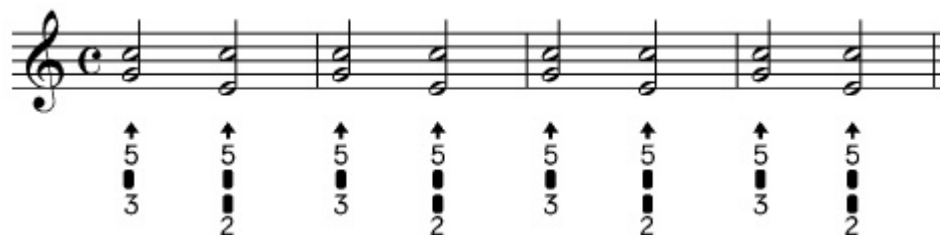
Click here [8-10.mp3](#) to hear the draw notes.

Click here [8-11.mp3](#) to hear draw and blow alternating.

Now, let's try expanding the block on the left side to arrive at a two-hole block:



With blow notes:



Click here [8-12.mp3](#) to hear it.

With draw notes:

Click here [8-13.mp3](#) to hear it.

Mixed blow and draw:

Click here [8-14.mp3](#) to hear it.

Click here [8-15.mp3](#) to hear it.

Click here [8-16.mp3](#) to hear it. Where do you hear the melody moving this time-on the left side or on the right?

Putting It To Work

Major Scale with Variable Splits

Here are two different harmonizations of the major scale, one using mostly a one-hole split, the other mostly using a two-hole split.

One-hole split:

↑ 5 ↓ 5 ↑ 6 ↓ 6 ↑ 7 ↓ 7 ↓ 8 ↑ 9 ↑ 9 ↓ 8 ↓ 7 ↑ 7 ↓ 6 ↑ 6 ↓ 5 ↑ 5
 3 3 4 3 5 5 6 6 6 5 5 3 4 3 3

Click here [8-17.mp3](#) to hear it.

Two-hole split:

↑ 5 ↓ 5 ↑ 6 ↓ 6 ↑ 7 ↓ 7 ↓ 8 ↑ 9 ↑ 9 ↓ 8 ↓ 7 ↑ 7 ↓ 6 ↑ 6 ↓ 5 ↑ 5
 2 2 3 3 5 5 5 6 6 5 5 3 3 2 2

Click here [8-18.mp3](#) to hear it.

Third Position Lines with Variable Splits

Here are a couple of exercises that employ variable splits playing in D minor on a C harmonica:

↓ 9 ↑ 8 ↓ 7 ↓ 7 ↓ 6 ↑ 6 ↓ 5
 6 6 5 4 3 3 2

Click here [8-19.mp3](#) to hear it.

↓ 5 ↑ 6 ↓ 6 ↑ 7 ↓ 7 ↓ 8 ↑ 9 ↓ 8 ↓ 7
 2 3 3 4 5 5 6 5 5

Click here [8-20.mp3](#) to hear it.

Tune Melody with Variable Splits

Here is the old folk tune, Aura Lee (also known as Love Me Tender), arranged with variable splits.

Staff 1: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. Fingerings: (3,1) up, (4,1) up, (4,1) down, (5,2) up, (5,2) down, (3,2) down, (5,2) down, (5,2) up, (4,1) down, (3,1) down, (4,1) down, (4,1) up.

Staff 2: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Fingerings: (3,1) up, (4,1) up, (4,1) down, (5,2) up, (5,2) down, (3,2) down, (5,2) down, (5,2) up, (4,1) down, (3,1) down, (4,1) down, (4,1) up, (5,2) up, (5,2) down, (3,2) down.

Staff 3: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Fingerings: (6,3) up, (6,3) up, (6,3) up, (6,4) up, (6,3) up, (6,3) up, (6,4) up, (6,3) up, (5,2) down, (5,2) down, (5,2) up, (5,2) down, (6,3) up, (6,4) up, (6,3) up.

Staff 4: Treble clef, C major, 4/4 time. Notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. Fingerings: (6,3) up, (6,3) up, (6,3) down, (6,3) up, (5,2) down, (3,2) down, (5,2) down, (5,2) up, (4,1) down, (6,3) up, (5,2) down, (4,2) up, (4,2) up, (4,2) up, (4,1) up.

Click here [8-21.mp3](#) to hear it.

Next Time

So far we've been avoiding leaps, never moving the entire embouchure more than one hole at a time. Next time we'll start leaping, and look at a few more extensions to variable splits and some of the cool things they make possible.

Notation Key

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