



# Chromatic for Diatonic Players

## Multiple Embouchure - Part 1

By Winslow Yerxa, Mel Bay's HarmonicaSessions® eZine

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Is your mouth like a hand or like a slug? A hand has fingers that can span long stretches and can work individually, or together as a block, or in complex coordination. A slug can only do one thing—ooze and creep from place to place in an unbroken trail.

For several installments, this series has been hinting that your mouth can be more like a hand when playing the harmonica. We've looked at playing split intervals—playing simultaneous notes on both the left and right sides of the mouth, with the tongue splitting them apart by blocking out the holes in the middle. This is a little like having a hand with two fingers.

We've looked at using the left side embouchure by itself to play melody instead of letting the right side embouchure have all the fun (see *Left Field Embouchure*, February 2006). We've looked at using the tongue to create chordal and rhythmic textures to enhance melody played out of the right side or the left side (see articles from December 2005 forward).

Now we're going to look at playing melody by alternating right and left side embouchures. All this adds up to something I call ***Multiple Embouchure***.

Embouchure just means what you do with your mouth to play a wind instrument. For players of flute, clarinet, trumpet, and all the other wind instruments, only one mouth opening is needed—the one that blows into the single air hole. The fingers do most of the walking from note to note, with some help from air pressure.

On the harmonica, the fingers have almost no role in selecting notes—the notes stay home and the mouth does the walking—it visits each note at home to play it. If you just make one hole in your mouth and move that around to get from note to note, you're using a single embouchure—you're really more like the slug oozing along. But if you can make multiple openings in different parts of your mouth that can play different notes on different parts of the harmonica, you have something a whole lot more like a hand. That's Multiple Embouchure. Multiple Embouchure can be used to play harmonies, chordal textures, and melodies, and it can alternate among all these possibilities.

## Multiple Embouchure and Melody

One of the great strengths of Multiple Embouchure is what it offers for playing clean, accurate melodies while traversing wide leaps. Wide leaps tend to present two problems to harmonica players:

**Crosstalk.** While we're crossing from one note to the next, the notes in between are talking.

**Slop.** We may have trouble hitting the target note accurately, and either miss it entirely or hit it sloppily, perhaps sounding holes on either side before we finally land in the right place.

You have a powerful tool to eliminate both these problems at once: let the tongue block out the intervening notes and switch between right and left embouchures. Classical harmonica players figured this out years ago and tend to call this **Corner Switching**. But it's really just one aspect of Multiple Embouchure.

Switching between right and left sides does more than solve problems. It also presents many opportunities for melodic patterns that are complex and yet easy to play once you get the hang of the basic technique. Even the basic exercises later in this installment will hint at some of the possibilities.

## Review

If you want to review tongue blocking basics, I suggest Installment 2 (April, 2005).

## Lick Your Lips

Place your tongue between your lips and lick them. Slide the tongue from side to side, to one corner of the mouth and then to the other, and back again.



That's all there really is to alternating notes via multiple embouchure. In fact it often takes far less motion than licking your lips.

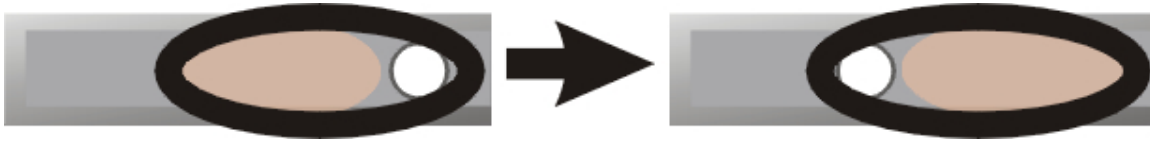
Now, let's play a single tongue blocked draw note with Hole 5 at the right:



Click here to listen [<10-2.mp3>](#) (visit [www.harmonicassessions.com](http://www.harmonicassessions.com) to here this MP3 example)

Now, remember licking your lips. Your tongue should be touching the left corner of your mouth. Stop playing for a moment—keep the harp in your mouth and make the move without breathing. Slide your tongue to the right until it touches the right corner of your mouth. Then slide it gently back so that it touches the left corner again.

Now try it with the sound turned on. Play Draw 5 out for the right side, then slide your tongue to the right until it touches the right corner. What you want to hear is a clean single note on the left side:



For now, don't worry about what note you find on the left side. Everyone is different and your lips and tongue may naturally block a width of three, four, or even five holes. Each width will result in a different note on the left side. Listen to the samples below to determine which one you are doing naturally.

At first you may not get a single note on the left side. Let your left side gravitate to a single note and isolate it. You may want to review playing melodies out of the left side (February 2006).

Click here to hear a switch from Draw 5 to Draw 3. [<10-5.mp3>](#) This covers a total of three holes and looks like this:



Click here to hear a switch from Draw 5 to Draw 2. [<10-6.mp3>](#) This covers a total of four holes and looks like this:



Click here to hear a switch from Draw 5 to Draw 1. [<10-7.mp3>](#) This covers a total of five holes and looks like this:



Most likely you naturally produce an embouchure that covers either three or four holes.

### In-Place Exercises

Following is a set of exercises that stays in one place on the harmonica and uses only four notes, a blow and a draw note on the right side and a blow and a draw on the left side. Switching around among these notes produces an amazing variety of combinations, and what is presented next only scratches the surface.

The exercises are presented in two versions: one that uses a three-hole spread and another that uses identical motion patterns but with a four-hole spread. If you can start with the three-

hole spread, it will probably make more sense to you musically. But start with whichever spread is most natural to you, learn all the patterns, then tackle the other spread.

### Exercises for a Three-Hole Spread

Here is an exercise that simply alternates draw notes between left and right.

R   L   R   L   R   L   R   L

Click here to listen [<10-3-1.mp3>](#)

The draw note on each side alternates with the blow note in the same hole. *Don't move your mouth—just change your breath.*

R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_

Click here to listen [<10-3-2.mp3>](#)

This time we start with the blow note on each side and alternate it with the draw note.

R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_

Click here to listen [<10-3-3.mp3>](#)

Now we alternate the blow notes on either side. Be sure not to change your mouth position.

R   L   R   L   R   L   R   L

Click here to listen [<10-3-4.mp3>](#)

First we alternate draw notes, then we alternate blow notes.

R L R L R L R L

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

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains eight quarter notes. Above the staff, the letters 'R' and 'L' alternate above each note. Below the staff, arrows point down for the first four notes (labeled 5 and 3) and arrows point up for the last four notes (labeled 5 and 3). The notes are: G4 (R), F4 (L), E4 (R), D4 (L), C4 (R), B3 (L), A3 (R), G3 (L).

Click here to listen [<10-3-5.mp3>](#)

Now we move from the lowest note in sequence through to the highest note.

L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L

↑ 3   ↓ 3   ↑ 5   ↓ 5   ↑ 5   ↓ 3

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains six quarter notes. Above the staff, 'L' is above the first and last notes, and 'R' is above the middle four notes. Below the staff, arrows point up for the first, third, and fifth notes (labeled 3, 5, 5) and arrows point down for the second, fourth, and sixth notes (labeled 3, 5, 3). The notes are: G3 (L), A3 (R), B3 (R), C4 (R), D4 (R), E4 (L).

Click here to listen [<10-3-6.mp3>](#)

Now we move from the highest note in sequence through to the lowest note.

R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R

↓ 5   ↑ 5   ↓ 3   ↑ 3   ↓ 3   ↑ 5

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains six quarter notes. Above the staff, 'R' is above the first and last notes, and 'L' is above the middle four notes. Below the staff, arrows point down for the first, third, and fifth notes (labeled 5, 3, 3) and arrows point up for the second, fourth, and sixth notes (labeled 5, 3, 5). The notes are: E4 (R), D4 (L), C4 (L), B3 (L), A3 (L), G3 (R).

Click here to listen [<10-3-7.mp3>](#)

Alternating leaps—draw jumps down, blow jumps up.

R L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R

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

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains eight quarter notes. Above the staff, 'R' is above the first, third, and seventh notes, and 'L' is above the second, fourth, fifth, and sixth notes. Below the staff, arrows point down for the first, second, fifth, and sixth notes (labeled 5, 3, 5, 3) and arrows point up for the third, fourth, seventh, and eighth notes (labeled 3, 5, 3, 5). The notes are: G4 (R), F4 (L), E4 (L), D4 (L), C4 (L), B3 (L), A3 (R), G3 (R).

Click here to listen [<10-3-8.mp3>](#)

Alternating leaps—blow jumps down, draw jumps up.

R L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R

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

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains eight quarter notes. Above the staff, 'R' is above the first, third, and seventh notes, and 'L' is above the second, fourth, fifth, and sixth notes. Below the staff, arrows point up for the first, second, fifth, and sixth notes (labeled 5, 3, 5, 3) and arrows point down for the third, fourth, seventh, and eighth notes (labeled 3, 5, 3, 5). The notes are: G4 (R), F4 (L), E4 (L), D4 (L), C4 (L), B3 (L), A3 (R), G3 (R).

Click here to listen [<10-3-9.mp3>](#)

Draw jumps down, blow jumps down.

R L R L R L R L

↓ 5 ↓ 3 ↑ 5 ↑ 3 ↓ 5 ↓ 3 ↑ 5 ↑ 3

Click here to listen [<10-3-10.mp3>](#)

Draw jumps up, blow jumps up.

L R L R L R L R

↓ 3 ↓ 5 ↑ 3 ↑ 5 ↓ 3 ↓ 5 ↑ 3 ↑ 5

Click here to listen [<10-3-11.mp3>](#)

### Exercises for a Four-Hole Spread

Here is an exercise that simply alternates draw notes between left and right.

R L R L R L R L

↓ 5 ↓ 2 ↓ 5 ↓ 2 ↓ 5 ↓ 2 ↓ 5 ↓ 2

Click here to listen [<10-4-1.mp3>](#)

Here, the draw note on each side alternates with the blow note in the same hole. *Don't move your mouth—just change breath.*

R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_

↓ 5 ↑ 5 ↓ 5 ↓ 2 ↑ 2 ↓ 2

Click here to listen [<10-4-2.mp3>](#)

This time we start with the blow note on each side and alternate it with the draw note.

R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_

↑ 5   ↓ 5   ↑ 5   ↑ 2   ↓ 2   ↑ 2

Click here to listen [<10-4-3.mp3>](#)

Now we alternate the blow notes on either side. Be sure not to change your mouth position.

R   L   R   L   R   L   R   L

↑ 5   ↑ 2   ↑ 5   ↑ 2   ↑ 5   ↑ 2   ↑ 5   ↑ 2

Click here to listen [<10-4-4.mp3>](#)

First we alternate draw notes, then we alternate blow notes.

R   L   R   L   R   L   R   L

↓ 5   ↓ 2   ↓ 5   ↓ 2   ↑ 5   ↑ 2   ↑ 5   ↑ 2

Click here to listen [<10-4-5.mp3>](#)

Now we move from the lowest note in sequence through to the highest note.

L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_

↑ 2   ↓ 2   ↑ 5   ↓ 5   ↑ 5   ↓ 2

Click here to listen [<10-4-6.mp3>](#)

Now we move from the highest note in sequence through to the lowest note.

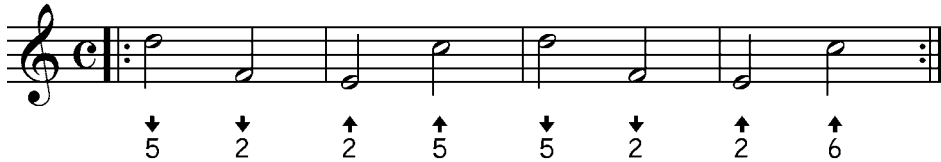
R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_

↓ 5   ↑ 5   ↓ 2   ↑ 2   ↓ 2   ↑ 5

Click here to listen [<10-4-7.mp3>](#)

Alternating leaps—draw jumps down, blow jumps up.

R L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R



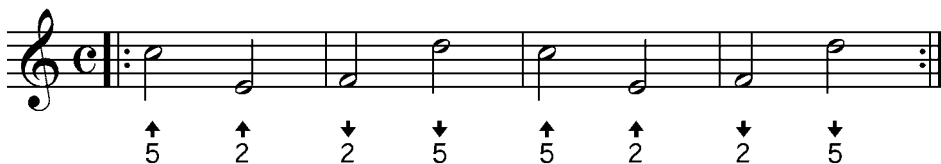
↓ 5   ↓ 2   ↑ 2   ↑ 5   ↓ 5   ↓ 2   ↑ 2   ↑ 6

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains eight quarter notes. Above the staff, the letters 'R' and 'L' are placed above the first and second notes, followed by two pairs of horizontal lines representing breath marks. Below the staff, arrows indicate fingerings: down arrows for notes 1, 2, 5, and 6; up arrows for notes 3, 4, and 7.

Click here to listen [<10-4-8.mp3>](#)

Alternating leaps—blow jumps down, draw jumps up.

R L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R



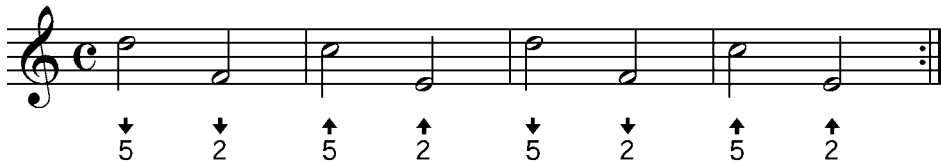
↑ 5   ↑ 2   ↓ 2   ↓ 5   ↑ 5   ↑ 2   ↓ 2   ↓ 5

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains eight quarter notes. Above the staff, the letters 'R' and 'L' are placed above the first and second notes, followed by two pairs of horizontal lines representing breath marks. Below the staff, arrows indicate fingerings: up arrows for notes 1, 2, 5, and 6; down arrows for notes 3, 4, 7, and 8.

Click here to listen [<10-4-9.mp3>](#)

Draw jumps down, blow jumps down.

R L R L R L R L



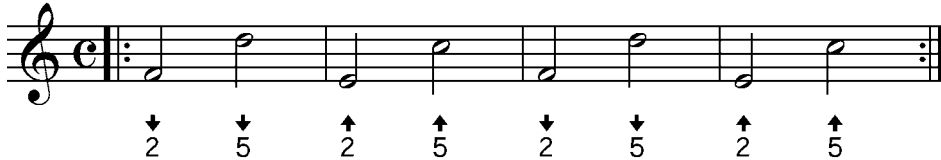
↓ 5   ↓ 2   ↑ 5   ↑ 2   ↓ 5   ↓ 2   ↑ 5   ↑ 2

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains eight quarter notes. Above the staff, the letters 'R' and 'L' alternate above each note. Below the staff, arrows indicate fingerings: down arrows for notes 1, 2, 5, and 6; up arrows for notes 3, 4, 7, and 8.

Click here to listen [<10-4-10.mp3>](#)

Draw jumps up, blow jumps up.

L R L R L R L R



↓ 2   ↓ 5   ↑ 2   ↑ 5   ↓ 2   ↓ 5   ↑ 2   ↑ 5

Detailed description: A musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature. It contains eight quarter notes. Above the staff, the letters 'L' and 'R' alternate above each note. Below the staff, arrows indicate fingerings: down arrows for notes 1, 2, 5, and 6; up arrows for notes 3, 4, 7, and 8.

Click here to listen [<10-4-11.mp3>](#)

Next time, we'll start moving the spread around.

## Notation Key

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