



Chromatic for Diatonic Players

Multiple Embouchure, Part 6: The Pivot Point

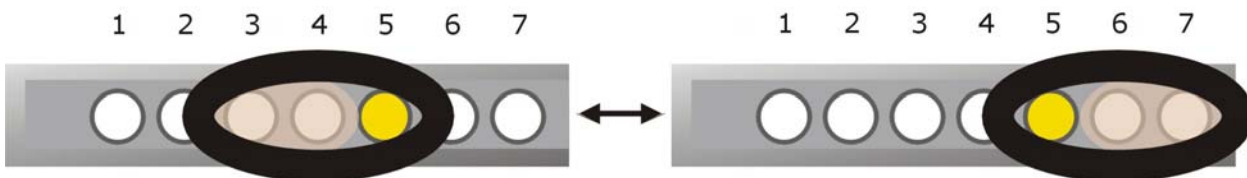
By Winslow Yerxa, Mel Bay's HarmonicaSessions® eZine

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In recent installments we've looked at ways to move your embouchure from one place to another while switching between left and right sides. So far, we've always kept within bounds – the new embouchure placement always overlapped the old one:



Now, we're going to up the ante and move them so that they have only one hole in common:



The last hole of the old placement becomes the first hole of the new placement. That hole is called the pivot point.

Cool Things To Do With Pivots

Pivot points can be used for some nifty effects – check out these sound samples. Notation is given later in the article.

Anchor Pivots

If a line tends to revolve around a single point, using that point as a pivot may make that line easier to play. The pivot point might be a single note, or more than one note found in the same hole.

Drone anchor pivot: You can play a drone note while adding harmony notes in splits – both above and below the drone note: Click here to listen [<15-07.mp3>](#)

Mid-line anchor pivot: You can place a pivot hole in the middle of a melodic line. Note that the pivot hole contains four different notes. Any one of them can be used when passing through the pivot point. Here, a blow and a draw note in the same hole form the pivot. Click here to listen [<15-08.mp3>](#)

Extender Pivots

Instead of using a pivot point to anchor the middle of a line, you can use it to extend a series of leaps over a long distance. Each time you reach the edge of your embouchure placement, you use the pivot to move it.

Repeated note extender pivot: Repeating a note and using the repeat as a pivot to extend your embouchure further through a series of pivots. Click here to listen [<15-09.mp3>](#).

Same-hole extender pivot: Here, instead of a repeated note, you play a different note in the same hole. Click here to listen [<15-10.mp3>](#).

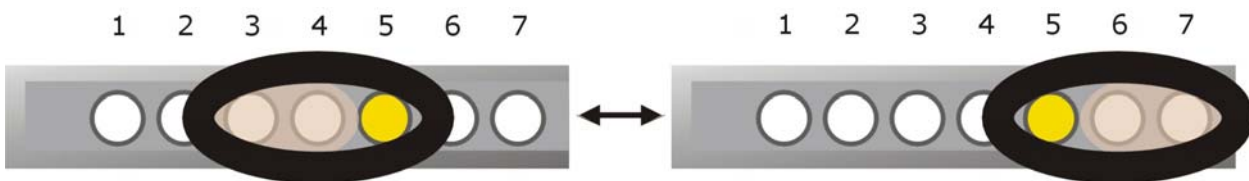
Harmony extender pivot: Here you're playing split harmony intervals. If you're going up, the right edge of the first one becomes the left edge of the next one. If you're going down, the left edge of the first one becomes the right edge of the second one. You can use this to cascade a split interval through several octaves. Click here to listen [<15-11.mp3>](#).

Mixed harmony extender pivot: More than one interval can be played at each embouchure placement. Click here to listen [<15-12.mp3>](#).

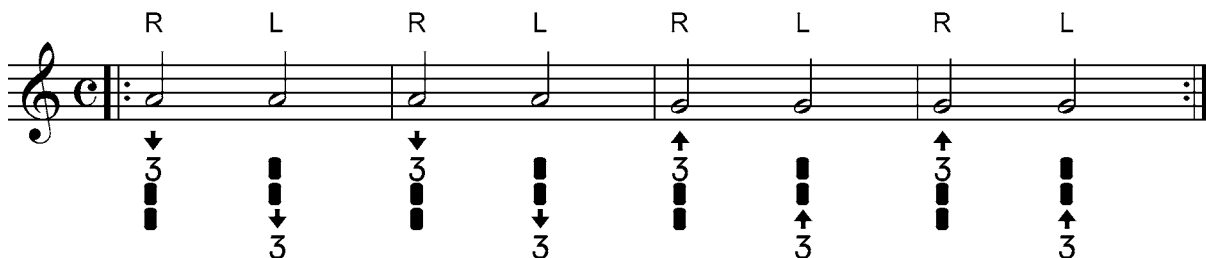
These are just a few of the ways of using pivots. There are more advanced ways we'll cover in later articles.

Basics of the Technique

The basic technique for using a pivot is to focus on a hole (or a single note in that hole), and play it more than once, first with the right corner, and then with the left (or vice versa):



Try to move smoothly between the two notes, without allowing any neighboring holes to sound. Also try to make a smooth transition between the notes. This is not always the effect you want, but it's worth cultivating. Click here to listen [<15-01.mp3>](#)



Now, let's use the left side of the embouchure to add a note below the pivot note. Click here to listen [<15-02.mp3>](#)

L R L R L R L R

Now let's add a note above the pivot note. Click here to listen [<15-03.mp3>](#).

R L R L R L R

Now let's combine pivot with note above and note below. Click here to listen [<15-04.mp3>](#).

L R L R R L R L

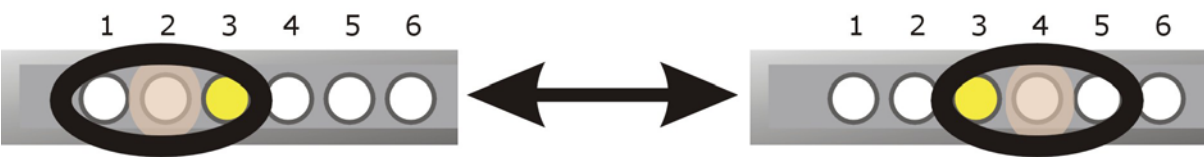
L R L R R L R L

Now we can make the identical set of moves but get different effects by changing breath as we move. Click here to listen [<15-05.mp3>](#)

Two musical staves illustrating melody moves. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Fingerings are indicated below: 1, 3, 5, 5, 3, 1. Pivot points are marked above the notes: between G and A, A and B, and B and C. The second staff shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below: 5, 7, 9, 9, 7, 5. Pivot points are marked above the notes: between G and A, A and B, B and C, C and B, and B and A.

These are the basic skills for making melody moves. You can also add slide changes to the mix.

For moving harmonies, the skill is very similar, but the pivot note is less obvious because it's sounding at the same time as another note. It may help to concentrate on the mouthpiece location and the corner of your mouth that covers that point just before you make the pivot move:



Here is a pair of simple exercises for getting familiar with the basic harmony move. Click here to listen [<15-06.mp3>](#).

A musical staff showing harmony moves. The notes are G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Fingerings are indicated below: 1, 3, 5, 5, 3, 1. Pivot points are marked above the notes: between G and A, A and B, B and C, C and B, and B and A.

Applying the Techniques

Now let's see how these techniques apply to the examples at the beginning of the article.

Drone Anchor Pivot

Here the anchor note is always in Hole 3 and is used in split intervals with notes both above and below. Try making it sound like one continuous note when you pivot. It's not easy, but it gives the effect of holding one long note while notes above and below it appear and disappear. Click here to listen [<15-07.mp3>](#)

The image displays four musical staves, each representing a different Drone Anchor Pivot technique. Each staff consists of a treble clef staff with a 3/4 time signature and a corresponding fingering diagram below it. The diagrams use arrows to indicate breath direction (up for in, down for out) and numbers to indicate fingerings. Brackets labeled 'pivot' are placed above the notes where the anchor note is held.

- Staff 1:** Shows a sequence of notes with a pivot point. Fingerings include 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 5, 3, 3, 6, 3, 3.
- Staff 2:** Shows a sequence of notes with a pivot point. Fingerings include 5, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 5, 3, 3, 6, 3, 3.
- Staff 3:** Shows a sequence of notes with a pivot point. Fingerings include 5, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 5, 3, 3, 6, 3, 3.
- Staff 4:** Shows a sequence of notes with a pivot point. Fingerings include 5, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 5, 5, 3, 3.

Mid-line Anchor Pivot

Here our pivot point is again in Hole 3, and it's in the middle of a moving line. At the pivot point, the moment when the embouchure moves from one placement to another, the note in the pivot hole will change breath direction. Note: When there are three consecutive notes at the pivot point, you can choose which one is used to shift the embouchure. The pivot point shown below is not the only one possible. Click here to listen [<15-08.mp3>](#)

Repeated Note Extender Pivot

At the pivot point, the note repeats, sort of like the left foot catching up with the right, only to have the right foot take another step. Click here to listen [<15-09.mp3>](#).

Same-hole Extender Pivot

Here, the note changes at the pivot point, but it's used to extend the line instead of anchoring the middle. Click here to listen [<15-10.mp3>](#).

Harmony Extender Pivot

Each split chord repeats but embouchure shift doesn't happen until the next chord. The repeat is just a way of feeling out where you are before going on to the next place. Click here to listen [<15-11.mp3>](#).

Mixed Harmony Extender Pivot

This exercise plays two chords at each embouchure location, but the first one is a slide-in blow chord and the second a slide-out draw chord. If you've got the last example down, this one will be only slightly harder.

Click here to listen [<15-12.mp3>](#).

The image shows two staves of musical notation for a saxophone exercise. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The first staff contains eight notes with fingerings: 3/1, 3/1, 5/3, 5/3, 7/5, 7/5, 9/7, and 9/7. Brackets labeled 'pivot' are placed above the notes at positions 2, 4, 6, and 8. The second staff contains eight notes with fingerings: 9/7, 9/7, 7/5, 7/5, 5/3, 5/3, 3/1, and 3/1. Brackets labeled 'pivot' are placed above the notes at positions 2, 4, 6, and 8. Arrows indicate slide-in (upward) and slide-out (downward) directions for each note.

This article has shown some very limited examples of what you can do with pivot points. We have used mostly one size of embouchure spread and a limited set of intervals. We also haven't touched on indirect pivots or the triple pivot. Hopefully the brief glimpses afforded here are interesting enough to get you going on your own creative journey with using pivots.

Notation Key

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