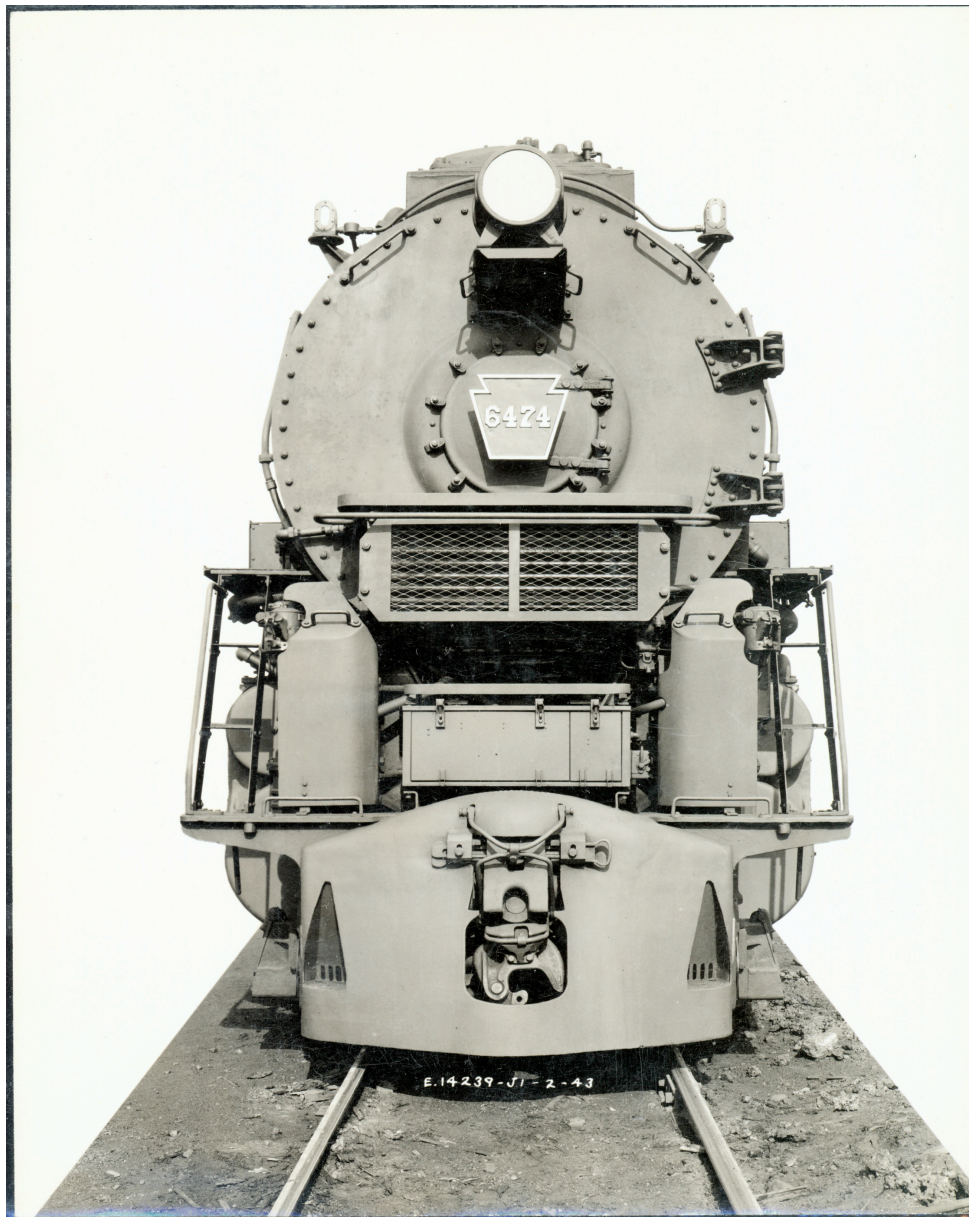


Train Rhythms & Pentatonic Scales



Richard Sleigh

A simple, powerful system of breathing exercises to relax and release your rich natural tone, focus your energy, and give you a rock solid foundation in rhythm and melody patterns for the diatonic harmonica.

"Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creative". - **Charles Mingus**

Welcome to Train Rhythms and Pentatonic Scales!
(Please read through at least once before starting)

I used to take “no pain, no gain” way too seriously. I played major scales in all keys on my Marine Band harmonica, forcing the overblows and overdraws to get through the process. It felt like it would take a million years to get even halfway decent at it and that most of what I was learning would fall apart instantly if I actually tried to use it on stage.

There is nothing wrong with doing this, BUT I got tired of beating myself up and looked for things to practice that would give me results I could feel and skills I could use NOW. When you seek, you find. I wish I had learned these scales and rhythms when I first started playing the harmonica. They have given me more control over my instrument than all the other methods I have used put together.

Here is a list of some things you will find easier to do when you practice these exercises:

- Balance your in-breath with your out-breath. When you do this, your blow notes and draw notes match each other in volume, tone, and timing.
- Be able to play faster and smoother.
- Find it much easier to think of a note and find it instantly
- Have patterns to play that work over all sorts of keys and chord changes, and use three basic patterns to play and improvise in 6 positions on the diatonic harmonica.
- Relax and use control, not force, to play the harmonica.
- Be able to play longer with less effort.
- Smooth out the differences between three octaves of the standard diatonic harmonica so you can move freely between them.

The train rhythms are one of the best ways to learn how to control your breath, tone, and volume so you can go from a whisper to a scream, keep a killer beat, and play all night long if you want to. Plus playing a steam train imitation on a harmonica is so much fun that it probably should be illegal!

Pentatonic scales are the superhighways of the harmonica. Here's why- they get rid of the two notes that cause most of the problems in seven note scales. It's easier to add these “extra” notes when you want them than to subtract them when you don't. You can add notes to a pentatonic scale and create other scales, but if you remove one note from a pentatonic scale it is no longer a scale. That is how basic they are.

Pentatonic scales have been around for thousands of years in folk music from every corner of the world. They also show up in Western Classical music in the work of Claude Debussy, Nicolo Paganini, and others. Jazz musicians, Pop, Rock and Blues players love pentatonic scales because they make it easy to shred over all sorts of chord changes.

The Train Rhythms

The train rhythms are on the A harmonica and are focused on holes 1,2, &3. I prefer lower keys for chord exercises. You hear more of the rich overtones when you play chords on a low harp, so you hear a big difference between bass tone and treble tone that you don't get on the high harmonicas.

There are two main things to focus on when you practice train rhythms:

1. Relaxing! Relax your shoulders and the muscles in your throat to allow the breath to move freely. Relax every muscle that you do not need to use, and you create space for big tone, free up energy, and clear your mind so it can focus on playing music. Check yourself in the mirror to see if your shoulders are rising or if you are tensing up in your face or throat. Get in touch with what it feels like to let your throat open up and make that your normal way of playing.

2. Support. Support your breathing with your lower abdominal muscles. Think of them as hands holding the lower part of your lungs. They hold the lower part of your lungs in place, so you move less air with more control. Use your diaphragm (the large muscle under your lungs) to move air and to change from in breath to out breath. Use the words **Ha Ha** for your basic rhythm. When you use the same words for in-breath and out-breath it is easier to develop the balance between in-breath and out-breath.

Start slow and relaxed with your throat wide open. Breathe from the bottom of your lungs and make your throat an open channel. This is how the deepest tone is created. Build your tone from the bottom up, from the base of your lungs to your mouth and tongue. It takes a lot of persistence and attention to keep your throat and upper body loose and your mid-section tight. A little effort daily is ten times more effective than once in a while efforts, of course.

You will make the most of throat articulation or throat vibrato after you can control rapid shifts from the bottom of your lungs. Keep your attention on your lower abdominal muscles. Get a rhythm going from the bottom of your lungs and as you speed up the train rhythm you will naturally add throat articulation to increase definition. The goal is to go faster and faster from the bottom of your lungs before the throat muscles kick in. This exercise sets you up for smooth fast melodic playing with fat tone.

When you can control your diaphragm breathing as I describe above, then you are ready to focus on throat articulation. Throat articulation is when you close off the air in your throat using the muscles that you use when you hold your breath or cough. The difference here is that you are opening and closing them in rhythm. If you articulate **Ah Ah** in breath followed by **Ah Ah** out breath this is a good way to get started.

Tracks 1 – 9 will give you practice on the basic train rhythm as described above.

Tracks 10 – 13 introduce the triplet rhythm – 3 in breaths followed by 3 out breaths. This breathing pattern is tabbed out underneath the tab for the pentatonic scales exercises. The shuffle rhythm is based on the triplet rhythm – the middle beat or breath is left out. Working with these rhythms will give you the basis for playing a convincing blues shuffle.

Pentatonic Scale Exercises (on the C harmonica)

C MAJOR (1st pos) 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1
 1↑ 1↓ 2↑ 3↑ 3↓ 4↑ 4↓ 5↑ 6↑ 6↓ 7↑ 8↓ 8↑ 9↑ 10↓ 10↑

A Minor b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3

G MAJOR (2nd pos) 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2
 1↓ 2↑ 3↑ 3↓ 3↓ 4↓ 5↑ 6↑ 6↓ 7↓ 8↓ 8↑ 9↑ 10↓

E Minor b7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 4

F MAJOR 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5
 1↑ 1↓ 2↓ 2↓ 3↓ 4↑ 4↓ 5↓ 6↑ 6↓ 7↑ 8↓ 9↓ 9↑ 10↓ 10↑

D Minor (3rd pos.) b7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 4 5 b7 1 b3 4 5 b7

Triplet. chord Rhythms - Play $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{3}$ (1st 2 or 3 holes)

↑↑↑ ↓↓↓ ↑↑↑ ↓↓↓ ↑↑↑ ↓↓↓ ↑↑↑ ↓↓↓

↑↑ ↓↓ ↑↑ ↓↓ ↑↑ ↓↓ ↑↑ ↓↓

↑↑↑ ↓↓↓ ↑↑↑ ↓↓↓ ↑↑↑ ↓↓↓ ↑↑↑ ↓↓↓

x x x x x x

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If you look at the tab on page 3, you will see three sections:

- Major Pentatonic scale on the top, written in scale degrees.
- Harmonica tab in the middle (number of hole followed by an arrow pointing up for blow note or an arrow pointing down for draw note)
- Minor pentatonic scale on the bottom, written in scale degrees.

The number 1 scale degree in the tablature is the first note of the scale you are playing when you follow the tablature.

This chart also shows the draw notes in reverse type (white on black background) to make the breathing patterns stand out. This makes it very obvious why it is faster to play in second position than most other positions. You don't have as many shifts from blow notes to draw notes.

The formula for the Major Pentatonic scale (in scale degrees) is: 1 2 3 5 6 1

The formula for the minor pentatonic scale (in scale degrees) is: 1 b3 4 5 b7 1

What are Scale Degrees?

Scale degrees use numbers to tell you what note to play. If you sing “ Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do” like the song “Do, a deer, a female deer, Re, a touch of golden sun,”, then you are singing the notes of a major scale. If you sing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, instead of Do, Re, Mi, for the same notes then you are now singing scale degrees. 1 is the first note of the scale, 2 the second note of the scale, and on it goes. The beauty of this system is that once you learn the numbers and can think in the numbers, then they are the same for all of your harmonicas. Learn the first position major pentatonic scale on a C harmonica, and the same numbers describe the first position pentatonic scale degrees on a G harmonica, F# Harmonica, or any other standard diatonic harmonica.

If you see a scale degree number with the flat (b) symbol before it, that note is ½ step lower than the scale degree note in a major scale. For example, in the A minor pentatonic scale, the 3rd note scale degree is b3. This means that it is a half step lower than the 3rd scale degree of the A major scale.

New Jersey based blues harmonica player extraordinaire Dennis Gruenling has a book coming out soon that will really get into scale degrees and the harmonica in a big way. Dennis has been teaching and developing ways to think in scale degrees on the harmonica for years and this book really puts it all together in a system that is easy and fun to use.

I know that the music theory and numbers can be boring, but it helps to learn enough of this to understand what you are doing and talk to other musicians. The beauty of these exercises is that you just get these scales drilled into your head so completely that you don't have to think about them anymore, they just become automatic. That is when they start to become really powerful.

The CD Tracks:

1. Train Rhythm #1 – Basic breathing - slow tempo
2. Train Rhythm #2 Basic breathing – medium tempo
3. Train Rhythm - Bass to treble tone
4. Train Rhythm - Treble to bass tone
5. Train Rhythms with dynamics changes
6. Train Rhythm - consistent up-tempo
7. Train Rhythm - Slow to fast to slow
8. Train Rhythm - Slow to medium to slow with steam
9. Train Rhythm - slow to medium & back with whistles
10. Triplet Train Rhythm – slow tempo
11. Triplet Train Rhythm - faster tempo
12. Shuffle Train Rhythm - slow tempo
13. Shuffle Train alternating with Triplet Train Rhythms
14. C Major Pentatonic Scale - middle octave – slow
15. C Major Pentatonic scale - top octave – slow
16. C Major Pentatonic scale - upper two octaves
17. C Major Pentatonic scale - 1st octave with bent note
18. C Major Pentatonic scale - Whole Harp
19. A minor Pentatonic Scale – upper octave
20. A minor Pentatonic Scale – 2 octaves, one bent note
21. A minor Pentatonic Scale – whole harp
22. G Major Pentatonic Scale – upper octave
23. G Major Pentatonic Scale – lower octave with bent note
24. G Major Pentatonic Scale – 2 octaves, one bent note
25. G Major Pentatonic Scale – whole harp
26. E minor Pentatonic Scale – upper octave
27. E minor Pentatonic Scale – 2 octaves – one bent note
28. E minor Pentatonic Scale – whole harp
29. F Major Pentatonic Scale – upper octave
30. F Major Pentatonic Scale – lower octave – 2 bent notes
31. F Major Pentatonic Scale - 2 octaves, 2 bent notes
32. F Major Pentatonic Scale – whole harp
33. D minor Pentatonic Scale – upper octave
34. D minor Pentatonic Scale - lower octave – 2 bent notes
35. D minor Pentatonic Scale – whole harp
36. Thoughts on selective relaxation
37. Thoughts on tone production
38. Expanding the use of Pentatonic scales
39. G Pentatonic scale exercise
40. Cross harp I –IV – V progression in 12 bars using G, C and Dm Pent. Scales.
41. 2nd or 5th position triplet pattern #1
42. 2nd or 5th position triplet pattern #2
43. 1st or 4th position triplet pattern #1
44. 1st or 4th position triplet pattern #2
45. 12th or 3rd position triplet pattern #1
46. 12th or 3rd position triplet pattern #2
47. C major pentatonic scale over chord changes (continued on next page)
48. E minor pentatonic scale patterns on C harp played over chord changes for “Help Me”
(continued on next page)

49. Guitar jam track for “Help Me” in E minor
50. E minor pentatonic scale on C and A harmonica
51. E minor Pentatonic scale on A harmonica, holes 1 – 6
52. E minor pentatonic scale on A harmonica with overblow on hole 6.
53. Thoughts on creating your own patterns and exercises
54. 2nd position E minor pentatonic scale on A harp, entire harmonica
55. 2nd position E blues scale on A harp, entire harmonica

Once you master the basic patterns here for the scales, you can cut down the practice to the whole harp patterns for each scale. Try playing them tongue blocked as well as pucker. When you can tongue block the notes on one side of your mouth, try the other side! When you can do that, try playing the whole harp scales using different hand positions and mic / hand combinations. You will find it easier and easier to get anywhere you want to on the harp while maintaining the tone and hand position you want.

The rhythms also grow with you – keep working to increase your speed while maintaining relaxed shallow breathing and great timing. Try varying the accents Accent the first beat, the second beat, the third beat. You will never run out of ways to expand your techniques with these exercises. You will also have a great short workout to get you psyched and ready for a gig.

Don’t forget to contact me and arrange your phone consultation after you have worked on these exercises. Please feel free to contact me with comments or questions! There is no such thing as a stupid question!

Tracks 41 - 46 on the CD are advanced pattern exercises that cover the whole harmonica. They are all played on a C harmonica. If you want bite size or slower versions of these patterns, contact me & I will send you mp3s as attachments in an email.

Track 47 is the C major pentatonic scale played over a series of chord changes that include C, F, and G major chords and A, D, and E minor chords. This shows how well this one pattern can work with a variety of chord changes.

Track 48 is an example of playing the E minor pentatonic scale as patterns over the chord changes for the songs “Help Me” or “Green Onions”. Track 49 is a jam track of the same song with no harmonica.

Tracks 50, 51, and 52 take you to the next logical place with your pentatonic scales. Playing a minor pentatonic scale in second position. The example here is playing the E minor pentatonic scale on an A harmonica.

This also leads you to playing an overblow on hole number 6 to complete the E minor pentatonic scale. This is a whole new ball game, and it helps a lot if your harmonica reeds are adjusted carefully for overblows. Even if you end up skipping the number 6 overblow, knowing this scale up and down the entire harmonica will give you plenty of new ideas for blues improvisation.

Thanks for your interest in my work!

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Check out the website www.customharmonicas.com for updates on new developments in tools, harps and instruction, and contact information for Joe Filisko, James Gordon, and Richard Sleigh.

Special thanks to Joe Filisko for his inspiration and guidance to me on train rhythms. Be sure to catch his masterful playing when you can. Details on his gigs can be found at: www.filisko.com



Speed Techniques

Most harmonica players I know would like to be able to play fast, to be able to "dump the clutch" from time to time, and some harmonica players have made it an obsession to see how fast they can go. It is all part of the game and the general advancement of the instrument.

When I hear a harmonica player like Howard Levy, Charlie McCoy, James Conway, or Jason Ricci playing a thousand miles an hour, it is astonishing and seems impossible. But like most techniques, speed playing is a matter of focusing on a few core mechanical skills and then practicing more than anyone else.

I can't make you practice more than anyone else, but I can make sure you know the mechanical or muscle techniques

The train rhythm chord exercises install the relaxed shallow breathing that makes it easy to shift smoothly and quickly from blow to draw notes. Practice these exercises carefully to get that part of speed playing covered. Always practice up to the speed that you can handle smoothly, and then go a little faster, but quit or slow down when you start to lose control. You do not, repeat, do not want to practice mistakes or sloppy technique. This only slows your progress down.

Practice your train rhythms daily, and your speed for the chord rhythms will keep going up AND your melodic playing will speed up as well.

Are there other ways to pick up speed? Glad you asked and the answer is: Yes!

One of the other mechanical problems for smooth, fast playing is how do you move from side to side quickly and efficiently. One of the most effective techniques for doing this is called the jaw flick. Charlie McCoy, Brendan Power, Mark Graham, and many other harmonica players use this technique to grab notes from side to side without the effort that it takes to move your whole face or the harmonica in a series of short moves. One of the earliest examples of this technique that I know of is from an Irish family of harmonica players, The Murphy's.

So, what am I talking about?

Try this: look in a mirror, put a harmonica in your mouth and play a long single note. You can use pursed lips or tongue blocking - it doesn't matter. Keep your upper lip in the same place while you move your lower jaw and lower lip to the right and left.

This technique lets you play the notes on either side of your starting note with far less effort than if you move your entire mouth or the harmonica.

That's it in a nutshell. Practice this technique with the pentatonic scales and patterns and watch your speed go up dramatically while your stress level goes down. When you get really good at this, it looks like an optical illusion - the notes are flying out at death-defying speed, but the harmonica seems to be standing still.

Good fun!

Tablature for tracks 41–46.

The notes in these patterns tend to arrange themselves in triplet patterns, and there is more than one way to accent the notes. I have grouped the notes as closely as possible to the way I play them on the recordings. In some places, you will find groups of 4 or 5 notes. This is something that is hard to analyze, but it makes sense rhythmically. In other words, it feels right. These groups with the extra notes are at the point where the pattern changes direction because you are at the top of the harmonica. They set you up to go down with a corresponding pattern.

Use the tablature and recordings as a way to get started and for reference, but remember - the real goal here is to play the patterns with a strong rhythm. It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing! Once you memorize the pattern, play without the recording. Concentrate on finding the groove and the timing of the notes will sort themselves out as you play the patterns. Try fitting the patterns into different beats and you will really start to master them. Have fun! Focus, but relax. If you want to play music, it really helps to be playful!

How to read the tablature

I use the same harmonica tab here as I used for the other page with the scales and rhythms. The arrows point up for blow notes and down for draw notes. A diagonal line across the arrow means a bent note. There is one slash for each half-step of a bend. For example:

2 is 2 draw bent down a whole step, or two half-steps. 2 is 2 blow

Track # 41 - 2nd or 5th position triplet pattern #1

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

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

3 2 3 3 2 3 2 1 2 3

Track # 42 – 2nd or 5th position triplet pattern #2

2 3 3 3 3 4 3 4 5 4 5 6 5 6 6 6 6 7 6 7 8 7 8 8 8 8 9 8 9 10 9 8

9 8 8 8 8 7 8 7 6 7 6 6 6 6 5 6 5 4 5 4 3 4 3 3 3 3 2 3 2 2 2 2 1

2 1 2 3

Track # 43 – 1st or 4th position triplet pattern #1

1 1 1 1 2 1 2 3 2 3 3 2 3 4 3 4 4 4 4 5 4 5 6 5 6 6 6 6 7 6 7
8 7 8 8 8 8 9 8 9 10 9 10 10 10 10 10 9 10 9 8 9 8 8 8 8 7 8 7 6 7
6 6 6 6 5 6 5 4 5 4 4 4 4 3 4 3 3 3 3 2 3 2 1 2 1 1 1 1

Track # 44 – 1st or 4th position triplet pattern #2

1 1 2 1 2 3 2 3 3 3 3 4 3 4 4 4 4 5 4 5 6 5 6 6 6 6 7 6 7 8 7 8 8
8 8 9 8 9 10 9 10 10 10 9 10 9 8 9 8 8 8 7 8 7 6 7 6 6 6 6 5 6 5 4
5 4 4 4 4 3 4 3 2 3 3 2 3 2 1 2 1 1

Track # 45 – 12th position or 3rd position triplet pattern #1

2 2 2 2 3 2 3 4 3 4 4 4 4 5 4 5 6 6 5 6 6 6 6 7 6 7 8 7 8 9 8 9
9 9 9 10 9 10 10 10 10 10 9 10 9 9 9 9 8 9 8 7 8 7 6 7 6 7 6 6 6 6 5 6
5 4 5 4 4 4 4 3 4 3 2 3 2 2 2 2 1 2 1 1 1 2

Track # 46 – 12th position or 3rd position triplet pattern #2

2 2 3 2 3 4 3 4 4 4 4 5 4 5 6 5 6 6 6 6 7 6 7 8 7 8 9 8 9 9 9 9 10
9 10 10 9 9 10 9 9 9 9 8 9 8 7 8 7 6 7 6 6 6 6 5 6 5 4 5 4 4 4 3
4 3 2 3 2 2 3 2 1 2 1 1 1 1 2

E minor Pentatonic Scale on A harp (2nd Position minor Pentatonic Scale) and the Blues Scale

I tabbed out the scale for the entire harmonica below. (The little circle above the number indicates an overblow or overdraw) The root note is 2 draw. (Track # 54 on CD)

1 1 2 2 3 4 4 5 6 6 7 8 9 9 10 10

Add one more note and you have a blues scale. Once again, the root note is 2 draw. Here it is tabbed out for the entire harmonica. (Track #55 on CD)

1 1 1 2 2 3 4 4 4 5 6 6 7 7 8 9 9 10 10 10

As you continue to advance and get comfortable with the other major and minor pentatonic scales, you can begin to modify the other scales that you have learned. Once you get the notes in your head, it becomes easier to begin changing the other major pentatonic scales into minor pentatonic scales or blues scales. And once you know the basic process for creating patterns, you can take these scales and start creating patterns with them.

P.S. Take a Stance!

The following message is one that I sent out recently to my email list that you can join by going to www.rsleigh.com. It relates to breathing exercises and how to bring up your consciousness and energy up for anything, including playing the harmonica...

Take a Stance!

I know I promised you short emails, but today I am breaking this rule. Cause I'm a rebel. Don't fence me in. I have nothing to sell today but air. I hope you buy it cause it's freeeee.

One of the things I do with the harmonica is bring it into the schools in my area with a couple of programs – “The History of the Harmonica” and variations on “Songs and Tales of Trains and Rails”. Both of these programs include teaching students to breathe through the harmonica by playing steam train imitations.

By the way, if you want to teach some kids how to play a steam train imitation, I can give you some great ideas...

Part of the process of working with the schools is creating study guides for teachers to help students get the most out of my programs. The study guides highlight the educational value of the program.

The study guides have all sorts of requirements that make them a pain to write most of the time, but they always make me dig deeper and find some good ideas.

This time, I did more research on the human body and how the lungs work to be able to talk in new ways about breathing in general and how it ties in with the harmonica. I ended up realizing a couple of things that really blew my mind when I reflected on them.

We all know in a vague sort of way that good posture is, well, “good”. But most of my life it has annoyed me when people tell me to straighten up, sit up, stop slouching. I associate it with a rigid, joy-free military sort of mind-set. “Rebels” slouch as one way of showing defiance to a world they see as pointless and unfair.

Well, I live with three females that have all studied dance (my wife and two daughters), and they correct my posture a lot. Plus I have studied yoga and I should know better. But some part of my early associations with slouching being “cool” and standing up straight means you are some sort of dork still linger on in my mind in some form.

I finally hit on a really good reason to maintain good posture, and if you can hang in here with me. I will relate it to playing the harmonica. It happened while I was trying to extract one more good reason for the schools to hire me to come in and work with their kids. I decided to sell them on the fact that I could teach the students a thing or two about their lungs and how to use them.

If you look at the structure of the lungs, you learn some really interesting things. Your right lung has three lobes; the left side has two lobes with your heart taking up the rest of the space. The lungs are basically pyramid shaped, and wider at the bottom. The bottom of the lungs has a much greater air capacity than the top part of the lungs.

Here is the kicker – when you slouch, you instantly cripple your lung capacity. Even a mild slouch has a big effect, because you are collapsing the large area at the base of your lungs. Good posture gives your lungs a lot more room to expand with each breath, and so they do. Excellent posture gives you even more lung capacity. Add deep breathing to the mix, and you get the Rolls Royce of energy states: increased alertness, energy, AND a calmer, more focused state. More oxygen = more energy. Slower rate of breathing = relaxation. Slouching induces shallow breathing, which is closer to the panic state. Less oxygen = more anxiety and less energy.

OK, so I look at videos of me playing the harp with a bullet mic and half the time I am bent over like someone that just got sucker punched in the gut. It is embarrassing. I have been working at changing this for years, as well as my overall posture. I even went through a series of Rolfing sessions a couple of years ago to get myself straightened up. It has been a real process for me, and I really believe it has something to

do with James Dean and “Rebel Without a Cause”, and other counterculture images I absorbed as a kid.

So I am in the middle of writing this study guide, and my whole idea of what is cool and what is not cool suddenly shifts in a huge way. Oxygen is the breakfast of champions. Having full lung capacity is a powerful way to show up. And then I remember Dennis Gruenling and his stance when he plays the harmonica.

This guy is the epitome of relaxed power in reserve. And he keeps his back straight most of the time. Find some of his youtube videos and you will see what I am talking about

I hope that you don't have the posture issues that I have had to deal with, but if you do find yourself giving in to gravity and general laziness in this department, I am here to tell you it is worth the effort to “Straighten Up and Fly Right”!

Check it out!

It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got That Swing.....

When I started working with the train rhythms and pentatonic scales, I thought that I had a great way to build a foundation for playing the diatonic harmonica. I still do. But there was something missing. Some days I found it hard to practice the scales. I wanted something that was more interesting and fun.

Playing scales can be boring and lifeless, unless you have a groove to get you going. Some days I had a groove, some days I did not.

It finally hit me that I had fallen into the trap of focusing on the notes and forgetting- RYTHM COMES FIRST!. Just playing notes and patterns that you hope to use some day is not enough. You need to be engaged. I looked for ways to make these exercises more fun AND more productive.

Then I remembered a gig I did years ago playing fiddle tunes with a conga player. It was a blast! Drums give you a groove, make things move, and just naturally install a sense of rhythm all at the same time. With drums it also doesn't matter what key harmonica you are playing.

I found a professional drummer and got some rhythm tracks to play along with. On the second CD, you will find a series of shuffle rhythm tracks. They go from 40% of the

original speed to 150% of the original speed.

These rhythm tracks give you a way to practice every thing on the first CD with a drum track that will give you a groove to work with. Go to track #15 and listen to the examples of how to use the drum tracks for your practice.

Since I started working with these drum tracks, I am having a lot more fun and I am also making more progress getting comfortable with new patterns. Plus it becomes a game to track your progress - how fast can you go before you lose the rhythm? When the drummer does the fills and then comes back to the main groove, are you still in sync?

These drum tracks will get you on “the good foot” as James Brown likes to say, and let you know right away if you are dropping the beat. Plus, they were done by a real live human being (Pat Bautz at <http://www.realdrumstudio.com>) so you know they’ve got soul. You can't get this kind of feel with a beat box. That's my story and I’m sticking to it!

When you find a part of a scale or pattern that is tricky for you, start with a slow drum track and work out at that speed until you have down, then move up a notch. Put these tracks on your ipod and you can have a portable practice lab in your pockets along with your favorite harmonica.

Here are all the Tracks on CD #2:

1. Steam Train Imitation Techniques

This gives you an overview of how to use the train rhythms and other effects to create a steam train imitation. This is a great solo harmonica piece to develop and when you get good at it, sometimes you can steal the show with it!

2. Tribute to Lonnie Glossen Steam Train Imitation.

This is my version of a steam train imitation based on the great Lonnie Glossen's "Fast Passenger Train"

3. The Shuffle tracks (3 – 14) are a traditional Texas shuffle going from 40% - 150% of the original recorded speed.

4. - 50%

5. - 60%

6. - 70%

7. - 80%

8. - 90%

9. - 100%

10. - 110%

11. - 120%

12. - 130%

13. - 140%
14. - 150%
15. Ideas and examples for how to use the shuffle rhythms.

More notes about the drum tracks on CD #2

Below are short descriptions of the different grooves.
from the Drummer, Pat Bautz.

16. Cajun Two beat - Some Jump blues for Ya'll
17. Straight Eights (Funk) - A continuation of Straight 8ths 2 with just a little more spice added
18. Straight Eights 2 - Think Mustang Sally with some funk added.
19. Swinging Eights - Really a shuffle funk groove
20. Second Line Funk - Think of a cool new orleans evening down in the quarter.
21. Six-Eight (slow blues) - A slow blues standard
22. Straight Eights #1 - Straight eighth groove that works for so many things
23. Second Line 1 -The Bo Diddley groove
24. Waltz- A Traditional Texas Waltz
25. Rumba- A Rumba groove with some more spice added
26. Jeff's Funk - Think BB King's The Thrill is gone

PAT BAUTZ Real Drum Studio
<http://www.realdrumstudio.com>

Please let me know how you get on with the drum tracks. If you like them, let me know, and I will work at getting more grooves available. I find these drum tracks a lot of fun to play along with. I hope you do, too.

Thanks for your interest in my work!

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Check out the website www.customharmonicas.com for updates on new developments in tools, harps and instruction, and contact information for Joe Filisko, James Gordon, Richard Sleigh, and Johnny Bishop.

I would like to give special thanks to Joe Filisko for his inspiration and guidance to me on train rhythms. Be sure to catch his masterful playing when you can. Details on his gigs can be found at: www.filisko.com

