

TEACH-IN: HARMONICA

by Glenn Weiser

Helpful hints & suggestions from instrumental masters

BIG WALTER HORTON PART II

While back we looked at a boogie style solo by Chicago harp master Big Walter Horton, widely regarded as one of the greatest blues players. In his book *I am The Blues*, Willie Dixon had this to say about the shy, lanky virtuoso: "They underestimated Big Walter because he stayed loaded most of the time, but once you got him in good condition he could run rings around all of them (Little Walter, Rice Miller, etc.). You couldn't whistle, sing, hum or play a rhythm of anything that he couldn't do like you wanted. He'd take a beer can, cut the top out of it, cup the harmonica in there and make that sonuvagun sound like a trombone and no one could tell the difference."

This time I have a transcription of Horton's solo from his version of *Careless Love*, the pregnancy song which is one of the oldest known blues. This can be heard on his album *Can't Keep Lovin' You* (Blind Pig #1484). Backed only by the acoustic guitar of John Nicholas, the solo follows the vocal line with some embellishments, and combines a wonderful lyricism with the harmonica's technical subtleties. Horton probably played it all in tongue blocking position, including the bends.

In the first measure, he ornaments the opening 3-draw with a releasing grace note bend – for this, begin the note bent down a half step and let it pop up to normal pitch immediately afterwards. Throat vibrato is also applied, as is the case for most of the long notes in the solo. The last note of the measure requires a variation of the grace note bending technique; here you must begin the note bent down a whole step and let it rise to a half step bend, which requires more control. In measure two, he plays a "blue" third preceded by a grace note bend. This could be described as quarter step or semitone bend, and is a hallmark of the African vocal scale. A long 3-blow with a tongue slap in measure three ends the first line.

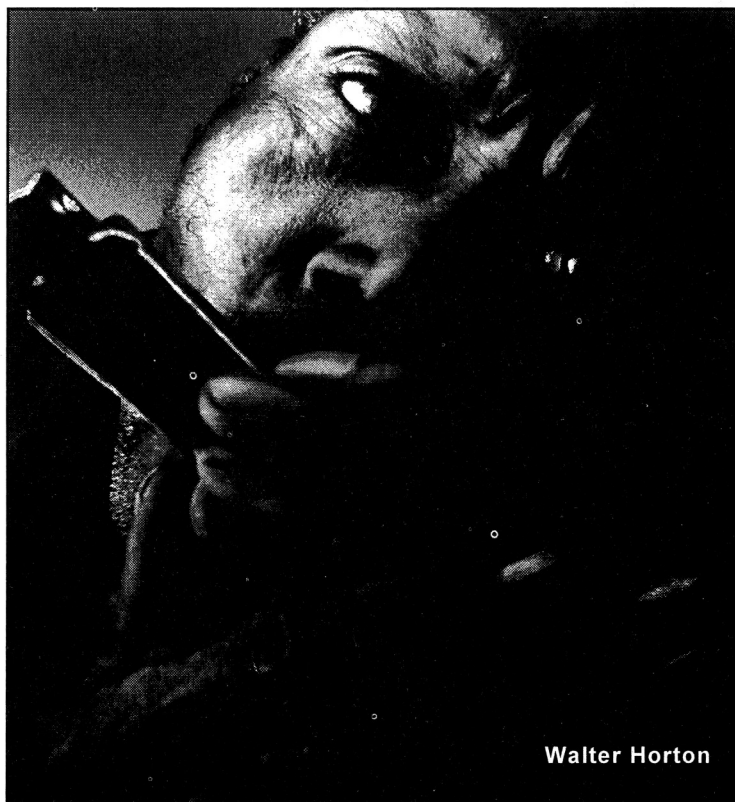
In measure four, Horton fouls up and drops two beats of what should have been a whole rest, but the guitarist follows him with no problem when measure five begins, again with a 3-draw ornamented by a quick releasing bend as in measure one. In measures five and six, he embellishes the original notes of the vocal line by breaking

them up into shorter notes, with syncopation. Measure seven ends the second line with a long 3-draw, whole step bend, played with vibrato and tied over from the last offbeat of measure six. This is a hard note to play well on the harmonica, and Horton's tone is superb here. In keeping with the vocal line, measure eight is a whole rest.

In measures nine through twelve, he opens on the 6-blow, the octave, and works down to a 3-blow, the tonic, played with a tongue slap and vibrato, and syncopates the melody along the way in measure eleven. A tongue slap is also used on the 2-blow, the last note of measure twelve.

Measures thirteen-sixteen are a variant of the first four bars, again with vibrato on the long notes and also the 2-draw, half step bend in measure fourteen. A blue third, 3-draw quarter-step bend is also played in measure fourteen, as well as the only triplet in the solo. The last member of the triplet ties into the ending note in measures fifteen and sixteen to finish the break.

For more information on harmonica-related topics, visit my Web page at www.celticguitarmusic.com.

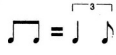


Walter Horton

Photo by Peter Amft ©

CARELESS LOVE SOLO

A- Harmonica
Slow swing feel



1 E vib.

2 B7 1/4 1/4 E 3 S. 4

5 vib.

7 B7 8 E 9 vib. vib.

6 6 6

10 E7 A 11 12 S. S.

13 E vib. 14 B7 vib. 1/4 3 vib.

15 E 16

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