

TEACH-IN: HARMONICA

by Glenn Weiser

Helpful hints & suggestions from instrumental masters

WIND HOWLIN' BLUES

By David "Honeyboy" Edwards

Wearing a red print polyester sports coat and sitting at a table opposite me, the old man's memory seemed sharp, and his mind clear as daylight. He told me that he was there at the party in 1938 near Greenwood, Mississippi, on the night Robert Johnson was given the glass of whiskey laced with lye by a jealous husband that killed him. Awed, I shook his hand and told him I was pleased to meet a man who had known the legendary Delta blues singer. David "Honeyboy" Edwards was 78-years-old and still going strong when I met him in a small bar in Albany, New York, where he was performing. And after talking about Johnson, it turned out he had known them all: Charlie Patton, Muddy Waters, Son House, Big Walter Horton, Little Walter Jacobs, and other luminaries of the blues.

He only played the guitar and sang that night, so I never knew he had played harmonica until years later, when I read his book, *The World Don't Owe Me Nothing*. Talking about how he first learned to play music in Mississippi, Edwards says "I come into Gulfport and I went to the music store there and found a little old harp rack. I started playing the harp and guitar and that was sounding alright."

Folksong collector Alan Lomax recorded Edwards, as well as Muddy Waters and Son House, for the Library of Congress in the early 1940s, and recalls his deft playing in his memoir, *The Land Where the Blues Began*. Out of Edwards' sessions, only two songs featured his rack-mounted harmonica: "Wind Howlin' Blues" and "The Army Blues." These tracks are rare among Delta blues, because Honeyboy Edwards was one of the few artists to record solo with harp as well as guitar. For this issue, I've transcribed portions of his harmonica playing on "Wind Howlin' Blues."

Edwards performs the song in the key of B, playing an E-scale harmonica in second position with skillful fingerstyle guitar accompaniment. The tempo is a moderate to fast shuffle. The absence of tongue-blocked chords in the recording indicates that he is probably playing in pucker position. Because an E harp is used, the transcription is in E rather than B, and includes some fills, the first break, and the ending riff. I've used chord symbols sparingly because it is sometimes hard to tell when he is playing the dominant or subdominant chord rather than the tonic.

Examples 1-3 are fills played in between the vocal lines. Here, Edwards follows a tradition that goes back to the call and response work singing of the antebellum South. In the typical three-line, 12-bar blues form, the vocals usually take up roughly the first two measures of each line, with the fills occupying in the last two

bars. But because Honeyboy is playing solo, however, he sometimes varies the length of the fills. I've written out the first and third fills of the first verse, and the first fill of the second verse.

Example 1: Verse 1, Fill 1

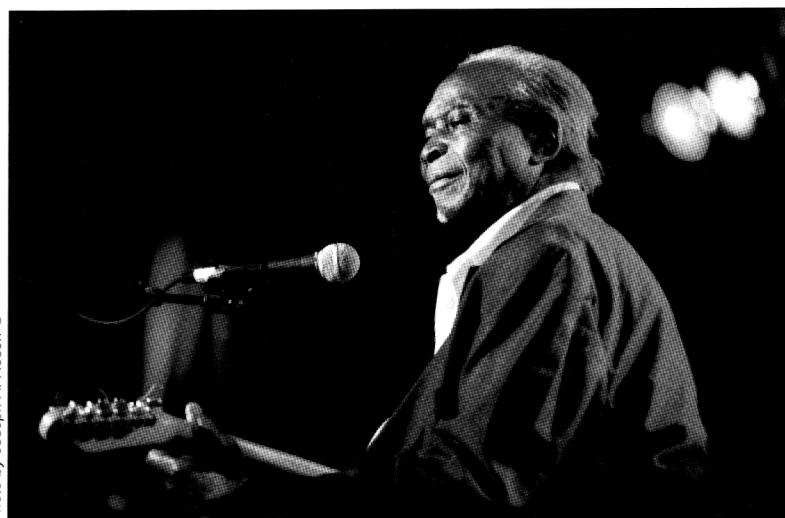
Swing 8ths
Rack Mounted
E-Harmonica

Example 2: Verse 1, Fill 3

Example 3: Verse 2, Fill 1

Example 4 is the first of the song's two harmonica breaks, which immediately follows the third fill of the second verse. As with some of the fills, the solo is also irregular, being 11 bars long instead of the standard 12. Edwards sometimes uses the harp more percussively than melodically here by repeating notes or chords, probably as he is playing a complex guitar part at the same time.

Example 4: First Solo



David "Honeyboy" Edwards, photographed in the 1960s (below) and at a recent concert in New York City (left).

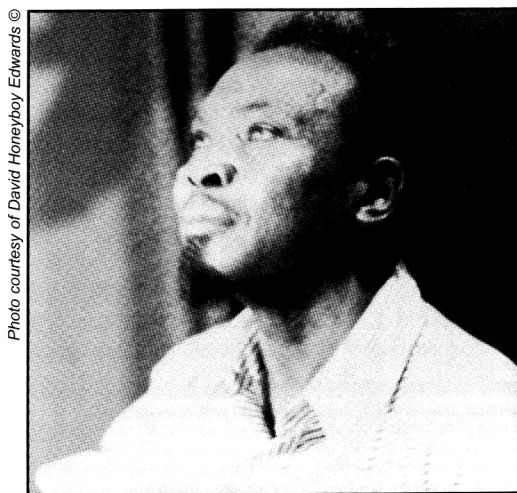


Photo by Joseph A. Ruseri ©

Photo courtesy of David Honeyboy Edwards ©

Example 5 is the ending riff, which is unusual for its delayed resolution to the tonic note. All in all, "Wind Howlin' Blues" is a masterful performance.

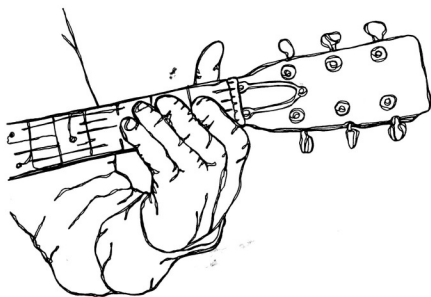
Example 5: Ending Riff

The musical score for Example 5: Ending Riff is written in 4/4 time and the key of F# major. It consists of seven staves of music. Fingerings are indicated by circled numbers 1-4, and techniques like triplets and slurs are shown. A guitar icon is located at the end of the seventh staff.

Glenn Weiser, author of several books on harmonica and Celtic guitar playing, performs solo acoustic blues, Celtic and old-time stringband music. You can write him c/o Sing Out!, P.O. Box 5460, Bethlehem, PA 18015-0460; or send e-mail to harmonicati@singout.org.

Wind Howlin' Blues

This early, raw Delta blues comes from the 1942 Library of Congress recordings that David "Honeyboy" Edwards made with Alan Lomax. The recordings took place in Clarksdale, Mississippi while a terrific electrical storm howled outside the cabin of Edwards' girlfriend. Only 27-years-old at the time, Honeyboy already had a firm grip on the blues traditions of borrowing and improvising. This and other recordings from this session, plus classic cuts from the 1950s, can be found on the Earwig compilation *Delta Bluesman* (#4922; available from 1818 West Pratt Boulevard, Chicago, IL 60626-3120; Ph: 773-262-0278; Fx: 773-262-0285; E-mail: <info@earwigmusic.com>; Web: <www.earwigmusic.com>).



Baby, don't you hear the wind howlin'
Howlin' all around my door
Baby, don't you hear the wind howlin'
Howlin' all around my baby's door
It howlin' so lonesome now
Lord, it ain't gonna howl no more

It's thunder and it's lightning, baby
And the wind begin to blow
It's thunder and it's lightning
And the wind begin to blow
Lord my baby told me this morning
now, now
Yeah she didn't want me no more

Lord it's stormin' outdoors
Rainin' on my old window pane
It's raining outdoors
Stormin' on my window pane
I'm gonna quit black Matty
You know it a low down crying shame.

Moderate; ♩ = approx. 60

1. Ba-by don't you hear the wind howl-in', _____
howl-in' all _____ a-round my door? _____
Ba-by, don't you hear the wind howl-in', _____
howl-in' all a-round _____ my ba-by's door? _____
It howl-in' so lone-some now, _____
Lord, it ain't _____ gon-na howl no more. _____

All but last time Last time

Black Matty's face is gonna shine
in
Baby, just like the rising sun
Black Matty's face is gonna shine
in
Baby, just like the rising sun
Lord, that high brown powder and
lipstick, baby now
You know it ain't gonna help black
Matty none

Well, now you look at little Matty,
baby
Do you think that's kind?
Take my love this morning, save it
for another man

Words & Music by David Edwards
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