



TEACH-IN: HARMONICA

by Glenn Weiser

Helpful hints and suggestions from instrumental masters

Puckering on up Jacob's Ladder (Lip Blocking Basics)

Starting with this issue I'm pleased to begin a new series of harmonica workshops with the beginner in mind. In this and future teach-ins we'll be looking at blues harp, "straight" harp, different playing techniques and more.

For this issue I have an easy version of the old spiritual "Jacob's Ladder," which I learned from the unaccompanied singing of my father. We'll use the lip blocking or "puckering" technique for this, and learn the two important techniques of tonguing and slurring.

There are two ways of sounding a single note on the harmonica. The first, tongue blocking, is done by covering three holes on the left side of the harmonica with the tongue while one hole on the right is sounded. The other method, lip blocking, is done by puckering the lips into the shape of a vertical oval, creating an opening just large enough to play one note at a time.

When you lip block, remember three things: keep the lips relaxed, pinch in the corners of the mouth, and position the harp on the inside of the lips. The result should be a clear single note. If you're doing something wrong, you'll get a hissing tone like a leaking tire. Keep working on your lip position until the tone is nice and clear.

In the context of lip blocking the term tonguing refers to touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth as if whispering the syllable "ta." This is a way to cut off the air stream, which has to be done when a note is to be repeated. Tonguing will be indicated by commas appearing above the notes.

Slurring is the technique of using the same breath to play two or more adjacent reeds of the same direction, for example, if you were going to play the sequence 4-out, 5-out and 6-out, you would simply play the 4-hole with an outbreath and move the harp, sounding the holes in succession with the same breath. Slurring will be indicated by curved lines connecting notes of different pitches. Also, remember that the circled numbers are draw holes and the uncircled ones blow holes.

"Jacob's Ladder" has an ingenious tune. On one hand, the continuous quarter note-half note rhythm produces a sense of eternal plodding. On the

other, the artful rise and fall of the melody create a beautiful image of ascent, fulfillment and return.

Moderate: ♩ = 92
G Harmonica

Glenn Weiser started playing guitar at fourteen. He studied classical guitar during high school, also picking up harmonica and banjo, and beginning to teach professionally. He is the author of two harmonica books, *Fiddle Tunes for the Harmonica and Blues and Rock Harmonica*, as well as two Celtic guitar books, *The Minstrel Boy and Harp Music of O'Carolan for Solo Guitar*. He has also recently completed transcriptions for 70 Little Walter solos. Glenn currently performs solo acoustic blues, Celtic music with Greg Schaaf, as well as blues and old-timey with the St. Regis String Band. Feel free to write to him at Box 2551, Albany, NY 12220.

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