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2nd Edition

# Harmonica

for  
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chords on a harmonica

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Renowned harmonica player  
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# Harmonica

2nd Edition

**by Winslow Yerxa**

**for  
dummies®**  
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## **Harmonica For Dummies®**, 2nd Edition

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[FIGURE 18-7: Marine Band compromise temperament.](#)

## **Chapter 21**

[FIGURE A-1: Harmonica in the key of C.](#)

[FIGURE A-2: Harmonica in the key of D \$\flat\$ .](#)

[FIGURE A-3: Harmonica in the key of D.](#)

[FIGURE A-4: Harmonica in the key of E \$\flat\$ .](#)

[FIGURE A-5: Harmonica in the key of E.](#)

[FIGURE A-6: Harmonica in the key of F.](#)

[FIGURE A-7: Harmonica in the key of F \$\sharp\$ .](#)

[FIGURE A-8: Harmonica in the key of G.](#)

[FIGURE A-9: Harmonica in the key of A \$\flat\$ .](#)

[FIGURE A-10: Harmonica in the key of A.](#)

[FIGURE A-11: Harmonica in the key of B \$\flat\$ .](#)

[FIGURE A-12: Harmonica in the key of B.](#)

# Introduction

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Are you hankering to play the harmonica? Are you intrigued by that tiny, expressive instrument that you can take everywhere? Or are you maybe fascinated by that cool character in shades who gets up in front of a band and rips through an incandescent harmonica solo or by the lass in blue jeans who plays a sweet, plaintive melody by the campfire? Have you finally decided that it's time to just go for it and become the person making that music?

If so, *Harmonica For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, is the place to start. If you're a novice who doesn't own a harmonica yet, this book opens the door with solid advice and gives you a guiding hand into this fascinating new world. Even if you're already an accomplished player, this book shows you all sorts of techniques and approaches that can take your playing to the next level of excellence.

You can have a lot of fun making music with the harmonica, and it can enrich your social life. Over the last 40 years, playing the harmonica has introduced me to new friends worldwide. I've become friends with some of the world's greatest harmonica players, and I've noticed something remarkable about them: Even though they can comfortably rest on their laurels and bask in being called "world's greatest," they rarely do. They remain curious and open to new experiences. I imagine that you do, too. If so, I invite you to join me on the journey of discovery called playing the harmonica.

## ***About This Book***

*Harmonica For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, gives you everything you need to get going with the harmonica. One great thing about this book is that it's a reference you can jump into and out of at will. Just head to the table of contents or the index to find the information you want. Here are a few more great things about this book:

» **Music tab and notation and for all the music in the book.** *Tab* (short for *tablature*) tells you the physical actions you take to play the harmonica. It tells you what hole number to go to and whether you need to exhale (an arrow pointing up) or inhale (an arrow pointing down). Simple, eh? Everything you can play on the harmonica in this book is tabbed.

In the second edition, you also get to see animated video of lips and tongue on the holes of the harmonica moving and breathing as a song is played ([Chapter 5](#)) or a technique is employed ([Chapter 7](#)). I include music notation for every piece as well. Being able to read notes on a staff isn't required to play harmonica, but it isn't difficult to learn, either.

» **Audio tracks that you can play along with for every example, song, and exercise in this book.**

Tab, tongue illustrations, and descriptions can carry you only so far. By listening, however, you can quickly comprehend what you're going for. In fact, by hearing the sound you're striving for, you'll achieve it more quickly.

» **Videos of important actions and techniques.** In addition to the 17 animated videos of lips, tongue, and breath actions to play songs and techniques, you can view 15 videos of me demonstrating essential techniques of breathing, holding the harmonica, getting a single note, shaping the sound with hand

action, using vowel sounds to bend notes, using microphones, and even repairing a harmonica.

The audio and video files are available at [www.dummies.com/go/harmonica](http://www.dummies.com/go/harmonica).

It's also important to note that this book focuses on the ten-hole diatonic harmonica, which has — you guessed it — ten holes. Each hole on the harmonica should be numbered. When I refer to a note on the harmonica, I often state the hole number and the breath direction. For instance, “Hole 4 Blow” refers to the note you get when you go to Hole 4 and exhale into it. “Blow 4” means the same thing.

To use this book, you only need one harmonica: a ten-hole diatonic harmonica in the key of C. Harmonicas come in all 12 keys, in addition to being available in high and low versions of several of those keys. All the skills you learn on the universally available C-harmonica will transfer to the other keys of harmonica.

You'll notice that I use the terms “harmonica” and “harp” interchangeably throughout the book. The harmonica has many colorful names, and these two are the most popular (and the most likely to be accepted in polite company).

When I talk about high and low notes, I mean exactly those — the notes that people think of as high (a mouse squeaking, for instance) or low (a foghorn or maybe Barry White). On a harmonica, the low notes are on the left and the high notes are on the right.

This book contains both figures and tabs, which are numbered sequentially within each chapter. Figures illustrate important points in the text. Tab, which is short for *tablature*, shows you the actions required to play each note (which hole to play, whether to blow or draw,

and any other actions required). Each tab in the book shows you a tune, scale, chord, or sequence of notes that you can play on a harmonica. And if you're not sure what the tab is supposed to sound like or whether you're getting it right, don't worry — each tab has a reference to the corresponding audio track so you can listen to the tab being played.

## ***Foolish Assumptions***

I'm going to stick my neck out and assume that you like the harmonica and that you wouldn't mind being able to rip out some cool licks. But I won't assume that you know anything at all about where to start or what sort of a harp to get (oops, I mean what sort of *harmonica* to get — maybe you don't know any of the inside lingo yet, either). Maybe you don't know anything about music except that you like it. Don't worry — that's not a problem.

At the same time, I won't assume that only a greenhorn will ever read this book. You may be an intermediate player who has the basics down but who is looking for a few tips to feed your ever-growing harmonica fascination. I also won't assume that you're interested in blues, campfire tunes, or any other style of music. The core techniques you need for every kind of music are covered, though I do include chapters specifically on blues and rock, folk and gospel, and fiddle tune styles.

I do assume that you're interested in the most widely played type of harmonica: the ten-hole diatonic harmonica (which includes such popular brands as Hohner, Lee Oskar, Suzuki, and Seydel). While I do touch briefly on other types, such as chromatic and tremolo harmonicas, this book focuses on the ten-hole diatonic.



# *Icons Used in This Book*

In the margins of this book, you find icons to help you spot important information — or even information that you may want to skip. Like those neon signs that depict a shoe or a martini glass in a shopping district, these icons point out things you may want to get into or skim over as you read. Here are the icons I use and what they mean.



**REMEMBER** This icon highlights important points that are key to the understanding and skills you want to acquire.



**TIP** Every now and then I offer a tip that can get you where you're going more quickly or can put things in the right perspective. This icon helps you spot these golden tidbits.



**TECHNICAL STUFF** This icon highlights long-winded technical explanations. If you want to skip the tech talk and just try out a new technique, that's perfectly fine. Later you may get curious about how things work. When that happens, you know where to look.



**WARNING** When you see this icon, exercise caution to avoid damaging your harmonica or, more important, your eyes, ears, or other sensitive body parts (including your ego).



PLAY THIS

This icon helps you relate what you hear on the audio tracks and see in the videos to the examples and techniques in the book. The book describes and the audio and video tracks demonstrate — what a combination!

## ***Beyond the Book***

This book provides great information to help you learn the harmonica, but you can find many more resources on Dummies.com:

- » There are over 100 audio tracks that accompany the chapters of this book. I also give several video and animated demonstrations. Check out these essential resources at [www.dummies.com/go/harmonica](http://www.dummies.com/go/harmonica).
- » You can download the book's Cheat Sheet at [www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/harmonica](http://www.dummies.com/cheatsheet/harmonica). It's a handy resource to keep on your computer, tablet, or smartphone.
- » You can read interesting companion articles that supplement the book's content at [www.dummies.com/extras/harmonica](http://www.dummies.com/extras/harmonica). I even included an extra top-ten list.

## ***Where to Go from Here***

If you're a beginner and don't know much about harmonica, start your journey with [Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5](#). They provide you with the basics to get you up and running.

If you already play but can't quite figure out how to play what you're hearing on CDs or at live shows, check out [Part 3](#), where you discover how players use positions to play in many keys.

If you're fascinated by the secrets of bending notes, check out [Chapter 8](#). (**Tip:** Working first with [Chapter 6](#) will give you a big advantage.) And if you want to learn some tasty tongue textures, flip to [Chapter 7](#).

If you already play fairly well but haven't yet developed a repertoire of tunes, hooked up with a band, or played in a jam or onstage, check out [Part 5](#). And last but not least, if you're an experienced player who wants to pick up on more advanced techniques, head to [Parts 3](#) and [4](#).

## **Part 1**

# **Getting Started with Harmonica**

## **IN THIS PART ...**

Learn about the origins of the harmonica.

Find out how harmonicas are constructed.

Figure out what kind of harmonica to buy.

Get an intro to harmonica tablature.

# Chapter 1

## What Is This Thing Called Harp?

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### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Discovering what makes the harmonica such a cool little instrument
  - » Considering what it takes to play the harmonica
  - » Understanding how to take your playing beyond the basics
  - » Sharing your music with others and visiting the virtual harmonica village
- 

Maybe you're attracted to the sweet yet wailing sound of a harmonica. Or maybe you dig the image of a harmonica player onstage who somehow manages to strike a hip-looking pose while apparently eating a sandwich that's hidden in his or her hands. Either way, you know you love harmonica, and you're dying to find out more. For a little background on the harmonica (or, as players call it, the *harp*) and why it's such a great instrument to play, read on.

## *Considering the Harmonica's Coolness*

What makes the harmonica one of the world's best-selling musical instruments? Let me count the ways! Here are just a few reasons that the harp is so cool: