



All About Music

I Want To Play The Harmonica!

The harmonica (or mouth organ) is a hand-held rectangular musical instrument. As the musician inhales and exhales into evenly spaced air channels, the metal reeds within produce musical notes. The length and thickness of the reed determines the note that is heard.

The first patent was issued to Christian Friedrich Buschmann of Germany. Several decades later, a young German clockmaker named Matthias Hohner learned to make a harmonica and consequently changed his profession. Starting his new company in a kitchen in 1857, he turned out 650 in his first year with the help of family and one paid worker. He marketed his harmonica well with his name engraved on everyone and introduced his instrument to North America. The harmonica's portability and affordability made it a favorite of the Western Cowboy. African-American blue musicians also found the harmonica an affordable alternative. Sonny Terry, James Cotton, Charles Musselwhite and William Clarke are just a few of the blue legends who used the harmonica.

The harmonica then entered the mainstream. Numerous rock and roll musicians picked up the harmonica. Folk singer Bob Dylan popularized the placing of the harmonica on a neck frame to free his hands for playing the guitar, etc.



Today, five major types of harmonicas are produced: diatonic, diatonic tremolo-tuned, diatonic octave-tuned, chromatic, and orchestral accompaniment. The single-reed diatonic harmonic is the most popular and can be heard in rock, country, blues, and folk music. It features 10 holes with 20 reeds, 10 for blow notes and 10 for draw notes.

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