

WHAMMER JAMMING

An introduction to power harp by Richard Taylor

"Playing the harmonica isn't like a whistle ... you wanna open your throat to make a really large channel of air. I like to bring the air from the stars all the way down into my feet when I draw, and when I'm going out with a blow note, I wanna take it from my feet and send it all the way back to the stars." **Norton Buffalo**

POWER HARPING

- Amplified / Electric harp
- Full throaty tone
- Fluent use of harp and mic technique
- Strong use of rhythm
- Voice sometimes heard through mic
- Working 'inside' the harp to release expression
- Largely R&B/Blues based, but also covers rock, pop and other styles
- Largely cross-harp (2nd position), though not exclusively
- Not just special effects and pedals
- Not Bob Dylan, country blues, folk, celtic etc
- A style of playing, not a harp brand patented by Brendan Power!



WHAMMER JAMMER

"There are no secrets. I'm not reluctant to tell people about Whammer Jammer. Quite frankly, it's one thing to be told the stuff, it's another thing to take it in and master it ... it has to be handled in a certain technical way in order for it to sound right." **Magic Dick**

Time Line

- 1959 **Back Track** recorded by Little Walter for Chess Records in Chicago
- 1963 **Bye Bye Bird** released by Sonny Boy Williamson II on his 45rpm single, with *Help Me*
- 1964 **Hard Hearted Woman** recorded by Big Walter 'Shakey Horton' on the LP *Soul of Blues Harmonica*
- 1967 **Rocket 88** is recorded by James Cotton on his live LP *Late Night Blues* in Canada
- 1971 **Whammer Jammer** is first recorded on J.Geils Band LP *The Morning After* in Detroit
- 1972 **Whammer Jammer** features on J.Geils live LP *Full House*
- 1978 **Harpin' On A Riff** is recorded by Charlie Musselwhite on his LP *Harmonica According To Charlie Musselwhite*
- 1980 **Swing Job** 9 Below Zero, with Mark Feltham on harp, recorded their LP *Live At The Marquee* in London's Soho

Magic Dick's influences

- Listening to non-harp music – largely jazz - before playing harp and focussing on the horn players
- Classic Jazz Trumpet – Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Roy Eldridge
- Classic Jazz Saxophone - Charlie Parker, John Coltrane (especially Coltrane for powerful blow bend)
- Jazz rather than Rock'n'Roll, excepting Little Richard's saxophonist Lee Allen
- James Cotton, Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson II, Sonny Boy Williamson I, Junior Wells
- Walter Horton (less so than Little Walter) – but special because he brought attention to tone and tongue blocking on *Hard Hearted Woman*, plus other artefacts difficult to get without this technique
- Energy and big lungs
- Not Jimmy Reed for *altissimo* blow bends – this was John Coltrane
- Frustrated trumpet player and jazzier (see Jerry Portnoy interview on www.harpsurgery.com)

Original rig

- Copied from James Cotton
- Used a Sure vocal style mic with volume on middle of shaft
- Can't recall the amplifier because he was experimenting – Fender Twin Reverb amp
- Cathode follower / Unity Gain, Y chord box – signal splitter
- We're working from the 1972 *Full House* LP live version of Whammer Jammer

Whammer Jammer sources

- Back Track – Little Walter
- Bye Bye Bird – Sonny Boy Williamson
- Hard Hearted Woman – Big Walter 'Shakey Horton'
- Rocket 88 - James Cotton

Basics

- Song in E major
- Played cross harp (2nd position) on an A major diatonic harmonica

Song map

- Double-hit, fanfare intro
- Unaccompanied solo section
- Six accompanied twelve-bar sequences
- Final flourish

Essential skills

- Tongue blocking – for darker, fatter tone
- Puckering – for articulation, blow bends and fast moves
- Cupped and open harp mic
- Articulation
- Tongue slapping
- Tongue fluttering
- Head rolls
- Draw bends
- Blow bends
- Falsetto voice whoopin'
- Versioning
- Full power from bottom to top of harmonica

DOUBLE-HIT, FANFARE INTRO

4D'..4D 2D#5D (2D".."2D) # fluttered
9B'..9B 10B..10B" (10B".."10B) 10B" modulated

UNACCOMPANIED SECTION

A

3D..1D* 2B..3B 2B..3B 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D (1D-2D)..3D'..3D' * *gliss* derdle-erder
1D 2B 3B..2B..3B 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D (1D-2D)..3D' 3D' derdle-erder
1D 2B 3B..2B..3B 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D (1D-2D)..3D' 3D' derdle-erder
1D 2B 3B..2B..3B 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D (1D-2D)..3D' 3D' derdle-erder
1D..1D 2B --- 4B 3D..2D..2B..(1B-2B) 4B 3D --- pause
1D 2B 3B..2B..3B 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..3D' derdle-erder
--- 3D..1D* 2B 3B --- pause * *gliss*

B

1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D derdle-derdle-derdle-der
1B-2B-3B..1D-2D-3D 2D 1D..2B..1D spit-cough tuh-kah
1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D derdle-derdle-derdle-der
1B-2B-3B..1D-2D-3D 3D'..2D 2B spit-cough tuh-kah
1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D derdle-derdle-derdle-der
1B-2B-3B..1D-2D-3D 2D 1D..2B..1D spit-cough tuh-kah
1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D..1D-2D 1D-2D derdle-derdle-derdle-der
1B-2B-3B..1D-2D-3D 3D'..2D 2B spit-cough tuh-kah
1D **4D 4B 4B** **tongue slaps**
1B **4B** 3D'! **tongue slaps** ! vibrato
2D..2D 3D 4B..4B 2D 2D".."1D..1D

C

3D **4D 4D 5B** **tongue slaps**
--- ^3D **4D 5B** --- pause ^ up bend (*port.*) **tongue slaps**
3D **4D 4D 5B** **tongue slaps**
--- ^3D **4D 5B** --- pause ^ up bend (*port.*) **tongue slaps**
1B 2B 2D" 2D
--- 1B..2B 2D" 2D --- pause
2D **3D 4D 5B** **tongue slaps**

--- 2D..2D **3D**..4D **5B**

--- pause **tongue slaps**

5D 5B 4D 4B

tongue slaps

3D'..2D 2D'' 1D..1B

2D **3D**..2D **2B 2D** 2D''..1D 1D

D

<3D-4D>

<pulsed tongue block trill> 16 beats

<3D'-4D'>

<pulsed tongue block trill> 8 beats

<3D-4D>

<pulsed tongue block trill> 8 beats

3D' 3D'

attack

2D 2D

attack

2D 2D

attack

2D 2D''..1D 1D

attack

6 ACCOMPANIED 12 BAR SEQUENCES

1

2D..**5D*** 2D..**5D*** 2D..**<6D~5D>** **<6B~5B>** **4D**

* *gliss* <head roll> **tongue slaps**

2D..**5D*** 2D..**5D*** 2D..**<6D~5D>** **<6B~5B>** **4D**

* *gliss* <head roll> **tongue slaps**

1B..**4B*** 1B..**4B*** 3D'..3D''..2D

* *gliss* **tongue slaps**

2D..**5D*** 2D..**5D*** 2D..**<6D~5D>** **<6B~5B>** **4D**

* *gliss* <head roll> **tongue slaps**

^<4D-5D> **6B 5D 4D 4B** 2D 2D''..1D 1D

< tongue block trill> 8 beats **tongue slaps**

2

<**4D-5D**> <**5B..6B**> <**5D-6D**>

<head roll> **tongue slaps**

<**4D-5D**> <**5B..6B**> <**5D-6D**>

<head roll> **tongue slaps**

<**4D-5D**> <**5B..6B**> <**5D-6D**>

<head roll> **tongue slaps**

10B..10B''

10B'' modulated

^9B

^ up bend (*port.*) articulation **X** (below)

4D..4D 4D'..4D-2D* **4B.. 4B** 3D'

* *gliss* **tongue slaps**

2D.. 2D 3D' 4B..4B 2D 2D''..1D 1D

tongue slaps

3

6B 5D..4D..5D 6B

tongue slap

6B 5D..4D..5D 6B

tongue slap

6B 5D..4D..5D 6B

tongue slap

10B..10B"

10B" modulated

^9B

^ up bend (*port.*) articulation **Y** (below)

4D'..4D-2D* 4D'..4D-2D* 4D'..4D-2D* 4D'..4D-2D*

* *gliss*

3D..3D 4B..4B 2D 2D"..1D 1D

tongue slaps

4

2D-4D'*..4D

2D-4D'*..4D

2D-4D'*..4D 2D-4D'*..4D

2D-4D'*..4D 4D'..3D 4D'..3D..2D

2D 3D'-4D' 3D'-4D'.....

across 8 beats

2D..2D 2D 2D..2D"..1D 1D

4D 5B 5D 5B

tongue slaps

--- **5D 5B** 3D'

tongue slaps

2D..2D 2D..2D"..1D 1D

5

Woooooooooooooooooh!

Falsetto descent for 16 beats

^3D'-4D' ^3D'-4D'.....2D

^ up bend (*port.*)

2D..2D 2D 2D..2D"..1D 1D

^ up bend (*port.*)

4D'-4D-4D 4D-4D-4D

triplet articulation **Z** (below)

4D'-4D-4D 4D-4D-4D

triplet articulation **Z** (below)

4D'-4D-4D 4D-4D-4D

triplet articulation **Z** (below)

4D'..3D..2D

triplet articulation **Z** (below)

2D..2D"..1D

triplet articulation **Z** (below)

6

2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D.. 2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D

2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D

^3D'.. 3D" 2D..2D..2D"..1D ^3D'.. 3D" 2D..2D..2D"..1D

^ up bend (*port.*)

2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D

4D'..4D~2D 2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D 2D..2D..2D"..1D

FINAL FLOURISH

6B 5B..4D 4B

5B

^3D..4D 5B 6B

10B..10B"....

10B" modulated

Rhythm

This is created by the tongue slap technique. The on-off movement of the tongue generates the *skip*.

Flutter

This short section is puckered apart from the 2-5 split which is fluttered. The split 2-5 draw is rapidly fluttered on-off-on-off with the front end of the tongue. The result is an alternation between the open 2-3-4-5 chord draw and the split, or blocked, 2-5 draw (E-D). You may need to perfect this technique. It is an in-out dabbing movement which momentarily blocks and then opens up the central 3-4 draw holes. It is *not* a draw trill across holes 4 and 5.

Tenuto

The notes at the end of each opening fanfare line are emphasised. Attack them and make an impact.

Blow bend modulation

You will need full control on the blow bends. This is the bit that makes the audience sit up and pay attention. The full blow bend on hole ten is partially released and re-applied in rapid succession to produce a modulation. This is sustained by applying a serious amount of pressure from behind the blow bend and a repeated flexing of the central upper tongue area. You would use the same mechanism to produce a high pitched vibrato effect when whistling. Try it.

Cupping

Listen to the original recordings and note where cupped and open-hand sequences occur by the changes in tone. Much of the opening section is played with a cupped mic for tone. When opening up, allow the harp to resonate naturally.

Glissandos

For glissandos, run a tongue block across holes 2-3-4 and apply a tongue slap to the final note.

Opening Trills and Head rolls

Are accented or pulsed across the first beat of each bar. Try to tongue block. Don't worry if you have to snatch a breath; Magic Dick does on one or two video takes. Later, Magic Dick produces his 12 bar trills using a tongue blocked head roll. If you've got crazy hair, you need to flaunt it. The follicle-challenged (and those who value brains and retinas) can use a standard hand roll or a hybrid. Of course you can also pucker. It's almost as effective, but play 'wildly!'

Pulls, Slaps and Pull Slaps

These three tongue blocking techniques are integral to the whole tune. They come from, and help generate, the soloist's rhythm by rapidly applying the tongue for single notes (*slaps*), opening up from a single note to a group of notes by pulling your tongue off the harp (*pulls*), or closing down from a pulled group to a single note (*pull slaps*). This technique is also applied to blown notes. You could describe pulled notes as incidental or passing notes which are sounded as you breathe. Initially you can get away without them, but they soon become an essential ingredient. So experiment!

Articulation

X 'dwit dwit dwit-dwit duh-diddit dwit-dit dwit-dit dwit-dit duh-diddit'

Y 'dwit dwit dwit- dwitduh- diddit dwitduh- diddit dwitduh- diddit dit dwitduh-diddit dwit'

Z 'diddler-diddler dwoodler-diddler dwoodler-diddler dwoodler'

'Every little thing you do makes a difference.' **Magic Dick**

REFERENCE

Rock Harmonica (Book/CD) – Dave Barrett (Melbay) with full transcription of studio version of Whammer Jammer

Blues Harmonica Masterclass (Book/CD) - Jerry Portnoy

Harmonica Power (Book/CD) - Norton Buffalo's Bag Of Tricks

Power Blues Harp (Book/CD) – Charlie Musselwhite

TAB

www.coast2coastmusic.com/diatonic/whammerjammer.shtml

www.harpsurgery.com

www.harmonicamasterclass.com

YouTube

Magic Dick – variety of live Whammer Jammer footage

Magic Dick explains “Whammer Jammer” posted by Adam Gussow (KudzuRunner) 2008

Modern Blues Harmonica – Whammer Jammer 1-5 posts by Adam Gussow (KudzuRunner)

Magic Dick

Richard Salwitz (aka Juke Joint Jimmy, Lord of the Lickin' Stick)

b 13.May 1945, New London, Connecticut

www.magicdick.com

“Mentally prepare for what comes next. Have a mental image – this creates a corollary path and awareness which sets up the body parts, so the sound that emerges is the sound you intend. Think beyond the hole and the bend and on to the body set up necessary to get it. This will become fundamental to the way you sound.

Take some of your practice time, forget about riffs and just go for tones and sounds, noting how much air you're putting through the instrument. Most of the time we play way too hard. Slow down and get a deliberate intent on tone and sound – this will determine the type of speed and execution you'll get.” **Magic Dick**