

Special Feature

Tongue Blocking

by Joe Filisko

Tongue blocking can be difficult for many players to learn and add to their arsenal of techniques. This is for a good reason. For the most part, you eyes are nearly useless in determining the placement of you tongue on the harmonica.

When a guitar player is learning, he will rely upon his sense of sight to help him find the correct finger placement on the strings. What fingers are to a guitar player and most other musicians, lips and the tongue are to a harp player. Being able to examine the lips and tongue in action, whether it be your own or someone else's, would shed much light on the approach to playing the "Blind Man's Instrument." This had never before been made possible until now.

Please welcome the Filisko Tongue Block Trainer. Your first opportunity to peek into the unknown.

All that you need is a transparent or translucent plastic milk or orange juice jug, a knife, scissors, pen, hole puncher, and a mirror.

No. 1 Start by first cutting off the handle of a clean jug as shown with your knife.

No. 2 Cut away the outside portion of the handle with your scissors.

No. 3 Mark off the holes. You can do this by placing the "U" shaped piece of plastic over your harp and marking off the holes as though you were tracing the onto it. Use the ridge caused from the mold as a guide to keep your holes in a straight line. You don't actually need 10 holes but try and get at least 7.

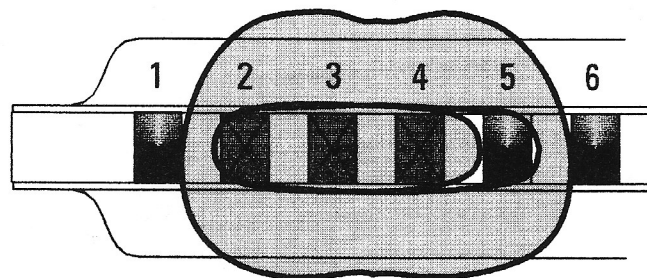
No. 4 Coming in from the side, punch out the holes with your hole puncher.

No. 5 Grab that mirror and prepare your tongue for awakening.

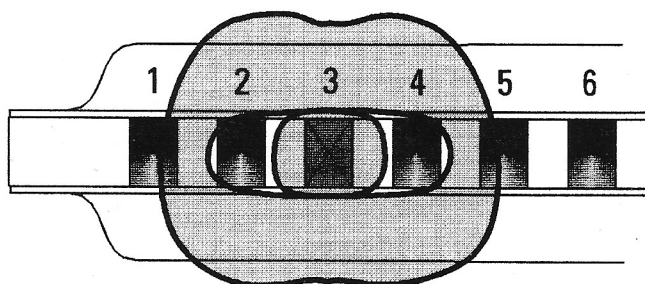
For the first time you will be able to see what is going on (or should be going one) inside your mouth when tongue blocking. Common tongue block positions to work on are the single note block, the split-3, split-4, and the split-5 block. Much can also be learned about the vamping (slapping) technique and the mysterious tongue trilling (warbling) technique.

May your blocking be fun, fulfilling, and fruitful.

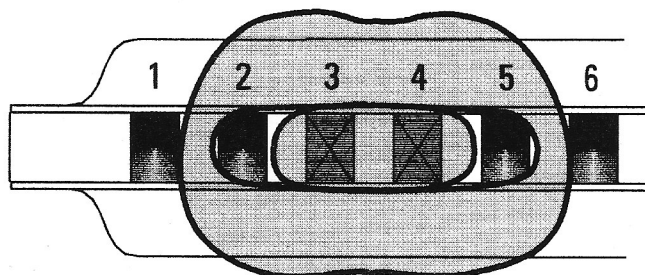
I will be using the Filisko Tongue Block Trainer and demonstrating its maximum potential as a part of my class during the Augusta Heritage Festival this summer. I will be teaching along with other harmonica notables such as Phil Wiggins and the "Iceman." □



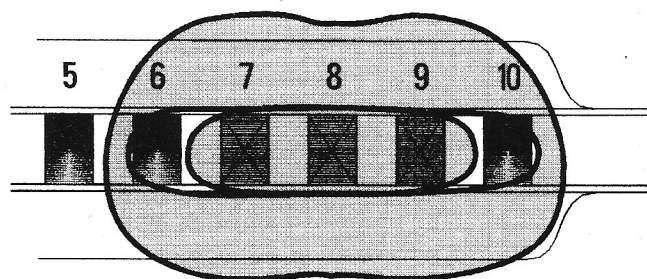
SINGLE NOTE TONGUE BLOCK



SPLIT-3 TONGUE BLOCK



SPLIT-4 TONGUE BLOCK



SPLIT-5 TONGUE BLOCK

Joe will be at SPAH 98. If you teach harmonica be sure to talk to him about his Filisko Tongue Block Trainer.

