

# Blues on a Chromatic

Neil Warren

## It's Easier than you think

Just like playing third position on a diatonic.

### Notation:

- d = draw
- b = blow
- 1 = press slide in, e.g. 6b1 = 6 blow with slide pressed in

### Two main scales to use:

Blues scale:

On chromatic:

- Low octave: 1d, 2d, 3b, 3b1, 3d, 4b, 5d
- Middle octave: 5d, 6d, 7b, 7b1, 7d, 8b, 9d

On diatonic:

- Middle octave: 4d, 5d, 6b, 6d1, 6d, 7b, 8d

Dorian scale: minor scale: flattened 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>

On chromatic:

- Low octave: 1d, 2b, 2d, 3b, 3d, 4d, 5b, 5d
- Middle octave: 5d, 6b, 6d, 7b, 7d, 8d, 9b, 9d

On diatonic:

- 4d, 5b, 5d, 6b, 6d, 7d, 7b, 8d

When playing blues: most of the time you will play the blues scale, but can use some notes from Dorian scale too.

### What Key Am I Playing In?:

- On C chromatic: playing in key of D or D minor
  - o Same on a diatonic: D or Dm
- On C chromatic: holding the button in (most of the time): playing in Eb or Eb minor
- Another common chromatic played is in key of Bb: play in C or C minor

### Playing in Eb (or Eb minor):

Holding the slide in on the chromatic raises the pitch of each note by a semi-tone.

So you can (almost) just hold the slide in all the time to play an Eb blues scale:

Blues scale:

- Low octave: 1d1, 2d1, 3b1, 3d, 3d1, 4b1, 5d1
- Middle octave: 5d1, 6d1, 7b1, 7d, 7d1, 8b1, 9d1

Some example riffs in D blues scale:

- 9d, 8b, 7d, 6d, 7b, 6d, 5d
- 7d, 7b, 6d, 5d, 5b, 3d, 5b, 5d, 6d, 5d
- 7d, 8b, 9d, 8b, 7d, 8b, 7d, 6d, 5d
- 5d, 6d, 7b, 7b1, 7b, 6d, 7b, 7b1, 7b, 6d, 5d

Example riff from Dorian scale:

- 5d, 6d, 7b, 6d, 5d, 6b, 5d, 4d, 5d

You could also try these licks in Eb

There are typically 12 hole and 16 hole chromatics: 12 holes easier to navigate, 16 hole add low octave

Some chromatic blues 'tricks':

- Octaves, e.g. 1d+5d: for a big, powerful sound
- Slide down the chromatic
- 'Fat' chord: play 12345d for a big minor chord. Great through an amp
- Tongue trill, e.g. 3d-5d (block 4d)

Blues structure:

12 bar blues in D:

D | D | D | D

G | G | D | D

A | G | D | A

- 5d = root, i.e. D
- 7b = 4<sup>th</sup>, i.e. G
- 7d = 5<sup>th</sup>, i.e. A
- 5b = 7<sup>th</sup>, i.e. C

Some Blues Chromatic Songs to Check out:

- Harpburn by Rod Piazza: played on 12 hole C chromatic in D
- Five Long Years by Kim Wilson: played on 16 hole C chromatic in Dm
- I'm Ready by Little Walter: played on a 16 hole C chromatic in Eb
- Blue Switch by George Harmonica Smith: played on 12 hole C chromatic in Eb

- 24 Hours Too Long by James Cotton: played on a 12 hole C chromatic in D
- Blowin' Like Hell by William Clarke: played on 12 hole Bb chromatic in C

Some non-blues Chromatic Players:

- Toots Thielemans
- Larry Adler
- Stevie Wonder
- Tommy Reilly

Chromatic tab:

This song is actually in the Aeolian scale / natural minor, (not Dorian scale).

Notice the 3d1 note is used, instead of the 3b1 (from D blues scale).

Still D minor, but based from the F scale, instead of the C scale.

## Saint James Infirmary

trad.

Musical notation for the first line of 'Saint James Infirmary'. The key signature has one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written on a treble clef staff. Above the staff are the chords: Dm, A7, Dm, A7, Dm, Bb7, A7. Below the staff is the chromatic tab: 1d 2d 3d 3d 2d 3b 3d 3b 2d 1d 3d 3d 3d 3d 5d 3d1 3d 1d 2d.

Musical notation for the second line of 'Saint James Infirmary'. The key signature has one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written on a treble clef staff. Above the staff are the chords: Dm, A7, Dm, G7, Bb7, A7, Dm. Below the staff is the chromatic tab: 3d 3d 2d 3b 3d 3b 2d 1d 2b 2d 1d 2d 2d 1d.

## Part 2

D blues scale or D minor and Eb blues scale or Eb minor are the usual approach Blues players take to playing the chromatic. And with good reason: it's pretty easy to play (and is just like third position on the diatonic).

But playing blues in the key of G on C chromatic is very similar to playing it on a C diatonic (so like 2nd position on the diatonic):

- Diatonic blues scale in G on C diatonic harmonica:

- 2d, 3d1, 4b, 4d1, 4d, 5d, 6b

- Chromatic blues scale in G on C chromatic harmonica:
  - 3b, 3d1, 4d1 (or 4b/5b), 5b1 (or 4b1), 5d, 6d, 7b

Extended blues scale range on C chromatic:

- 1d, 2d, 3b, 3d1, 4d1, 5b1, 5d, 6d, 7b
- Next octave: 7b, 7d1, 8d1, 9b1, 9d, 10d, 11b

Next:

- Chromatic solos on Transcribe!