

Make Your Own "Stretch Harps"

by Brendan Power

The overwhelming majority of single-reed diatonics are in the familiar 10 hole Richter format. However, right from my early days of playing in New Zealand I got frustrated with the limitations of the 10 hole size, as it didn't suit the alternate tunings I was starting to dream up. There was no useful alternative available so, out of sheer necessity, in 1980, out of sheer necessity, in 1980 I invented the *Stretch Harp*.

The *Stretch Harp* is a longer size diatonic harmonica made by slicing and joining the parts of two harps together. My first ones were 11 hole models made from two Hohner Special 20s. I made a whole set of these in all 12 keys in my Regular Breath tuning, that I played all through the 1980s and recorded on my first two albums (Country Harmonica 1984 and State of the Harp, 1990). Here is the tuning layout. I also had some small variants.

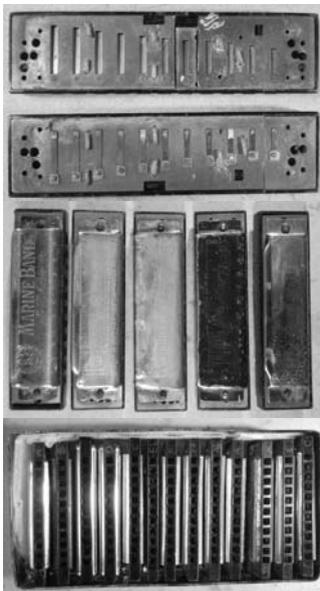
Regular Breath Tuning

(Brendan Power 1980)

Blow	C	E	G	C	E	G	A	C	E	G	C
Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Draw	D	G	B	D	F#	A	B	D	F#	A	B

You can see that the upper octave has the same breathing pattern as the rest of the harp, which is why it's called Regular Breath tuning. But it would have meant losing the

high C to get the full 3 octave range – so I added the eleventh hole. Here are some photos of those old harps:



Incidentally these 11 hole harps had some other innovations too: they were the first harps to incorporate another invention of mine, Half-Valving;); featured the first use of Blu-Tack as a reed tuning material; and had flattened rear covers and drilled side-vents, common in custom harps today. You can read more and hear MP3 clips of these harps on my website if you're interested.

The first photo shows how the reedplates were split and recombined. The reason I chose the Special 20 was because it had a plastic lipped comb, which covered the sharp edges of the reedplate cuts from your mouth.

I adopted the same approach for other *Stretch Harps*. I've made 12, 14 and 16 hole models; here is a photo of 12 /14/16 hole *Stretch Harps* using Suzuki Harpmaster combs and Hohner coverplates:



But my current favourite is my *Lucky 13!* This has the 3 octave range of a standard harp plus a lower octave tagged on the bottom end, to give a full 4 octave range. It's a similar idea to Steve Baker's SBS tuning, but with the advantage that the hole spacing is identical to a normal harp.

I've got six Lucky 13 Stretch Harps in my current gig case; most of them combine Hohner Thunderbird super low octaves attached to Suzuki SUB30 upper ends in my PowerBender tuning. But here's the scale in standard Richter:

"Lucky 13" Stretch Harp in Richter Tuning

Blow	C	E	G	C	E	G	C	E	G	C			
Hole	1*	2*	3*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Draw	D	G	B	D	G	B	D	F	A	B	D	F	A

Here are some photos:



I don't make these harps for sale, but anyone who is reasonably handy with tools can create their own. All you need are: two harps with lipped combs, a fine-tooth saw, a file, a drill, plastic glue, some long coverplates - and LOTS of patience! It takes quite a bit of fiddly work to put all the bits together, but the result is well worth it. Why not give it a try!

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