Section 1 – Preparing for the Jam Session

What is a Jam Session for?
• Gain experience
• Try new material
• Build contacts

Purpose
• Know why you’re there
• Try new material
• Work on new skill sets
  o Dynamics
  o Breaks
  o Making connection with audience

Three Types of Jam Sessions
• Pro
• Standard
• Loosely run
• Check it out—don’t jam the first time

What to Expect
• Find jam leader and sign up
• Tell them your strengths
• You may not be called up in the order you signed up
• You may be with jammers of varying skill levels
• How many songs?
• Solos are commonly two choruses in length
• Ask to use equipment and thank everyone when done

Song Selection
• Use standard grooves, openings and endings (or modify your songs to be so)
  o The more complex the song is, the higher the anxiety level and the lower the probability of success
• Present groove by stating:
  o Its common name (e.g., Rock Beat)
  o A famous song that uses that groove (e.g., “Tramp”)
  o Learn to play the main line on the harmonica (e.g., 2 P 2 1 2" 1 2” 1)
• Study songs are a good choice (I write them with common grooves and keys)
• Safe band keys are: E, A, D, G, C and F (pro bands can generally play in any key)
• You’re the leader, so make sure practice all signals

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Section 2 – At the Jam Session

Sitting In
• State your strengths
• Pinpoint leader
• Study Accompaniment Playing
• Bring your entire set of harmonicas just in case an uncommon key is called

Leading
• Material
  o Memorized (non-dynamic)
  o Head + Improvise
• Speech: Key, Groove and Where
• Count-in
  o Pickup? “Temperature” Tongue Blocking Study 2 & “The Split” Study 4 Example
  o Practice with metronome
• Signal solos
  o Pass off solos while you’re playing the turnaround
  o Step forward when you solo and step back when you’re done
  o Listen and open your eyes for peripheral vision at the turnaround
• Ending
  o Nod Ending = Everyone plays ending with you
  o Hand Break = The band stops to give you ending lick and then enters for the last notes

What to do when you get in trouble
• Listen for turnaround and then get back in
• When in doubt, shake… get back in when you hear the turnaround.
• When completely lost, look to another musician to solo. Come back with the last chorus of your song (common the head returning) when they look back to you and then end the song.
• Show confidence, not mistakes

Section 3 – Jam Session Equipment

The Equipment
• Harps
  o All
  o Basic Set = G, A, B♭, C, D and F (standard F or Low-F)
• Playing through what’s there
  o Vocal mic
    o Inch away
    o Pinky as tactile reference
    o Cover more of the mic with your hand for more volume and bass if needed
    o Filisko and Peter “Madcat” Ruth method (Mic on the right-hand side of the harp)
  o Amp
    o Ask permission to use and adjust amp (if you bring your own mic, ask as well)
    o Tap mic to see if it’s on. If not, flip standby switch on amp, turn volume control on mic up or toggle switch to the on position.
    o When you’re done place the amp back on standby
• Bringing your own gear
  o Acoustic Mic
    o Vocal mic, stand and cable (label all your gear so it doesn’t walk away or it can be identified if you accidentally leave it behind)
  o Amplifier
    o Large is safest (Fender Bassman is the standard)
    o Small is not as safe, though you can use line-out or mic the amp (still not a guaranty that you’ll be able to hear yourself)
  o Setup
    ▪ Set the amp on a couple of milk crates or steady chair
    ▪ Have the amp directly behind you
    ▪ Get away from the amp as far as possible to hear the amp
  o Tone Adjustment: +.5 for mid and treble to help you cut through
  o With loud bands lean towards using higher-keyed harmonicas (C and above)
  o Whenever an option, mic your amp
    ▪ Recruit buddy to help with volume/tone

Record Yourself

Blues Standards List
Below is a blues standards list I’ve but together for you—my friends John Garcia (guitarist and vocalist), Frank De Rose (bassist) and Kevin Coggins (drummer) helped. Become familiar with heads, hooks and where breaks happen. Speak to experienced musicians in your area to ask which tunes should be added. This list provides you with the song title, the artist who made the song popular (the writer is in parenthesis if the artist listed didn’t write the song) and the key of the song. The songs in gray are instrumentals.

1) Ain’t Nobody’s Business If I do – Jimmy Witherspoon & Billy Holiday (*Granger & Robins) [Ab]
2) All Your Love – *Otis Rush [F#]
3) Baby Please Don’t Go – *Muddy Waters [G]
4) Baby Scratch My Back – *Slim Harpo (aka James Moor) [F]
5) Baby What You Want Me To – *Jimmy Reed [E]
6) Blues with a Feeling – *Little Walter [A]
7) Boogie Thing – *Mat Murphy [A]
8) Boom Boom (Out Go the Light) – *Little Walter [E]
10) Born in Chicago – Paul Butterfield (*Nick Gravenitis) [A]
11) Caldonia – Louis Jordan, B.B. King & Big Joe Turner (*Fleecie Moore) [C]
12) Chicken Shack – *Jimmy Smith [F]
13) Crosscut Saw – *Albert King [Ab]
14) Driving Wheel – Jr. Parker (*Roosevelt Sykes) [D]
15) Dust my Broom – *Elmore James [E]
16) Everyday I Have the Blues – *Memphis Slim aka Peter Chapman, B.B. King & Joe Williams [Bb]
17) Everything Gonna be Alright – *Little Walter [G]
18) Further Up the Road – *Boby Bland [F]
19) Good Morning Little School Girl – *Sonny Boy I (John Lee) [A]
20) Got My Mojo Workin’ – Muddy Waters (*Preston Foster) [E]
21) Help Me – *Sonny Boy Williamson [F]
22) Hide Away – *Freddie King (Hound Dog Taylor is noted as originator) [E]
23) House Party – *Amos Milburn [C]
24) Hoochie Coochie Man – *Willie Dixon [A]
25) I Can’t Quit You Baby – *Otis Rush [Ab]
26) I’m Ready – Muddy Waters [Eb]
27) It Hurts Me Too – *Elmore James [D]
29) Just Your Fool – *Little Walter [A]
30) Kansas City – *Wilbert Harrison [Db]
31) Key to the Highway – Little Walter & *Big Bill Broonzy [G]
32) Killing Floor – *Howlin’ Wolf [A]
33) Little By Little – *Jr. Wells [F#]
34) Little Red Rooster – *Willie Dixon [E]
35) Mean old World – *T-Bone Walker, Little Walter & Otis Rush [F]
36) Messin’ with the Kid – *Jr. Wells [C]
37) Next Time You See Me – Jr. Parker (*Don Robey & William Harvey) [A]
38) Off the Wall – *Little Walter [G]
39) One Bourbon, One Scotch and One Beer – John Lee Hooker (*Amos Milburn) [G]
40) One Way Out – *Sonny Boy II & *Elmore James [D]
41) Reconsider Baby – *Lowel Fulson [G]
42) Rock Me Baby – *B.B. King & Muddy Waters [E]
43) Rock this House – *Jimmy Rogers (aka James Lane) [G]
44) Same Thing – Muddy Waters & *Willie Dixon [C]
45) Spoonful – Howlin’ Wolf (*Willie Dixon) [E]
47) Sweet Home Chicago – Magic Sam & Jr. Parker (*Roosevelt Sykes) [E]
48) T-Bone Shuffle – *T-Bone Walker [Ab]
49) That’s Alright – *Jimmy Rogers [E]
51) The Things I Use to Do – *Guitar Slim [F]
52) The Thrill is Gone – *B.B. King [Bm]
54) Walkin’ By Myself – *Jimmy Rogers [A]
55) Woke up This Morning – *B.B. King [C]
56) You Don’t Love Me – *Jr. Wells [A]