

History of Harmonica



Matthias Hohner (1833-1902)



M.Hohner Trumpet Call Harmonica (1906)

Matthias Hohner, who was originally clockmaker, started making harmonicas (by hand) in 1857 with his wife and a single employee. 650 were made in the first year. Hohner harmonicas quickly became popular and during Matthias' lifetime he built the largest harmonica factory in the world. During the American Civil War Matthias Hohner gave harmonicas to family members in the United States who in turn gave them to the fighting soldiers.

In the 1920s Hohner began manufacturing chromatic harmonicas that can be played in any key.

In the mid-1950s Hohner began producing electric guitars. In 1964 Hohner released **The Beatles Harmonica Kit** which was sold in a blister package, much like most Hohner harmonicas nowadays, retailed for \$2.95, and help what Hohner calls "bring about a new popularity upsurge of the Hohner harmonica on both sides of the Atlantic." In the 1970s Hohner began manufacturing acoustic guitars, and re-producing electric guitars.

Matthias Karl Hohner, son of Dipl.-Ing. Matthias Hohner and a direct descendent in fourth generation and name bearer of the founder Matthias Hohner (12 December 1833-12 December 1902) was one of the last members of the Hohner dynasty involved in managing the family business between 1968 and 1986. His son Matthias Francisco Hohner belonged to the first generation of direct descedents who did not enter into the family business. Many direct descedents of the founder are still active as members of the "Deutsches Harmonika Museum" and the "Hohnerschefamilienverein".

150th Anniversary and beyond

For Hohner's 150th Anniversary in 2007 Hohner began manufacturing Limited Edition Diatonic harmonicas all tuned to the key of C major only.

- **Gold** limited to 150 pieces.
- **Chrome** limited to 1,857 pieces.
- **Standard Edition**

The "**Gold Edition**" harmonica is based upon the MS reed plates. Featuring a crystal glass comb and specially engraved gold-plated cover plates, this is the harmonica to have. The bottom cover plate has the serial numbers from 1 to 150. It is packaged in a top-quality fitted leather case with an anniversary booklet.



Hohner 150 Anniversary Gold 42 of 150

The "**Chrome Edition**" harmonica is also based upon the MS reed plates. Featuring a crystal glass comb and specially engraved chrome-plated anniversary cover plates. The bottom cover plate has the serial numbers from 1 to 1857. It is also packaged with an anniversary booklet. The "Standard Edition" model features a clear acrylic comb and the top cover plate is specially engraved.

The "**Standard Edition**" model is presented in 12 piece wooden anniversary boxes.

All three models will be available at select dealers nationwide.

Hohner has announced they will be producing Special 20, Blues Harp, Marine Band, and Big River harmonicas in **Pro Packs** which have three harmonicas keyed in C, G, and A, and retailed at a cheaper price, are to be released sometime in May.

Marine Band

The Marine Band has been Hohner's most popular model of harmonica for generations. Made in Germany on a wood comb, most blues and rock artists play a Marine Band. Several noted users are Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Bruce Springsteen, and Neil Young. There are various subdivisions of the Marine Band.

Subdivisions



Hohner Special 20 Marine Band

The Marine Band is the base model of the line. Technically named the Marine Band 1896/20 for the year it was introduced and the twenty reeds it possesses, it has been the basis of a number of Hohner's harmonicas over the years. It also has some tuning variations like the 1896N (natural minor key) and the 1896H (harmonic minor key).

The Special 20 (#560) was introduced in the mid 1970s. It has the same reeds as a Marine Band, but it has a plastic comb instead of a wooden comb, and rounded edges. It was the first Hohner

harmonica to have a plastic comb, which not only made the instrument more airtight, but also eliminated the swelling wood combs go through as they moisten from use. Made in Germany, this model quickly became the preferred choice of many rock and blues players. Now, most harmonicas being manufactured from all companies are based upon the Special 20. Its most noted user is John Popper, who appears on the blister. Like the 1896,

the Special 20 also has tuning variations available, like the #560C in country styled tuning, and the #560N in natural minor.

The Marine Band Deluxe has all the features of the original Marine Band with tighter construction and a new cover design which creates a greater volume.

The Marine Band Crossover also features the same reeds, but is made on a bamboo comb that is water repellent.

The Marine Band Thunderbird is a model of low and super-low pitched 10-hole diatonic harmonica that was introduced in 2011. It possesses a bamboo comb like the Crossover, and a conical shaped lower cover plate. Designed by noted harmonica player and customizer Joe Filisko, this plate helps reduce any rattle caused by the low frequency tone produced by the reeds. It is available in low major keys A through F, as well as low B-flat and E-flat, and double-low F.

The Marine Band 364 has twelve holes and is available in the natural keys of C, G, and D only. **The Marine Band 365** has fourteen holes and is available in keys C and G only.

The Marine Band Soloist (364s) is the same as a twelve hole chromatic harmonica without a button. Available in key of C

The Marine Band 365 Steve Baker Special (365/28 SBS) possesses the same construction as the original 365, but with low pitched tuning to their natural major keys, available in C, D, G, A,

and F. It is named for, and was developed in part by noted harmonicist Steve Baker, who resides in Germany and has contributed to the design of several other Hohner harmonica models, including the Marine Bands Deluxe and Crossover.

The Marine Band Octave has two rows of reeds tuned an octave apart. Available in the keys of C and G.

The modular system

In the mid-1990s, to respond to the competing new Lee Oskar Harmonica System by Tombo, Hohner introduced an interchangeably parted harmonica series known as the Modular System, usually abbreviated MS. Over the years, several harps have been added to this system.

The Blues Harp has been around since the early 1970s. Until the 1990s, it was functionally identical to the Marine Band, the only differences being the cover plates and the varnish on the front of the wood comb. The harmonica's profile was thinner as well. At one point, Johnny Cash promoted the Blues Harp.^[13] In the 1990s, Hohner made the Blues Harp part of its Modular System (MS) line. This new Blues Harp lost its uniqueness and is interchangeable with the other models in the MS line, but it currently remains the standby of many players who use MS harps.

The Pro Harp features greblon coated cover plates with a matte black finish and a plastic comb. Since its inception, it has become a very popular model among rock and roll players. The Pro Harp was another model that was in Hohner's handmade line of harmonicas, and was later adapted to the modular system.

The Cross Harp was a nearly identical model to the Pro Harp with the exception of a wood comb and slightly thicker original reed plates. It was discontinued in 2011.

The Big River Harp was introduced as a less expensive alternative to the Blues Harp. It is favored among beginner harmonicists, although many experienced players also prefer the Big River for its higher natural volume. It features a plastic comb and bare metal cover plates.

The Blue Midnight was released in 2011 with a limit to the key of C, also on the less expensive side of the market. It features stainless steel cover plates with a wider back gap for enhanced volume while playing. The unique feature of this harp is the comb, which is made out of translucent blue plastic. The comb allows for brighter tone than the black combed models. It also has a special just-intonation "Chicago tuning." It is also now available in other keys. The **225 - Deuce and a Quarter** was a limited edition harmonica on the modular system that was put out between 2007 and 2008. It was made on a black plastic comb, with chrome plated reedplates, and black powder-coated coverplates with art resembling a vintage car's hood-emblem. It was available only in the key of A.

The Meisterklasse is a high end harmonica on the Modular System, featuring chrome plated cover plates, an aluminum comb, and nickel plated reeds. One other feature that sets the Meisterklasse apart from most other Hohner harmonicas are its full-length cover plates, which extend all the way to the ends of the harmonica's comb rather than sharply angling down before the ends to form an adjoining surface parallel to the reedplates and comb. The only other Hohner harmonica possessing this quality is the curve-framed Golden Melody.

Other diatonic harmonica models

The Old Standby is another model beloved by generations of harmonica players. Up until the 1990s, this model was a quality instrument made in Germany on a wood comb. Where the Marine

Band was the choice of blues players, many Country players such as Charlie McCoy preferred the Old Standby. In the 1990s, Hohner began manufacturing this model in China on a plastic comb with a significant decrease in quality. Among harmonica fans the downgrade remains unpopular.

Golden Melody, designed by Frank and Cham-Ber Huang, has a curved shape. This German made, plastic comb model has a slightly different tuning than other diatonic harmonicas, making the Golden Melody better suited for playing single note melodies and solos.

The **XB-40**, (short for Extreme **bending-40** reeds), is unlike any other diatonic made. Released in 2010, it was specifically designed by harmonica specialist Rick Epping to simplify proficient bending of the notes. To make this possible, the XB-40 uses forty reeds as opposed to the usual twenty found in most ten-hole diatonics. With these bending capabilities, the XB-40 gives access to all the notes on the chromatic scale through bending the natural tones of each hole.

The American Ace has been a popular choice as a beginner's harmonica for decades. Originally made in Ireland on a wood comb, this model is currently being made in China on a plastic comb.

The Pocket Pal is a recent addition to the Hohner standard line of harmonicas. It is somewhat unique because it is slightly shorter in length than most harmonicas, leading to its namesake of being pocket handy. It is Chinese made, which is unfavorable to most harmonica players, but the Pocket Pal has caught on as an inexpensive, yet quality harp.

38C, also known as the **Mini Harp**, is Hohner's least expensive model. With four holes, the 38C plays a single octave in the key of

C. Like other budget harmonicas, the 38C is manufactured in China with a plastic comb.

The Little Lady is very similar to the 38C, but on a pearwood comb and with different cover plate art. It is technically a playable harmonica, but it is generally regarded as a nick-nack piece that can be used as personal jewelry. It is also available as a keychain.

Other harmonica types In addition to diatonic harmonicas Hohner also produces other types such as "chromatic" and "Tremolo".

Chromatic



Hohner "Super Chromonica"; case marked "No.260 1/2" (model); images top-to-bottom show the case top, harmonica top, case bottom, and harmonica bottom/obverse.

The **Chromonica** contains forty reeds and plays 2½ full chromatic octaves. There is also a **Super Chromonica 270** which contains

forty-eight reeds and spans three octaves.

The **Super Chromonica 270 Deluxe** is an updated improvement on the Super Chromonica, featuring tighter reedplate fixtures, thicker reedplates, round holes in its chrome plated mouthpiece, a smoother slide mechanism which can be remounted for left-handed use, and a round-edged comb for more comfortable holding.

The Deluxe is also available with a gold plated mouthpiece and coverplates, known as the **Super Chromonica Gold**.

The **Educator 10** is a 10-hole, 40 reed chromatic harmonica built on an aluminum comb. It is designed without the valve or windsaver technology found in many other chromatics, and because of its ten holes, it is smaller than most chromatics. This makes it a simple and inexpensive chromatic, ideal both for novices and for experienced diatonic players making the transition from the smaller 10-hole harmonicas. Like the Chromonica, it plays 2 1/2 full octaves.

The **Koch Chromatic** and **Slide Harp** are both designed in the same fashion as chromatic harmonicas, but possess the Richter tuning found in typical 10-hole diatonic harmonicas. Like the Educator 10, both are also 10-hole and built on a pearwood comb. The Slide Harp has been discontinued.

The **64 Chromonica** is a four full-octave harmonica in the key of C. With 64 reeds on a plastic comb, it boasts an extra octave below the middle-C note, giving it an accentuated versatility.

The **CX-12** is a 12-hole, 48 reed chromatic, uniquely designed with a one-piece plastic housing and a more ergonomic slide button. It is available in several keys including a tenor-C. The standard model is charcoal black in color, but a gold colored one is available in the key of C only. A variant of the CX-12, the **CX-12 Jazz**, has slightly different outer body features for better

ergonomics, a red and gold colored housing, and higher reed offsets which aid in better tone for jazz harmonica players.

Tremolo:

On tremolo harmonicas each channel has two reeds for each note, i.e. one pair for blown notes and another pair for drawn ones, each pair tuned slightly apart from one another to produce a tremolo sound.

The most popular models are either single-sided or double-sided **Echo** harps, but the single-sided ones can be combined into quadruple or sextuple 'corncob' setups, with a different key on each row.

Chord:

On Chord Harmonicas, there are 2 harmonicas hinged together capable together of playing 48 chords. They are 23 inches long, and each chord takes up 4 holes. The chord harmonica is used for a beat, or tricks. Jerry Murad's Harmonicat's 1947 " Peg O' My Heart " was played on a chord. Hohner's Chord is known as the Hohner 48, because it plays 48 chords.

Artist series harmonicas:

Hohner has several harmonicas designed by several famous harmonica players.

Larry Adler

Famous Jazz harmonica player Larry Adler has his own harmonica series, which are chromatic with either 12 or 16 holes.

Toots Thielemans

Another noted jazz player, Toots Thielemans, also has a chromatic harmonica line with two types being **Mellow Tone** (for classical material) and **Hard Bopper** (for contemporary material).

Steven Tyler

Aerosmith's lead man Steven Tyler has two types of diatonic harmonica(s). An **Artist Series** and a **Signature Series** with the latter being more expensive.

Bob Dylan

Legendary folk musician Bob Dylan also has a **Signature Series** diatonic harmonica as well as a **Collection** which features seven harmonicas.

NewEditor: Giòng Bách Việt