

# The Harmonica

## Its Evolution, Variety and Beauty

*For Players, Collectors,  
And the Curious*

A Presentation for the  
Members of the Lyncean Group

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# Outline

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## 1. About harmonicas

- Definition
- History

## 2. Harmonica as a musical instrument

- Types
- Demonstration

## 3. Harmonica as a “collectible”

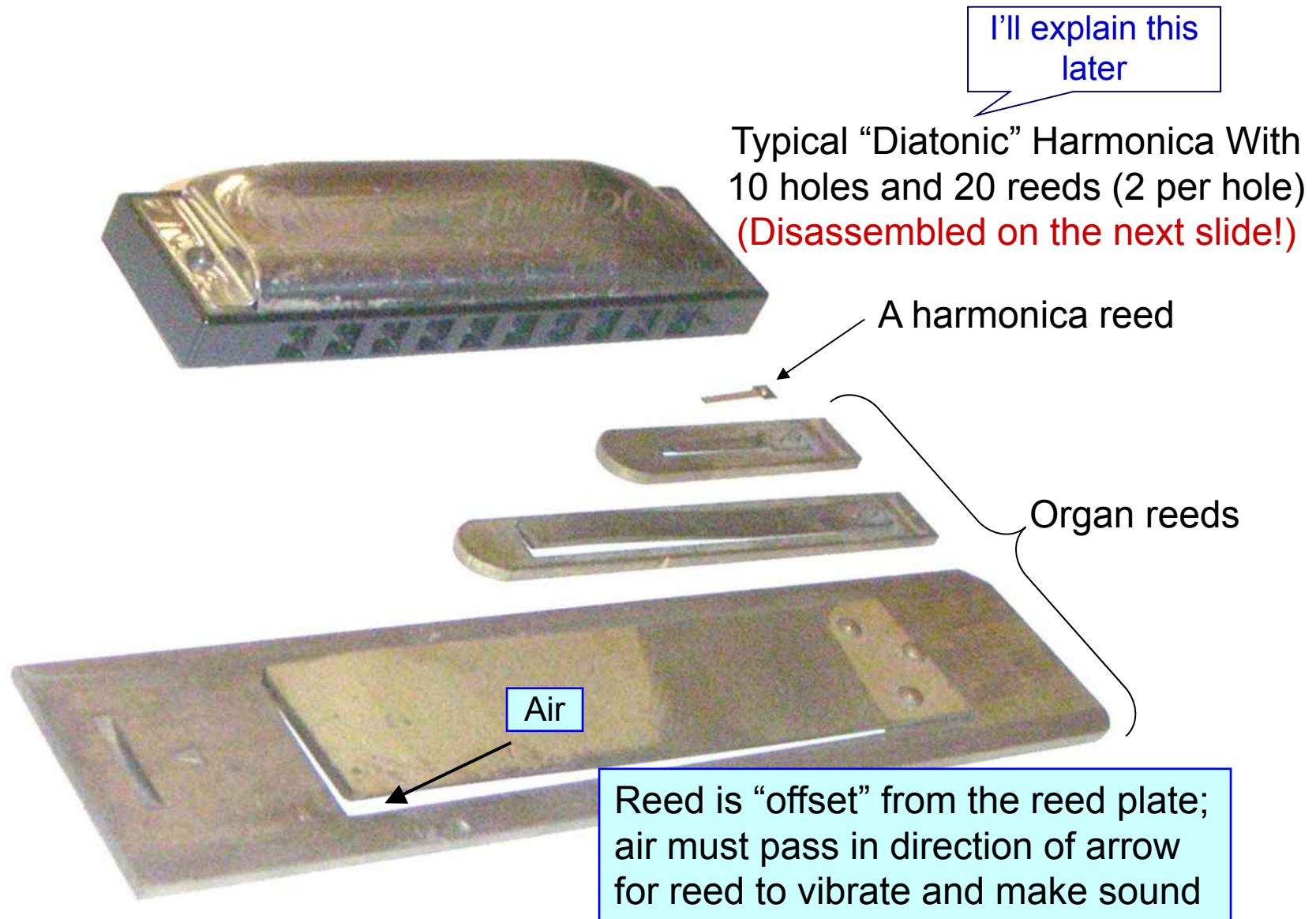
- Show and tell



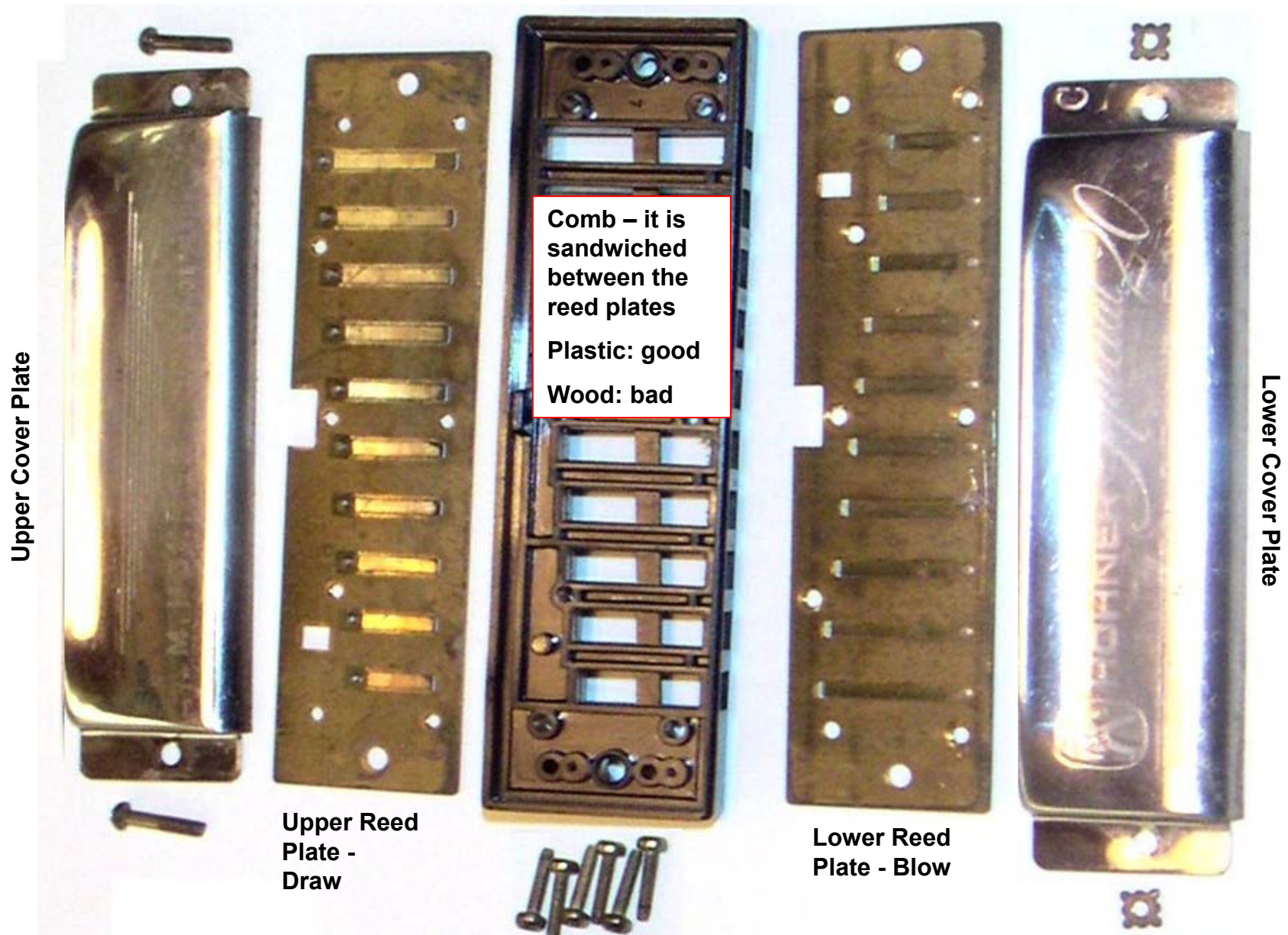
# Definition of “Harmonica”

- “Free reed” instrument that is played by blowing/drawing with the mouth.
  - Also known as *mouth organ* (UK mostly), *mundharmonika* (Germany), *harp*
- Other popular *free reed* instruments:
  - Accordion (button box, concertina, handharmonika, piano accordion)
  - Jew’s harp
  - Reed organ (pump organ)
  - Melodica (evolved from the blow accordion)

# Standard Harmonica



# The Insides





# Brief History of the Harmonica

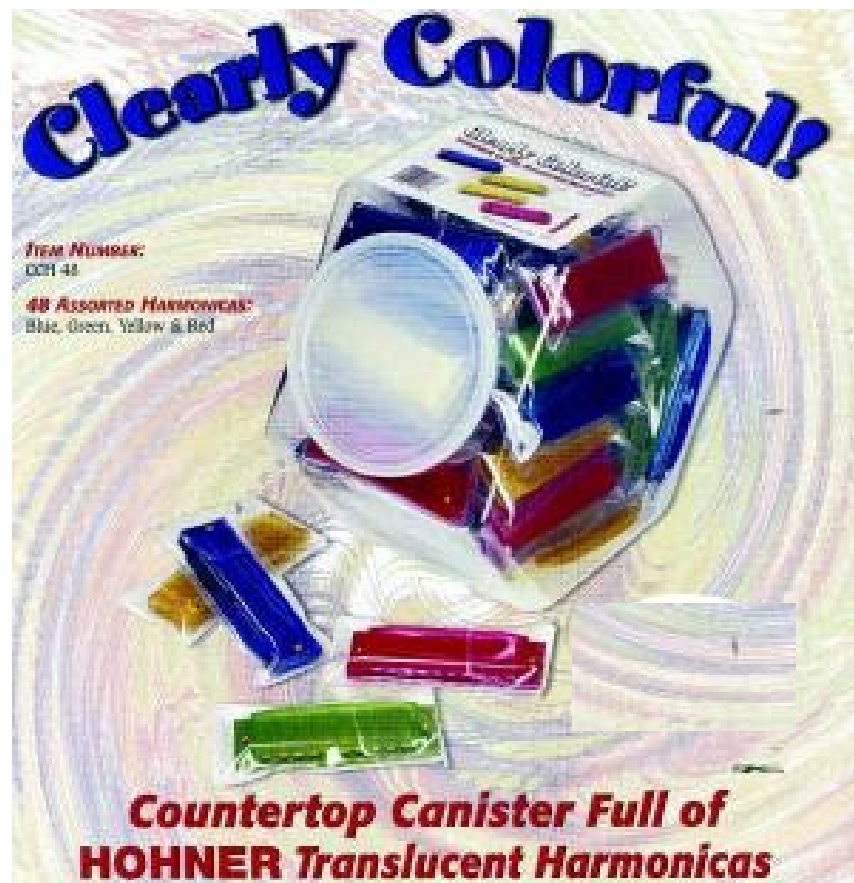
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- ~1821 – first harmonica was made in Berlin from pitch pipes by Christian Buschmann – a mere 196 years ago
- ~1830 – first U.S. harmonicas made by James Bazin
- 1857 – Hohner starts to manufacture (700 first year)
- 1887 – Hohner produces 1 million per year
- 1920s – Golden age of harmonicas, 20 million/year
- 1932 – Peak production of 25m despite Depression
- 1938 – Recorded music and world situation decreases Hohner production back to 20 million, steadily declining ever since; Germany eventually cedes harmonica preeminence to Japan and China.



# Why Play a Harmonica?

- 📁 Very inexpensive – quite decent for less than \$5
- 📁 Portable – you can be a nuisance anywhere
- 📁 Versatile – Folk songs, pop, oldies, blues, classical, religious
- 📁 Easy to learn – most harmonica players do not read music!
- 📁 If you're playing the harmonica, you don't have to sing!



\$2.29 each for 48 of these; free shipping

[www.AndyHWeaver.com](http://www.AndyHWeaver.com)

# Why Collect Harmonicas?

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# Why Collect, Indeed!

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- Be one of the few to understand this incredible musical instrument
- Have your own artifacts of 196 years of evolution, largely undocumented
- ~40,000 models – every collector has a few that no one else has ever seen
- Evolution through 2 World Wars, The Great Depression, Art and Customs of the day, and competition from recorded music
- And you can even play them if you wish

# Some Types of Harmonicas

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- Single row – Pocket harmonica
- Double row – Tremolo or octave
- Chromatic – Plays all notes
- Rotaries – Multiple harmonicas on a spindle 
- Resonators – Natural amplification by horn/box
- **Orchestral – Bass and chord for ensembles**
- Novelties: Trumpet, Bell, Players, Miniatures, Blow Accordions, Patriotic/Military, Art



# The Single-row Harmonica

- The 10-hole diatonic – More of these than any other harmonica
- *Diatonic* is the natural scale – Do Re Mi Fa etc.  
or C D E F G A B C – no sharps or flats
- Basic harmonica – good to start on or stay with
- *Blues Harp*, musicians play wonderful music on these, change pitch on reeds as they play
- Most are in the key of C, but available in all keys



Very Old

Old

Pretty / Deco

Recent

New

# The One and ONLY Lesson on Technique

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- To play the harmonica, you must be at least be able to play single notes
- And each hole has 2 single notes – blow for one, draw for the other – it's easier than you would think
- Achieve that single note by pucker or <sup>(My Preference)</sup> tongue block
- Short demonstration: *pucker* vs. *tongue block*
- After you are able to play single notes by tongue-blocking the notes to the left of your mouth (dragging your tongue along the left side of harmonica mouthpiece), then you can start pulling your tongue back to play chord rhythm
- Short demo: melody then add rhythm & chords



# Double-row Harmonicas

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- Tremolo – 2 reeds per note, tuned slightly off to give a wavering sound and echo like an accordion in a French café
- Octave – 2 reeds per note, tuned high and low to give a richness and depth to notes

## Tremolo Tuned



Upper hole and the hole beneath it are tuned to the same note as each other, but one is slightly off pitch causing a vibrato sound plus an echo like an accordion

## Octave Tuned



Upper hole and the hole beneath it are tuned to the same note as each other, but one is low and the other is high (an octave apart)

# Examples of Tremolo Harmonicas

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# Chromatic Harmonicas

- Chromatic harmonicas have all the notes, like a piano – white keys and black keys (sharps and flats)
- Can play any melody or any harmony
- 3 types: double row, in-line, shifted

**Double Row Chromatic**



**In-Line Chromatic**



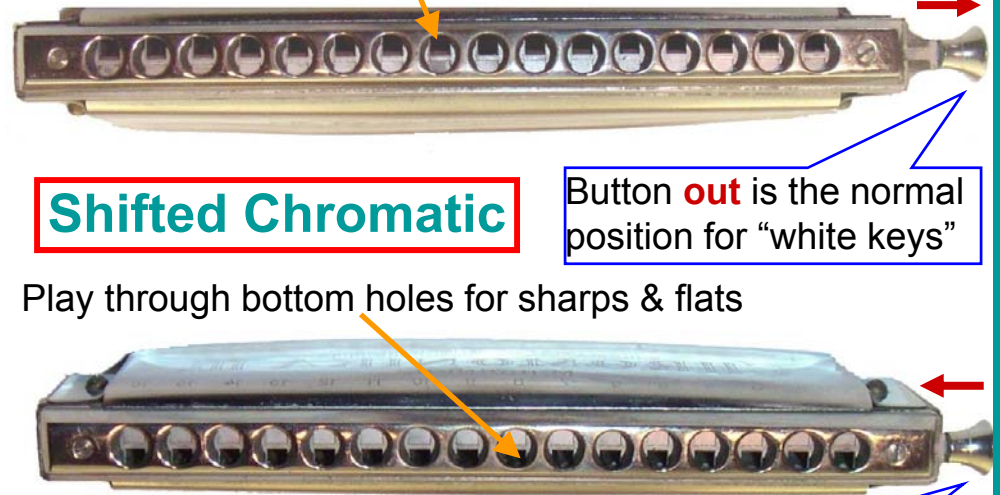
Play through top holes for natural notes

**Shifted Chromatic**

Play through bottom holes for sharps & flats

Button **out** is the normal position for "white keys"

Button **in** is the position for "sharps & flats", then it springs out again

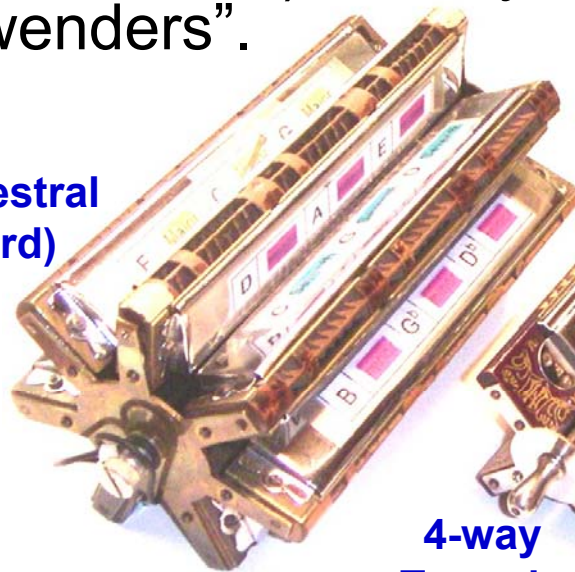




# Rotary Harmonicas

- Rotary harmonicas are made of 3 or more harmonicas (usually in different keys) mounted on a spindle that can be spun to get from one to the other.
- They go back as far as any catalogs – over 125 years or so, and they are still being made and sold
- They are also called “paddle wheels”, “corncobs”, “sextets” (for 6 harmonicas), “6-way”, “6ers”, and by the Germans “Kreuzwenders”.

**7-way Orchestral  
(bass-chord)**



**4-way  
Tremolo**



**6-way  
Diatonic**



**6-way  
Octave**



# Resonator/Horn Harmonicas

Horn or box amplifies the sounds and also provides an opportunity to add a wah-wah effect with the hand



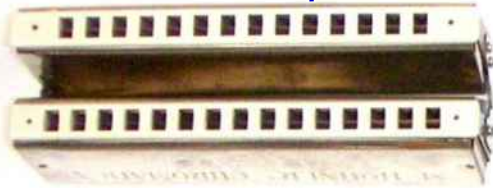
Kiwanikats – c.2002

Reissued in ~2002

# Orchestral Harmonicas

- Harmonicas used in “ensembles” primarily for accompaniment
- Bass and Chord – good players are impressive
- Demonstration

Bass: 1930s – present



Bass: 1920s – 1930s



Bass: 1900s – 1910s



48 Chord: 1930s – present

Melody w/Chords



In-line “Chromatica”: 1920s – present



Bass-Chord: 1920s - present



1950s – too Geeky



Pocket Bass – Extraordinary



36 Bass-Chord: 1930s



Now...  
Especially For Collectors



# Estimating a Harmonica's Age

## ➤ Award Medallions



Made  
after 1876



Made after 1869  
but before 1876

## ➤ “MacDonald’s” Annual Quantity (Hohner)

c.1900

1920s

1938

HOHNER'S RECORD!	
Table of Harmonica Output!	
In the year:	
1857:	700 Harmonicas
1867:	22,000 Harmonicas
1877:	90,000 Harmonicas
1887:	one Million Harmonicas
1897:	Three Million Harmonicas
1907:	Six and a half Million Harmonicas
1911:	Eight Million Harmonicas!

## ➤ Presence/Absence of 6-pointed Star in Hohner Trademark



Made before  
1938



Made after  
1938



# Trumpet Horn Harmonicas

- Mostly Decorative – to sell more harmonicas
- Weiss Pipeolion made from 1907 to 1910 – 2 reeds inside each trumpet



Pipeolion

Reed Slit



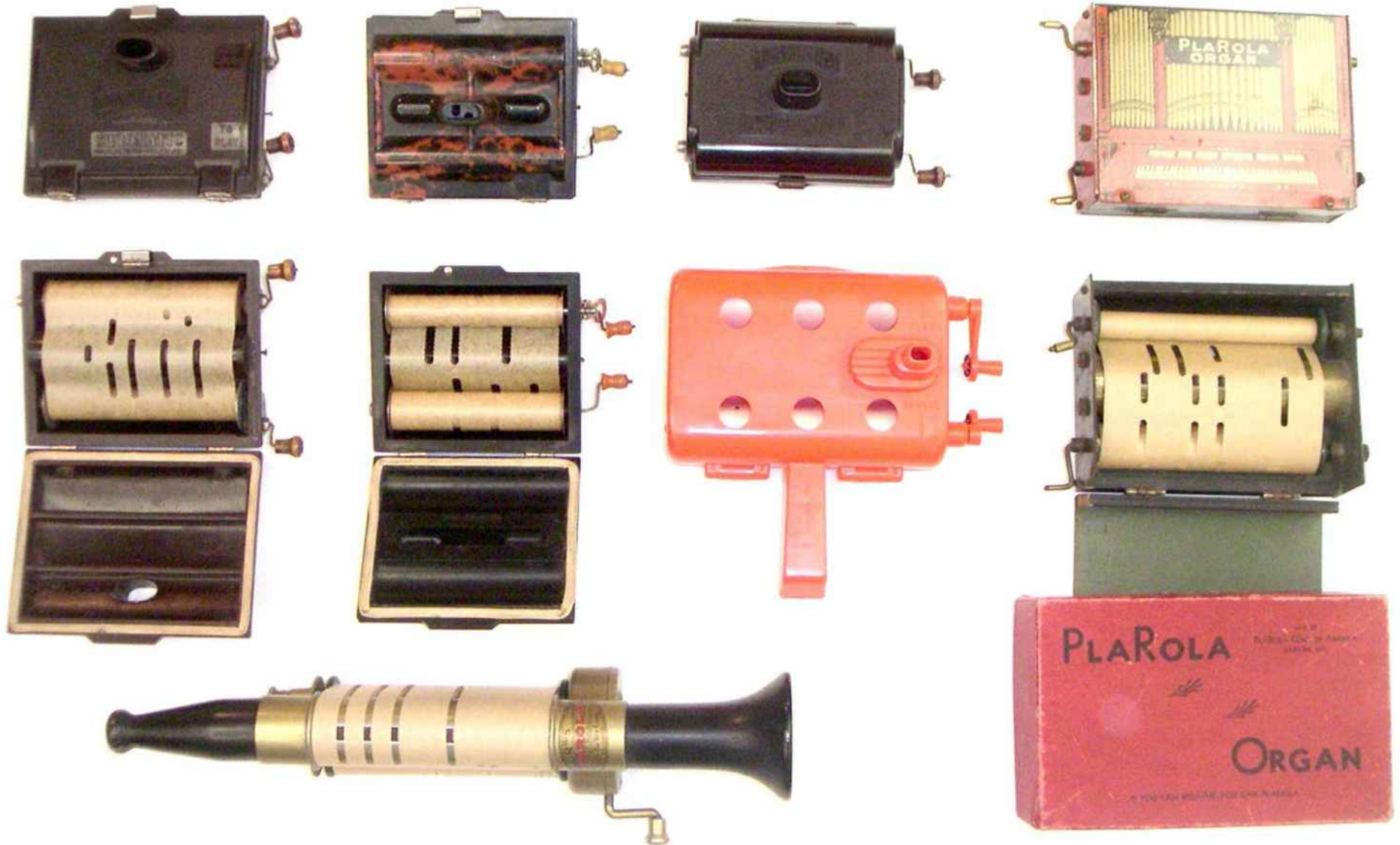
# Bell Harps





# Player Harmonicas

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# Blow Accordions

Real Accordion c1900



# Patriotic and Military Theme

Durch Kampf Zum Sieg



Unsere Marine



Rosemarie



Hurra!



Uncle Sam – pre WWI



Unsere Flagge



Militär Musik



Deutschlands Stolz (Pride)

Die Wacht am Rhein – the Watch on Rhein



Russian: "to our Brothers in Arms"



Gruss von Daheim – "Greetings from Home"

Wenn wir Marschieren



Militär Musik



Militär Musik



Militär Musik



Militär Musik



**Deutschland Erwache!**  
**"Germany Awaken!"**

(German Trademark registered in 1931)





# Some Favorites



# The End

Thank you for inviting  
me to conduct this program!

If you would like a copy of these “slides” in PowerPoint  
or in pdf format, please send me an email:

[JohnWhiteman88@gmail.com](mailto:JohnWhiteman88@gmail.com)

I welcome inquiries by email or phone.

