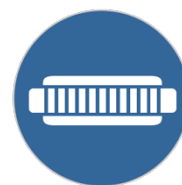


Lesson 1: Where's your pulse?

By Vid Gobac



The Pulse is the gravity that pulls us into 'time'. This concept of 'time' essentially keeps us at a steady tempo (speed of the pulse) and will prevent us from getting faster or slowing down. From a harmonica point of view, this can be quite tricky because the instrument tends to play against the beat during a solo. However, the harmonica can also be a 'time-keeper'.

It is very important for us to understand where the pulse is in a tune. Let's break down concepts.

In conventional blues formats, most songs range in the time of 4/4 time. I won't get into the specifics of music notation. Essentially what this means is that there are 4 strong beats in one bar. A bar is a grouping of a set of strong beats. So, if I said "there's a two-bar count in before the intro".... what I'm saying is "I am going to count 8 beats".

Let's simplify notation for a bit...

Let's convert this:

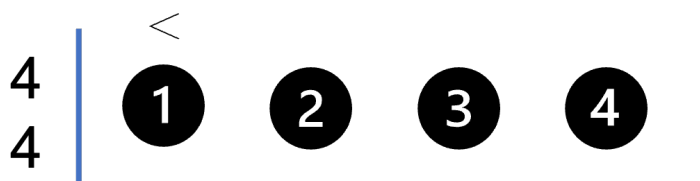


To this: Figure 1



The black dots represent our pulse. This is also our 'downbeat'. Turn the metronome on at a slow tempo (80bpm will do) and clap along on every metronome tick

Figure 2



This sideways chevron represents an "accent". This note will be played 'louder' than the rest. Let's try and move it around the other beats.

Figure 3. Let's expand on this.



It is important to feel the down beat... AND the off-beat! The triangles represent the off-beat and are counted as 'ands' in '1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and...'

To feel the downbeat, stomp your feet on the 1,2,3,4. So when you clap, you'll feel more grounded in time.



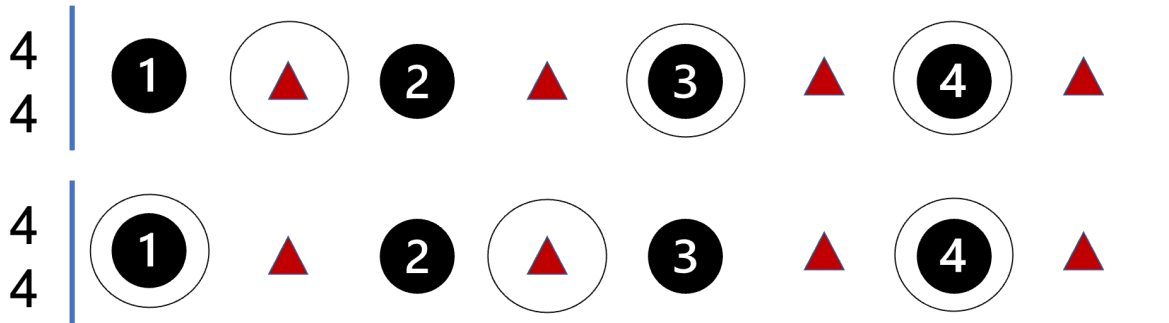
To identify a certain off-beat, we name it after the downbeat it comes after. The first red triangle is called the "and of 1", the second the "and of 2" and so on.

Practise along to a metronome. Set the metronome to 80bpm and clap on the 'ONS' (black dots) only, 'OFFS' (triangles) only, then clap all of them.

Remember the Accent sign from Figure 2? We can also apply it to our offs! Try placing the accent on random figures of your choice and clap along through them. The more you practise the more solid your time will be.

Let's try phrases that are longer than one bar. Here we can choose to clap on the circled figures only or we can choose to accent them whilst clapping all the beats.

Figure 4.



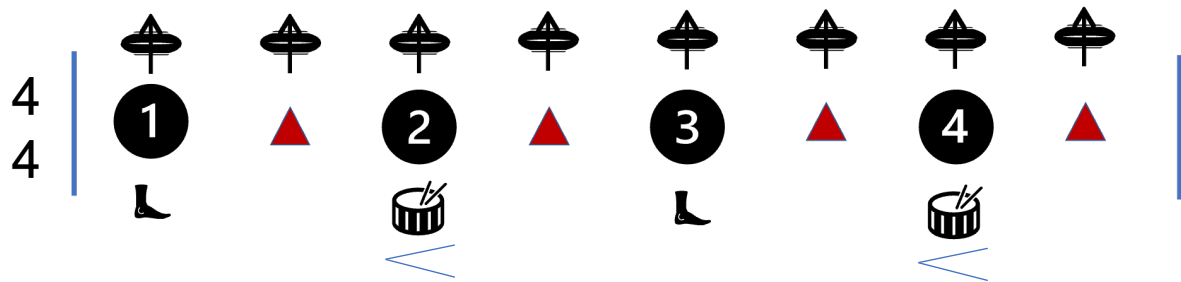
Remember to  on the down beats!

I recommend drawing up a similar bar with dots and triangles and circle your own figures. Create new and interesting rhythms and practise them as much as possible.

What is backbeat?

If you listen to the drums of most records, this will give you a solid feel of time and pulse. The kick drum (low sounding drum) will usually be orchestrated around the 1 and 3 and the snare (higher sounding drum) will be played on 2 and 4. The Hi Hats usually play all the notes in between. If you can hear that all 3 different rhythms working as one, you'll never get lost! 😊

Figure 5.



The 2 and 4 is called the backbeat. It's extremely important to have this feel when you clap along to a song. This usually gives a driving momentum in the groove and is super important for accompanying instrumental players to internalise. If you can feel the downbeat in between the backbeat, you're on your way to better time! It also helps the overall band sound bounce!

Other styles might not have a very pronounced backbeat or downbeat even! Certain Latin rhythms avoid the 1 entirely and the downbeat is 'felt' rather than heard. The Partido Alto is a real trippy groove if you can't 🦶 along to it!