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Please wait while your url is generating... 3 Resolution: Image Size: Download The harmonica part on Billy Joel's "Piano Man" is a fun and easy song to learn on harmonica. Piano Man, originally released in 1973, was Billy Joel's first hit song. He recorded it in the key of C, which also makes it a great song for beginners to learn on harmonica... because most of us start learning on a C harmonica! I'm going to teach you how to play this song in 4 levels: LEVEL 1 Just learning the harmonica tabs in C. LEVEL 2 How to play the right rhythms like a ninja master. LEVEL 3 How to play it with single notes, injecting soul and feel with bending. LEVEL 4 Putting it all together and playing Piano Man like a total boss. Even though Piano Man is a good song for beginners, if today is your very first day playing the harmonica, I'd recommend that you consider first learning the Deep Relaxed Mouth Position. In my Beginner to Boss course, we actually do 24 lessons before we get to Piano Man, because I believe it's so important to develop the right fundamentals from the start, and to avoid picking up bad habits. So don't hesitate to take some time really getting secure in the Deep Relaxed Mouth Position before you tackle this song. Level 1: Just the Tabs, Ma'am The great thing about harmonica tabs is that they tell you which holes to play in what order. The not-so-great thing about tabs is that they don't indicate how long or short to hold each note. Tabs are most helpful when you already know a song really well. (Tip: you can tell how well you know a harmonica song by how well you can sing it.) Here are the harmonica tabs in C for Piano Man: 56 -56 56 -45 45 -45 45 34-34 45 -34 45 -45 56 -56 56 -45 45 -45 45 34 -45 45 -34 34 You can see that all of the notes are played 2 at a time. These are called "double stops." The nice thing about playing double stops in a song like this is that we can have a chance to play a great song before we even need to learn the technique required to isolate single notes. But in order for the Piano Man harmonica riff to sound truly great, you have to nail the rhythm of the notes like a boss. So sit back, relax, and let's take a trip through the time of Piano Man... Level 2: Learning the Real Deal Rhythms The #1 difference between a pro musician and a hack is having a killer sense of time. It's one thing to know how to play all the notes of the Piano Man harmonica solo. It's another thing to be able to play Piano Man in time. I'm gonna teach you how to nail the exciting rhythms exactly the way that Billy Joel plays them. Piano man is in 3/4 time, also known as "Waltz Time." What that means is, in order to count along with the song, you'd repeatedly count to 3 over and over, "1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3...." Try listening to the song and counting along out loud. Those notes we were just counting together are called Quarter Notes. The fastest notes that we're gonna play in this song are called eighth notes, which are twice as fast as what we were just counting. The easy way to count eighth notes is simply to add the word "and" in between every number. So now we count like this: "1 & 2 & 3 &, 1 & 2 & 3 &, 1 & 2 & 3 &...." The 1st and 3rd phrases have very similar rhythms, and they are the trickiest to play. 1 2 3 &| 1 2 & 3 &| 1 & 2 3| 1 2 3 56 -56 56 -45 45-45 45 1 2 3| 1 2 & 3| 1 2 3| 1 2 3| 34 -34 45-34 45-45 1 2 3 &| 1 2 & 3 &| 1 & 2 3| 1 2 3 56 -56 56 -45 45-45 45 1 2 3 | 1 & 2 3 | 1 2 3 34 -45 45 -34 34 Looking at the chart above, try counting out loud with me nice and slow, and clapping on the beats where we'll be playing notes. Remember you have to say the words with your mouth, "One and two and three and, One and two and three and..." If you're not saying the words out loud, then you're cheating! ☺ So there are three things you have to do at the same time. Look at the chart above.Count the beats out loud with your mouth.Clap with me everywhere we'll be playing notes on the harmonica. If you didn't nail it, go back and do it as many times as you need to until you've got it. Take your time, and have fun! If you can play these rhythms accurately at a slow tempo, you're gonna sound like a total boss when we speed it up. OK, now we're gonna take it up to record tempo. It's kinda hard to say all the numbers at this speed, so you're off the hook. Feel free not to count out loud, and just see if you can clap along at exactly the same time that I'm clapping. Congratulations! You have now internalized the rhythm of the harmonica solo to Piano Man, by Billy Joel! Now grab your harmonica, and try playing it again, but this time with the accuracy of the rhythmic ninja that you've become. Level 3: Single Notes + Adding Soul with Bends Next, let's practice playing what the Piano Man harmonica solo would sound like just with single notes. When we play double stops, our ear naturally gravitates toward the higher note. So to play this solo with single notes, we'll simply drop the lower note of each double-stops. Our harmonica tabs now read like this: 6 -6 6 -5 5 -5 5 4 -4 5 -4 5 -5 6 -6 6 -5 5 -5 5 4 -5 5 -4 4 In order to play one note at a time, you have to know the technique to isolate notes on the harmonica. The quickest and easiest way to isolate notes is to use the Lip Blocking technique. If you don't know how to do that, check out my lesson here. Playing this song with single notes is great because: It gives us an opportunity to practice playing nice, clear single notes.By playing the most important note alone, we'll play more confidently when we go back to doing double stops.If you know how to bend, playing single notes gives us a chance to work on adding in some bends to infuse more soul, feel, and emotion into the song. Bending is a technique on the harmonica whereby we lower the pitch of the note. It is not a beginner technique. I recommend becoming really secure in the Deep Relaxed Mouth Position and Isolating Notes using Lip Blocking before you learn how to bend. For example, in my course Beginner to Boss, we do 27 lessons on chords and double-stops, followed by 51 lessons on single notes before we even start getting into bending. So if you know you're not ready for bending yet, then go ahead and skip down to the Level 4. Piano Man Bossdom section below, and play along with me, and just don't worry about the bends for now. If you don't know how to bend, but you are already secure in the Deep Relaxed Mouth Position, and you can consistently play nice clean single notes, then check out my lesson on bending here. If you know how to bend, then the first note we'll add a bend on is the first -5 in the first line. This note barely bends, but we'll do it anyway, just to add a little color. We are going to start in the bent position, and swoop up into the -5 like this: 6 -6 6 -5'-5 5 -5 5 Line Without Bend: Line With Bend: Even though we can bend all the draw notes between holes 1 and 6, we are only bending this note because the other draws happen so fast, there isn't really time to get a proper bend. The next note we have time to bend is the second -4 in the second line. We can bend up into it like this: 4 -4 5 -4'-4 -5 -5 Line Without Bend: Line With Bend: The third line we will bend up into the -5 just like we did in the second line: 6 -6 6 -5'-5 5 -5 5 Line Without Bend: Line With Bend: Then in the final line we'll bend up into the last -4 like this: 4 -5 5 -4'-4 4 Line Without Bend: Line With Bend: Adding one little bend to each line like this really injects soul and feel into the song. Here are the complete tabs with the bends: 6 -6 6 -5'-5 5 -5 5 4 -4 5 -4'-4 -5 -5 6 -6 6 -5'-5 5 -5 5 4 -5 5 -4'-4 4 Level 4: Piano Man Bossdom Now that you've learned how to play the harmonica tabs to Piano Man, you've learned how to nail the rhythms, and you've learned how to add some soulful bends, you are ready to put it all together and play this song like a boss. There are 2 things that we're going to add here for the final level: We are going to try and incorporate those bends we were doing on the single notes now on double stops. If you've never tried to bend a double stop this might sound intimidating. But don't worry, just use the same mouth motions for that you used bending the single notes, and presto, you're bending a double stop! In order to play this song exactly like it is on the recording, we can open up our mouths a bit wider on the first blow notes to include the 7, like this: The tricky part about this is making our mouth wider and then narrower really quickly, so that when you play -6, you do NOT play the -7. This is the only place on the harmonica where 2 adjacent holes sound terrible. -67. Try it. It sounds like "this has been a test of the emergency broadcasting system." OUCH! We want to avoid that at all costs. I don't think adding the 7 makes a huge difference. So feel free not to incorporate this detail. The only reason I mention it is because it is played like this on the recording, and it can be a fun little challenge to add. So with the little detail of adding hole 7 to the first two blows, and the one bend we're doing on each line, here's our final harmonica tabs to rock out with Billy Joel on Piano Man, Level 4: 567 -56 567 -45-45 45 -45 45 34-34 45 -34'-34 45 -45 56 -56 56 -45'-45 45 -45 45 34 -45 45 -34'-34 34 Congrats on playing the harmonica solo on Piano Man by Billy Joel like a total boss. If you want to try playing along with JUST the backing tracks (without hearing me playing harmonica) here they are: If you got through all this, and you're into blues, you can definitely handle my Blues for Beginners lesson, if you haven't already. How did this lesson go for you? If you have any questions or comments, give me a holler below.





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