

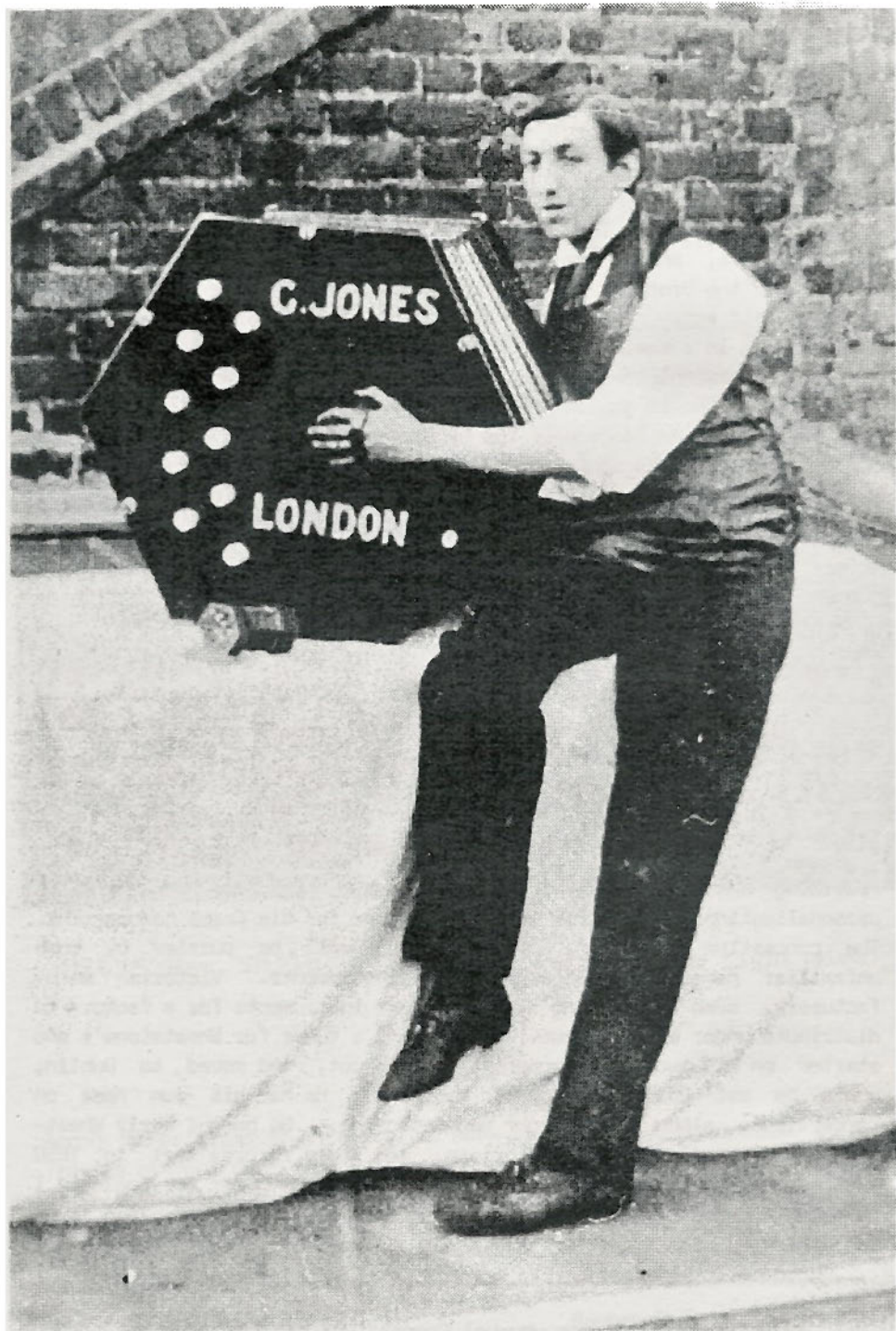
UNUSUAL CONCERTINAS

I enclose a photo, I fear a poor one, of two unusual instruments, a giant and a miniature. Both were made for the Brothers Webb by George Jones. The giant incorporates a standard 48 key English, the miniature is a small Anglo. The problem of transporting the big one was insurmountable, and it was abandoned. A duplicate of the miniature was made, and the Brothers Webb played a little German folk tune on them during their act. Miniatures have only a novelty value. They do not add anything in a musical sense, unlike the piccolo concertina, which is tuned an octave higher than the treble, and brings high notes conveniently under the fingers. The Bros. Webb used to play "The Wren" on one, and Mrs. Helen Kennedy of the EFSS used one for folk dance playing as well as sometimes contributing to ensembles under my baton.

The figure in the photograph is Arthur Jones, second son of George Jones. The eldest son died in 1897, so this photograph is probably later than that. The setting is the roof of the factory at 350 Commercial Road, London. A modern advertising practitioner would be horrified at the crudity.

Concertina manufacturers have always been agreeable to make unusual instruments, and this to me is regrettable. The lack of standardisation has not been in the best interests of the free reed instruments. Some of the instruments have reached the height of absurdity. The late Harry Crabb told me of an instrument he made for a music hall performer, with manifold bellows long enough for the player to skip in them as he played. But Harry never told me if it was a success.

Providing the basic design remains, I completely favour the degree of personalisation that Rayford Goninon obtained for his Crabb concertina. The concertina historian, however, may well be puzzled by some unfamiliar names on nineteenth century instruments. Victorian manufacturers, even Wheatstone's, would make instruments for a factor to distribute under another name. Scates was a tuner for Wheatstone's who started on his own. Subsequently he sold out, and moved to Dublin, where he set up a retail music business. He had his own name on concertinas, although no longer manufacturing. He bought early Wheatstone instruments at bargain prices, and Jones records that in 1850 Scates practically set him on his feet with a large order for Anglos. I have handled a concertina bearing the name "Professor Morse", and I do not think he made it. The firm of G.S. Murdoch of London distributed



the "Peerless" range of Anglos and English, which they advertised as made for them in England. By 1922 Murdoch were selling "Spencer" pianos.

I know the Mayfair Concertina well. At the time I was teaching one half of Harry Minting's Concertina School. Harry sold Mayfairs to aspiring pupils, and tuition to aspiring customers, and his tutor to both. Harry told me the reeds were imported from Italy already assembled and tuned. I did not like the reedy tone, and I missed the duplicated accidentals. On the other hand, if any were present when I was using orchestral parts I used to put them to play oboe parts, to which instrument the tone had a slight resemblance. Every Mayfair player I met was saving up to buy a conventional instrument.

I welcomed the articles on Dickenson and Dipper, and their craftsman-made traditional concertinas. The prices are reasonable, as a little consideration on the part of your complaining correspondents will show. Two people work for a month to make one concertina. Deduct the cost of materials, and overheads, and they are a long way from earning high wages. Their figures tally near enough with Crabb. It was Harry Crabb who said to me that nobody could make money out of concertinas. Actually, my grandfather, George Jones, who died in 1919 left 7,000 (equal to three quarters of a million by today's standards), but although he made concertinas, he was also a wholesaler and retailer in all types of musical instruments, and sheet music.

There is a bit to add to the tale of Skippy's clarinet concertina ('Interesting Instruments', Issue No.6). When Harry Minting was managing Wheatstone's, he phoned me to listen to him playing "Stranger on the Shore" on his clarinet. I was not deceived, but it was his breathing that gave the game away. I suppose he lent it to Alf Edwards for ghosting, and from there the dismembered instrument came to Skippy. It was made in Bb, and sharp pitch at that. Harry said it could not be re-tuned.

I have had three basses. One went down to C below the stave, and one to F, a tone lower than that you illustrate. I also had a double action bass going down to C, but it was almost unmanageable. I think it is in Neil Wayne's museum now. The reeds in my single action basses were stacked like the clarinet concertina. I did not take the double action one apart.

A very interesting statement came from Harry Minting while at Wheatstone's. He said that concertinas were made in batches of twelve, identical, but nevertheless when completed each instrument would be found to have characteristics of its own. I understand that one gets the same feeling with cars.