

## 6

# The Anglo-German Concertina: Product Diversification in an Expanding Market

### Introduction

The reader of this is kindly requested not to confuse the “English Concertina” with the article called the “German Concertina”, the correct name of which is “Harmonica”, this is only a toy, and does not bear any resemblance to the English Concertina in either tone, fingering, or class of music.<sup>374</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter 2.0, a family of concertina type instruments was made in Germany during the 1830s or 1840s, seemingly independently of Wheatstone’s instrument. Shortly after these became known in Britain, a hybrid, Anglo-German concertina was developed. This was a cheaper alternative to the English model and met with considerable commercial success in the amateur market. Here I discuss the introduction of this instrument type, its particular musical qualities and its principal areas of use.

The instrument was originally targeted at a wide cross-section of the population, with manufacturers and publishers exploiting the respectable image of its cousin, the English concertina, and its use was encouraged among the working classes in “rational recreation”. However, the Anglo-German concertina was not just a poor man’s English concertina but it had its own niche in a rapidly developing market for musical instruments, a niche which incorporated and appealed to tastes associated with various social classes.

From the earliest, the instrument was criticised, particularly by advocates of the English model, as being unsuitable for “serious” music. However, its mass availability and relatively low cost ensured that, by the late nineteenth century, it became a working-class instrument. Adoption by street players reinforced the image of the Anglo-German concertina’s low-status. In Scotland, this model was largely

---

<sup>374</sup> Pietra, The National Tutor..., p.1.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

abandoned by 1914, although a number of relatively self-contained pockets of use did survive well into the twentieth century elsewhere.

Given the individual character of the instrument and its restricted patronage, this chapter covers a wide time scale and is relatively self-contained.

### **History and Development**

The first German concertinas were of a rectangular shape and, unlike the English type, were “diatonic”, that is, limited to the notes of one or two major keys. As in the simple mouth organ and early accordion from which they developed, their manuals were arranged so that each button would sound a different note on pressing and drawing the bellows.<sup>375</sup> In the simplest form, each manual comprised a single row of five buttons running horizontally (i.e. at right angles to the line of the players fingers, the opposite direction from the rows on the English model) to give the notes of a scale in a single key (Figure 6.1a). More commonly, each manual comprised two rows of five buttons; with the row farthest away from the player’s body giving the basic key and with the inner row pitched a fifth higher to allow performance in a second related key. On each row, the scale ascends from left to right and the left hand manual gives the lower part while the right hand gives the treble of the scale.

Their simple shape, “single action” and limited range (requiring fewer reeds) meant they could be produced much more cheaply than the English concertinas and cost savings were also made through mass production and the use of lower quality materials. Given their musical “limitations” and inferior quality, it is reasonable to assume that they were not produced in direct competition with the “superior” English models but were aimed at a separate sector of the developing market for musical instruments. The new form of concertina was promoted as an advance on the primitive French and Viennese accordions which had enjoyed great popularity among amateurs throughout Europe<sup>376</sup> during the 1830s and 40s:

The CONCERTINA is an instrument of a similar nature to the Accordion and Flutina, but of an improved construction, the arrangement of the keys enabling both hands to be used at once, and thus facilitating the execution of extended passages, where the music proceeds to extreme degrees of the scale; and also producing a much superior style of harmony to what can be attained on the Accordion, giving a richness and fullness to the music such as no other instrument,

---

<sup>375</sup> Where a different note is sounded on the press and the draw this is termed “single action”.

<sup>376</sup> The Edinburgh musical instrument firm of Glen bought in large numbers of accordions and related parts during this period. See Myers, The Glen Account Book...

left

right



Figure 6.1a 10 Key German Concertina Layout.



Figure 6.1b 20 Key Anglo-German Concertina Layout.

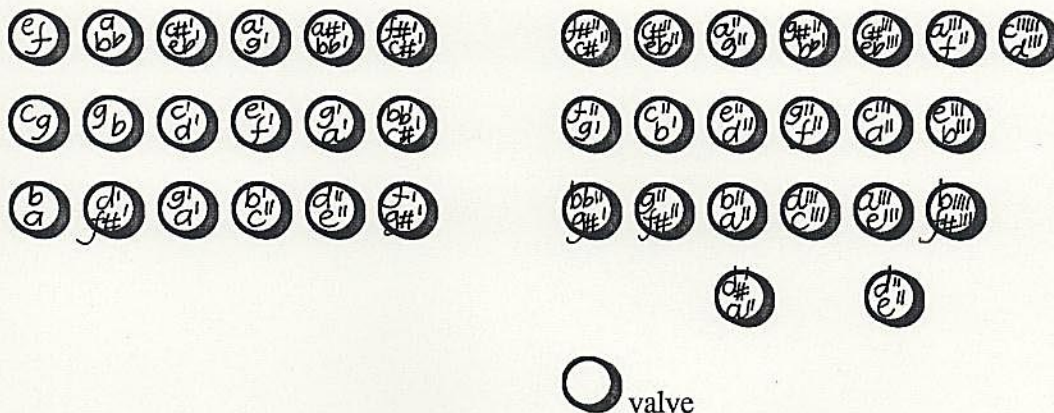


Figure 6.1c Chromatic Anglo-German Concertina Layout.

Upper values are notes on closing bellows  
Lower values are notes on drawing bellows

Although the sample layouts are typical, instruments are found in a variety of sizes, layouts and key combinations.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

except those constructed on the principle of the Pianoforte or Organ, is capable of producing.<sup>377</sup>

Later in the century it was possible to claim:

The melodion [German button accordion] is similar in form and construction to the French accordion, an instrument extremely popular until the introduction of the German concertina, which came rapidly into universal favour with musicians, amateur and professional.<sup>378</sup>

I do, however, urge caution in regarding musical instruments as being in competition with each other, for, in a rapidly expanding market, a number of similar products can comfortably co-exist, each serving different musical and social functions.

Although it is not known precisely when the German instruments were first imported into Britain, evidence from advertisements confirms that they were on sale by the mid- 1840s. It is an instrument of this kind that is played by the subject of Millais' famous "The Blind Girl", painted in Scotland in the early 1850s.<sup>379</sup> Wheatstone and Co. recognised the potential market for the German imports when they developed their own rectangular instrument called the duett.<sup>380</sup> This instrument shared the construction and external appearance of the German instrument but had the double action of the English type and comprised two manuals of 24 buttons which limited playing to a single key. Wheatstone and Co.'s records note the sale of several duett concertinas in the early 1860s. These were priced between 12s. and £1.12s., in contrast to the 5-10 guineas being charged for English models.<sup>381</sup> A tutor was published<sup>382</sup> for the duett but the instrument met with little commercial success.

---

<sup>377</sup> The Concertina Preceptor or Pocket Guide to the Art of Playing the Concertina (Glasgow, Enlarged and Improved Edition, c1850), p.29. British Library a.77.a..

<sup>378</sup> Gems of Song for the Melodion (Glasgow, c1880), p.3. Published by Cameron and Ferguson, Glasgow.

<sup>379</sup> The Blind Girl by John Everett Millais, City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The figures and foreground were painted in Perth, Scotland with the artist's wife Effie and later two local girls posing for the work. According to the April 1857 entry in Diary of Effie (London, n.d.) "the concertina was lent us by a Mr. Pringle who had an only daughter who played it. She died about six months ago and he said sadly that we might keep it as long as we liked for it would never be played on anymore". Other examples of the concertina being played by blind beggars are discussed later in this thesis.

<sup>380</sup> This instrument should not be confused with the duet forms discussed earlier and in later chapters. Examples of Wheatstone's duett instruments are held in the Concertina Museum, Belper, The Science Museum, London and the private collection of Stephen Chambers, Dublin.

<sup>381</sup> Chidley, K.V. "The Duet Concertina -Its History and the Evolution of its Keyboard" Free Reed 17 (1974), pp.15-6. Wheatstone's rival, Louis Lachenal of London advertised 24 key duett concertinas at £1 2s.- £1. 6s. at the same time as he sold his best quality 48 keyed English models at £3-8s.: Advertisement in Musical Directory and Advertiser (London, 1862).

<sup>382</sup> Wheatstone and Co. Instructions for Performing on Wheatstone's Patent Duett Concertina (London, 1856).

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

By the 1850s, a hybrid Anglo-German concertina (commonly abbreviated to “Anglo”) was being marketed in which the hexagonal shape (Figure 6.2) of the English type was combined with a keyboard layout based on that of the early German instruments (Figure 6.1b). It is not known how and when this version of the instrument emerged, but it has been suggested that it was a London concertina maker C. Jeffries who was responsible.<sup>383</sup> The Anglo-German concertina was subsequently made both in England and in Germany. The best British instruments were generally of a constructional standard comparable with native English system concertinas while the German made instruments were typically less durable. These less expensive instruments also had a somewhat “brasher” timbre. In the 1880s, an additional third row and other notes were being added to the instrument to provide sharps and flats to complete the chromatic scale (Figure 6.1c). A typical version of this Chromatic Anglo-German or Anglo-Chromatic concertina is given in Figure 6.3.

After 1860, increased free trade made a substantial contribution to the distribution of cheap instruments from Germany. Ehrlich has noted that as late as 1853 import duties on “fancy articles”, including musical instruments, were “applied with bureaucratic punctiliousness”.<sup>384</sup> Import duty of 5s. was charged for every 100 “notes”<sup>385</sup> of “common German square concertinas” and 4s. each for “concertinas of octagonal form, not common German”.<sup>386</sup> With the removal of protective tariffs in the 1860s, a highly competitive international market emerged, encouraged by cheap labour and large scale industrial production. This drove down the price of instruments. Swift developments in musical instrument manufacture in Germany during the 1870s and 80s, based upon “a formidable amalgam of qualities, technical, commercial and cultural”,<sup>387</sup> stimulated a large output of pianos, string, free-reed and brass instruments. The cottage industries of Chemnitz and Klingenthal evolved rapidly into large scale factory production and took advantage of new machine tools, a progressive technical/commercial educational system, a clear marketing strategy and a national musical prestige.<sup>388</sup> This contrasted greatly with the situation in England where most musical instrument production remained as a craft rather than an “industry”. Although seen as a novelty at first, it could be claimed by the 1850s that the Anglo-German concertina “is now also manufactured and sold at such a moderate price as presents an additional inducement to its extended use”<sup>389</sup> and it was only a short time before increased disposable income and leisure time among the working classes would make purchase of the instrument easily affordable.

---

<sup>383</sup> Pilling, “Concertina”, p.462. This is highly unlikely for according to Cowan, Joel “A Brief History of the Jeffries Concertina” in Concertina and Free Reed 1, No.2 (Spring 1983), pp.6-7, Jeffries did not commence manufacture until around 1870.

<sup>384</sup> Ehrlich, The Music Profession..., p.100.

<sup>385</sup> This may refer to either buttons or reeds.

<sup>386</sup> Buxton, Charles Finance and Politics, a Historical Study 1783-1885 Vol.1 (London, 1888), p.201. I am grateful to Cyril Ehrlich for this reference by personal communication.

<sup>387</sup> Ehrlich, The Piano..., p.71.

<sup>388</sup> Autorenkollektiv, Das Akkordeon, pp.28-30.

<sup>389</sup> The Concertina Preceptor..., p.29.





Figure 6.2 Player of Anglo-German Concertina.  
Source: Concertina Preceptor (Glasgow, 1855). Copy in  
British Library.



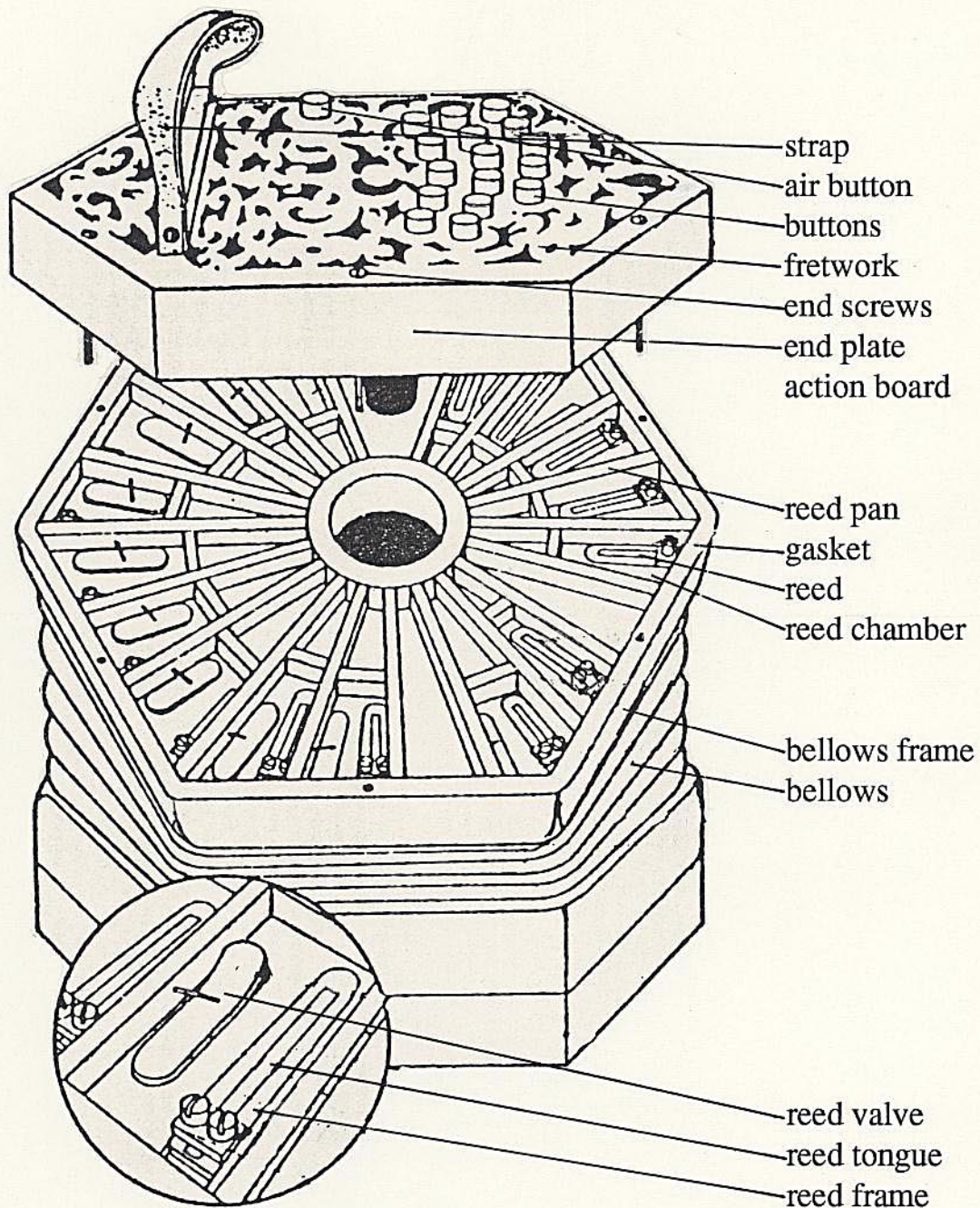


Figure 6.3 Typical Anglo-German Concertina, c.1890.  
 Source: NGDMM Vol.4, p.626, additional text added.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

The German producers offered a large range of models tailored to suit different musical requirements and pockets. Wayne has suggested that the most prominent importers of German concertinas into Great Britain were the firms of M. Howson, Winrow and Son and Jabez Gregory, who were “based in the warren of streets around Hollow Stone, Nottingham.”<sup>390</sup> However, trade advertisements and directories show that importers were operating in all large centres of population and included Köhler of Edinburgh and Campbell and Co. in Glasgow. Campbell and Co. (established c.1840) offered a large range of both Anglo-German and English concertinas. They operated a retail mail order service throughout Britain and Ireland and were also major suppliers of the melodion or German accordion.<sup>391</sup> According to an advertisement of 1900, they had branches in London, Berlin and Dresden<sup>392</sup> and elsewhere they claimed the “largest stock outside London”.<sup>393</sup>

Anglo-German concertinas of quality were made in England by a number of companies, most of whom were already involved in the manufacture of English models. Of these, George Jones had a particularly high output.<sup>394</sup> As a part-time music hall performer, he claimed to have been the first person in Great Britain to perform publicly on the German concertina.<sup>395</sup> Jones commenced commercial production of the Anglo-German concertina in the early 1860s and was immediately successful in securing large orders from J. Scates of Dublin, Campbell of Glasgow and other provincial retailers. He developed and made “organ toned” instruments in which two sets of reeds were tuned to play an octave apart and he produced both English and Anglo concertinas under the name “Celestial”.<sup>396</sup> In 1870, he introduced “Broad Steel Reeds” of powerful tone. His catalogue of c.1900 listed over fifty varieties of “Anglo” of his own make, grouped into qualities A, B and C. In 1884, Jones patented his “Improvements in Anglo-German Concertinas”, the basis of the fore-mentioned Perfect Chromatic Anglo-German Concertina, and wrote a tutor for the instrument which was published by Wheatstone and Co.<sup>397</sup> and remained in print into this century.

---

<sup>390</sup> Wayne, Neil “George Jones, An Echo From the Past: The Concertina Trade in Victorian Times” Free Reed 16 (November, 1973), p.15.

<sup>391</sup> Campbell and Co. Privilege Price List (Glasgow, 1890-91). Copy supplied by Kingussie Folk Museum. There is a photograph of Campbell’s shopfront showing a display of concertinas in the Stephen Chambers Collection, Dublin. The Mitchell Library, Glasgow has a photograph of the interior of Campbell’s workshop (Photograph no. 1956).

<sup>392</sup> Advertisement in The Celtic Monthly (November, 1900).

<sup>393</sup> Quiz (24 March 1898).

<sup>394</sup> Jones, George “An Echo from the Past: The Concertina Trade in Victorian Times” (with notes from Neil Wayne and Frank Butler) Free Reed 16 (November 1973), pp.14- 20. Butler, Frank E. “The Story of George Jones” (with additional notes and commentary by Joel Cowan) Concertina and Squeezebox 20 (Summer 1989), pp.5-14.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid. Jones, p.15.

<sup>396</sup> According to Autorenkollektiv, Das Akkordeon, p.16, it was the Viennese harmonica maker Wilhelm Thie who invented the “Celeste” tuning (or mistuning) by which two reeds were set slightly out of tune to effect a form of vibrato.

<sup>397</sup> Jones, George Tutor for the Anglo-German Concertina, with 26 or 30 Keys, comprising Rudiments of Music, scales, Exercises and a large Selection of Popular Airs and Melodies, including Imitation of



## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Anglo-German concertinas were also made by Wheatstone and Co., and the companies of Lachenal, Crabb and Jeffries. Instruments by the last mentioned gained a particularly high reputation and are still prized.<sup>398</sup>

The large range of concertina models on offer can be viewed as a classic example of product diversification resulting from attempts to cater for the widest musical market. Around 1890, George Jones' "Class A" Anglo-German instruments sold for between £1 2s. 6d. for a 20 key brass- reed, mahogany ended model and £3 3s. for a 32 key, steel- reed nickel ended instrument,<sup>399</sup> and Campbell and Co.'s best (most likely made by Jones) were between £1 15s. and £5 5s..<sup>400</sup> Both offered a large range of cheaper "quality" instruments starting from 4s. 6d., but even these were twice as expensive as many imported instruments which were available for as little as 2s 6d.<sup>401</sup> from "toy dealers, stationers and cheapjacks".<sup>402</sup> Pegg<sup>403</sup> identifies low cost as an important factor in the adoption of the Anglo-German instrument by the working-class musicians of the late nineteenth century but also notes how the instrument's adoption must be considered within the context of a larger instrument family. The Anglo-German concertina, mouth-organ and button accordion share the same single action and basic layout of notes and therefore the player of one could move with some ease to the others. As the cheapest, the mouth- organ was often the beginner's instrument but later he or she might move onto the accordion or concertina as economic circumstances allowed or musical requirements changed. The double action English concertina was outwith this group.

### **Late Nineteenth Century Popularity**

The capabilities of the German concertina to rank high in the scale of musical instruments has rendered it, in the present day, one of the greatest favourites in the family musical circle. It has many varied and excellent qualities. From its sweetness and peculiarity of tone it is

---

the Bells. (London, n.d.).

<sup>398</sup> Cowan, A Brief History....

<sup>399</sup> Extract from company catalogue reproduced in Butler, "The Story of George Jones..." , p.8. His 48 key English concertinas ranged from £2 2s. to £14 14s.

<sup>400</sup> Privilege Price List, p.2.

<sup>401</sup> Bradshaw, Harry notes accompanying cassette recording William Mullaly: The First Irish Concertina Player to Record (Viva Voce 005, 1992), p.3. Charles Middleton of Hamilton advertised a wide range of Anglo-German concertinas from 2s. 6d. upwards: advertisement in Middleton's Selection of Humorous Scotch Songs (Hamilton, c1880).

<sup>402</sup> Campbell's Privilege Price List, p.35. In 1855 Rudall, Rose and Carte and Co. of London advertised German concertinas at one halfpenny, 2 row instruments at 1d. and octagonal instruments at one and a half penny! Their English concertinas sold at between 6 and 15 guineas: Musical Directory and Advertiser (London, 1855).

<sup>403</sup> Pegg, "Musical Choices...".

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

exquisitely adapted for the performance of sacred music, hymns, chants etc...<sup>404</sup>

A working man's instrument, ideal for proletarian musical junkets.<sup>405</sup>

These seemingly contradictory images of the Anglo-German concertina are not uncommon and serve to illustrate the instrument's adoption into domestic music-making across a broad class base in the Victorian period. Increased spending power and leisure-time enjoyed by certain sectors of the working-class in the last quarter of the nineteenth century led to a dramatic rise in the demand for musical instruments for amateur use, a demand which was in large part satisfied by the free-reed instruments.

It has been suggested in popular historical writing that, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was a piano or harmonium in nearly every home in Britain, irrespective of the class of its occupants.<sup>406</sup> While I hope to prove later that this is a gross exaggeration, such perceptions do recognise the great blossoming in the ownership of commercially produced musical instruments which occurred.<sup>407</sup> The form of musical instrument adopted by members of a working-class household was dependent not only on cost and musical requirements but also housing conditions. Throughout the nineteenth century, cramped living conditions were a major feature of working-class life. Taking Scotland as an example, in 1861, 27 per cent of the whole population lived in "houses" of one room and another 38 per cent in those of two: the one-room cottage and the "but-and-ben" cottage, or their urban equivalent. Fifty years later, the combined total for both types was still very nearly 50 per cent and the census of 1951 showed that it had only been reduced to just under 30 per cent.<sup>408</sup> Even when not a necessity, single-room living continued as an inheritance from the rural housing from which many of the urban workers came. Furthermore, housing was only available in tenement buildings of three to four storeys to all but the highest income groups in Scottish cities. Each level would contain several flats or "houses" which were reached by a common stair, sometimes with galleries or balconies. This prevailed well into the present century. Even when keyboard instruments could be afforded, living conditions ruled out acquisition, lack of space, combined with high densities and low security of tenure favouring smaller, portable and quieter alternatives such as the accordion and concertina.

---

<sup>404</sup> Moore's Irish Melodies, (Published by Cameron and Ferguson, Glasgow, c.1880) p.2.

<sup>405</sup> Pearsall, R. Victorian Popular Music (Newton Abbot, 1973), p.128.

<sup>406</sup> For example, "little more than a generation ago [i.e. 1830-60], pianofortes were to be found only in the houses of the well-to-do; but now [1894] there are few working-men's homes in which there is not either a pianoforte, a harmonium, or an American organ.": Aird, Andrew Glimpses of Glasgow (Glasgow, 1894), quoted in Farmer, A Musical History..., p.350.

<sup>407</sup> By 1880 "ownership of playable instruments [pianos] had extended to at least one for every twenty people, perhaps one in ten": Ehrlich, The Music Profession..., p.102.

<sup>408</sup> McWilliam, Colin Scottish Townscape (London, 1975), p.151.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

As with the English concertina and the early accordion, the Anglo-German concertina found acceptance among both male and female amateurs. The Steven Chambers collection includes an early Victorian portrait photograph of a young girl in fashionable tartan attire posing at a table bearing an Anglo-German concertina. This depiction of the new instrument as a symbol of refined female respectability has many parallels in portraits featuring the accordion. By the early twentieth-century, it was known as a women's instrument in a number of communities including Co. Clare in Ireland<sup>409</sup> (perhaps because of the associations of the existing traditional instruments with a solely male performance tradition) and in the northern isles of Scotland where Peter Cooke has gathered evidence of the instrument being brought in by women labourers returning from working in the fishing ports of the East Coast mainland.<sup>410</sup>

The Anglo-German instrument was promoted as an instrument of "rational recreation" as middle-class reformers sought to impose their ideology of the "improving" benefits of musical participation on the lower classes. This is particularly apparent in the large amount of music published for the instrument in the period 1850-1890.

Unlike the English concertina, which can be used for performance from music written out for other instruments, the common diatonic Anglo-German instrument requires its music to be played by ear or specially arranged to suit, unless it is of appropriate range and simplicity. Furthermore, for some musicians of the nineteenth century, the acquisition of the concertina often represented a first entry into musical activity and the peculiarities of the novel instrument required explanation and demonstration. As a consequence, the rise in popularity of the instrument was accompanied by demand for published music and primers. The desire for large amounts of cheaply produced music also coincided with a substantial drop in sheet music prices brought on by a combination of structural changes in the print industry, new technology, reduced paper costs, fiscal benefits and improved distribution.<sup>411</sup>

During the 1850s, we find a modest number of tutors and collections of a catholic nature from small companies<sup>412</sup> but, by the late 1860s and the 1870s, the largest London publishing firms were compiling extensive catalogues and beginning to dominate the national market.

The tactic of most of these companies was to supply a large number of separate volumes, each concentrating on a different part of the contemporary popular music repertory. Music was often published under the name of some leading musician,

---

<sup>409</sup> Breathnach, *Folk Music and Dances...*, p.86.

<sup>410</sup> Cooke, *The Fiddle Tradition...*, p.22. Cooke notes that the instrument was known in Shetland as the "peerie accordion". In my own family it was known as the "wee melodeon".

<sup>411</sup> Ehrlich, *The Music Profession...*, p.103.

<sup>412</sup> For example: Charles Coule's *The Casket for German Concertina* (London, 1855), Coleman's *Gems of Sacred Melody for German Concertina* (London, 1855) and Rock Chidley's *Chidley's Instructions for the German Fingering Concertina* (London, 1858).

*The Life and Times of the Concertina*

invariably without endorsement. A particularly blatant case of this was the large list issued by C. Sheard<sup>413</sup> under the name of Regondi, the great English concertinist:

Regondi's Concertina Melodist  
Regondi's 100 Country dances, Jigs, Reels etc...  
Regondi's Comic and Christy Album, Books 1-6  
Regondi's Tutor  
Regondi's 20 Selected Quadrilles  
Regondi's 200 Melodies  
Regondi's Christy Minstrel and Buckley Songs  
Regondi's Sacred Airs  
Regondi's Dance Album

Metzler and Co. issued over a dozen editions under the name of Carlo Minasi<sup>414</sup> at 6d. each for 25 to 30 pieces, including:

Minasi's Favorite Songs and Ballads, Books 1-4  
Minasi's Hymns, Ancient and Modern  
Minasi's Popular Comic Songs, with words  
Minasi's Popular Scotch Songs, with words  
Minasi's Popular Songs of the Day  
Minasi's Twenty-five Favourite Songs and Ballads  
Minasi's Twenty-five Popular Waltzes, Gallops, Polkas etc...

Like other champions of the emerging national music industry, Metzler was also closely involved in the manufacture, import and sale of all forms of musical instruments and in the promotion of concerts.<sup>415</sup>

Boosey and Co.'s "Instrumental Library"<sup>416</sup> also included similar collections at between 1s. and 1s. 6d. for between fifty and one hundred pieces and the firm also published, every Saturday (at only 1d), its serial Weekly Concertinist: A Miscellany of the Newest and Most Popular Music. Issue XVII<sup>417</sup> comprised:

The Patti Polka  
"Violetta" Polka Mazurka

Alfred Mellon  
Carl Faust

---

<sup>413</sup> British Library catalogue.

<sup>414</sup> Advertisement in Metzler and Co.'s Selection of Quadrilles, Waltzes, Gallops, Polkas, Etc., for the Violin (London, n.d.). Minasi was an arranger for Metzler and his name is also found on a tutor for the German concertina published by Boosey and Co.

<sup>415</sup> Scott, The Singing Bourgeois, pp.122-3.

<sup>416</sup> Advertisement in writer's collection.

<sup>417</sup> (London, c.1875), p.99-104.



*The Life and Times of the Concertina*

“Quell ‘agil pie” (from William Tell)	Rossini
When the Swallows	F. Abt.
The Sun Smiles in Beauty	Welsh Melody
Far, Far O’er Hill and Dale	
Ciel Pietoso (from Zelmira)	Rossini
Oh! Boys, Carry Me ‘long	S. C. Foster
Dwy You Know Dat	M. Pike
Darkies, Sing	Christy’s
Old Memories	S. C. Foster
Clare de Kitchen	Christy’s
I would not have the young again	S. Massett
Root, Hog, or Die	Christy’s
Happy Haidee	M. Pike
The Bowery Gals	Christy’s

Although less “artistic” than much of the music published for the English concertina, this selection is, nevertheless, quite “up market” and confirms the Anglo-German concertina as a respectable instrument at the time. The large amount of minstrelsy and music by Stephen Foster is striking. The presence of Foster’s music is not surprising given its “folksy” sentiment, melancholy and gentle pace which made it so popular in the English speaking home of the mid- nineteenth century, irrespective of class. Just as Scott<sup>418</sup> has shown how Foster’s “up tempo” music was closely tied to the emerging popularity of the banjo, so it could be argued that the character of his sentimental songs was well matched to the sound character of the new free-reed instruments, including the Anglo-German concertina, the harmonium and the North American lap-organ.

In addition to the output of the London based publishers, a large amount of music for the Anglo-German concertina was published in Glasgow during the period 1850-1885.<sup>419</sup> The publishers were all small scale stationers, printers and booksellers serving the developing commercial sector in the city and the expanding markets of popular education and respectable domestic leisure.

William Hamilton published his *Concertina Preceptor or pocket guide to the art of playing the concertina comprising a complete course of lessons on music with instructions, scales and a selection of favorite airs arranged in an easy and progressive style*<sup>420</sup> as early as 1855. Hamilton was an enterprising publisher and educationalist who launched the national journal, The British Minstrel, in 1842 (two years before

---

<sup>418</sup> Scott, The Singing Bourgeois, p.86.

<sup>419</sup> Eydmann, Stuart Concertina Music Published in Scotland 1850-1885: a Preliminary Checklist (Edinburgh, 1994). Unpublished typescript in National Library of Scotland.

<sup>420</sup> British Library BL a.77.a. A copy is included in the catalogue of the Advocate’s Library, Edinburgh but is now missing.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Novello's Musical Times) and experimented with patent forms of music notation in which the tonic sol-fa equivalents were printed inside each note.

George Cameron (b. Inverness 1814 d. Glasgow 1863) was a noted composer of psalmody and publisher of school books, catechisms and sacred and instrumental music. His eight collections for the concertina,<sup>421</sup> issued during the 1850s, can therefore be seen within the wider context of his publication of other "rational" material.

John S. Marr was successor to George Cameron and published 14 concertina books under his own name during the 1880s.<sup>422</sup>

Cameron and Co. operated from around 1865<sup>423</sup> and published a series of twelve collections for the concertina under the title "Adams's". This was after either Richard and Robert Adams, noted musicians and music dealers in the city at the time who also led "Adams's Band", "the most popular in the city, and in great request at concerts, balls and soirees",<sup>424</sup> or Thomas Julian Adams, composer and conductor from London who formed an orchestra during the 1850s and held weekly concerts in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Greenock.<sup>425</sup>

The output of the Glasgow publishers largely reflected that of the London houses with the exception of a larger component of Scottish song and dance music<sup>426</sup> as in Adams's Scottish Dance Music for the Concertina<sup>427</sup> which contains 25 reels and strathspeys, 6 jigs, 2 highland schottische, 2 sets of quadrilles and 5 country dances.

John Cameron<sup>428</sup> was a publisher of songs and music for various instruments including the accordion and melodion. He published 26 collections for the Anglo-German concertina, including a number under the title "Mitchison's".<sup>429</sup>

---

<sup>421</sup> For example Cameron's Selection of Concertina Music... (Glasgow, 1857) (copy in The British Library a.7.b (2)), Cameron's Selection of Concertina Music... (Glasgow, 1861) (copy in New York Public Library), Cameron's New and Improved Concertina Tutor (Glasgow, 1860), (copies in The British Library a.7.b (1) and New York Public Library).

<sup>422</sup> All are held in the British Library.

<sup>423</sup> Post Office Directory (Glasgow, 1865).

<sup>424</sup> Industries of Glasgow (London, 1888), p.227.

<sup>425</sup> Brown and Stratton British Musical Biography, p.2.

<sup>426</sup> Such as Adams's 100 Scottish Airs for the concertina: with complete instructions and scales (Glasgow, c.1860), Copy in National Library of Scotland MH.s.259. Stamped Willam [Mac?]Duff, Concertina [M?]aker, Perth and signed "Margaret Ann Campbell, Auch[?]jeck, August 16th. 1866". Gaelic note written on page 12. Illustrated cover (Figure 6.5).

<sup>427</sup> (Glasgow, c1860). Copy in The National Library of Scotland MH.v.458.

<sup>428</sup> According to the Post Office Directory he operated from around 1865 and through the 1870s.

<sup>429</sup> William Mitchison (b. circa 1809 d. Brooklyn 1867) was a pioneering publisher of inexpensive sacred and traditional music in Glasgow between 1839-54.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Cameron and Ferguson grew out of Cameron and Co. around 1875<sup>430</sup> and continued to publish music under the “Adam’s” title. The catalogue of fourteen publications for concertina included “Ethiopian” and Christy minstrel selections, the new sacred music of Moody and Sankey and several collections of Irish melodies,<sup>431</sup> the latter reflecting the large immigrant population in the publisher’s city. The cover illustrations of many of these editions (Figures 6.4 and 6.5) show the concertina in “up-market” settings and, although this may have been in reflection of the reality of its use, it is more likely that they sought to sell the image of upper middle-class respectability.

The output of the Glasgow companies can be read not only as an indication of the popularity of the instrument in Scotland at the time but also as a provincial attempt to meet a widely based local demand not provided for by London publishers. By 1890, most of these small publishers had ceased to exist and music publishing in Glasgow became the concern of a smaller number of larger businesses. It is an indication of the fall in popularity of the Anglo-German concertina in Scotland that none of the new publishers issued music for it, demand continuing to be met by London houses.

In all the above mentioned publications for the Anglo-German concertina, the music is printed in both the conventional treble clef form and in a coded system which indicates the required fingering and direction of bellows movement. The commonest forms are shown in Figure 6.6. The coded version allowed the musically non-literate to obtain early results and encouraged self learning. Although there are crotchets and bar-lines, readers of the code only have no indication of tempo or rhythm. Code is therefore appropriate for the performance of music which was already “in the head” of the player, where learning was by a combination of reading and ear or where the expected rhythm and tempo were standard, as in much traditional dance music. It is also possible that the sole use of code places less emphasis on “correctness” and allows for a greater degree of personal interpretation and expression. Such tablature systems have been extensively used by melodeon players well into this century<sup>432</sup> and are still employed by accordion teachers and in published tutors for the harmonica. A number of children’s musical instruments come complete with instructions based upon similar methods of instruction.

The presentation of two different notation systems is further evidence of the wide base of adoption of the Anglo- German concertina. It suggests that the instrument was targeted not only at different class sectors but also at two seemingly contradictory attitudes to popular music-making in the nineteenth century; the “improving/literate”

---

<sup>430</sup> Post Office Directory, 1875.

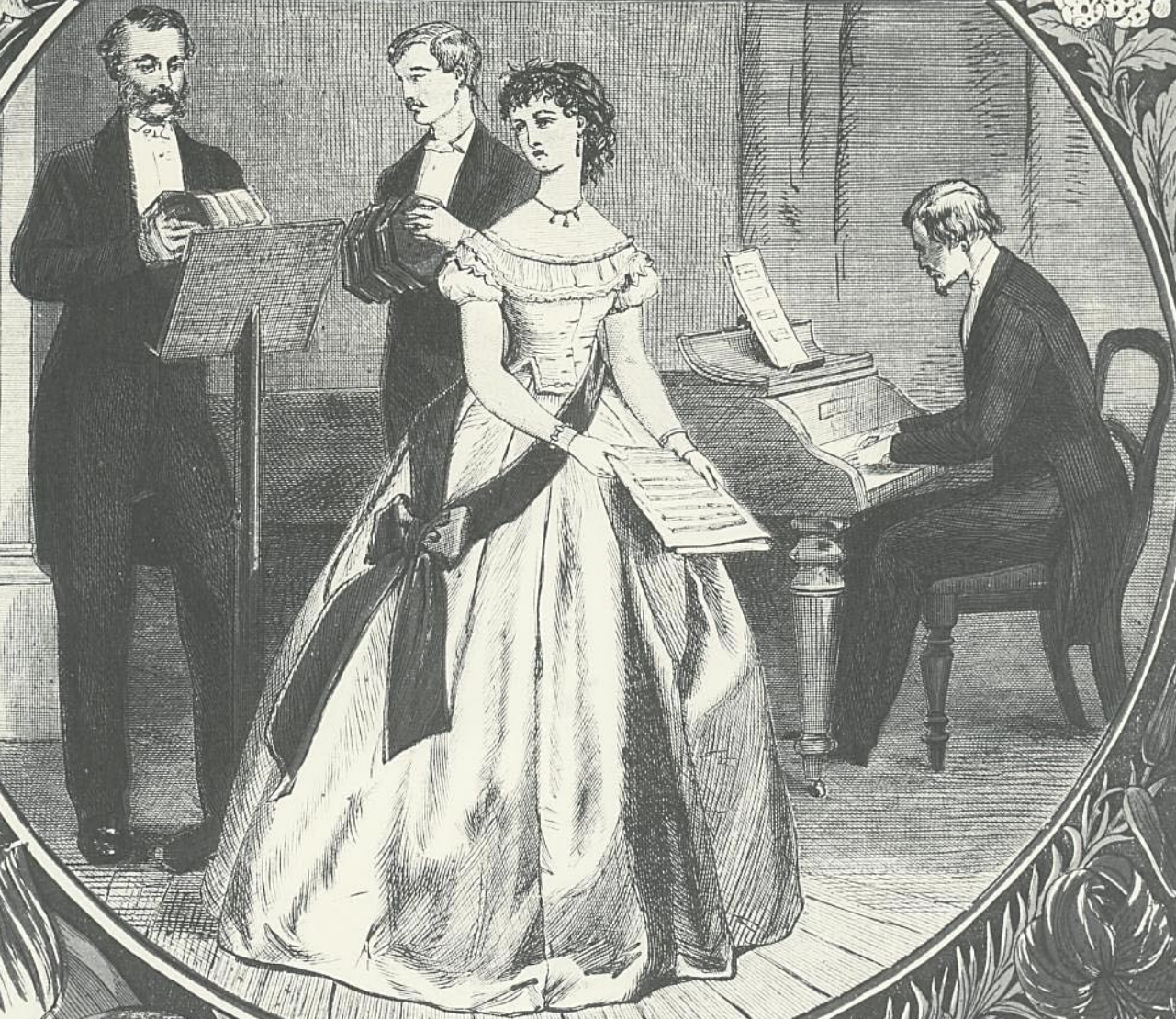
<sup>431</sup> Extant examples include Sixty Irish Songs, Music and Words for the Concertina (Glasgow, n.d.) (copy in The Mitchell Library, Glasgow) and Moore’s Irish Melodies, (copy in The National Library of Scotland, MH.s.53).

<sup>432</sup> Breathnach, Folk Music..., p.85. Non-standard notation systems of this type were also used by teachers of traditional fiddle. See, for example, Mac Aoidh, Caoimhín, “Aspects of Donegal and Kerry Fiddle Music” Ceol 21 (Vol.VII, Nos. 1 and 2, December 1984), pp.20-28.



# SIXTY IRISH SONGS

## MUSIC AND WORDS FOR THE CONCERTINA



GLASGOW: CAMERON & FERGUSON.

LONDON: 12, AVE MARIA LANE.

Figure 6.4 Cover, Sixty Irish Songs etc... for Concertina.  
Source: Mitchell Library, Glasgow.



*Margaret Ann Campbell Acquired August 16<sup>th</sup> 1876*

MH. s. 259

WILLIAM GUY,  
CONFECTIONER

**ADAMS'S**  
**100**  
**SCOTTISH AIRS**  
FOR THE  
**CONCERTINA;**

With Complete Instructions and Scales.



**GLASGOW: CAMERON & CO., 88 WEST NILE ST.**  
**LONDON: F. PITMAN, 20 PATERNOSTER ROW.**  
SOLD BY ALL BOOK AND MUSIC SELLERS.

Figure 6.5 Cover, Adam's 100 Scottish Airs for the Concertina.  
Source: National Library of Scotland.





+ bellows in

- bellows out

Buttons numbered 1-10, left to right, outer row first.

Source: The Concertina Preceptor or Pocket Guide to the Art of Playing the Concertina (enlarged and improved edition) (Glasgow, n.d.). British Library Catalogue a.77.a.



^ bellows in

- bellows out

Source: Adam's Scottish Dance Music for the Concertina (Glasgow, n.d.). National Library of Scotland Catalogue MH.v.458.



^ bellows in

- bellows out

Source: Roylance, C. Tutor for Chromatic Anglo-German Concertina (London, n.d.).



P bellows in (Press)

D bellows out (Draw)

• indicates left hand manual.

Source: Kail, Bob The Best Concertina Method - yet! (Carlstadt, N.J., n.d.).

Figure 6.6 Anglo-German Concertina Code Systems.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

and the “plebeian traditions”,<sup>433</sup> both of which were in tension throughout the nineteenth century. By the 1880s, literacy had come to permeate most forms of popular music making although in Scotland the conservative nature of the strong musical traditions may have dictated that change occurred more slowly.

While some have viewed the nineteenth century popularity of cheap, mass-produced musical instruments as a major contribution to a decline, degeneration or abandonment of “authentic folk music” through the corrupting, commercial exploitation of a duped public, I prefer a more positive angle which recognises the unprecedented opportunities for working-class participation in instrumental music-making which the Anglo-German instruments offered. The adoption of the instrument can thus be seen not as an impoverishment but rather as a diversification, which contributed to the democratisation of music in the nineteenth century by offering a foot on the ladder of instrumental music while occupying an important place in the transition to a literate musical society. Although the Anglo-German concertina was, for a time at least, associated with the promotion of the ideology of organised, “improving” musical activity among the working class, I would suggest that, rather than destroying “traditional” musical forms and practices, it may have helped enrich and even consolidate and maintain older music in a period of musical and social change.

### **Contemporary Comment and Status**

The Teutonic instrument of the midnight Mohawk.<sup>434</sup>

The nineteenth century saw the reform of many popular and traditional activities. In addition to the promotion of music as a more “rational”, improving activity, certain existing musical practices were dismantled or transformed from above. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the Anglo-German concertina’s adoption into the “plebeian tradition” heavily criticised in contemporary comment. Gammon and Gammon<sup>435</sup> have shown how such texts are crucial to an understanding of popular music in the nineteenth century as they provide information relating to repertory and practices and help map out contemporary social and class divisions in musical activity.

Middle-class commentators saw the instrument as a nuisance, disturbing public peace and order. George Bernard Shaw, an advocate of the English concertina, singled out the Anglo-German instrument for attack:

---

<sup>433</sup> Gammon and Gammon, “From ‘Repeat and Twiddle...’”.

<sup>434</sup> Shaw, George Bernard, in *The Star* (8 March 1889) quoted in Laurence, *Shaw’s Music* Vol.1, p.575. Mohawk refers to the “Mohawk Minstrels”, one of the most influential blackface minstrel troupes in Britain. According to Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois*, p.87, they were formed in 1867.

<sup>435</sup> “From ‘Repeat and Twiddle...’”, pp.125-129.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Pawnbroker's shops should be searched for second-hand brass instruments and German concertinas; and the law as to their possession should be assimilated to that concerning dynamite. Amateurs wishing to practice should, until they can obtain a diploma from an examining board, be confined to a four-mile radius measured from the centre of Salisbury Plain.<sup>436</sup>

This complaint was repeated by others:

German cheap labour has caused, of late years, to be indissolubly associated in most minds with 'Arry and 'Arriet on 'Ampstead 'Eath.<sup>437</sup>

and

Regarded as an instrument of torture by peaceable inhabitants of the London suburbs.<sup>438</sup>

Even if not directly attacking the instrument, comment was often condescending:

The German concertina is admittedly an inferior instrument. Still, we must not sneer at the thing. I believe it does give a measure of enjoyment to some of our hard working people; it is better for them to listen or to dance to a German concertina than to hear no music at all. In time they will learn to like something better.<sup>439</sup>

Advocates of the English concertina were continually at pains to distance their instrument from the Anglo-German type. As early as 1851, it was noted that "the English concertinas surpass, in beauty of tone and durability, those made on the continent".<sup>440</sup> In his paper promoting the merits of the English concertina, Wm. Cawdell lamented "the fact that inferior imitations have caused the Concertina in its perfect form to be comparatively little known",<sup>441</sup> and that "serious" concertina music "received as much ridicule as favour, partly owing to an inferior imitation made abroad and much patronized by street boys".<sup>442</sup> Elsewhere, he notes how "the English Concertina is making rapid strides in favour of amateurs, notwithstanding the

---

<sup>436</sup> Shaw, George Bernard *The Dramatic Review* (2 January 1886) in Laurence, *Shaw's Music* Vol.1, p.439.

<sup>437</sup> Fraser, Norman "The Cult of the English Concertina" in *Cassell's Magazine* (June-November 1908), p.159.

<sup>438</sup> From *Era* (22 May 1899), quoted in Honri, Peter *Working the Halls* (Farnborough, 1973), p.55.

<sup>439</sup> Southgate, T.L. *English Music 1604-1904* (London, 1906) p.339.

<sup>440</sup> "Musical Instruments" *Illustrated London News* XIX No. 512 (Supplement, 23 August 1851) quoted in MacTaggart and MacTaggart, *Musical Instruments...*, p.60.

<sup>441</sup> Amateur, *A Short Account...*, p.6.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.



### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

prejudice occasioned by the imperfections of its cousin-German”.<sup>443</sup> Shaw offered similar comment: I also heard the Brothers Webb, musical clowns who are really musical, playing the Tyrolienne from William Tell very prettily on two concertinas - though I earnestly beg the amateurs who applaud from the gallery not to imagine that the thing can be done under my windows in the small hours on three and sixpenny German instruments.<sup>444</sup>

By the end of the century, the Anglo-German concertina had come to symbolise working-class life. In *The Forsyte Saga*, John Galsworthy wrote of how, contrary to social custom, Soames Forsyte insisted on having a hot dinner on Sundays at a time when servants had “nothing to do except play the concertina”<sup>445</sup> and, elsewhere, he draws a picture of a drunken man emerging from a pub playing the concertina.<sup>446</sup> Similar images are not uncommon. The instrument commonly appeared in children’s writing as an object of fun. Shaw’s comments are reflected in the poem concerning the cat, Trilby Tabitha Mewlina:

Trilby Tabitha Mewlina  
Played the German Concertina-  
Played it on the roofs at night,  
Which, of course, was hardly right.  
When a piercing note she drew  
People woke at half-past two,  
And- which much increased their pain-  
Couldn’t get to sleep again.

“Fifty cats with bushy tails  
Must be practicing their scales,”  
Groaned those people as they lay  
Waiting for the dawn of day.  
They are wrong, as you’re aware.  
Only one small cat was there-  
Trilby Tabitha Mewlina with her German Concertina.<sup>447</sup>

It is not surprising to find the instrument played by two of Heath Robinson’s eccentric characters in his “Uncle Lubin” and “Bill the Minder”<sup>448</sup> and such comical associations began to appear regularly in clowning, music hall and early cinema,

---

<sup>443</sup> Cawdell, William M. “A Vote for the Concertina” *South Hackney Correspondent* (27 July 1865).

<sup>444</sup> Shaw, George Bernard in *The World* (6 April 1892) quoted in Laurence, *Shaw’s Music* Vol.2, p.593.

<sup>445</sup> 1906.

<sup>446</sup> *In Chancery* (1920).

<sup>447</sup> Edwardian poem, provenance unknown, quoted in *Concertina and Squeezebox* 18 and 19 (1989), pp.18-19.

<sup>448</sup> Heath Robinson *Bill the Minder* (London, 1912).

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

cartoons and other forms of popular “art”, including figurative ornaments, picture postcards and other ephemera. The low status suggested in these examples had implications for all forms of concertina and contributed greatly to the fall in popularity of the English concertina among the middle classes during the late Victorian period.

### **Musical Aspects of the Anglo-German Concertina examined through its use in Traditional Dance Music**

The Anglo-German concertina is principally a melodic instrument but one which allows the performance of chords and, to a degree, playing in parts. In contrast to the English model, which was evolved within the culture of bourgeois “art” music and can substitute for other instruments such as the flute or violin, the nature of the Anglo-German means that it imposes its own character on the form and sound of the music it carries. In its commonest form, the instrument is limited to only two related keys (usually C and G) and is therefore particularly suited to simple melodies such as folk songs, dance tunes, popular and sacred music. Music requires to be transposed to suit the particular keys of the instrument and, if the melody strays outwith the given scales, it requires to be “stripped down” or modified to fit. However, the “adjustment” of music to suit performance on the Anglo-German version should not be viewed merely as a debasing of the original version but rather as a reworking to suit a particular musical context and function. Similar “limiting” processes can be seen at work in other “folk” instruments, such as the Highland bagpipes, where music from outwith the tradition is “adjusted” to suit the particular scale of the instrument. The English concertina, of course, was deliberately designed to eliminate any “limiting” influence.

The keyboard layout and single action of the instrument also affect the musical output. The performance of certain intervals or passages might be awkward or impossible and again the music has to be altered to accommodate them.

Changes in bellows direction also imparts a distinctly jerky, staccato character to the music. Pegg<sup>449</sup> has suggested that the Anglo-German Concertina was adopted for dance music from the 1870s onwards largely on account its compatibility with the “sound ideal” of the country fiddlers and in particular their “distinctive style which combined a choppy bowing technique, an aggressive tone with no use of vibrato, and double-stopping and drone notes to provide a driving rhythmic sound suitable for dancing”.<sup>450</sup>

Example 6.1a shows a typical fiddle version of the traditional Scottish dance tune “The Wind That Shakes the Barley”, 6.1b is an Anglo-German concertina version

---

<sup>449</sup> Pegg, “An Ethnomusicological Approach...”, pp.55-72.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p.67.



Example 6.1a The Wind that Shakes the Barley.  
 Source: Hunter, James Scottish Fiddle Music (Edinburgh, 1979) p.223.



Example 6.1b The Wind that Shakes the Barley.  
 Source: Adams' Scottish Dance Music for the Concertina (Glasgow, c1850) p.13.



Example 6.1c The Wind that Shakes the Barley.  
 Source: Transcribed from the playing of Mrs. Crotty by Michael Tubridy (?) c1964. Published in the leaflet Mrs. Crotty of Kilrush (n.d.).

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

published around 1850<sup>451</sup> and 6.1c, a version of the tune from an elderly player within the Irish tradition,<sup>452</sup> recorded around 1950. In the 1850 version, the key has been moved to G major, one of the two principal keys (C and G) of the instrument. The Irish version shows the tune reworked within a separate, yet related tradition, which encourages individual interpretation. In line 3, bar 1, for example, we see the inversion of the original figures.

The Irish example also illustrates the degree of adjustment which can take place within the limitations of the instrument and is notable for the performance of the melody in octaves. This device has also been used by players within the English Morris dance tradition to add volume (valuable in the open air or crowded room) or to emphasise certain passages. In the playing of octaves, the limitations of the instrument dictate that, where a tune goes below the range of the right hand, it becomes necessary to move up an octave in each part to accommodate the lower notes and still keep the octave effect. This too can lead to the adjustment of the music, as can be found in Example 6.2. Such playing also influenced the work of Cecil Sharp who took down the melody “The Willow Tree” from the playing of William Kimber and published it (thus establishing the “authorised version”) as a single line melody complete with curious octave leap.<sup>453</sup>

A number of notes occur on both rows of the manual of the common Anglo-German concertina and these offer alternative fingerings and bellows movements which can be drawn upon to facilitate performance or for musical effect. Where a scale or passage can be played using different combinations of buttons and bellows, each imparts its own precise phrasing implications, with differing degrees and occurrences of “smoothness” or “lilt” which can be selected to suit the personal taste of the musician, musical or ergonomic requirements. For example, on a chromatic concertina (Figure 6.1c), it is possible to play both the notes a’ or g’ on any of four different buttons. This offers a wide range of possible bellows change/fingering sequences which can be exploited as required. One combination might involve a particularly abrupt change of bellows direction but, if the required notes can be found elsewhere on the concertina in locations which do not require the change, then “cross fingering” can allow an execution which does not interrupt the flow of the music. In contrast, playing passages involving dramatic bellows changes can be employed to enliven the music.

Single action instruments have the disadvantage of running out of air if the performance involves too much use of the same bellows direction. In his study of the

---

<sup>451</sup> Adams’ Scottish Dance Music for the Concertina (Glasgow, c.1850), p.13.

<sup>452</sup> From Mrs Crotty of Kilrush, leaflet in The Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin. Thought to have been transcribed by Michael Tubridy from a recording made around 1950. Mrs. Crotty (1885-1960) of Kilrush, Co. Clare, played for dancing and represents the old style of concertina playing in this part of Ireland where the instrument has remained popular. Mrs Crotty also played a version of the tune “Heilan’ Laddie” for a kind of sword dance, “An Gabairín Bui”: see Beathnach, Breandán Folk Music and Dances of Ireland (Dublin, 1971), p.42.

<sup>453</sup> Kirkpatrick, John “How I play the Anglo, Part 3” NICA 337 (May 1986). p.12.



The image shows two staves of handwritten musical notation in 6/8 time. Staff (a) is labeled 'a' and contains a single melodic line. Staff (b) is labeled 'b' and contains two lines of music: a lower line with a bass clef and a higher line with a treble clef. The two lines in (b) are octaves apart. In the fourth bar of (b), there is an asterisk (\*) above a note, indicating an adjustment. Both staves end with 'etc'.

a : basic tune

b : tune in octaves with adjustment in bar\*

Example 6.2 Bobbing Around (extract).

Source: Kirkpatrick, John "How I Play the Anglo, part 3"  
 NICA 337 (May 1986) p.12.



### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Irish concertinist, Paddy Murphy of Bealraggan, Co. Clare, ó hAllmhuráin notes that the player has consciously developed a style with:

A very even bellows movement throughout the melody which gives the proper pulse movement to the phrasing of tunes, as well as overcoming gushing sounds of air from the bellows.<sup>454</sup>

The player of the concertina version of the Shetland fiddle tune “Underhill”, notated in Example 6.3, suggests using different rows of the concertina keyboard for ergonomic convenience and for musical effect. The outer row (scale of C) is used for the first part of the tune because it is easy to play and offers a “lilting” effect. In the second part, by contrast, he deliberately employs the inner row (scale of G) to allow a “call and response between the right and left hand of the instrument” which is less lilting and more akin to the syncopation which fiddlers achieve in bowing the repeated figure fsharp"- a".<sup>455</sup>

The division of the instrument into both bass and treble manuals allows the performance of separate parts and offers opportunities for harmony, albeit far removed from those available to the performer of the English model. While there is no obvious logic or symmetry to the keyboard layout which would encourage adventurous harmony, the performance of basic chords is quite straightforward and can be achieved almost accidentally by simply sounding the buttons adjacent to those of the melody note. Figure 6.7 demonstrates how simple triads can be sounded by using a basic pattern of three adjacent notes on the same row. On the outer row of the left hand manual, holding down buttons 3, 4 and 5 while compressing the bellows produces chord I and reversing the action gives chord II. The same simple fingering pattern on the other row (buttons 8, 9 and 10) gives chords V and VI. Moving the finger pattern down a button (7, 8 and 9) and compressing the bellows gives chord III and if repeated on the outer row (2, 3 and 4) Chord I is sounded on compression and chord VII on opening the bellows. The only deviance from the three adjacent button block is the combination of buttons 4, 5 and 9 or 4, 8 and 9 with the bellows drawn to sound chord IV. The simple triads can, of course, be varied through the use of the other available notes and those on the right hand manual.

“Double-stopping”, produced by playing adjacent notes in the row (thirds or sixths), is another simple technique which found its way into the performance of traditional dance music. The harmonic potential of the Anglo-German concertina gave traditional musicians a new facet to their music. Johnson suggests it was “the first naturally harmonic Scottish folk instrument”, its popularity around 1880 being an

---

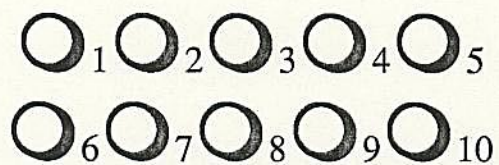
<sup>454</sup> ó hAllmhuráin, Gearóid “The Concertina Music of Paddy Murphy” *Treior* 13, No.4 (1981), pp.18-19; “Part 2” 13, No.5 (1981), pp.29-31; “Part 3” 13 No.6 (1981), pp.17-21; “Part 4” 14 No.1 (1981), pp.17-20. The quotation is from “Part 1”, p.19.

<sup>455</sup> Levy, Bertram “The Correct Row on the Anglo” *Concertina and Free-reed* 1 No.2 (Spring 1983), p.13.

ROW II R L RL RL R L RL R L

ROW III R LR R LR LR LR LR L

Example 6.3 Underhill.  
Source: Levy, Bertram "The Correct Row on the Anglo"  
Concertina and Free-Reed Vol. 1 No.2 (Spring 1983) p.13.



chord	buttons	bellows
I	3 4 5	in
II	3 4 5	out
IV	4 8 9	out
III	7 8 9	in
IV	4 5 9	out
V	8 9 10	in
VI	8 9 10	out
VII	2 3 4	out
I	2 3 4	out

Figure 6.7 Simple Triads played on the Anglo-German Concertina.



## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

important step in the modernisation of the country's traditional music.<sup>456</sup> The ease of sounding simple chords encouraged the adoption of the Anglo-German instrument into the accompaniment of traditional and popular song. The left hand manual can be used to provide a harmonic accompaniment to a melody performed on the right. This renders the instrument more versatile than its distant cousin, the melodeon or German accordion, in which the left hand offers only fixed chords.

In the chromatic version of the Anglo-German concertina, the extra notes allow the performance of music in all keys and of greater complexity. It gives further opportunities for alternative fingerings and bellows movement and offers the possibility of a smoother, flowing style. The chromatic Anglo-German concertina can come close to sharing much of the repertory of the English model and it is recorded that it was commonly used in North West England in the early years of this century for the public performance of brass- band marches and up-to-date popular music.<sup>457</sup>

Young musicians in the Irish tradition have come to exploit the opportunities of the chromatic instrument's additional row in playing traditional dance music not just in the inherent "home keys" but in others also by picking notes from all over the keyboard as required. They have also developed intricate forms of decoration ("rolls", "cuts", "cranns") derived from the fiddle, pipes and flute repertoires.<sup>458</sup> Certain forms of traditional ornamentation, such as the fast triplet, can be reproduced on the Anglo- German concertina in imitation of the fiddle with careful use of the bellows. Other ornaments, however, are less easy to emulate due to the form of the instrument. In "cutting", where a note is ornamented by a rapid higher note which precedes it, the diatonic keyboard dictates that the ornamental note is almost always two notes above that decorated, if bellows direction is maintained (Example 6.4a).

Performance of the "roll", as commonly found in fiddle music, is not possible on the Anglo-German concertina but is substituted by the "grace note run" which uses a complex selection of button and bellows direction to sound a series of individual grace notes to create a similar effect (Example 6.4b).

Despite these opportunities, it has been noted that many performers of the chromatic instrument continue to play "single line" music with little harmony in the older styles associated with the diatonic concertina.<sup>459</sup>

---

<sup>456</sup> Johnson, *Music and Society...*, pp.93, 192. Johnson informs me that he selected the year 1880 on account of an advertisement for the instrument found in an Orkney newspaper of that year.

<sup>457</sup> Ward, Alan "Fred Kilroy: Lancashire Concertina Player, Part 2" *Traditional Music* 3 (1976), p.5.

<sup>458</sup> Cowan, Joel "The Concertina Tradition in County Clare" *Concertina* 1 No.4 (Autumn 1983), pp.9-12; Cowan, Joel "Interview with Noel Hill" *Concertina and Squeezebox* 13 (1986), pp.17-22; Worrall, Dan "The Irish Anglo at the Willie Clancy School" *Concertina and Squeezebox* 13 (1986) pp.36-39.

<sup>459</sup> Koning, Jos *Irish Traditional Dance Music: a sociological study of its structure, development and function in the past and present*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Amsterdam (1976), p.64. This thesis contains transcriptions of traditional concertina players in Co. Clare.

fiddle ornament (♯)      Anglo-German concertina ornament (♯)

Example 6.4a "Cutting" on Anglo-German Concertina.

fiddle "roll"      "grace note run"

Example 6.4b "Grace Note Run" on Anglo-German Concertina.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Even in its most sophisticated forms, the peculiarities of the Anglo-German concertina encourage players to devise their own solutions to bellows movement, harmony and ornamentation and as a consequence it has become associated with those who play by ear. It was therefore at odds with ideology behind the elevating, “correct” and smooth playing of nineteenth-century bourgeois musicians who would have been more attracted to the English concertina. The gulf between the two markets is illustrated in early tutors for the Anglo-German concertina which suggested that “a very effective crescendo or swell can also be introduced on the Concertina, by waving the instrument in the air while the passage requiring it is being played”<sup>460</sup> and in “airs requiring a certain expression, a most pleasing effect is produced by gently swinging or waving the instrument to and fro.”<sup>461</sup> Such practices were strictly forbidden in contemporary tutors for the English instrument, such as that by Signor Alsepi:

The author wishes to protest against the practice indulged by many performers who “swing” the instrument whilst playing. No one wishing to uphold the character of the instrument will do this. The immortal Regondi, in his Method (page 52) says, “avoid all such movements of the body, arms or hands, as may appear affected, and ridiculous,” which remark the Author wishes to endorse.<sup>462</sup>

By the turn of the century, the German accordion or melodeon had started to dominate as the principal instrument in working class social dance in Scotland. This instrument was louder than the concertina and, in many respects, was easier to perform on. The provision of fixed accompaniment chords on the left hand manual and the fuller sound from its multiple were also perceived as major benefits. The Anglo-German concertina was still heard in Scotland during the first half of the present century in traditional music and was used by players of sacred music unable to afford the more expensive English version. Although a number of my informants remember players of the Anglo-German concertina between the wars, I was unable to trace any older players active in the 1980s and 90s. Fortunately, one player, Searus McDairmid of Wormit and Newport-on-Tay, Fife, was recorded in the early 1960s while he was in his eighties.<sup>463</sup> His repertory comprised simple song and dance tunes usually played slowly and in a “lilting”, unadorned manner. I am unable to identify any of the eight tunes collected from McDairmid (Example 6.5 and 6.6) and this might suggest that they were his own compositions or highly personal versions of existing music.

---

<sup>460</sup> The Concertina Preceptor..., p.29.

<sup>461</sup> Moore's Irish Melodies, p.2.

<sup>462</sup> The Modern English Concertina Method, p.64.

<sup>463</sup> Letter with music examples from Rick Ulman, Manchester, St. Louis in Concertina and Squeezebox 1, No.4 (Autumn 1983), pp.20-23. In a personal communication in 1984, the writer informed me that his musical transcriptions are approximate and may contain errors. The original tape has since been lost in a fire.



**Example 6.5** Mussels in the Burn.

Source: Transcribed from the playing of Searus McDiarmid by Rick Ulman. Published in Concertina and Squeezebox Vol.1 No.4 (Autumn 1983) p.22.

**Example 6.6** Cutting Thyme.

Source: Transcribed from the playing of Searus McDiarmid by Rick Ulman. Published in Concertina and Squeezebox Vol.1 No.4 (Autumn 1983) p.23.

## Other Principal Areas of Use

So far I have discussed the instrument's principal use in domestic, amateur music-making. Some other areas of adoption are worthy of special attention.

### Street Music

Towards Findlater's church a quartet of young men were striding along with linked arms, swaying their heads and stepping to the agile melody of their leader's concertina. The music passed in an instant, as the first bars of sudden music always did, over the fantastic fabrics of his mind, dissolving them painlessly and noiselessly as a sudden wave dissolves the sandbuilt turrets of children.<sup>464</sup>

Despite official attempts to limit the use of public space for unregulated musical activities, the street was a major site of both amateur and professional music in the Victorian period and evidence confirms the Anglo-German concertina as a prominent instrument in such performance. Illustrations of Victorian beach entertainment, street minstrels and Derby Day commonly include a concertina player.<sup>465</sup> As suggested by Millais' "The Blind Girl", the concertina would appear to have been the favoured instrument of sight impaired buskers<sup>466</sup> (Figure 6.8 and 6.9) and it became particularly associated with the image of the London "coster" (Figure 6.10),<sup>467</sup> an image which was to be constantly reworked by music hall performers. There is a fine illustration of local tinkers playing Anglo-German concertina with bass and tenor drums in the town of Kinross in the early years of this century<sup>468</sup> and a commentator, writing of Dundee in 1894, stressed the popularity of the hand-held free-reed instruments in the city:

Concertinas and melodeons are as common as blackberries and the twilight hours are filled with their melody, poured forth by the enamoured youth at the stair-foot of his seniorita's seven-floor tenement.<sup>469</sup>

---

<sup>464</sup> Joyce, James *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914).

<sup>465</sup> Delgano, Alan *Victorian Entertainment* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p.90; "Returning from the Derby" in *Our English Cousins* (1894) reproduced in *Concertina and Squeezebox* 18 and 19 (1989), p.45. Cohen, David and Greenwood, Ben *The Buskers* (Newton Abbott, 1981), p.143, reproduces a photograph of three blackface "Ethiopian Serenaders" playing whistle, banjo and Anglo-German concertina, taken at Greenwich in 1884.

<sup>466</sup> For example: Painting by Ed Holt of Edinburgh c.1880 (private collection, photographic copy in collection of Stuart Eydmann); photograph of blind beggar from Nitshill in Pollokshaws, Glasgow c.1890 (People's Palace Museum, Glasgow Negative 84.87) and busker with dog playing in street Hartlepool, Cleveland c.1913 (Beamish Museum, Co. Durham Negative 3603).

<sup>467</sup> Picture postcard in Eydmann collection.

<sup>468</sup> Munro, David M. *Kinross in Old Picture Postcards* (Zaltbommel, 1985).

<sup>469</sup> Burn Murdoch, W.G. *From Edinburgh to the Antarctic* (London, 1894). Page number unknown. I am grateful to Mr Billy Kay for this reference.



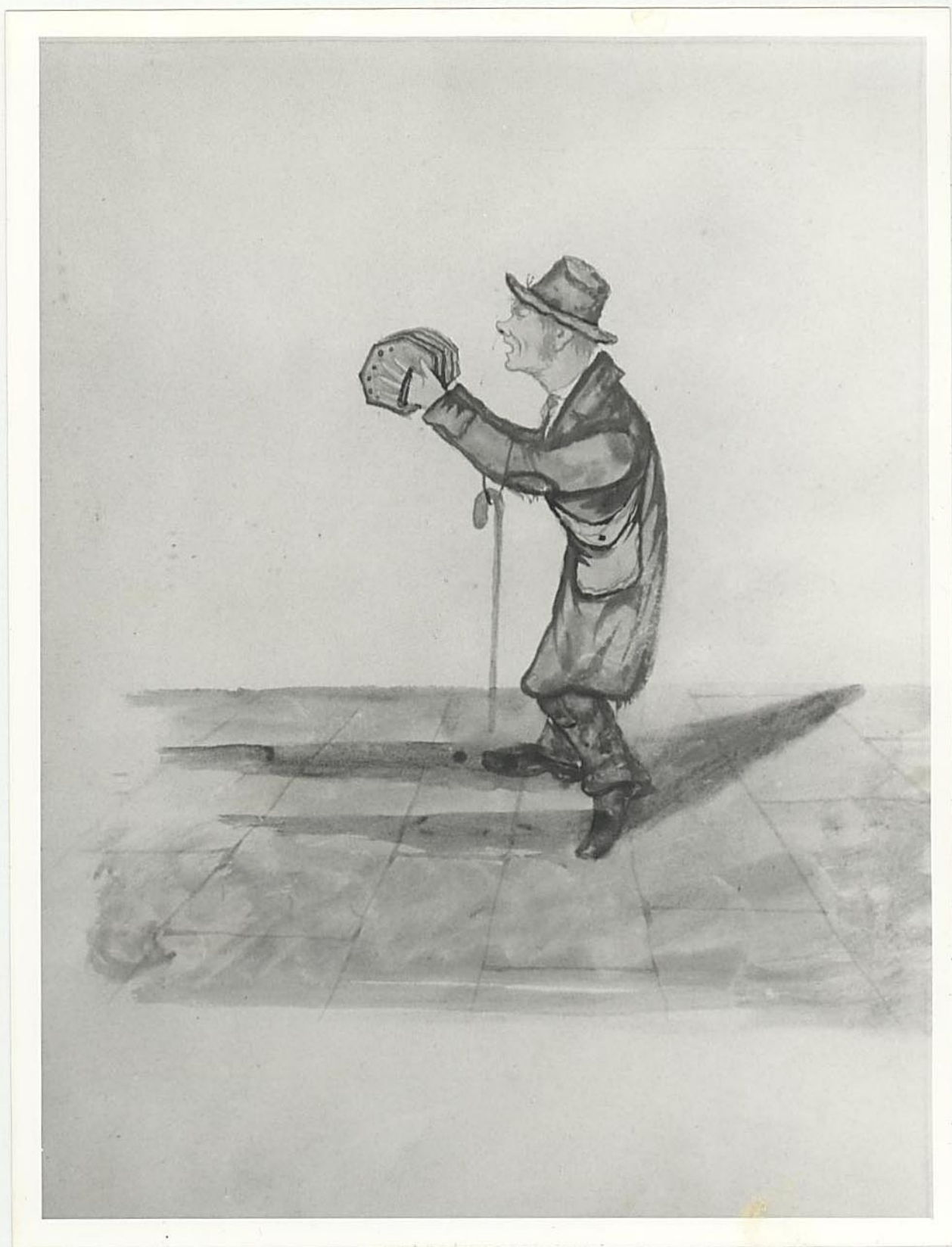


Figure 6.8 Blind Concertina Player, Edinburgh c1890.  
Source: Watercolour by Ed Holt in private collection.



Figure 6.9 Blind Concertina Player, Pollokshaws, Glasgow  
c1890.  
Source: The People's Palace Museum, Glasgow.





Figure 6.10 Picture Postcard c1904.  
Source: Author's collection.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

It is Henry Mayhew, however, in his “London Labour and the London Poor”,<sup>470</sup> who offers the best description of an itinerant concertina player through his lengthy portrait of a young London musician who played the Thames steamboats. The player talks of the great popularity of the Anglo-German concertina and how his father bought him one when he was eleven or twelve for 2s. 6d.:

I was about getting on for twelve when father first bought me a concertina. That instrument was very fashionable then, and everybody had it nearly.

He learned by ear, picking up tunes by listening to other bands on the steamers and following other street musicians:

I play entirely out of my own head, for I never had any lessons at all. I learn the tunes from hearing other people playing of them. If I hear a street band, such as a fiddle and harp and cornopean playing a tune, I follow them and catch the air; and if it's any sort of a easy tune at all, I can pick it up after them, for I never want to hear it more than twice played on an instrument.

He describes his repertory based upon customer's demands but noted his own preference despite the limitations of the instrument:

For myself, I prefer lively tunes. I don't know much operatic music, only one or two airs; but they're easier to play on the concertina than lively music because it's difficult to move the fingers very quickly. You can't hardly play a hornpipe. It makes the arm ache before you can play it all through, and it makes such a row with the valve working the bellows up and down, that it spoils the music.

The instruments were bought wholesale from the importers:

The concertina I use now cost me 16s. It's got twenty double keys - one when I pull the bellows out and one when I close it. I wear out an instrument in three months. The edges of the bellows get worn out; then I have to patch them up, till they get so weak that it mostly doubles over. It costs me about 1s. a week to have them kept in order. They get out of tune very soon. They file them and put fresh notes in. I get all my repairs done trade price. I tune my instrument myself. The old instruments I sell to the boys, for about as much as I give for a new

---

<sup>470</sup> Mayhew, Henry London Labour and the London Poor (London, 1861), pp.182-185.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

one. They are very dear; but I get them so cheap when I buy them, I only give 16s. for a 25s. instrument.<sup>471</sup>

Busking on the steamers was supplemented by performance along with fiddle, harp and fife in an orchestra playing for dance classes and assemblies:

The room is like a street, almost, and the music sounds well in it. The other three play from notes, and I join in. I learnt their airs this way. My mother and father were very fond of dancing and they used to go there nearly every night, and I'd go along with them, and then I'd listen and learn the tunes. I don't have any stand before me. I never look at any of the other's music. I look at the dancing. You've got to look at the time their dancing at, and watch their figures when they leave off.<sup>472</sup>

A player in Cornwall paints a similar picture of the popularity of the instrument around 1890:

In these days, the 'tina was a very popular instrument in Cornwall, you could hear one in many houses. You could always buy a 'tina in the shops from 4s. to 5s. and many used to buy one just to have a bit of fun for the Christmas, and my belief is that is why many learnt the 'tina. Of course, they only had brass reeds, and when they went out of tune we should throw them into the dust bin. You could not get them tuned. But if you had one with steel reeds, German make, you could not wear them out. My father had one called "The Nightingale" for 21s., it was a handsome 'tina. But lastly my father bought one by Jones of London: of a summer's evening you could hear it nearly 2 miles away.<sup>473</sup>

The concertina was used (along with bones, triangle and tambourine) for dance music and song accompaniment around the houses of the neighborhood, with the musicians blacked up and in strange clothing:

Groups of four or five would come around -we played mainly to the higher class folk, and to the farmers, when we would get a glass of cider and a piece of Christmas cake, but the working class, who were

---

<sup>471</sup> The poor durability of cheap Anglo-German concertinas was always a problem which must have contributed to the abandonment of the instrument in favour of more robust instruments. In response to problems of maintenance *Amateur Work* 3 (1883), pp.298-300 published a do-it-yourself guide "Concertina and Melodeon Tuning and Repair" by Henry Dryerre.

<sup>472</sup> Mayhew's description suggests a fairly respectable dance-hall. This, and the fact that a good quality Anglo-German concertina was still expensive in the 1850s is intriguing. Although inexpensive for many workers, one would tend to assume that the cost of a new concertina would be high for a player relying solely on busking and dance music for income.

<sup>473</sup> Collins, F.J. "The Concertina in Cornwall, Around 1890" in *The Concertina Newsletter* 7 (August 1972) pp.9-10.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

mainly players, would join in with us with their concertinas. and we found many good players. Sometimes they gave us a step dance in the kitchen, with a glass of wine. The 'tina was a lovely instrument for quick music. Then at Christmas time we'd have dance parties in the kitchen. We used to have one dance, we would do, "The Polka", and at intervals all dance and meet at the centre. Then we had another dance called "The Heel and Toe", and we finished with a jig... You was lucky to get a shilling from each house in the olden days but as the years passed, we got more... Then of a Saturday night or at Christmas time, many would take their 'tinas to the pubs and after closing time they would do step dancing on a farm wagon with the 'tina, and dance for prizes.<sup>474</sup>

Collins, like Mayhew's informant, suggests that players learned by ear, gathering music from wherever they heard it: "Many players would go to a fair and learn some of the fair organ tunes, and would play them off when they got home".<sup>475</sup> Here we have an early example of aural learning from the repetitive reproduction of pre-programmed music which prefigured the role of the gramophone record in the dissemination of music in the current century.

### **The Anglo-German Concertina in Non-European Cultures**

It is possible to identify some major areas of adoption outwith the British Isles. The world market was shared with the square German Konzertina family which found favour in South America<sup>476</sup> and in a number of cultures of North America.<sup>477</sup> The Anglo-German concertina was adopted by native South Africans in the late nineteenth century<sup>478</sup> and up to the 1960s and 70s was used by Zulu migrant workers in the cities. The instrument was often used to accompany walking, song and dance. Several non-standard tunings evolved to suit different functions and traditions. To this day it enjoys an elevated status as the principal instrument of Boer folk music or "Boermusiek".<sup>479</sup> The instrument was also popular among the working classes of

---

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>476</sup> In particular the bandonion of Argentina associated with the tango. See, for example, Åhlén, Carl-Gunnar Det Mesta Om Tango (Stockholm, 1984).

<sup>477</sup> In particular the Chemnitzer system brought to the United States by Henry Silberhorn and popularised among the German and Middle European immigrants of the Midwest where it is still popular today.

<sup>478</sup> For a contemporary study see Clegg, Johnny "The music of Zulu immigrant workers in Johannesburg: a focus on concertina and guitar" Symposium on Ethnomusicology: papers presented at the symposium on ethnomusicology 10-11 October 1980 (Rhodes University, 1981). See also Scurfield, Harry "Squashbox" in Folk Roots (September, 1993), pp.31-33.

<sup>479</sup> For example: "Boermusik Olympics 1982" Concertina and Squeezebox 3 No.3 (Summer 1985), p.5; notices from South African Sunday Times (January 1988) in NICA 355 (March 1988), p.8 and NICA 355 (March 1988), p.8.



## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Australia and New Zealand in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discovery of surviving instruments, much iconographic evidence and recent research by enthusiasts<sup>480</sup> in these countries, confirm links with the immigrants from the British Isles. The benefits to both purchaser and manufacturer/distributor of inexpensive, portable and durable instruments are obvious. Furthermore, Ehrlich, in his history of the piano,<sup>481</sup> notes that the large scale export of inexpensive, but durable, free-reed organs was used by the entrepreneurs to develop markets within the British colonies which were to be exploited later through the distribution of more valuable pianos. Was the inexpensive Anglo-German concertina also used as a musical emissary to help build up demand for musical hardware in developing countries?

### **Conclusion**

The Anglo-German concertina suffered rejection by its adherents and gave way, with the exception of a few residual pockets, to the German Accordion or melodeon in popular and traditional dance, to the English concertina (which was being taken over by the working-classes) and, in the cities at least, to other more fashionable instruments: “The ladies of the East End are discarding their favourite instrument, the concertina, for the more attractive one of the West, the banjo”.<sup>482</sup> After serving as an entry into the world of instrumental music making, this concertina was in turn abandoned in the face of changing musical taste and ideology and alternative attractions.

The Anglo-German concertina remained tied to the fortunes of “plebeian” music making (both folk and popular) as the nineteenth century drew to a close. The rise of cheap, reliable pianos, violins, the English concertina, brass and other “respectable” instruments, organised music making in bands and choirs, the availability of formal tuition, and the attractions of alternative musical instruments offered new opportunities. Under the influence of social reformers, rational recreationalists and a new bourgeois-dominated taste, the less refined musical practices became marginal, residual or died out. “Traditional music” was changing too and the rise in popularity of more chromatic dance tunes in the late nineteenth century helped reduce the instrument’s attractiveness.<sup>483</sup> In England, the Anglo-German concertina survived among isolated groups of dance musicians or as a child’s toy and in Ireland it continued in use in some rural communities for the performance of dance music.

---

<sup>480</sup> See various articles in *Concertina Magazine*.

<sup>481</sup> Ehrlich, *The Piano...*, pp.130-131.

<sup>482</sup> *The Sketch* (13 December 1899). Both the banjo and mandolin were popular instruments in urban Scotland during the period 1890-1930. The latter was mainly associated with women players and a number of bands performed regularly.

<sup>483</sup> For example the compositions of fiddlers Peter Milne, James Hill and James Scott Skinner which were to become popular with players of the English concertina in the early twentieth century: see Chapter 10.0.

*The Life and Times of the Concertina*