

Current Developments

The Continuing Revival

The International Concertina Association remains the principal institution dedicated to the concertina and membership is now dominated by players who first came to the instrument through the folk music revival of the 1960s and 70s but have since widened their musical interests. The Association continues to privilege musical literacy by publishing advice on music theory and promotes teaching through the organisation of “concertina weekends” and workshops. Supplements issued with the Association’s newsletters are a principal source of music arranged for the concertina (e.g. Example 12.1). However, despite an attachment to the “rational” aspects of concertina playing, there is also a strong element of humour and lightheartedness about its proceedings and a willingness to accommodate all musical styles and repertory.

Regional branches hold meetings throughout the country including “The West Country Concertina Players”, “The Yorkshire Concertina Club” and groups representing the North East, South East, Midlands and Nottingham. There is also a Scottish group which meets regularly in Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, an area which contained a large number of concertina players during the folk music revival of the 1970s. The small number of outstanding players who emerged through the folk revival have retained much of their status. Alistair Anderson continues his solo work but also performs with his group Syncopace which is a medium for his own compositions. He is also involved in the organisation Folkworks which is charged with promoting traditional music within the North-East of England through school visits, concerts and workshops.

Although I have no statistical evidence to support this view, I would suggest that there are now fewer professional concertina players on the “folk scene” and that the concertina has lost its special place within the folk music group. Many of the amateurs active during the 1960s and 70s have either abandoned musical performance or have moved their playing “indoors” and away from the pub and folk-club scene because of changing interests or the demands of career and family life. Nevertheless, the image of the concertina as an instrument at the core of the tradition remains a strong one, illustrated by the fact that in the late 1980s, the major retail chain, Virgin Records, was promoting its folk and traditional music sales through an advertisement

MUSIC SUPPLEMENT

TAKE ME BACK TO BLIGHTY

- arranged for English concertina by
Chris Todhunter. (Copyright 1993)

The musical score is written for English concertina in 6/8 time. It consists of ten staves. The first staff is the melody line, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second and third staves are the bass line, starting with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings (e.g., 7, 7, 7, 7). The piece ends with a 'REPEAT AD LIB.' section followed by a 'LAST TIME' section.

This excellent arrangement for English concertina was contributed by Chris Todhunter, and is based on a tune from 'Feldman's Brass and Military Band Journal, 1914' (see last September's 'Music Supplement' for the original version). This arrangement is designed specifically to 'fall nicely under the fingers' of the English concertina, taking into account the system's limited bass range etc. It is, however, equally effective on duet and anglo systems.

Example 12.1 Take me back to Blighty.

Source: Music supplement issued with Concertina World 392
(July/August 1993).

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which used a wood-cut illustration of the “source” musician William Kimber (Figure 12.1).

Concertina Playing in Scotland Today

Earlier chapters have shown how post-Second World War use of the concertina in Scotland was very much a reflection of tendencies in Britain as a whole.

Despite endorsement by the Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland through competitions in the early 1970s, the blossoming of interest in the concertina as an instrument of Scottish traditional music has not been maintained. As early as 1979, the programme of the annual traditional music festival at Kinross wrote of the concertina competition:

The support for this competition has been so poor in recent years, that the committee has decided that unless there are more than three entrants for the competition the cup will not be awarded and the competition will be cancelled.⁹²⁴

The competition at the festival at Newcastleton, Roxburghshire, was abandoned in the mid-1980s while that at Kirriemuir Festival does survive, although under threat due to lack of interest. Festivals now include competitions for “miscellaneous instruments” which do accommodate concertina players.

Since the mid-1980s, “The Scottish Concertina Project”, a loose association of enthusiasts, has helped organise workshops at folk festivals. A gathering in late 1993 in Glasgow, held in conjunction with the Traditional Music and Song Association and the Glasgow Traditional Arts Trust, attracted over 30 players, mainly musicians from the over 40 age group who were interested in folk song accompaniment and the performance of traditional dance music.

The concertina is now found in only a few traditional music groups (e.g. the Whistlebinkies, the Gaugers and Ceol Beag), its use having died out as bands have disbanded and fashions have changed. On one hand, a move towards the presentation of the “authentic” in traditional music has encouraged the popularity of more “Scottish” instruments, such as the fiddle, small-pipes and harp. On the other, the late 1980s and 90s have seen the rise of a more syncretic approach to traditional music which attempts to promote an image of progressive modernity through the use of modern electronic instruments along with “authentic” traditional ones and a synthesis of traditional music and modern rock accompaniment and arrangements.

⁹²⁴ Programme, September 7-9th 1979, p.7.



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MANCHESTER Unit 11B, Arndale Centre, Market Street - MILTON KEYNES 59 Silbury Arcade, Secklow Gate West - NEWCASTLE 10/14 High Friars,
Eldon Square - PETERBOROUGH 34 Queensgate Centre - PLYMOUTH 105 Armada Way - PORTSMOUTH Units 69-73, The Tricorn, Charlotte Street -
SHEFFIELD 35 High Street - SOUTHAMPTON 16 Bargate Street & Plummers Department Store Above Bar - SUNDERLAND 29 Blandford Street -
TORQUAY 9 Haldon Centre, Union Street - YORK 5 Feasegate - LONDON STORES MARBLE ARCH 9 Marble Arch - MEGASTORE 14/16 Oxford Street.

Figure 12.1 Virgin Records, Advertisement.
Source: Folk Roots 26 (August 1985) p.9.

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One notable player to emerge in the recent period is Simon Thoumire of Edinburgh.⁹²⁵ Born in 1970, his repertory embraces many strands of music present within the late folk revival including Irish, Scottish, Jazz and Blues. He first became interested in the instrument at the age of 12 through listening to his parents' folk music records and learned to play with the benefit of the Alistair Anderson tutor discussed in the previous chapter. He has played with the Edinburgh folk music group Seannachie but is better known for his solo performances and work with a trio bearing his name. He has also performed and recorded extensively with the guitarist Ian Carr of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, playing a wide selection of music "which sees no distinction between Scott Skinner and Scott Joplin. One medley romps through George Gershwin's "Fascinating Rhythm", Jim Sutherland's very-Scottish-sounding "Radical Road" and Dave Brubeck's "It's a Raggy Waltz".⁹²⁶

Simon was the 1989 winner of BBC radio's "Folk on Two Young Tradition Award" and later took the "Folk Roots Award" which recognises outstanding talent in the performance of traditional music. He has developed his own way of holding the concertina in which his fingers approach the buttons from an unusual angle but which, he claims, allows a greater dexterity. In playing slow music he uses a full organ-like chordal accompaniment (Tape Item 12.1). In faster music his style is eclectic and employs riffs and figures borrowed from jazz, dramatic syncopations, sudden full chords, melodic extensions, exaggerated bellows changes, percussive hitting of the buttons, rapidly executed triplets, "birls" and other forms of traditional ornamentation (Tape Item 12.1). His idiosyncratic arrangements suggest comparison with the playing of Irish fiddle player Tommy Potts:

Some basic ingredients like timbre and repertoire, are obviously traditional, while in other areas there are smartingly new ingredients. A high degree of innovation is evident and many aspects of the music which have been untouchable for the three centuries of its existence as a genre are directly challenged.⁹²⁷

Simon deliberately chooses traditional tunes with an inherent syncopation which he further exaggerates through bellows action and he constantly deviates from the "authorised versions", rarely playing exactly the same way twice.

In recent years, Scotland has witnessed a revival in traditional dance by young people within the cities.⁹²⁸ Such dancing is free of many of the conventions of the Scottish

⁹²⁵ See Reid, Lindsay "Simon puts the squeeze on his talent" *Edinburgh Evening News* (25 September 1989) p.10, Adams, Rob "Take a good tune and add that mischievous tendency" *The Glasgow Herald* (8 January 1991) p.8.

⁹²⁶ Ibid. Adams.

⁹²⁷ O'Suilleabhain, Michael "'My Love is in America': melodic deviation and the programmatic in the fiddle playing of Tommy Potts" *An Fhìdil Ghealach* 1 (1980) p.17.

⁹²⁸ For an introduction to this aspect of the revival see various articles in "Completely Ceilidh'ed" *The*

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country dance “movement” including the instrumentation and repertory used in its accompaniment. The accordion, which is *de rigueur* in established dance accompaniment, is often absent, while the concertina and fiddle are given a more prominent role as in The Cloud Howe Ceilidh Band of Glasgow (which combines two fiddles, English concertina, played by Steve Sutcliffe, and “jazz” guitar) or the Ceilidh Collective from Edinburgh. These new style bands do not follow the conventions of “Scottish Country Dance” ensembles but embrace a less conservative approach to instrumentation, repertory, style, decorum and performance practice. Ann Ward, who plays concertina in the Ceilidh Collective, played for folk dance while resident in England for a while and during the early 1980s was one of two concertinists in the all woman Scottish traditional music group Sprangeen. She sees the instrument as being highly appropriate to her band’s historical and musical approach to Scottish dance music:

Because a concertina blends in so well. In our band we try and do a lot of old fashioned Scottish tunes. In fact we’re doing some old fashioned Scottish dances and one called “The Black Dance” and all of the tunes are 18th Century tunes and if you had an accordion you wouldn’t be able to hear this so you can’t feel at best that you’re recreating an old sound... So if you’re wanting to recreate not just the Scottish sound [but] the old fashioned Scottish sound, then the concertina’s the instrument.⁹²⁹

For tunes like [the schottische] the concertina is absolutely amazing for you can get these “Scotch snaps”, diddle-dum, diddle-dum, so crisp. You can’t do it on a flute, you can do it on a whistle and of course you can do it on the fiddle for they can just go with their bow, flick, flick, flick but this [the concertina] is excellent for these tunes.⁹³⁰

Despite this latest area of use, the concertina remains on the outer fringe of dance music in Scotland. Although the concertina was originally revived as an alternative to the accordion, this latter instrument has itself been rehabilitated and now has a place with revival musicians, to the extent that the popularity of the concertina is kept in check.

Instrument Manufacture and Retail

The number of concertina makers continues to grow slowly to meet demand (including new manufacturers in Germany and France) but overall output remains low. Retail is still mainly through a small number of specialist outlets and private

Scotsman Weekend (18 December 1993) pp 4-10.

⁹²⁹ Ann Ward: Eydmann 93.01.A3.

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*, A5.

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dealers. None of these are located in Scotland although a few music shops do deal in second-hand concertinas as they come up and foreign made English and Anglo-German instruments are widely available. Specialist dealers often set up temporary stalls at folk music festivals and can become a focus for interested musicians trading information and conversation as well as instruments. Many players buy second-hand and the International Concertina Association, local players' groups and the traditional music press all help facilitate the market. Musicians seeking new, quality instruments deal directly with the small number of manufacturers although these are expensive (a new English concertina can cost well over £1,000) and there are long waiting lists. The high cost of instruments is a major factor which influences adoption.

Instrument Technology and Design

The revival has also led to the creation of new concertina keyboard designs. Drawing upon a study of earlier patents, the "Hayden System" concertina was developed with the folk revival player in mind (Figure 12.2). This is promoted as being particularly suited to the non-sight reader (typical of many players of the revival) and is said to encourage transposition without the need to learn radically different fingering patterns.⁹³¹ Versions of this concertina are currently manufactured by Wheatstone and Co. and by Bastari of Italy. Although well received in journals concerned with traditional music, it is too early to reach conclusions regarding levels of adoption or aspects of performance using this new form of concertina fingerboard. I have not encountered its use in Scotland.

There have been several attempts to adapt the concertina to the demands of modern electronic music. Individual players, particularly those in dance bands and "folk-rock" groups, have devised their own arrangements for the fitting of microphones to allow the amplification (and electronic manipulation) of the instrument's sound⁹³² and a number of commercial manufacturers of "pick-up" microphones or "transducers" specifically target the concertina in their trade literature (Figure 12.3).⁹³³

However, the amplified concertina does not offer the potential range of synthesised "sounds" or access to "sampling" available in many modern keyboard instruments. It would be possible to construct such an electronic instrument with a concertina keyboard for there are a number of commercially available accordions which include

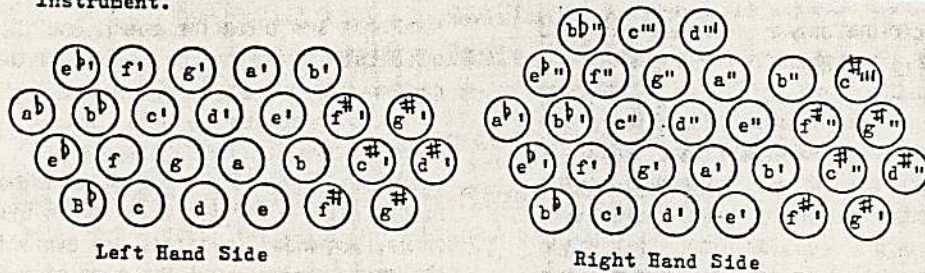
⁹³¹ Townley, John "The Hayden Keyboard: a new breed of concertina" *Concertina and Squeezebox* Vol.3, No.3 (1985) p.13, Hayden, Brian "The Hayden Concertina Keyboards" in *English Dance and Song* Vol.46, No.2 (Summer 1984) and *The Hayden Concertina Keyboard* information sheet published by Brian G. Hayden (1983).

⁹³² For example, see Galvin, Patch Edward "Electronic Pickups in Concertina" letter to the editor, *Concertina and Squeezebox* Vol.2, No.2 (Spring 1984) p.30. Players often employ "tie-pin" microphones fitted to the instrument ends with "Velcro".

⁹³³ For example, "Accusound" and "Microvox".

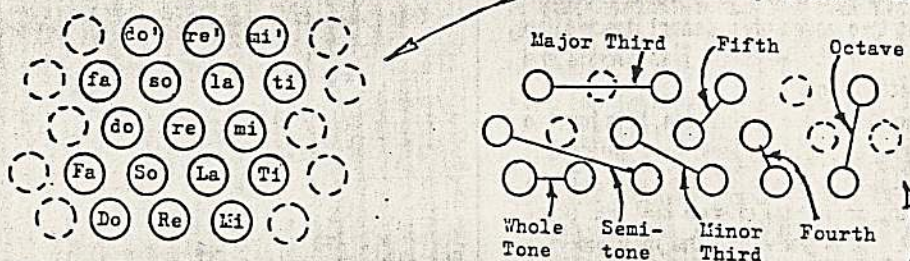
THE HAYDEN CONCERTINA KEYBOARDS

This is an entirely new way of arranging the notes on Concertina Keyboards. It is very easy both to learn and to play. Briefly - you only need to learn to play in one straightforward Key; and learn one simple Chord - modify it, and move it round; to play Music with full interesting harmonies in no less than 8 different Keys. The System may be used for any size of Concertina: the diagram shows the Keyboards of a medium sized Instrument.

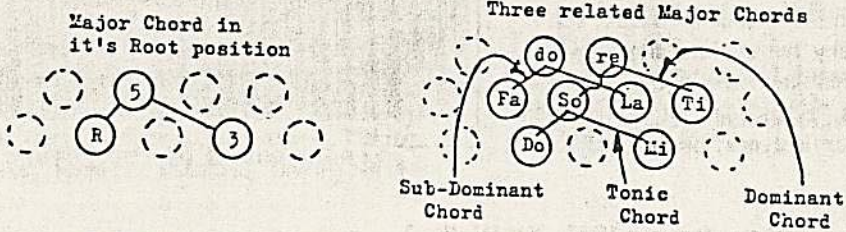


Left Hand Side Right Hand Side

It has a number of advantages over the more common Concertina Keyboard systems. (1) The notes of no less than eight different Keys :- E^b, B^b, F, C, G, D, A, & E are arranged in the same manner. (2) Each of these Keys forms a compact block of Touches on the Keyboard, with inter-meshing runs of 3 and 4 Touches. (Note - the other 4 Keys can be played on this Concertina, but with a more or less modified fingering.) (3) Each of these runs goes consecutively from left to right. (4) The Fingers can move easily from one run of notes to the next. (5) The Octaves repeat on the nearest Touch of the next but one row of notes. (6) A tune learned in one of the above Keys can (within the limits of the Keyboard) be Transposed into any of the other 7 Keys without altering the fingering pattern. (This is like Caping a Guitar). These 6 are illustrated SolFarily below:- left



(7) All the various musical intervals have specific constant patterns:-
 (8) Chords are very easy to play on the Keyboards. The basic Major Chord pattern is about the easiest way the three "strong" fingers fall on the Keyboards. This basic chord may be moved diagonally to the left and right to give a simple 3 chord accompaniment in the 8 most important Keys.



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Figure 12.2 Hayden Duet Concertina Layout. Source: Handbill published by the patentee in 1983.

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Figure 12.3 Advertisement for Accusound.
Source: The Musician (March 1994) p.20.

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provision for linking into “MIDI” devices. These invariably have the drawback that the keys of the electronic version do not have the same “feel” as the original form or allow the expression which can be gained by varying pressure to the bellows. At the time of writing, an electronics inventor and enthusiastic concertina player, Steve Simpson of Edinburgh, has developed a new design for a “MIDI Universal Instrument Controller” comprising microprocessor-driven digital electronic circuitry within a modest console which can be linked between a musical instrument and a synthesizer or sound module. The controller, it is claimed, is designed to facilitate programming to suit a variety of different input devices and allow “rapid development and minimum delay in controlling new MIDI instrument designs” and is “a low cost solution to attaining a MIDI musical instrument without the cost of developing dedicated hardware”. The device can be easily upgraded and allows for “instrument breath control for bellows and mouth activated instruments”.⁹³⁴ It is intended that this would offer a versatile control of different instruments which can be rapidly changed during performance yet all linked to one module. By way of a prototype to demonstrate and promote the controller, the inventor has developed a MIDI concertina based device in which the conventional reeds of an existing concertina are replaced by electronic sensors. There is also a means of responding to changes in bellows pressure and the use of the remote console removes any need to install the necessary dedicated control hardware within the concertina body. I have inspected this device and confirm that it has much the same “feel”, response and weight as the conventional concertina.

Although the controller may have a wider applicability, it is difficult to envisage any great demand for the use of the “MIDI concertina” outwith the limited circuit of a few professional artistes with appropriate musical taste and aspirations. Simon Thoumire might be such a player. “High- tech” instruments of this sort are contrary to the folk revival’s respect for an idealised past, ideology of authenticity and preference for personal, intimate sounds.

Looking to the Past

A number of concertina players are currently re-examining the concertina’s nineteenth-century repertory and experimenting with its use in the performance of “art” music.

Douglas Rogers, a London based guitar tutor working in higher education, came to the English concertina as a result of researching the nineteenth-century guitar repertory. Exploring the works of Regondi, he became fascinated by his pieces for concertina and undertook to learn the instrument. He now performs professionally from nineteenth-century concertina scores with piano accompaniment. Rogers

⁹³⁴ “MIDI Universal Instrument Controller: Single MIDI Unit Controls Variety of Instruments” marketing information brochure published by [Inventions International](#).

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established concertina classes in “classical” solo and ensemble playing in London in September 1988 which echo the 1960s and 70s courses run by Alf Edwards and Frank Butler for the International Concertina Association. A number of new works for concertina have been written for him as discussed below.

Dave Townsend (1951-) is another “serious” player who has come to prominence in recent years. His widely based repertory and studied approach to performance contrasts greatly with the “primitivism” of many earlier “traditional” revival players. Already a pianist, he came to the instrument through Irish traditional music while a student in Manchester in the early 1970s but later developed an interest in how the concertina could be used for playing English early music, music hall, classical and contemporary “art” music. His catholic taste is reflected in a gramophone record⁹³⁵ of which his arrangement of J.S. Bach’s “Suite in E sharp minor” is particularly notable for its complexity, precision and balance in volume between parts (Tape Item 12.2). He has described the problems inherent in playing such music on the English concertina:

That’s a great piece of music with some rattling good tunes. the different sections may have been written for other instruments, then brought together as a suite, perhaps to be played originally on a lute or harpsichord. It was an interesting challenge for me. On lute or harpsichord the sound of each note begins to die away as soon as you have plucked the string or pressed the key. On a concertina you’ve got the opposite; the note stays there as long as the key is depressed, and the sound doesn’t decay. You can bring out the contrapuntal texture more fully because the “hidden” melodies below the upper tune can be brought into greater prominence. But if you play all the notes with their full length, the lower notes start to drown out the higher notes, on a concertina... You have to let the upper notes sing out. I remember when I was first working on the fast bit of the Prelude... I needed to separate out the upper part and the lower part, and phrase them independently... It is possible. It’s not particularly easy, because you have to think the two separate parts, instead of thinking right hand and left hand, as you do on a keyboard.⁹³⁶

Townsend is in demand as a concertina player and has taken part in National Theatre productions and performances with several orchestras.

In my chapter on concertina bands I made reference to Nigel Pickles’ attempt to recreate the sound of such ensembles. During the late 1980s, he was also been involved in another project which seeks to revive concertina music from the nineteenth-century repertory. The New Mexborough English Concertina Quartet

⁹³⁵ *Portrait of a Concertina* (Saydisc 5DL 351) (1985).

⁹³⁶ “Dave Townsend” *Concertina and Squeezebox* 22 (Spring 1990) pp.15-16.

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comprises musicians who originally played traditional music only but later developed an interest in the late Victorian and Edwardian popular repertory:

We're really dead serious about the music. We want to preserve it, keep it alive, not take the piss out of it. We found for instance that people like to be told a hell of a lot if you don't make a history lesson out of it. And of course we can cover the whole range of music available for the concertina. This is where it's new for all of us really - we each happen to have our roots in folk, but what we're doing now isn't people's generally accepted idea of folk music.⁹³⁷

The group, which made a gramophone record⁹³⁸ in 1986, performs in evening dress in the manner of an Edwardian string quartet. There is also a new ensemble, "The Lost Chord", which combines serpent and concertina in the accompaniment of Victorian song and which was featured on BBC radio in December 1993.⁹³⁹

New Music for Concertina

In parallel with the revival of interest in "early" concertina music, the instrument has recently attracted the attention of a number of contemporary composers.

Keith Amos (1939-) published his "Sonata for Concertina and Piano" in 1988. Commissioned by Douglas Rogers, it lasts approximately 12 minutes and is in 3 movements. The piece is not particularly difficult although there is one slightly awkward passage in chromatic chords in the first movement (Example 12.2), quite a lot of octave work throughout and two part writing in the dance-like last movement (Example 12.3). In the words of Rogers:

The whole piece is beautifully written for the concertina, and the slow middle movement ("lament") with its discreet pedal and double-dotted rhythms has that poignant celtic lilt that falls so very well on the instrument. The piano part is not hard, but is light in texture to give just the right balance and tone.⁹⁴⁰

The piece was first performed at Wimpole Hall, London on 14 November 1988. Also written for Douglas Rogers, Oliver Hunt's "Song of the Sea" exploits the concertina's associations with seafaring: A "programmatic" work scored for concertina and piano, with the latter playing more than just an accompanying role. It is built round the well-

⁹³⁷ Nigel Pickles interviewed by Maggy St. George in "Their boots all polished black..." *Concertina and Squeezebox* 12 (1986) p.9.

⁹³⁸ *The New Mexborough English Concertina Quartet* (Plant Life Records, 055).

⁹³⁹ *Folk on Two* (22 December 1993).

⁹⁴⁰ *NICA* 344 (March 1987) p.3.

Handwritten musical score for Example 12.2, Sonata for Concertina and Piano (extract). The score consists of ten staves of music. The first two staves feature complex chordal textures with many sharps and naturals. The third staff has a "Psub." marking and a boxed "H". The fourth and fifth staves show a melodic line with a "2" marking. The sixth and seventh staves continue the melodic line with a "dim" marking. The eighth staff has a "pp" marking and a boxed "T". The ninth and tenth staves show a melodic line with a "3" marking and a "f" dynamic.

Example 12.2 Sonata for Concertina and Piano (extract).
 Composed Keith Amos. Published by CMA Publications
 (Kingston, 1987).

Handwritten musical score for a piano sonata extract. The score is written on a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. It features several systems of music with various annotations including dynamic markings (*mf*, *p*), articulation (>), and phrasing slurs. Chord symbols **F**, **G**, and **H** are placed above the staff. The tempo marking *Più Mosso* is written above the final system, which also includes the dynamic marking *mf sub.* and a key signature change to one sharp (F#).

Example 12.3 Sonata for Concertina and Piano (extract).
 Composed Keith Amos. Published by CMA Publications
 (Kingston, 1987).

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known sea shanty “Windy Old Weather”, of which occasional fragments can be heard throughout... appearing mysteriously like the distant, ghostly voices of drowned men fleetingly heard, then lost on the wind or veiled by the mist. Near the end the tune appears in its entirety, a lonely requiem, but disturbed and haunted still by an accompaniment that, like the sea itself, has no sympathy, but surges on and on unfeeling and unknowing.⁹⁴¹

The Scottish composer Edward McGuire (1948-) used the concertina in a number of pieces of varying character and function throughout the 1980s and 90s. In the incidental music for the feature film “Blood Red Roses”,⁹⁴² which tells the life story of a twentieth century trades union activist and is set in both urban and rural Scotland, the concertina is given the lead role. This was at the request of the producer John McGrath who felt that the sound of the instrument lent the correct “feel” to his film, the concertina having originally been scored in a less prominent position along with other instruments.⁹⁴³ In “The Spirit of Flight” (1991), a ballet suite for string orchestra with brass and traditional instruments, the concertina’s role is limited to a few chords and unison performance with the Scottish instruments in sections based upon traditional Gaelic song and dance rhythms. McGuire’s “Riverside” (1991), for chamber orchestra and traditional music group, uses the concertina in similar way but gives it a prominent part along with the oboe and bassoon in the atmospheric close of the piece (Example 12.4). His “Prelude 11 for English Concertina” (1994) is distinctly “modern” in character and makes use of the full range of the instrument and a variety of bellows effects. In this piece, which mainly comprises a series of chords or “clusters”, the writing is exceptional in that the composer has scored the piece on two lines, one for each hand, a device which recognises and exploits the “stereo” effect of the English concertina’s separate manuals. His use of the duplicate notes found on either side of the concertina further emphasises this (Example 12.5).

McGuire’s “Cullercoats Tommy”, first performed in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1993, is a one hour, one act opera based on a local historical incident. The music for this modern dramatic piece combines actors, orchestra, dancers and choruses (adults and children) and a traditional music quartet of concertina, small-pipes, fiddle and flute. The traditional musicians appear on stage playing dance music in a “Northumbrian style”, sometimes as a group, sometimes embedded in the larger orchestral sound. In some sections the concertina is also used to accompany the principal soprano. The concertina player for this production was Alistair Anderson.

Anderson himself has been actively composing for the instrument since the early 1970s. At first this took the form of dance tunes in a traditional style but more recently he has tackled more involved pieces, including his “Steel Skies” for traditional flute, fiddle, English concertina and Northumbrian small-pipes. This

⁹⁴¹ Ibid.

⁹⁴² Freeway Films, 1986.

⁹⁴³ From the personal experience of the writer who played the concertina part in the recording.

ORCHESTRA

OBOE
1. *p*
PPP < SOLO

BASSOON
PPP < SOLO

VIOLINS 1
PPP

VIOLINS 2
PPP

VIOLAS
PPP

CELLOS
PPP

BASSES
sf > 1/2 SIM.

WOOD FLUTE
(VOICES) SHH

SCOTS FIDDLE

LOWLAND BAGPIPES

TREBLE CONCERTINA
LIBERO (NOT IN TEMPO)
PPP < SOLO

CLARSACH
(VOICE) SHH

Example 12.4 Riverside (close).
 Source: Composed by Edward McGuire, 1991, reproduced from composer's manuscript.

2 PRELUDE 11 for Concertina

$p = 112$ Eddie McGuire '94

R.H. (AIR SOUND ONLY) --- PITCH APPEARS --- STEREO SOUND GROWS ---
NIENTE (PPP)

L.H. IN OUT IN OUT SIM.

Circa 15"

x4 x3 x2 xc3

psf pp < > sim. sf > < sf > < sf >

(EXCITED, RHYTHMICAL, SOMETIMES SYNCOPATED)

3 3 SAME CHORD

CRES. ---

ffp sf

CRES. poco a poco

molto

Example 12.5 Prelude 11 for Concertina (extract).
Source: Composed by Edward McGuire, 1994, reproduced from
composer's manuscript.

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music, which is based upon rhythms of the dance music of the British Isles, makes allowances for each player's own interpretation and decoration:

Since the style has evolved to interpret melody, then, I decided that all or the vast majority of the lines within "Steel Skies" as it turned out to be, would need to be highly melodic so that they could still use those styles. In other words, you couldn't write the sort of piece you might write for a standard second violin because if it isn't a good enough tune, then you don't feel like interpreting it. And what's more, you can't suddenly ask somebody to play two notes here, six bars rest, three notes here, six bars rest. You can make wonderful music out of that, but it's a different thing. You can't really play three notes in the middle of nothing in traditional style. I wanted to stay close enough to use those strengths, so that's why all the harmonies and everything are separate melodies. If you take "The Iron Bridge", for instance, the fun there is that each of us has got a tune which is ours, and we all learnt our tune and went off and interpreted it the way we wanted and, and then came together, and then the fun was listening very carefully to everybody.⁹⁴⁴

An extract from the published music for "The Iron Bridge" is given in Example 12.6. This piece is written for five parts in the treble clef, with the main tune in the upper part. The musicians are invited to devise their own arrangement an instrumental combinations based on the score. On Anderson's gramophone recording of the piece he uses concertina, Northumbrian pipes, two fiddles, viola, flute and mandolin.⁹⁴⁵

Karen Wilmhurst and Ron Shaw are both composing members of the ensemble The Cauld Blast Orchestra which originally came together for the 1991 stage play "Jock Tamson's Bairns". Both have produced work which uses the English concertina in a syncretic approach to Scottish music by combining jazz, rock and traditional elements. The ensemble's concertina player, Norman Chalmers, who was introduced in the last chapter, frequently plays with theatre companies in Scotland and has contributed much new music for the instrument.

One further area of concertina use which should be mentioned here is the American composer John Cage's use of the concertina in his work with Scottish traditional musicians.

In the late summer of 1984 he spent a day in Edinburgh listening to a group of Scottish musicians and before directing an "arrangement" using their music. The composer was particularly interested in the English concertina and insisted that the

⁹⁴⁴ "An Interview with Alistair Anderson" Concertina and Squeezebox 13 (1986) p.9.

⁹⁴⁵ Steel Skies (Topic Records 12TS427).

The Ironbridge

The musical score for 'The Ironbridge' (extract) is presented in two systems, each with five staves. The first system is marked 'A' and features a variety of rhythmic and melodic patterns, including triplets, trills, and slurs. The second system continues the piece with similar notation, including a '6r' marking and a '7' marking. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C).

Example 12.6 The Iron Bridge (extract).

Source: Composed by Alistair Anderson, c1982. Published by the Serpent Press (Witney, 1982) p.15. The piece is played nine times with different combinations from concertina, Northumbrian pipes, fiddles (2), viola, flute and mandolin in each.

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instrument be employed in this and in his subsequent “Scottish Circus” which was premiered in Glasgow in 1990.⁹⁴⁶ In these pieces, the musicians play separate selections of traditional music in their own time and in various locations within the performance space. According to Revill:

The effect of the performance is spacious; tonalities are superimposed non-intentionally as players weave in and out. It can be criticised, on the other hand, as essentially a parasitic work; the input from Cage was minimal - he simply “signed” it, not unlike a Duchamp readymade - and so dependent on a folk tradition with a lengthy lineage which, arguably, it denatures.⁹⁴⁷

Conclusion

Although the concertina continues to attract a number of enthusiastic players, it must be regarded as something of a minority interest. In traditional music, the principal site of its current use, the fortunes of the concertina are tied to the direction of the present post-revival phase. In Scottish music it is likely to remain marginalised as more overtly “national” instruments (i.e. the bagpipes and harp) dominate. Key individuals will continue to exert an important influence but unless there is some form of awakening of “grass roots” interest there is unlikely to be any substantial increase in adoption. Perhaps those players of the early revival who are now in middle-age will come to be discovered by younger generations and venerated as “old timers” in Ledang’s sense.

New instrument designs may be developed but it is unlikely that these will ever challenge the dominance of the English and Anglo-German types which currently dominate the market. The availability of inexpensive, but good quality instruments, will remain a problem unless a major manufacturer enters the scene. A good second-hand stock of instruments will continue for some time but the instruments will eventually “wear out” as the reeds can only tolerate a few re-tunings and other parts will fail. This will only contribute to the fact that demand outstrips supply.

The concertina will still be used in unusual musical settings (playing both old and new music) on account of its novelty or antiquarian interest and I would suggest that the symbolic, ideological and historical associations linked to the instrument will be more important than its musical qualities in determining the patterns of its future adoption. The theatre, for example, draws on these aspects and is an area in which one can expect to see the use of the concertina developed in future.

⁹⁴⁶ The concertina was played by the writer.

⁹⁴⁷ Revill, David *The Roaring Silence. John Cage: A Life* (London, 1992) pp.293-4.

Concluding Remarks

In my introductory chapter, I tabled a number of questions. Who played the concertina? What did they use it for? What kind of music did they play? How did they play? etc... In addressing these issues I have found that the history of usage of the concertina has not followed any single linear path but rather it has been adopted at different times by different musical groups for a whole variety of purposes. Once “invented” and in the public domain, the concertina soon found favour in settings and activities well away from the inventor’s original aim of creating a formal concert instrument and its adoption has never been limited to any self-contained group or associated with any simple defined repertory or musical style.

My evidence leads to the conclusion that, in the nineteenth century, this “novel” instrument was most readily adopted into institutions and settings which were themselves new and free from convention, such as the music hall, concertina bands, new forms of sacred music making and the expanding domestic market. It fared less well in the more formally structured world of “art” music where, after an initial period of novelty, it became reduced to occasional use as a curiosity or source of exotic tone colour. In the present century, adoption has been greatly influenced by the wide range of popular images (working class, seafaring, Victorian nostalgia etc...) which have become attached to the instrument. My findings confirm the suggestion in the introduction that musical instruments are not just the tools of the musician’s trade, selected for musical effectiveness, but are taken up to serve extra-musical functions also. The case study of the concertina shows that the inherent fundamental qualities of musical instruments do not alone dictate their usage; but rather they are, adopted, promoted, abandoned, rediscovered and revived for a combination of reasons and in many different ways.

I commenced this study as an enthusiast for the concertina family but came to develop a wider concern for the forces and processes behind the creation, use and abandonment of musical instruments in general. My work with the concertina has raised many questions regarding the fortunes of other “novel” instruments such as the accordion and saxophone. Similar studies of these instruments would, of course, tell different stories but taken together they would help build up a wider understanding of the adoption and abandonment of musical instruments in the modern period.

My work has led me to develop a wider fascination for the broader issues of popular music in Great Britain, and has brought an awareness of the constancy of musical change. As we have seen, the concertina has proved a good subject for the study of this aspect of music making. I have also been struck by the variety of music encountered at the popular level and have had to reassess my previous notions regarding musical boundaries. My introductory comments that the study of instruments in society requires a theoretical framework which recognised the richness, complexities and contradictions of the musical field have been justified.

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I have found that adoption of the concertina in Scotland has tended to reflect the situation in Britain as a whole, but with differences due to prevailing performance traditions (e.g. social dance, the piping tradition, etc...) and different rates of social and musical change. Although the use of the concertina in Scotland was never great in comparison to the level of usage of older, more traditional instruments (fiddle, bagpipes etc..) and other new instruments (accordion, melodeon etc..) it did play a significant part in the general “nationalisation” and modernisation of native traditions which occurred throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This study backs my view that, far from supplanting existing instruments and debasing native traditions, as some hold, the arrival of the concertina (and other novel musical inventions) should be seen as part of a broadening and enriching of music making in Scotland.

It is customary to make suggestions for further work in the area and here I offer a few ideas for consideration. The Victorian repertory of both “art” and popular music is worthy of more in-depth study. A vast amount of concertina music from the nineteenth century awaits cataloguing and discussion. Professional concertinists, such as Regondi and Blagrove, deserve attention on account of their integration into the wider musical community in the mid-nineteenth century. The music hall and the Salvation Army are principal sites of concertina use which are also rich in primary source material. The activities of the International Concertina Association are worthy of more detailed examination because of the variety of musical tastes the institution embraces and the fact that the group has encouraged interaction between older and younger musicians. The continuing popularity of the concertina in the folk music revival demands further extensive and intensive recording.

At the time of writing these concluding remarks, articles appeared in the national press reporting the impending sale of the concertina collection presently housed in the private museum of Neil Wayne in Belper, Derbyshire. These features lamented the lack of attention being paid to the concertina in 1994, the 150th. anniversary of Wheatstone’s 1844 consolidating patent for the instrument. Although only a modest contribution, it is hoped that this study adds to our understanding of the life and times of this fascinating and largely misunderstood family of musical instruments.

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