

COMMUNICATIONS

From Göran Rahm:

In his contribution to the 'Picture Gallery' in *PICA 2* (2005), pp. 65-67, Chris Algar presented two photographs of Salvation Army concertina bands. Subsequently, Les Branchett added one more photo of an Army band in 'A Note on Salvation Army Concertina Bands' in *PICA 3* (2006), pp. 27-32. After some analysis, both authors came to conclusions that, as far as I can tell, are not quite as self-evident as they claimed. Thus a few more words might be in place about the matter.

Although there likely was an increase in the use of English and Triumph (Crane) systems in the Salvation Army in general during the period from circa 1910 to the 1930s (as compared with the use of the Anglo-German system), and though this was probably reflected in the distribution of those models among the Army's bands, I would question Algar's speaking of this phenomenon in the following terms:

This change in instrumentation appears to have taken place around the end of World War I. Prior to that time, it seems that the Anglo was the concertina of choice, only to be supplanted by war's end by the English and Duet (p. 65).

I would also question Branchett's assertion that 'By the 1930s. . .the Triumph (Crane) and English systems were clearly the Army's instruments of choice . . .' (p. 27). And though the photos seem to confirm a predominance of English and Triumph systems, I am not sure that these few photos attest to a general change or shift within the Salvation Army Bands in particular or the Salvation Army as a whole.

The Salvation Army Bands: To begin with, and limiting the discussion to the photos of the bands in articles mentioned, I would say that any judgement about the 'change in instrumentation' requires photos of the same band at different moments in its history, though even as wide an interval of the said ten to twenty years is not likely to tell the whole story. Moreover, since Branchett himself notes that, while the Norwich Citadel Band (1907) was a real 'band', the 'Sergeants' (1931) represent nothing more than an occasional constellation, these two photos offer nothing in the way of real information concerning the 'change of instrumentation'.

In their heyday, there may have been as many as fifty Salvation Army Concertina bands, and only an investigation of the greater part of these would make the picture clear. I suspect that the small sample presented is not sufficient to sustain Branchett's conclusion that

In all, the evidence for the change from the Anglo system to the Crane and English systems is undeniable. Moreover, the shift coincides precisely with what was happening among the 'secular' concertina prize bands of the same period (p. 29).

But the similarity between Salvation Army and secular concertina bands may be somewhat illusory. The latter belonged to the same cultural milieu as the ever-popular brass bands. For the members of both these types (secular concertina and brass bands), the activity was a leisure-time interest, and we may assume that musical ambition—there were prizes to be won—and perhaps economic interests drove the musicians to seek to improve their performance and to acquire instruments that would help them do that. This is likely what led to the ‘change of instrumentation’ in the secular concertina bands.

On the other hand, it is plausible that the majority of Salvation Army bands (excepting, perhaps, the better-known and more durable ones at, for example, Bristol, Doncaster, and Plymouth) did not have the permanent and organized structure that characterized the secular bands. Nor, most likely, did they have the training programs, extensive activity with respect to arranging and publishing music, or models available on gramophone records that the secular concertina bands or Salvation Army brass bands enjoyed. (I know of neither specific musical arrangements for Salvation Army Concertina Bands nor ‘official’ recordings.)

Thus in comparing the Salvation Army and secular concertina bands, it is important to remember that the former did not consider musical activity as an end in itself, and that developments in the secular bands—changes in instrumentation, for instance—cannot automatically be assumed to have affected the Army bands. (I do not mean to say that higher musical ambition was completely lacking among Salvation Army concertina bands—it was certainly present among the Army’s brass bands—but I would assume that it was important for only a small minority of them.)

Another point of interest in comparing the Salvation Army concertina bands with their secular counterparts concerns the distribution of gender. It is my impression that, while the secular concertina and brass bands and the Salvation Army brass bands consisted predominantly of males, the Army concertina bands had a substantial number of female members, and that within the Salvation Army in general, these women most often played the Anglo concertina. This was still the situation as late as the 1960s, for instance, with respect to the Bristol band.

The Salvation Army as a whole: I would like to widen the context by looking at concertinas in the Salvation Army as a whole, even if my data is limited. The Army experienced its greatest expansion during the first decade of the twentieth century (the number of officers increased from—all numbers are approximate—2,700 in 1901 to 20,000 in 1908), and continued to expand during the 1920s (31,000 officers in 1927), levelling out a bit after that.

As with brass instruments, concertinas were likely provided to the members on some kind of loan, and were returned if the individual member did not use them any longer. As such, there had probably been an accumulation of Anglo-German instruments during the earlier decades, and it seems unlikely that these instruments simply vanished or were put to rest in order to up-date the instrumentation; rather, they probably stayed on duty ‘in the lines’, even during the less expansive later periods.

In addition, there can be no doubt that the concertina was often a second instrument for Army musicians, particularly so among the musical officers, for whom the instrument was primarily a useful (musical) accessory rather than an

instrument intended primarily for performance. As such, the model or system employed was of minor importance, and there was probably little pressure to change.

I can support this impression with observations that I made when I tried to look into the phenomenon of the concertina in Sweden in the 1980s (to be sure, fifty years after the time about which we're concerned). To my surprise, I noticed that among concertinas associated with the Salvation Army the majority—almost two-thirds—were of the Anglo-German type; next in terms of numbers was the English, followed by only a small percentage of Triumphs. In all, while English and Duet probably gained influence during the early twentieth century, they certainly did not drive the Anglo into extinction.

Finally, Branchett makes one other assertion that seems questionable: 'It is very doubtful that the brass instruments would have combined with the concertinas to form a single musical ensemble' (p. 29). Quite the contrary, I would say! The formation of unorthodox, mixed ensembles has always been common in the Salvation Army, necessitated by limited musical resources. Two pieces of evidence support the idea of mixed ensembles: (1) the often-found tuning of the concertina to 'high pitch' ('Old Philharmonic pitch", a' = 452.5) in order to bring them into line with the brass band tradition that used this (otherwise obsolete) pitch; and (2) the predominance of Anglo models in Ab/Eb in order to facilitate an accomodation with transposing brass instruments.

to which Les Branchett responds:

It is a pity that Göran Rahm relies upon unsubstantiated musings and assumptions instead of drawing upon the widest possible range of reliable resources and seeking the evidence that they provide. That is what I attempted to do when I commented upon Chris Algar's two photographs.

I had recourse to the following resources: family memorabilia (including material from the Training College concurrent with the Sergeants shown in Algar's Figure 2); my own extensive records and personal experience of fifty years of concertina-related activity within the Salvation Army; a wide selection of contemporary and current S.A. publications; and the valued, prompt, and precise assistance of the archivist at the S.A. International Heritage Center.

Moreover, rationality dictates that not all instruments in a band are always played together. Thus an orchestra that uses a cannon in its performance of the *1812 Overture* does not necessarily use it for each piece on the program. Or, closer to home, the most internationally known Swedish Salvationist must be the recently retired General John Larsson, who, though an exponent par excellence on the musical saw, does not produce it every time he hears other instrumentalists. I know! I travelled with him many times. Nor should we be fooled into thinking that concertinas in B flat solved all problems or that high pitch was obsolete by 1930, at which time it was still being used by military bands, brass bands, and many provincial orchestras.

If Göran had taken the trouble to analyse the fifty S.A. concertina bands to which he refers, he would have seen very clearly that some, like Doncaster,

actually commenced with English concertinas, whilst others changed to the English as their instrument of choice as soon as practicable. Göran also defies his own logic. Since he asserts that secular bands changed to English models 'to improve their performance', why refuse to accept that the S.A. did the same? In fact, that is exactly what Bram Thornett says happened. His forebears mastered a few keys on the Anglos, but, he says, the 'English type is more suited to our needs'.

Finally, if Göran would look carefully, he would find ample evidence for the changeover. Space limits me to cite just two further examples. First, the 1924 Salvation Army English Concertina Tutor contains several tunes 'specially arranged for Concertina Bands'. (Note that there was no longer a tutor for the Anglo.) Secondly, the Training College curriculum of 1930 includes 'English Concertina Lessons', but makes no provision for the Anglo. This is the kind of evidence at which Göran should have looked.

In the end, Göran uses too many vague, ambiguous phrases, and his comments are simply unworthy of serious attention. 'There likely was', 'this was probably', 'I suspect', and 'most likely' are all phrases that reduce Göran's comments to nothing more than unsubstantiated suppositions, rather than the results of serious research.



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