



International Concertina Association

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Record recently released: "BOUREE A SIX" by ROSBIF, features mostly French traditional dance tunes and two sets of Playford tunes played on Anglo Concertina, Melodeon, Hurdy Gurdy, French Bagpipes, Bassoon, 'Cello and Violin.

available from Alan Day, The Firs, Church Lane, Burstow, Surrey, RH6 9TG.

Price £5.00 + 50p P&P.

0293 782414

Book which mentions the ICA: "TELESCOPE OF TIME" the autobiography of A.C.TRENT
Published by Book Guild, Lewes, B.Sussex. £8.50 hardback. Review 'a book of high adventure, hard to put down.'

WHAT TO SEND WHERE: Items for the Newsletter, except diary, to me, Alan Dyer,
Items for the diary to Marian Janes, Events Secretary.
Subscriptions to John Entract, Treasurer,

This illustration appeared in the 'Radio Times' (and is reproduced here with their permission) as part of an advertisement for Clarks Shoes. I wonder if anyone would could think of a suitable caption . I'll be pleased to print any suitable contributions.

You may also like to consider the physical contortions required to play the instruments.



HISTORY OF THE CONCERTINA

- 1825 An old catalogue for Wheatstone states that the Symphonium was invented in this year. It was a mouth blown silver box measuring 2 3/4" in height and 2 1/2" in width. It was the forerunner of the English system in the management of keys and reeds but had no bellows.
- 1827 The same catalogue states that the English concertina was built first in this year but not patented (along with the symphonium) until 1829 (Pat. No. 5003). At this stage it was a 24 key hexagonal shape with the pads and part of the levers exposed. Wheatstone did not call his instrument the concertina at this stage.
- 1831 John and Charles Crabb joined Wheatstones. A Mr Nickolds joined Wheatstone in 1847 as a tool maker and he later established a business with John Crabb.
- 1832 George Jones was born on 29 February this year. A fairly detailed description of his life as a concertina maker is contained in an article in the East London Record published in 1980. It was written by Frank Butler a noted player, teacher of and writer on the English concertina and a grandson of Jones. (See Section 3)
- 1834 Carl Uhlig, in Germany, invented a diatonic concertina on 'konsertina'. This was known as the German concertina later to be called the Anglo-German or simply Anglo.
- 1835 The first 48 key system was made but it was single action, only playing on the press. This remains the basic design of the English system though the action now is double i.e. the same note sounding on the press and the draw.
- 1840 The duet concertina was invented. This is an extension of the English system with bass on the left hand side and treble on the right.
- 1844 A further patent. No. 10041 of 1844 was taken out for a rectangular 6" x 4 1/2" keys diatonic English concertina. the patent was for 4 models, one with 8 rows, one with 7 rows both chromatic. One with 4 rows chromatic and one with 4 rows, diatonic in Eb. Wheatstone referred to the instrument as being already known as the concertina. George Jones began work in the concertina business at the age of 12 with a Mr Jabez Austin who made reed for Wheatstones. Some years later Jones and Austin transferred to the firm of Joseph Scates in Frith Street, Soho. According to Jones' own memoires Austin did the woodwork while Jones made reeds.
- 1848 John Crabb left Wheatstone and started a partnership with Mr Nickolds. The firms of Nickolds Crabb and Co. of Woodbridge St., Clerkenwell claimed to be the inventors of the Anglo concertina. Charles Crabb remained with Wheatstone and later worked with Lachcnal. It is thought that Lachenal and Co. began making concertinas in their own right about this time.
- 1850 The concertina at this stage was almost exclusively played by the Victorian upper classes. The demand for the instrument from this sector is reflected in the cost which was 9 guineas, at a time when the craftsmen who made them were paid 15/- or \$1.30 in today's money. In Other words, an instrument cost about 6 week's wages. This ratio remains true in the U.K. today where a new or good second hand instrument can cost from £900 - £1,500 or \$1,500 - \$2,500.
- Music being played on the concertina was confined to established classical pieces as well as newly composed Victorian tunes. The 'professors' of the concertina as they were called included, Richard Blagrove, George Case, Guilio Regondi, A.B. Sedgewick and Joseph Scates. They wrote tutors, gave classes and performed at numerous pubic concerts and were apparently very much in demand. The instrument was becoming acceptable in classical circles and Berlioz and Rossini included it in their works.

Jabez Austin started manufacturing in his own right and was joined by George Jones who later used the date as the date upon which he started manufacturing himself. He did not stay long with Austin but left to work the music halls which were booming at the time. After an unknown period, Jones left the music halls to work for John Nickolds who had left Wheatstones and set up with John Crabb - see note on Crabb & Co. Jones must have been very restless at this stage of his life because he moved yet again back to his old employer Jabez Austin who at this stage was manufacturing at 3 Crombies Row on the north side of Commercial Road. The business prospered but Austin did not survive long being more than partial to a drop or two. He died in 1857 and Jones took over at the age of 25.

1860 The partnership of Nickolds and Crabb dissolved and John Crabb established his own business at Spring Street, Clerkenwell. It could be said that around this time John Crabb was approached to make concertinas for Charles Jeffries. Some old Jeffries type instruments are unstamped and probably date from this period. The "Jeffries" fret-work was supposed to have been originally designed by Crabb. Early Jeffries and Crabb are indistinguishable in looks with the same gold tooling on the bellows.

1861 George Jones prospered and his business expanded until a fire in 1861 burnt down his premises. Jones and his wife (whom he had married in 1852) and three daughters escaped the fire but Mrs Jones died of other causes within 12 months. Jones did not dally and married again on 20 June 1862 to Mary Matilda Walsh. In a further patent Wm. Wheatstone, brother of Charles, patented a 7 row chromatic version of the English concertina in 1861.

1862 Soon after the fire in his premises in 1861, George Jones moved to 2 Lucas Place and started production of Anglos after receiving a large order from Joseph Scates who had now moved to Dublin. This address presumably was changed to 350 Commercial Road where the firm occupied large premises comprising workshop and sales areas as well as living quarters. Jones was joined at this time by a Mr Shaller who had been a toolworker with Lachenals at their factory in Bedford Row, Bloomsbury. They also began manufacturing harmoniums which sold for 5 guineas each. The working man's wage at this time was £1 per week so the market was obviously the better off class.

1863 Wheatstone records show sales of Duets as follows:
Jan, 29th - Mr Forsyth, Duet 15/-
May 16th - Mr Smith, Duet £1.10
Aug. 26 - Mr Curling, 2 Mahog. Duets £1-12.0
Dec. 10th - Mr Boncher, Mahog. Duet 12/-

English Concertinas sold for about 5-10 guineas at this time.

1875 The concertina had now become so popular that its appeal spread from the upper classes to the other social orders. Manufacturers - mainly Wheatstone and Lachenal - were producing many instruments in various different models in the range from piccolo, soprano, treble, tenor treble baritone, bass and contrabass. Concertina bands became popular in working class districts in Yorkshire, Lancashire and the Midlands and it would appear that because of its broad appeal to the common people the concertina lost favour with the upper classes and, as a result, its position as an instrument in classical ensembles.

A further, technical, factor was that between 1830 and 1930 there were many changes in the standard pitch used by orchestras. The concertina being a fixed pitch instrument could not, of course, adapt easily to these changes. With different orchestras a player would need instruments in different tunings to be in proper pitch. It would have been impractical for the whole orchestra to tune to the concertina and impossible if a piano was present.

The anglo concertina had become popular in the 1860s and 1870s, most of them being made in Germany. The London makers began producing these in this period to meet the demand which existed probably to a great extent in traditional areas but also in the music hall. The Anglo has a more earthy sound and would be more suited to rhythmic traditional and popular tunes.

1870 Jones published a tutor for the Anglo, which was the only one available at the time. It continued to be published by Wheatstones after Jones ceased business and was available until 1960.

1884 A J.H. McCann of Plymouth applied for, and got, a patent for a chromatic duet of 39-58 keys, based on the original Wheatstone design. This is now one of the basic duet systems, the others being the Crane and Jeffries.

A patent for what was called the "Perfect" Anglo was taken out by George Jones in this year. At the time he listed more than fifty variants of the Anglo and eleven different styles of English in addition to piccolo, tenor, baritone and bass models.

The Jones concertinas have broader steel reeds than the other makes and were advertised as "never wearing out". Instruments made for the Salvation Army which was a major customer have S.A. described on the end plates.

They also were in the same pitch as the Army's bass instruments which was probably Bb/F old pitch. Lachenal later made concertinas for the Salvation Army and these also have S.A. shown on the left hand side.

1891 At this time Crabb moved to new premises at 158 Liverpool Road, Islington, where the firm remains today. The firm of C. Jeffries moved to 23 Praed Street, Paddington.

1889 The firm of George Jones & Sons closed a few years after Jones' retirement in this year. He had left the business to his two remaining sons but they were not successful and Jones had to come out of retirement to sell off and settle with creditors.

1900 John Crabb died and his son Henry took over and continued the business for the next 22 years, working later on with his own son Henry who eventually succeeded him in 1930.

1914 The popularity of the concertina, both the classical English system and the Anglo, was at its highest from 1870 to before World War I. Wheatstone's had produced 25,000 concertinas up to 1910 and Lachenal's a staggering 200,000. The latter aimed at mass producing a whole range of cheaper instruments, the cheapest of which could have cost £2, Wheatstone catered still for the quality market and its prices were reflected accordingly. In addition to the high level of production of quality concertinas by two main producers thousands more were produced by smaller makers such as Jones, Jeffries, Ebbelwhite, Case, Crabb, Metzler, Shakespeare and so on.

Despite this, the London trade suffered severe competition from cheap Anglo concertinas from Germany as well as imports of cheap melodeons and accordions.

After the first World War interest in the instrument declined sharply and by 1930 most of the smaller manufacturers had ceased production. These would include Jones, Jeffries, Shakespeare and Ebblewhite. The decline could be attributed to the popularity of the accordion and also the advent of the radio and gramophone.

1919 George Jones died at the age of 87 and none of his direct descendants are in the trade. However a grandson Frank Butler is a noted player and teacher of the English concertina. He has published a good tutor which is readily available - it is noted in section 4 - List of Tutors.

1936 Competition between Lachenal and Wheatstone intensified especially as the market was dwindling. The accordion was now much more popular than the concertina. Both firms reduced staff and moved to smaller premises. Lachenal tried to compete with the accordion, producing the 'accordeaphone' a cross between the English concertina and the three reeds per note of the accordion. It was a complete and expensive failure. Lachenal could not keep going and was forced to close in 1936. Most of the tools and equipment were bought by Wheatstones to avoid them falling into other hands. According to the late Tommy Williams, one of the last workers at Lachenal, the Salvation Army repairs and new orders were given to Crabb & Son and Wheatstone took the rest. It was the end of nearly 100 years of concertina making by Lachenal & Co.

1950 While Wheatstones survived after Lachenals closed they did so mainly on repairs and the sale of secondhand instruments. They were forced to move from their Charing Cross premises after 1936 and set up in Ives Street, Chelsea. After World War Two they moved to Duncan Street, Islington where they shared premises with

Lafleur - a flute maker. The number of craftsmen employed dwindled and as orders dried up the company was forced in the early 1950s to sell out to Boosey & Hawkes a firm of wholesalers and importers of musical Instruments. Crabb and Sons remained as the only makers and survived on repairs, second hand sales and on export trade.

1951 The International Concertina Association was formed in this year being sponsored by K.V. Chidley a director of Wheatstones and Desmond Hart of Accordeon World magazine. Tommy Williams the aforementioned ex-worker with Lachenal was also one of the main instigators. The Association holds regular monthly meetings in London at which members perform singly or in groups. The most popular model is the English with some duets and anglos being played. The active members who would be largely London based have a repertoire of mainly classical music and hold annual competitions.

Whilst it is somewhat conservative in its musical outlook the ICA has performed a valuable function and provides communication to concertina players worldwide by means of a newsletter published every month.

1970 The concertina enjoyed a revival since the 1960s which has been allied to the popularity of folk music in general. Good quality second-hand instruments were much in demand and, of course, Crabb and Sons continued alone producing quality instruments.

Mid 1970s In addition to Crabb two other makers of quality began manufacturing concertinas viz C & R Dipper and Steve Dickinson who owns the Wheatstone name. The demand for good instruments is hopefully sufficient to keep these firms going, the problem is the slowness of production with waiting lists of a year or two and more and the cost. A new Crabb, Dipper or Dickinson Wheatstone will now cost about £1,500 after taxes.