



# International Concertina Association

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## CONCERTINAS FOR SALE

Four CONCERTINAS, the property of HARRY MINTING will be offered for sale by auction on 15th December, 1988 (viewing 13th Dec.) by

PHILLIPS, SON & NEALE  
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1. Concertina by C.Wheatstone. Open pallet model. 1829, 24 ivory keys, 4 fold green leather bellows, original fitted wooden case.
2. Concerting by C.Wheatstone. No. 112, 23 ivory keys. 1836. 4 fold green leather bellows and thumb straps. Original fitted wooden case.
3. Symphonium by C.Wheatstone, 24 keys. 2 3/4" x 2 1/2". Original case.
4. Concertina by C.Wheatstone. No. 24800, 1910. 56 keys, 7fold bellows, 6 sides, Ebony ends. "Clarinet model" tuned in Bb, C540. Single action. Original wooden case.

That blasted Meloconcertinaphone again ...

Having just read Douglas Rogers' absorbing article on whether or not Giulio Regondi played the Melophone on his continental tour of 1840-41, I hope I may be permitted to throw a few more irons in the fire.

I have spent some time trying to sort out whether Regondi played Melophone or Concertina on that tour, and although the many sources on the subject are infuriatingly contradictory, I think the balance is in favour of our own Concertina. This may admittedly be the product of wishful thinking and the absence of any International Melophone Association to counter my enthusiasm, but here are a few points to consider.

The 1830's and '40's saw a great many developments in the Free Reed instrument field, and the flood of new instruments makes accurate identification of each one very tricky, especially as contemporary descriptions tend to be vague and general - for instance, a reviewer in 1831 described the new Accordion as being 'not unlike a small tea-caddy in appearance' and the Symphonium as 'resembling a silver snuff-box, such as may be carried in the waistcoat pocket .' Entertaining descriptions, but not very helpful!

Regondi was not the only youthful guitar virtuoso to explore the possibilities of free-reed bellows instruments - his friend and contemporary, Leonhard Schulz, gave a guitar recital in Vienna at around the same time accompanied by his brother on the 'Physharmonika'.

Regondi and Schulz appear to have met in London in the 1830's. When Regondi performed in Vienna in 1841 he was invited to submit his lithographed portrait and a couple of handwritten pieces of music to a collection made by the artistic patron Baron Wimpffen. The two pieces, both bearing Regondi's signature and the curiously multilingual subscript 'Giulio Regondi, Vienne, 9th February 1841' are an Andante by his friend Schulz for the guitar - a diplomatic gesture this, as Schulz was Viennese himself - and, lo 'and behold, a piece entitled 'Pour Melophon.' All Regondi's reviewers on that tour refer to the instrument as a 'Melophon' and it would be comfortable to assume that this settles the argument.

However, I maintain that, for whatever reason, the German speaking public used the name Melophon for Wheatstone's concertina, and that Regondi's title for his musical autograph was deferential to this custom. I have scoured the tour reviews for descriptive phrases, and everything points to a concertina rather than a melophone. Here are some examples (my translation):-

"... the melophone is actually just a 'hand-harmonica' [i.e. an accordion] refined to its highest potential, whose range covers some three-and-a-half octaves ...'

At another concert '... the instrument is in fact a very remarkable improvement on the so-called 'hand harmonica', at any rate it closely resembles the latter in tonal character and appears, moreover, to be constructed in the same way; a duplicated keyboard plays the notes on expanding ... the wind-bellows... often we believed we were hearing ... a clarinet ...' The vagueness of the description is explained when the reviewer points out that 'we have unfortunately not been able to examine the instrument personally, and must therefore content ourselves with the above observations.' A Viennese reviewer comments that 'The melophone is really just an improved accordion, raised to a higher plane ... in its newly-restructured form it encompasses more than three octaves, and combines the musical tones of the clarinet, the oboe and the flute.'

It seems to me that these are descriptions of a concertina and not of a melophone. It is worth hearing in mind that the 'Musical World' review of Regondi playing the concertina in 1837 also referred to the tonal similarity to the woodwind instruments - 'the lower tones are similar to the chalumeau of the clarinet, the middle ones like the sweetest on the oboe, and the upper part partakes of the silvery notes of the flute.' Later reviews make the same point. The reference to a 'duplicated keyboard' surely refers to the Wheatstone fingering system for the English concertina, visually identical on either end.

The one observation that would settle the argument - a reference to the shape of the instrument - is tantalisingly missing from any of these reviews.

Having smugly convinced myself of the Tightness of my case, I must admit to choking on my Frosties when I read of the 'melophonic guitar'. This certainly throws a spanner into the works. I have invented all sorts of theories to explain it away, but really I can only leave it to you, gentle readers, to puzzle it all out for yourselves.

One parting shot. I have before me a biographical sketch of Regondi from an aged German dictionary of musical history, in which the following sketch appears (my translation):- '... his rare virtuosity and expressive, inspired playing on the eight stringed Guitar and the Melophone (Concertina) ere admired... in concert reviews. Something to chew on there, I think. In the meantime, I think somebody ought to have a look in the dark recesses of the Tunbridge Wells railway station left luggage office.

Steve Desmond  
Durham, July 1988

HARRY SCURFIELD AT THE ICA - SATURDAY 19 JUNE 1938

The rain dripped steadily down on a dismal evening outside 22IB Baker Street. I was reading my ICA newsletter while Holmes embroidered variations on Regondi using his 1872 Wheatstone Aeola, which had played such an unexpected and crucial part in the foiling of the Giant Accordion Conspiracy - a tale for which the world is regrettably not yet ready.

Holmes suddenly broke off his playing and looked hard in my direction. "What would you say were the main qualities of the Anglo, Watson?"

I rummaged mentally for the right words. "It's really an instrument for folk music playing. Not my favourite, but I dare say it's all right in its place. Not very versatile though."

"So if I told you about an Anglo player who started off a set with the 4 Hand Reel, would you normally attend?"

"Heavens, Holmes, I'm too old to be capering around Morris Dancing at my time of life".

"But you would be wrong, Watson. I daresay it would surprise you to learn that I have recently attended an ICA meeting where the Anglo played by far the predominant role, and the main performer showed himself equally proficient not only with folk music, such as the tune I mentioned, but also with Cajun music, German Marches, Jazz, Blues, the Beatles and Yiddish socialist songs from New York".

"You astound me Holmes] I was not aware that you regularly went to ICA meetings."

"Hush, Watson. Many people are unaware that I am usually to be found at these events - naturally, having assumed some effective disguise, sufficient to elude discovery. On this occasion I was present to observe one Harry Scurfield, of Bradford. A gentleman of great versatility, who has been known to play in several bands in the North of England and who can perform equally upon the tuba as on the Anglo concertina. I confess that before I heard him I was not aware myself that the Anglo could lend itself so mellifluously to 'Sweet Georgia Brown' and 'Buddy Can You Spare A Dime?'. And his stories of Kazoo bands and tale of the unfortunate player who was compelled to walk nine miles at dead of night, carrying his concertina and nailed securely into a tin bath as a fancy dress costume, made me almost regret the pampered and luxurious life that awaits the modern concertina player. In fine, I have had to revise my opinion of the Anglo's potential. Perhaps the late lamented Professor Moriarty was right to devote so much of the reputable portion of his life to mastering its finer points".

"And did you form any deductions from the meeting you attended?"

Holmes dug our supply of tobacco out of the Persian slipper and illuminated his hookah before replying, with a lowered brow.

"I observed that ICA members are less familiar with the words of the Internationale than were their ancestors. I deduce a general decrease in moral fibre. I learned also that other Anglo players can surprise the unwary with the range of their repertoire and general technique upon the instrument. Mr Digby and Mr Davies impressed me, although I noted the absence of Mr Trimming. These are deep waters, Watson. But in truth, the general standard of playing was uniformly commendable. I heard with pleasure Ms Bishop's Duet piece and Mr Desmond's rendering of 'The Bells'."

"So you would recommend a visit to the next ICA meeting?"

"I fear, Watson, that I see your name prominently listed on the cover of the Newsletter you are reading as having not paid your subscription. I deduce that you might be lynched were you to go without remedying the situation."

THE DIATONION (perhaps).

by Hugh Blake.

In his concertina system, Brian Hayden has reformed same-tone squeeze-boxing. I think that change-tone instruments also need reform, and am getting the reeds to build a prototype change-tone diatonic instrument, the keyboard of which will be as Fig. 1. If it works it will be called a Diatonion, being two-voice with accordion sound (a sort of reformed bandoneon or enlightened melodeon) but it could just as well be single-voice and then it would be a Diatina, or sort of reformed Anglo concertina. I thank Brian for helpful exchange of ideas.

"Improving the melodeon" in English Dance & Song Sept/Oct 1987 described the limitations of my melodeon, although change-tone has the unbeatable advantage over same-tone of having two keyboards, one on push and one on pull, for the size and price of one. But accidentals are missing and push-pull patterns are not consistent from octave to octave, among other frustrations. The article first suggested 6 rows FCGDAE to get all accidentals naturally, but ended by proposing 5 rows CGDAE with consistent "extended" octaves in 5 buttons Doh-Doh.

Meanwhile John Kirkpatrick put me in touch with Pat Robson, to whom I am greatly indebted for reawakening my interest in the bandoneon. I was born in Argentina and confirm Pat's view that the bandoneon is the king of boxes when in the hands of a professional tango virtuoso. Fig. 2 however shows why it has never caught on among musically literate amateurs, although playing-by-numbers allowed it to be "the coal-miner's piano" in Germany: its gradually-added-on note arrangement is now a mental shambles, whether or not the fingers can manage. Still, its notes 1-14 more or less preserve the brilliant change-tone idea of 150 years ago, i.e. the alternating blow-suck diatonic major scales used also in mouth-organs, melodeons, Anglos and Chemnit2ers. For my own playing benefit, I just want to make the most of that original idea.

There's more to instrumental ease than keyboard layout; for example, melodeons are clumsy to operate. Fig- 3 is my 65-button bandoneon: note the comfortable arm position, with the weight partly taken by the neck-strap whether you want to sit or stand, and with the hands symmetrically placed although somewhat cramped by the strap arrangement (as with the Anglo) and the strong thumbs are largely wasted. Methought: noting that the bandoneon has 6 rows, why not a 6-row "melodeon" layout after all and with snappy button action, but compact and comfortable like a bandoneon? I realise now that the 5-button octave idea made the keyboard too long, so by arranging Doh-Doh in 4 buttons as Fig. 1 (exactly like bandoneon buttons 5-8 but now always finding Lah in adjoining rows) we get a button layout nearly as compact as on a bandoneon. The linked buttons mean that the prototype Diatonion will have 70 pallets/reedsets and so it can be about the same 240 x 220mm size as the standard 71-button/pallet bandoneon.

Hand and finger position: fingers want to swing freely, not poke, and cross under/over each other, not too restricted by straps. My Diatonion mock-up has a neck-strap, has straps more round the wrist than the back of the hand, and uses the thumb to anchor and help push. The symmetry of hands will be for more than comfort: the bass will be able to do as much as the treble, as on the Anglo, not just oom-cha. There will be air buttons both sides, for good spare-air control.

These ideas can only be tested by making and playing the prototype. Obviously it can be push-pulled like an Anglo or melodeon, but note in Fig. 1 that both the all-pull and all-push major scales share the same track, so that when you want smooth same-tone passages or grace-notes they are consistently available via adjoining rows. Chords are in consistent positions for the keys CGDA and all notes are available on both push and pull, including complete semitone runs.

If any craftsperson will consider tendering to make the prototype - to save me having to do so - please get in touch: Hugh Blake, 10 Ninetree Hill, Kingsdown, Bristol BS1 3SG (0272-40744). The full-size working drawings are proceeding nicely; then I must mock-up a section of the action.

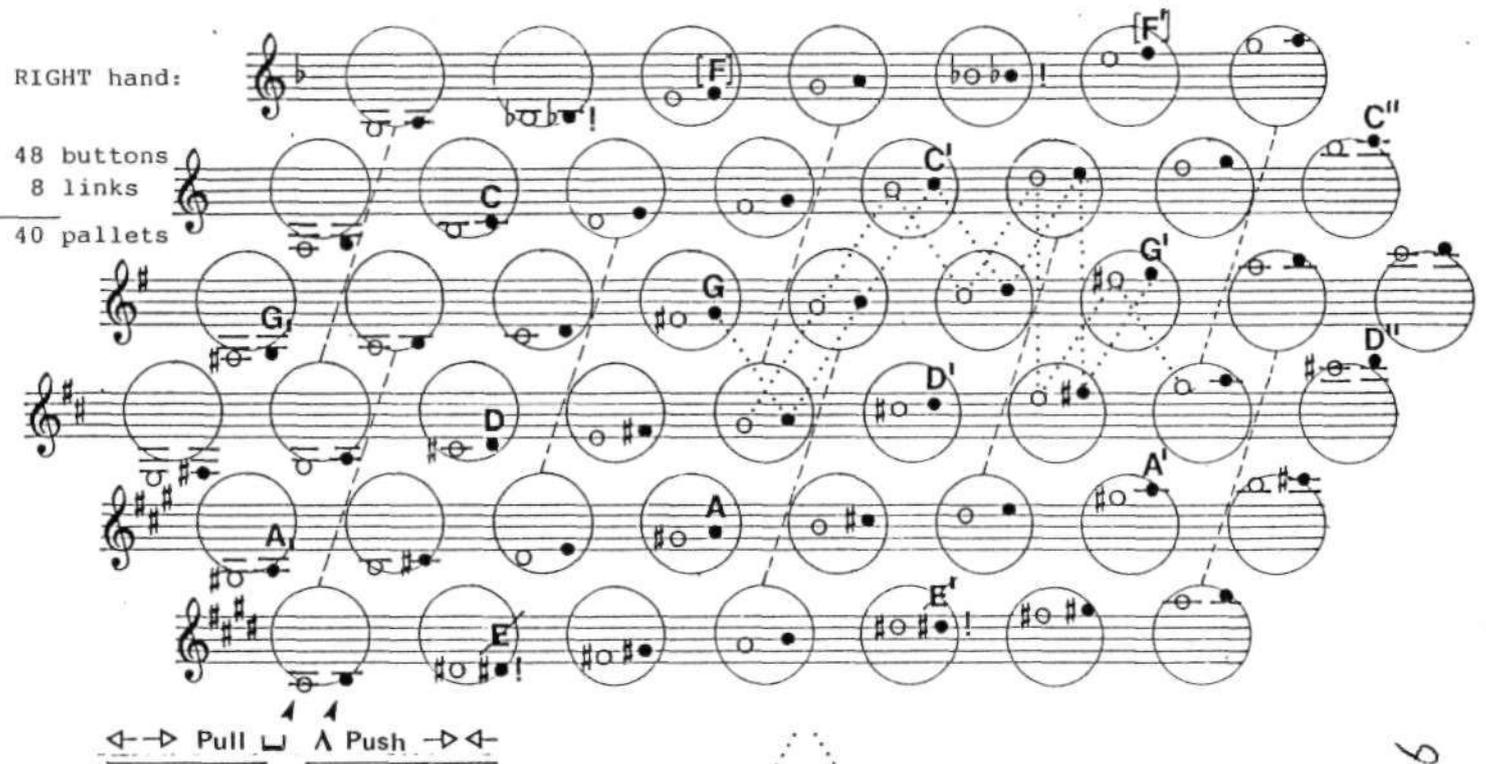
Figure 1.

Hugh Blake, Sept. 1988.

DIATONION

= reformed diatonic accordion.

Keyboard layout of prototype;  
button spacing is to scale,  
full-size.

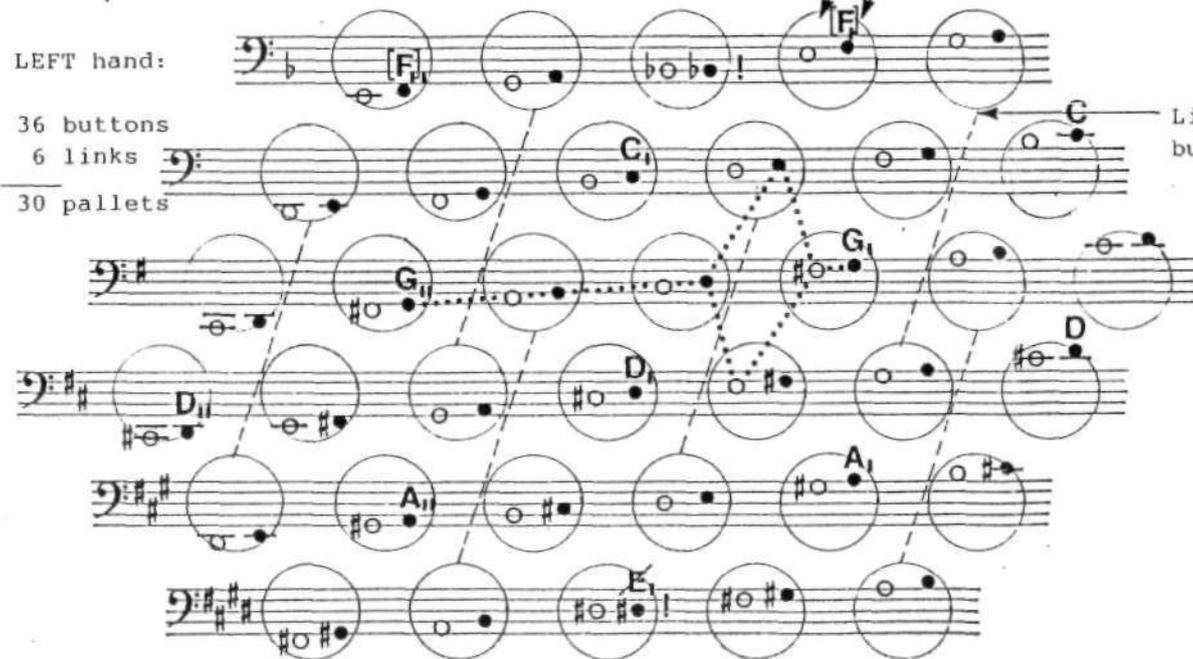


LEFT hand:

36 buttons

6 links

30 pallets



= tracks of same-tone major scales.

..... = track of change-tone major scale.

FREE OF PATENT.

Figure 2.

STANDARD BANDONEON

71 buttons and pallets.

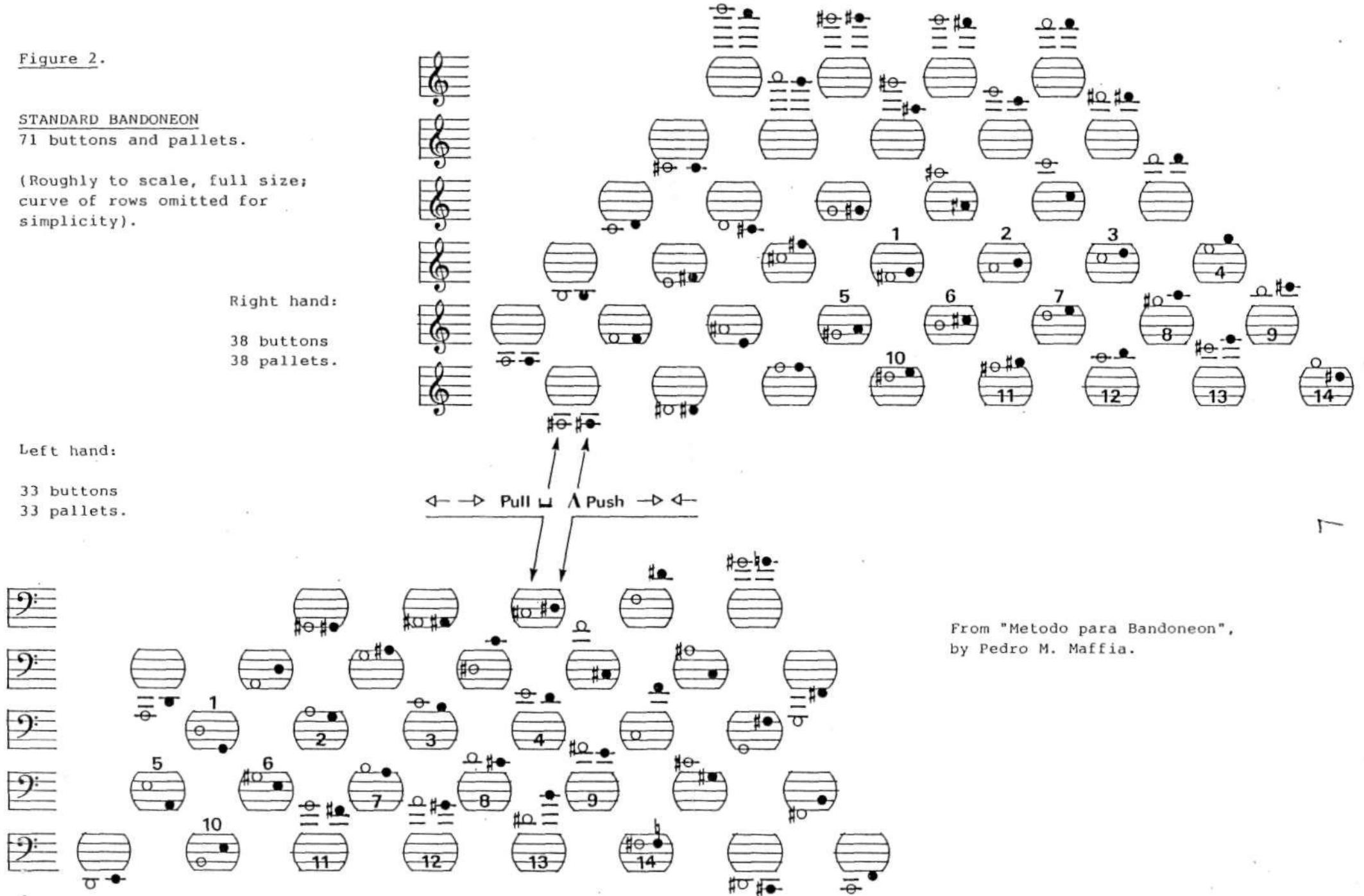
(Roughly to scale, full size;  
curve of rows omitted for  
simplicity).

Right hand:

38 buttons  
38 pallets.

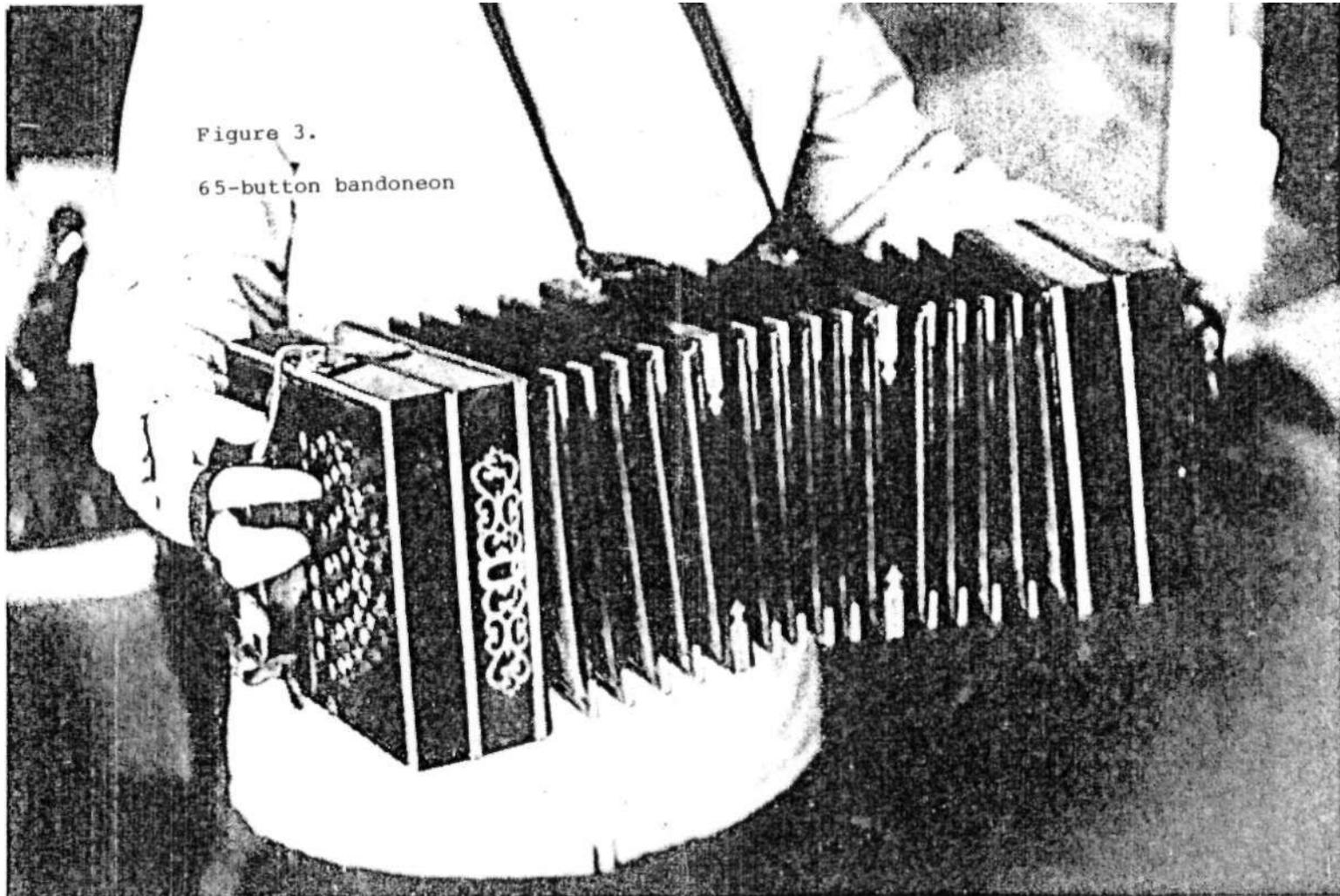
Left hand:

33 buttons  
33 pallets.



From "Metodo para Bandoneon",  
by Pedro M. Maffia.

Figure 3.  
65-button bandoneon



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## D I A R Y

OCTOBER 88

Sunday 9th ICA Meeting 2p.m. The Bloomsbury Concertina Band will perform.  
Plus usual group and individual playing.  
At: Museum of Flowers, Tredescant Courch, East end of Lambeth Bridge, SE1.

NOVEMBER 88

Friday 11th DOUGLAS ROGERS will take part in a concertina workshop .  
St. Audrie's Bay Holiday Club, West Quantoxhead, nr Minehead, Somerset.  
More Information from Douglas Rogers, 01 578 0690

Sun. 13th Playing day at Butleigh Court Tower, nr. Taunton, led by Douglas Rogers.  
He will give an illustrated talk and lead a band session. (Tim Laycock  
apologises that he will not be able to be there as he will be touring  
in Africa with Dave Townsend and the Mellstock Band.)  
Details from Jenny Cox, 26 Hill Grove, Henleaze, Bristol BS9 4RJ.  
Tel: (0272) 629931.

Sat 26th DOUGLAS ROGERS will give a recital of music for Concertina and Guitar,  
Music by Regondi, Warren, Molique . + piano acc.  
At the GUILDHALL THEATRE, DERBY. 7.30 pm.

December 1988

Sat. 10th ICA Christmas Social, 1.00-7.00 pm, Working Men's College, Crowdale  
Road, London NW1. Admision £1.00. Usual oppourtunities for solo and  
ensemble playing, and the Butleigh Court Concertina Band will be  
travelling to London especially to entertain us at about 3.00 pm.

January 1989

Sun. 8th WCCP New Year Party at Butleigh Court Towers. Details Jenny Cox,  
see Nov. 13th entry for her address.

February 1989

Sun. 5th WCCP Playing day at Freshford. Details Jenny Cox.

Sat. 11th ICA AGM, 2.30 pm at the Working Men's College, Crowndale Road,  
London NW1. The Events Secretary will definitely be resigning,  
so applications for this post will be warmly received.

March 1989

17th-19th Sixth Annual Halsway Weekend, organised by the West Country  
Concertina Players. It will be led by Dave Townsend, with  
Andy Turner on Anglo and Jean Megly on Crane Duet. Further  
publicity to follow. All enquiries and bookings to Jenny Cox,  
26 Hill Grove, Henleaze, Bristol BS9 4RJ, tel. (0272) 629931.

June 89

Sat 3rd ICA Meeting DICK MILES

### Regular events

South Wales Concertina Players meet on the last Monday of every month at  
Marcus Music, Newport, Gwent.

All West Country Concertina Players's Freshford meetings are 12.00 noon to  
6.00 pm. Tea and coffee will be available, but bring your own food. For full  
details of all WCCP events, phone Jenny Cox on 0272 629931.

English concertina classes at the Working Men's College, Crowndale Road  
London, NW1. Wednesday evenings during term time. Teacher DOUGLAS ROGERS  
Telephone 01 573 0690