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**PAPERS OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONCERTINA  
ASSOCIATION**

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Editor: Allan Atlas  
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Center for the Study of  
Free-Reed Instruments  
The Graduate Center/CUNY  
365 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10016  
USA

International Concertina  
Association  
17 Nursery Road  
Bishops Stortford  
Herts  
CM23 3HJ  
UK

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## **Sandra Kerr's English Concertina Workshops at the Australian National Folk Festivals, 2000 and 2003**

JILL STUBINGTON

The Australian National Folk Festival takes place every year in Canberra over the Easter weekend. During the week prior to the Festival, a series of master classes is offered. Instructional classes for particular instruments or voices are held in the mornings, and the afternoons are devoted more generally to repertoire. In 2000 and 2003, the English musician Sandra Kerr offered classes in English concertina. Fifteen of us turned up for her classes in 2000. Three of us had played together in the Australian Concertina Band, later called Reeds in Harmony,<sup>1</sup> a Sydney band currently in recess. Of the other twelve a few had played in bush bands,<sup>2</sup> but most played concertina singly for their own enjoyment and had little experience of playing with other musicians. A couple played Anglo concertina, and Sandra welcomed them to the group also. The musical experience and level of playing ability varied widely through the group: from almost complete beginners to players with some degree of fluency; music reading ability was similarly diverse.

We had a concentrated three - hour class every morning for the three days, and in the afternoon went to repertoire or choral groups as we chose. The morning sessions were a joy. Sandra talked to us, instructed us, played with us, and listened to what we said and the way we played. We learnt new repertoire and new techniques and refined our thinking about what we were actually doing and the contexts in which we played. Sandra's extensive musical experience and her intelligent and thoroughly musical approach to what we were doing ensured that it was an immensely rewarding experience for us, so rewarding, that the 2003 class had an almost identical class list to the 2000 class — everyone wanted to come back for more.<sup>3</sup> As an ethnomusicologist I was interested in following some of the ideas that Sandra briefly touched upon in class a little more deeply, and Sandra kindly agreed that I could record an interview with her for this purpose. Figure 1 is a photograph of the 2000 class enjoying a joke, and indicates the convivial atmosphere in which the classes were conducted.



Fig. 1. English concertina workshop at the Australian National Folk Festival 2000. Sandra Kerr is second from the left in the front row; Jill Stubington is third from the right in the back row.

British migration to Australia was extensive during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and continues even today. Much of what is called 'bush music' or 'folk music' in Australia is derived from the music of those British immigrants. In the last sixty or so years, however, there has been considerable migration from Australia back to Britain, and temporary visits, a few years in duration, are now common in both directions. Against this background, then, the workshops of 2000 and 2003 and the interview provide a focus through which some contemporary issues in Australian folk music can be examined.

The first issue to consider might be the available evidence concerning the concertina's early presence in Australia and the information that we can access about the way it was used. A definitive history of the concertina in Australia is still some way off, though materials for such a study are beginning to appear and sources are becoming more available. The richest sources would be the recordings and information gathered by individuals known in Australia as 'collectors'. This term is used to refer to those people who visit and make sound recordings of

senior musicians, especially those living in country towns, hence the term 'bush music'. In Australia, this process began in the 1950s. Often the musicians contacted are no longer active performers. Sound recordings are made of their songs and dance tunes, and information is gathered about the musicians' lives, especially where and from whom they had learnt their material and where and how they used to perform it. Many, if not most, of these collectors operated and still operate outside academic institutions. Their publications contain transcriptions of songs and dance tunes and also include notes about the performer contacted. The overriding purpose of these publications is to keep the repertoire alive: to allow other people to learn and perform it. The theoretical framework in which they worked is not usually examined, but a passionate personal conviction about the value of this music is usually present. The term collector does not acknowledge that many people so named are seasoned and skilful performers, and many are now also published academics. In some quarters the term is avoided because it is considered to be somewhat condescending. I will use it here because it is still the commonly-used descriptor, but I do not intend it to carry pejorative overtones.

The earliest and most well-regarded of these collectors is John Meredith, who published two volumes about the people he contacted and their music,<sup>4</sup> and some of whose recordings have recently been released in a two-CD set.<sup>5</sup> There are many other collectors, and some of them gave concise accounts of their activities at a forum at the University of New South Wales in 1987.<sup>6</sup> Information gathered by the collectors relates mostly to singing and dancing in the first half of the twentieth century, with some of these musicians being able to discuss earlier practices of which they were aware. First-hand nineteenth-century sources are rare, but a general picture of musical practices from that period is evolving.

More recent sources include *The Concertina Magazine (Australia)* published during the 1980s, which, however, was concerned primarily with the instrument itself, as opposed to the way it was used. In October 2005 an inquiry to the 'ConcertinaDownUnder' mailing list drew out a lively discussion about recordings of the concertina being played in Australia. Most of the recordings discussed were privately held, and some were recordings which were known to have existed at one time, but whose present whereabouts and indeed existence were unknown. The twenty or more emails that were part of the discussion are full of interesting details (especially to an Australian) about who played what, when, and where. Knowledgeable people such as Bob Bolton, whose long association with bush music and the people

involved in it has given him a wealth of knowledge, and experienced collectors such as Maria Zann Schuster, who has worked with bush musicians in southeast Queensland, contributed to these exchanges. As for internet sources on the history of the Australian concertina, there is Warren Fahey's website, [www.warrenfahey.com](http://www.warrenfahey.com), which has an extended discussion about the instrument.

The concertina is thought to have been popular in Australia during the nineteenth century, especially among itinerant workers. Its convenient size and versatility are usually cited in explanation of this popularity. Twenty years ago, when I was looking for an instrument to learn which would enable me to participate in 'folk' groups, I was told that the Anglo concertina was more commonly used than the English in nineteenth-century Australia. It was described to me as a diatonic instrument which could play easily in two keys. Its bellows action, which gives different notes on the pull and push directions, was thought to give the instrument a particularly marked rhythm because of the tiny pause while the direction of the bellows was changed. The bounce and emphasis which this gave to the rhythm, I was told, made it a very suitable instrument to play for dancing. As Graham Seal and Rob Willis put it in *Verandah Music: Roots of Australian Tradition*: 'Early concertinas used at bush dances were usually the "Anglo" style... small, portable and loud'.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, the English concertina was described to me as chromatic, with a single button producing the same note irrespective of the direction of the bellows. This was thought to allow the player to decide on the phrasing without being constrained by the need to change the direction of the bellows. I bought an English system New Model Lachenal, whose portability seemed very attractive to someone whose first instrument was piano. Playing it now, I realize that, with some care, phrases can be sustained through a change in the direction of the bellows, and I now wonder whether the Anglo is quite as deterministic of articulation as I was told.

Warren Fahey, an energetic and highly productive Australian collector and folklorist, suggests that both systems were in use: 'Both English and Anglo-German concertinas were extremely popular in nineteenth-century Australia as they were light, relatively affordable, portable and were ideal for dance music and song accompaniment',<sup>8</sup> although he also notes that the Australian singing tradition was mainly unaccompanied. Bob Bolton makes a typically sensible comment on the 'ConcertinaDownUnder' mailing list: 'All the old Bush Music Club LPs (made between 1958 and 1966) include Jamie Carlin playing very

nice, traditional-sounding, concertina...even if he is producing it on the less-appropriate English System',<sup>9</sup> His observation keeps the traditional practice in mind, while acknowledging that it is the musical result which is important.

Sandra Kerr's account of her search for an appropriate repertoire for the English concertina brought up many issues of relevance for Australian musicians. In her interview with me in 2003, Sandra notes that the concertina was not her first instrument. She sang and played guitar, dulcimer, and whistle before picking up the concertina in the early 1970s. She says that there was a great deal of Irish music being played in London at that time, but no tradition of playing English concertina. She tried to play Irish tunes on her English concertina, and was in contact with Tom McCarthy, about whom she observes: 'he was from County Clare, West Clare, where all the best concertinas come from in Ireland...Tom was so generous with his time and his repertoire and skill and so on and just a delightful man'.<sup>10</sup> Attempting to play tunes from *O'Neill's 1001* tune book,<sup>11</sup> and with Tom McCarthy's help, she found that although she could play the Irish tunes on the English concertina they never really sounded as she felt they ought to. She says '[I] learnt a lot of tunes, but honestly they never worked for me on the English concertina, and I think to this day, I don't realize how they didn't work'. She found that the Scots tunes 'felt more comfortable on the English concertina,' but she responded particularly well to the Northumbrian tunes, introduced to her by a partner who was a Northumbrian piper, Ron Elliott. The seminal work of Alistair Anderson playing Northumbrian tunes on the English concertina was also an influence here. She says of that repertoire: 'I loved it. I thought it was so distinctive, so very special, because it just has intervals in it and arrangements of notes, you just don't find in other tunes. And then the pipes themselves...give it that particular energetic flavour, and that crispness, and that's what I've tried to get into my playing. I think that was the big turning point for me. In the Northumbrian repertoire, the pipes themselves...gave me a notion of how I might play, physically play the instrument'.

Sandra mentioned two conditions which she found to be necessary for playing a particular repertoire well. One is to have the appropriate instrument, and the other is to be in contact with a musician who is experienced in playing the music of the tradition. In attempting to play Irish tunes, she had a written source (O'Neill's) and contact with a brilliant interpreter of the repertoire (Tom McCarthy), but found that the musical style was not achievable on her instrument (the English concertina).<sup>12</sup> When learning the Northumbrian repertoire, on the

other hand, she had both an experienced player (Ron Elliott) and a suitable instrument, and was able to play tunes in the appropriate musical style.

Our experience in the Australian Concertina Band was the same as Sandra's. We had attempted to play Northumbrian tunes from sheet music, and had not been able to make much musical sense of them. When Sandra introduced us to Northumbrian tunes, however, we were able to listen to how she played them; we also listened to her speak about how they were constructed and were put together, and we eventually came to understand and play them with something approaching the appropriate style. We needed the contact with an experienced player.

This is the oral transmission which folklorists talk about as a defining characteristic of folk music, distinguishing it from classical music. My observation has been that oral transmission is important in every musical tradition. Learning the classical piano tradition as a child, I had a weekly session with a teacher for fifteen years. Yes, we used musical notation, but style and interpretation, the things which make a performance musical, were learnt by my teacher talking to me, listening to me, and playing for and with me. The relationship between music as sound and music notation is neatly characterized by John Shepherd:

Music notation—which is visual, tangible, two-dimensional, and static in character—can only, as it were, identify points on the surface of a sonic world that is intangible, constantly in motion and multidimensional. The sonic world of music—even classical music—is highly complex in the ways in which its different dimensions of harmony, melody, rhythm, and timbre (not to mention amplitude, attack, envelope, and so on) interact with one another. What notation—either as a score or sheet music—represents is but a very pale imitation of this world.<sup>13</sup>

Another striking feature of the workshops that Sandra Kerr gave in Australia was the importance she laid on place and context: the locality in which the music was found and the particular places where it was performed, the musicians who performed it and what they said about the particular songs and dance tunes, and what they said about the music in general. In introducing the class to the music of Northumbria, Sandra talked to us about her own contacts with traditional musicians, her investigations into the circumstances which led to certain pieces being composed, and the stories which some pieces enfolded. *Meggy's Foot* came to us with the story of the pony that had a stone in her foot.

We were invited to make up stories to go with the various parts of the tune. *Bob and Joan* brought forth a comment on how much the Lydian mode, with its raised fourth degree, is favoured in Northumbria. And about *Noble Squire Dacre* we learned that this acknowledgement of a member of a class above that of the musicians was rare, since the tradition belonged to the working class. Sandra delighted in telling us of her initiatives in contacting and talking to Northumbrian musicians, and hearing at first hand how a squeaky wheelbarrow in the mine inspired a particular composition. These stories were not presented as curiosities: they were for Sandra more than an enrichment in their connections to the music; they were part of the music. In telling us to make up stories for the variations in *Meggy's Foot* and to consider how the two parts of the tune *Bob and Joan* might be related to the two people named in the title, she was helping us to understand and own the tunes we were learning.

This awareness supports the ethnomusicological challenge to the boundaries traditionally placed around music. Where does the music stop? The musician, the instruments, the circumstances of the performance, the performers' ideas about what they are doing, are all part of the ethnomusicologist's concern when they study 'music'. Although in the early days of ethnomusicology, these features were described as 'context', we now recognize that the idea of music in the centre of some complex which can be called 'culture' and which provides a context for it maintains an autonomy for the music which actually does not exist. Music does not so much have a cultural context; it is the culture. It is in and through the music that the culture is made and expressed. Clearly the words of songs pick up and relay ideas and events which the singers/composers find to be significant. But ethnomusicologists are finding that the form and structure of the music itself expresses the patterns which the people of a particular culture use to frame their lives.

During the workshop, some members of the class asked Sandra to talk about using the English concertina to accompany singing. She did so, but, at the same time, turned the question around and asked us how the concertina was used to accompany singing in Australia. We were not able to answer her at the time, but a preliminary look at the material readily available might be a starting point.

The literature maintains that Australian traditional singing was unaccompanied and the source recordings available bear this out. It may not be that straightforward, however. John Meredith and Hugh Anderson write that 'Sid Heather of Hurstville was a fiddler who

accompanied himself while singing'.<sup>14</sup> The CD *Sharing the Harvest* includes his one recorded song, *The Wonderful Crocodile*; here he first plays the tune on the fiddle, and then sings it unaccompanied, finishing with a short fiddle coda. The fiddle is part of the performance, but it does not accompany the singing in the strict sense.

There are, however, indications of the concertina being used to accompany singing in the musical practices of the collectors. Because of their exposure to traditional musicians, and their reverence for that material, it seems likely that the collectors' performance conventions will echo those of the earlier musicians. Alan Scott was one of the early collectors, and his CDs made with Keith McKenry provide a rich musical source.<sup>15</sup> The record notes state: 'Of necessity, the songs in bush camps and homesteads often were sung unaccompanied. Where instruments were available, they typically would be portable, compact items such as violins, tin whistles, concertinas, banjos or mouth organs'. With one exception, however, Alan Scott accompanies himself in all the songs with his English concertina. Sometimes, as with *The Little Sparrow*, piano and fiddle join with his concertina in a beautifully discrete accompaniment.<sup>16</sup> In other songs, *Jog Along Till Shearing*, for example, the concertina is the only accompanying instrument. It doubles the singer's melody a couple of octaves above. Repeated notes in the singer's part are played just once and held through on the concertina, and the last bar of the melody is repeated between verses. In the second line of each verse, the concertina has a slightly different tune from that of the singer. As an experienced collector and singer of traditional songs, Scott inspires confidence that, at the very least, he would be true to the spirit of the tradition.

A similarly informative CD is Dave de Hugard's *Songs of the Wallaby Track*.<sup>17</sup> Dave de Hugard performed all the items on this CD and also wrote the notes which accompany the recording. Carefully and attractively performed, the musical style is, like the Alan Scott recordings, unmistakably that of Australian bush performers. (My father, born in 1896, lived until the Second World War in country New South Wales. He did not call himself a musician, and sang very rarely, but when he did, he used the vocal timbre, articulation, and style of phrasing that I hear in these two performers.) De Hugard's liner notes, which combine detailed scholarship with a very clear and engaging account of his experience with the performing tradition, begin as follows for the song *Sing Birdie Sing* begins:

This beautiful song, partly reconstructed from memory, I heard from Albert 'Dooley' Chapman at Dunedoo in New South Wales. I met

'Dooley' in the early 1980s when he was nearly ninety. He was still a fine concertina player and a good yarner. He had a fine sense of humour and he loved a good song. We don't know the origin of the words but I came across a close variant of the tune in the Queensland State Library where it was published as 'The Mouse-Trap Man' circa 1870.

There is a photograph of a concertina on the same page, and in the recording, the singing is accompanied by concertina and probably banjo. As with Sid Heather's recording of *The Wonderful Crocodile*, the concertina plays the tune before the voice enters. Thereafter it doubles the voice in a slightly decorated version of the tune. The decorations consist mainly of added passing notes. The final song on the CD, *A Trip on the Wallaby Track*, mentions the concertina and mouth organ in the text itself, and the concertina accompaniment doubles the tune, this time a little more ornamented. The ornament is usually a triplet, consisting of the melody note itself, the note above, and the melody note itself again. In this performance in triple time it occurs on the third beat of a bar. De Hugard's performance of *The Man with the Concertina*<sup>18</sup> is a jaunty song in praise of the concertina, which accompanies the voice; the performers achieve a remarkable coincidence between the sound of the concertina and the sound of the voice.

Danny Spooner is another influential singer in Australia who accompanies himself on English concertina. A recent CD, *The Great Leviathan*,<sup>19</sup> includes many songs where concertina accompaniment is used. In general, Danny's style is based on chordal accompaniment; in *Talcahuano Girls* and *Rolling Down to Old Maui*, for example, there is a discrete pulsing on second and third beats, with the melody notes lightly touched while the chord is held. The concertina also embellishes the melody with decorative 'filler', and the frequent use of open fifths gives these performances a strength entirely suitable for Danny's forceful voice. These three performers—Alan Scott, Dave de Hugard, and Danny Spooner—provide Australian examples of the emblematic nature of the concertina which Stuart Eydmann discusses in relation to the British folk music revival.<sup>20</sup>

There is a similarly retrospective view of what nineteenth-century Australian musical practices might have been like. Although no source recordings of singing accompanied by concertina are available—and this does not indicate that it did not happen, especially since there are so few recordings to begin with—there is a strongly held view that the concertina was associated with singing in late nineteenth- and early

twentieth-century Australian bush music. Robert Stewart's song *The Man with the Concertina*, performed on Dave de Hugard's CD, articulates this view in its text, and the three performers support it by their musical practices. There is also a literary source in Henry Lawson's poem of 1891, *The Good Old Concertina*,<sup>21</sup> which provides images of the concertina playing for dancing and accompanying singing. Perhaps there are many more such sources.

The project called *Song Links* produced an interesting set of two CDs in which English traditional songs on the first disk are juxtaposed against Australian versions of the same songs on the second disk. The purpose of the set is to allow comparisons of text and melody, but perhaps it might be useful to look also at other details of musical style as possibly characteristic of each country's music. Nancy Kerr and James Fagan sing *The Banks of the Nile* on the first CD and *The Banks of the Condamine* on the second one. This is the only instance in which the same musicians perform on both CDs, and is itself an example of the always close—and now even closer—relationship between the English and Australian folk traditions, since Nancy, with her English heritage, and James, with his Australian heritage, now perform together regularly in Australia, England, and elsewhere. In a video of an interview with Nancy and James now available at [www.thepuredrop.com.au](http://www.thepuredrop.com.au), Nancy draws on the example of a performance of *The Banks of the Condamine* that they did with a concertina player and observes that the concertina reinforces the 'Australianness' of the song. I am not sure how to read this comment, since it is Nancy's mother, Sandra Kerr, whom Stuart Eydmann names as one of the people responsible for promoting the use of the concertina to accompany songs in the British tradition.<sup>22</sup> Be that as it may, for me, the 'Australianness' of Nancy and James's performance of *The Banks of the Condamine*, here without concertina, is expressed emphatically by the insertion of the *Mudgee Waltz* as an interlude within the song. John Meredith collected this tune, and recounts that he first heard it in the Mudgee district of New South Wales, played on a kerosene-tin dulcimer.<sup>23</sup> In the *Song Links* project itself, there are more concertina players and more items with concertina accompaniment on the English CD than there are on the Australian CD. Again it seems that the concertina figures more extensively in discussions about Australian traditions than it does in recordings. Of course it may well be that the absence of the concertina in recordings of older Australian singers is more a function of the paucity of the available materials than of actual practice.

Returning again to Sandra Kerr's concertina workshops at the Australian National Folk Festivals in 2000 and 2003, there is one other aspect that seemed to me to be important. In 1985 I was asked (as an ethnomusicologist) to investigate what was described to me as Anglo-Celtic folk music in Australia. I have since then been interested in the music that is presented under the rubric of folk music in Australia, and I have been concerned to describe and investigate what happens in its performances and transmission. What the performers and their audiences take folk music to be is of interest because of the light it sheds on what is performed, why it is performed, and how it is performed. I am more concerned with those relationships than with some definition of folk music against which particular songs might be measured.

It seemed to me that the folk music I met in clubs and at festivals at that time could be more adequately described as a philosophy of music rather than by the delineation of a particular repertoire. The three attitudes which seemed paramount were: (1) live music was better than pre-recorded ('canned') music; (2) music performed acoustically was better than music performed with amplification; and (3) music was too important a vehicle for self-actualization to be left to a few highly-trained professionals: it should be something that everybody does. The inclusiveness of this third attitude was amply demonstrated by Sandra Kerr's conduct of the workshops. Every one, no matter how well or how inadequately he or she played, was of equal interest to her and attracted the same degree of attention. It is never easy to deal with a class in which the members are all at different stages, and a perfect solution to this problem is rarely achieved; but Sandra made a valiant attempt. However, it is the other two attitudes which are of particular interest here, and they can be seen as the expression of a concern with embodiment. When Sandra was playing for us, when she was talking to us, and when she was simply being with us and listening, her physical presence engaged us. The way she held herself, the way she spoke and what she said, the way she moved, her facial expressions, the way she held and moved her concertina were essential parts of what she gave us. This is what is being sought in the emphasis on live performance and what is lacking in recordings: this is why live music is held to be better than pre-recorded music. The attraction of acoustic performances, the second stipulation, is the immediacy of the music. The singer's vibrating vocal folds, the sounding reed, the vibrating string, these are very different in character from the vibrations of membranes of electronically excited speakers which is what is heard in amplified music.

The physicality of the performers invokes and implicates the listener's own body and perspective. Thus selling recordings at a live performance can be seen as an attempt to alleviate the physical remoteness of recordings. When listeners have heard a live performance, they have at least the memory of that physical presence to colour the recordings when they are played at home.

## Conclusion

Australian traditional singing of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was closely related to British traditions. The influence of other European countries from where immigrants came can be seen in the dance music, but not very much in song. No doubt the immigrant families' eventual loss of language was associated with this decline in their singing traditions in Australia. The singers contacted by the collectors usually have a British immigrant one or two generations back from whom they have learnt songs. The *Song Links* project demonstrates this, and the many tunes of British origin which are in Australia associated with completely Australian sung texts are another example.

In the second half of the twentieth century musicians have achieved much more mobility. The influential folklorist A.L. Lloyd's sojourn in Australia is an early example of the now well-established practice of moving between countries. Danny Spooner, born and raised in England, has lived in Australia for more than 40 years, while Martyn Wyndham-Reed, the British singer who put the *Song Links* CDs together, has spent time in Australia. There are many others who have experienced music-making in both Australia and Britain and whose repertoires now reflect this. Among recent performers are Nancy Kerr and James Fagan, who move between Australia and England (and other countries) every year. When Sandra Kerr came to Australia and gave us the concertina workshops at the National Folk Festival, she also spent time and performed with Nancy (her daughter) and James in their trio called Scalene. In the interview Sandra said that she was 'totally intrigued by this country because it has that mixture of total familiarity and completely exotic'. She felt that James's high-energy bouzouki playing, setting up cross rhythms, playing with accents and moving the beat, and exploring different tonalities had a somehow characteristically Australian freedom which dramatically influenced her own playing.

Australian traditions have not been as well researched as British and American ones have. English-speaking traditions are much

younger here, and we have nothing like the generations of musicians in one family such as the Clough family of Northumbrian pipers.<sup>24</sup> Nor do we have detailed musical studies like Dáibhí Ó Cróinín's account of Elizabeth Cronin's repertoire,<sup>25</sup> or folkloristic accounts such as Patricia Sawin's of Bessie Eldreth in America.<sup>26</sup> There were and still are in some places extensive repertoires of Indigenous songs,<sup>27</sup> but these were largely inaccessible to the immigrant musicians who came here after 1788.

In the twentieth century, the concertina seems to have shed its association with classical music and band music and become established as an iconic folk instrument. In Britain, Stuart Eydmann documents the way A.L. Lloyd's insistence that folk song should be unaccompanied was challenged by revivalist singers, and promoted and developed by Peggy Seeger and her associates, John Faulkner and Sandra Kerr.<sup>28</sup> In Australia, similarly, a tradition of unaccompanied singing among bush musicians who may sometimes have been accompanied by concertina has been succeeded, in the second half of the twentieth century by singers such as Alan Scott, Dave de Hugard, and Danny Spooner, who regularly accompany themselves on concertina.

Finally, as an accompanying instrument, the concertina is capable of an expressiveness which can encompass a poignant wistfulness, a bouncy rhythmic jauntiness, and the gravitas and solemnity of a chordal drone. It may be that it is this versatility that has attracted the superb folk musicians of the last fifty years to the instrument, and it may well be that there are possibilities for the concertina which are yet to be explored.

## NOTES

1. About the band, see Jill Stubington, 'Black Dots on a Page: Aural and Written Transmission in the Australian Concertina Band,' *Australasian Music Research*, 2-3 (1997-1998), 175-82.

2. See Graeme Smith, *Singing Australian: A History of Folk and Country Music* (North Melbourne: Pluto Press Australia, 2005).

3. Sandra Kerr, Peggy Seeger, and John Faulkner are credited as being influential in the promotion of the English concertina during the English folk revival of the 1950s-1970s; see Stuart Eydmann, 'The Concertina as an Emblem of the Folk Music Revival in the British Isles,' *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 4 (1995), 41-49; online at [www.concertina.com/Eydmann/index](http://www.concertina.com/Eydmann/index); subsequent references are to the online version (and thus without page numbers).

4. John Meredith and Hugh Anderson, *Folk Songs of Australia and the Men and Women who Sang Them* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1967); John Meredith, Roger Covell, and Patricia Brown, *Folk Songs of Australia and the Men and Women who Sang Them, II* (Kensington, NSW: NSW University Press, 1987).
5. *Sharing the Harvest; Field Recordings from the Meredith Collection in the National Library of Australia*, 2 CDs, National Library of Australia (2001).
6. See Jill Stubington, *Collecting Folk Music in Australia* (Kensington, NSW: Publications Section of the University of New South Wales, 1989).
7. Graham Seal and Rob Willis, eds., *Verandah Music: Roots of Australian Tradition* (Fremantle WA: Curtin University Books, 2003), 63.
8. Fahey 'The Big Squeeze', online at [warrenfahey.com/concertina/concertina-1.html](http://warrenfahey.com/concertina/concertina-1.html).
9. See 'ConcertinaDownUnder': 'Looking for details of recordings by Aussie players of Aussie Bands', 31 October 2005 9:07:38 AM.
10. Throughout this article, Sandra Kerr's words are quoted from an interview with her recorded at the workshops associated with the 2003 National Folk Festival.
11. Francis O'Neill, *The Dance Music of Ireland: 1001 Gems* (Dublin: Walton's Musical Instrument Galleries, 1965; originally published 1906).
12. Sandra says in an aside: 'People tell me that there are people who play Irish tunes on the English concertina and they really make it work, and get the style properly.'
13. John Shepherd, 'Text', in Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss, eds., *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 163.
14. Meredith and Anderson, *Folk Songs of Australia*, 133.
15. Alan Scott and Keith McKenry, *Battler's Ballad: Songs and Recitations of Australian Life*; (recorded by the National Library of Australia, published by Fanged Wombat Productions, 1991) and Scott and McKenry; *Travelling through the Storm: Australian Bush Songs and Poems: The Battler Series Volume 2* (recorded by the National Library of Australia, published by Fanged Wombat Productions, 1996).
16. The collectors often became active bearers of the tradition, and *The Little Sparrow* exemplifies the importance of their contribution, as it consists of a tune that John Meredith set to a poem published in 1925.
17. *Dave de Hugard, Songs of the Wallaby Track*, DDH001 (recorded in Maldon, 2002)
18. Originally issued on his CD *Magpie Morning*, Sandstock Music, SSM047CD (2002), now also available on *Musical Traditions in Australia*, Folk Alliance Australia FAA 003/004 (n.d.).

19. *The Great Leviathan: Songs of the Whaling Industry: Danny Spooner, DS007 (2006).*
20. Eydmann 'The concertina as an emblem of the folk music revival in the British Isles'.
21. Leonard Cronin, ed., *A Camp-Fire Yarn: Henry Lawson, Complete Works 1885-1900*, (Willoughby, NSW, Lansdowne Press, 1984), 130.
22. Eydmann, 'The concertina as an emblem of the folk music revival in the British Isles'.
23. Meredith and Anderson, *Folk Songs of Australia*, 220.
24. See Chris Ormston and Julia Say, *The Clough Family of Newsham: 200 years of Northumbrian Piping* (Morpeh, Northumberland: Northumbrian Pipers' Society, 2000).
25. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *The Songs of Elizabeth Cronin, Irish Traditional Singer: The Complete Song Collection* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).
26. Patricia Sawin, *Listening for a life: A Dialogic Ethnography of Bessie Eldreth through her Songs and Stories* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2004).
27. See Jill Stubington *Singing the Land: The Power of Performance in Aboriginal Life* (Sydney: Currency House, 2007),
28. Eydmann, 'The concertina as an emblem of the folk music revival in the British Isles', and the more extended study in his Ph.D. Thesis, 'The Life and Times of the Concertina: The Adoption and Usage of a Novel Musical Instrument with Particular Reference to Scotland', Open University (1995), available online at [www.concertina.com/eydmann/life-and-times/](http://www.concertina.com/eydmann/life-and-times/).



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## **Tommy Elliott and the Musical Elliotts<sup>1</sup>**

VIONA ELLIOTT LANE, RANDALL MERRIS,  
and CHRIS ALGAR

### **INTRODUCTION**

When Tommy Elliott (born Thomas Varley) first took the stage with his concertina, cinema was already making inroads into the British variety theatres. The glory days of music hall were passing away, but 'live' venues still had enough vitality to support the career of an energetic and talented multi-instrumentalist who, most prominently, played popular music on the concertina. Seven decades later, Tommy Elliott could look back on a 'musical tour' that had taken him through hard times—two world wars and an economic depression—in the midst of a media revolution in which variety theatre was giving way to movies, radio, and television.

While still in his teens, Tommy's personal and professional fortunes were intermingled with the Elliott family which, for decades, had been performing in circuses and variety theatres, both as originators of trick bicycle/unicycle riding ('The Cycling Elliotts') and as a musical ensemble ('The Elliott Savonas'). Having taken a liking to Tommy and his concertina when they all performed on the same theatre program, the Elliotts proceeded to advance Tommy's career, inspire his stage name, and provide his partner in matrimony. Around 1920, Tommy joined 'Hazel Elliott and Her Candies', in which he played several instruments and introduced the concertina. In 1924, he married the bandleader—Florence Hazel Elliott (stage name Hazel Elliott)—daughter of James Elliott, one of The Cycling Elliotts and Elliott Savonas.

In the 1930s, Tommy and Hazel—joined by family members and other artists—performed as The Seven Elliotts (sometimes simply billed as The Elliotts). In 1940, daughter Viona, age eleven, was ready for the stage, and the act known as 'The Musical Elliotts'—Tommy, Hazel, and Viona—was born. What follows provides information about the Varley and Elliott families and their musical acts, which together spanned nearly a century of performances; that in turn is followed by Viona's personal account of the Elliotts' life in the circus and variety theatres, as related to her by Tommy and Hazel, or as remembered from her own days on tour.

## THE FAMILIES AND THEIR MUSICAL ACTS

**The Varleys and the Elliotts:** Thomas Varley was born on 30 October 1902 in South Shields, Durham. Tommy's mother, Isabella 'Bella' Varley (b. 1873), was the daughter of fisherman Ebenezer Purvis and Jane Purvis (formerly Ditch). Tommy's father, James 'Jimmy' Varley (b. 1870), was the son of Thomas and Catherine Varley. Employed as an 'engineman' (machinery operator) at the Marsden Colliery in South Shields, Jimmy Varley was also a concertina player and a founding member of the Marsden Concertina Band (see Figs. 1 and 2).<sup>2</sup> Jimmy and Bella married in 1898 and had four children—Irene May (b. 1899), Olive Lillian (b. 1900), Tommy, and Harriet Etta (b. 1914).



Fig. 1. James 'Jimmy' Varley (this and subsequent illustrations are from the private collection of Viona Elliott Lane).



Fig. 2. The Marsden Colliery Concertina Band, with James Varley at the far left of the first row.

Florence Hazel Elliott was born on 12 April 1902 in Nottingham. Her mother, Florence Clara Elliott (b. 1882), was the daughter of Joseph Platts, a lace curtain manufacturer, and Sarah A. P. Platts (formerly Crosland). Hazel's father, James Elliott (1871-1916), was the son of James Bedford Elliott (1846-1906) and Mary Elliott (formerly Thompson). Though referring to himself as a blacksmith,<sup>3</sup> James Bedford Elliott (hereafter, J.B. Elliott) was the developer, promoter, and manager of the circus/variety acts in which his children and one niece appeared (see Table 1).

James Elliott and Florence Clara Platt were married in 1898 and had three children—Florence Hazel (b. 1902), James Savona Elliott (b. 1907), and Olive May Elliott (b. 1912)—all destined to be musical performers with Hazel Elliott and Her Candies.

Tommy Varley ('Elliott') and Hazel Elliott were married at the Church of St. Barnabas, Parish of Hendon, Middlesex, on 5 June 1924. They had two daughters: Viona Hazel (born on 5 October 1928 in Ivor, Eton, Buckinghamshire) and Julia Rosanne (born on 11 November 1938 in Hendon, Middlesex). Viona performed with The Musical Elliotts until shortly after her marriage to Raymond D. Lane (manager of the Coliseum Theatre<sup>4</sup> and, later, Her Majesty's Theatre, in London) in

**Table 1. Seven Children and a Niece of J.B. Elliott.<sup>a</sup>**

Name	Year of Birth	Stage Name
Catherine Thompson	1868	Kate
Thomas	1870	Tom
James	1871	Jim
Mary Rand	1878	Polly
Matthew Albert	1878	Little Dot
Amphlett	1880	Harry
May	1883	
Dorothy Ann (niece) <sup>b</sup>	1878	Little Annie

<sup>a</sup> Mary Elliott was the mother of the first six children, Margaret Elliott of the seventh and last child. Perhaps Mary Elliott (born Mary Thompson in 1847 in Gateshead, Durham) and Margaret Elliott (born Margaret Thompson in 1862 in Birmingham) were related.

<sup>b</sup> Dorothy Ann was the daughter of J.B. Elliott's brother, Robert Taylor Elliott.

1952. Julia took her sister's place in the act until her marriage to puppeteer Michael A. Buckmaster in 1959.

**The acts:** The later Elliott acts—'Hazel Elliott and Her Candies', 'The Seven Elliotts', and 'The Musical Elliotts'—injected their own styles of musical entertainment into their performances, while retaining components of the successful Elliott Savonas formula: dramatic costuming,<sup>5</sup> spectacularly painted linen backdrops and special lighting, fine playing on saxophones and other instruments, and musical diversions on unique 'instruments', along with clowning, comedy skits, and pantomime.

The first musical act of the Cycling Elliotts was as a 'string' ensemble with James on guitar, Harry and Matthew on violin and viola, respectively, and Tom and the ladies on mandolin. After acquiring their billing as The Elliott Savonas (later as The Seven Savonas or The Musical Savonas), they became best known as brass and wind players and, in particular, as the first saxophone band in Great Britain (shown in eighteenth-century court attire in Fig. 3).<sup>6</sup> Whether on strings or winds, their repertory was a mixture of classical music (by Bach, Donizetti, Mendelssohn, Rossini, among others) and lighter, more popular music by John Philip Sousa and other composers of the day.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 3. The Elliott Savonas as a saxophone band.

In addition to saxophones (in all ranges) and strings, they also played trumpet, tuba, trombone, xylophone, bells, maracas, gongs, fairground trumpet-organ, and such novelties as musical glasses (bowed) and spinning 'sea shells', this last routine devised by J.B. Elliott.<sup>8</sup> The 'shells', in fact, were metal disks of varying diameters (though less than five inches) and saw-tooth borders that, when spun sequentially on a hard surface, would produce a tune. Hazel and her sister Olive later performed the routine in Hazel's band and in The Seven Elliotts.

By the time Tommy joined Hazel's Candies, the Elliotts no longer performed as The Cycling Elliotts, but continued to appear as the Elliott Savonas in 'The Garden of Harmony'—a musical revue introduced in 1920. This revue supplanted their first stage production, 'The Palace of Orpheus', which they had been performing since 1908.<sup>9</sup> The Elliott Savonas disbanded in 1923, closing out the 'The Garden of Harmony' at the Coliseum Theatre, London.<sup>10</sup> By 1925, Matthew Elliott was leading his own (short-lived) band. For their August-September engagement at Edinburgh's finest ballroom, The Palais de Danse, one of the band's billings was 'Matt Elliott and His Band, Of Elliott Savona Fame. TWELVE EXPERT MUSICIANS, playing Twenty-Eight

Instruments. Direct from his most successful World's Tour. Music *par excellence*'.<sup>11</sup>

Hazel Elliott and her Candies had seven-to-nine members drawn from inside and outside the extended Elliott family. In its last days, the troupe was at its largest, and was billed as 'Hazel Elliott's 9 Serenaders'.<sup>12</sup> The family members in the act were Hazel, her younger brother James Savona, her sister Olive May, Tommy, and Tommy's sister Olive Lillian. The musical framework was a saxophone band supported by the heralding of straight, no-valve trumpets, the swirl of Tommy's concertina and cornet playing, the xylophone playing of Hazel and her sister, and demonstrations of proficiency on other standard and novelty instruments. Later, The Seven Elliotts also included Tommy, Hazel, Olive May, and Olive Lillian. The string section consisted of Hazel and her sister Olive on guitar, along with non-family members on guitar and banjo. The surnames of the non-Elliott Candies and Seven Elliotts—Bobby, Lenny, George, and Henry, and a few others—are unknown.

With choreography, high jinks, and novelty music routines interwoven, the programs of Hazel's Candies and The Seven Elliotts varied across venues, as did their costuming. Hazel's Candies favored bold-striped suits and dresses (see Fig. 4), but sometimes appeared in



Fig. 4. Hazel Elliott and Her Candies; Hazel is second from left; Tommy is in the back row.

Renaissance outfits, tuxedos and gowns, gypsy garb, or other attire. The Seven Elliotts' wardrobe ranged from formal attire to nautical apparel or gypsy wear (see Fig. 5). Among their many musical novelties, the most popular were Tommy's miniature concertina, the 'sea-shell' routine of Hazel and Olive M., bell-ringing 'marionettes' (ladies on elasticized puppet strings), and the 'Ship's Wheel', which consisted of sixteen bicycle horns mounted as spokes around a wooden wheel, on which Tommy and others took turns playing 'Rule Britannia' and other tunes by rotating the wheel and squeezing the rubber bulbs on the variously pitched horns.<sup>13</sup> Later, Tommy would sometimes do a solo on the Ship's Wheel.



Fig. 5. The Seven Elliotts, circa 1932; left to right: Lenny, Hazel, Tommy, Olive L., Bobby, Olive M., and George.

. The Musical Elliotts carried on the Elliott traditions: the assorted wardrobe (formal wear, Scottish outfits, navy uniforms, clown costumes, etc.), 'straight' and novelty instruments, and comedy capers. A major new dimension was concertina duets and trios (see Fig. 6), along with Tommy's solos on both 56-button and miniature concertinas. Tommy taught Hazel and Viona to play the concertina in the 1920s and

'30s, respectively, though father-daughter instructions had drawbacks, as Viona recalls:

I had some stage fright, because my father was so good and expected rather an awful lot from me. He had no sort of patience for me. He expected me to know it! I learned all the way around with him, but he used to get so mad at me that he would bang the door and go out saying 'you'll never learn, you'll never do it'. (But I did.) He was a genius who just picked up the concertina and played whatever he wanted without looking at music or anything.



Fig. 6. The Musical Elliots: Hazel, Viona, and Tommy.

Viona also tells us about Tommy's concertinas:

He always played English 'tinas—Wheatstones; he wouldn't have anything else. But he never went to the Wheatstone factory for repairs or retuning. Instead, he insisted that such work be done by Harry Crabb, who was Tommy's close friend at Crabb & Sons. My father never went to the Wheatstone factory as far as I can remember.

The concertinas varied in range: 56-button, miniature, tenor, and baritone, the last of which had belonged to his father (see Figs. 1 and 7).



Fig. 7. The Musical Elliotts: Viona, Hazel, and Tommy.

Tommy's repertoire on concertina consisted almost exclusively of 'popular' music. Thus he followed neither the Victorian virtuosos such as Giulio Regondi, Richard Blagrove, and George Case, nor the classical and semi-classical inclinations of later music-hall and recording artists such as the Duet players Percy Honri and Alexander Prince. Folk music, too, was barely acknowledged. As Viona notes, Tommy's focus on popular music was reinforced by a 'musical experiment':

He tried to do 'Flight of the Bumblebee'. He worked on it for a whole year and got it down to one minute, because he was determined to do it in one minute. He went on stage and played it as a concertina solo, and he didn't get more than two claps. Nobody wanted to know. The next morning, he went to the Woolworth store and bought a 6-pence sheet copy of 'As Time Goes By'. He got the boys in the band to ad lib it. He saw the sheet music once; he looked at it one time and did his own thing, going on and playing it that night, and brought the house down. He said that experience had finished him on doing anything tricky. On classical music like Blagrove's and Regondi's, he really didn't want to get into it. He made me play it; he got Mom and me into it.

Percy Honri and my father were totally different. Percy would always go for the classics; my father would go for the jazz. He was shunned by all the concertina players, because he loved to do his own thing. I think he was born to it. He just adored it.

Tommy occasionally returned to 'Flight of the Bumblebee', but it was *on occasion only!*

Tommy's performances on the concertina included then-current hits from Tin Pan Alley, many of the 'standards', and the occasional Irish tune, such as 'The Sailor's Hornpipe', 'Phil the Flutter's Ball', and 'The Irish Washerwoman' jig. Many of the pieces were adaptations of songs from stage musicals and motion pictures (Table 2).

Table 2. A partial list of Tommy Elliott's concertina repertoire.<sup>a</sup>

<u>Selection</u>	<u>Music-Lyrics by</u> __	<u>Show/Film</u>
A Wonderful Guy	Rodgers-Hammerstein	<i>South Pacific</i>
Alexander's Ragtime Band <sup>b</sup>	Irving Berlin	<i>Alexander's Ragtime Band</i>
Avalon <sup>b,c</sup>	Silver-De Sylva	<i>The Jolson Story</i>
The Bells of St. Mary's	Furber-Adams	<i>The Bell's of St. Mary</i>
Blaze Away	Holzmann-Kennedy	
Bye Bye Blues <sup>b</sup>	Hamm-Bennett-Lown-Gray	
Carolina in the Morning	Donaldson-Hahn	<i>The Dolly Sisters</i>
Charmaine <sup>b</sup>	Rapee-Pollack	<i>What Price Glory</i>
Chinatown, My Chinatown <sup>b,c</sup>	Schwartz-Jerome	
Climb Every Mountain	Rodgers-Hammerstein	<i>The Sound of Music</i>
Do-Re-Mi	Rodgers-Hammerstein	<i>The Sound of Music</i>
Edelweiss	Rodgers-Hammerstein	<i>The Sound of Music</i>
Get Me to the Church on Time <sup>b</sup>	Loewe-Lerner	<i>My Fair Lady</i>
My Ain Folk	Lemon-Mills	<i>My Ain Folk</i>
On a Slow Boat to China <sup>b,c</sup>	Loesser-Olstead	
Roamin in the Gloamin	Harry Lauder	
Shantytown	Schuster & Little-Young	
Sunshine of Your Smile	Cook-Ray	
Tea for Two	Youmans-Caesar	<i>No No Nanette</i>

<sup>a</sup> There are recordings of all pieces listed.

<sup>b</sup> Recordings are taken from a performance on 'The Straw Hat', a BBC Radio show transmitted from Manchester in 1969/70 and hosted by Clinton Ford, a versatile singer and recording artist. Tommy was also a popular guest (on concertina and other instruments) on an earlier BBC radio show—'Worker's Playtime', a thrice-weekly lunchtime show live from factory canteens and aired on BBC Home Service (1941-1957) and BBC Light Programme (1957-1964).

<sup>c</sup> Included on *English International*, Folksounds Records, FSCD 80 (2008).

Tommy's use of the miniature concertina differed from that of his variety-stage peers and predecessors, and easily qualified him as 'King of the Miniature Concertina'. Though many music-hall concertinists pulled out their miniature concertina for a one- or two-piece interlude or encore,<sup>14</sup> Tommy made it a major part of his act, even performing occasional requests on it if they did not exceed the range of a twelfth on what he called his 'teeny-weeny concertina' or his 'baby 'tina' (see Fig. 8).<sup>15</sup> Tommy might play a tune on his 56-button instrument, and then, for a different program, play the same tune on his miniature. Among the pieces for the miniature concertina were 'Ain't She Sweet' (*Duck Soup*), 'Charmaine',<sup>16</sup> 'Climb Every Mountain', 'Do-Re-Mi', 'Gigi' (from the eponymous film of 1958), 'If I Were a Rich Man' (*Fiddler on the Roof*), 'Nola', and many others.<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 8. Tommy Elliott with his miniature concertina.

Tommy also utilized a number of concertina novelties: imitations of church bells, birds singing, a baby squalling, and other sound effects, as well as performances on his 'breakaway' concertina, a regular-size instrument with center baffles in the bellows, thus allowing the instrument to be 'broken' into halves that Tommy played independently on each hand (see Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Tommy Elliott with his 'breakaway' concertina.

## VIONA'S RECOLLECTIONS

From this point to the end of the main body of the article, it is Viona Elliott Lane's voice that we hear in a wonderfully informal, first-person, and virtually unedited style.

**The early years:** Tommy fell in love with the concertina, watching and hearing his father play. Badgering his father to let him play his from the age of two, Tommy wanted to have a concertina of his own by the time he was five years old. The family was very poor and couldn't afford to buy one, so Jimmy (his father) would take his

concertina down to the Marine Grotto (which is still there today in South Shields) on weekends and play to the public, his 'old hat' on the floor. People used to throw pennies, half pennies, and farthings into the hat and ask him to play songs for which they could have a sing-a-long with him. He did this until he had enough money to buy his son a concertina. He taught Tommy all the rudiments of the concertina.

Tommy's eldest sister (who played the piano and, indeed, used to play for the silent films at the only cinema in South Shields at the time) taught Tommy to read and write music when he was about eight or nine years old. They used to do a little act, the three of them—Jimmy and Tommy on their concertinas and sister Irene ('Rene') on her piano, calling themselves 'The Varley Trio: The Acme of Refinement'. This was about 1911.

Then, about 1913, a show came to the Queens Theatre, South Shields. It had a juveniles-only cast, all boys between eleven and fourteen years of age (including Albert Burns, a young comedian with whom Tommy would eventually be teamed). They saw Tommy and asked his family's permission to put their son in the show, playing the concertina. So off he went to the music halls, starting his career in show business as Tommy Varley. These young boys had to go to school in the daytime and do their acts at night in the theatre, which meant that they had a different school every week as they traveled around the country. Tommy stayed with the company for two years.

Following that two-year stint, Tommy struck out as a 'single act' on the music hall circuit, still as Tommy Varley. By this time, he had bought himself a cornet, which he added to his act alongside the concertina. Tommy often played on the same bill as the Elliotts & Savonas, and this is where he met Hazel Elliott, daughter of Florence and Jimmy Elliott. Jimmy and Florence liked him so much that they asked him to join an act with their daughter, Hazel Elliott and Her Candies. Tommy said yes, as he had fallen in love with Hazel. They put together a musical act with saxophones, trumpets, concertina, banjo, and drums—eight members altogether; and in 1921 or shortly thereafter, Tommy changed his stage name to Tommy Elliott.

**The prewar years:** Hazel Elliot and Her Candies became a very popular musical act. Not only did they do variety, but also revue, road show, summer season, cabaret, end-of-pier show, pantomime, and circus. They traveled in Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Italy, and Spain.

Hazel and Tommy married in 1924, and I was born in 1928. They were in a revue at that time. A revue consisted of six to eight girl dancers, a comedian, a male singer, a *soubrette* (a girl who could sing and dance, had lovely legs, fed the comedian by doing sketches with him, and worked in production scenes), and a 'specialty act' (which did production scenes as well). This is where the concertina used to have to work hard. There was nearly always a 'gypsy scene' with all the girls in their gypsy costumes and with Tommy also made up as a gypsy. Tommy played his concertina—*all Gypsy music*—while the girls danced around a 'fire', which was made of wood and red cellophane or gelatin cut up in a way that it could be put around the wood, with white bulbs at the centre. In those days, there were no coloured light bulbs, and even the footlights, hanging lights, and spotlights all had to have this cellophane, cut to put in front of the lights in different colours—red, green, blue, pink, etc. The girls had to be careful not to trip over the wires into the gypsy fire, as it had to be plugged in on the side of the stage. There were no fire regulations in those days! There were other scenes, too: Indian Camp, Cowboy Camp, Middle Eastern Scene, Navy Scene, and so forth. The music always had to go with the scene, and Tommy used to play his concertina in all of them.

My father, mother, and a few other performers in the act would do a three-minute musical spot in the first half, in 'front tabs' (that is, in front of the curtain while the stage was being set), playing popular numbers of the day. The actual musical act would come at the end of the revue, with a finale to follow. Tommy and Hazel always would conduct the pit band during the show. When they themselves were on stage, the pianist or first violinist would take over the conducting duties.

While in this revue, Hazel left the act on a Tuesday, and traveled down to Ivor in Buckinghamshire. I was born two days later, on Thursday, at the family home. Two days after that, on Sunday, Hazel headed back up to Leeds to rejoin the revue with a four-day-old baby in her arms. On Monday night, she was back on stage, and I was tucked up in a shawl in a suitcase on the dressing room table with one of the girls keeping an eye on me.

My parents had decided before I was born that if I were a girl my name would be 'We-own-her' (prospective spelling unknown). As it happened, the act went to Verona, and my mother was quite big with me. She was talking to an Italian lady (whom I adore now). And the lovely Italian lady said 'Ah, bambino'. My mother said she hoped for a girl. The lady asked: 'What name'? My mother said: 'We Own Her', and the lady said 'Ah, Viona'. And that is where I got my name; otherwise,

my parents would have called me 'We Own Her'. I will always be grateful to that Italian lady.

One thing that was great for a variety act working in a revue was the traveling arrangements. There was always a company manager (also somewhat of a stage manager) who used to find the train times and sort out the baggage man, who collected all the scenery props, cases, baskets, and instruments to take down to the railway station on the way out (and to bring from the railway station on the journey in). It would have been easier if we had played only concertinas. But we also had saxophones, all the other instruments, costumes, and backdrops. There was always a 'train call' on Saturday morning at 11 a.m.; the artists had to be on stage, where the company manager would fill them in on train schedules and give them their railway tickets.

The Elliotts worked fifty-two weeks a year. Tommy and Hazel never had a holiday; they never had a 'week out' to take one. But around 1930, 'talkies' had come into the cinema, and life became pretty grim for a short spell. The act had to break up, as theatres were closing down all over the country. Savona Elliott (Hazel's brother) left to go into the management side of cinema, and the girls left. But Tommy and Hazel decided that they should stick it out in the belief that theatre would never die! Bobby also stuck by them. They lived in Ivor, money ran out, and they already had me. On a midnight trip from Ivor to Hazel's mother (Florence Elliott) in Golders Green, they thought up another act. Their theatrical agent had phoned to say that the big cinemas in London wanted variety acts to play between films, calling it Cine-Variety. They said 'yes', got Hazel's sister (Olive Elliott), Tommy's sister (Olive Varley), and two boys named Lenny and Henry; and, along with Bobby, changed the name to The Seven Elliotts. Once again, Tommy wrote out all the music for the act, including the parts for the band.

The Seven Elliotts did five shows each day—three in one cinema and two in another cinema—leaving home at 10 a.m. and not returning until after midnight. They did this for a few months, until the bigger theatres started to reopen with variety. So The Seven Elliotts were off again as a successful musical act in variety, working the Moss-Stoll, Butterworth, MacNaughton, and Broadhead circuits; the Syndicate Halls;<sup>18</sup> and 'private' theatres in Scotland, Wales, and England.

In 1935, The Seven Elliotts employed as their agent a gentleman named Les Grade<sup>19</sup>—a very famous impresario at that time—who booked them into Berlin's Winter Garden as part of an international

bonanza. On opening night, Adolph Hitler and his girlfriend Eva Braun were in the front row to watch the show. Miss Braun fell in love with the way Tommy played, especially with his rendition of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'. The manager told my father that she often popped in and stood in the back circle, just to hear his concertina solo. Suddenly one day, Tommy received a summons from Hitler's office with a request that he come and perform on the concertina. (No one else in the act was wanted.) A big car arrived at the stage door at the arranged time, and two men in black leather coats came to collect him and his concertina. They whisked him off and, to his dying day, he never knew just where he was taken, only that it was a big studio and that Eva Braun was present. She asked him to play 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', which he did. She then asked him to play 'Happy Feet' ('You got those happy feet . . .'), which was another number in the act, the seven of them playing it on saxophones and doing a 'cod act' (fake) tap-dance routine. Tommy played the number on the concertina, and Eva Braun was very happy. My father was then 'collected' and taken back to the stage door of the theatre, where Hazel and the rest of the act were extremely happy to see him. They were all shocked. Tommy wasn't paid for his little 'private' performance, and always wondered if it had been taped. But he enjoyed himself immensely—as long as he could play his concertina, the love of his life. The Seven Elliotts enjoyed their success in Berlin, where they had a lovely landlady and digs. (The landlady told them that Germany and England would fight the Russians together in a few years!)

Tommy had another surprise visitor during this stay in Berlin: Joseph Goebbels, the Third Reich Propaganda Minister and 'czar' of arts and entertainment in Nazi Germany. Goebbels *instructed* Tommy that he was to be taken to a Telefunken studio in order to make a film for German television. Naturally, Tommy inquired about the remuneration. Goebbels replied that Tommy would receive nothing, because it was for the Führer! Though certainly no supporter of Hitler, Tommy went to the studio and played the concertina. He neither saw the TV broadcast nor ever received a copy of the film.

When the Berlin engagement ended, The Seven Elliotts came back to England, and joined a revue called the Arthur White Company, with which they stayed for quite a while. That same year, 1936, they became one of the first variety acts to appear on British television.<sup>21</sup>

Tommy and Hazel managed to mortgage a little house in Brent, next to Golders Green, where Florence Elliott (Hazel's mother) lived. In 1938, my mother had to leave the act; and on 11 November 1938, my

sister Julia was born in a cottage in Hendon. A week later, Hazel was back on stage. I had traveled with the troupe, going to a different school every week. But now with Julia on the scene, and with their own house, my parents got a widowed member of the Elliott Savonas to come down from Middlesbrough to look after us. I had to go to school properly. Taking care of Julia was the task of Great Aunt Dolly, who was wonderful. But to give her a break, Julia and I would travel with the act when school holidays came around. I never seemed to get back to school on time and was always taken away before the term was finished. Our schedule always had to be coordinated with The Seven Elliotts' travel arrangements, as they were always working in different cities and towns every week. But it was done!

**The war years:** In September 1939, with war declared, the Elliotts found themselves stranded at St. Helen's Railway Station, Merseyside. The baggage man told them that the Theatre Royal had closed because of the outbreak of war, so they had to sort out another train to get back to London. Though Bobby, Lenny, and Henry were called up almost instantly and went into the Army, Tommy didn't pass his medical exam: he had a mastoid in his left ear, which had left him partially deaf; in addition, he had broken his right arm when he was young, and because it had been badly set, it was crooked and shorter than the left.

Hazel Elliott had always been prone to bronchitis, so she too did not manage to pass a medical exam. Olive Elliott (Hazel's sister) had married an RAF officer who was posted out to India as an instructor for the Indian Air Force and wanted Olive to go out and join him; so Olive got the last civilian ship out to India, and they were out there for the duration of the war. Olive Varley (Tommy's sister) had married a tenor saxophone player who worked in one of the big bands. He too was called up, and wanted Olive, who was pregnant, to join him where he was stationed. Once again, then, the act broke up, and only Tommy and Hazel were left.

When they tried to build up the act, all they could find were young accordion players who, as soon as they were trained, were either called up to the Army or went into the Entertainments National Service Association<sup>22</sup> in order to avoid being called up. By 1940, both Tommy and Hazel were exhausted trying to keep the big act going, and they decided to scale things back a bit. And so, even though I was only eleven years old, they pulled me into the act and named the three of us The Musical Elliotts. There were immediate problems with producers about our fees, as there was a feeling that we couldn't possibly be as good as The Seven Elliotts and should therefore work for

considerably less. Though the going was tough at first, we managed to prove them wrong.

We went into a revue called 'Jane of the Daily Mirror'. Jane packed the theatres, as she was just about the first actress to tour in the nude.<sup>23</sup> Every Monday, a 'watch committee' used to come to the theatre to observe her act. Had Jane even blinked an eyelid, they would have closed the theatre down. She had to be *perfectly still*, posing as if in a painting with a big gold frame, and with curtains opening and closing to show her in various poses. The girls used to come on in harem costumes, with Tommy, as the sultan, sitting on a gold throne for about twenty-five minutes. He had to do that twice nightly, every night apart from Sunday, for two years, as we never had a week out. That's the only time Tommy was on stage without his concertina, saxophone, or cornet, during the whole of his working life!

We girls who had to show our legs—i.e., chorus girls, 'principal boy' in pantomime, skating acts, acrobatic acts, and I—had no tights in those days, so we had to put on 'Wet White' leg makeup. We made it ourselves, using oxide of zinc, glycerin, rose water, a touch of yellow ochre, and methylated spirits, which we carefully spread all over our legs and then applied an eyebrow pencil to make a straight line from the ankle to the top of the leg. After the show was finished, there was a mad tear to get to the dressing rooms in order to get hot water with which to wash it off in the sink. If the hot water ran out, we had to do with cold, which made things very difficult, and the landladies didn't like you to wash it off in your digs.

Generally, camaraderie prevailed in the troupes, but there was some competition. People who had struggled to get to the stage could be somewhat aggressive. I was often in trouble in pantomime with the 'principal boy'. Although things were usually OK, she could turn sour if my legs were just a little better than hers, in which case, oh, she didn't speak to me for a whole season, or, if she did, it was rather 'tarty'. Nothing to do with my music, you see—it was my legs that got me in trouble.

Traveling during the war was rather hazardous. In the winter, the Blackout came on us quickly. We always had to travel by train, and there were often long journeys. The train was completely dark, no lights anywhere—looking out of the window, it was jet black unless there was a moon. Nothing but blackness at the stations and, of course, no names, all of which had been taken down in case of an invasion. If we hadn't counted the stops (in those days, the trains

stopped at all stations), or if we had tried but lost count, we would pull down the window and shout out 'where are we', and a voice from the black night would yell out 'who wants to know'. We answered back: 'theatre artists going to appear at the Empire Newcastle next week' (or whatever theatre we were going to). A voice would reply: 'four stops up line', and that's how we used to find out where to get off! It was either that or the fish train. Early in the morning, the wagons were full of fish in wooden boxes, with loads of ice in them, which would melt (no refrigeration in those days), and our compartments were next door. You can imagine the 'fish smell', which seemed to get into everything. We tried to avoid that if we could.

Then there was the petrol shortage. Often, the baggage man had to meet the train with a horse and cart—no petrol for the van. All the scenery, costumes, props, and our instruments had to be put on the cart, and the poor horse had to walk to our digs. Finding our theatrical digs in the daylight was a lot easier than trying to find them with a small torch in the blackout. Now and again, a warden used to shout out: 'Put that light out'!

Theatre digs were very special, as they catered only to theatre folk, who often liked to eat after the show. The landlady would therefore have to cook at around 11 p.m. or later. Life revolved around the very odd hours that we kept: rehearsals and meetings, late mornings, and so on. There were no bathrooms then, so hot water had to be put in a large jar and taken into the bedroom, where there was a stand with a washing bowl and a glass jug on top (for drinking water and cleaning one's teeth), as well as a chamber pot under the bed. The toilet was at the bottom of the garden, with newspapers cut up in little squares with holes in them so that they could be strung up on a rail along the wall.

Though war raged, we took the act on one-week engagements in large and small theatres all over Great Britain. For years, my mother kept the act's weekly records. I still have the 'Duplicate Books' in which she posted the weekly salaries and expenses for the period from late August 1942 through early April 1944. The records show our appearances in more than 60 different theatres—Empires, Grands, Hippodromes, Palaces, and others—during that mid-war period. In mid-1942, the act was being paid from £31 to £38 per week. By early 1944, we were making as much as £53 per week, or even £58 per week in some theatres. (During this period, my salary climbed from £2 to £5 a week.) Fortunately, wartime price controls were not applied to variety acts.

As we toured the theatres of England, Scotland, and Wales, we would also perform at British, American, Canadian, Polish, and other military bases. An officer would come to the stage door and ask us to do a show for the camp, which we did in the afternoon. They often had little bands of their own. The singer, comedienne, six chorus girls, and The Musical Elliotts would be collected outside the theatre by a truck to take us to the camp for an afternoon show. We also did a lot of shows on our own, as the concertina was a great favourite with the forces. We used to play all the popular tunes of the day. Then Tommy would go into a 'solo' and ask the members of the audience what they would like to hear. He got hundreds of requests. The three of us would then finish the show on a happy note.

We loved to play the American bases, as they would give us a lot of food: tins of fruit, Spam, milk, coffee, and jam! Food was in short supply in those days, and our rations didn't last very long. The Canadians gave us sheets, pillowcases, and blankets. In fact, Mom and I made a winter coat out of two blankets, since we didn't have that many coupons for clothes, and we had to use precious coupons to have clothes made for the act. The poor British could only give us canned beef and sugar! We never got paid for those shows, but the food was much better than all the money in the world.

We also took our concertinas and played on ships and docks when we worked Chatham, Portsmouth, Southampton, and other ports. We played in hospitals, and we played hymns in churches. We did this until the end of the war.

Despite the hardships, there were no grumbles. We all got on with our jobs. And the public was marvelous. The theatres were always full of uniformed men and women (there were also civilians), even though they had to walk to the theatre in the blackout. And though the theatres were blacked out outside, inside, the lights were on, the curtain rose, and the show got underway, even when the air raid sirens went off! We carried on every week, traveling every Sunday, until the end of the war.

**The postwar years:** END OF THE WAR!—what a wonderful sight it was to see the street lights aglow and the theatres 'lit' up again outside. Down came the blackout curtains and boards. Off came the tape that was criss-crossed against the window panes of every window possible. Everybody was so happy in that marvelous atmosphere, and the people came to see the show. They laughed at all the jokes and applauded everything going. Variety came back with a swing. Although

the war had closed down a lot of private theatres, some were opening up again. The Musical Elliotts never had a 'week out'.

As it happened, 1947 was the year of the circus for us, starting off with Sanger's Touring Circus, then the Tower Circus, Blackpool, for six months of summer season; then came Tom Arnold's Knights of the Ring, and after that Tom Arnold's Mammoth Christmas Circus. Finally, there was the '3 Ring Circus' at the Harringay Arena, London, which had the greatest collection of animals and circus stars ever seen in one programme. Practically every country in Europe was represented in British circusdom's greatest achievement. I can also say that the animals were better looked after than the human beings themselves! There were also quite a few 'rows', but with the language problem like that of the Tower of Babel, it's likely that the less-than-genteel language wasn't understood. I have to admit that I found it all very funny (but I spoke only English).

After finishing with the circus, we went back into variety, summer season, and pantomime. In 1949, we were booked as guest artists for a month with the Tommy Morgan Summer Show at the Pavilion, Glasgow. After the first week, Morgan asked us to stay for a full six months, changing the act every month. (It seemed that we were very popular with the Glasgow public.) We could always do a change for three acts, but six gave us a challenge that my father just 'loved' and could not resist—so we stayed. It was rather difficult playing one of the acts, rehearsing for the second, and sorting out and getting music and ideas for the third sketched out. How we didn't get mixed up has always amazed me! It was jolly hard work, but the audiences were marvelous and so was the company that we were with. Then we went for pantomime season to Popplewell's Gaiety Theatre in Ayr, Scotland, and back to variety after that. We still never had a 'week out'—no time for holiday, too busy working.<sup>24</sup>

We never had a day off except for Sunday. And when we got home, the props came with us. We would arrive home with our baskets full of things, and would pile them all in the middle of the front room. The front room was the room for all the instruments, backdrops, costumes, and so forth.

I had an offer from Ivy Benson to go as her second trumpet.<sup>25</sup> Of course, I said 'No. Tradition—I'm a family act. I'm not doing it'. Julia's godmother came up to me and said, 'Viona, break up the act. Go into Ivy Benson's band, and Julia won't have to go into the family act'. I said: 'I'm sorry; I can't do that'.

I met Raymond Lane during the 1951/1952 pantomime season at the Derby Hippodrome; he was the manager of the theatre.<sup>26</sup> At first, we were just friends—very sensible. Both of us had seen many artists fall in ‘seasonal’ love; it often didn’t work out. So at the end of the pantomime, we said our goodbyes, and I went off with Tommy and Hazel for a variety date at Portsmouth. To cut a long story short, we wrote to each other every day, and Ray phoned every night. We soon got married. The act was booked at the Ocean Revue Theatre at Clacton-on-Sea for the summer season. On Sunday, 10 August 1952, I—Viona Elliott (real name Varley)—was married to Raymond Lane, at St. Paul’s Church, Clacton. The next night I was back on stage with the act, with Raymond sitting in the front row with his mother and friends. Honestly, I could not play. All the girls behind me were ragging me, and Tommy had to go on at the end of the act and announce: ‘Please forgive my daughter; she only got married yesterday’. I received the greatest round of applause ever. We had to delay our honeymoon; that was show business in those days. The act always came first.

I stayed with the act during the following year while my younger sister, Julia, finished school. At fifteen, she joined us while we were at Feldman’s Theatre, Blackpool, for the 1953 summer season. Julia took over for me, and she and the family carried on in variety, summer seasons, and ‘panto’ seasons. They went over to entertain the troops in Germany and Suez while the war was on over there. Eventually, Julia met a very clever puppeteer named Michael Buckmaster. They married in 1959, with Julia going off to join him in his act.

**The last years:** Tommy and Hazel carried on as a ‘double act’ until a tragic accident in 1960. As they were returning home from a show at an American base near Newmarket, the car broke down at two o’clock in the morning. Tommy got out to look under the bonnet. At the same time, Hazel got out to stop a car that was coming the other way. She neglected to look behind. She was hit by a car coming up and was killed instantly, as Tommy could only stand and watch in horror. A sad coincidence: the car that hit Hazel had five musicians who were coming back from a gig in Newmarket. Tommy felt that he could not go on without Hazel. However, time went by, and one day his agent phoned to say that a single specialty musical act was wanted for summer season in Jersey. We persuaded him to take it, and off he went again with his concertina—a great success! When he got back he had a contract to play in a film, *The Passport is Courage*, starring Dirk Bogarde. Tommy then went to South Africa for six months. Upon returning to England, he met Joan Lily Mountain, the manager of the

showroom where he paid his electricity bills. They got married in 1974, and Joan was his constant companion from then on, touring everywhere with him (he was now in his early 70s). Joan felt that it was time for Tommy to have a holiday, so they booked a fifteen-day cruise. This was the very first real holiday that Tommy had ever had. So what did he do? He took his baby 'tina with him! To mark the gala night on the cruise, the passengers were encouraged to 'dress up', all for fun. There were 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> prizes. My father went on with his baby 'tina, played 'Charmaine', and won 1<sup>st</sup> prize. For the rest of the cruise, the passengers kept asking him to play for them. He really couldn't live without his concertina, even on his first holiday!

By the time Tommy retired from playing the major theatres, he had performed with many stars of stage, screen, and television. Appendix I provides a select list of one hundred stars with whom Tommy shared the stage. Notable among them is Grock—the famous clown and multi-instrumentalist—probably the only non-Elliott concertinist ever to perform on the same bill as Tommy. The engagement was early in Tommy's career, when Hazel Elliott and Her Candies had a one-week engagement at the Coliseum Theater in London in 1923.<sup>27</sup>

My father carried on touring until, at age 78, his bad ear acted up, and the doctor told him: 'No more driving'. Since Joan didn't drive, he hired a car and driver and played various cabarets in hotels, Masonic lodges, Rotarian gatherings, etc. He also played for school parties. Often there would be a phone call from one of the children's parents, asking him to play his baby 'tina at their daughter's or son's birthday party at their home. He did this until he was eighty-two! Finally, after a fall, he became rather frail, and he would sit in his chair with a rug around his knees and his concertina on a table at his right side. He played for himself and anyone else who would 'call in' to see him. He had arthritis in his fingers, but it didn't stop him from playing his concertina.

The last time I saw my father was on 15 August 1987. Raymond and I were off for a week's holiday, so I called in before we left in order to say 'Bye, see you next week'. He asked me: 'Want to hear "The Bells of St. Mary's", Viona'? I said: 'Of course, I do'. He picked up his concertina and—at age eighty-four, with arthritic fingers and a rug around his legs—played it perfectly, swinging the instrument from his lap, every note clear and strong! That was my last memory of him, and I am so pleased to have it.

Three days later (18 August), we got a phone call saying that he had died. It seems that he didn't feel good in the morning. Joan got the doctor, who sent him straight into hospital. Joan visited him in the afternoon. As she left the ward and looked back at him, he gave her his 'cheeky little wave', which he had always done when finishing his act—his goodbye to the audience ever since the early days when he had done the act on his own. The next morning at 6 a.m., Joan got a phone call to say that he had died very peacefully in his sleep, with a smile on his face. I think he was smiling, playing his concertina, all the way up to the pearly gates of heaven.

## **Appendix I: One-Hundred 'Stars' with whom Tommy Elliott Shared the Stage, 1923-1980**

What follows is a list of one hundred well-known figures of stage, screen, and television with whom Tommy Elliott performed during the period 1923-1980.

- Chesney Allen** (1893-1982), comedian and actor, partner of Bud Flanagan and member of the Crazy Gang
- Julie Andrews** (b. 1935), singer and actress
- Andrews Sisters:** LaVerne (1911-1967), Maxene (1916-1995), and Patricia (b. 1918), singers
- Billie Anthony** (1932-1991), singer
- Arthur Askey** (1900-1982), comedy vocalist and pantomimist
- Winifred Atwell** (1914-1983), pop, jazz, and boogie-woogie pianist
- Ronnie Barker** (1929-2005), radio and TV comedian; partner of Ronnie Corbett in *The Two Ronnies*
- Jack Benny** (1894-1974), vaudeville performer, comedian, and actor
- George Bernard** (1912-1968), comic actor, performed with Bert Maxwell as the Bernard Brothers
- Boswell Sisters:** Connee (1907-1976), Helvita ('Vet'—1911-1988), and Martha (1905-1958), singers
- Eve Boswell** (1922-1998), singer, not one of the Boswell sisters
- Peter Brough** (1916-1999), radio and TV ventriloquist (with dummy Archie Andrews)
- Max Bygraves** (1922 -), comedian, singer, and actor
- Elsie Carlisle** (1896-1977), singer and actress
- Rosemary Clooney** (1928-2002), singer and actress
- Ronnie Corbett** (1930 -), radio and TV comedian, partner of Ronnie Barker in *The Two Ronnies*
- Leon Cortez** (1898-1970), vaudeville, radio, and TV actor
- Billy Cotton** (1899-1969), bandleader and drummer
- Michael Crawford** (1942 -), singer and actor
- Marie Dainton** (1881-1938), actress and mimic
- Billy Daniels** (1915-1988), nightclub, film, and TV singer
- Denny Daniels** (dates unknown), radio and TV actor, and author
- Jerry Daniels** (1915-1995), singer and instrumentalist in the Ink Spots
- Florence Desmond** (1905-1993), actress, comedienne, and impersonator
- Marlene Dietrich** (1901-1992), singer and actress
- Reg Dixon** (1914-1984), singer, comedian, and actor
- Ken Dodd** (1927-), comedian and singer
- Val Doonican** (1927 -), singer
- Arthur English** (1919-1995), comedian and TV actor
- Norman Evans** (1901-1962), comedian and pantomimist
- Sid Field** (1904-1950), variety actor and comedian
- Gracie Fields** (1898-1975), singer and comedienne
- Bud Flanagan** (1896-1968), actor, partner of Chesney Allen and member of the Crazy Gang
- Clinton Ford** (1931 -), singer and recording artist
- George Formby, Jr.** (1904-1961), comic singer and banjolele (banjo ukelele) player

- Bruce Forsyth** (1928 -), actor, presenter, and TV host
- Charles Fuqua** (1910-1971), singer and instrumentalist in the Ink Spots
- Will Fyffe** (1885-1947), comic singer
- Harry Gordon** (1893- 1957), comedian on stage, radio, and records
- Grock** (Charles Adrien Wettach, 1880-1959), circus and music-hall, multi-instrumental clown
- Adelaide Hall** (1901-1993), jazz singer on stage and records
- Tony Hancock** (1924-1968), comedian and actor on radio, TV, and film
- Will Hay** (1888-1949), comic actor
- Richard 'Dickie' Henderson** (1922-1985), actor in revues and films, and best known as a TV host
- Benny Hill** (1924-1992), comic actor and singer known for *The Benny Hill Show*
- Stanley Augustus Holloway** (1890-1982), comic and character actor on stage and screen
- Leslie Holmes** (dates unknown), singer and recording artist
- Frankie Howerd** (1922-1992), comic actor of TV and cinema
- David Hughes** (1929-1972), singer on stage, radio, TV, and later in opera
- Nat Jackley** (1909-1988), comedian and pantomimist
- James 'Jimmy' James** (1940-), vocalist and bandleader (Jimmy James and the Vagabonds)
- Patricia Jessel** (1920-1968), actress
- Orville Jones** (1902-1944), singer and instrumentalist in the Ink Spots
- Howard Keel** (1919-2004), singer and actor of stage and screen
- Pat Kirkwood** (1921 -), singer and actress
- Teddy Knox** (1896-1974), juggler and actor, member of The Crazy Gang
- Turner Layton** (1894-1978), singer, composer, pianist, and music publisher
- Albert Lester** (1894-1925), actor in dramas and later in comedies
- Joseph Locke** (1917-1999), singer on stage, film, and records
- Lulu** (Marie McDonald McLaughlin Lawrie, 1948 -), singer, songwriter, actress, model, and TV personality
- Vera Lynn** (1917 -), singer and actress
- Bobbie MacCauley** (d. 1955), singer and actress, teamed with Nat Mills
- Jessie Mathews** (1907-1981), singer, dancer, and actress
- Albert 'Bert' Maxwell** (1918-2004), comic actor, performed with George Bernard as the Bernard Brothers
- Ethel Merman** (1908-1984), singer and actress
- Max Miller** (1894-1963), comedian and actor
- Nat Mills** (1900-1993), singer and actor, teamed with Bobbie MacCauley
- Eric Morecambe** (1926 -1984), comedian, teamed with Ernie Wise
- Tommy Morgan** (d. 1958), comedian and pantomimist
- Ruby Murray** (1935-1996), singer, recording artist, and TV hostess
- Jimmy Nervo** (1898-1957), circus performer and actor, member of the Crazy Gang
- Des O'Connor** (b. 1932 -), singer and TV personality
- Donald O'Conner** (1925-2003), singer, dancer, and actor
- Tessie O'Shea** (1913-1995), singer, comedienne, actress, and banjoist
- Wilfred Pickles** (1904-1978), actor and radio personality
- Sandy Powell** (1900-1982), comedian, singer, actor, and ventriloquist
- Arthur Prince** (1881-1948), ventriloquist (with sailor dummy, Mike), actor on stage, screen, and early TV
- Frank Randell** (dates unknown), comedian and actor
- Leslie Sarony** (1897-1985), singer, pantomimist, and recording artist, Leslie Holmes's partner in The Two Leslies
- Harry Donald Secombe** (1921-2001), singer and comedian
- Ann Shelton** (1923-1994), singer
- David Soul** (1943 -), singer and actor (Hutch in *Starsky and Hutch* on TV)
- Dorothy Squires** (1915-1998), singer
- Rosemarie Squires** (1928 -), singer
- Stan Stennett** (1925 -), comedian, jazz musician, actor
- Edwin Styles** (1898-1960), comic and dramatic actor
- Jimmy Tarbuck** (1940 -), actor on radio and screen
- Tommy Trinder** (1909-1989), comedian on stage, radio, and screen
- John Turner Layton** (1894-1978), singer, pianist, composer, and music publisher
- Max Wall** (1908-1990), comedian and actor
- Michael Warre** (1922-1987), actor, writer, producer, and production designer
- Waters Sisters:** Elsie (1895-1990) and Doris (1904-1978), comic singers, songwriters, and sketch actresses
- Ivory Watson** (1909-1969), singer and instrumentalist in the Ink Spots
- Ernie Wise** (1925-1999), comedian teamed with Eric Morecambe
- Norman Wisdom** (1915 -), comedian, singer, and actor
- Harry Worth** (1917-1989), comic actor and radio host
- Jimmy Young** (1921 -), singer, disc jockey, and radio host

## Appendix II: The Cycling Elliotts<sup>28</sup>

James Bedford Elliott (1846-1906)—born in Middlesbrough, Yorkshire—was the son of blacksmith Thomas Elliott and Mary Elliott. J.B. (as we shall often call him) and his brothers followed their father's lead by becoming blacksmiths or choosing vocations related to blacksmithing.<sup>29</sup> After serving an engineering apprenticeship and spending a season with a circus in Middlesbrough, J. B. settled down to building 'Old Bone Shakers' (those newfangled bicycles) and became an expert bicycle trick rider and racer, winning money, silver cups, and medals from the late 1860s to the early 1880s, all the while improving the bicycles of his manufacture. J.B.'s racing achievements included winning a distance race of 132 miles from Newcastle-on-Tyne to Edinburgh, establishing a seven-day record for riding from Newcastle-on-Tyne to London and back, and beating a horse and jockey in a race in Madrid in 1881.

J.B.'s first son, Tom, took an avid interest in the bicycles in the shop and, at the age of three, began to torment his father into making a tiny bicycle for him. The result was a little 8½ pound, wood-wheeled machine on which Tom rode from morning to night (falling asleep still clutching the bike). He soon became the first boy bicycle champion, winning first place, £3, and a gold medal in the first junior bicycle race, in Wolverhampton.

On those rare occasions when Tom was not on his bicycle, his sister Kate tried to learn to ride it. Tom strenuously objected, prompting J.B. to build a little bicycle for her; he then repeated the pattern and built bikes for each of his children, turning them out on the lathe, forge, and forge bellows of his own construction, in the small workshop behind their house which, in the mid-1870s, was on Zoar Street in Southwark, London.

Tom became proficient at riding on the front wheel and turning pirouettes before letting the back wheel touch the ground,<sup>30</sup> a feat that was the inspiration for J.B.'s invention of the unicycle. The first 'single wheel' had two posts, one for a handlebar and one for the seat. The handlebar post was soon removed, and the Elliott unicycle took on the modern no-hands design.

J.B. also patented a second type that was totally unlike what we would call a unicycle today. The 'uni' in these 'unicycles' referred to a single small bicycle wheel (12-to-18 inches in diameter) attached to a boot on each foot of the cyclist. The Kemp Troupe of Chinese Bicycle

Skaters already had an act in which they 'skated' on tiny bicycles fastened to each foot of the performer. J.B.'s design involved removing the back wheel of the bike on each foot, providing the 'skater' with much greater mobility in rolling around the stage. The Elliott 'unicycles' (or cycle skates) were used extensively by The Cycling Elliotts, as well as by trick cycling acts that followed them.<sup>31</sup>

Tom's bicycle riding at home led to another of J.B.'s inventions for the act. Ralph Elliott noticed the small circles that his nephew Tom could ride on his bicycle. Uncle and nephew together lobbied J.B. to let the boy ride in circles on a round table, about six feet in diameter. J.B. was reluctant to go along with the table riding but, after relenting, took the stunt a major step further. Tom learned to ride on the table while it was being rotated in the opposite direction, at first by hand and then from behind a screen, using a belt and pulley assembly attached to the underside of the table top. Progressively, Tom and his brother Jim, then both boys and a sister, and finally all four— Kate, Polly, Tom, and Jim—were simultaneously circling on the rotating table.

The difficulty of the Elliott kids' stunts progressed over time. The act would start with the pack of riders circling and weaving in and out among themselves, or with pairs of cyclists holding banners between them. Pairs of cyclists with team members on their shoulders might follow. They formed pyramids: first, two cyclists with a third member standing on their bike frames while holding a sister on his shoulders; eventually, the pyramid consisted of six riders. Next, four cyclists might perform a May-pole-winding routine, or they might ride on the revolving table. Jim would ride among hand bells closely arranged on the stage; later, the hand bells were replaced by lighted candles. The Elliotts also pushed and pulled each other around the stage; for example, Tom peddled a bicycle while pushing Little Polly in a wheelbarrow, or he pushed Little Dot, who was mounted on a unicycle fitted with a carousel-style horse. On occasion, six riders would be harnessed to J.B.'s buggy and pull it across the stage. And there were still other stunts, including their riding up and down the Oscillating Bridge, a seesaw-like device. The trickiest segment of the performance was probably the Revolving Wheel of Fire, which J.B. described as follows:

It consists of a wheel of about four feet, six inches in diameter and six inches wide with projecting flames of fire attached all around, and it is upon this wheel that little Tom is placed upon his bicycle, the driving of which revolves the large wheel of fire underneath him, in the opposite direction with great velocity, the boy depending solely on his

nerve and skill to maintain his equilibrium, at the same time, spinning a plate making a wreath of fire (Elliott, Life and Career, 30).

In the early years of the act, the youth and pluckiness of the performers added to their appeal. J.B. described an incident during their performance before His Imperial Majesty Oscar II, King of Sweden and Norway (circa 1878):

The idea of performing before a real live king set the hearts of the little ones beating high with curiosity...Little Polly, straining her little eyes to catch a glimpse of this august family, forgot herself for one moment. Turning her head away from the direction of her bicycle, she collided with Kate, a spill being the result, the latter falling from the stage. King Oscar seeing the little girl in this sorry plight, rose...and lifted little Kate from her ignominious position. Quieting her little fears and caressing her, His Majesty restored the child to her father and at once sent his physician to the back of the stage, but to their surprise on his arrival Miss Kate was once more pegging away in the continuance of the programme (Elliott, Life and Career, 21).

Already at age four or five, Polly could amuse the crowd on her bicycle simply by covering her eyes while holding a sign that read 'I am Little Polly But You Can't See Me'. However, the 'cuteness' duties were soon assigned to Matthew Albert, called Little Dot, the world's first baby bicyclist, who made his debut at age two years and three months at Manchester in March 1881. The following year, J.B.'s niece joined the act, and Little Dot and Little Annie, both born 1878, were teamed together.

On 12 March 1883—having already secured a contract with the Barnum-Bailey-Hutchinson circus—J.B., Kate, Polly, Thomas, James, Matthew (Little Dot), and Dorothy Ann (Little Annie) Elliott, along with Margaret Thompson (J.B.'s second wife), arrived in New York City, which became their base for the next fifteen years. Within weeks, though, J.B. and the circus owners were in trouble with the authorities and, in early April, were arrested at the urging of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The highly publicized trial lasted about twenty minutes, during which time the Elliott children performed their cycling act for the three judges, who concluded that the defendants had not committed a breach of law and dismissed the case. The trial and verdict proved to be great publicity for the Elliotts, making the children the talk of New York City and earning them the title 'The Only Children Allowed to Perform by Law in America'.<sup>32</sup>

During the 1894-1895 season, the Cycling Elliotts performed in Cuba. By the time they returned to New York in May 1895, the family had two

additions: Tom's new wife, Eloina (an acrobat and trapeze artist), and their five-month-old daughter, Violetta. Having returned to the USA, the Elliott's (in their Savona personae) became one of the first musical ensembles to record, turning out a version of 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles' in 1895. Figure 10, which dates from the 1890s, shows the Cycling Elliotts as they appeared towards the end of their long sojourn in the United States.



Fig. 10. The Cycling Elliotts in the 1890s.

The Cycling Elliotts returned to England in 1898 and toured widely throughout the British Isles. J.B. purchased one of the very earliest automobiles—a motorized 'surrey with the fringe on top'—which was used to great promotional advantage (see Fig. 11). According to Viona:

My father said that they had one of the first cars, but they couldn't go too far in it. They would put the car on a flatcar on the train and would go to the town right before the place in which they would be playing. They would get off the train, unload the car and get into it, and then kid everybody that they had driven all the way from London. It was quite an announcement of their presence in the next circus or theatre location.



Fig. 11. The Elliott Automobile: J.B. with daughters and grandchildren, circa 1900.

The Cycling Elliotts dissolved their act at some point during the period 1904-1907, leading them to concentrate on making revisions to the Elliott Savona act. As the Cycling Elliotts, their last review in a major newspaper appeared in January 1904; their performance at the Empire Place Theatre in Edinburgh was well received by the reviewer for *The Scotsman* (19 January 1904, 7):

The Elliotts, trick cyclists, gave as fine an exhibition as has ever been seen in Edinburgh. Their feats were numerous, varied, and clever, and were accomplished with a celerity and neatness that were greatly admired and applauded.

By 1907, they were billed for twice-nightly performances at the Empire Palace Theatre in Edinburgh, but now only as The Elliott Savonas (*The Scotsman*, 23 August 1907, 1), as they would subsequently be billed in a series of American performances in 1912 and during the course of their very last overseas sojourn, in Australia in February 1914. In all, The Cycling Elliotts enjoyed a most successful career, one that gave rise to a show-business-family tradition that, under such billings as the Elliott Savonas, The Seven Elliotts, Hazel's Candies, and The Musical Elliotts, continued to entertain audiences through the middle of the twentieth century.

James Bedford Elliott died at the boat landing in Jarrow-on-Tyne on 22 May 1906. The epitaph on his memorial in Linthorpe Cemetery in Middlesbrough reads: 'He Died As Fades The Morning Star Into The Light Of Heaven'. J.B.'s wife Margaret died in 1913, and James Elliott in 1916, when his daughter Hazel was fourteen years old. J. B. Elliott's oldest son and youngest daughter—Thomas and May—both died in 1929. Viona's memories from the 1930s and '40s include trips to the homes of some of her great aunts and uncles who had been Cycling Elliotts and Elliott Savonas.

### NOTES

1. We appreciate the comments of John Cady, Stephen Chambers, Geoffrey Crabb, Alan Day, Robert Gaskins, Greg Jowaisas, Neil Wayne, Wes Williams, Dan Worrall, and Cheryl Zollars.
2. Viona's comment on Fig. 2: 'I can't get over the woman in the band. I always thought it was a man's world! It's a pity that the boy in the picture isn't my father, but he's not. And dig those shirts that the men are wearing! Poor old mothers and wives, they would have to boil those in the scullery boiler, put a "blue dolly" bag in the washing to make them white, and starch the collars. Help!'
3. 'Blacksmith' is shown on his marriage certificate, his children's birth certificates, and even his death certificate.
4. Today, the Coliseum Theatre is the home of the National Opera Company.
5. The multi-talented Elliott ladies sewed most of their own outfits, sequins and all, and managed the wardrobes.
6. They were billed as 'The Savona Saxophone Band' for a long engagement at the Hippodrome Theatre, London, in 1903 (*The Times*, various issues, October-November 1903).
7. The Elliotts' musical instruments were provided by J.W. Pepper of Philadelphia. Founded by James W. Pepper in 1876, the company manufactured band instruments and also imported instruments. Today, J.W. Pepper & Son advertises itself as the world's largest retailer of sheet music.
8. For their engagement at the Empire Palace Theatre in Edinburgh in 1904, they were proudly billed as 'The Seven Savonas: These Artistes Play on over 50 Musical Instruments'. They appeared on the same programs as 'The Elliotts, Marvellous [sic] Trick Cyclists' (*The Scotsman*, 18-22 January 1904).
9. The 'Palace' revue played the Empire Palace Theatre, Edinburgh, in 1908 (*The Scotsman*, 24 November 1908, 8), and later the Coliseum Theatre, London (*The Times*, 2 November 1917, 6; 21 March 1918, 6). Somewhat fittingly, a comedy cycle act—The Merrills—was next to the Savonas on the November 1917 bill.
10. *The Times*, 15 November 1923, 10.

11. *The Scotsman*, 27 November 1926, 1.
12. The engagement was at the Coliseum Theatre in August 1930 (*The Times*, 9 August 1930, 8), which appears to have been the last 'Hazel Elliott' billing at a major London theatre.
13. The Seven Elliots can be seen performing (including the Sea Shell and Ship's Wheel routines) in a British Pathe newsreel, 'Sea Shells Have Music' (1936), online at [www.britishpathe.com](http://www.britishpathe.com) (Search: Elliots [sic]).
14. They include Harry Thompson, Percy Honri, Dutch Daly, John Hill Maccann, Henri Albano, Jack Clevoner, Joseph and Arthur Webb, Sam and Betty Aukland, Herbert Greene, Jack Easy, and others. Some of these performers are profiled in Randall C. Merris, 'Dutch Daly: Comedy and Concertinas on the Variety Stage', *PICA*, 4 (2007), 16-17; others will be covered in a forthcoming article on miniature concertinas.
15. His well-known shtick was to pull out his miniature concertina while saying 'Ah ..., a teenie-weenie concertina' and have the audience respond with an 'Ah ...' of their own.
16. Tommy can be heard playing 'Charmaine' on a miniature concertina in the film cited in note 21.
17. 'Gigi' and 'Nola' appear on *English International* (see Table 2).
18. The Oxford, Pavilion, and Tivoli Theatres in London, controlled by an ownership group formed in 1891.
19. Leslie Grade (1916-1979)—born Laszlo Winogradsky in Tokman, Ukraine—and his brothers, Lew Grade and Bernard Delfont, were leading theatrical agents/managers and television and film producers under the auspices of The Grade Organization. Leslie's son Michael is now Chairman of ITV.
20. Regular television service in Berlin was new, having just started in March 1935. Television viewing advanced rapidly and, in 1936, the Summer Olympics in Berlin were broadcast up to eight hours daily.
21. "'The Seven Elliots" in Home Stations - London Television Programme', *The Times*, 12 December 1936, 10. Tommy later appeared as a supporting actor (with miniature concertina) in the film *The Password is Courage* (1962), starring Dirk Bogarde and Maria Perschy.
22. The Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) was organized by Basil Dean in 1939 to provide entertainment for the British armed services during the war. It operated as part of the Navy, Army, and Air Force Institutes. Entertainers were in short supply, and the ENSA employed talent that ranged from well-known stars—among them, Dame Gracie Fields, George Formby Jr., Sir Laurence Olivier, Maurice Chevalier, and Seymour Hicks—to marginal acts for which the acronym ENSA was said to mean 'Every Night Something Awful'. In addition

to entertaining troops at home, the ENSA troupes saw action close to the front lines in France, Italy, North Africa, Burma, New Guinea, and elsewhere, leading to a few war casualties within their ranks.

23. Christabel Jane Drewry (born in 1913 at Eastleigh, Hampshire) was the long-time artist's model for Norman Pett's cartoon strip, 'Jane's Journal: The Diary of a Bright Young Thing', which made its debut in *The Daily Mirror* on 5 December 1932. She became Christabel Leighton-Porter shortly after the war, having married Arthur Leighton-Porter, an RAF pilot. The cartoon strip, illustrating compromising situations in which Jane was in various states of undress, was wildly popular with the troops. Illustrations of a startlingly bare Jane that appeared in the *Mirror* on 7 June 1944 (the day after D-Day) added to the already fever-pitch interest in the cartoon strip. Besides inspiring the revue, the cartoon strip spawned 'Jane' books published by *The Daily Mirror* (*Jane at War* and *Farewell to Jane*), movies (including *The Adventures of Jane*, a 1949 film starring Christabel), and TV productions. The cartoon strip ended in 1959. Christabel Leighton-Porter died in 2000.

24. I once asked my father about why we never took a holiday. He said: 'Who could ask for more of a holiday than performing by the seaside'?

25. Ivy Benson (b. 1913 in Leeds; d. 1993) was the leader of an all-girls band for more than forty years; 'Ivy Benson and Her All Girl Band', online at [www.ivybenson-online.com](http://www.ivybenson-online.com).

26. Raymond would later manage London's Coliseum Theatre, which previously had been managed by Sir Oswald Stoll of the Moss-Stoll Theatre Empire.

27. Advertised in *The Times*, 8-13 January 1923, 8 (each issue).

28. What follows is based in part on J.B. Elliott, *Life and Career of the Celebrated Elliott Family* (Middlesbrough: J. B. Elliott, 1883); and Ken Marshall, *Middlesbrough's Good Old Days* (Redcar, Cleveland [UK]: C. Book, n.d.).

29. He had a sister, Ann (b. 1858), and seven brothers: Ralph (b. 1842), William Rand (b. 1844), Robert Taylor (b. 1847), Joseph (b. 1848), John T. (b. 1849), Bedford Rand (b. 1856), and Francis G. (b. 1861). In the British census, his brothers' occupations are shown as 'blacksmith', 'forgeman', 'enginesmith', and 'engine fitter'.

30. The Elliott bicycles were small versions of the old 'Big Wheel' bicycle, which had direct drive pedals on the front axle and a relatively small back wheel. Later, the Elliotts would also have the modern type of rear-wheel-drive bicycles with wheels of equal size. On the early history of the bicycle (as found in an early article), see 'How We Got the Cycle: The Curious Stages Through Which the Wheel Has Passed', *The Hub*, 26 February 1893, 141-42.

31. The Cycling Elliotts' act spawned imitators, particularly in Europe; among the best known were The Arthur Klein Family, Les Fluher—Cyclistes Serieux, The Aurora Troupe, The George Narow Co., and Lilly Meranda—Bicycle Queen and Musical Marvel.

32. On the arrest and trial, see *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2 April 1883,4; 5 April 1883, 2; online at [www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle](http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle). The Cycling Elliotts later appeared in the W.C. Coup Circus.

***Hawkwood Concertina Band  
the CD***

<b>Director and Producer:</b>	<b>Dave Townsend</b>
<b>Co-conductor:</b>	<b>Steve Ellis</b>
<b>Sound Engineer :</b>	<b>Rob Harbron</b>
<b>Organiser:</b>	<b>Jenny Cox</b>

In April 2009 some 20 concertina musicians will spend six days creating a CD of varied, tuneful music. We'll include pieces recalling the historic concertina bands (Heywood, Heckmondwike, Mexborough etc), special arrangements from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and a new composition. Please will you support our ambitious project by ordering one or more CDs? This will be the first commercial recording of a substantial modern concertina band. You'll enjoy a unique CD, and help us to preserve the living tradition of Concertina Bands.

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***Thanks for your support***

## PICTURE GALLERY

### **An Early Wheatstone 'Open Pallet' Concertina from Charles Wheatstone's Collection**

Notes by NEIL WAYNE

The Concertina Museum has acquired a very early Wheatstone 'open pallet' concertina, its provenance traceable back to the original Kings' College Museum used by Charles Wheatstone to display his inventions from the 1830s onwards. This instrument was part of the large collection of Wheatstone's scientific and musical apparatus that was on display in the college's King George III Museum (by then named 'The Wheatstone Laboratory'), but were cleared from the Museum rooms after Wheatstone's death, and finally dispersed (in very distressed condition) from an attic store-room in the 1960s and 1970s. The instrument was given to a college employee during the 1960s dispersal, when much of the collection was unfortunately being thrown away.

The instrument is a 24-key open pallet English concertina, made in the very early 1830s at Charles & William Wheatstone's London manufactory at 20 Conduit Street. Open pallet concertinas have their air-valve pads ('pallets') and associated levers exposed in the manner of the late-1820s accordéons patented by Demian and other makers, rather than enclosed beneath fret-cut wooden end-plates. Figure 1a-b shows the right hand end of the instrument before (Fig. 1a) and after (Fig. 1b) cleaning and conservation.

This instrument is the fifth known open pallet Wheatstone to appear in collections around the world. And though the surviving examples show many individual variations in terms of reeds, pallet material, levers, bellows frames, and labelling, they all show the 24-key layout that Wheatstone developed for his 24-key Symphonium of around 1825, which he patented in 1829. This un-numbered instrument bears many features that place it amongst the very earliest known concertinas: the ebony levers and circular pearl pallets are close copies of the levers and pallets used by Demian on his 5-key accordéon, patented in 1829 (see [www.ksanti.net/free-reed/history/demian.html](http://www.ksanti.net/free-reed/history/demian.html)), while its silver label announcing the address as 20 Conduit Street label is not the common oval appliqué plate, but a semi-circular banded form (see Fig. 2a-b). (When Neil Wayne cleared the final remnants of the Wheatstone material from King's College in the early 1970s, there were four Demian or Demian-style accordéons surviving, each with a pink, Wheatstone-Conduit Street label within the

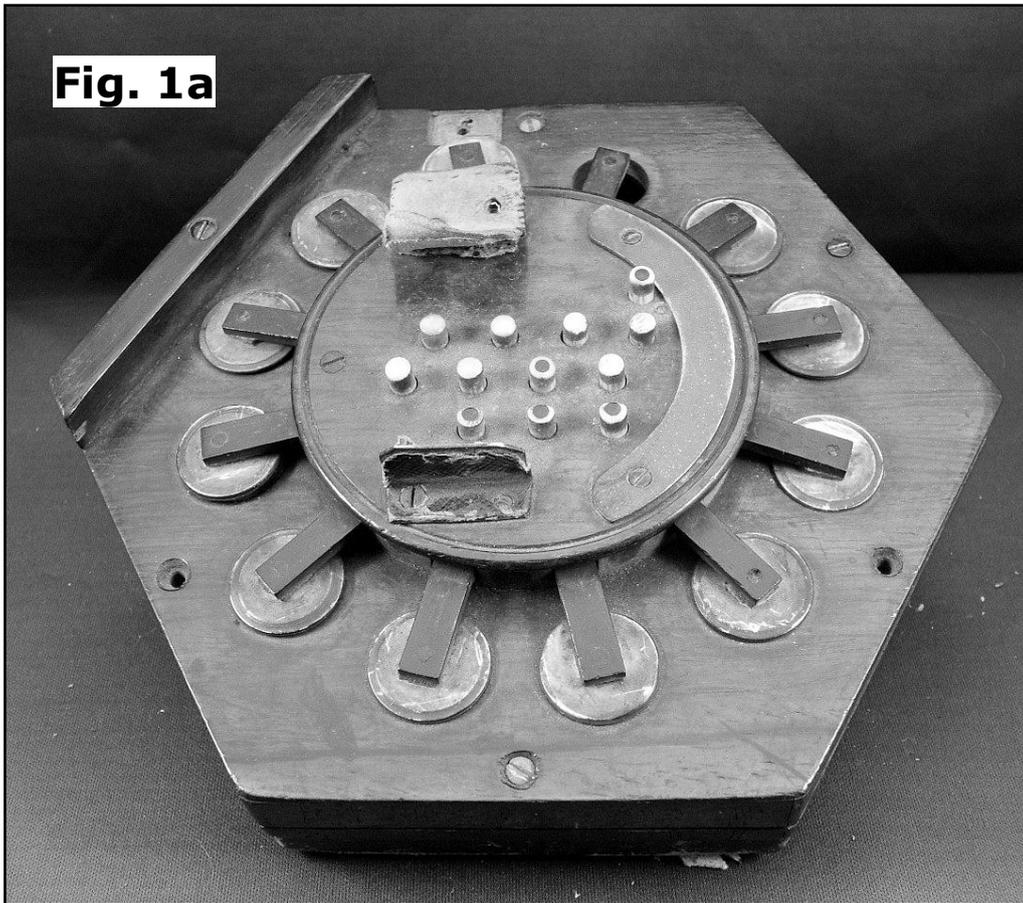
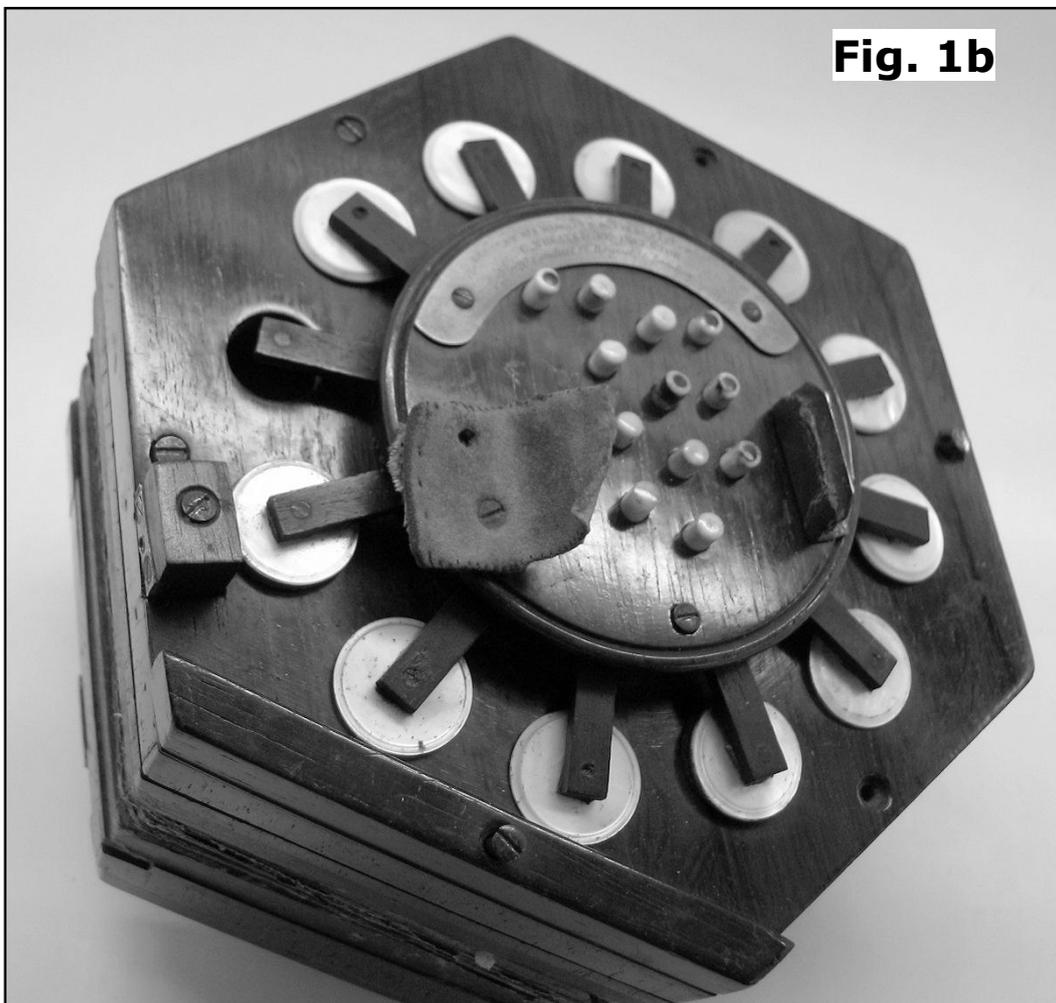
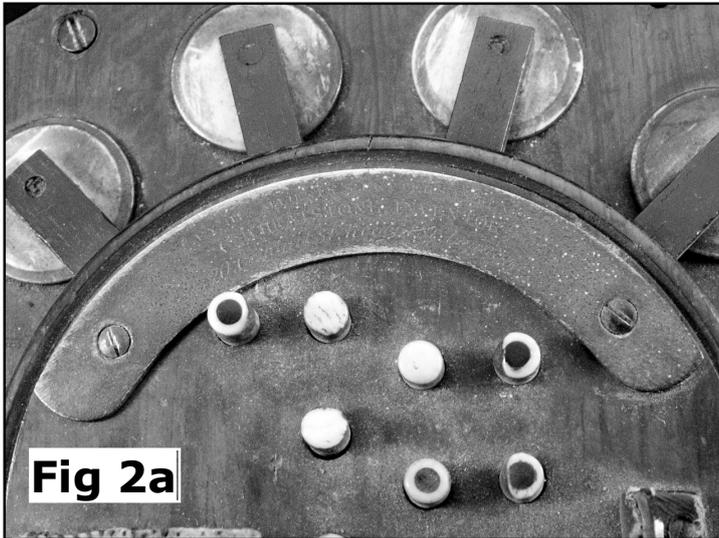


Figure 1a-b shows the right hand end of the instrument before (Fig. 1a) and after (Fig. 1b) cleaning and conservation.



air-valve pallet: these are now in the Wayne Collection at The Horniman Museum, numbered M-15-1996 [5-Key]) M-243-1996 [8-Key], M-586-1996 [10-Key], M-587-1996 [21-Key].)

The later open pallet models have silver-metal levers, and their entire end-plate through which the keys pass is a silver or nickle disc (rather than a circular rosewood plate), and this bears the engraved Conduit Street address. The later open pallet models also have a gilt embossed paper trim around the bellows frame, in common with mid-1830s accordéons.



Finally, I would note that I will be discussing the evolution of the concertina from the various Symphoniums through these early open pallet prototypes to the familiar mid-Victorian design in a forthcoming paper.

Fig. 2a-b. Image of the silver, semi-circular label: (a) prior to conservation/cleaning; (b) after the same.



## William and Marjorie Hurlstone

Notes by CHRIS ALGAR AND RANDALL C. MERRIS

This installment of the Picture Gallery features a promotional postcard of William Hurlstone (see Fig. 1) and a publicity photo of Marjorie Hurlstone (see Fig. 2), father and daughter who performed on

the concertina in the first half of the twentieth century. The William Hurlstone postcard, along with three unrelated photos, came to Barleycorn Concertinas in 2007. I (Chris) was immediately struck by the Hurlstone name and the 'oddness' of the concertinas in the photo, which reminded me of the Marjorie Hurlstone photo that I had bought at an antiques fair many years ago.

Postmarked 24 November 1918, the postcard is addressed to a Mr. Yarrow, 183 Victoria Park Road, S. Hackney E9; the return address is 29 Ormeley Road, Balham SW 12. Hurlstone writes:



Fig. 1. William Hurlstone, promotional postcard, postmarked 1918(courtesy of Chris Algar, Barleycorn Concertinas).

My Dear Friend,  
Haven't forgotten you all & trust this'll find you all well. Will give you  
a call first opportunity. Remember me to Alex when you see him.  
Best wishes, Yours Faithfully W. Hurlstone



Fig. 2. Marjorie Hurlstone, publicity photo, 1935 (courtesy of Chris Algar, Barleycorn Concertinas). The photo of Marjorie Hurlstone has a faint autograph, dated 1935.

We should call attention to the unusual designs of the Hurlstones' concertinas. Marjorie appears to be playing a standard Lachenal, 56-key Edeophone English concertina, but with non-standard fretwork and unusual strap adjustment (see the close-up in Fig. 3). Whereas Edeophones always had beautiful and elaborate fret design, Marjorie's instrument seems to have simple fretwork with crudely drilled holes in what appear to be raised ends. Either the concertina was made with these features (which we doubt) or, more likely, the fretwork was crudely replaced. It seems that the intricate design of Edeophone ends were constantly in danger: owing to their near circular shape,

Edeophones were prone to roll off flat surfaces and sustain damage to their fretwork.



Fig. 3. Marjorie Hurlstone's concertina.

William's instruments are not English concertinas, but rather resemble the Crane/ Triumph duet design (see the close-up in Fig. 4). However, the keyboards of his concertinas are configured with horizontal buttons in straight lines, a design that differs from the curved configuration of the button layout on the usual factory-built instruments. Both concertinas in his photo appear to have Lachenal antecedents. The smaller concertina has an Edeophone-like shape and

a drilled-hole pattern of fretwork that is more elaborate, but no less strange than that of Marjorie's concertina. The larger concertina has a typical Lachenal duet shape and customary Lachenal fretwork, but both instruments have strange sets of handstraps and thumbstraps.

We believe that William adapted existing concertinas to his own design, which obviously required new ends or, at least, alteration of the originals. This opinion is based on the crudeness of design and the fact that, in thirty-four years of collecting and dealing in concertinas, I (Chris) have never seen instruments with these keyboard layouts. Thus it seems that William Hurlstone, who would go on to become a maker of scientific instruments, applied his craftsman skills to modifying concertinas.

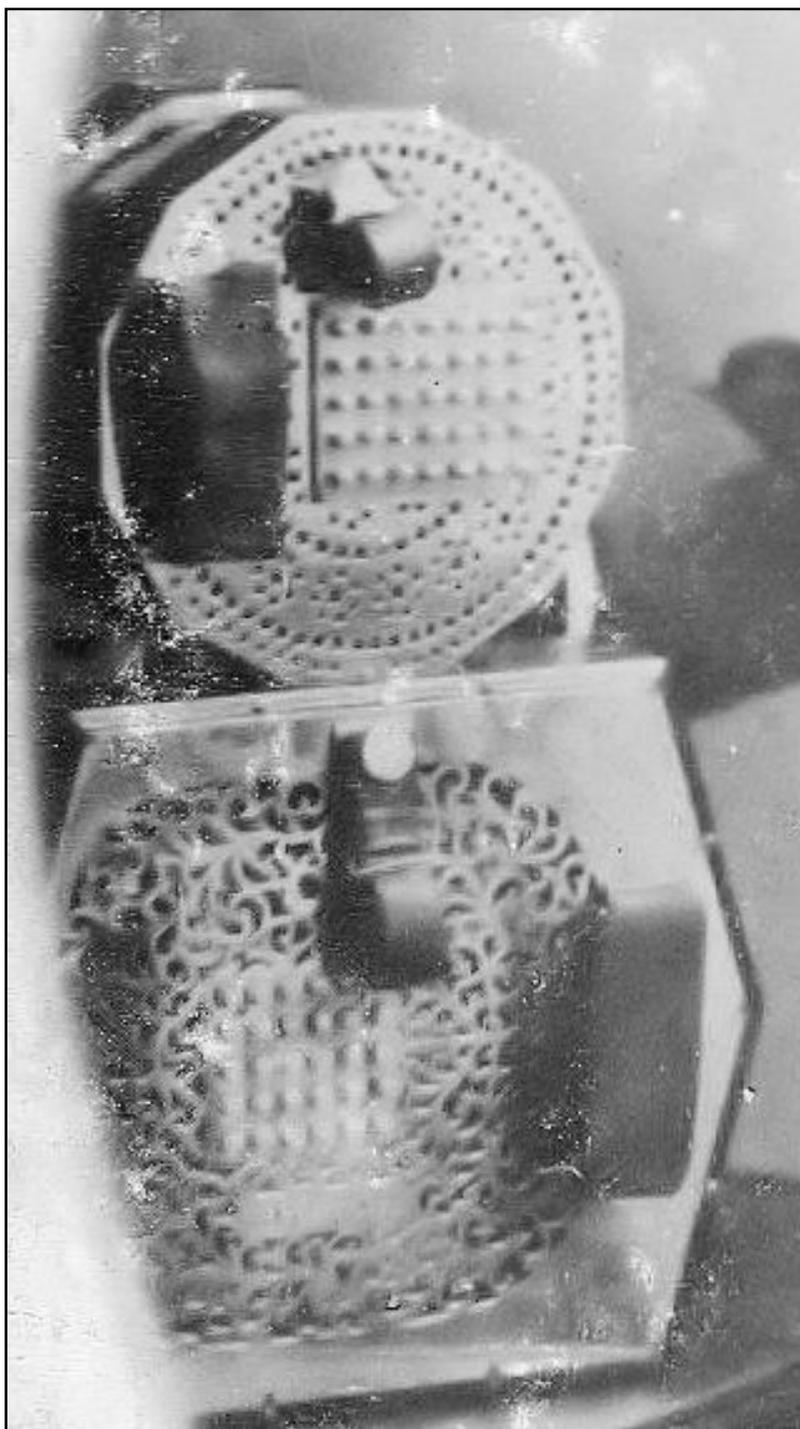


Fig. 4.  
William  
Hurlstone's  
concertinas.

To conclude with a brief biographical note: William George Hurlstone (b. 1874) and Ellen Ferris (1882-1941), daughter of a bookbinder, were married on 3 September 1907 in St. George, Hanover Square, London. Their marriage certificate shows that William resided in Pimlico and was an 'Instrumentalist' at the time of the marriage. Marjorie Joyce Hurlstone was born on 3 January 1917, at which time the Hurlstones were living in North Brixton, and William was a 'Scientific Instrument Maker', as he is described on Marjorie's birth certificate. On 26 July 1941, Marjorie married one Frank Rosso, a shoemaker from Toronto who was then a private in the Royal Squadron, Army Service Corps and stationed in England. By then, Marjorie was a stenographer for a jewelry and watch-making business, while William was still a maker of scientific instruments. After the war, Frank and Marjorie Rosso resided in Toronto.

The Center for the Study of Free-Reed  
Instruments,

The Graduate Center of the City University of  
New York



Housed at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York, the Center for the Study of Free-Reed Instruments (Allan Atlas, Director) fosters research and discussion about all aspects of all free-reed instruments. To that end, the Center sponsors a concert/colloquium each Spring semester, maintains a library/archive of materials pertaining to free-reed instruments (the jewels of which are a large collection of Victorian music for the English concertina and the Deiro Archive, which preserves the documentary and recorded legacy of the legendary accordionists Guido and Pietro Deiro), has published four volumes of The Free-Reed Journal (1999-2002), and now co-publishes with the ICA Papers of the International Concertina Association. Among past events: 'Tango-Bandoneón-Piazzolla' (2000), 'The Accordion as an Icon of Italian-American Culture' (2001), 'The Incredible Concertina: A Concert in Honor of Sir Charles Wheatstone--A Bicentennial Celebration' (2002), 'Free Reeds of Asia' (2003), and 'Viva Regondi' (2006).

**HISTORICAL DOCUMENT**  
**Charles Wheatstone on the Police Blotter**

NOTES BY ALLAN ATLAS

Bad things happen! Even to our heroes! Thus did the young (sixteen-year-old) Charles Wheatstone (1802-1875) fall victim to a crime! But every cloud has a silver lining: it was a flute—*not* a concertina—that was stolen from his home, and that for a very good reason: the crime took place on 17 March 1818, that is, likely before the concertina was even a glimmer in Sir Charles's mind (the Wheatstone family manufactured flutes at the time.)

The following account of the Old Bailey proceedings speaks for itself and is drawn from *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, London 1674 to 1834*: 'The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, Ref: t18180401—28', online at [www.oldbaileyonline.org/htmo\\_units/1810s/1810s/t18180401—28.html](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/htmo_units/1810s/1810s/t18180401—28.html) (accessed 29 December 2005; note that we could no longer access this on 3 May 2008.)

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557. SAMUEL CROUCH and JAMES BULL were indicted for stealing, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March [1818], one flute, value 3£, the goods of Charles Wheatstone, in his dwelling-house.

MOSES HARRIS [testimony]. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, about seven o'clock in the morning, I met the prisoner, Crouch, in Great Marylebone-street, and asked him if he had any thing to sell? I knew him before. He said he would take me where there were some things to sell. He took me to Marylebone-mews, and sold me the flute and other things. As I was going along Holborn, I went into a music-shop, to ask the value of it. A boy, who was there claimed it as his master's—"Wheatstone, Strand," was stamped on it. Bull was present when I bought it, and said he sold it to Crouch.

EDMUND BRYAN [testimony]. I am servant to Mr. Wheatstone. I was in Mr. Oxley's shop, in Holborn. A man came into the shop with the flute, I claimed it, and the man beckoned to Harris. He then came in.

WILLIAM CLEMENTS [testimony]. I apprehended the prisoner and found a 1£ note on Bull.

MOSES HARRIS [testimony]. I know this to be one of the notes I paid him by a blot.

(Property produced and sworn to.) NOT GUILTY.

Second Middlesex Jury, before Lord C.J. Ellenborough.

## REVIEW-ESSAYS

### ***The Clare Set: Free Reed Reissues Classic Clare Concertina Recordings Monumental but Hardly Definitive***

Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin

***The Clare Set: The Definitive 6-CD Archive of the Concertina Traditions of County Clare***, various artists. Free Reed AnClar06 (2006)

For centuries, the near-insular county of Clare, on Ireland's western seaboard, has been an unlikely land's end for travelers and merchants, evangelists and colonial bureaucrats, antiquarians and historians. Anthropologists and music collectors too have added their peregrinations to the well-worn pathways of earlier travelers.<sup>1</sup> Like the proverbial goldfish in a transparent bowl, the natives of Clare have been screened and measured, described and defined by legions of scribes from all corners of the globe. From Harvardians Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball whose somewhat spurious account of a 'typical Irish rural community' was based on fieldwork conducted in Clare in the 1930s,<sup>2</sup> to English concertina enthusiasts Neil Wayne and John Tams, whose fieldwork produced this monumental collection of Clare music in the 1970s, *etic* enthusiasts of various persuasions have sought to render the all-illusory *definitive account* of this isolated barren place and its quaint, if oddly exotic, inhabitants.

Music collecting has enjoyed a long and eclectic history in Clare, since the forays of George Petrie and Eugene O'Curry in the pre-famine years of the nineteenth century to the now famous radio journeys of Séamus Ennis and Ciarán MacMathúna over a century afterwards. By the 1970s, however, Clare was rapidly exposed to new currents in popular and counter cultures, both of which would have a pivotal impact on its traditional music and on those concerned with its preservation. A decade after the implementation of the Lemass-Whitaker plan for Irish economic recovery in the late 1950s, the region had grown relatively prosperous as foreign corporations invested in the Shannon industrial corridor and Clare's youth no longer felt the need to emigrate in large numbers. The introduction of television to Ireland in 1961 had, by the end of the decade, reinforced the presence of Anglo-American popular culture throughout Clare, as well as in other parts of rural Ireland. Likewise, Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community (later the European Union) in 1973, set the stage for seasonal incursions of new tourists from the university towns of Europe. Young Americans too found their way to Clare in the 1970s,

many seeking a respite from the corporate liberalism and sprawling suburban culture of Uncle Sam. For reasons still largely unexplored, Clare and, in particular, the straggling fishing village of Doolin on the edge of the Burren karst, became a musical mecca for a global community of students and hippies escaping the chains of modern industrial culture. 'Landing in with their bags and their rags'—in the prophetic words of Pakie Russell (Doolin's philosopher and concertina player)—on an aging community of farmers and fishermen (one of the largest concentrations of bachelors in the West of Ireland), these *arrivistes* transformed Doolin into an *entrepôt* of multicultural tourism during the 1970s. Dubbed by one laconic wag as 'the vas in Doolin crowd', demin-clad blondes from Sweden, German rucksackers, and sallow-skinned Francophones in yellow wind-breakers packed Doolin's three pubs to capacity every night to hear the natives play the music of another era. In the narrow street outside, tourist bikes, laden with bags and maps, jostled with tractors, cattle creels, and the Citroën *deux cheveaux* (the ubiquitous people's car of France) for miniscule parking spots. The hidden Ireland of rural Clare would never again be the same. In the resulting transformation, this transient community would change forever the cultural texture of Clare, designating Doolin as a world capital of Irish traditional music and elevating its hereditary keepers (especially the Russell brothers) to the role of ambassadors of a music that was once consigned to the periphery of Irish life.

It was into this milieu of socio-cultural change that Neil Wayne and John Tams arrived in January 1974. As counter-cultural hippies, folkies, and revivalists were witnessing and waking the old folk ways, new cultural vistas (Anglo-American and European) beckoned abruptly from afar. In Clare, 'the spiritual home of the concertina', according to Tams, the instrument was associated with an older cohort of male performers, relatively few in number, who represented the public face of a once-thriving tradition that went back to the Great Famine of the 1840s. Marginalized by mass-produced accordions (the instrument of choice for most young Irish musicians in the 1960s and 1970s), the concertina seemed as if it might go the way of the uilleann pipes in Clare, or indeed the harp on the eve of the Belfast harpers' gathering in 1792 (that attracted a mere ten performers, the last of their kind who were heirs to a thousand years of music). Disciples of the English folk revival, Wayne, a concertina historian, and Tams, a well-known folk singer (and future music director with BBC Radio 2), began their journey in Dublin, where they were treated to 'tea and cream buns' by the then upwardly-mobile overlord of the Chieftains, Paddy Moloney, in the luxurious offices of Claddagh Records. In the weeks that

followed, their journey took them from the former second city of the empire across the heartland of the nation, westwards over the Shannon to the Banner County of Clare. Armed with Nagra and Sennheiser tape recorders and a van ready to tackle the byroads of rural Ireland, their mission was to record the keepers of Clare's concertina music and publish it on Wayne's nascent Free Reed label, which had joined forces with Topic Records, an older company with strong socialist credentials that had brought icons like Ewan MacColl, A.L. Lloyd, and Shirley Collins to public attention during the halcyon days of the British folk revival.<sup>3</sup> To help bring their task to fruition, Wayne and Tams recruited Kerry folklorist Muiris Ó Rócháin (Director of Scoil Shamhraidh Willie Clancy, the largest Irish traditional music academy in the world), who had just settled in Miltown Malbay a few years earlier; in addition, there were West Cork concertina player and music historian, Seán O'Dwyer, English folklorists A.L. Lloyd and Roly Brown, designer Tony Engle, and photographer Valerie Wilmer. In 2007, Dubliner Shay Fogarty and former Chieftain, Michael Turbidity contributed their editorial skills to the re-issued box set of this 1974 expedition.

## **The Recordings, Performers, and Collectors**

***The Russell Family of Doolin, Co Clare*** (Free Reed FCLAR 01, originally Topic LP 12TS 251). Recorded in 1974 and released the following year, when Doolin was a nascent mecca of Irish traditional music, this recording features the Russell brothers—Micho (1915-1994), Pakie (1920-1977), and Gussie (1917-2004)—playing whistle, flute, and concertina, as well as the wonderfully quaint traditional singing of Micho Russell. With an ethnographic essay and annotated tune notes by Muiris Ó Rocháin (who had just launched Scoil Shamraidh Willie Clancy in nearby Miltown Malbay the previous year), this recording is an abiding testament to unadorned traditional playing rendered in its own natural environment without recourse to studio contrivances or technical gimmickry. It is suitably adorned with period photographs of the Russells playing outside the door of Gussie O'Conner's pub in Doolin (before it was 'spruced up' for the hordes of *vas in Doolin* tourists), as well as stoic portraits (especially of Pakie) taken within the portals of this once all-male sanctuary. The new issue also features a copy of the real estate advert announcing the sale of the Russell homestead after the death of Gussie, the last brother, in 2004—a sad reminder of the music and music makers that are no more.

From a musical perspective, this disc contains a superb snapshot of vernacular dance music and song plucked directly from its guardians in full flight in the kitchen of their local hostelry. The ambiance of the performance has more in keeping with the natural milieu of a *teach cuairde* (old-world visiting house) than a modern pub intent on matching tunes played with pints of Guinness sold. Unfazed by microphones or foreign guests, the brothers seem totally relaxed as they play through various solo, duo, and trio combinations. While Micho's songs, sung in his own inimitable style, were light years removed from the lyrics sweeping to fame on commercial charts, his archaic narratives spoke of an older *gemeinschaft* of saints and monasteries, migrant fishermen in search of patronage, and farmers' sons intent on courtship. Likewise, the whistle playing of himself and Gussie, deceptive in its simplicity, was filled with enigmatic silences and unpredictable beauty. For concertina aficionados, this recording shines a rare spotlight on the musical genius of Pakie Russell, one of the most unlauded figures of Irish concertina music. His playing of *The Heather(y) Breeze* and *The Traveler* (signature pieces), *Russell's Hornpipe* and *Fisher's Hornpipe*, as well as *Tommy Glenny's Reel (Tear the Calico)* is laced with melodic taste and rhythmic sophistication. However, his unique treatment of the local *Connemara Stockings* (of biblical importance in the music of Kilfenora) and the global *The De'il Among the Tailors* (known under various French and English monickers all over North America) is nothing short of stunning. The pensive, curious, and roguish personality of Pakie (so well explored in the erudite essays of Irish poet Michael Coady, and quintessential reading for anyone interested in the Russells and their habitat) permeates these tunes and continues to inspire those with an ear for the deep spirituality that underlies this music. Reflecting on the folk philosophy that informed this old world, Coady cites the maxim: *Is deartháir don phaidir an port* - 'The tune is brother to the prayer'.<sup>4</sup> It is that same ageless maxim that lies at the heart of this historic recording.

**Clare Concertinas—Bernard O'Sullivan & Tommy McMahon** (FCLAR02, originally Topic/Free LP 12TFRS 502). Recorded in 1974 in the Cree-Cooraclare district of south west Clare (one of the heartlands of the Clare concertina and birthplace of Mrs. Elizabeth Crotty, Ireland's 'First Lady of Concertina'), Bernard O'Sullivan and his neighbour Tommy McMahon (accompanied by Bernard's daughter Bernadette playing guitar on some tracks) perform a bevy of traditional dance tunes from reels, jigs and hornpipes to polkas, Napoleonic marches, and set dances, the latter being a relatively neglected genre in Irish traditional music. A former student of Mick 'Stack' Ryan (who

ran an informal concertina school in nearby Leitrim) and an experienced veteran of the house dance scene, Bernard O'Sullivan had a wealth of local dance music. McMahon, then a twenty-four-year-old All Ireland Champion (1971, 1972, and 1973), was somewhat more exposed to musical influences beyond his immediate habitat, not least of which were those garnered by contacts made at *fleadhanna* and on concert stages outside of Clare.

As a duo, the older master and his young protégé played with tremendous empathy and panache. Their treatment of the polkas *The Babes in the Wood*, *The Cooraclare Polka*, and *Clare's Dragoons* (originally a march) is a classic case in point, and speaks to a bygone era of Plain Set dancing (to polkas) in south west Clare. Likewise, their treatment of the set dance *Rodney's Glory*, composed by the eighteenth-century Kerry poet Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-1784), is exemplary. Notwithstanding McMahon's interest in external dialects of dance music, his sense of deference towards local sources is evident throughout this disc, particularly in the jig set *Martin Talty's*, *Thomas Friel's*, and *Joe Cuneen's* (affirming local tradition bearers from the Miltown Malbay-Quilty area of midwest Clare), *The Danganella Hornpipe* (named after his own townland), and *Ollie Conway's Selection*, which recalls one of Ireland's legendary set dancers who grew up in nearby Kilmihil before moving to Mullagh where his pub is one of west Clare's best-known landmarks for musicians and dancers. Like the other discs in the collection, this ethnographic recording is a timely testament to an era and a soundscape that has changed radically in the past three decades. Its ultimate demise may well have been foretold in the prophetic words of the Basket storytellers: *Ní bheidh a leithéidí ann arís*—'Their kind will never be here again'.

***Irish Traditional Concertina Music—The Flowing Tide: Chris Droney*** (Free Reed FCLAR 03, originally Topic/Free Reed LP 12TFRS 503). A veteran of *fleadh cheoil* competitions, concert tours and céilí bands for over half a century, Chris Droney from Bellharbour (a picturesque hamlet overlooking Galway Bay on the brow of the Burren in north Clare) is the most recorded of Ireland's senior concertina players. This disc was recorded by Tams and Wayne in January 1974 when Chris Droney was in his prime. It includes twenty-one tracks of reels, jigs, hornpipes, polkas, marches, waltzes, and a slow air: *Ar Éirinn, Ní Neosfainn Cé Hí* (regrettably listed as 'untitled' in the credits). As with all of the new issues, this CD package contains reflective travelogues by Wayne and Tams, an essay on the history of the concertina in Clare (in which Clare plays an ancillary role to the history

of the instrument in England, Wayne's real area of specialization), a blurb on Éigse Mrs. Crotty, and a marketing promo for the remainder of *The Clare Set* (as well as a supplementary extract from the Free Reed catalogue in this booklet). Despite this welter of literature, the package contains no tune notes whatsoever. The only annotations the listener is given on the music of Droney—a key figure in Irish concertina music—is a superficial five-paragraph biography. That said, the contrasting (historical and contemporary) photographs are a fitting tribute to his enduring place in the chronology of Irish concertina music.

Chris Droney's music is distinguished by an unornamented 'single-note' style, a driving rhythm, and an upbeat pulse (referred to as 'lift' in Clare) that is tailor made for the set dancers of north Clare; and to this day, he is highly sought-after as a dance player. In this recording, his music (much of it inherited from his father Jim Droney, one of last Gaelic speakers in north Clare) finds its historic wellspring in pieces like *The Three Little Drummers* and *The Eagle's Nest*, *The Union Reel*, *The Three Part Jig (The Bride's Favorite)*, and *Tim Maloney's Reel*. Droney's own gift for composition makes a cameo appearance in *The Bellharbour Reel*, popular in Irish music communities on both sides of the Atlantic. His signature hornpipe, *The Flowing Tide*, is also included. Published as *The Seventh Regiment* reel in *Ryan's Mammoth Collection*, this tune is attributed to the nineteenth-century fiddler Conn Higgins.<sup>5</sup> Its transition to hornpipe status remains a mystery.

While the inclusion of additional tracks in the new CD version is laudable in principle, it is frustrating that tunes often reappear under different titles in the bonus tracks (as in the case of track 10's *The Three Part Jig* and *The Moate Hunt*, which re-emerge as *Katie's Fancy* and *Willie Coleman's Jig* - both valid alternative titles - in the bonus tracks). Surely, between the additional editors and multiple checking mechanisms, a vote could have been taken in the name of consistency. Omissions also occur in the additional tracks. Track 20, for example, which is listed as *Connemara Stockings*, actually opens with *John Brennan's Reel* (which has at least fifteen other titles to choose from) before Droney changes into *The Connemara Stockings*, a local favourite.

Some effort could have been made to safeguard the integrity of Irish language names and titles, not just on this disc but throughout the series. While this has not always been a strong suit among British 'visitors' to Ireland, it is grating to see an absurd meaningless title such as *Sliam na Gapall* in place of the correct version: *Sliabh na gCapaill*

(‘Mountain of the Horses’) on the Droney disc. Flippant inaccuracies are speckled throughout the other booklets too; not least of which is the near universal absence of length accents (*síntí fada*) over long vowels in Irish-language names, as in Séamus Ennis, Seán O’Dwyer, Mícheál (*not: Michael*) MacAogáin, Muiris Ó Rócháin (*not: Muiris O Rochain*) and Bunnán (*not: Bunnan*). This lack of care also extends to photo captions, as in *Sceoil Eigse* for *Scoil Éigse* (correct version) and *Eigse Teachers* for *Éigse Teachers* (correct version with the proper accent). Failure to use accents in Irish can completely change the meaning of a word. Similarly, the plural of *céilí* (a traditional dance) is not *ceilidhs* but rather *céilithe*. Now that the Irish language (after centuries of colonial oppression and at times native indifference) is an official language of the European Union, surely it is time to afford it the full dignity of orthographic accuracy—as with any other national language of equal political and cultural status.

**John Kelly: Irish Traditional Concertina and Fiddle Music** (Free Reed FCLAR 04, originally Topic/Free Reed LP 12FRS 503). Recorded in January 1974 by Neil Wayne and John Tams and in March and April 1975 by Tony Engle and Patrick Hayes, this seminal disc was released originally in 1975. It features the concertina and fiddle music of John Kelly from Rehy West on the Iorris peninsula in south west Clare (he had lived in Dublin since the 1940s). A veritable encyclopedia of traditional dance music, tune lore, and folklife, John Kelly was a key member of Seán Ó Riada’s Ceoltóirí Chualann (forerunner of the Chieftains), an ensemble that had refashioned Irish traditional music by presenting it formally on the concert hall stage. Kelly was also a veteran of both the celebrated Castle Céilí Band (that swept to national prominence at the All Ireland Fleadh Cheoil in Thurles in 1965) and Ceoltóirí Laighean (another outgrowth of Ceoltóirí Chualann founded by musician and filmmaker Éamon de Buítléar after Ó Riada’s death in 1972).

By the time Wayne and Tams arrived in Dublin, Kelly was an archdeacon in the city’s traditional pub sessions, holding court in Slattery’s and later in the Four Seasons, across the street from his home and shop (the Horse Shoe) in Capel Street. These legendary sessions were learning academies for scores of musicians from all over Ireland who came to learn from Kelly and his cohorts Joe Ryan and Desi O’Connor. The apex of the CD series in terms of archaic tune settings, this recording showcases Kelly at the height of his career. Drawing on an older and often peripheral repertoire from players like Charlie Simmonds, Tim Griffin, Frank Keane, and Patsy Geary from Iorris,

Kelly as a hereditary keeper of an older dialect of Clare concertina music was indeed the last of his kind. Today's genericization of styles among younger players has afforded little affirmation or longevity to this rare dialect of concertina music. Interspersed with fiddle tunes (local and external), the concertina pieces that really shine in terms of stylistic rarity are the reels *The Spike Island Lassies*, *The Heathery Breeze* (very reminiscent of west Clare), Charlie Simmonds' version of *Eddie Dunn's Reel* (a setting of *The Bag of Potatoes*), and Neil Gow's *Flogging Reel*. The inclusion of quaint slides and jigs from an older pre-reel era in south west Clare is also a marked feature of this recording. Slides that linked the music of the Iorrus peninsula with Sliabh Luachra (through the work of travelling teachers like George Whelan, who crossed the Shannon from Kerry into west Clare in the late nineteenth century) are an all-too-rare commodity in the music of Clare today. The glimpses we get here in *The Scatterry Island Slide* and *John Kelly's Slide* speak to a time when slides and polkas populated the soundscape of Clare before retreating across the Shannon to their celebrated Sliabh Luachra heartland in west Limerick, north Kerry, and north west Cork. While the additional tracks on the re-issued recording will invariably appeal to fiddlers (although track 27 is a two-part version of *Jenny's Welcome to Charlie*, followed by a brief interlude of *The Collier's Reel*, not *Lucy Campbell* as listed), John Kelly's voice introducing the (repeat of the) hornpipe *An Comhra Donn* (not the jig set cited) on track 28 is a tease for listeners who never knew or heard him. A track (or two) devoted to an ethnographic interview with Kelly—a pithy and colorful character, who was very articulate, even down to his legendary malapropisms—would have helped introduce his personality, as well as his music, to a broader, newer, and younger audience. This recording above all the others in the compendium is the *pièce de resistance*, a priceless jewel in a sea of gems.

**Tommy McMahon & Bernard O'Sullivan—Irish Traditional Concertina Music of Co. Clare** (FCLAR05, originally Topic/Free Reed LP 12TFRS 505). Issued a year after its 1975 precursor, this disc contains another installment of the field recordings made in Bernard O'Sullivan's house in Sheane in January 1974. Showcasing their duet that lasted over thirty years until O'Sullivan's death in August 2006, Tommy McMahon and his mentor Bernard O'Sullivan play more reels, jigs, hornpipes, set dances, and polkas from a variety of indigenous and external sources. While some pundits feel that these performers were over-represented in the collection (in comparison to such players as Mary King, Mary Lynch, Bridget Dineen, Micho Doyle, and Pappy Looney, all of whom were within easy reach of Wayne and Tams, as

well as countless others all over Clare who failed to register on the grid), the performance quality of the duet playing on this second disc is just as commendable as it is on the first. Worthy of note are the polkas *I Have a Bonnet Trimmed with Blue* and *The Rakes of Mallow* (given very different treatment here from the hackneyed routine of dancing school initiation drills usually associated with it) and the jigs *The Blooming Meadows*, *The Mullagh Jig*, and *The Ballinakill Jig*. Although McMahon's 'external' influences (especially ornamentation patterns and tune settings from accordion players, who were a dominant force in Irish music in the 1970s) can be a bit jarring at times, his peregrinations beyond the fold are counter balanced by O'Sullivan, whose solo pieces from the repertoire of Stack Ryan more than compensate for the 'modernist' proclivities of his cohort.

While the additional tracks are interesting and their inclusion laudable, there is some repetition and confusion with respect to titles that could have been avoided with more discerning editing. These shortcomings aside, the disc continues the exemplary standard of sound recording evidenced in the previous discs. Photographs of the performers (working farmers taken from their midday chores by the visiting collectors) are also included, plus an exquisite period photograph of Stack Ryan posing for the camera in his Sunday best. Similarly, the photo collage in the first CD by O'Sullivan and McMahon contains an interesting contrast between historical black and white prints taken in 1974 and color prints taken when Shay Fogarty went back to visit O'Sullivan and his family thirty-two years after the field trip of Tams and Wayne. One of these modern prints shows Bernard and his grandson both playing concertinas—a portent for some musical continuity in the land of the affluent Celtic Tiger.

***Irish Traditional Concertina Styles—Twelve great players from the 1970s*** (FCLAR06, originally Topic/Free Reed LP 12TFRS 506). This CD represents a veritable 'Who's Who' of the Irish concertina in the 1970s. There are twenty-two tracks from twelve players recorded in 1974 and released on LP in 1975, as well as eight additional tracks from Chris Droney, the Russell family, Tommy McMahon, and Bernard O'Sullivan. Clare players dominate this compendium: among them are Paddy Murphy, Sonny Murray, Gerald Haugh, Solus Lillis, Tom Carey, Chris Droney, Pakie Russell, Tommy McMahon, and Bernard O'Sullivan. Two younger Dublin players, Seán O'Dwyer and Mícheál MacAogáin, (both transplants from west Cork and Sligo), as well as Seán O'Dwyer's mother, Ella Mae O'Dwyer (a native of west

Limerick who married and raised a family in Ardgroom on the Beara peninsula in west Cork), fill the ranks of the non-Clare cohort.

This CD is a musical *tour de force* that spans the spectrum from the most sophisticated modern masters of the day (Paddy Murphy) to quaint older stylists (Chris Droney and Ella Mae O'Dwyer). Occupying the ground between these two poles were players like Sonny Murray, Tom Carey, and Gerald Haugh. There was also a 'middle generation' between the senior figures whose styles were brought to fruition on cheaper German concertinas and the younger players of today who can afford expensive Anglo-German instruments (made by Jeffries and Wheatstone) that lent themselves to complex fingering techniques and more challenging repertoires. Although paltry in comparison to the man's standing at the apex of modern Irish concertina music, the two tracks recorded by Paddy Murphy of Kilmaley—*Kit O'Mahoney's Jig* and *The Mason Apron*—represent only a modicum in a colossal store of highly-sophisticated concertina music. The disappointing lack of ethnobiographical detail in the liner notes (along with several historical inaccuracies) does nothing to elevate Murphy to his rightful place in the pantheon of Irish concertina music. Thankfully, the gaping lacuna in this compendium was finally redressed in 2007 with the release of an extensive historic recording of Paddy Murphy's music by the San Francisco-based Celtic Crossings label, which was launched to popular acclaim by Cathal Goan, Director General of RTE (Irish National Television) in Clare in December 2007. (Full details can be downloaded from: [www.celticcrossings.com](http://www.celticcrossings.com) and [www.paddymurphy.eu](http://www.paddymurphy.eu).)

Sonny Murray, another celebrated west Clare player from Knockalough near Kilmihil, is also featured on this final disc. An exemplary player with a considerable repertoire of tunes (on whistle and concertina), Murray's style is rich in melodic detail and polished in its use of 'long note' phrasing, double-octave variations, and rhythmic cadences. Ironically, all of his contributions are misrepresented by the editors, not least in their lack of attention to detail in titles and inclusiveness. In the opening track, he is listed as playing *The King of the Clans* reel, whereas, in fact, he plays *Christmas Eve* (also known as *Tommy Coen's Reel*). *The King of the Clans* appears (unlisted) in track 10, after a tune incorrectly titled *The Morning Dew*. The correct title of the latter is *The Daisy Field*, composed by Aughrim Slopes fiddler Paddy Kelly. In track 9, Murray is listed as playing *Chancy Cheory* and *West Along the Road*, whereas the standard vernacular titles for these tunes in Clare are *Seán sa Cheo* (attributed to Donegal fiddler Neilie Boyle) and *Come West Along the Road*. Incidentally, *The*

*London Lassies*, which he plays to close the suite, is totally missing from the track index. In the thirty-two-year window since the initial launch of the series in 1975 and its update to CD status in 2007, it is quite inexcusable that it never occurred to the editors to check tune titles or proof the audio files for accurate disclosure of their contents.

The inclusion of Ella Mae O'Dwyer—the only female concertina player in the series—was a welcome return to the older milieu of the German concertina, which enjoyed widespread currency in rural communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She is featured on seven tracks that include jigs, reels, a march, a barn dance, and a number of polkas that are spuriously described by the editors as 'set tunes' and 'set dances' for reasons known only to themselves. Her playing of the jigs *Jenny's Beaver Hat*, popularly known as *Jerry's Beaver Hat*, and *The Humours of Glendart*, also known as *East of Glendart* (neither of which feature in the tune names), is exquisite. Again, the editorial guardians fail to identify the barn dance in track 8 as *The Stack of Barley*, which is known to virtually every school child in Ireland who ever held a traditional instrument. Similarly, the barn dance referred to as the *Ardgroom Set* (which may or may not be a contrived title) is known in Sliabh Luachra (the childhood home of Mrs. O'Dwyer) as *Johnny Leary's Polka*, *Tournmore*, or *Wallace's Cross*. A modicum of editorial cross-checking could have unearthed this information that would have added exponentially to the 'scholarly' credibility of the project.

This compendium also features the duo playing of Tom Carey and Solus Lillis, who contributed three selections to the disc: *The Clare Jig (Stack Ryan's)*, *Apples in Winter*, and a track simply cited as *Reels*. Here again, ethnomusicological accuracy is marred by a lack of editorial vigilance, as tunes and titles fail to register with the collectors. Track 6, generically titled *Reels* contains *The Heathery Breeze* (which appears twice previously in the collection—played by John Kelly and the Russell Family—and should have been familiar to the editors at this point) and *The New Copperplate*, another popular standard. Likewise, *Apples in Winter* is followed by *The Boys of the Town* and *The Carraroe Jig*, neither of which is identified by our editors.

The 'Spot-the-Mis(un)named-Tune' safari continues throughout the remainder of the compendium. Track 25 cites Chris Droney playing *The Dublin Reel*, whereas he actually plays *Jim McCormick's Reel* (a four-part tune named after a celebrated flute player with the Kilfenora Céilí Band). While part of the tune is a transposed cognate of *The Dublin*

*Reel* (from D major to G major), the overall melody is quite distinct and recognized by most of the informed Irish traditional music community as being a different tune from the three-part *Dublin Reel*. In track 27, the Russell brothers are listed as playing *The Skylark*, whereas, in fact, they play *The Scholar*, a reel made famous by Miltown Malbay piper Willie Clancy. Few informed editors would confuse both pieces. In track 18, Solus Lillis is cited as playing an *Air from Thomas Moor* (which should read *Thomas Moore*, one of the most illustrious musical figures of the Regency period). Despite Solus's interpretative license, the piece bears an uncanny resemblance to the Gaelic air *Caoine Cill Cháis* (especially in the second part). This eighteenth-century song mourns the destruction of Ireland's native forests, such as those around Cill Cháis in south Tipperary, during the Elizabethan conquest in the sixteenth century. Sadly, these forests were never replenished by their exploiters.

### **Lacunae and Selectivity in the Fieldwork**

Editorial quibbling aside, the definitive pretensions of *The Clare Set* are also laid bare by other key inconsistencies. At a time when women were becoming increasingly visible in Irish traditional music (and when the Women's Movement was particularly active in Irish social, political, and intellectual life), it is quite astonishing that the collectors could not have seen their way to include any more than one female performer, Ella Mae O'Dwyer (two, if one counts guitarist Bernadette O'Sullivan), in this project. As mentioned already, Clare was awash with female performers in the 1970s, such as Mary King, Mary Lynch, Bridget Dineen, Molly Carthy, Nora Neylon, and Susan Whelan, all of whom were within easy access (a ten-mile radius) of Wayne and Tams at the time of their fieldwork. While social mores may have prevented some of these ladies from performing in public, an effort to record some of them in their own homes (as was the case of their male cohorts who qualified for inclusion) may have presented a more balanced gender profile. When, a decade afterwards, I conducted my own ethnomusicological fieldwork in Clare, I interviewed fifteen elderly female performers, four of whom lived to be over one-hundred years: Susan Whelan from Moy, Bridget Dinan from Clooney, Margaret Dooley from Knockjames and Molly Carthy from Lisroe, who was still playing a week before she died at the age of 104 in December 2000. Sadly, not one of these performers was ever sought out by broadcasters, collectors, or archivists before I interviewed them in the years 1985-1988. Similarly, in choosing to ignore young performers, the collection created the (unintended) impression of a last-ditch rescue operation. In the 1970s, young Clare players like Noel Hill, Ann Droney, Nuala Hill,

Jacqui McCarthy, and a very young Mary McNamara were all beginning to come to national prominence at *fleadhanna* and Slógadh competitions. A nod in their direction by Wayne and Tams may have helped to reinforce their confidence and affirm their place within the growing repository of Irish concertina music. Emigrant Clare players are also conspicuously absent from the grid, among them, Tommy McCarthy from Sheane, who lived in London and who, according to Wayne, had 'transformed the pub sessions scene in the capital' (see *From here to Clare—winter 1974. Some notes by Neil Wayne*). Having supplied the names and addresses of his musical neighbours in west Clare to Neil Wayne, McCarthy was probably the initial catalyst that led to this mammoth collection. His inclusion in the final product would have been a grateful gesture for the generosity that inspired the journey.

Topographical myopia is also a disconcerting issue. Although they aspired to present a *definitive* archive of Clare concertina music (and even claimed non-Clare musicians like Johnny Doran, a Wicklow man, and Michelle O'Sullivan, a Kerry woman, for the Banner County), the collectors devoted most of their time and energy to south west and north west Clare. The part of Clare that lies east of the Fergus river valley (almost half of the landmass) found no place at all in the collection. In ignoring east Clare, Wayne and Tams missed a formidable treasury of concertina music, for it was a time when east Clare masters like 'Young' John Naughton, Bridget Dinan, Mickey Donoghue, Margaret Dooley (who was recorded by the BBC on her hundredth birthday), John Gorman, and Paddy Shaughnessy were all still in their prime. While their music found its way into my own field collections (housed in Queen's University, Belfast), it also found a global voice in the fiddling of Martin Hayes and the concertina playing of Mary McNamara. Had these masters featured to any extent in this monumental collection, *The Clare Set* could at least justify some claim to being a *definitive* portrait of Clare music. Alas, such claims remain untenable.

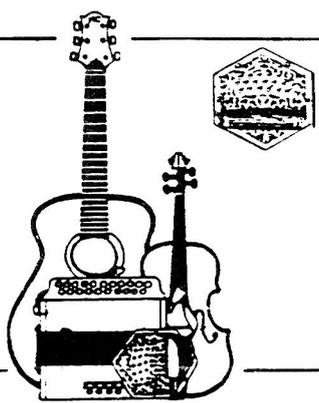
#### NOTES

1. See Brian Ó Dalaigh, ed., *The Stranger's Gaze: Travels in County Clare 1534-1950* (Ennis: Clasp Press, 1998); Kieran Sheedy, ed., *The Clare Anthology* (Ennis: Clasp Press, 1999).
2. See Conrad Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), and Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940).
3. One of the most celebrated albums of Irish traditional music, *Street Songs and Fiddle Tunes of Ireland*, which featured the Cork street singer Margaret Barry

and Sligo fiddler Michael Gorman (both of whom were based in London), was issued by Topic in 1958. For a history of Topic Records, see Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival 1944-2002* (Aldershot [UK] and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

4. Michael Coady, *The Well of Spring Water: A Memoir of Packie and Micho Russell of Doolin, Co. Clare*, (Carrick-on-Suir: Private Publication, 1996), 40.

5. William B. Ryan, *Ryan's Mammoth Collection: 1050 Reel and Jigs, Horn-pipes, Clogs, Walk-arounds, Essences, Strathspeys, Highland Flings and Contra Dances, with Flings and How to Play Them* (Boston: Elias Howe, 1883; reissued by Patrick Sky, St. Louis: Mel Bay Publications, 1995), 75.

	<p><b>CHRIS ALGAR</b></p> <p>BARLEYCORN CONCERTINAS AND OTHER FOLK INSTRUMENTS 57 LITTLE CHELL LANE, TUNSTALL SYOKE ON TRENT ST6 6LZ Tel/Fax +44 (0) 1782 851449</p> <p>E-mail : barleycorn@concertina.co.uk Web site: www.concertina.co.uk</p> <p><b>CALLERS BY APPOINTMENT</b></p>
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## ***English International: A History of the English Concertina in Sound***

ALLAN ATLAS

***English International***, various artists. Folksounds Records FSCD 80 (2007).

In his wide-ranging essay on *Anglo International* (Folksounds Records, FSCD 70) in *PICA*, vol. 3 (pp. 38-44), Roger Digby confessed to a conflict of interest: he was writing about a set of CDs in which he himself had 'some slight involvement', permission for this having been granted by, as he put it, the 'esteemed editor' of the journal. To 'fess up, then: I find myself in the same position in reviewing *English International* (henceforth *English*), for I am one of the concertinists represented there, and I can say that I offered at least a modicum of advice (sometimes taken, sometimes not, which is just as it should be) as work on the collection progressed. And it is, therefore, with the permission of our esteemed reviews editor that I proceed.

Our reviews (Roger's and mine) share two other characteristics: (1) Roger was and I will be generous with praise and superlatives (and well deserved they are in both instances), and (2) like Roger, I will avoid a track-by-track or even a concertinist-by-concertinist approach (either of which quickly becomes tedious for both writer and reader). Rather, I shall look at *English* from the point of view of repertorial 'themes', as it were; for if there is one thing that *English* demonstrates, it is that the English concertina and its players have been—and still are—comfortable in many musical homes: from Bach to bluegrass, from the lyricism of the Victorian composer George Alexander Macfarren to shades of Woody's 'Herd', and on to some homes that teeter on somewhat hazily defined stylistic fences. And though this diversity sometimes complicates the task of thematicizing, I have settled on the following traditions, which I take up in the rough chronological order (with some inevitable overlapping) in which instrument and traditions initially came together: (1) the Victorian 'art-music' repertory; (2) music hall, vaudeville, and other 'commercial entertainment'; (3) concertina bands; (4) two Russian concertinists; (5) the folk and folk-influenced; (6) what we might call 'stretching the traditions'; and (7) 'art music' (that term again) composed for the concertina since the 1980s.

Prior to setting out, though, we should attend to some preliminary business. Conceived of and compiled by Alan Day and Graham

Bradshaw (APPLAUSE. . .APPLAUSE. . . . TAKE A BOW, GENTLEMEN!), *English* consists of three CDs, with eighty tracks by thirty-nine concertinists (or groups thereof), and runs for 3 hours-45 minutes. It comes with a beautifully illustrated, highly informative, 48-page booklet, and it is worth every pence or penny of its £25 price. It entertains and educates, and it even provides an occasional revelation. Its concertinists range from household names to those either now largely forgotten or just coming to the fore. In effect, it is a *history-in-sound* (beginning with the twentieth century, of course) of the English concertina. And as such it represents a major contribution—surely one of the most important in years—to our knowledge and appreciation of the instrument. Finally, since it is impossible to mention the playing of all the contributors, I hope that they and readers alike will understand that what goes unmentioned may nevertheless be quite mentionable.

**1. The Victorian Tradition:** Before the music hall, before the bands of the northern industrial towns and Salvation Army, before the village greens and pubs, there were London's leading recital halls and fashionable upper-class salons: that's where the English concertina found its first home, with players and repertory to match. And though we have no recordings by the period's two superstars, Giulio Regondi (d. 1872) and Richard Blagrove (d. 1895)—after whom the tradition pretty much exhausted itself, not to be revived until Douglas Rogers led the way with his recordings of Regondi in the early 1990s (see note 3 below)—*English* does afford us a brief but valuable earful of one player who could still claim direct roots in the tradition.

Though probably best known to concertinists as the author of *A Practical and Comprehensive Tutor for the Duet Concertina* (1914), Ernest Rutterford knew his way around the English. Moreover, he could brag about his pedigree: son or nephew of Charles Rutterford, who could, in turn, boast of having performed with Richard Blagrove. And it is in a performance of Blagrove's *Recollections of Scotland* that we hear Rutterford on *English* (disc 1/tracks 3-4). To be sure, there is nothing particularly subtle about Rutterford's playing: he zips up and down the sometimes interminable arpeggios (this particular piece is not one of Blagrove's better efforts) at a tempo that is just a shade faster than he can always manage cleanly; he plods through 'John Anderson, My Jo'; and with his instrument's low *g* blasting away like a bagpipe gone berserk, he drowns out the 'Monymusk' strathspey that is trying to be heard above (I find the sound of his instrument rather overpowering from the *d'* down).<sup>1</sup> In all, Rutterford seems to bring what I hear as the then-contemporary music hall style of performance to a piece that simply requires a bit more in the way of nuance and

subtlety. Yet it is absolutely wonderful to have the opportunity to hear him, for he no doubt exemplifies the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century approach to the Victorian repertory, and the recording therefore constitutes an important historical document.

As for present-day 'Victorianists': Pauline De Snoo offers a sensitive performance of George Alexander Macfarren's exquisite *Barcarole* (1/19)—how instructive it would have been had she offered the piece on the meantone concertina for which Macfarren explicitly wrote it (more than once Macfarren's notation makes one's eyes roll, as he calls for what would have been a rather sharp A flat in the concertina to sound against a G sharp in the piano)—while my own contribution (with pianist David Butler Cannata) consists of the 'Bolero' from Bernhard Molique's *Six Characteristic Pieces*, Op. 61 (1/6), and No. 4 from Giulio Regondi's set of twelve *Leisure Moments* (1/7), both performed on an 1866 Wheatstone beautifully restored by Wim Wakker of Concertina Connection.

Would I have liked a bit more in the way of the Victorian tradition? Of course! I'd have wallowed in it. But I also appreciate the tricky balancing act behind the production of an anthology such as this one: the need to weigh historicism against present-day trends and tastes. In the end, Alan and Graham—and therefore *English*—have probably gotten it right.<sup>2</sup>

**2. Music Hall, Vaudeville, and Commercial Entertainment:** I have, with respect to the concertina, been something of an ostrich, with both my performance and my research heads buried mainly in the Victorian sand. Thus while I knew that the English concertina had entered the music hall tradition as early as May 1851, when Alfred B. Sedgwick and a concertinist named Barton were performing at London's Royal Music Hall,<sup>3</sup> and though I was familiar with Tina Webb's display of virtuosity on the Fayre Four Sisters' 1950s recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee* (2/13),<sup>4</sup> my knowledge of this tradition during the intervening hundred years or so was rather slim. And as I quickly discovered in listening to *English*, it was I who had been the musically poorer for it. For as much as any of the traditions represented in the set, this one bowled me over, with the playing of two concertinists in particular—Walter Dale and Tommy Elliott (neither of whom I had ever heard before)—coming as something of a revelation.<sup>5</sup> The two musicians are different enough in terms of style. Perhaps we can say that the Birmingham-born Dale (1873-1939) represents a musical hall style that was just a bit raw around the technical edges.<sup>6</sup> Heard in a set of Scottish tunes (1/2), a

reminder of his activity in Glasgow from 1910 to 1935, Dale has technique to spare—I was particularly impressed with his rapid repeated notes—even if there is an occasional, if slight, ‘raggedness’ in the playing. In the end, though, the exuberance, coupled with a kind of musical honesty that lets the music speak for itself, comes through and carries along everything in its wake.

Tommy Elliott (1902-1987) is another story! A member of ‘The Musical Elliotts’ (with his wife and daughters), Elliott, represented by three tracks (2/10-12), was a virtuoso of the highest rank. His playing is smooth, even glitzy at times, as he was performing for a more cosmopolitan audience (he continued to play into the 1980s). And one of the highlights of *English* is Elliott’s performance of the well-known Silver-De Sylva song ‘Avalon’ (2/10),<sup>7</sup> at the beginning of which he is introduced as the ‘Wizard of the Concertina’. Simply put, he plays up a storm. No less entertaining is the two-tune medley of ‘Nola’ and ‘Gigi’ (2/12); here Elliott plays on a miniature concertina, and shows that the instrument is more than just a ‘toy’, though I admit that some (my eight-year-old Havanese named Chibi, for example) might find it a bit shrill.

Finally, there is Alf Edwards: eminently musical, stylish and suave, and always secure in his technique, the sounding image of a man who sat ramrod straight while playing.<sup>8</sup> And all of this (minus the manner in which he sat) can be heard in his performance of that old Maurice Chevalier hit ‘Mitzi’ (2/1). Little wonder that Boris Matusewitch held his playing in the highest regard.

At the risk of repeating myself: thank you, *English*, for introducing me to this repertory, to Elliott, as well as to Walter Dale, Walter Jukes, Tommy Dale, *et al.*

**3. The Concertina Bands:** What do the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell, Astor Piazzolla’s second quintet, and the Heywood English Concertina Prize Band have in common? They play with a sense of precision that boggles the mind—well perhaps in the case of the Heywood lads (nineteen strong plus drummer and leader in an undated photo from the early twentieth century)<sup>9</sup> let’s say that ‘impressive’ is a more apt description.

First, though, some context.<sup>10</sup> Concertina bands began to come to the fore during the 1880s, modeling themselves, both in terms of conventions and repertory, after the popular brass bands of the period. Concentrated in the industrial towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire (Heywood is just outside Manchester), the number of bands grew

quickly, and, in its issue of October 1889, *The Brass Band News* could claim that there were more than two hundred of them on the equivalent of its mailing list. Among the better known bands were the Heywood, Heckmondwike, Mexborough, Oldham, and Ashton-under-Lyne ensembles; at least they were the ones that walked off with the prize money—£10 for first place in 1923—year after year at such major contests as those at the Crystal Palace (London) and Belle Vue (Manchester) in the early 1900s. Needless to say, World War I put a crimp in things, and, by the end of the '20s, the concertina bands had largely faded into the background, victims of their own conservatism, as they failed to come to terms with changing fashions and musical styles. And while there have been attempts to resurrect the tradition—one thinks, for example, of Jenny Cox's annual concertina band weekends—its glory days are a thing of the past.

*English* opens with the Heywood's rendition of William Frederick Rimmer's rousing *Titania* (1/1), with James Eastwood as the featured soloist (the piece was originally for brass band and the solo instrument was the cornet). Three things strike the ear: Eastwood can play like the dickens, the balance between high and low registers is quite good (none of that booming bottom that one often finds with concertina bands), and the sound is remarkably clean. It would be difficult to think of a more inviting and entertaining way in which to begin this set of three CDs.

There is a nice symmetry to disc 1. Having begun with the Heywood band, it concludes with that from Ashton-under-Lyne, which won the Belle Vue contest in 1911-1913 and then again in 1922-1925 (in American sports parlance, that's a 'dynasty' twice over). Here, though—in their c. 1935 recording of the popular 'Glow Worm Idyll' (as it was originally called)<sup>11</sup>—the bass does boom, even if in a sort of comical way that draws a smile.

In all, the Heywood and Ashton tracks bear witness to an important aspect of the history of the English concertina, as the concertina bands represent one of the first steps in what might be called the democratization of the instrument. And that *English* now makes two snapshots of that history easily accessible to us earns our gratitude and whets our appetite for the single CD that Folksounds Records plans to devote entirely to the concertina bands.

**4. *Two Russian Concertinists:*** The English concertina made its debut in Russia by 1853 at the latest, when Isabelle Dulcken, one of Regondi's students, performed in Moscow and St. Petersburg.<sup>12</sup>

Whether the concertina began to gain popularity in Russia immediately after her tour we (or at least I) don't know, but it was certainly well entrenched on the musical map there by the 1880s and continued to hold its own after the turn of the century.<sup>13</sup> And it was from this tradition that two of the phenomenal concertina virtuosos of the twentieth century emerged: Gregori Matusewitch (b. Minsk, 1886/89?; d. New York, 1939) and Raphael Alexandrovich Sonnenberg (b. Tamboff; d. New York—dates uncertain), both of whom eventually came to the United States under the auspices of Sol Hurok in the 1920s (Matusewitch) and 1930s (Raphael, as he was called).<sup>14</sup>

They shared more than just national origins, however, as their careers, repertoires, and manner of performance were similar in many respects: (1) they thought of the concertina mainly as a substitute for the violin, and music for that instrument made up the bulk of their repertoires; (2) they played in venues as diverse as New York's staid Town Hall and ritzy Waldorf-Astoria; and (3) they seemed to revel in music suffused with the Eastern- and Central-European *klezmer* (or, more generally, gypsy) tradition. And it is this last aspect of their careers that *English* highlights, with Matusewitch's rendition of that favorite of strolling-violinists, Vittorio Monti's *Csárdás* (1/5),<sup>15</sup> and Raphael's performance of a Romanian *Doina* ('Shepherd's Song', 1/10) and a medley made up of 'Two Guitars' and 'Dark Eyes' (1/11).

Now, while these guys could certainly get around the button boards—their technique ranges from impressive to awesome—there is one feature of their playing (and it also pervades Rutterford's performance, if to a lesser degree) that I find annoying: the constant use of what can only be called the concertinist's 'faux vibrato', obtained by shaking one's hand while sustaining a note. But a vibrato it isn't, at least not in the sense that a string or wind player produces it, since that consists of "A slight fluctuation in pitch", to quote the opening words of the article on that subject in *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*.<sup>16</sup> Nor is it the same as the more-difficult-to-define vocal vibrato, which many will claim is more a fluctuation in intensity than in pitch.<sup>17</sup> And while the 'faux vibrato' can be effective when used as an occasional *ornament* of sorts (which is how string players generally used vibrato prior to the twentieth century), its non-stop application becomes tiresome. In fact, the uninitiated might even think that the player is suffering from stage fright. Giulio Regondi addressed this 'faux vibrato' in his *New Method for the Concertina*, where he opens his 'Concluding Remarks' with a discussion of 'certain defects of style and execution to be avoided':

A continuous quivering of the sound during a melody has become prevalent among players who perhaps imagine that (by imitating in this manner the tremulousness of voice in which so many singers of the present day indulge to a lamentable degree,) they are playing "with feeling." It must be carefully avoided by all who aim at purity of style and truth of expression.<sup>18</sup>

There are, I think, three lessons to be learned from all of this: (1) the Russians neither inaugurated the 'quivering', nor were they the only ones to use it (as noted above, one hears it in the Rutterford recording), (2) I strongly doubt that either Matusewitch or Raphael ever read Regondi, and (3) though they themselves were not that far removed (at least chronologically) from the likes of John Charles Ward, Ernest Rutterford, and Marie Lachenal, for them the Victorian tradition was a dead herring. In fact, I doubt that they knew much of it at all.<sup>19</sup>

**5. The Folk and Folk-Influenced:** This, no doubt, is the 'theme' that will interest most *English* listeners; and in a show of reciprocity (not to mention good marketing strategy—and there's nothing wrong with that!) *English* has accommodated them by emphasizing that theme and the number of concertinists who play within it. Table 1 crunches some numbers.

**Table 1.** The distribution of repertory/themes, concertinists, and concertinists by 'generations' across *English*: VicC = Victorian classical; MH-V-CE = Music Hall, Vaudeville, and Commercial Entertainment; ConB = Concertina bands; Russ = Two Russians; F-FI = Folk and Folk-Influenced; StrT = Stretching the Traditions; CAM = Contemporary 'Art Music'. N.B.: (1) the total number of concertinists accounted for (42) exceeds the number that actually contributed (39), since some are represented by more than one theme; (2) the two tracks over which Rutterford's recording is split is counted only as one.

	VicC	MH- V-CE	ConB	Russ	F-FI	StrT	CAM
Tracks (80)	5	15	2	3	46	8	1
Concertinists (39)	4	9	2	2	19	5	1
Living concertinists (23)	2	0	0	0	19	5	1

Though numbers can be read in many ways, and though *English* could include only what it received upon its 'call for recordings', Table 1 tells a pretty clear story: (1) folk and folk-influenced music predominates, with more than half the total number of tracks and virtually all of the living concertinists; (2) the various traditions that grew out of the Victorian period are pretty much dead, with not a single live concertinist, for example, contributing to the Music Hall-Vaudeville-Commercial Entertainment theme;<sup>20</sup> (3) that there is only one track devoted to Contemporary 'Art Music' shows how little that repertory has taken hold (let's face it: it's even less well known than the Victorian classical); and (4) few English players seem to be willing to 'stretch the traditions' in brave and meaningful ways. Folk music, then, is the main attraction, both for players and—to the extent that *English* has taken the pulse of the prospective buyers—for listeners. And that's fine! It's great stuff! I also enjoy whiling away a Saturday or Sunday afternoon with it (in private). But, I would plead (I'm sitting, not kneeling): there's a wide, wide, very wide world of music out there—experience it in hands-on-the-concertina fashion!

Having crunched the numbers and delivered the sermon, I should move on and consider a few of the contributions to this theme (with apologies to those who go unmentioned). To begin with another revelation (for me): Mark Evans and the Obi's Boys band playing two traditional American tunes, 'Whiskey before Breakfast' and 'Blackberry Blossom' (3/17-18)—you'd think that the English was to blue grass born. This is simply good, foot-stompin' music, nicely arranged (see below), and with the concertina utilized to perfection. Also Appalachian: Ian Robb's lovely rendition of 'One Day I Will' (3/2), a gospel song from the North Carolina/Virginia singer Estil Ball, played here as a lilting waltz on a rare 'double-reeded' concertina, part of which has two reeds per note, these tuned an octave apart; and Sarah Graves's lovely 'Fair and Tender Ladies' (3/9), on which she both sings and plays the concertina.<sup>21</sup> In all, it was a surprise to put on disc 3, which is devoted entirely to folk and folk-influenced music, and be regaled by music with some down-home, I-77 soul.<sup>22</sup>

Jumping across the ocean: there is the consistently beautiful playing of Tim Jennings and harpist Leanne Ponder, who offer a stunning performance of Turlough O'Carolan's 'Lord Inchiquin' (2/22); the meticulously clean technique of Rob Harbron (1/21-22 and 3/11-12); and Simon Thoumire (3/6-7), who, if better known for his jazz playing, simply bowls one over with his performance of 'Bonaparte' (3/6). Finally, there is Dave Townsend's 'Giga ferrarese' (2/19), about which I would say this: if ever pressed to single out a performance that

demonstrates the English concertina's technical capabilities in the field of folk music, this is the performance to which I'd point. Townsend turns this attractive sixteen-bar 'folk' tune (from the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy) into a tour de force, the likes of which concertinists have not done since Regondi and Blagrove were turning out their many 'Fantasias on. . .' a few concertina lifetimes ago. There is something for everyone to admire: single-note passage work, chordal accompaniment, and fleet parallel thirds (though as most English players will know, these sound more impressive than they are difficult to play). Finally, for those Anglo players who insist that only their instrument can deliver dance music with the proper punch: listen to Dave and the 'Giga'. *Bravo!*

Our forty-six tracks of folk and folk-influenced music raise some questions. Is Dave Townsend's virtuosic 'Giga ferrarese' any longer representative of the 'folk'? Are the beautifully crafted arrangements presented by Mark Evans and friends still the voice of the 'folk'? Are things realized in an Oxford studio or a Boston pub truly 'folk'-like? Do all those players of the English concertina really like 'folk' music? When does 'folk' music verge on—or even become—commercial entertainment? Is it the 'source' of the music that counts? Is it the way in which it's transmitted (and if so, where does O'Carolan's music—carefully notated—stand in the mix)? Is it the venue in which it's played that counts? Happily, no one says that he or she who asks questions is obliged to answer them! Rather, I will let Ralph Vaughan Williams shoulder the responsibility:

Our folk song, like our language, is neither new nor old... they are both of immemorial antiquity and both are means of expression today just as they were 500 years ago. In our native song just as in our native speech the form gradually changes with the changing needs of the community. Our language and our song are like an old tree, continually putting out new leaves.<sup>23</sup>

**6. *Stretching the Traditions:*** To be frank, I have created this theme in order to accommodate music that does not fit easily into any of the other traditions. We might consider two of them: jazz and 'classical' music of bygone—or even recent—times that was obviously not conceived for the concertina. To the first category belong three multi-tracked contributions of John Nixon, whose 'Slipped Disc' (2/7) looks back to the old Benny Goodman Sextet, while an up-tempo 'Besame mucho' (2/9) packs a Latin punch. I assume that John first establishes the rhythmic foundation and then adds the various lines

above it. I also enjoyed Martin Bradley's 'Spot the Tune', where he wails away as if her were playing a Dixieland clarinet.

We might quibble about whether or not adapting music from the Baroque period really constitutes 'stretching the traditions'. After all, Giulio Regondi included excerpts from the Bach unaccompanied sonatas and partitas for violin in his *Rudimenti del Concertinista* of 1844 and Arthur James Balfour spent many an hour playing Handel trio sonatas with Mary Gladstone, daughter of the prime minister.<sup>24</sup> Thus Baroque music and the English concertina have gone together almost from the instrument's inception, with the tradition having been extended beyond the Victorians by the likes of Gregori Matusewitch and his son Boris, as well as by Dave Townsend, whose recording of the Bach Suite for Lute in E minor, BWV 996, adapted (though only slightly) for a tenor-treble instrument, is certainly a highlight among recent recordings of the instrument.<sup>25</sup> In any event, Danny Chapman treats us to a 'Bourrée and Minuet'—originally for keyboard—by the German composer Johann Krieger (1/25), and then comes chronologically forward with an 'Andante - Largo', Op. 5, No. 5, for guitar by the Spanish composer-guitarist Fernando Sor (1/27), both played with an exquisite feeling for their respective styles.<sup>26</sup> Moving in the other direction, Martyn Bradley reaches back to the early sixteenth century and treats us to a fine performance of 'Helas madame', attributed to no one other than King Henry VIII (2/13); here the concertina stands in very nicely for the shawm or crumhorn.<sup>27</sup>

**7. Contemporary 'Art Music':** The Victorians produced half a dozen concertos for the English concertina,<sup>28</sup> after which the well of concertina concertos ran dry until the New York-based composer James Cohn wrote his *Concerto in A for Concertina and Strings*, Op. 44, in 1966. For various reasons the work lay pretty much dormant for thirty-five years<sup>29</sup> until it was taken up by Wim Wakker and the Latvian National Symphony on a 2002 recording devoted entirely to the music of Cohn.<sup>30</sup> And thanks to the generosity of the composer, *English* was able to borrow from that recording the third movement of the work, the devilishly difficult Rondo, which Wim romps through as though he had been playing it for years (I can attest that he learned the piece in just a few weeks).

As I noted earlier, *English* runs for almost four hours. Wim gets through the Rondo in 2:33 (that's two minutes and thirty-three seconds, not two hours and thirty-three minutes—just making sure), and that is it for the very impressive and growing (slowly but surely) body of music that has recently—let's say from the mid-1980s—been

written for the English concertina. How nice it would have been to have included Oliver Hunt's haunting *Song of the Sea* or Alla Borzova's *Pinsk and Blue* or, in a lighter vein (and much easier to play), Stephen Jackman's *Two Jazz Duets* or *Jazz Menagerie*, any of which—especially the two pieces by Jackman—might have encouraged concertinists to try this repertory.<sup>31</sup> Would another few minutes devoted to one of these pieces have been worth knocking out a 'tune' or two? I think so. Others will think not. And I have already given one sermon too many.

I would, before concluding, like to raise a question: now that we have *English*, now that *English* sums up about a century's worth of playing and repertory, *whither the English concertina?* Clearly there is no one answer, and whatever answer each of us comes up with may ride on just how he or she uses the instrument. In other words, those who use the English concertina 'merely' as a vehicle on which to play their favorite music—and clearly, that is music that falls into the broad category of folk or folk-influenced—will likely continue the profile that already characterizes *English*: the Victorian period in all its guises is pretty much dead, there is relatively little 'stretching of the traditions' going on, and the 'new' music for the instrument remains almost completely unknown except to a very small, infant-size handful of concertinists. On the other hand, those with an itch to explore the instrument's historical repertory and/or technical capabilities will no doubt want—and even have—to broaden their repertorial horizons. And though I rather suspect which will be the path more heavily trod, I don't have a crystal ball. Perhaps I'll be surprised.

It is time to sum up: *English International* is a wonderful collection. It presents the English concertina from myriad angles: thirty-nine concertinists diving into seven different repertories, and with most of the performances being of very high caliber. It is, as I called it earlier, a history-in-sound of the English concertina, as that history unfurled during the twentieth—and now the early twenty-first—century. As such, it surely ranks as one of the most significant contributions to recent 'scholarship' about the instrument. Moreover, everyone will find something—in fact, everyone will find quite a bit—that he/she likes, and—equally important (and central to my own personal agenda)—everyone will no doubt learn something about the instrument; as I said some pages back, *English* both entertains and educates. In all, I know I speak for all of us when I offer Alan Day and Graham Bradshaw our heartfelt thanks for a job **very, very very well done**.<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

1. Part of the problem is that Rutterford plays the *Recollections* (published no later than 1876) on a 'modern' instrument for the sound of which it was not conceived. I argue for playing the Victorian repertory on period instruments in 'The Victorian Concertina: Some Issues Relating to Performance', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 3/2 (2006), 33-61, especially 38-44; online at [www.concertina.com/atlas/index](http://www.concertina.com/atlas/index).

2. Having said that, I must qualify things just a bit in what I hope is not too nit-picky a fashion. The Victorian period is in fact represented by one more track, Harry Dunn's rather weird performance (I'm being polite) of Regondi's little masterpiece, *Les Oiseaux*. What's weird about it? Two things: (1) Dunn omits the piano part entirely, and thus misrepresents the music, and (2) he begins in bar 5 (obviously skipping over the four-bar piano introduction) and ends in bar 52; the problem is that the piece as a whole is 252 bars long, so that we only have about twenty percent of the work, and we never do hear Regondi's wistful second theme. But perhaps we should be happy that the performance is cut short, since the fifty-two bars that we do have leave much to be desired (once again, I am trying to be polite). And yet there is some virtue in including Dunn's recording, for it shows us into what disregard Regondi and the Victorian tradition in general fell in the twentieth century. Those who would like to hear a truly bravura recording of *Les Oiseaux* should listen to the Douglas Rogers CD cited below.

Finally, I simply cannot pass up this opportunity to take note of just how paltry is the representation on 'modern' recordings of the instrument's Victorian repertory. First and foremost—and really occupying a place of honor for its path-breaking efforts—are the two recordings of Regondi's music by Douglas Rogers: *The Great Regondi: Original Compositions by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century's Unparalleled Guitarist & Concertinist*, The Giulio Regondi Guild, Douglas Rogers, concertina; David Starobin, guitar; Julie Lustman, piano; d'Anna Fortunato, mezzo-soprano. 2 CDs, Bridge Records, BCD 9039 and 9055 (1993, 1994); Dave Townsend has recorded two items: the 'Serenade' from Bernhard Molique's *Six Characteristic Pieces*, Op. 61 (1859), and Joseph Warren's *Variations on 'Home, Sweet Home'*, both on *Concertina Landscape*, Serpent Press, SER 006 (1998); he had already recorded part of the Warren on *The Music of Dickens and his Time*, Beautiful Jo Records, BEJO CD-9 (1996); there is a 'private' (unissued) recording by the fine Finnish concertinist Petri Ikkela which includes Molique's entire set of *Six Characteristic Pieces* as well as Julius Benedict's *Andantino*; beyond these, Wim Wakker is working on a recording, Douglas Rogers might still resurrect his series of Regondi CDs, and I hope to turn out a CD in conjunction with my forthcoming *Victorian Music for the English Concertina*, an anthology to be published by A-R Editions in 2009. There is almost something embarrassing about just how short the list is. In fact, in terms of total recording time, there is almost twice as much Victorian concertina music available on CD in performances by *accordionists!* (yes, by accordionists!): Joseph Petric has recorded Molique's Sonata in B flat, Op. 57 (c. 1860) and the same composer's *Six Melodies, Lieder ohne Worte* (Op. 51?/1854?), transcribed for concertina and harp by Regondi and Charles Oberthür, both on *Joseph Petric, Accordion*, CBC Recordings/Les disques SRC, Musica viva MVCD 1056 (1993); Petric has recorded both of these pieces anew and added Molique's *Flying Leaves*,

Op. 50 (1856) (another set of six pieces) on a CD scheduled to appear shortly; Helmut C. Jacobs, *Giulio Regondi (1823-1872): Souvenir d'amitié, Compositions for concertina and baritone concertina*, Musikproduktion Dabringhaus und Grimm, MDG 903 1420-6 (2006), this CD reviewed by Wim Wakker in *PICA*, 4. Am I alone in finding this both astonishing and dismaying?

3. There is a notice about them in *The Times*, 2 May 1851; cited in Allan W. Atlas, *The Wheatstone English Concertina in Victorian England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 57, n. 45.
4. This recording has long been available on Richard Carlin's valuable compilation, *The English Concertina*, The Smithsonian Institution, Folkways Cassette Series 08845 (1976/reissued 1992); on the Webb sisters, see Richard Carlin, 'The Fayre Four Sisters: Concertina Virtuosi', *The Free-Reed Journal*, 3 (2001), 79-88. Having listened to the performance again on *English*, I am struck by the extraordinary degree to which her playing surpasses the quartet's overall sense of ensemble in terms of both precision and balance.
5. For profiles of both musicians, see Randall C. Merris, 'Dutch Daly: Comedy and Concertinas on the Variety Stage', *PICA*, 4 (2007), 16, and Viona 'Elliott' Lane, Randall C. Merris, and Chris Algar, 'Tommy Elliott and the Musical Elliotts', in this issue of *PICA*; on Dale, see also, Stuart Eydmann, 'The Life and Times of the Concertina: The Adoption and Usage of a Novel Instrument with Particular Reference to Scotland', Ph.D. dissertation, Open University (1995), 121-23; further references to this study are to the version available online at [www.concertina.com/eydmann/index](http://www.concertina.com/eydmann/index).
6. As Eydmann, 'The Life and Times of the Concertina', puts it, his music was a reflection of 'conservative working-class' tastes.
7. Louis Silver and G.B. De Sylva; the song was introduced by Al Jolson in the 1921 Broadway musical *Bombo*.
8. There is a photo of him in action—sitting ramrod straight in tuxedo and black tie—in Allan Atlas, *Contemplating the Concertina: An Historically-Informed Tutor for the English Concertina* (Amherst: The Button Box, 2003), 9.
9. A concert announcement dated 14 October 1928 from the Olympia Theatre, Coalville, puts their number at twenty-five; my thanks to Alan Day for sending me a copy of the announcement.
10. What follows draws upon Stuart Eydmann, 'The Life and Times of the Concertina'; Stephen Chambers, 'Joseph Astley, Oldham Concertina Band and the MHJ Shield', *PICA*, 4 (2007), 27-40 (online at [www.concertina.org/pica/index.htm](http://www.concertina.org/pica/index.htm) and [www.concertina.com/chambers/index/htm](http://www.concertina.com/chambers/index/htm)); Nigel Pickles, 'The Heckmondwike English Concertina Band', *International Concertina Association Newsletter*, 321 (October 1987), 5-9.
11. A word about this well-known song: written by the German composer-conductor-violinist Paul Lincke (1866-1946) as part of his 1902 operetta *Lysistrata-Idyll*, the song, originally known as 'Glühwürmchen', became popular throughout

Europe; it was translated into the English version that we know today in the late 1940s, and climbed to No. 1 on the Hit Parade thanks to the 1952 recording by the Mills Brothers (in collaboration with the arranger Johnny Mercer). On Lincke, see *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy, at [www.grovemusic.com](http://www.grovemusic.com).

12. See Atlas, 'Ladies in the Wheatstone Ledgers: The Gendered Concertina in Victorian England, 1835-1870', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, 39 (2006), 34-35, 105-6 (online at [www.concertina.com/atlas/index](http://www.concertina.com/atlas/index)); Isabelle was the niece of Louis Dulcken (d. 1850), piano teacher to the royal family.

13. See Hilding Bergquist, 'Concertinas', *Accordion World*, September 1949; online at the website of The Classical Free Reed: [www.ksanti.net/free-reed/essays/bergquistconcertinas.html](http://www.ksanti.net/free-reed/essays/bergquistconcertinas.html). There is an oft-repeated error about the concertina in Russia: Tchaikovsky did not use concertinas in his Suite No. 2, in C, Op. 58; he used accordions (or, more precisely, bayans).

14. On Gregori Matusewitch, see Eric Matusewitch, 'The Matusewitch Family: Concertina and Accordion Virtuosi—Russia, Europe and the United States; online at [www.ksanti.net/free-reed/essays.matusewitch.html](http://www.ksanti.net/free-reed/essays.matusewitch.html), and 'The Matusewitch Family: An Annotated Bibliography', *PICA*, 2 (2005), 52-60; on Raphael, see two unsigned notices: 'Squeeze Music: Raphael Presses out Anything from Beethoven to Gershwin', *Literary Digest*, 5 December 1936, 20, and 'Raphael', *Accordion World*, 1/7 (October 1936), 14.

15. Despite the obvious gypsy flavor of the piece—the *czárdás* is a dance of Hungarian origin—Monti (1868-1922) was born and bred in Naples. It is instructive to compare Matusewitch's performance of the piece with that by Dave Townsend on *Portrait of the Concertina*, Saydisc SDL-351 (1985). Though Townsend can keep up with anyone in the fast sections, his performance of the slow, opening section misses the gypsy flavor (this notwithstanding guitarist Nick Hooper's occasional imitation of a zither). On the other hand, for Matusewitch, who came out of the same musical-cultural milieu as Mischa Elman and other Russian violinists of that generation, 'schmalz' came naturally.

16. Ed. by Don Randall (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), 910.

17. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 910.

18. Regondi, *New Method for the Concertina* (Dublin: Joseph Scates/London: Wessel & Co., [1857]), 52.

19. Having studied with Boris Matusewitch, with whom the Russian tradition of concertinists came to an end (at least in the West), I can say that he played—and may only have known—very little of the Victorian repertory. He performed (1) the Molique Concerto No. 1, (2) the opening, self-contained *Andantino* from Regondi's lengthy *Morceau de salon: Andantino et capriccio-mazurka*, and (3) Regondi's unaccompanied *Hexameron*. For 'exercises', he drew mainly on nineteenth-century violin methods. One can hear Boris Matusewitch on Carlin's *English Concertina* compilation (see note 5).

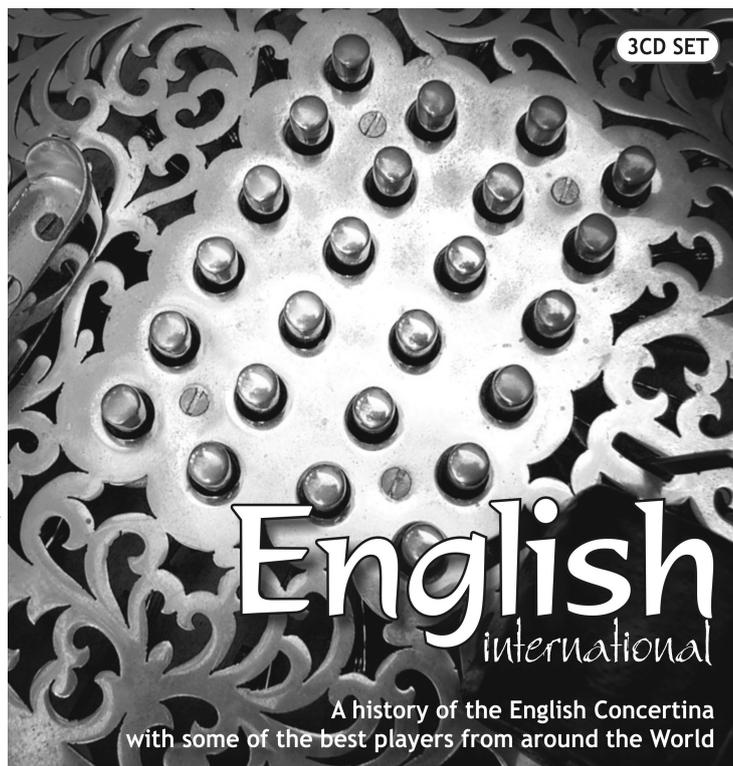
20. This is a little surprising in view of the availability of Phil Hopkinson's nice collection titled *Dancing with Ma Baby* (Newbiggin-by-the-Sea: Dragonfly Music, 1994), which can certainly serve to start players off in this repertory.
21. Readers might be interested in knowing that there is a novel by one Lee Smith called *Fair and Tender Ladies* (New York: Random House, 1993); it evokes life in Appalachia as it plays out in the mountains of Virginia. (I cannot say that I've read it.)
22. Interstate 77 runs north-south for 611 miles through Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, and the Carolinas, that is, through what some call 'mid-Appalachia', where this music is entirely at home.
23. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'British Music', *The Music Student*, 7 (1914); reprinted in *Vaughan Williams on Music*, ed. David Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 45.
24. On Balfour and the concertina, see my article, 'Lord Arthur's "Infernals": Arthur James Balfour and the Concertina', *The Musical Times*, 149/No. 1904 (Autumn, 2008); the article will eventually be posted at [www.concertina.com](http://www.concertina.com).
25. On Baroque music as part of the repertory of the Matusewitches, see Eric Matusewitch, 'The Matusewitch Family', 52-59; for the Townsend recording: *Portrait of a Concertina*, Saydisc CD-SDL 351 (1985). It is interesting to note that there is even a piece of Baroque music on *Anglo International* (2005): John Kirkpatrick's performance of the Gigue from Johann Mattheson's Suite No. 11, which is included in his *Pieces de Clavecin en deux volumes* (1714).
26. On Krieger (1652-1735—not to be confused with his older brother Johann Philipp Krieger) and Sor (1778-1839), see *Grove Music Online* ([www.grovemusic.com](http://www.grovemusic.com)).
27. On Henry VIII as a composer, see *Grove Music Online* ([www.grovemusic.com](http://www.grovemusic.com)).
28. These are listed in Atlas, *The Wheatstone English Concertina*, 59.
29. Though it was I who commissioned the work, I never had the opportunity to play more than a movement here or there, and even then only with piano.
30. *James Cohn: Concertos and Tone Poems*, XLNT Music, XLNT CD-18010 (2002); the work received its first live performance by Wim Wakker and the Queens College (CUNY) String Orchestra at a concert sponsored by The Center for the Study of Free-Reed Instruments, 'The Incredible Concertina 2', The Graduate Center of The City University of New York, 26 March 2004.
31. Of the pieces just mentioned, all but Hunt's *Song of the Sea* are easily available in editions from Concertina Connection. For some background about this 'new' repertory for the English, see my article, 'The "Respectable" Concertina', *Music and Letters*, 80 (1999), 242-47, where, however, my list of pieces is already sadly out of date. Within a few weeks of my having finished this review

(but before we went to press), I learned of a new recording by Pauline De Snoo, *Concertina Scape: Contemporary Music for Wheatstone's Concertina, 1985-2004*, Concertina Academy Con-Ac 1112 (2008), available from Concertina Academy, of which Ms. De Snoo is Director. Happily, Hunt's *Song of the Sea* is on that recording, as is music by Richard Williams, Chris van de Kuilen, Hazel Leach, and Keith Amos. There will be a review of the recording in *PICA*, 6 (2009).

32. Still to come in the *International* series: a three (?)-CD set devoted to the Duet concertina. In addition, there will be the single CD devoted to concertina bands (see above), and *PICA*, volume 6, for 2009, will carry an article by Alan and Graham that will give readers a glimpse into the making of *International*.

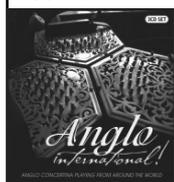
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***Masters of the Concertina***, Gordon Cutty, Tommy Williams, Free Reed Records FRRR-12 .

***The Whirligig of Time***, Steve Turner, The Living Tradition, LTCD1103.

***Out of the Box***, Will Duke, Country Branch, CBCD 235.

#### ROGER DIGBY

Had Gordon Cutty been included on English International, he would have been classified by Allan Atlas as 'MH-V-CE = Music Hall, Vaudeville, and Commercial Entertainment', where he might have been overshadowed by the sparkling performances of his contemporaries who were recorded in their prime. Had Cutty been recorded in his prime, we would have been able to hear the unique presence of an English Concertina leading a conventional small dance band.

Born in County Durham in the North of England where the English Concertina appears to have enjoyed a more robust life than in the South, Cutty had a surface job in the mines and led a band in the evenings; he is photographed here in a typical line-up with trumpet, banjo, piano and drums.

Solo recordings of Cutty made quite late in his life were issued on vinyl as *A Grand Old Fashioned Dance* by Free Reed in 1976 and reappear now as part of the complete republication of the Free Reed catalogue. Cutty plays dance tunes and popular tunes from the repertory of Concertina and Brass Bands, while some more modern tunes reflect a player who kept adding to his material. The playing is highly accomplished with a full use of chords and a wide dynamic range and, like the archive recordings on English International, it reflects a time when the level of virtuosity was much higher than generally found today.

The Free Reed re-issues are sometimes the original LP with extra tracks, and sometimes two LPs combined to make a single CD; *Masters of the Concertina* also contains '*Springtime in Battersea*' featuring Tommy Williams playing his large 64-button McCann Duet, also originally released in 1976. Tommy's repertory reflected the same background as Gordon Cutty's, and they both play Felix Burns's *Woodland Flowers* in its original form of a three-part schottische (see the *ICA Music Supplement*, 436). Neither are flawless performances, but they provide an interesting example of the different potentials of the two systems. As well as opening a fascinating window onto a vanishing musical world, Tommy was also very important as a source of oral concertina history, having worked in the business all his life. The CD offers two mp3s of Tommy talking about his working life, which replace the extracts on the LP. The mp3 format may be incongruous, but the CD already holds 75 minutes of music.

This re-release, together with the Irish recordings now presented as *The Clare Set* and reviewed elsewhere in this issue, is a reminder of the valuable and altruistic programme that started Free Reed records and made available players and musics which were never likely to be commercially viable and thus very unlikely to be released elsewhere. The concertina enthusiast owes a huge debt to this initiative. However, there is a serious problem. Gearóid, in his review of *The Clare Set*, is rightly critical of the accompanying documentation; I found many similar errors when I reviewed the compilation CDs *This Label Is Not Removable* in an earlier *PICA*, 2 (2005). This trademark ineptitude is here again. In the Cutty listings, Reisdorff's *Luxembourg Polka* is attributed to 'trad', as is an untitled polka which, if 'trad', will see me eating my bellows. In contrast not one of the Williams tunes is attributed at all, not even *Springtime In Battersea*, which he claimed (controversially) to have written. The main documentation is taken from the LPs where there is a section of three paragraphs on Williams's music. This begins on page 13 of the booklet, but instead of continuing on the next page, page 14 is a complete reprint of page 2, repeating the introduction and the opening lines on Gordon Cutty. This careless, indeed witless, editing is inexcusable. Its implication is, however, much more serious than merely a source of annoyance and despair. We spot what we know to be wrong; we don't spot what we don't know to be wrong. We are left able to trust nothing. Unless Free Reed rectifies this chapter of disasters, the place of these historic, priceless and irreplaceable recordings will be for ever undermined.

Allan Atlas has suggested that *English International* contains too large a slice of 'Folk and Folk-influenced' material, but this reflects the main contemporary use of the instrument. Nevertheless it makes it hard for me to argue for another, yet *The Whirligig of Time* clearly indicates that Steve Turner should be in there even at the expense of some who do receive their international laurels (I've got a list).

Steve Turner is a folk-singer who accompanies himself on English Concertina, and after a period of absence club organisers and audiences have welcomed the return of this accomplished performer. He has a good, sure voice which he also uses well and his accompaniments are considered and well-played (and with Ollie Knight on the sound desk the recording quality is guaranteed 100% perfect). Other musicians join Steve on certain tracks to add texture and colour to a studio performance, but the solo performances make it quite clear that he needs no extra help. His 64-key instrument (with four Anglo buttons!) has all the richness of tone that goes with old pitch.

Steve's CD is released on a label entitled 'The Tradition Bearers', and while I am sympathetic to their aim some of their mission statement sounds like special pleading. Steve Turner is not a 'tradition bearer'. He

is a folk-singer and one of the very best. He should not be judged by the tenets of the tradition.

Will Duke, on the other hand, is certainly a tradition bearer, and his solo CD *Out Of The Box* is simply magnificent. There is something delightfully old-fashioned about Will; one can easily imagine him in a time when children were instructed to be 'seen but not heard'. Unfortunately this is too often also true of Will's performances as he frequently appears in the company of other, louder musicians. Here, in splendid isolation, his huge talent is able to shine throughout. Will is inevitably associated with Scan Tester, and nine tracks here are from Scan's playing. Will's playing, like Scan's, is bright, crisp and rhythmically compulsive; however, he is no copyist. He has a lighter touch, a fuller left hand, and uses much more ornamentation than Scan. Scan didn't accompany his own singing and neither does Will, and there is a further similarity in their light singing style. Both have gentle voices, and in performance Will seems to stand specially straight, reminding himself of the need to throw his voice to the back of the room. Here in the studio there is no such need and the result is the best singing I have heard from someone whom I've had the pleasure of hearing many times.

Of course, I am begging the question of why I consider one singer/concertina player to be a bearer of the tradition and one not, and this is a question that deserves more than the glib answer that resurrecting old songs and setting them to the concertina is a product of the Folk Revival while playing dance tunes and unaccompanied singing has no similarly definable genesis. Traditional Music is alive and well in England, but if you insist that the transmission must also be traditional (mother's knee, neighbour's kitchen, village pub) then you won't need the fingers of your second hand to count those who qualify. The links have changed in the chain of transmission and recordings; specialist gatherings, even the internet, now play a role. Some of the important links in this new chain, like Will Duke, are people who have spent years and years listening, intelligently and sensitively, to traditional music and have come to understand not just its sound, but also its context and its attitude. They make developments but not changes; they introduce the new without ever weakening the old; and if the new were suddenly stripped away from their performance, there would be the original, strong and unsullied, the pearl safe within the oyster.

The word 'tradition' (*trado, tradere*, I hand over) is used outside the small world of ethnomusicology. The archive recordings on *English International* and those of Gordon Cutty make it clear that there was once a tradition of the English concertina in mainstream, popular entertainment. Where are the bearers of *that* tradition today?

## BRIEFLY NOTED

### **Free and Squeezy: The New Web Catalogue at the Horniman Museum**

ALICE LITTLE

The Horniman Museum has always been committed to improving access to its collections, and to this end April 2008 saw the launch of a new online catalogue featuring some of the Museum's best known collections. Alongside instruments from the collections of Boosey & Hawkes, Carse, Dolmetsch and Music from India<sup>1</sup> will be included entries for a number of free-reed and other instruments from the Neil Wayne Collection.

The new catalogue will enhance the existing online register, giving a more detailed technical description of each object and highlighting noteworthy instruments with a commentary on their wider contexts. Of particular note in this collection is one of the earliest known concertinas made by Wheatstone (M19-1996), as well as a number of prototypes, including the 1844 duette system concertina (M246a-1996) and the 'gliding reed' (M336-1996).

Not limited to concertinas, the Neil Wayne Collection incorporates Wheatstone's own collection of experimental instruments, including an Aeolian harp (M576-1996) which, attached to a concealed piano, once amazed audiences by 'playing itself'! There is also an entry for a wind powered monochord device (M591-1996), bought in 1837 by one of Wheatstone's earliest customers, the famous concertinist Giulio Regondi.

In addition the collection includes instruments by other makers: a rare ivory-ended concertina (M98a-1996) and the only round-ended German concertina known to exist (M550-1996). Meanwhile, instrument number M9a-1996 is notable on account of its first owner, the acoustician-mathematician- linguist Alexander J. Ellis, inventor of the cents system for measuring pitch, whose pencil marks on this instrument suggest that he was experimenting with different temperaments, perhaps as part of his early research.<sup>2</sup>

With such a huge number of significant instruments to document, the team's priority has been to enhance access to information previously only available at the Horniman, rather than to duplicate

general historic background already to be found on the seemingly infinite resources on [concertina.com](http://concertina.com), [concertina.net](http://concertina.net), and similar sites.

However, if the website highlights the particular objects held by the Museum, it also allows a general overview of historic trends in instrument manufacture and the relationships between makers. For example, the choice of wording on a selection of makers' labels reveals the weight of the Wheatstone name throughout the nineteenth century: independent makers might claim prior association with his factory (M232a-1996), or even use fake Wheatstone labels (M168a-1996)!

The new website therefore brings to light a huge selection of instruments from the Horniman Museum—of which the Neil Wayne Collection is only a fraction—and is set to increase in coverage as the project progresses into its second phase. It is hoped that the online catalogue will be of interest and use both to the general public and to researchers who may wish to arrange to see some of the items not on public display. With enhanced textual descriptions and better quality photographic documentation of each object, this is the first time the Horniman Museum's Musical Instruments Collection has been revealed in such detail.

The new catalogue can be viewed online, following the links from [www.horniman.ac.uk](http://www.horniman.ac.uk).

## NOTES

1. The collections refer to (1) the publishers Boosey & Hawkes; (2) Adam Carse (1878-1858), English musicologist and collector-historian of instruments; his collection of some 350 wind instruments forms the core of the Horniman Museum's collection; his two works on the history of the orchestra, *The Orchestra in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (1940) and *The Orchestra from Beethoven to Berlioz* (1948) are classics in their field; (3) Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940), English pioneer in the field of performance practice and in the revival of early music on period instruments in accordance with the style of the period; founder of the journal called *The Consort*; and (4) the title of the current exhibition (March 2008) at the Horniman Museum.

2. On Ellis and the concertina, see Allan W. Atlas, 'Who Bought Concertinas in the Winter of 1851? A Glimpse at the Sales Accounts of Wheatstone and Co.', in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, i, ed. Bennett Zon. Music in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 63-64; and 'Ladies in the Wheatstone Ledgers: the Gendered Concertina in Victorian England, 1835-1870', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, 39 (2006), 16.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Chris Algar** ([barleycorn@concertina.co.uk](mailto:barleycorn@concertina.co.uk)) is head of Barleycorn Concertinas (Stoke-on-Trent), which is generally thought to have the largest selection of concertinas in the world, including rare and unusual ones. A longtime Morris musician, he now plays Irish music with various bands.

**Allan Atlas** ([aatlas@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:aatlas@gc.cuny.edu)) teaches music history at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York. He is particularly proud that, with this volume, *PICA* celebrates its fifth birthday!

**Viona Elliott Lane** played concertina, saxophone, and other instruments in The Musical Elliotts trio, which performed in British variety theatres and circuses in the 1940s and 1950s. Viona and husband Raymond D. Lane (former manager of the Derby Hippodrome and the Coliseum and Her Majesty's Theatres in London) reside in West Sussex.

**Alice Little** is Assistant Curator of Musical Instruments at the Horniman Museum, London, where she has been working on a project to catalogue and publish online a number of the Museum's collections, including Neil Wayne's collection of free-reed instruments. Her previous research has included early twentieth-century collectors of musical instruments; the Whit-horn and the whittle-and-dub in nineteenth-century Oxfordshire; the portrayal of death in Victorian broadside ballads from the John Johnson Collection; and the contribution of musical instruments to identity. She holds a Masters degree in Material Anthropology, with Ethnomusicology, from the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Also a ubiquitous musician outside the Museum, Alice both performs and teaches music, although being primarily a fiddler she is a mere wannabe concertina player. (Questions about 'Free and Squeezy' should be addressed to Margaret Birley at [mbirley@horniman.ac.uk](mailto:mbirley@horniman.ac.uk)).

**Randall C. Merris** ([rmerris@imf.org](mailto:rmerris@imf.org)) is an economist at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and an amateur concertinist. He has been an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, has taught economics and finance at the Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University, and has consulted with Asian governments on economic policy and financial reform. He writes mainly on economics and occasionally on the concertina and its history. His latest book is *Monetary and Financial Statistics: Compilation Guide* (IMF, 2008); he is the author of 'Instruction Manuals for the English, Anglo, and Duet Concertina: An Annotated Bibliography', *The Free-Reed Journal*, 4 (2002), which is also available online at [www.concertinas.com/merris/bibliography](http://www.concertinas.com/merris/bibliography).

**Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin** ([gearoid\\_ohallmhurain@umsl.edu](mailto:gearoid_ohallmhurain@umsl.edu)) is a native of County Clare and a fourth-generation traditional musician. He is the Smurfit-Stone Professor of Irish Studies and Professor of Music at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. A holder of five All-Ireland Championship music titles, he is the author of *A Pocket History of Irish Traditional Music* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1998), as well as numerous articles on Irish music and folk culture. His CDs include *Traditional Music from Clare and Beyond* (1996), *Tracin'—Traditional Music from the West of*

*Ireland* (1999), and *The Independence Suite—Traditional Music from Ireland, Scotland and Cape Breton* (2004), all issued on the Celtic Crossings label.

**Jill Stubington** ([jill.stubington@unsw.edu.au](mailto:jill.stubington@unsw.edu.au)) is an Australian ethnomusicologist who taught at the University of New South Wales. Her initial research into the music of Australia's Indigenous people led to her recent book, *Singing the Land: The Power of Performance in Aboriginal Life* (Sydney: Currency House, 2007). Now retired, she is spending time in her second research field, Australian traditional music. She plays concertina and keyboard in the Heritage Ensemble and Loosely Woven, two folk-related performing groups in Sydney, and is investigating the repertoire and performance practices of an Australian folk revival singer.

**Neil Wayne** has been interested in concertinas—their history, players, and music—since a chance purchase of a 67-key Duet *Æola* in 1964 (for £2.10.0!). He soon met Frank Butler and older ICA members at the Battersea Concertina classes led by Frank, and visited Tommy Williams many times. By 1966, he was accumulating a large collection of early and historic concertinas, and by 1969, he had started 'The Concertina Newsletter', which later became *Free Reed Magazine*. This ran for twenty-four issues, and played a part in what has become known as the concertina revival. His Free Reed record label, started in 1976 with many recordings of concertina music, including LPs by Tommy Williams, Gordon Cutty, and (in association with Topic Records) many LPs of Irish concertina players. All of these are now available as remastered CDs at [www.free-reed.co.uk](http://www.free-reed.co.uk). In 1996, his complete collection of 700 concertinas, together with thousands of images, manuscripts, and patents was acquired by the Horniman Museum. Neil's current collecting themes include the very earliest Wheatstone concertinas, instruments by all other pre-1850 makers, and all images relating to the concertina as an icon of English culture and music.

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