

The Concertina in the Music Hall and Variety Theatre

Introduction

Mid-nineteenth century urban Britain witnessed the emergence of the music hall as a major cultural institution. The music halls offered a varied programme of acts to a mainly working and lower middle-class audience which benefitted from increased leisure time and income available for disposal on entertainment. In many respects, the music hall represented “the decline of folk amateurism and collectivity”⁴⁸⁴ and was the prime example of the “expansion, diversification and nationalisation”⁴⁸⁵ of popular music in the industrial period. It was a major manifestation of the burgeoning of commercial concert activity and one of the ways in which working-class music making became formally organised and shifted away from communal, public areas towards “framed public spaces which eventually became constituents of a national and international musical commodity market”⁴⁸⁶.

The music hall developed gradually from a number of existing musical institutions, including miscellaneous and popular concerts, tavern concerts,⁴⁸⁷ minstrel shows,⁴⁸⁸ the “free-and-easy”, the travelling show,⁴⁸⁹ street music, pleasure gardens, public spectacles and “harmonic” societies, glee clubs and popular theatre. Each contributed to the music hall elements of their organisation, repertory, performance practice, musical style and use of musical instruments. Many of these and other emerging musical institutions (e.g. holiday resort entertainment and the concert party) continued

⁴⁸⁴ Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, p.55.

⁴⁸⁵ Russell, *Popular Music...*, p.1.

⁴⁸⁶ Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, p.80.

⁴⁸⁷ Arnold Bennett, in his novel *Clayhanger* (London, 1910), describes an evening in a public house in the Potteries in the 1870s when there was “some concertina- playing, with a realistic imitation of church bells borne on the wind from the distance! Late in the evening, Mrs Offlow, a Champion clog dancer, happening to be on tour with her husband through the realms of her championship performed a dance in short red and black velvet skirts, accompanied by her husband on concertina”.

⁴⁸⁸ According to Cohen and Greenwood *The Buskers*, p.141: “Around 1850, the St. James’ Theatre saw the first performances of a man named Pell, who played the bones. He was accompanied by Harrington on the concertina, White on violin, Stanwood on banjo and Germain on tambourine”.

⁴⁸⁹ The movements across rural South West Scotland of John Carson, “Concertina King” and “celebrated concertina player” are recorded in local newspapers. *Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser*: Burnhead, 22 January 1879; Kirkbean, 5 March 1879; Dumfries, 26 March 1879; Burnhead, 2 April 1879; Dunsore, 9 April 1879. *Wigton Free Press*: Stranraer, 6 February 1879.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

in parallel with the music hall as an “extensive undergrowth and feeder system”,⁴⁹⁰ part of a wider system of commercial music making and consumption which allowed a flow of musicians and musical ideas to and from the halls. Performers could thus be drawn “upwards” into the halls from low status performance settings, such as the street and circus, or “downwards” from an increasingly competitive “art” music where professional musicians were being displaced by the rapidly changing concert world. In charting the use of the concertina, it is therefore important to view music hall as “an entire section of the music industry”⁴⁹¹ with its own “structure and processes”⁴⁹² rather than a more rigid or limited sphere concerned with a typical theatre or building housing popular music or a simply defined musical style.

Individual halls varied considerably in scale and organisation; they were continually in a state of flux and development was uneven. As the century progressed, improved communications and increased capital investments encouraged the development of a national and international touring system which allowed “star” artistes to reach a massive audience and exert unprecedented influence over popular taste. Although many halls continued as small-scale local affairs, by the time of its “golden age”, in the period 1890-1914, the hall circuit had become highly organised with fewer, larger and more luxurious establishments under the control of a small number of entrepreneurs who operated a massive infrastructure. As the century came to a close, “variety” companies presenting the complete programme came to the fore, there was a move towards more opulent and spectacular shows and there was increasing competition from musical comedy and revue. During the period 1920-40, the halls suffered through competition from fashionable American originated dance and alternative musical attractions, such as the radio, cinema and gramophone, began to dominate popular music consumption. Many aspects of the music hall, including the use of the concertina, survived in these or in related fields of entertainment, such as seaside concerts, concert parties, pierrot groups or pantomime and are therefore also included here.

The Concertina in the Halls

The music of the mid-nineteenth century halls reflected that of the institutions which contributed to their development. This included material from Italian opera, sentimental songs, ballads, glees, salon music, national songs, instrumental solos (including showy virtuoso playing which was being abandoned from the high status concert), and popular dance music selections.

A common music hall language developed during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Elements of “art” music remained (mainly overtures and operatic selections

⁴⁹⁰ Bailey, Peter *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes, 1986), p.xi.

⁴⁹¹ Russell, *Popular Music*, p.73.

⁴⁹² Bailey, *Music hall...*, p.viii.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

played by the house orchestra) along with much minstrelsy, novelty acts, physical feats, dance, burlesque and, in Scotland and North East England at least, elements of local traditional music and song. Although smaller halls had only a piano or harmonium for accompaniment, it became standard for many establishments to employ their own house orchestras. These ensembles, which were highly variable in standard and reliability, required that the singer or performer carried parts for the band's use. The orchestra could also help with dramatic effects, providing links between verses and supporting the informal, parlando, narrative delivery of much music hall song, accompanying non-vocal activities and generally helping in the build up of a performer/audience relationship necessary in the larger halls which lacked the intimacy of the earliest establishments.

Each "house" (and there could be several in one night) comprised a programme of up to 15 or more acts drawn from a large range of types. The concertina had a place in a variety of forms of act, as discussed below.

Singers

The concertina found favour with music hall singers for a number of reasons. The instrument provided support for vocalists and was well suited to self accompaniment (prior to the rise of the piano accordion in the late 1920s only the keyboard instruments, harp or guitar could offer such facility). This would be especially welcome where the orchestra was unreliable or non-existent. The singer could swing the concertina to good effect in conducting the audience, leading choruses and adding dramatic visual emphasis to a performance in a manner not possible with any other self-accompaniment instrument. This was highly important in the larger halls where each performer had to work hard to build up an effective relationship with the audience. Having his or her own accompaniment meant that the singer could take complete control of the musical production and shape of the performance, an important advantage in a competitive market where each strove to develop an individual style. On a non-musical level, I would like to suggest that the concertina also solved the stage singer's problem of "what to do" with one's hands, just as contemporary popular singers might use a microphone or guitar, although I have no evidence other than my own experience as a performer to support this.

Musical Clowns

The concertina found favour in clowning through the exploitation of its humorous as well as its musical potential. The bellows action offered many opportunities for fun and manufacturers were always willing to construct unusual sizes of instrument (hyperbole was a major ingredient in the music hall) and "specials", such as instruments with unusually long bellows and concertinas which could come apart or had hidden chambers to contain butterflies or confetti. Some were fitted into other objects, such as the miniature concertina hidden in an enormous bow tie or the

The Life and Times of the Concertina

property dog whose body formed the bellows.⁴⁹³ The concertina could also offer a variety of sound effects and whistles were often incorporated into them.

Clowning was often combined with a high degree of musical skill, contradiction (e.g. slapstick v. virtuoso) being a common element in music hall performance. The Webb Brothers (“JoJo and Ruté”) of London,⁴⁹⁴ for example, undertook a comprehensive training in dance, acrobatics, fencing and music (concertina was learned from George Jones, manufacturer and music hall performer) in order to perfect their act during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The duo used miniature concertinas as well as conventional instruments for instrumental pieces, sentimental songs and music performed during acrobatic stunts. Their performance usually closed with a march played on treble and baritone English concertinas accompanied by the house band, orchestra or organ. Playing was “bravura in style, and they swung their concertinas unashamedly”⁴⁹⁵ but they also gave “serious” recitals which attracted the attention of George Bernard Shaw who praised their taste and skill.⁴⁹⁶

Perhaps the most notable concertinist to combine a high degree of musical talent with humour was Grock, the Swiss musical clown. Equally at home in both circus and music hall, Grock was highly influential in bringing continental clowning to the British stage using mime and a variety of musical props including miniature violin, grand piano and English concertina. It is worth repeating in full a description of his use of the concertina:

[Grock] produced from somewhere a concertina. He climbed onto a chair, an ordinary cane chair, and sat on the curved back of it, knees crossed, a most precariously balanced position. He leaned towards the footlights, and, after deep intake of breath, blew them out, left to right. A single “lime” shone on his face in the prevailing darkness. He prepared himself to play the concertina. His fingers pressed the keys and, faintly we could here the beginning of the quartette from “Rigoletto”. What is more, Grock was hearing it too. He listened intently. He looked up and down, seeking the source of the music. When he had traced it to the concertina which he held far from his body in the truly professional manner, his chuckle of enchanted surprise was more and more onomatopoeic.

Next, he indicated to the conductor that he was, at long last, really ready for serious playing with full orchestral accompaniment. The conductor raised his arms and baton. And before the orchestra could begin a note, there was a crash, a splitting noise, not merely of wood and of cane, but as of a whole universe, the bottom dropping out of it.

⁴⁹³ Honri, Peter *Working the Halls* (Farnborough, 1973).

⁴⁹⁴ Butler, Frank “The Webb Brothers” *Concertina and Squeezebox* 18 and 19 (1989), pp.11-14.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁴⁹⁶ Laurence, Dan H. (ed.) *Shaw’s Music* Vol.2 (London, 1981) p.593.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Grock had crashed clean through the chair at this moment of the conductor's, the orchestra's, and everybody else's suspense.⁴⁹⁷

Character Acts

In the expanding musical market, each performer required a style, repertory and "image" recognisably their own and this led to the development of a wide range of specialties and "character acts". Emulation of the most successful acts, a stereotyping of certain assumed roles and a common response to the demands of performing resulted in the emergence of particular personae and stylistic elements. The concertina was suited to a wide variety of character types and by the time of the height of the music hall's success was already laden with much symbolism derived from other areas of adoption (middle class, working class, minstrelsy, street music, sacred etc...) which could be exploited to the full.

Again, deliberate contradiction and humorous juxtaposition were important elements (e.g. the musical tramp playing music "above his station"). One performer active in the 1930s, "The Rt. Hon. Lady Lyveded", made play of her title in her "novel musical specialty"⁴⁹⁸ in which "she performs extremely well on the instruments, one being the size of two tea cups placed together -her smallest being only 1.5 inches across -on which she plays Scottish airs"⁴⁹⁹. As noted previously, the concertina had been used from an early date in minstrelsy and it continued well into the present century as the instrument of the music hall blackface artist. The concertina found particular favour with Cockney "costermonger" acts, perhaps as a result of its popularity in metropolitan street life, and was often associated with pirate or sailor characters. Many of these music hall associations carried over into cinema and have remained with the concertina to the present day.⁵⁰⁰

Concertina Ensembles

Although the "classical" concertina ensembles discussed in Chapter 4.0 had gone by the late nineteenth century, small concertina groups did find a place within the music hall. One act which exploited the potential of the English concertina in both art and popular music was "The Fayre Four Sisters" quartet which played from the early twentieth century through to the 1950s, touring Great Britain, Europe and the United States.⁵⁰¹ All four were daughters of Joe Webb, one of the Webb Brothers, the musical clowns discussed earlier. Surviving recordings⁵⁰² display brilliant playing in

⁴⁹⁷ Cardus, Neville *Full Score* (London, 1970) p.33.

⁴⁹⁸ Copy of handbill *The People's Palace* (London, 16 January 1938).

⁴⁹⁹ From *The Western Morning News* (19 January 1937) quoted in publicity bill. Copy in collection of writer.

⁵⁰⁰ One "serious" player writing in *NICA* (18 October 1956), p.6, strongly condemned the damaging effect of the use of the instrument in drinking and "character" scenes.

⁵⁰¹ Amateur cine film of the Fayre Four Sisters in action survives in the Scottish Film Archive, Glasgow. It was recorded at a local theatre around 1951/2 and may be from the pantomime "Humpty Dumpty". There is a photograph of the group in Carlin, Richard *The English Concertina*, p.39.

⁵⁰² All the following items were re-released on *The English Concertina* by Folkways Records (FW 8845).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

novelty pieces and medleys mostly arranged by Tina, the eldest sister. “Speak Easy”⁵⁰³ and “Raggin’ the Scales”⁵⁰⁴ combined popular American music with themes from Gershwin, including “Rhapsody in Blue”. Their “Russian Fantasy” includes quotations from “The Volga Boatman”, Tchaikovsky’s “1812 Overture” and a concluding “Imitation of Church Bells”. “The Flight of the Bumblebee/Forgotten Dreams”⁵⁰⁵ paired Rimsky-Korsakov’s piece of 1900 with Leroy Anderson’s popular song. Their act also included preludes by Chopin, ragtime and pieces which involved dancing while playing, such as waltzing during “The Blue Danube”. In 1950, they recorded “Morning”⁵⁰⁶ by Grieg, a piece already popular with amateur concertinists (Tape Item 7.1). Their popular “The trip Round the British Isles” brought together a number of national melodies and their act would often close with a rendition of “The Lost Chord” with the players dressed as choir boys.

Other well known family ensembles active in the first decades of the present century included The Royal Bartle Quartet (Steve Bartle with Estella, Essie and Babs; “The best dressed and staged act ever seen in the Music Halls. There is nothing to equal it. It stands alone.”⁵⁰⁷), The Paget Trio and The Musical Elliots (led by Tommy Varley) from the North East of England. These acts were all popular in Scotland and a number of my informants have referred to the outstanding skill of the last mentioned.

Musical Imitations and Novelties

Many music hall performers used the concertina in imitation of other musical sounds. The imitation of bells was particularly common and had its origins in much earlier music and song (e.g. Charles Dibdin’s “The Jolly Ringers” and Nathaniel Gow’s “Caller Herrin”). With the double action and split manual of the English concertina, it is possible to finger dramatic peals in which each note slightly overlaps the next. Performance of the bell selections were usually undertaken with a dramatic movement of the instrument in a wide circular motion. In addition to contributing to the overlapping sound,⁵⁰⁸ this added a visual aspect to the instrumental performance. The technique, which was highly criticised by “classical” concertinists, became commonplace with street and music hall players and their amateur imitators:

One night, as I gingerly worked the bellows, it struck me that the music sounded rather cheezy and commonplace, so I determined while playing to give it an overhead swinging movement, as I had seen done

⁵⁰³ Great Scott Records (A154).

⁵⁰⁴ Great Scott Records (A151).

⁵⁰⁵ (Master No. 01-748-7150A).

⁵⁰⁶ (Master No. 01-748-7150A).

⁵⁰⁷ Advertisement in *The Performer* (1913) p.133.

⁵⁰⁸ A similar technique had been used in the playing of the *Bell Harp*, a late eighteenth century English instrument in which strings were plucked by the thumbs as it was swung around to “give it an undulating tone” (Exhibition note, Victoria and Albert Museum Collection (VA 240-1882 non keyboard 15/7)).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

by a chap on stage who was billed at the local theatre as the “Concertina King”. I managed the swinging part fairly well, but the waltz time of “Smile Awhile” suddenly developed into a syncopated rendering of a funeral march. The energetic swinging motion made me involuntary misfinger some of the notes. To say the least, I was surprised. I continued the vigorous swinging movement and to my surprise I found myself playing, without previous practice, “The Campbells are Coming”. I was delighted -enraptured. Then the words of that famous old time song flashed across my mind, “Swing me just a little bit higher, Obadiah, do”. With renewed zest, I swung the concertina round and round and invited “The Campbells” to come again. Alas! it was all in vain, and I fear it is only in Heaven I shall hear that lost refrain.

However, I consoled myself with the reflection that, standing up, whirling the instrument around, at least looked more professional like than sitting in the old arm-chair tamely holding the darned thing like a cut of wool.⁵⁰⁹

Henri Albano, working from Liverpool in the early years of this century was claimed as “The Greatest English Concertina Act of the World”, “The Paganini of the Concertina” and “The Monarch of All English Concertina Players”.⁵¹⁰ He made a speciality of his “Imitations of Church Bells and Organ”, the score of which was published by C. Wheatstone and Co. (Example 7.1) and taken up by other professional players.⁵¹¹ This medley opened with “Caller Herrin”, an early nineteenth century tune by Nathaniel Gow (1763-1831) which was written to portray the cries of Edinburgh fishwives in its first part set against the peal of a city church in the second. In the English concertina setting, the peal is played in octaves. This is followed by “The Bells”, in which the player is instructed to “swing the instrument to obtain the effect of the chimes” and to play very quietly “to imitate bells in the distance”. The peal rises in volume and leads into a rapid arpeggio or “firing” before an imitation of the Westminster chimes and the sound of Big Ben striking the hour. The melody “Sweet Chiming Bells” introduces other peals before the concluding “Abide with me” which imitates a church organ. An advertisement in the trade press (Figure 7.1) shows Albano swinging his instrument during “The Bells” and waving and playing two concertinas simultaneously in another novelty piece, his “Echoes of the Wood”.

“Vasco the Mad Musician”, a musical novelty artist who enjoyed international fame during the period 1897-1923, developed the theme of instrumental imitations in his grand finale in which he lay on his back, striking hanging bells with his feet while

⁵⁰⁹ Hill, John W. *Leisure Hour Gleanings: Songs, Sketches and Rhymes* (Paisley, 1923) pp.54-55.

⁵¹⁰ Advertisements in *Performer Annual* (1911) p.201.

⁵¹¹ Catalogue No. 2490. “As Performed By The Author On His Tour Round The World”. “Church Bells” (H. Albano) was recorded by James Hume on Zonophone Records (serial 1754 X- 2-49109).

2480

IMITATION OF CHURCH BELLS AND ORGAN

INTRODUCING
 CALLER HERRIN, "SWEET CHIMING BELLS"
 AND "ABIDE WITH ME"

ARRANGED FOR THE
CONCERTINA
 by
HENRI ALBANO
 (AS PERFORMED BY THE AUTHOR ON HIS TOUR ROUND THE WORLD)

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HENRI ALBANO

ECHOES OF THE WOOD

Figure 7.1 Henri Albano, Music Cover and Trade Advertisements.

Source: The Performer Annual (21 December 1911) p.201 and Carlin, R. The English Concertina (New York, 1977).

"CALLER HERRIN."

Moderato

Musical score for "CALLER HERRIN." in G major, 2/4 time, Moderato. The piece begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The first staff shows a series of chords and eighth notes. The second staff features a dynamic shift to fortissimo (*ff*) with triplets of eighth notes, followed by a piano (*pp*) section and a final fortissimo (*ff*) ending. The third staff continues the rhythmic pattern.

The BELLS.

(Concertina to be played swinging to obtain the effect of the chimes.)

Musical score for "The BELLS." in G major, 2/4 time. The piece is marked fortissimo (*ff*). It consists of several staves of music, including a section marked *ppp* (To imitate bells in the distance.) and a section marked *ff*. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords, with some sections using triplets.

FIRING.

(The notes in each bar to be played in rapid arpeggio style.)

WESTMINSTER CHIMES.

BIG BEN.

(Striking the hour)

Musical score for "FIRING.", "WESTMINSTER CHIMES.", and "BIG BEN." in G major, 2/4 time. The "FIRING." section is marked *Example* and consists of three bars of chords. The "WESTMINSTER CHIMES." section is marked *Example* and consists of three bars of eighth notes. The "BIG BEN." section consists of three bars of quarter notes. The notes in each bar are to be played in rapid arpeggio style.

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Example 7.1 Imitations of Church Bells and Organ
(extract).Source: Arranged by Henri Albano. Published by Wheatstone
and Co. (London, c1900).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

playing a concertina accompanied by the house orchestra.⁵¹² Sam Auckland and his daughter Betty performed with “Little Tweet, The Canary Caruso”.⁵¹³ Their gramophone record, from around 1930, features the ubiquitous “Bells of St. Mary’s”⁵¹⁴ and “A Londonderry Air” against which the bird provides an obbligato.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the imitation of natural sounds (a crying baby, birdsong etc...) or other musical instruments was a common feature in traditional fiddle playing in Scotland and Ireland and we find this taken up by concertinists too. The Highland bagpipes was a common subject for imitation and the music hall musician J. Howard Shackleton made an arrangement for concertina (Example 7.2) which was published by Wheatstone and Co. This solo is more of a parody than an imitation. The introductory drone, with pulses in march time and expansion into full chords, a typical orchestral device used to parody the bagpipes, leads into that archetypal pipe tune “The Campbells are Coming”. The drones, which are continued throughout the march and the following strathspey “Tullochgorm”, are awkward to finger at the same time as the melody and they tend to dominate the tune. Because of the air loss in playing sustained notes, frequent bellows changes are required (most likely at each bar line) and this tends to interrupt the drone. Where the drone notes are even slightly out of tune with each other this results in a particularly humorous effect.

Soloists and Virtuosi

The music hall and variety circuit was able to support a small number of outstanding concertina virtuosi and a larger number of lesser, more local solo performers. Many of the lesser acts were semi-professional players filling out the programme. From its earliest days, the music hall offered opportunities for the amateur and self taught musician and served as an interface between professional and amateur music making. Necessity often forced or encouraged amateur players into the halls. George Jones, a noted concertina manufacturer of the Victorian period, recalled how he supplemented his income through performance: “having a good voice [I] took engagements at Music Halls and came out as a vocal and instrumental artist”.⁵¹⁵ Similarly, the maker Harry Crabb often performed popular songs and band music during cinema intervals.⁵¹⁶ Other music hall players would often combine performance with teaching, playing in dance bands and other musical activities.

The halls, of course, featured soloists on a wide variety of instruments. The violin was common, the xylophone and other tuned percussion were popular and the saxophone, another “novel” instrument, found a place while still excluded from the symphony orchestra. In most cases, the repertory contained a major element of “art” music. While reflecting the wide range of popular taste of the late nineteenth and

⁵¹² Frank Anderson, untitled article in *Free Reed* 12.

⁵¹³ *NICA* 18 (October 1956) p.5.

⁵¹⁴ Edison Bell Winner (Nos. 4909: 12300 and 12299).

⁵¹⁵ Jones, George “Recollections of the English Concertina from 1844” *NICA* 327 (May 1985).

⁵¹⁶ Carlin, *The English Concertina*, p.55.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

early twentieth centuries, this was also an expression of the proprietors' aspirations to respectability and a "defence against the attacks of critics who contested the granting of licences with charges of intemperance and immorality".⁵¹⁷ Such music would add to the variety of a performance and help endorse the player as a "high-class act". The work of "great" composers also offered the performer opportunities for parody and humorous juxtaposition.

Although the music hall suffered in the early decades of this century through the rise of American dance music and new entertainment forms, some areas of its instrumental music were able to respond to the new fashions. Among music hall instrumentalists, the concertinists were perhaps most able to absorb and interpret the fashionable music of the native brass band tradition, the American marching bands, military bands, ragtime and related musics.

Although the Anglo-German concertina was not unknown (Dutch Daly was a well known player in the halls and on early gramophone records at the turn of the century⁵¹⁸), most music hall players of the nineteenth century used the English model. However, during the first decades of this century, a number of outstanding performers of the "duet" concertina came to prominence, and they are considered below.

The Maccann Duet Concertina: Instrument of the Music Hall Virtuoso

Mention has been made in earlier chapters of "duet" forms of the concertina. Although Charles Wheatstone's first patents covered instruments of a form with separate bass and treble keyboards and the company produced a number of versions commercially, it was not until John Hill Maccann of Plymouth⁵¹⁹ developed the instrument bearing his name that the concept met with any great success. Maccann adapted Wheatstone's earlier layouts⁵²⁰ into a double action concertina which was:

Fitted with a complete chromatic scale continuing from the left hand to the right hand side so that all the treble notes are on the right hand side,

⁵¹⁷ Bailey, *Music Hall...*, p.x.

⁵¹⁸ Dutch Daly was the first treasurer of the music hall trade union The Variety Artistes Federation. He recorded two sides, "American Airs" and "Imitations on a Concertina" (labels and numbers unknown), in London in 1903. According to *The Glasgow Programme* (December 1898) he played at the Glasgow Empire Theatre in December 1898.

⁵¹⁹ Patent 4752 *Improvements in Concertinas* Provisional Specification (12 March 1884). Maccann's address is given as 30 Morley Street and 37 Morley Place, Plymouth. According to Brown and Stratton, *British Musical Biography*, p.258, he was a "Concertina player in business as a concertina maker at Plymouth. He has appeared in many concerts in the locality". *Reeves Musical Directory* of 1895 lists a J. H. Maccann of London and a W. H. Maccann of Plymouth, both as teachers and players of the concertina.

⁵²⁰ Chidley, K.V. "The Duet Concertina: Its history and the evolution of its keyboard" *Free Reed* 17, pp.15-17.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

the bass or lower notes being on the left, so that the melody can be entirely played on one side leaving the other hand at liberty to play the accompaniment (as on the pianoforte). There are six rows of keys which are simply arranged so that each finger has its proper row.⁵²¹

This he named the “Improved Chromatic Duet English Concertina”⁵²² although it became popularly known as the “Maccann Duet”⁵²³ to distinguish it from other forms which evolved later.⁵²⁴ The keyboard layout of a typical 72 button model is shown in Figure 7.2. Particular notice should be taken of the fact that there is a substantial overlap in the range of the manuals which allows alternative fingerings and playing in unison, features unique to the duet concertina. Although there is apparently no logical pattern to the keyboard layout and players require to memorise a separate fingering pattern for each key played, professional performers recognised the distinct musical advantages over the other concertina forms in its fuller sound, potential for musical effects (through the duplicated areas of the keyboard), wide range⁵²⁵ and suitability for extensive and convenient playing in parts.

The arrival of this instrument reflected the peak in popularity of the piano and music written for the keyboard could be performed on this concertina with relatively little rearrangement. In part playing on the English concertina, the different voices tend to blend together but on the duet they are more distinct. The division into right and left hands also tailored this concertina to the syncopated nature of much of the popular music which was emerging at the time.

Maccann wrote a tutor for his instrument which was published by Lachenal⁵²⁶ and he issued “The Concertinists Guide”.⁵²⁷ He was a noted performer and teacher and he brought the instrument to the public through his performances (with a piano accompanist) at the Great International Exhibition, Edinburgh in July 1888. The champion of popular refined music, Barr, noted the content of his programme:

Fan Valse	(Duet)	Asher
Masaniello	Overture	Auber
Cupid’s Arrows	Galop	Barthmann
Aux Flambeaux	March	Clarke

⁵²¹ Patent 4752, Improvements in Concertinas.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Often given as “Mccann Duet”.

⁵²⁴ A number of other duet concertina forms followed soon after, including the “Crane” or “Triumph” duet favoured by sacred music performers and discussed in Chapter 9.0; the “Jeffries” system which “seems to defy all logic”: Concertina 14 and 15 (1987) pp.74-75 and the “Linton” duet devised by the music hall virtuoso Charles Gray (Linton) for use in his own concertina band: The Concertina Newsletter 11 (April 1973) pp.20-21.

⁵²⁵ The instruments were first made by Lachenal of London and later by other firms in sizes between 46 and 80 buttons, i.e. up to a range of 5 octaves.

⁵²⁶ MacCann J.H. New Method of Instructions for... Duet English Concertina (London, c.1884).

⁵²⁷ (London 1888), 12pp. This is listed in the British Library catalogue (7808 c14(14)) but is missing.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Blau Veilchen	Mazurka Caprice	Eilenberg
Die Neinzelnmaunchen	Mazurka Caprice	Eilenberg
Les Etoiles	Air de Ballot	Eaton
True till Death	Song	Gatti
Zampa	Overture	Herold
Tel-el-Kebir	Battle March	Jonghmanns
Lyrics of Scotland	Fantasia	Jonghmanns
Opera Reminiscences		
Levithian	Polka de Concert	Lévy
Cornelius	March	Mendelssohn
Tel-el-Kebir	Descriptive piece	Maccann
Anantie	Valse (Duet)	Maccann
Iolanthe	Selection	Sullivan
The Lost Chord	Song	Sullivan
Mikado	Valse (Duet)	Sullivan
For Ever and for Ever	Song	Tosti
The illage Blacksmith	Song	Weiss ⁵²⁸

An advertisement of 1892 announced:

Without Equal
PROF. MACCANN R.S.O.I.
The world renowned musical specialty in his high-
class refined entertainment,
MERRY MUSIC
Engagements attended any part of the globe;
Theatres, Circuses etc.. taken on share or rental
for his various combinations.⁵²⁹

Given his repertory of light opera, drawing room songs and popular “art” music and the type of work he engaged in, Maccann can be seen as bridging the gap between the declining use of the concertina in the concert hall and the emerging forms of popular entertainment.

The Maccann Duet was soon taken up by others in the music hall circuit, the most notable being Percy Honri, Ernest Rutterford and Alexander Prince. Percy Honri (1874-1953) came from a musical family which had been involved in the music hall business at Blackpool and Banbury since the mid- nineteenth century. His father,

⁵²⁸ Barr, Robert *Music for the People* (Edinburgh, 1889) pp.206-7.

⁵²⁹ Advert from specialist music hall press dated 1892, origin unknown. Maccann’s address is given as 3a Tottenham Court Road, London. Honri, *Working the Halls*, p.38, refers to Maccann playing at Hengler’s Cirque, Liverpool in April 1891.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

who played English concertina, had been a blackface minstrel and part of a duet (“Virto and Thomson, Musical Savages”) before forming a family act in which Percy was a child singer, clog-dancer and instrumentalist. Percy recalled how his concertina playing was added to the act:

You see my father happened to possess common sense. My voice was bound to break, so he suggested I should learn some instrument -the piano or the violin. What did I fancy? I fancied the Concertina, overcame my father’s dismay, bought a shilling piano catechism -and here I am, Percy Honri, The Concertina Man.⁵³⁰

Honri was promoted as a concertina virtuoso in his early teens and he attracted the praise of Maccann.⁵³¹ His repertory comprised a mixture of descriptive songs, sentimental songs, blackface minstrelsy, light classics (“The Lost Chord”, Rubinstein’s “Melody in F”, “Barcarolle” from Tales of Hoffman etc...), “things that have never been attempted before by any concertina player and nearly every overture published”.⁵³² He toured Europe and North America and soon claimed to be “the world’s greatest concertinist”. He demonstrated the duet concertina for Lachenal in the United States where he came to the attention of the bandmaster John Philip Souza who invited him to join his company as a soloist for a world tour.

In the early years of this century, he developed his act into a pioneering touring revue (Figure 7.3) and introduced back projection and one of the first uses of cinema into his shows. The synopsis of his act in 1902 confirms an amalgam of many areas of music hall music making:

Plays Wagnerian Selection
Sings High-class Ballad
Pantomime Action
Quick Change to “Jester”
Magnificent Scenic and Electric Display
Shakespearian Musical Recitation (H. Godfrey)
Plays Concertina Necktie
Quick Change to “Coster”
Eccentric Dance
Tells really Humorous “Gags”
Novel Imitations on Concertina
Quick Change to “Romeo”
Classic Solo on the Finest Concertina in the World
ENCORE
Illusion Explosive Basket of FLOWERS

⁵³⁰ Honri, *Working the Halls*, p.35.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁵³² *Cambria Daily Leader* (4 August 1898) quoted in Honri, *Working the Halls*, p.55.

Percy Honri

ON THE
BARRASFORD
TOUR

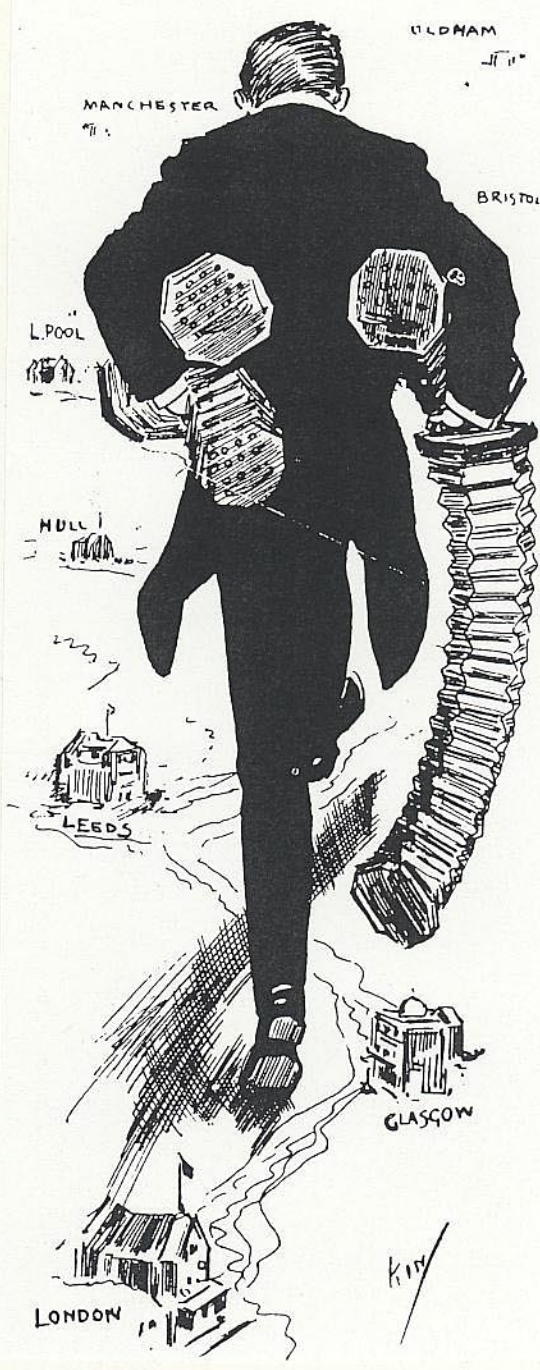


Figure 7.3 Percy Honri, Trade Advertisement.
Source: Honri, Working the Halls, p.63.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Quick Change to “The Newest Dandy” introducing the Great Cinematograph Novelty of the Age OH MISTER MOON⁵³³

After 1917, Honri reverted to solo work and was later joined by his daughter during the mid 1930s. The breadth of his act was reflected in his few commercial gramophone recordings (his earliest was in 1898⁵³⁴) which included minstrel material, popular and humorous songs, sketches, popular classics and the music hall and circus anthem, “The Entry of the Gladiators” by Julius Fucik. He was popular in South Africa during the 1930s and produced some records in Afrikaans.

The personal and musical background of Alexander Prince (Figure 7.4) is more obscure. Born Alexander Sutherland into a Scottish professional musical family⁵³⁵ around 1870, he later became established in Nottingham as a professional concertinist and achieved considerable fame as a soloist and prolific recording artist during the period 1906-1924. His gramophone recordings reflect popular musical taste across the first decades of the present century and include Victorian drawing-room material as favoured by Maccann and Honri (“The Lost Chord”, Gounod’s “Nazareth”), modern American dance music (“Kunnin Kaffir’s Cake Walk”), contemporary British brass and wind band compositions (“Woodland Flowers” and “Darkie’s Holiday Schottische” both by Felix Burns) and military marches (“The Call of the Drum” by A. E. Godfrey and “The Great Little Army”⁵³⁶ by K. J. Alford). There is novelty music (“Bluebells of Scotland, with Bell Effects”), medleys of popular songs from contemporary musicals (“Rose Marie” by Rudolf Friml and “No, No, Nanette” by Vincent Youmans, both 1924), traditional Scottish dance music and modern dances and marches drawing on Scottish themes (“Tam o’ Shanter Two Step”, “Lads of Scotland March”).

Prince’s performance of Scottish music is interesting on a number of counts, as can be illustrated by transcriptions from one of his recordings (Tape Item 7.2). In his medley of dance tunes, “Blue Bonnets Schottische”,⁵³⁷ he employs a range of treatments to add variety and interest. His opening fanfare, in octaves and with a concluding chord, is more a part of the music hall, brass band or circus than the dance hall (Example 7.3a). In the first tune, “The Laddie wi’ the Plaiddie” (Example 7.3b), he uses the left hand manual to harmonise what would traditionally have been monophonic fiddle music, but in a manner which does not smother the tune or detract from the rhythmic pulse. There is a crisp handling of the dotted rhythms and skillful bellows work is displayed in the phrasing of the groups of triplets in the final section. In the first part

⁵³³ The Era (January 11 1902).

⁵³⁴ His discography is included in Honri, Working the Halls, pp.142-3.

⁵³⁵ Walsh, Jim “Favorite Pioneering Recording Artists: Wizards of Accordion and Concertina” Hobbies (March 1953) pp.32-37, 42.

⁵³⁶ Said to have been written in 1916 in reply to the Kaiser’s reference to the British Expeditionary Force as a “contemptible little army”.

⁵³⁷ Played on gramophone record Regal G 7003 (28023).



ALEXANDER PRINCE.

Figure 7.4 Alexander Prince.

Source: The Performer Annual (21 December 1911) p.202..

$\text{♩} = \text{F}\sharp$ tempo $\text{♩} = 174$ pitch and tempo variable due to 78rpm format.

Example 7.3a Introduction.

bass one octave lower than written

long bellows breath

Example 7.3b The Laddie wi' the Pladdie.

Source: From the playing of Alexander Prince on gramophone record Blue Bonnets Schottische (Regal G 7003 [28023]).
 Transcribed by Stuart Eydmann.

etc

bars one octave lower
dotted notes are longer than shown

Example 7.3c Monymusk.

etc

continues for 4 bars then repeats

Example 7.3d What's a' the Steer, Kimmer?

right hand

left hand

etc

dotted rhythm is more exaggerated than shown

Example 7.3e Miss Betsy Robertson.

Source: From the playing of Alexander Prince on gramophone record Blue Bonnets Schottische (Regal G 7003 [28023]).
Transcribed by Stuart Eydmann.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

of “Monymusk” (Example 7.3c), the harmony becomes a sustained drone, played more sensitively than one finds in the typical musical hall treatment (c.f. Example 7.2) and in the second part, the tune is played in octaves. Elsewhere, he plays in thirds (Example 7.3d) and also in unison (Example 7.3e), a technique which is unique to the overlapping manuals of the duet forms of concertina. To the music hall performer, playing in octaves, unison etc... offered advantages of enhanced volume and enriched tone. Its use may also have been encouraged by the rise of the modern accordion which has sets of reeds tuned to sound together in octaves.

During my field work with concertina players active during the period 1910-1945, the name of Alexander Prince was raised on many occasions as the leading soloist of his day and a major source of inspiration and repertory for amateurs.

Ernest Rutterford was also a prolific recording artist and band leader who employed the concertina in his orchestra which played at the Alexandra Palace, London during the 1920s.⁵³⁸ The music of Souza (“El Capitan”, 1896) and the British military band composer Alford (“On the Quarter Deck”) are both represented in his records and his playing of dance music shows a clear influence of American ragtime. His “light classics” included “Humoresque” by Dvorak, “Berceuse de Jocelyn” by Godard, “Le Cygne” by Saint-Saens and the overture to Wagner’s “Tannhauser”, a piece popular with brass bands. Example 7.4 is his arrangement of the “early rag”⁵³⁹ tune “A Coon Band Contest” by Arthur Pryor.⁵⁴⁰ The close correlation with the original piano version confirms the suitability of the Maccann concertina as an instrument for reading from piano scores. Rutterford had music published by Wheatstone and Co., including Sousa’s “The High School Cadets”, and a tutor for his duet concertina.⁵⁴¹ Like Prince, Rutterford’s recordings cover a wide range of styles. As well as playing solo, he also performed and recorded with the cornet player Lloyd Shakespeare (thus combining two areas of contemporary popular working-class musical taste, as the Salvation Army also did); often he acted as accompanist, exploiting the potential of the duet concertina as a substitute for a piano or full band.⁵⁴²

The success of these virtuosi encouraged many other professional⁵⁴³ and amateur imitators. They also had a great influence on the styles of players of the English

⁵³⁸ I know little of Rutterford’s background, dates etc.

⁵³⁹ Berlin, Edward A. *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1980) p.163.

⁵⁴⁰ Written 1899. Arrangement circa 1914. Copy in International Concertina Association library.

⁵⁴¹ Rutterford, Ernest *A Practical and Comprehensive Tutor for the Duet Concertina* (Wheatstone’s Instructions for the Duet Concertina) (London, 1914). Copy in British Library, catalogue h.261.a(18).

⁵⁴² According to Wallis and Malm in *Big Sounds from Small Peoples*, p.2: “The acoustic recording techniques used at the time favoured the loud noises made by industrially produced instruments like the brass and the accordions”. The concertina was used as a convenient substitute for organ on early recordings. Batten, J. *Joe Batten’s Book* (London, 1956) p.56, notes how “the bass concertina made a convincing substitute in Elgar’s “Dream of Gerontius”.

⁵⁴³ One such player, Tommy Williams of Battersea, London, was recorded by Neil Wayne in 1968. The interview was published in *The Concertina Newsletter* 4, 5 and 7 (January, May and August 1972) and with musical recordings on the disc *Tommy Williams, Springtime in Battersea* issued by Free Reed

A Coon Band Contest.

1

Duet.
Concertina Solo.

(A. Pryor.)

TWO STEP.

Arranged by
ERNEST RUTTERFORD.

Moderato.

The musical score is written for a duet in 2/4 time, marked 'Moderato'. It consists of five systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system includes a '3' (triple) marking above the treble staff and 'L.H.' and 'ff' (fortissimo) markings below the bass staff. The second system begins with a 'f' (forte) marking. The third system features a sequence of fingerings '4 3 1 3 4' in the bass staff. The fourth system has an 'L.H.' marking below the bass staff. The fifth system includes measure numbers '19' and '29' above the treble staff and a 'ff' marking below the bass staff. The score is characterized by rhythmic patterns, including triplets and accents, and concludes with a final cadence.

C. W. & Co. 2477.

Example 7.4 A Coon Band Contest.

Source: Composed by Arthur Pryor (1899), arranged by Ernest Rutterford. Published by Wheatstone and Co. (London, c1914).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

concertina who strove to match their complex arrangements, full chords, effective syncopation and full rich sound within the limitations of their own instruments.

The Concertina in the Scottish Variety Theatre

The music hall and variety theatre in Scotland can be viewed as a microcosm of a larger “nationally organised market and production system”.⁵⁴⁴ Although it is commonly accepted that music hall, variety and related forms of entertainment flourished in Scotland and there are vast quantities of primary evidence in libraries and archives, there is very little published research to provide any context for my own work. Random sampling of the music hall press of the period 1880-1930 confirms that all the major concertina acts played in the principal halls of urban Scotland.⁵⁴⁵ However, two important sections of the Scottish scene are worth considering within the context of this study:

1. There was a strong national element within popular musical taste, embracing dance tunes, traditional music and “national” music and song, which was reflected in the halls,⁵⁴⁶ and
2. There were highly developed local networks in the entertainment industry involving many lesser halls and theatres, reflecting local taste and featuring their own “stars” and infrastructure.

Walter Dale of Glasgow was a prominent player of the English concertina during the period 1910-1935 who was little known outwith Scotland.⁵⁴⁷ Like many music hall

Records (FRR 008) in 1976. A music hall poster in the People’s Palace Museum, Glasgow shows a female player of the duet concertina alongside a clown with piano.

⁵⁴⁴ Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, p.21.

⁵⁴⁵ For example: “Variety holds the stage at the Empire this week. Percy Honri is there with his concertina as musical and amusing as ever” in *The Glasgow Herald* (11 November 1919). According to *The Era* (1 January 1920) Steve Bartle, “The Concertina King” played Scotland in early 1910. “The Fayre Four” played the Glasgow Empire for a week in June 1919: *The Glasgow Programme* (June 1919). Dutch Daly played the Glasgow Empire for one week in December 1889. An illustrated article in *Quiz* (9 July 1896), p.262, notes Fred W. Malburn of Stockport appearing at the Glasgow Britannia Music Hall and *The Stage* of 18 January 1900 records him at the Peoples’ Palace Dundee. According to Littlejohn, J.H. *The Aberdeen Tivoli* (Aberdeen, 1986), p.9, “Vasco the Mad Musician” played at the Aberdeen Tivoli in 1911 and the *Glasgow Evening Times* (24 March 1914) recorded Minnie Paget, “The Concertina Queen” playing the Glasgow Pavilion. My informants also referred to performances by Grock, Prince, the Musical Elliots and other leading stars.

⁵⁴⁶ A similar situation existed in North-East England. There has always been a great deal of musical interchange between Scotland and this part of England.

⁵⁴⁷ There were also many lesser known players. For example Alec Reid, “Concertinist and instrumentalist” (Photograph in writer’s collection), or Rex Allan who recorded Scottish traditional music for Regal-Zonophone during the late 1930s. I have found many other references to concertina

The Life and Times of the Concertina

performers, he combined his playing with teaching of the instrument, he played in dance bands and, in common with players on the Manx, Thames and Irish Sea ferries, he was often heard playing on the Clyde steamers.⁵⁴⁸ A number of my informants speak of his influential role in concertina playing in the West of Scotland in the years immediately after the First World War. His gramophone recordings⁵⁴⁹ reflect twin facets of conservative working-class musical taste in the Scotland of the time: brass band music (e.g. “Honest Toil” by William Rimmer and “Administration March”⁵⁵⁰) and traditional fiddle music (e.g. “Irish Medley”/ “Scottish Reels”,⁵⁵¹ “The Bonny Lass o’ Bon Accord etc...”/ “Cradle Song etc...”⁵⁵² and “Orange and Blue”/ “Hornpipe Medley”⁵⁵³). Much of the Scottish music is from the publications of the fiddle player James Scott Skinner (1843-1927) whose compositions have had an important place in the canon of Scottish instrumentalists since the early years of the century. The music of Skinner was not inappropriate for a player of the English concertina interested in Scottish music, for it was written during the peak of the instrument’s popularity and reflected many aspects of wider musical taste. His output was wide-ranging and included many slow tunes of a sentimental nature within the Victorian drawing-room tradition favoured by many concertinists. It also included showy virtuosic pieces that betrayed his rigorous classical training (they feature extended arpeggios and runs of triplets) and fast dance tunes which today have a distinct, late nineteenth-century “feel” and include a degree of chromaticism for which the English concertina is well suited. Skinner’s tunes use all the familiar building blocks of the Scottish fiddle idiom and in particular the so called “double tonic” effect, a sequence of a melodic figure on a major triad followed by the same or another figure on the major triad, a tone lower. I have already demonstrated in Chapter 5.0 how the basic triads are easily fingered on the English concertina.

The air, “The Bonny Lass of Bon Accord” (Example 7.5), was originally published with variations in 1888⁵⁵⁴ and later gained a further strain in the tonic minor. Dale’s recorded version compresses the tune by abandoning the central strains, moving quickly to the minor variation for an earlier dramatic effect and to make space on the record for the customary strathspey and reel which follow. As the transcription shows, his interpretation of the tune is close to Skinner’s published version. The harmony is sparse but does include some octave playing. This may have been used to boost the instrument’s volume or perhaps a response to the fact that it had become central to music hall concertina playing through the outstanding players of the duet

players in Scottish halls about whom I have no background information.

⁵⁴⁸ A gramophone record from the 1930s by “Alex Reid and Company” features a comic sketch “Doon the Clyde” based on a journey on a Clyde steamer. The sketch features an appearance by Walter Dale as himself when he plays a hornpipe (Stern 560, copy in collection of Frank Bruce, Edinburgh).

⁵⁴⁹ In addition to the Stern recordings which are described, Dale also made a number of discs for the Homophon label around 1912.

⁵⁵⁰ Stern, numbers unknown.

⁵⁵¹ Stern (596).

⁵⁵² Stern (589).

⁵⁵³ Stern (568).

⁵⁵⁴ Alburger, *Scottish Fiddlers...*, p.184.

The Bonnie Lass o' Bon-Accord

Violin Solo

Moderato $\text{♩} = 84$

J. Scott Skinner

Musical score for the main piece, consisting of three staves of music. The key signature is two sharps (D major), and the time signature is common time (C). The piece begins with a violin solo marked *mf*. The first staff contains the initial melody with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a *V* (violin) marking. The second and third staves continue the melody with various fingering numbers (e.g., 4 3 0, 1-1 3 0 2, 4 3, 1-1 3, 3, 1-1 3 2 4, 3, 1-1 3) and dynamic markings including *f* and *mf*.

VAR. I

Musical score for Variation I, consisting of four staves of music. The key signature is two sharps (D major), and the time signature is common time (C). The piece begins with a violin solo marked *p*. The first staff contains the initial melody with a dynamic marking of *p* and a *V* (violin) marking. The second and third staves continue the melody with various fingering numbers (e.g., 1-1 3, 4 3, 4 3, 3) and dynamic markings including *mf* and *f*. The fourth staff concludes the variation with a *rall.* (rallentando) marking and a *V* marking.

VAR. II

Sadly

Musical score for Variation II, consisting of four staves of music. The key signature is two sharps (D major), and the time signature is common time (C). The piece begins with a violin solo marked *p*. The first staff contains the initial melody with a dynamic marking of *p* and a *V* (violin) marking. The second and third staves continue the melody with various fingering numbers (e.g., 2 1 3, 2 1, 2 1, 1 4, 3) and dynamic markings including *mf* and *f*. The fourth staff concludes the variation with a *rall.* (rallentando) marking and a *f* dynamic marking.

Example 7.5 The Bonnie Lass o' Bon-Accord.

Source: Composed by James Scott Skinner and published in *The Scottish Violinist* (Glasgow, n.d.) p.1. Overlay shows variations on the original as played by Walter Dale on gramophone record (Sterno 589), transcribed by Stuart Eydmann.

The Bonnie Lass o' Bon-Accord

Violin Solo

Moderato ♩ = 52

Dale's version limited to areas in boxes

J. Scott Skinner

VAR. I

VAR. II

Sadly

Example 7.5 The Bonnie Lass o' Bon-Accord.

Source: Composed by James Scott Skinner and published in *The Scottish Violinist* (Glasgow, n.d.) p.1. Overlay shows variations on the original as played by Walter Dale on gramophone record (Sterno 589), transcribed by Stuart Eydmann.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

models. The melody of the strathspey, “The Miller O’ Hirn” (Example 7.6), is also played very much as published although many of Skinner’s bowing subtleties are ironed out. Dale uses chords rather than double stopped unisons in the first notes of each strain and there is none of the pointed rhythms, crisp, staccato bowing or exaggerated accents one would expect from fiddle players from the Skinner’s homeland in the North East of Scotland.

In its original form, the reel “Miss Shepherd” (Example 7.7a), makes full use of the fiddle’s compass with the opening section played on the G and D strings. Dale’s version (Example 7.7b) raises the pitch of the opening bars by an octave to avoid the difficulty of playing fast passages in the lower range of the English concertina.

Dale skilfully plays rapidly repeated notes, as in the traditional “birls” in his version of “Harvest Home” (Example 7.8a). These can be bowed with ease on the fiddle but are particularly difficult to execute cleanly on the concertina. However, they can be fingered in a number of different ways as shown in Example 7.8b. It is also possible to take advantage of the duplicate Eb and Ab notes which exist on the English concertina and these are employed to good effect by Dale in another passage of “Harvest Home” (Example 7.9) and (to more dramatic effect) in the “Reel o’ Thuilleachan” (Example 7.10). In both of these pieces, the key has been transposed by Dale from Skinner’s published original to deliberately allow use of the duplicate notes. Each of these tunes include a number of accidentals and demand the rapid performance of runs which would have been impossible to render on most accordions of the day.

Walter’s son, Tommy Dale, was also a professional concertinist. During the 1930s he became associated with the Logan family which has occupied a central position in variety theatre in Glasgow throughout this century.⁵⁵⁵ A season spent in New York may account for the inclusion of American pieces on a gramophone record made during the 1930s (“Marilyn” and “Lopeziana” by Lou Adler⁵⁵⁶). He later formed the musical act “Douglas, Dex and Dale” (piano, saxophone and concertina) which met with some success on the Scottish variety circuit. A descendant, Ron Dale, was active in the Scottish variety scene during the 1950s, 60s and 70s⁵⁵⁷ as a multi-instrumentalist who included the concertina in his act.

My informant Willie Smith (b1904) (Figures 7.5 and 7.6) worked as a miner but found, during the early 1920s, that he was able to earn as much playing concertina in the evenings. His teachers were Walter Dale and George Simpson and he was a great admirer of Alexander Prince, who he said could play “more than I ever thought could be done with 10 fingers, with the amount of music that was comin’ out of it”.⁵⁵⁸ He recalled that “Prince could fill a concert hall in Glasgow [at a time] when people were

⁵⁵⁵ Personal communication with Buddy Logan, Glasgow, 1985.

⁵⁵⁶ *Sterno* (552).

⁵⁵⁷ Littlejohn, J.H. *The Scottish Music Hall 1880-1990* (Edinburgh, 1990) p.22.

⁵⁵⁸ Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A8.

tempo ♩ = 156

Skinner writes this piece one fifth lower but Dale has transposed it to flow directly from The Bonny Lass o' Bon Accord. The higher pitch results in a more brilliant effect in the closing two bars.

Example 7.6 The Miller O' Hirn.
 Source: Composed by James Scott Skinner and published in The Scottish Violinist (Glasgow, n.d.) p.2. As played by Walter Dale on gramophone record (Sterno 589), transcribed by Stuart Eydmann.



Example 7.7a Miss Shepherd (extract).

Source: Composed by James Scott Skinner and published in The Scottish Violinist (Glasgow, n.d.).

Three systems of handwritten musical notation in treble clef, common time (C), and one sharp (F#). The notation includes slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The word "faster" is written above the first, second, and third systems. The tempo marking "tempo d = 120-126" is written above the first system. Some notes are marked with an asterisk (*).

Skinner writes the crotchets marked * as birds:



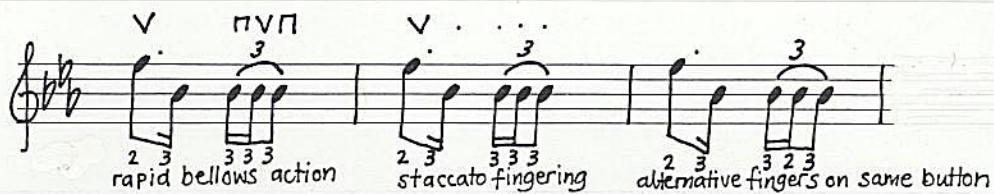
These are difficult to finger on the concertina at this speed.

Example 7.7b Miss Shepherd.

Source: As played by Walter Dale on gramophone record (Sterno 589), transcribed by Stuart Eydmann.



Example 7.8a Harvest Home (extract).



Example 7.8b Harvest Home (extract).



Example 7.9 Harvest Home (extract).

Source: Composed by James Scott Skinner and published in The Scottish Violinist (Glasgow, n.d) p.44. As played by Walter Dale on gramophone record (Sterno 568), transcribed by Stuart Eydmann.

right 2 left 1 left 1 right 1 left 1

Example 7.10 Reel o' Thulleachan (extract).
 Source: Composed by James Scott Skinner and published in The Scottish Violinist (Glasgow, n.d.) p.25. As played by Walter Dale on gramophone record (Sterno 589), transcribed by Stuart Eydmann.



Figure 7.5 Willie Smith on Clyde Steamer c1964.
Source: Author's Collection.

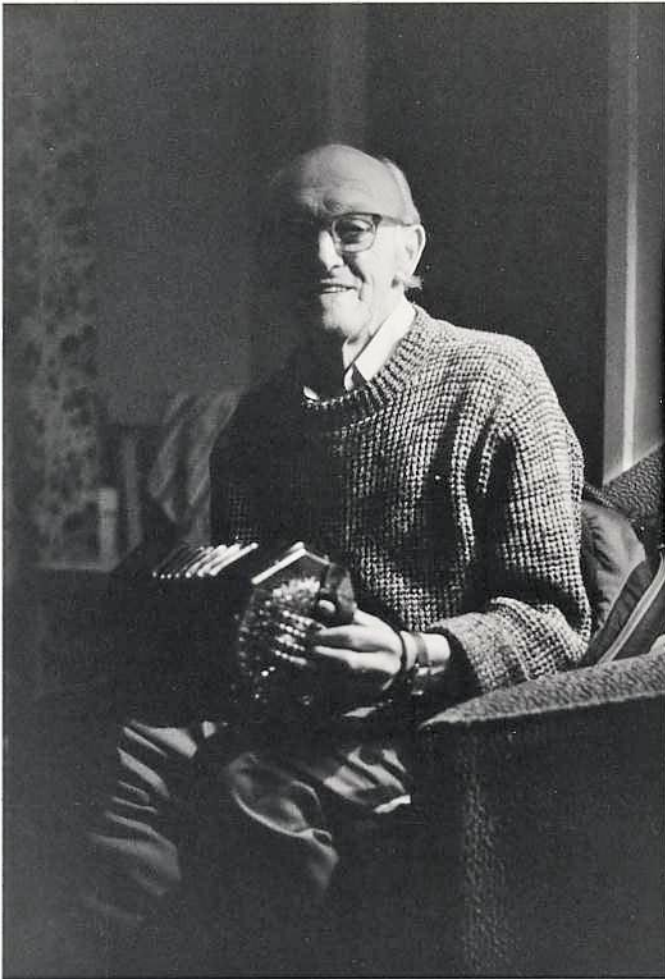


Figure 7.6 Willie Smith, Greenock 1984.
Source: Author's Collection.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

abandoning the variety theatre”.⁵⁵⁹ During the miner’s strike of 1926 Willie took up music as his sole employment⁵⁶⁰ playing in local dance bands⁵⁶¹ and concerts:

The concertina was a popular instrument then. If you could play the concertina the whole district was coming to your home, or could hear you play or were going to the concerts, a concert maybe in your own district. The whole place would turn out. “Billy’s playin’ tonight! come an’ we’ll hear Billy playing this, that, you know”.⁵⁶²

He learned clarinet and graduated to playing in the orchestras of the larger variety theatres in the city. Opportunities declined as the cinema expanded so he added saxophone to his skills and took work in more fashionable dance bands too. By the early 1930s he had to return to his concertina to make a living:

W.S.: Instead of the variety they went to the talkies, and that was the orchestras all done away with and lo and behold I had to go back to my concertina for a year or two but I got on the stage just the same.

S.E.: In the variety halls?

W.S.: In variety halls, and just played the teeny [concertina] and all the kiddin’ and swankin’ and blowin’ them round my head and imitating the bells and a’ that kind of thing and I got a living that way...⁵⁶³

The last paragraph refers to the strutting, exaggeration and novelty playing expected from concertina players in the halls. Willie played clarinet and saxophone for many years as part of the small orchestras on board the liners of the Glasgow- Quebec and Southampton-South Africa lines.⁵⁶⁴ In these situations he would use his concertina to vary the programme by playing music of a “nautical” nature. As with other players of the music hall, he had a wide personal repertory which included overtures, light music, Scottish dance music, novelties and general popular music.

Willie Smith’s concertina playing became widely known in the 1950s through his performance in the theme music of the Ealing comedy “The Maggie”⁵⁶⁵ and in the

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ “Rigby and Royal, The Musical Miners”, two brothers from Yorkshire also took to the stage with their concertinas during the miner’s strike of 1926: *NICA* 6 (May/June 1955), p.10-11.

⁵⁶¹ The concertina in local dance bands in Scotland is discussed in detail in Chapter 10.0.

⁵⁶² Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A9.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., A2.

⁵⁶⁴ Just before the Second World War ship’s musicians sailing from the Clyde had a basic rate of £14 per month: *Musician’s Union Scottish Branches Price Lists 1938-42*. Copy in National Library of Scotland.

⁵⁶⁵ Ealing 1953. Known in the U.S. as “High and Dry”. Music by John Addison (1920-). The use of

The Life and Times of the Concertina

1960s through his playing of the theme for the B.B.C. comedy drama “The Vital Spark”. Both productions drew on the themes of Neil Munro’s “Para Handy Tales”,⁵⁶⁶ short stories published in the Glasgow Evening News during the early years of this century, which featured the antics of the crew of a cargo ship working the waters of the West Coast of Scotland.

The music of “The Maggie” takes as its theme the Scots fiddle tune “Hamilton House”. This lively jig, which dates from the eighteenth century, is played by the concertina in a variety of tempi and styles for dramatic effect (one of the leading characters in the film plays the concertina and Willie Smith himself makes a brief appearance as a concertina player in a ceilidh scene). In the title sequence, the tune is played by an orchestra with the concertina taking solo passages. The jaunty simplicity of the tune, combined with Willie Smith’s lively playing, offers a flavour wholly appropriate to the humour and spirit of the film which is Scottish in character yet avoids stereotypes. The use of free-reeds had a parallel in Larry Adler’s harmonica music for the film “Genevieve” of the same year.

The “Vital Spark”⁵⁶⁷ theme (Example 7.11) is closer to the popular music of the early twentieth century. In the style of the polka or schottische, it matched the lighthearted nostalgia and humour of the programmes. Incidental music, including minor key variations on the theme, featured the concertina and jew’s harp. Both projects further promoted and emphasised the popular image of the concertina as a seafarer’s instrument in Scotland. Like his teacher Walter Dale before him, Willie Smith was a well known performer on the Clyde steamers during the 1960s (Figure 7.5). He is remembered by several other informants:

On the Waverley, on the boats doon the Clyde. Aye he wisna a big man, he was a wee man that played the concertina. But... the harp was an enormous size and for a while, I can mind for a while they had a piana as well on the boat and they pulled it out on the deck and they played the piana and harp and the concertina and a fiddle.⁵⁶⁸

On the Waverley, they used to have pianos all over the boat. There was usually a violin player and the piano was there a’ the time and

the concertina was in keeping with Addison’s other film work in which he favoured solo instruments with a specific character such as the oboe in “The Girl with the Green Eyes” and the harpsichord in “Tom Jones”.

⁵⁶⁶ Munro, Neil Para Handy Tales (Collected edition, Edinburgh, 1955). In Munro’s stories it is the melodeon and trump (jew’s harp) which are the instruments of the seamen.

⁵⁶⁷ Composed by Ian Gourlay (1915-1993).

⁵⁶⁸ Jimmy Lindsay: Eydmann 86.03.A8. In Colour on the Clyde: Memories of the Clyde Steamers (Rothsay, 1970), Cameron Somerville records that “On the [ship] Isle of Arran... there was a harp, two violins and a concertina, and there was much good singing of Scottish songs, in which the passengers joined with immense gusto.” There is a photograph of a concertina player and harpist on board a Clyde ship in the collection of Rosa Michaelson, Fife (Figure 7.7). The concertina player may be Walter Dale, discussed earlier.

tempo ♩ = 160

I

A

B

C

played IAABBACAA

Example 7.11 The Theme from The Vital Spark.

Source: Composed by Ian Gourlay, c1965. As played by Willie Smith, transcribed by Stuart Eydmann from tape Eydmann 83.01.A1.



Figure 7.7 Musicians Playing on Clyde Steamer.
Source: Collection of Rosa Michaelson.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

maybe an accordion and a saxophone and the concertina. This was the band they had. There was always a concertina there.⁵⁶⁹

Jack Easy (Joe Maley d.1980) was another outstanding Glaswegian concertinist of the Scottish music hall. He worked extensively as a soloist throughout Britain and took his own show to resorts in Ireland for the summer season. During the 1950s and 60s he followed in the footsteps of Tommy Dale by becoming associated with the Logan Family and played in their shows and revues throughout Scotland. He made occasional appearances on television in Scotland during the 1960s. In the early 1970s he retired to Fleetwood, Lancashire. A field recording made in 1977⁵⁷⁰ shows him to have been a highly skilled player, able to bring a large repertoire of colouring and expression to his arrangements, including playing in octaves and a sensitive tremolo similar to that employed by harmonica players. His pieces invariably opened with a flourish and closed with a bravura ending and made full use of his brilliant technique.

As with the other music hall players, his repertoire was diverse and included brass band pieces (e.g. “Under Freedom’s Flag”), Latin American style dance music (“Pablo the Dreamer”), blackface minstrel music, sentimental choruses, “hits” from shows and films and Scottish and Irish traditional dance music played in a fast, showy fashion. Ragtime tunes such as “12th Street Rag”, “Leicester Square Rag” and “Black and White Rag” featured prominently in his repertoire and were appropriate showpieces for his outstanding technique. This material was more closely linked to popular taste of the 1930s and 40s and the ragtime revival of the early 1970s than a direct link to the music of the early twentieth century.⁵⁷¹ His Dixieland Medley (Tape Item 7.3) is chosen to illustrate his skillful playing.

A popular part of his act was an appearance on stage dressed as a Merchant Navy sailor: “a most immaculate figure, with a white hat”.⁵⁷² He introduced this act with a selection of naval tunes including “Anchors A-weigh”. Again we find the exploitation of the theme of the concertina as a seamen’s instrument (West Central Scotland was the location of a number of major ports). He would follow this with “A Life on the Ocean Wave”, and “Every Nice Girl Loves a Sailor” and “then you could play anything you liked after that”. He invariably included one of a number of his Scottish and Irish medleys in his act. One was the published “Savoy Scottish Medley

⁵⁶⁹ Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.A7. There is a photograph of “The Kaye Orchestra” playing on a steamer c1939 which shows piano, cello and saxophone (played by Willie Smith?) in McCrone, Ian To The Coast: One Hundred Years of the Caledonian Steam Packet Company (Glasgow, n.d) p.57.

⁵⁷⁰ Made by Ross Campbell in Fleetwood. A copy of the tape is lodged in the North West Sound Archive.

⁵⁷¹ Dating from 1914 “12th Street Rag” was revived in the film “Close Harmony” in 1929 and was later featured on a hit record of 1948 by Pee Wee Hunt. “Leicester Square Rag” is by Harry Roy (1900-1971) whose band supported films in the newly opened Leicester Square Theatre, London. “Black and White Rag” of 1908 was revived with great success by the Trinidadian pianist Winifred Attwell (1914-1949) in the 1940s.

⁵⁷² Fred Osbourne “The Concertina on the Variety Stage” Concertina Newsletter 5, p.19.

The Life and Times of the Concertina

One Step”⁵⁷³ and another, the “Savoy Irish Medley One Step”, which dated from Debroy Summer’s directorship of the Savoy Orpheans dance band at the Savoy Hotel, London in the mid 1920s. The former includes a whole palette of Scottish gimmicks including, bagpipe effects, sentimental songs, bell effects (the ubiquitous “Caller Herrin”), Robert Burns’ songs and dance tunes bound together by a quickstep rhythm. Similarly, his “Piper’s Wedding Medley” (which has no relation to the bagpipe tradition) was a pastiche of Scottish melodies which managed at one point to combine strains from four tunes (“Auld Lang Syne”, “Annie Laurie”, “Caller Herrin” and “Peat Fire Flame”) in as many bars before concluding with an imitation of bells. “The Wee MacGregor Patrol” opened with an imitation of a pipe band rising in volume and closed with it fading out as if marching past and into the distance. His own “Irish Medley”, which he played at the Metropole Theatre, Glasgow, crams seven familiar songs and dance tunes of different measure into a few minutes:

song:song:reel:song:hornpipe:song:jig

The field recording features another Scottish selection of his own arrangement which combined the following tunes in the order listed:

Westerin’ Home	song/waltz
My Bonny Lies over the Ocean	song/waltz
The Road to the Isles	song/march
Mairi’s Wedding	march/march
The Inverness Gathering	march
Unidentified Quickstep	quickstep
The Barren Rocks of Aden	quickstep

The selection faded out with drones suggesting the sound of the bagpipes.

Modern polkas featured prominently in his repertory including “The Swedish Polka”, “Hopscotch Polka” and “The Bluebell Polka”, a popular tune from the pen of Jimmy Shand, a Scottish accordionist who has played a central role in Scottish dance music in the period after the Second World War.

⁵⁷³ Published 1924. Recorded by the Savoy Orpheans on Columbia (939).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Outwith the Glasgow conurbation, George Morris (also known as “Dod” or “The Buchan Chiel”),⁵⁷⁴ was a music hall performer who associated himself with the language and humour of the north-east of Scotland. He is remembered mainly as a writer, publisher and singer of “bothy ballads”, several of which he recorded for the Beltona label during the 1930s.⁵⁷⁵ He also performed comic material and instrumental pieces⁵⁷⁶ using concertina. His monologue “A Sunday Morning Ramble”, transcribed here from a gramophone recording,⁵⁷⁷ contained all the typical novelty effects heard on the concertina in the music hall:

[Concertina playing chimes, as in Big Ben]

Oh me! Whit a fat heid I hiv this mournin. I think I’ll hae soda water and reflection for my breakfast.

[Concertina playing a peal of bells]

Great Scot! There’s the kirk bells. I’ll hae tae dress an’ get outside.

[Peal becomes louder]

It’s a fine morn this mornin’ is’n’t it Jimmy? I doubt we’re ower late for the kirk, eh? Never mind, come on round by the kirk door an’ we’ll hear the organ.

[Concertina playing in imitation of church organ]

Man Jimmy, that’s fine, eh? Na, ya canna beat the auld tunes. It’s gettin awfa het is’n’t it tae? Whit about a walk down the beach. eh? You’ve tae be back for yer denner at ane o’clock? Och, we’ll easy manage that.

[Concertina drones, as in bagpipes]

Come on. Sic a crowd at the end o’ the street. Wonder whit’s a dae. Listen man! It’s the Deebank boy pipers mairchin tae their Kirk parade. Come on an see them Jim.

[Concertina playing “Cock of the North” and “All the Blue Bonnets are o’er the Border” in imitation of bagpipes]

⁵⁷⁴ Extract from *Beltona Electrographics* catalogue, not dated, writer’s collection.

⁵⁷⁵ Morris, G.S. *Kerr’s “Buchan” Bothy Ballads* Books 1 and 2 (Glasgow, n.d.).

⁵⁷⁶ For example: “Nonsense”/“Comin’ Fae ‘Rury” (comic songs) Beltona (1876), “Uryside”/“Bennachie Schottische” Beltona (1877).

⁵⁷⁷ “A Sunday Morning Ramble”/“Way Down South” Beltona (1718, M13733E and M13734).

The Life and Times of the Concertina

Come on! Man that's fine. Look at this.

[Bagpipe imitation fades as if band marching away]

In "Way Down South", on the reverse side, he played a selection of minstrel style tunes.

As in other parts of Britain, the music hall and variety theatres of Scotland largely disappeared after the Second World War. However, many of the acts continued in seasonal shows in the cities and seaside resorts and on television, although the programmes became dominated by a particular formula of "Scottish entertainment" which, drawing on the music hall tradition, combined aspects of popular and traditional music in a category now known as "tartanry". The accordion, which had assumed the role of principal instrument in Scottish dance music, became an important element of such shows, in dance music, song accompaniment and for listening. The concertina, which had been in decline in any event, became marginalised. A number of more recent Scottish variety artistes played the concertina (often a miniature version) but have used it more as a novelty or as a clowning prop in a wider act.⁵⁷⁸ These included Jimmy Logan, Billy Crotchet the musical clown,⁵⁷⁹ and the comedian Lex MacLean. Such acts reinforced the humorous aspects of the instrument to the detriment of its more serious side and contributed to its abandonment in the longer term. Laden with these associations, the concertina was never adopted as the instrument of an overtly "Scottish" act in the way that the killed accordionist has become de rigueur.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ During this period the concertina found favour with a number of fashionable cabaret artistes outwith Britain. These included Raymond Devos and "Fred and Frederika" in France and Margaret Scott in New York.

⁵⁷⁹ Billy Crotchet and Jeannie were part of "The White Heather Club Show" during its four week season at the Edinburgh Empire in 1959 (Programme, Edinburgh Public Libraries). They appeared at the Aberdeen Tivoli in the show "The Swing o' the Kilt" in the same year (Littlejohn, *Aberdeen Tivoli*, p.83).

⁵⁸⁰ One exception was "Jock Harris, Scottish Entertainer" who performed on concertina in formal Highland Dress. Photograph, c.1920, in writer's collection.

The Life and Times of the Concertina