

# CONCERTINA CONVERGENCE

The National Folk Festival 2015

## WORKSHOP 3

Chordal accompaniment on the Anglo Concertina with Malcolm Clapp

Song Room

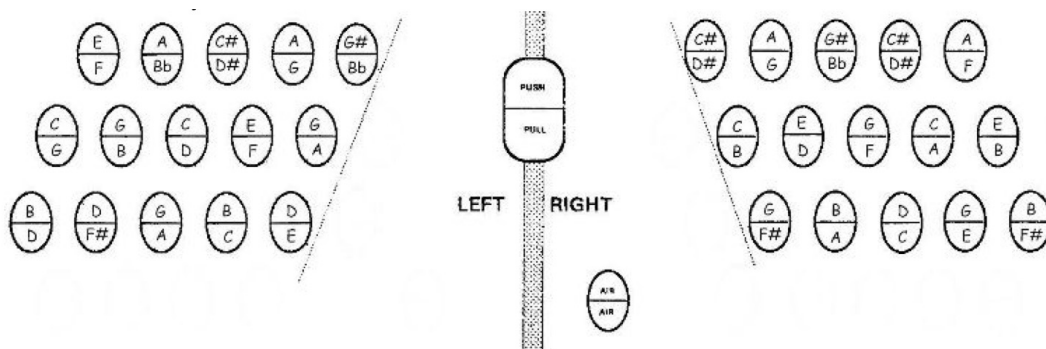
10.00 to 11.00am Saturday 4th April 2015

20 people attended

I am often asked how to use the left hand of the concertina to play an accompaniment to the melody. I have heard many different ideas on the subject over the years, but this workshop deals with a few tools and techniques that I use and others may find useful as an introduction to chording and related matters.



Each concertina is different and many have been modified, so it is important to get to know your instrument. A good idea is to draw up a keyboard chart of your own instrument showing notes push and pull for each button. Below is a chart for a typical 30 key instrument in C/G:



My approach to accompaniment is to consider that the concertina may be divided into 3 parts: the right hand end carries the melody line, often an octave higher than written; higher pitches notes on the left can be used for chording; the lower notes on the left hand used for single bass notes. Of course, there will be situations where these functions overlap.

On the left hand, some notes are available on both push and pull; some only on the push, some only on the pull. An easy way to establish which buttons and directions are needed for simple chords is to prepare a template consisting of two columns of left hand keyboard blanks for push and 8 for pull as shown below:

PUSH	PULL
<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O O O O O</p> <p>Chord ____ _ _ _ _</p>
etc	etc

Use one vertical column for PUSH chords, the other for PULL chords. Enter the name of the chords you will most often use (on a C/G instrument, probably F, C, G, D and A majors, D, A and E minors) and the notes making up those chords. It is then an easy matter to refer to the keyboard chart and block out (or colour in) the notes available for each chord diagram in each direction.

It will be noted that some chords have a great many buttons available in one direction, but barely any in the other. This will suggest the best direction for such a chord. It will also govern the choice of buttons to use in the melody on the right hand side to get them in the same direction, so a bit of cross rowing may be needed.

It is not necessary to play every button/note in the chord. Experiment! Be selective. Often a two note chord is ample, accompanied by a low note, perhaps an "um-pah" sequence like many accordion players use, maybe broken up with a bass run. Maybe add a 7th. Keep it fairly simple though, for folk music especially. Yes, many other chords are available, and someday you might need something a bit obscure, but worry about the basics first. The good old I, IV and V "three chord trick" plus relative minors for the most commonly used keys: C, G and D. *(Someone claimed after the workshop that he had found 84 nameable chords available on an anglo left hand, but declined to demonstrate them all to me!!!)*

Which chords to use? If playing from written music, often the chords are indicated. Playing by ear they can be a bit more difficult to select, but as stated earlier, experiment! Then experiment some more :-)

I have found that rather than playing triads, leaving out the thirds can be effective, particularly in many French tunes and medieval/early music. To me, this more haunting quality fits these genres well.

Of course, not everyone wants to play chords. Sometimes a simple drone is very effective for accompaniment. Playing in octaves is another way of fattening up the sound, and of course many players of Irish Traditional Music tend to imitate the sparse chording available on the uilleann pipes. Another technique is to play arpeggios rather than chords. And for variation, maybe try playing the chords on the right hand and the melody on the upper left. Lots of possibilities to make the sound more interesting.

A word of warning though: please take care not to allow the accompaniment to dominate the melody. It is all too easy to let this happen, and I have been guilty of it myself on occasions, so try to keep the left hand crisp and a little subdued. Accompaniment is just that; it is to enhance the melody, not to replace it.

An excellent resource is the book by **Gary Coover** entitled "*Anglo Concertina in the Harmonic Style*", available on eBay USA or from the author direct. He also has several YouTube videos, which are well worth watching to see just what he does by way of accompanying the melody, and has developed a notation for many of the tunes he teaches.

**I hope that the workshop and these notes may inspire players to make use of a little more of the instrument's capabilities and perhaps make tunes a bit more interesting. However, it is up to the individual to decide just how much accompaniment is enough. Give it a try and enjoy the journey!**

(This workshop is based on my own experience and playing techniques. Its intention is to present a number of potentially useful ideas, but is not claimed to be a definitive instructional, may contain errors and omissions, and at best is only a rough introduction to the subject. However, it is hoped that it may prove useful. The content of this workshop and of these notes may include advice which may differ from that offered by other concertina players and teachers. I acknowledge and respect all contrary views, and I would recommend that these be considered no less valid than my own.)