

ABSTRACT

Victorian England held firm convictions about which instruments were appropriate for middle- and upper-class women, whether professionals or well-bred amateurs. Conventional wisdom holds that, until the informal ban on women playing the violin began to loosen in the 1870s, only three instruments were deemed suitable: piano, harp, and guitar. There was, however, a fourth instrument to which women had recourse: the English concertina, developed by the physicist Charles Wheatstone circa 1830.

This study looks at the 978 women for whom there are 1,769 transactions—about 12% of the total—recorded in nine extant Wheatstone & Co. sales ledgers that list the firm's day-to-day sales from April 1835 to May 1870. It is in two parts: (1) an Introduction, which analyses the data presented in the Inventory from a demographic-sociological point of view and places Wheatstone's commerce with women into the context of its business activity as a whole; and (2) the Inventory (with three appendices), which lists every transaction for each of the 978 women, identifies as many of them as possible, and offers a miscellany of comments about both the women and the transactions. Briefly, the roster of Wheatstone's female customers reads like a list of Victorian England's rich-and-famous: the Duchess of Wellington and 146 other members of the titled aristocracy (more than twice as many as their male counterparts), the fabulously wealthy philanthropist Angela Burdett Coutts, members of the landed gentry, and such mainstays of London's musical life as the guitarist Madame R. Sidney Pratten, the organist Elizabeth Mounsey, and the contralto Helen Charlotte Dolby, as well as a large number of Professors of Concertina.

THE AUTHOR

Allan W. Atlas teaches at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York, where he heads The Center for the Study of Free-Reed Instruments. Author of books and articles on both fifteenth-century music and Puccini, he currently focuses his research on the English concertina, especially its sociological role in Victorian society, with publications in this area including *The Wheatstone English Concertina in Victorian England* (Clarendon Press, 1996) and 'George Gissing's Concertina', *Journal of Musicology*, 17 (1999), 304–18; his current projects include an edition of selected works for the instrument by Giulio Regondi (co-edited with Douglas Rogers) and an article on Arthur James Balfour and the concertina. He is also the founding editor of the *Papers of the International Concertina Association*. An avid concertinist, he performs (together with Julia Grella O'Connell and Francesco Izzo) with the New York Victorian Consort.