

## Working Class Adoption of the English Concertina in Scotland 1900-1945

### Introduction

By the start of the twentieth century, Lowland Scotland had largely ceased to be a peasant society and was a modern, industrialised country. The population was mostly housed in urban communities and many of those living in rural areas had a reasonable experience of the wider world through family links, employment and military service. In the cities and larger towns, society comprised a varied cultural and ethnic mix of residents of mainly Lowland, Highland (often Gaelic speaking) and Irish origin. The multi-storey tenement flat remained the principal urban housing form and the living conditions of the working class were generally poor. In 1911, for example 50% of Scottish dwellings had only one or two rooms.<sup>726</sup>

As I have remarked in earlier chapters, there was an increasing tendency for popular music to become focused at a national and international level through the developing entertainment industry and the influence of the music hall, the churches, modern dance music, bands and choral organisations. There was also a considerable amount of pressure for “improvement”, through evangelistic and temperance organisations, adult education, the labour movement and the influence of the middle-classes, who had already adopted more refined, “rational” and home-based recreation as the norm. However, while older cultural forms survived mainly in the rural and island areas or among sub- groups such as the travelling people, there remained lively “folk traditions” of dance and song in the industrial areas too, as has been recognised by A.L. Lloyd.<sup>727</sup>

The First World War brought major changes in the economy and industrial organisation which had effects on everyday life, cultural attitudes and practices. By 1914, the economic life of the country had become linked to the fortunes of a small number of staple industries (iron and steel, coal, shipbuilding, heavy engineering and

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<sup>726</sup> Harvie, Christopher *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Scotland 1914-1980* (London, 1981) p.70. In England and Wales the figure was less than 8%. By 1931 the Scottish figure had fallen to only 44% and, according to Dickson, A. and Treble J.H. (eds.) *People and Society in Scotland: Vol. III 1914-1990* (Edinburgh, 1992) p.6, to 32% in 1951.

<sup>727</sup> Lloyd, A.L. *Folk Song in England* (London, 1967). The whole area of traditional music and song in urban Scotland has been sadly ignored in favour of the rural areas and still awaits a definitive study.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

textiles) operating in increasingly competitive world and domestic markets. A boom associated with the aftermath of war was followed by economic problems and unfavourable trade conditions. Contraction in the basic industries resulted in long term structural unemployment which was felt most deeply in the early 1930s and in those parts of the Central belt most dependent on such activities. Conflict occurred in urban centres with rent strikes and other local, radical political action. Emigration from Scotland became a common form of escape, from the 1920s onwards.

As the influence of the church waned, its role in the organisation of personal free-time declined and evangelicalism and its musical expressions became residual and marginalised, though with some pockets of survival and revival, particularly in areas undergoing economic hardship. Despite increased commercialisation, the desire for leisure to be linked to self-improvement remained strong, although “the mantle of evangelicalism and temperance passed to secular socialism”<sup>728</sup> and earlier organised rational recreation gave way to new forms such as cycling, athletics, sports, sightseeing, hill climbing, and hostelling.

No part of Scotland escaped the influence of the increasingly dominant forms of American originated music, song and dance being mediated through radio, cinema, gramophone and the dance hall. Fashionable dance venues were very popular in the towns, although lower status dancing, which retained a strong scottish element, continued to flourish at social evenings and weddings in both urban and rural areas.

Against this framework I consider different aspects of the use of the concertina by working-class people in the first half of the present century by drawing on the oral testimony and musical evidence of musicians active during the period. Several of my informants, all of whom are male, have already been introduced in my thematic chapters on music hall, sacred music and bands, but here I concentrate on secular, non-professional and less institutionalised musical activities, although there are many overlapping areas. I consider the level of popularity of the instrument, how musicians came to adopt the concertina and how they learned to play. Aspects of concertina retail, repair and maintenance are examined. I also discuss the instrument’s special place in areas of semi-professional music making and look at aspects of repertory and style. The use of the concertina in the accompaniment of social dance is discussed in detail before consideration of the rise of the modern accordion and saxophone, instruments which came to assume many of the roles enjoyed by the concertina. In conclusion, I look at the changing status of the instrument and discuss reasons for its decline in popularity around the time of the Second World War.

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<sup>728</sup> Fraser, W. Hamish “Developments in Leisure” in Fraser, W. Hamish and R.J. Morris (eds) People and Society in Scotland: Vol. II 1830-1914 (Edinburgh, 1990) p.259.

## Popularity

By 1914, the use of the Anglo-German concertina had largely died out in Scotland and the duet forms had become the sole preserve of a small number of Salvation Army players and music hall artists. The English concertina, by then abandoned by the middle classes, was still popular among working-class musicians although it is impossible to make authoritative statements about intensity of use without access to reliable data on sales and ownership. Nevertheless, field work confirms that the English concertina was highly fashionable, particularly in the urban areas of Scotland, during the first half of this century, with the melodeon or German accordion holding ground as the principal free-reed instrument in the more conservative rural communities. Popularity was its height in the years immediately after the Great War, especially in the Glasgow conurbation, where several spheres of concertina use (amateur secular, sacred, music hall etc...) interrelated. David Haxton claims that use of the concertina in the city was “as great as any in Britain”<sup>729</sup> and points to evidence to support his view:

D.H.: Glasgow was a great place for the concertina.

S.E.: Do you think, more than anywhere else?

D.H.: I think so, for I remember some of Wheatstone’s correspondence at that time. Somebody bought an instrument and then they wanted to change it, they wanted it altered. Wheatstone said they would supply another instrument but said “You should have no bother selling that in Glasgow”. He did sell it right enough. There was a high demand in Glasgow.<sup>730</sup>

Both David Haxton and Peter McCabe remember:

P.M.: It was very popular, you could see all over the streets of Glasgow, you’d see people with the wee box.<sup>731</sup>

D.H.: In these days, round about 1912-14, the First World War days, young people would march the streets playing the concertina at night as they do today with the guitar. After the war production and demand accelerated. 1920-35 was supposedly the peak for manufacture. The little boxes were very evident in the streets of Glasgow:

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<sup>729</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.01.B2.

<sup>730</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.04.A6.

<sup>731</sup> Peter McCabe: Eydmann 84.01.B2.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

people going for tuition, others playing in dance bands, hurches, missions, Salvation Army.<sup>732</sup>

These references suggest that portability was a major reason for the concertina's popularity in city areas where tenement living and an almost universal reliance on foot or public transport, favoured small instruments. Wheatstone and Co. stressed this advantage of the concertina in their literature:

Wheatstone's slogan. Do you know Wheatstone's slogan? It was in all their adverts: "Play an instrument you can carry".<sup>733</sup>

Endorsement came from Peter McCabe when asked:

S.E.: Why were you attracted to the concertina?

P.M.: Because I discovered it was handy to carry about. Likes of the accordion was different; you could get the concertina, carry it and you could take it out anywhere and play it.<sup>734</sup>

### **Learning to Play**

Several of my informants came to the concertina through the playing of relatives and most learned initially in an informal manner and without reference to written music. As a child, Peter Campbell of Tomintoul (a rural player) would listen to his father play: "I'd watch him every night. It was a ritual. He used to sit and play it, you know, and if he was playing that instrument I was there".<sup>735</sup> He claims that at the age of eight or nine he "just literally lifted it up and played it", taking the instrument out while his father, who would have disapproved of him touching it, was not around.

David Haxton was shown the basics of concertina technique by his older brother who was already an accomplished player: "My brother (I really wasn't interested till the end of the war, '18 or '20). He showed me the rudiments and that was all. I never had tuition. Self taught".<sup>736</sup>

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<sup>732</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.04.A1.

<sup>733</sup> Ibid.

<sup>734</sup> Peter McCabe; Eydmann 84.02.B4.

<sup>735</sup> Peter Campbell: Eydmann 82.01.A3.

<sup>736</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.04.A3.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Alexander McLaren was born in Fauldhouse, West Lothian, in 1910 and later moved to another mining community, Larkhall in Lanarkshire. His father, who came from Blantyre,<sup>737</sup> played concertina, as did his uncle and older brother who was a friend of the music hall player Alexander Prince. McLaren was also self taught, learning by ear from the playing of his father and brother who were both sight readers. When asked who taught him, he replied: “Naebody. I just learned it off them. My brother couldna understand how I could play without music.”<sup>738</sup>

Peter McCabe went to a teacher for his first instruction: “Well the thing is, I got the rudiments, how to, but I just carried on myself.”<sup>739</sup> He also progressed as an “ear player”, an approach which, as discussed in the previous chapter, he found crucial to spontaneous performance:

They’ve got to get the book out. Its most essential to go by music -it’s the real thing. But the thing is, is it? The one that scores most is the one that can turn that. If you’re in a house and somebody says “Dark Lochnagar”... well they’ve got to run away and look for it, get out the music, see.<sup>740</sup>

Like Peter, Victor Kersley of Hawick used the keyboard layout from a published tutor as a basis for teaching himself.<sup>741</sup>

Danny Toner of Govan grew up in family in which his father (a music hall performer), brother, uncle and cousin were all concertina players. His role model was his cousin Dan Green, who he remembers as a great performer of Scots and Irish dance music and a player in the Clydebank Concertina Band. However, it was his invalid uncle, also named Dan, who “organised everything” and influenced his musical education and choices. He settled on the concertina after trying a number of other instruments:

S.E.:            You said you started off on the violin?

D.T.:            I started off with the violin, aye. I tried the violin. My Uncle Dan got me onto the violin, eh, he said: “I’m goin’ to get Dan onto the violin” so I stuck into the violin. Now I’m about nine year old then, nine goin’ on for ten, but, eh, I got fed up wi’ it for one note wisna’

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<sup>737</sup> There was a lively musical community in this mining area of Lanarkshire in the early years of this century. See Morton, Robin *Come Day, Go Day, God Send Sunday* (London, 1973) pp.67-74. The influential melodeon players, Peter and Daniel Wyper, lived nearby.

<sup>738</sup> Alexander McLaren: Eydmann 86.05.A11.

<sup>739</sup> Peter McCabe: Eydmann 84.02.A2.

<sup>740</sup> Peter McCabe: Eydmann 84.02.A4.

<sup>741</sup> Dallas’ Shilling Tutor for the English Concertina (London, n.d.).

*The Life and Times of the Concertina*

enough. I wanted harmony, you see. So he said: "See Dan, forget about the violin." ...my Uncle Dan packed me up and he got me on the dulcimore<sup>742</sup>.

S.E.: Why the dulcimore, was he playing it as well?

D.T.: Aye, he made dulcimores. He was a good player. He learned me. It took me about three years and I was able to play all the different hornpipes. I played a' the Irish hornpipes, Scots hornpipes, you know.

S.E.: Was there a lot of dulcimore players about?

D.T.: There was a lot then. See the dulcimore is what you call a "bastard instrument". My Uncle Dan said that and he said: "That's correct", see. Its no' an instrument they'd music for in those days, see. So he used to make one every three month. £7 for his dulcimore.<sup>743</sup> The dulcimer did not suit him either, so it was suggested that he learn concertina or piano:

D.T.: So I'm away from it then so he said: "We don't have a piana. We'll put Dan at the concertina." So he got the concertina music an' I stuck into the concertina music and I was doing pretty good. So I bashed in, but we couldna buy a piano then.<sup>744</sup>

He was taught "second hand" by his older cousin who was attending formal lessons and, although they practiced formal exercises published for the concertina, they pursued the wider popular repertory from published piano music:

D.T.: .My Uncle Dan got me interested and my cousin was going to a teacher years ago (he was six years older than me) sothat he learned me.

S.E.: He was going to a concertina teacher?

D.T.: Aye, a Mr. Caldwell frae Anderston. He was great player, you know. And he was a full [i.e. high] class teacher and the funny thing about it was when they were teaching you, it was always, for scales it was always the

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<sup>742</sup> Hammered dulcimer.

<sup>743</sup> Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.A4.

<sup>744</sup> Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.A4.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

concertina music for scales. All the music we learned from was all the treble of the piano music. But I had to do all the scales, I studied it for four years. Four years I studied music with the good supervision of my cousin, you know.

But I spoiled it. He was always mad at me and when he was teaching me he was getting fed up with me. He says: “See you Dan, you’re no stickin wi’ the music and its goin’ to be later on, you’re on your diatonics now, you’re comin’ on but you’re spoilin’ it. You’re playin’ by ear and its no’ goin’ to pay off later on -you should stick in just now!”

And he got mad with me one day and he says: “You’re only wastin’ my time and you’re wastin’ you’re own time so I’m packin’ you up”

So my teacher actually packed me up ‘cause I wisna stickin’ in!

So I played by ear then but I’m sorry I never did what he told me ‘cause if I’d stuck in... I’d been doin’ a lot better today.<sup>745</sup>

Danny gave up music around the age of 19 but took up the concertina again later.

Several of my informants played other instruments too and had gained a foundation in music elsewhere before turning to the concertina. Peter Campbell of Tomintoul said of his father:

He had so much pride in this instrument. And don’t forget he played the trombone and the piano accordion when it came into vogue... several instruments, like myself, but the concertina was his prize, his pride and joy.<sup>746</sup>

Like many other working-class musicians in the early twentieth century, Peter obtained his formal musical training through membership of the local silver band and piping during military service.<sup>747</sup> Similarly, James Dickson, discussed in Chapter 9.0, played cornet in the Galashiels Town band since he was 13. He remembers this as a strict musical background: “the poor man’s school of music”.<sup>748</sup>

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<sup>745</sup> Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.A3.

<sup>746</sup> Peter Campbell: Eydmann 83.01.A3.

<sup>747</sup> Personal communication with the writer, 28 June 1984.

<sup>748</sup> James Dickson: Eydmann 86.08.A4.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Players living in the cities were able to pursue a more formal education from “professors” of the concertina. Willie Smith was taught by Walter Dale, the noted music hall player discussed in Chapter 7.0, and by George Simpson of Tollcross, a professional teacher (Figure 10.1). Archibald Ross, discussed below as a maker and retailer of concertinas, ran a concertina teaching enterprise in Glasgow. Throughout the 1930s, he operated “musical parlours” in the city’s Maryhill Road and at Saracen Street, Posillpark. According to David Haxton: “He was a good teacher. He had a good [i.e. large] clientele for tuition but he wisnae a player, mind ye. Ross wisna a player -a good salesman”.<sup>749</sup> He ran his “English Concertina Teaching Saloons” at the Maryhill shop and his advertising showed group photographs of concertina players of all ages with statements stressing the earning potential of the instrument:

**We can earn from £3 to £7 per week, besides the everlasting source of constant pleasure we get from the English Concertina.**

**WHY NOT become a player of this wonderful instrument. So easy to learn under the personal and private guidance of Principal A.M. Ross.**

**What of your future? NOW is the time to lay in store a thorough knowledge of the English Concertina which can be converted into £ s. d. when the need arises.**

and

**We want you to provide for the future as well as the present... So call and enrol for a thorough teaching on the king of musical instruments.**<sup>750</sup>

Both cash and “easy payments” were accepted.

Ross was associated with the Christian Brethren sect and may have drawn much of his custom from evangelistic musicians in the city. The only professional teacher I have traced operating outwith Glasgow during the 20s and 30s taught in Leith, Edinburgh, shortly after the war.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>749</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.03.A9.

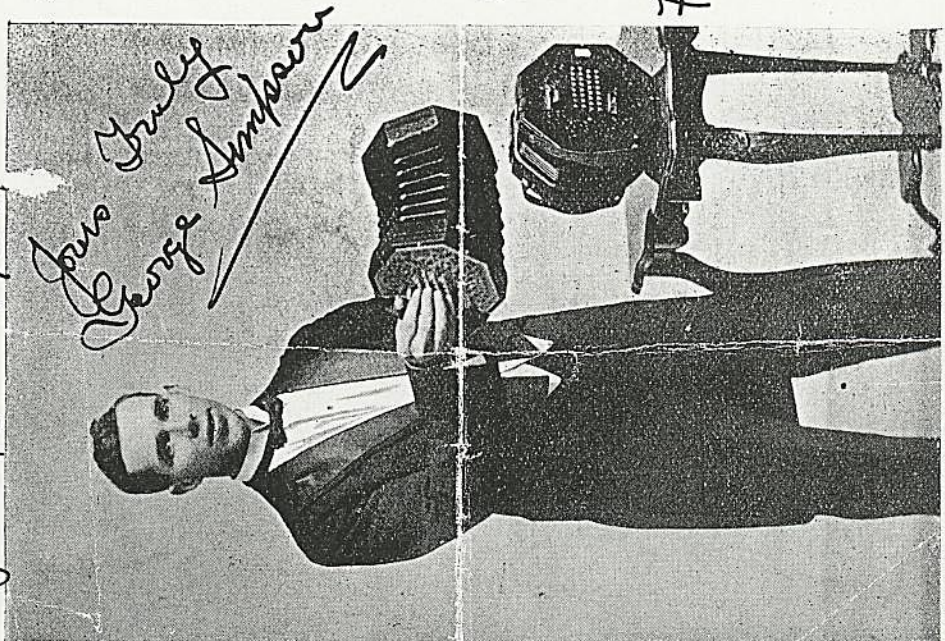
<sup>750</sup> Advertisement on 78rpm record sleeve in Eydmann collection.

<sup>751</sup> “Alex Ronald, 322 Easter Road, teacher of English Concertina and Aeola”: [Edinburgh Post Office](#)



14 DEERPARK GARDENS,  
TOLLCROSS, GLASGOW.

Jan 18<sup>th</sup> 1927.



Yours Truly  
George Simpson

This Week,

Next Week,

M<sup>rs</sup> Alice Wackell

A Special Junior Trubla #52a  
56 Keys Nickel Ends Large Model  
Leather Bellows 6 Fold Back Straps  
Bow Value Etc to Cost

By Wheatstone 700 J 27.10  
Lopson Deposit 7.10

seven pounds 10/-  
Feb 7<sup>th</sup> received Twenty Pounds



George Simpson  
Satisfied 1927  
Feb 7<sup>th</sup> 1927  
George Simpson

Figure 10.1 George Simpson, Handbill.  
Source: Author's Collection.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Several of my urban informants attended part-time music theory classes -an illustration of the concertina's continuing role as an instrument of personal advancement and rational recreation. Both David Haxton and Richard Walker of Glasgow attended the Athenaeum, now the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, studying piano and harmony with a view to improving their concertina playing.

Other musicians I have interviewed, such as David Steele of Musselburgh, took up the instrument in isolation without access to a wider network of teachers or other players, teaching themselves and developing their playing to suit their own needs.

In conclusion, it can be said that among my informants, there was no pattern to learning the English concertina as the instrument lent itself equally well to self education and formal tuition and allowed the player to pursue advanced levels of attainment if desired.

### **Acquiring a Concertina**

At the start of the twentieth century, there were only a few concertina manufacturers and all were London based. George Jones ceased production in the first decade and Jeffries continued only until the 1920s, leaving Wheatstone and Co., H. Crabb and Son. and Lachenal as the only makers.

Immediately before the First World War, Wheatstone and Co. were offering 34 models of English concertina ranging in price from £3.0s.30d. to £25., including versions of their concert model, the Aeola, at £18.10d. to £24.<sup>752</sup> This range was still on offer through to the late 1930s when the cheaper, more basic models were dropped from their lists. By the 1930s, prices had risen somewhat, the range running from £9 to £32. In Scotland, concertinas were sold in music stores and the manufacturers dealt directly by post. Only Glasgow supported specialist retailers, most of whom were located in the east end of the city centre close to the principal mission halls and an area where a large number of my informants lived at the time (see Figure 10.2). Campbell and Co. and Chisholm Hunter of Trongate and Dunlop of Candleriggs were the principal retailers in the city, with the latter acting as the main agent for Wheatstone and Co.

My informants speak of saving hard to buy new instruments. Danny Toner recalls his father working overtime for 2 years in his job as a bolt and rivet maker to earn the 30

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Directory (1920-21). Mr. Barnes (b. 1909), an informant of the "Leith Lives" oral history project, recalled a professional concertina teacher working in the area at the time. The teacher was later murdered crossing Leith Links, a local public park (Tape G 9A, 5 December 1984).

<sup>752</sup> Price List of C. Wheatstone and Co.'s Concertinas and Aeolas (London, c.1910). Xerox copy in Eydmann collection.

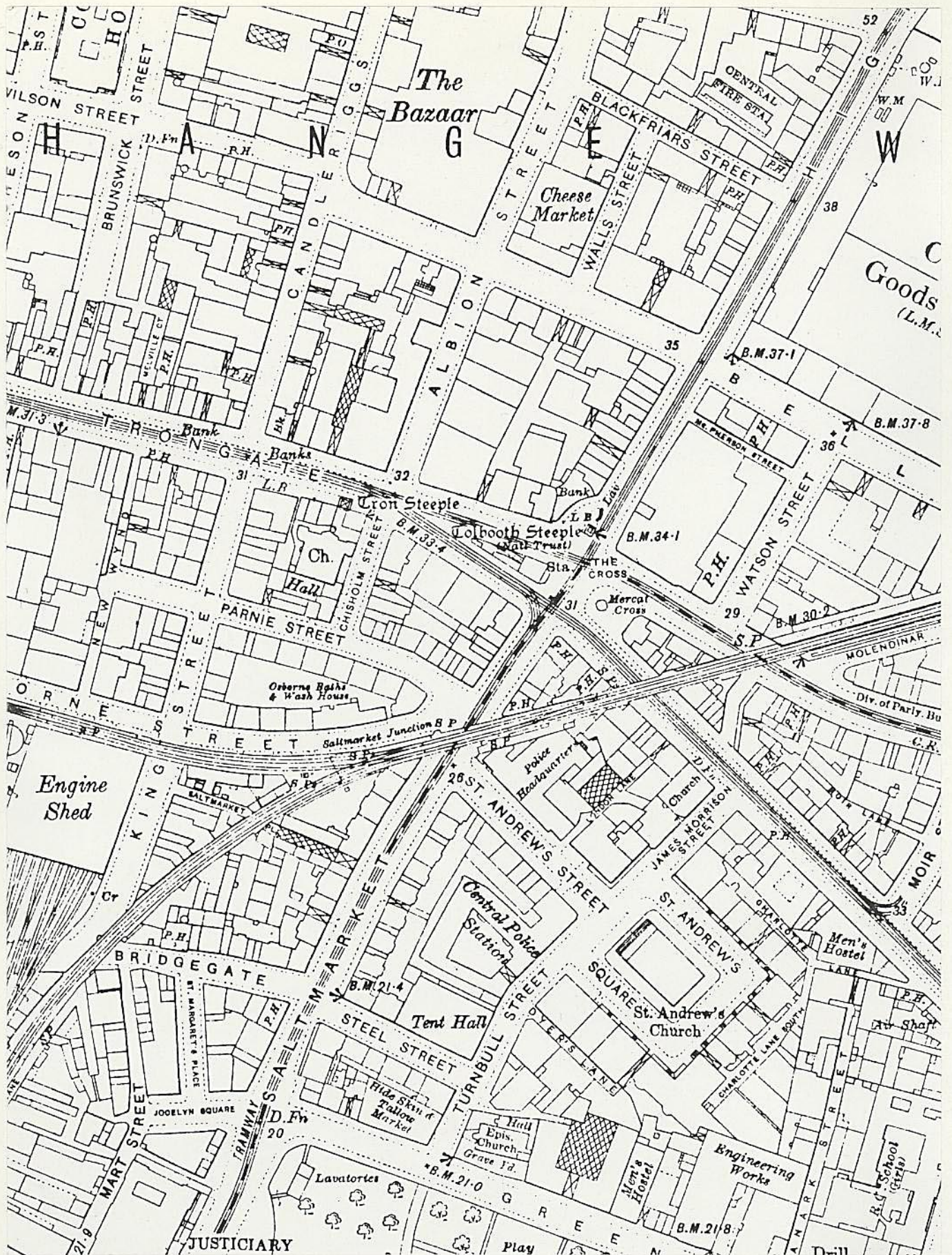


Figure 10.2 Glasgow Cross showing Tent Hall, Trongate and Candleriggs, c.1930.

Source: Ordnance Survey/ National Library of Scotland.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

guineas for his instrument<sup>753</sup> and Peter McCabe relates how he bought his first concertina from Dunlop in the early 1930s after gathering funds:

I bought my first concertina with my pocket money for a year. Saved up. It was 7s. 6d., that was 3 half crowns, I saved that up for a year to buy my first concertina which was £25.<sup>754</sup>

He noted that it was also possible to pay in instalments: “You could get it and pay up, you know... you would pay so much, maybe 7, 5 bob a week”.<sup>755</sup>

There was a flourishing secondhand market and this is how David Haxton acquired his first instrument around 1918 for £6.<sup>756</sup> Pawn shops were a major source of instruments of all kinds:

They were always in pawn shops ‘cause some guys bought a concertina and they couldna learn them. They’re a hard instrument to play as you know. They’re hellish to learn so what happened, a lot of them would pawn the concertinas and they always got a lot of money for them for a concertina was always very dear.<sup>757</sup>

A new English concertina was an expensive purchase for most when it is considered that, in 1934, 71% of the working population in Glasgow had an annual income of less than £208 a year.<sup>758</sup>

Alexander MacLaren would either visit the shops around Glasgow Cross or track down sales heard about by word of mouth when seeking a new instrument. Teachers often acted as agents for the London manufacturers (as in the receipt reproduced in Figure 10.1) or dealt in second hand concertinas.

Archibald McIntyre Ross, already discussed as a teacher of concertina, sold concertinas by the London manufacturers from his music shops on the north side of Glasgow. He also offered concertinas assembled from parts acquired from Lachenal of London. His instruments, identifiable by their brown bellows, were deemed inferior:

He couldna make them. He only assembled them. He got folks down in London to make parts for him. Crabb did a bit. Crabb would supply so many and supply the reeds and somebody else would make the

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<sup>753</sup> Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.A9.

<sup>754</sup> Peter McCabe: Eydmann 04.02.A4. His arithmetic is incorrect.

<sup>755</sup> Peter McCabe: Eydmann 04.01.B1.

<sup>756</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.04.A3.

<sup>757</sup> Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.A8.

<sup>758</sup> Harvie, *No Gods...*, p.85. The Scottish figure was 74.8% and the English 73.5%.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

bellows and somebody else the buttons buying them from all different parts. He assembled them himself. Oh! terrible concertinas.<sup>759</sup>

Poor construction, poor frames, poor reeds, poor studs, no action wi' them.<sup>760</sup>

Informants would spend much time debating the comparative merits of individual concertina manufacturers but generally agreed that the instruments of Wheatstone and Co. were the best. Peter Campbell described the concertina of Lachenal as “just a copy” of Wheatstone’s instruments with “not quite the same tone”<sup>761</sup> while Harry MacIntyre of Glasgow (now of Galashiels) recalled his aspiration to owning a top quality Wheatstone model:

Another gentleman who was a wee bit older than me and he had been playin’ the concertina before he was called up for the army and when he came back he bought a brand new Aeola Wheatstone 56 key that went down to C, low C. And that was always my ambition to be able to own an Aeola, which I did. That was the one I sold last, but eh, it was a different kettle of fish than the wee push and shove Lachenal.<sup>762</sup>

Size of concertina was another point of discussion. The 56keyed instruments were particularly popular, although some players preferred the larger 64 keyed versions to allow the performance of a fuller sound in imitation of the music hall virtuosi. The smaller and lighter 48 key models were preferred for fast dance music. Alexander McLaren always used a large concertina and said of my 48 key treble instrument: “That’s too wee son, that’s too wee”.<sup>763</sup> Like others, he had a view on the suitability of different concertina end plate materials for particular musical functions. Comparing the merits of wood (mellow tone) with metal (bright tone) he stated:

Oh, [the metal ended] Lachenal’s the best tone. [the wooden ended] Wheatstone’s a’ right but the Lachenal’s the best tone, son. Oh, that’s right. The metal end’s for the dancers, you know.<sup>764</sup>

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<sup>759</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.01.B1.

<sup>760</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.04.A1.

<sup>761</sup> Peter Campbell: Eydmann 83.01.A1.

<sup>762</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.A4.

<sup>763</sup> Alexander McLaren: Eydmann 86.05.A6.

<sup>764</sup> Alexander McLaren: Eydmann 86.05.A6.

## **Instrument Maintenance and Repair**

Musical instruments require specialist attention to keep them in good repair and in a playable condition. While many allow a degree of maintenance by the player, it is a common feature of the modern factory made instruments (piano, keyed woodwinds, brass and free-reeds) that they demand the services of a technician for anything but the simplest work. Such skills are generally only available as part of an infrastructure supported by demand. My research would suggest that, as with the provision of retail outlets and teaching facilities, Glasgow was the only centre in Scotland which was able to support a specialist technical back-up, although a certain amount of work was done by those servicing the needs of players of the melodeon and accordion.

Several of my informants preferred to send their instruments directly to the concertina manufacturers in London where they felt sure of more sensitive workmanship.<sup>765</sup> I have only interviewed one player who undertook major re-tuning himself, although several attempted the resetting or tuning of individual reeds when required.<sup>766</sup> Danny Toner's uncle did basic repairs but the instruments were sent to London for more important work, such as selective re-tuning of individual notes:

My Uncle Dan was very brilliant and he looked after the concertinas, done them up, took them apart. If I'd had a spring broke inside there, that's a hard job, spring. He fixed it, see. But it was no problem then before the war. You could send a letter to Wheatstone. They were the makers. Then they would send a letter back: "O.K. Send it." They were very honest. I sent that concertina to Wheatstone. I got it all done. I changed [to the] New Philharmonic [pitch], they put [in] the big key. See, there are two Bb, you've got two Bb in a block. Now, they gave me this one lower than that. What is it, two tones [octaves] lower? I got that done... bellows polished, nickel plated, all new straps -did it all up and the whole lot came to £5. It was a lot of money then in 1938. That was two weeks wages.<sup>767</sup>

Here he refers to the re-tuning of one of the duplicated notes which occur on the English concertina to provide an additional note, a low Bb outwith the standard range.

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<sup>765</sup> In the 1980s many older players were unaware of the new repairers who had arisen to service the concertina players of the folk revival discussed in the next chapter. Peter McCabe sent his instruments from Glasgow to Wigan for maintenance.

<sup>766</sup> Several retailers, such as Ross, kept stocks of reeds and other spare parts often salvaged from old instruments.

<sup>767</sup> Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.B3. New Philharmonic Pitch, which is now obsolete, was higher than current Concert Pitch (A=440). Alexander MacLaren also remembers how his uncle had certain reeds re-tuned to suit his style of playing. The lowest G sharp on the right hand manual of the 48 button model, which duplicates the Ab on the left hand, is often re-tuned to provide an additional lower note, usually F natural. Victor Kersley of Hawick had his low G sharp replaced by F also.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

The need for specialist tuning and repair, the presence, or otherwise, of a supporting infrastructure and the cost implications of maintenance work had important consequences for adoption and abandonment. Musicians without access to, or knowledge of, specialists and those unable to afford repairs, eventually abandoned their instruments once they had reached an unplayable condition. Similarly, the establishment of an internationally agreed standard pitch in 1939 rendered many concertinas unplayable with other fixed pitch instruments such as the piano and contributed to their abandonment in the subsequent decades.

### **Earnin' a Few Bob**

The opportunities for casual and semi-professional musical employment in the inter-war period were considerable, for live music was still the norm in most public and social situations. The Glasgow Branch of the Musician's Union categorised the variety of places of engagement in order to determine basic rates:

- Ships.
- Summer Variety Shows.
- Dances: a. Hotels, University, City Hall, Class
- Dance Halls and Ballrooms.
- b. Lesser Ballrooms, Halls and Masonic.
- c. Smaller Halls.
- Bazaars and Flower Shows.
- Fine Art Galleries.
- Cinema Trade Shows.
- Glasgow parks (including dances).
- Charity Performances.
- Garden Parties.
- Receptions.
- Concerts, Choral and Orchestral.
- Amateur Opera.
- Mannequin Parades.
- Cafes, Tea Rooms and Trading Establishments.
- Cinematographic Theatres.
- Theatres and Music halls.
- B.B.C. Light Orchestra.<sup>768</sup>

The concertina found a place in all but a few of these locations and to the list we can add a further network of occasional and informal events and functions, a “black economy” of casual musical employment which included small local dances, concerts

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<sup>768</sup> Musician's Union Directory Glasgow Branch (1938). Copy in National Library of Scotland.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

and public houses. Private parties were a major source of casual work for semi-professional musicians at the time. These varied from children's parties through to family celebrations and works' socials and made considerable demands on the player's repertory, flexibility and ability to play from memory and by ear. During the 1920s, Harry MacIntyre played at parties for 5s on Friday evenings<sup>769</sup> and stresses that "a concertina could keep it going".<sup>770</sup>

Other means of earning money were through the amateur nights held in music halls, "filler spots" at cinemas and talent competitions. Phillips, in his biography of the accordionist Jimmy Shand, describes such a night in the 1920s:

In fact there was a rough-and-ready way of having your talent gauged readily available in those days. Go-as-you please contests were held in cinemas, theatres, halls, schools all over Fife. Prizes, which usually didn't exceed ten shillings, went to the contestants who got the most applause. Jimmy admits a fair amount of success at such affairs. His most vivid memory of such, however, is about an older busker who shuffled around towns and villages dragging the most agonising yelps from a battered concertina, and who once appeared on the same "bill" at Green's Playhouse, Leven.

The concertina's wavering screeches brought a great and sustained volume of ribald cheers, hand clapping, foot stamping from the audience, inciting the player to even more disastrous flourishes, thus seeing himself ahead of the field. On the basis of audience reaction in theory he should have been an easy winner... He took some dragging off.<sup>771</sup>

There was also open air busking which, despite regulation since the mid-nineteenth century, still formed an important element of urban street life. Earlier chapters have already discussed the concertina's role as an instrument of street music. Jean Hay of Edinburgh recalled:

Another character was the old man with the long white beard who played the concertina outside the Caley [Caledonian] Hotel in Lothian Road. In a beautiful quiet voice he sang songs like "Bonny Strathyre" and "The Rowan Tree".<sup>772</sup>

while the Glasgow writer Cliff Handley tells us how:

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<sup>769</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.A4.

<sup>770</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.A14.

<sup>771</sup> Phillips, Ian *Jimmy Shand* (Dundee, 1976) p.22.

<sup>772</sup> *Kiss Me While My Lips Are Tacky* People's Story Reminiscence Groups/WEA (Edinburgh, 1988) p.25.



### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

One thin man was a regular turn on Saturday afternoons, with an English concertina and a tune called “Butterflies in the Rain”. He played it fast and he never played anything else.<sup>773</sup>

In Chapter 7.0 I discussed the place of the concertina in the bands which played on the Clyde Steamers. David Haxton relates how one such band also played on the Glasgow streets:

The grand harp was really popular in these days with the concertina and fiddle. Sauchiehall Street on a Monday night, great crowds round them.<sup>774</sup>

He also recalled how:

The street buskers, they could play... You got ex-army men and a’ the rest of it after the 1st World War. They all came off with the clarinets, cornets and violins and all that kind of thing.<sup>775</sup>

During the hungry 1930s, that was a great time. Between the 20s and 30s wonderful groups went about the streets and the back courts. Men back from the war, army musicians, trumpeters, saxophones, trombonists linking up with good concertina players, piana, big harps. They had to earn some bread.<sup>776</sup>

His recollection that many of the street bands of the 1920s were made up from unemployed ex-servicemen is backed by published sources<sup>777</sup> which also suggest that ensembles of such musicians operated well into the 1930s.

The back courts of city tenements formed natural amphitheatres for buskers.<sup>778</sup> Danny Toner remembers:

You got a lot of back court playin’ the concertina with guys dancing wi’ a wee board... and the concertina goin’ like hell, there. You know, fast stuff. It’s a wee band on its own.<sup>779</sup>

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<sup>773</sup> Handley, Cliff *Dancing in the Streets* (Glasgow, 1979) p.73.

<sup>774</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 86.03.A8.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid.

<sup>776</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.04.A15.

<sup>777</sup> Green, Mike (ed.) *Nostalgia: Bygone Days and Memories from Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1992).

<sup>778</sup> This aspect of Scottish urban life is discussed in a number of popular history and more academic studies. For examples of the former see Faley, Jean: *Up Oor Close* (Glasgow, 1991) and Damer, Sean: *Glasgow Going for a Song* (London, 1990).

<sup>779</sup> Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.B6. Step and tap dancing was performed on a wooden board.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Contrary to the evidence of other informants, Willie Smith suggests that the English concertina was quite rare in the streets, the melodeon being much more common.<sup>780</sup> However, as a professional player of the concertina, he could be saying this in an attempt to emphasise the respectability of his instrument.

Again we hear of blind concertina players working the streets:

Johnny Welsh, he played walking round the streets in the east end of Glasgow. He played from music, he played from the braille. Taylor played at the football match, at the entrances. He helped at the missions and he played at the football matches. He had to make his living with the concertina.<sup>781</sup>

An example of an itinerant concertina player in the country areas during the early years of the century was Roger Quinn, “The Tramp Poet”. Born in Dumfries in 1850, he worked for a time as a clerk before pursuing a career as a poet. He stayed in a model lodging house in Glasgow during the winter and walked the roads of the Scottish Borders during the summer, playing both flute and English concertina. His poems were published<sup>782</sup> before his death in July 1925.

The concertina was often pressed into service during periods of industrial strife and economic hardship:

Now, another skilled violin player was Jimmy Miller, from Carriden, teamed with Alex Grant (concertina), from Silver Villa opposite McNay’s Pottery. During the 1921 strike, the soup kitchens were all the go, that is when already mentioned, the men went to the mudheaps about Blackness for coal... Well, concerts were arranged up at the golf course and singers and musicians were scheduled to play their part and the “bunnets” went round the crowded audience, for collection for benefit of the soup kitchens. Alex and Jimmy rendered the sweetest music that could fall on human ear.<sup>783</sup>

Willie Smith became a “serious” concertina player in the 1920s:

The time of the [1926] miner’s strike I could earn money with that [concertina], you know. 5s or 7s or 10s it was a fortune, you know. It

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<sup>780</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A17.

<sup>781</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.03.A17. Elsewhere (Eydmann 84.04.A1) he recalls that Welsh could be seen “In all kinds of weather, a good player”.

<sup>782</sup> *Midnight in Yarrow and other Poems* (London, 1918). Poems were also published in *The Glasgow Herald*. See Young, Douglas (ed) *Scottish Verse 1851-1951* (Edinburgh, 1952) pp.88 and 321.

<sup>783</sup> Martin, Charles *Reminiscences: Bo’ness from 1900 to 1939: Places and Personalities* (Bo’ness, 1982) p.53.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

was a fortune during the miner's strike getting 5s, 7s and 6d for playing, maybe playin' 4, 5 hours for that.<sup>784</sup>

Similarly, Harry MacIntyre relied on his concertina to help his family get by:

I had no money at that time. We werna really well off at all. We were strugglin' to get our food without that [concertina]. That was taken right up to say, maybe, '28, '29, '30. Then I started to serve my time.<sup>785</sup>

David Haxton was able to earn money through teaching the concertina and dealing in instruments: I had unemployment too in these days in the hungry '30s, so instead of playing outdoors I could always earn cash by teaching. I was quite busy and, of course, supplied quite a number of new concertinas bought from Wheatstone and Lachenal.<sup>786</sup>

During military service in the late 1930s, while stationed in England, Danny Toner was able to earn money playing in pubs weekends. He was often accompanied by a step-dancer ("She's my Lady Love" was a favourite number) and they could often earn up to £3 in one night, much more than their 3s. per week wage.

### **Repertory and Style**

A great deal of music from the Victorian period was still represented in the popular music of the early twentieth century. Many sentimental songs, pseudo-folk songs (which had passed from the middle-class parlour into popular tradition), operatic extracts, minstrel songs and popular classics remained current and to these were added American and British military band pieces, ragtime,<sup>787</sup> jazz, music associated with emerging dance forms, film music and pieces from musicals and other stage shows. Music hall, brass bands, gramophone records and radio also had a major influence on the determination and maintenance of the concertina player's repertory.

That the "popular classics" of the Victorian period held their place well into the present century is confirmed by a programme presented by Adam MacGibbon, a concertinist from Glasgow but domiciled in the United States, at the Fredericksburg Music Club, Virginia, as late as February 1971:

Radetzky March  
Intermezzo Russe

J. Strauss  
Th. Franke

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<sup>784</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A16. He played in his home area to the East of Glasgow.

<sup>785</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.A4.

<sup>786</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.04.A1.

<sup>787</sup> In "Melodies and Harmonies" *Concertina and Squeezebox* 14 and 15 (1987) pp.28-29, Frank Butler remembers London concertina players discovering ragtime: "It was brash and noisy but good fun".

*The Life and Times of the Concertina*

The Lost Chord	A. Sullivan
Four Chorales	J.S. Bach
Chant Sans Paroles	Tchaikovsky
Hungarian Dance No. 5	Brahms
March from Norma	Bellini
Soldier's Chorus from Faust	Gounod <sup>788</sup>

Wheatstone and Co. remained the principal publisher of concertina music throughout the first decades of the twentieth century and expanded their catalogues by adding arrangements of music hall and military band music. More representative of contemporary taste, among sight readers at least, were the six editions of English Concertina Music: A Collection of Popular Songs and Instrumental Music<sup>789</sup> published between 1905 and 1927. These were used by several of my informants and contained a wide cross section of popular music, including Victorian favourites, national airs, band marches and contemporary dances. Book 3 comprised:

Come back to Erin	Claribel
Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond	Scottish
Gordon Highlander's Schottische	Felix Burns
Primrose Paths (Idylle)	Faulkener Brandon
Daddy Longlegs Polka	J. Warwick Moore
Sweet Auburn	Oscar Verne
Kansas Koon (Kake Kombine)	Felix Burns
Ever of Thee	Foley Hall
Danse Characteristique	Paul Ambrose
Queen of May Mazurka	Felix Burns
Beyond earth's Shadowland	Theo. Bonheur
Marche aux Flambeaux	Scotson Clark
Jessie's Dream	John Blockley
Marche des Troubadours	R. Roubier
A Song of Holiday	David D. Slater
Old Malabar Schottische	Felix Burns
Jenny's Bawbee	Scottish
The Hundred Pipers	Scottish
Good-Bye, Sweetheart	J.L. Hatton
Flowers of the Forest	J.L. Hatton

The music was clearly targeted at the serious amateur in that it demanded a reasonable level of sight reading and technical proficiency without being over demanding. This

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<sup>788</sup> Reproduced in Concertina Newsletter (5 May 1972). Adam MacGibbon played in a concertina duet with David Haxton in Glasgow during the early 1920s.

<sup>789</sup> 1s 6d. each volume. Published by J.H. Larway of London. Arranged by Faulkner Brandon.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

is illustrated by Example 10.1, an extract from the arrangement of “Jessie’s Dream”.<sup>790</sup> Example 10.2 is a contemporary version of the same piece for melodeon, the principal alternative free-reed instrument to the concertina before the rise of the modern accordion around 1930. Reflecting the limitations of the diatonic instrument, the melodeon setting is restricted to one of its “home keys” and is unable to include the two and three note chords of the concertina version.

Concertina arrangements of compositions by the military bandmaster Felix Burns were popular with many players (Alexander Prince recorded many of his tunes) and feature prominently in these collections. David Haxton, who played a number of Burns’ pieces, remembers their popularity in dance accompaniment:

S.E. : Felix Burns’ music, was that popular?

D.H.: Only amongst the third rate dance hall people (when I’m speaking about a dance hall I’m not [talking] in terms of a ballroom). Third rate dancing, working folks dance halls such as you would have in Edinburgh or Glasgow. Working people’s dance halls. Felix Burns was a very popular writer but it was orchestral writing. It wasn’t written for the concertina but they used all the tunes that were so popular.<sup>791</sup>

“The Gordon Highlanders” (Example 10.3), from Faulkner Brandon’s Book 3, is typical of the composer’s military band compositions and David Haxton can be heard paying Burns’ popular Cakewalk “Shufflin’ Samuel” on Tape Item 10.1.

Most of the players I encountered agreed that Scottish music had an important place in their repertoires. With the exception of Peter Campbell of Tomintoul in the Grampian mountains, who was mostly concerned with fiddle and bagpipe music, there was no consensus as to the limits of what could be described as “Scottish” and no one appeared to be concerned with issues of “tradition” or “authenticity”. When asked to play something Scottish, Danny Toner offered not only traditional dance music but also “My Heart Belongs to Loch Lomond”, a song made popular by Gracie Fields<sup>792</sup> and David Galloway turned to the sheet music for Hohner’s “Scottish Waltz Selection” when asked the same question. Nineteenth-century “Scotch” songs were highly popular; David Haxton played “Dark Lochnagar” and Peter McCabe had a favourite in “My Ain Folk”. Harry MacIntyre remembered both “Hame o’ Mine”<sup>793</sup> and “The Wells o’ Wearie” as “good party pieces”.

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<sup>790</sup> Book 3, p.18. Composed c.1857 as a narrative on the Relief of Lucknow, this piece remained in popular currency well into this century. The concertina version also brings in “The Campbells are Coming”, “Auld Lang Syne” and “God Save the Queen” as in the original.

<sup>791</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.01.B1.

<sup>792</sup> Danny Toner: Eydmann 85.02.A1.

<sup>793</sup> Written by MacKenzie Murdoch, the noted Scottish violinist/fiddler. Murdoch toured with Harry

## JESSIE'S DREAM.

JOHN BLOCKLEY.

Moderato.

13. *p*

Distant March of Highlanders.

*pp*

*mf*

L.1029.

Example 10.1 Jessie's Dream (extract).

Source: Composed by John Blockley. Arrangement published in  
 Brandon, Faulkner English Concertina Music Book 3 (London,  
 c1914) p.18.

## TUNES FOR 19 KEYED MELODEON ONLY.

## JESSIE'S DREAM.

No 1.

Moderato.

(O) *p*

Musical score for 'Jessie's Dream' in C major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The melody is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score is heavily annotated with fingering numbers (1-8) and bar lines. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

## SHE WORE A WREATH OF ROSES.

No 2.

Andante.

(I)

Musical score for 'She Wore a Wreath of Roses' in D major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with an andante tempo marking. The melody is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The score is heavily annotated with fingering numbers and bar lines. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

## OH, DEAR, WHAT CAN THE MATTER BE?

No 3.

Lively.

(I)

Musical score for 'Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be?' in D major, 2/4 time. The score consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a lively tempo marking. The melody is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The score is heavily annotated with fingering numbers and bar lines. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Melodeon Tutor.

## Example 10.2 Jessie's Dream.

Source: Composed by John Blockley. Arrangement for melodeon published in *Wyper's Melodeon Tutor* (Hamilton, n.d.) p.5.

## THE GORDON HIGHLANDERS.

Schottische.

FELIX BURNS.

3.

*mf*

*f*

*f*

*f*

*f*

*mf*

*f*

*mf*

*f*

1

2

FINE

DC.

L. 1029.

Example 10.3 The Gordon Highlanders.

Source: Composed by Felix Burns. Arrangement published in Brandon, Faulkner English Concertina Music Book 3 (London, c1914) p.2.



### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

The traditional dance music in the repertoires of my urban informants was limited to a few well known dance tunes such as “The Deil Amang the Tailors”, “Dashing White Sergeant” and “The Soldier’s Joy”, thus suggesting a very utilitarian approach to dance accompaniment. Again there was no desire for “purity” and Scottish dance music was often played in medleys with tunes from the minstrel and other “foreign” traditions as in David Haxton’s quickstep version of “Yankee Doodle” (Example 10.4) which he played together with versions of “The Bluebells of Scotland” and “Caller Herrin”. His variation of the first strain played in sixths is worthy of note. The compositions of the stage fiddler, James Scott Skinner, already referred to in my chapter on music hall, were also popular, particularly with sight readers. David Haxton recalled how he would work through Skinner’s The Scottish Violinist (he called it “the pink book”) playing from sight, and David Steele of Musselburgh, who played only from written music, numbered Skinner’s airs among his favourites.

Novelty pieces had a special place in the music of amateur players and many had their own versions of “The Bells” or bagpipe imitations. David Haxton played banjo imitations on his miniature concertina by using very rapid bellows movements to suggest a plectrum hitting the strings.

Polyphony was an important element in the playing of most of my informants and single line playing was regarded as somewhat inadequate. I have already related Danny Toner’s desire to play harmony. Similarly, Victor Kersley noted how: My mother was anxious that I should, eh, play an instrument and she got me to have violin lessons, which I didn’t want very much because the violin was only one part and I was far more interested in, eh, chords and accompaniment and various parts rather than the single part.<sup>794</sup>

Victor expressed the view that the ease of playing chords on the concertina encouraged this:

I think in these days people found it very easy to play. You could play a common chord, you got 3 notes on one side and one note on the other and very often my experience was that they weren’t very musical but they could get a tune, a fair amount of volume and some accompaniment from a concertina although I wouldn’t say they always played the right chords... If you stick to common chords that’s so easy. It may be that there was something in that.<sup>795</sup>

Rich, chordal playing was found in the music of “ear players” as well as sight readers, as can be seen in Example 10.5, Peter McCabe’s version of “Mary of

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Lauder from 1897. Lauder made a successful commercial recording of the song in the 1920s: Baker, Darrell and Kiner, Larry F. The Harry Lauder Discography (London, 1990 p.71).

<sup>794</sup> Victor Kersley: Eydmann 86.04.A4.

<sup>795</sup> Victor Kersley: Eydmann 86.04.A7.

*played ABA'B*      *tempo ♩ = 104*

The musical score is written in treble and bass clefs. It is divided into five systems, each with two staves. The first system is labeled 'A', the second 'B', the third 'A'', the fourth 'B', and the fifth 'A''. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 104. The form is ABA'B. The score includes first and second endings for the B sections and a 'slows second time' instruction. The final measure of the A' sections contains a triplet.

Example 10.4 Yankee Doodle.

Source: As played by David Haxton. Transcribed by Stuart Eydmann from tape 86.07.A1.

tempo ♩ = 60

The musical score is written in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of seven staves. The first staff is the melody, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. The second staff is the bass line. The third staff contains chords, with a sharp sign indicating a key signature change. The fourth staff continues the bass line. The fifth staff has a 'slower' marking above it. The sixth and seventh staves continue the bass line and end with a double bar line and repeat sign.

Example 10.5 Mary of Argyll.

Source: As played by Peter McCabe, transcribed by Stuart Eydmann from tape Eydmann 84.02.A1.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Argyle”.<sup>796</sup> Peter uses chords (selected for ergonomic as much as musical reasons) to mark the ends of each line, a stylistic element developed in his sacred work to assist him lead communal singing. Again, the Highland musician Peter Campbell was an exception, his relatively unadorned style reflecting the monodic tradition of Scottish music. His approach to playing “The Dark Island”<sup>797</sup> (Example 10.6) exploits a different aesthetic which prefers the stark simplicity of the melody, part of the more conservative, rural tradition.

### **Popular Dance**

I have already touched on the subject of the English concertina as an instrument of dance accompaniment. The period under consideration here saw major changes in fashions in social dance and it is possible to chart the use of the concertina within these, using oral evidence.

Before the First World War, dance was a highly popular social activity. In Scotland, traditional dance and music remained important in both the rural and urban areas where “penny dances” were held in small halls and private houses at which “lads and lasses... paid their pennies to dance to the music of a wheezy concertina or a squeaky fiddle”.<sup>798</sup>

The make up of bands reflected the scale and status of the event and varied from formal dance orchestras through to ad-hoc groups which often combined “traditional” instruments with newer, more fashionable ones. Although it might be assumed that the concertina was more of an urban instrument, there is some evidence of its use for traditional dance in country areas in the early part of the century. Flett and Flett record a concertina player, Mr. Alexander Montgomery, playing for dancing in the Strathglass area around 1907<sup>799</sup> and there is a photograph of a dance band featuring piano, two violins and English concertina in the village of Kirkconnel in South West Scotland.<sup>800</sup> Peter Campbell’s family had a concertina-based dance band which played around the Tomintoul area:

P.C.:            Yes. There was “Campbell’s Dancing Band” which consisted of my grandfather, my father and my uncle. They were, eh, he had two brothers that also played it. My father’s family were five sons and five daughters

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<sup>796</sup> C.f. Example 5.4.

<sup>797</sup> Composed by the button accordion player Iain MacLachlan of Benbecula and published by Essex Music Limited in 1963. This air has become a Scottish “classic”.

<sup>798</sup> From Urie, John *Reminiscences* quoted by King, Elspeth “Popular Culture in Glasgow” in R.A. Cage (ed.) *The Working Class in Glasgow 1750-1914* (London, 1987) p.162.

<sup>799</sup> Flett J.M. and T.M. *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (London, 1964) p.294.

<sup>800</sup> Print, c.1920, supplied by Ian Kirkpatrick, Glasgow. Origin unknown.

*The Life and Times of the Concertina*

and three out of the five played the concertina, and at  
one time they had this concertina dance band.

Cooke.: Campbell's?

P.C.: Aye, father and two sons.

Cooke. : All playing concertina?

P.C.: Yes. No drums.

Cooke.: No fiddle?

P.C.: All concertina.

Cooke.: Good. What sort of dances then? It was the old Scottish  
dances, of course? Eightsomes?

P.C.: Eightsome reels, quadrilles.

Cooke.: Lancers?

P.C.: The Lancers, highland schottische, polkas, all these  
kind...<sup>801</sup>

Willie Smith played for dancing in the mining area of Mount Vernon to the East of  
Glasgow during the 1920s:

W.S.: In those days I just played what they called "wee gigs".  
You know, wee dances. I mean everybody danced in  
those days.

S.E.: Did you play for the dancing?

W.S.: All the time.

S.E.: Was that old time dancing?

W.S.: Old time dancing and new dances. I mean, it wasna the  
type of music that they're using today and the

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<sup>801</sup> Peter Campbell: Eydmann 83.01.A4. Interviewed by Peter Cooke.

*The Life and Times of the Concertina*

teeny<sup>802</sup> was a great wee instrument [for] smashin' out a' the stuff.<sup>803</sup>

As a matter of fact, I got married at that time. I was earning that [much] money. 12s and 6d for a night in those days.

S.E.: Was that in halls?

W.S.: No, dance bands. Wee dance bands. 4- piece dance bands.

S.E.: What would be in that, a piano?

W.S.: Piano, violin of course, English concertina, double bass and [or] drums. Plenty of melody, everybody loved melody.

S.E.: Did you play Scottish music as well?

W.S.: Oh aye! I played a' the Scottish music. Oh dear aye.<sup>804</sup>

Harry MacIntyre, from the East End of Glasgow also played for dancing at the time:

S.E.: What sort of places would you play in?

H.M.: It was just local things. It would just be a wee hall, maybe. The biggest one we ever had it was, something in those days, that was a "late-night" and we got 15s each for playing from 8 o'clock to 2 o'clock in the mornin'. Of course you got your tea in the interval but the average was maybe 10 bob, 12 bob.<sup>805</sup>

S.E.: So it was not unusual to see a concertina on the stage in a dance band?

H.M.: Oh no. No. You see the accordion hadn't come into its own then. It was a melodeon that led onto the accordion. The melodeon was the one that was quite

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<sup>802</sup> Concertina.

<sup>803</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A1.

<sup>804</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A11.

<sup>805</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.04.

*The Life and Times of the Concertina*

common if ye went to a wee dance or a wee “jiggin” as it was called - just coppers to get in. It would be a melodeon or a dulcimer or a concertina but there would be no drum or no piano. If it was a “late-night” they would try and get a pianist and maybe a drummer of a kind and the pianist often couldna play, just he could vamp and he could keep goin’ wi’ the vamp and kept it goin’.

S.E.: The dulcimer was popular in Glasgow?

H.M.: Oh very popular. Aye, ‘cause I, even after I, when I was serving my trade I used to make the sticks for them ‘cause they broke, you know, and they were made wi’ teak.<sup>806</sup>

Willie Smith remembers the place of the dulcimer in the dance band before it was abandoned with the rise of more fashionable instruments:

W.S. The dulcimer? Yes that was right, it was played. That’s what a dance band was you know. There wasna even a drummer in those days.

Dulcimer, melodeon, Oh yes, because the dulcimer was the wee hammers, you know, he had the wee hammers in his hands, he made his own hammers. Well you would always get the 8 in a bar if it was the 4 in the bar movement; da-dy da-dy da-dy da-dy. The dulcimer, jumpin’ up and down, Oh aye, it was good stuff. I liked it but it was dyin’ when I went to it. The concertina knocked that out. Concertina, piano and violin. That put the dulcimer and the melodeon out. People went for the ‘posh band’; violin, concertina, piano and we introduced the drums. Oh well it was marvelous.

“Have ye got drums in yer band?” [They would say.]

“Aye”[He would reply.]

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<sup>806</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 86.10.15.

tempo ♩ = 66

slower

slower

slower

slower

etc..

Example 10.6 The Dark Island.

Source: Composed by Iain Maclachlan, 1963. As played by Pete Campbell, transcribed by Stuart Eydmann from field recording by Peter Cooke in School of Scottish Studies archive.



## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

“[Then] We’ll gie ye a job!”<sup>807</sup>

After 1910, new forms of dance became widely known in Britain. The popularity of American music and dance, such as the cakewalk, which had been known in Scottish music halls since the early years of the century, was boosted through ragtime revues and the introduction of dances such as the Boston, Bunny Hug and Tango.

The 1914-18 War was a time of widespread change in the social, economic and moral life of Britain and this had important effects upon dancing and its musical accompaniment. “Modern” dancing became a form of mass recreation in the cities of Scotland:

Almost more important, and like the cinema a “mixed” activity was “The Dancing”, which gripped Scotland in the 1920s and only died with the ballroom style in the 1960s. Young men in their “paraffin” - three-piece suits and slicked down hair -and girls would flock, up to six nights a week, to huge dance halls. Glasgow had 30; in some you could dance for six hours for sixpence. Liquor was banned and there wasn’t much sex around; the stress was on skill and style -a classy evening out for the poor and unemployed... The halls were in the main fiercely respectable.<sup>808</sup>

Dance music of a syncopated nature became the norm (at least in non-traditional dance) and the foxtrot and quickstep came into fashion. The English concertina was suitable for the playing of both traditional and new dance forms:

Oh it’s ideal for Irish jigs and the quadrilles as you say and military two-step, Boston two-step, all these things that were out at that time because you had to get the noise, you had to belt it out and the time, you had to keep perfect time.<sup>809</sup>

It could also handle the chromatic arrangements of modern dance with appropriate smoothness and dynamics and was particularly suited to those styles of Latin-American music which used the bandonion, a form of German concertina, in their native contexts. David Haxton:

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<sup>807</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A14. By “the 8 in a bar if it was the 4 in the bar movement” he means

His reference to “posh bands” echoes that of Scan Tester “I didn’t play many posh dances”, the title of the biography of this notable player of the Anglo-German concertina.

<sup>808</sup> Harvie, *No Gods...*, p.121.

<sup>809</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.A15.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

In those days before the accordion actually got well known on the Continent, France and these places, in ballroom dancing the tango was a great dance. You've heard of the tango and the concertina was a famous instrument for giving tone to the tango and the bands that played for the tango, often you got a good concertina player who could bring in the tango effects from the reeds. It was famous for that.<sup>810</sup>

Harry MacIntyre emphasised the value of the volume of the concertina in the busy dance hall:

I had a small band myself. The piano, myself [English concertina], the piano and violin and we used to play for dances. In those days you had no microphones, you really had to belt it out but it was mostly eightsome reels, quadrilles and military two-step, old time waltz -that was before the quickstep and before the sax came on the scene.<sup>811</sup>

With the introduction of popular American dances and the emergence of more formal bands and arrangements, playing demanded a high degree of literacy, as Willie Smith recalled:

S.E.:           What about the music? Did you play from concertina music?

W.S.:           No, anything at all. Anything written in the treble clef, or if it as written in the bass clef you had to play it too.

If you went to a job they just gave you a book with maybe 200 tunes in it. You know, different tunes and they'd say play number 66 and 84 and you just got them out the package and you put them up and played them.<sup>812</sup>

During the 1920s it was normal to play from published band parts. Harry MacIntyre:

I remember deputising concertina and the concertina player who lived across the road from me and... he knew I played and he took ill on the Friday and his wife came over in an awful state.

“Would I play in his place?”

And eh, I could read the music you know and I said “Oh aye, I'd go and play in your place.”

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<sup>810</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.01.B1.

<sup>811</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.04.

<sup>812</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A20.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

At that time they was eh, different music companies like Keith Prowse, Francis Day and Hunter; it was four of them. And you could send, you could join as a semi-professional if you like, pay a fee and they sent you new numbers as they came out and you would maybe get 4 numbers maybe, every month or two a month, something like that. You got them sent periodically and often we had numbers before anybody had them at all, before they became popular. And so it happened that this time the number that was out, [that] was all the rage was “Valencia”. It was a quickstep and I said “We’ll take this”. We went over and saw the fella and I said “I can play this one. That will be one I can play myself with confidence”... I could read the music and I got by and I played and that was my first “late-night” that I played with a decent concertina. So all you would get then, I think it was 10 bob we got at that time.<sup>813</sup>

Dances could be long and the musician required a large repertory to vary the evening. They also had to cope with rapid changes in the popularity of different tunes and dances.

Although the above evidence suggests that the dance band format was fluid, often adhoc depending on the local availability of musicians, it became more standardised in time. Harry MacIntyre remembers:

It was quite common that a concertina, sometimes trumpet, violin/trumpet, just for the noise to get ... plenty of noise, but it was quite common, the concertina.<sup>814</sup>

The pianist, I might tell you, wisna a pianist. All he could do was give you a vamp. He just kept (the) vamp going you know, but the violinist was a good violinist and then we had a trumpeter that came with us occasionally you know. That was noise too, just for the quadrilles and the eightsome reels.<sup>815</sup>

In time, the concertina fell out of fashion. Danny Toner spoke of how it lost its place in “real [i.e. modern] dance bands” but remained in the adhoc local bands. During the 1930s, the saxophone and accordion became the principal melody instruments in many bands at the expense of the concertina:

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<sup>813</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.A7. The reminiscences of Smith and MacIntyre describe a culture of music and dance with many parallels to that of the Co. Durham English concertina player Gordon Cutty (born c.1900) who was recorded by Neil Wayne in the early 1970s. See Wayne, Neil “The Concertina Revival, Part 1” in *Folk News* (March 1974) pp.9-10 and the disc *A Grand Old Fashioned Dance* (Free Reed Records, 006), 1977.

<sup>814</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.07.

<sup>815</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.16.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

What killed it was the accordion coming in, then the sax. The band format changed to sax and the violin of course and the trumpet and the drums. That became the band, then the cycle changed.<sup>816</sup>

As the American material began to spread within and from the cities, there was a conscious “revival” in Scottish dance in an attempt to rescue and preserve older forms. This was driven by an ideology which rejected foreign (and seemingly non-respectable) modern dance, while seeking to elevate native music and dance into a performance art. One writer of 1932 summed up the aims:

For years, reel and strathspey societies have been meeting through the winter - usually a great majority of fiddlers with one or two bass fiddlers - skirling away to their heart's content, but with result more pleasing to the music makers than to the discriminating listener. The arrangements of the old airs for more than one performer have been hitherto sadly lacking in musicianship; but the advent of the Scottish Country Dance Society is likely to put this class of music on a sounder basis, and the young musicians of the new generation will be able to experience this part of the groundwork of the national musical heritage presented in a better and more palatable form.<sup>817</sup>

The foundation of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society led to a standardisation of traditional dance forms, prescribed tempi and an officially endorsed repertory. Dance band form and repertory was also influenced by the B.B.C. (there were regular broadcasts of dance music on the Scottish Home Service) and by gramophone recordings, so that, by the 1940s, a standard Scottish country dance band centred on the accordion had emerged. By 1940, the concertina had no place in dance bands, no matter what market they catered for.

### **The Rise of the Modern Accordion**

Then yer accordions came on and started. The big piano accordion; it was bloody useless!<sup>818</sup>

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<sup>816</sup> Harry MacIntyre: Eydmann 86.10.15.

<sup>817</sup> Thomson, David Cleghorn (ed.) *Scotland in Quest of her Youth* (Edinburgh, 1932) pp.126-7.

<sup>818</sup> Alexander MacLaren: Eydmann 86.05.A11. This statement is intended as a derogation of the accordion.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

Despite Alexander MacLaren's strong views on the dominance of the modern accordion during the 1930s, it was the fact that it was so useful which led to a rise in its popularity at the expense of other instruments, including the concertina.

Throughout the late nineteenth and the first decades of the present century, the English concertina co-existed with the melodeon, the instruments catering mainly for different sectors. As illustrated earlier, the melodeon (which attracted many players, including a number of outstanding players of traditional dance music) was limited to the performance of more basic music. Willie Smith:

You saw the melodeon. If you can remember the old 16 (is it 18?) key melodeons. I don't mean the accordion, I mean the old, what Dan Wyper, Peter Wyper played. They were great players. Wonderful players at their instrument but their instrument would not be tolerated today, 'cause they could not go into any keys. They were stuck in the sharp keys, what they call the sharp keys, Gs and Ds.<sup>819</sup>

The melodeon also lacked the benefit of the layers of associations with respectability and "rational recreation" enjoyed by the English concertina.

During the 1920s, however, more sophisticated button accordions with a fuller, richer sound and extended bass keyboards came onto the market in Scotland. Many such accordions, particularly those manufactured in Italy, were in bright colours and had decorative metal panels or patterns outlined in gems which conveyed a sense of decadent modernity. These ostentatious instruments attracted musicians away from the conservative concertina and melodeon and competed with the domestic piano as symbols of conspicuous consumption. The modern accordion was promoted vigorously. Forbes of Dundee, for instance, used a variety of methods to promote the accordion, including film advertisements in cinemas, appearances at agricultural shows, concerts by "world champions" and home demonstrations. The early 1930s also saw a rise in the popularity of the piano accordion which was already in use by soloists and adopted into many "big bands".

The new instruments gave the accordionist access to the full range of music previously enjoyed by the concertina but denied the player of the melodeon. Their volume was greater than other free-reed instruments, they had facilities for the couplings of reeds to give some variety of timbre and the left hand manual offered fixed chords as well as bass notes.

The piano accordion gave direct access to piano scores (for the right hand) and took on some of the piano's "rational recreation" associations. The British College of Accordionists was established during the 1930s to validate teachers and administer competitions and examinations across a national network. By the 1940s, the modern

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<sup>819</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A17.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

accordion had found its way into the standard dance band format associated with the Scottish Country Dance and manufacturers developed a distinct “Scottish” tuning (actually a “mistuning”) of the multiple reeds which gave the instrument its distinct sound. The dance band broadcasts of the B.B.C. Scottish Home Service further endorsed the accordion as an instrument of Scottish music. In the words of Alexander MacLaren:

My father was the best at that for dancing because he was clean fingered. Jigs, Irish Jigs, Kerr’s books o’ music, a’ the jigs and schottisches, spot on. That was just at the end o’ it. See, the radio and the accordion killed this [the concertina].<sup>820</sup>

Just as the concertina suited the cramped housing conditions and dependence on foot and public transport which was universal among the working classes well into the 1930s, the rise of the large accordion was coupled to improved housing conditions and the rise of private transport.

It is not surprising, therefore, to hear concertina players blaming the rise of the large modern accordion for a decline in the fortunes of their own instrument. Willie Smith:

It seemed to die a death. The big accordion got in... the accordion got in. The people were enamoured. The size of it and the big raucous sounds that could come out of it. You know, pulling it out and pushing it in. But you could never drown this [the concertina] ‘cause it has its own sound. If you had ten accordions one concertina would have been heard... against the ten of them, ‘cause of the sound that comes out of it, you know.<sup>821</sup>

and David Haxton:

It was a great instrument. You see, the accordion and a’ that, the accordion did a lot of harm, and the saxophone, especially the accordion. When the accordion came in it could give you such a wonderful box of reeds and it was so much easier learned than the concertina. With the stops on the accordion you could get octaves.<sup>822</sup>

During the 1930s, Lachenal and Co. recognised the threat from the new accordions when they produced their accordeophone, an “instrument combining the lightness of

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<sup>820</sup> Alexander MacLaren: Eydmann 86.06.A2. He refers to Kerr’s Collection of Merry Melodies for the Violin, issued in several parts in Glasgow c.1880. These large volumes, which are still in print, had a significant influence on popular and traditional music making in Scotland which is largely ignored by the standard works on the fiddle tradition.

<sup>821</sup> Willie Smith: Eydmann 85.07.A5.

<sup>822</sup> David Haxton: Eydmann 84.01.A9.

## *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

the English concertina with the tone of a piano accordion".<sup>823</sup> The instrument had a standard English concertina keyboard but there were three sets of reeds tuned in the accordion fashion. This invention failed and the company collapsed a short time later.

The broader socio-economic context was that, during the period 1924-1935, there was a general drop in domestic music making which was reflected in changes in musical instrument purchase. Consumer expenditure on musical goods (instruments and sheet music) in Great Britain fell by one half while expenditure on all other household goods increased, including the sale of radios and gramophones which multiplied four times.<sup>824</sup> In a contracting market for musical instruments it was the most fashionable and versatile - in Scotland, the accordion and saxophone - which won the day.

### **Status and Decline**

By the middle of this century, the status of the concertina was at its lowest. The instrument's use in bands, music hall and evangelicalism, had largely disappeared and, with the exception of a few surviving pockets of use by older players, the instrument was largely abandoned. Writing in Glasgow in 1944, one writer could state:

Concertinas cost from £10, though a second-hand one can be bought for from £3. There is only a limited market for them, and they are chiefly used for accompanying country dancing and by the Salvation Army. The German Concertina... is much cheaper. A small one costs about 5s.<sup>825</sup>

The 1954 edition of The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians summed up the contemporary view of "classical" musicians about the free-reed instruments:

...the accordion and concertina, instruments which produce quite the most unpleasant musical sound ever devised by the inventor's and instrument maker's ingenuity, so far as we can tell from instruments still in use.<sup>826</sup>

The decline in popularity of the concertina in the late 1930s was reflected in the fortunes of the principal manufacturers. Lachenal went out of business in the 1930s, Wheatstone and Co. continued only to have its activities redirected for the war effort in the 1940s, while the family concern of H. Crabb and Son. managed to survive on orders from abroad, particularly South Africa. There was an inevitable decline in the

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<sup>823</sup> Specification published in The Concertina Newsletter (6 July 1972) pp.7-8.

<sup>824</sup> Ehrlich, The Piano..., p.189.

<sup>825</sup> Scott, Mary Margaretta What can I Play: A Book About Musical Instruments (London, 1944) p.51.

<sup>826</sup> Vol V, (1954), p.919.

### *The Life and Times of the Concertina*

supporting infrastructure in Scotland and the loss of retailers, tuners and repairers meant that instruments went without attention and were abandoned.

The final blows came with the disruption of the Second World War and its aftermath. The post-war period heralded new fashions and comprehensive urban redevelopment and planned decentralisation broke up the old communities<sup>827</sup> with drastic consequences for social institutions and their musical activities. The new attitudes of the post-1945 period, however, also contained the seeds of a revival of interest in the concertina as discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>827</sup> Most of my Glasgow informants moved from inner city tenement housing to suburban estates in the 1950s or 60s.