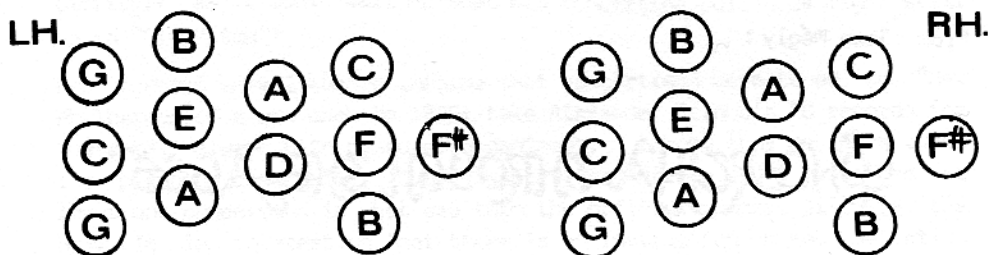


# THE HISTORY OF THE DUET CONCERTINA : Part I

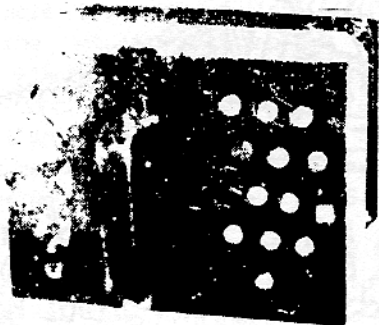
Despite being the last type of concertina to gain popularity the Duet concertina can be traced back to the early days of the concertina.

Wheatstone describes Duet systems in his concertina patents of 1829 and 1844. According to K.V. Chidley, one of the last managers of Wheatstone and Co., the first prototype Duets were made between 1837 and 1844, and the first production models made in 1844. These instruments had a total of 24 keys arranged in 4 rows on either end. They were not chromatic, having only the F sharp, but show the basis for later systems.



One feature which is apparent in this and later systems was the overlap between the two hands. In construction this model was more like a small accordion, of rectangular shape with keys at the top and the reeds in two rows at the bottom. The metal topped keys were lettered and operated wooden levers.

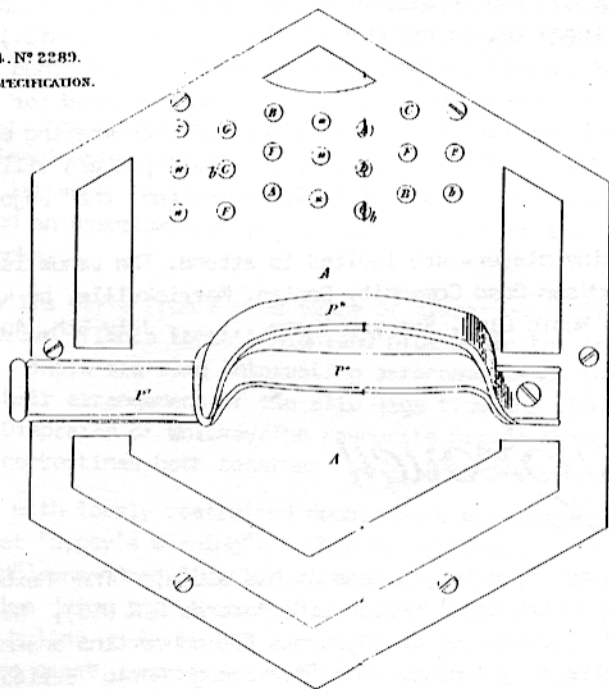
Whether these concertinas were intended as serious playing instruments is doubtful; I think it is more likely that they were made to counter the import of cheap continental melodeons and concertinas. How many were made, and for how long, is not clear as they were not properly numbered or recorded. I have two, (one rosewood and one mahogany, numbered in pencil internally 129 & 130 ) and have come across a number of others.



24 key Duet  
Concertina  
c.1844

Other Duet systems were also devised. Wheatstone's patent of 1844 describes four different systems, two with four rows, one with seven rows and one with eight rows. [ For illustrations of the fingering diagrams for these systems see issue #3 of Concertina Magazine where figures from the original patent were shown.] One interesting feature of this 1844 patent was that Wheatstone foresaw one of the problems of the Duet - that of getting the correct balance between the left and right hand ends. He proposed dividing the bellows into two sections separated by a partition to allow independent control of air to either end. I do not believe it was ever used, however. William Wheatstone (Charles' brother) patented a seven row version of the original system in 1861.

A. D. 1861. SER. 14. N° 2289.  
WHEATSTONE'S SPECIFICATION.



There does not appear to have been a great interest in the Duet before the 1880's. Wheatstone's records show only four Duets sold, all in 1863. Other than the 24 key Duets described above, I have only come across one dating from this period. This instrument has its keys arranged in five rows and is fully chromatic. The layout differs from the later Crane system [ to be described in a future article ] in being arranged as a chromatic scale across and up the keyboard. This concertina carries no label but was probably made by Wheatstone or Chidley, and has a very large and useful range. It is unusual in having English style thumb straps and finger plates instead of wriststraps.

# THE HISTORY OF THE DUET CONCERTINA : Part II

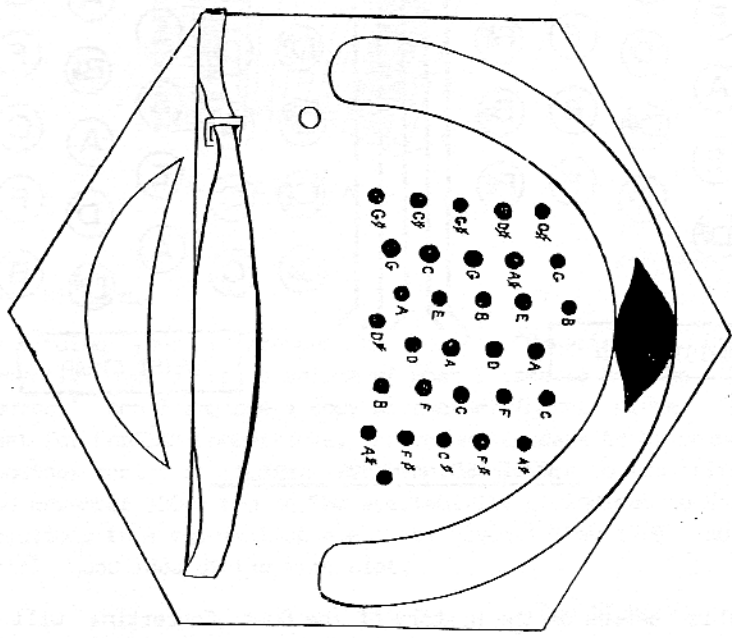
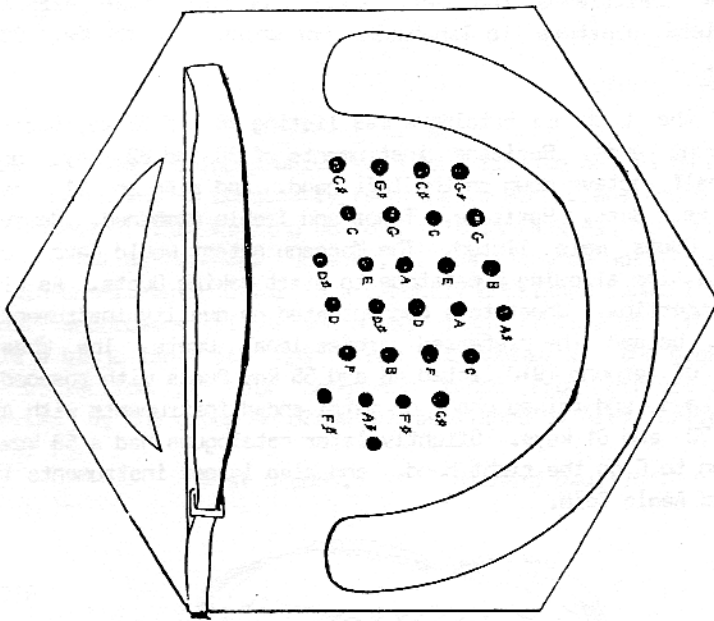
In 1884, J.H. Maccann of Plymouth secured a Patent (#4752) for the 'Improved Chromatic Duet English Concertina'. Whether this means improvement over earlier Duets or the English system is unclear. However, this undoubtedly represents the birth of the Duet Concertina in its popular form. (There seems to be some confusion over the spelling of Maccann. The spelling given was used in the literature of the period, but nowadays other variants exist and the system seems to be referred to as McCann.)

The original Maccann system is really a chromatic version of the original Wheatstone system and retains the unusual arrangement of the first octave on the right hand. This led to difficulties with the next octaves and suggests that Maccann was used to the earlier system. Further developments led to improvements in the right hand to produce the Maccann system as used in production.

Maccann's Patent specifies instruments from 39 to 58 keys, also suggesting the possibility of extending the scale in either direction. It is probable that this development coincided with the increased popularity of the Concertina as a music hall instrument. Maccann was a teacher and performer using the stage name 'Professor Maccann'. His Duet Concertina was taken up by other artists, and Lachenal and Company were given sole manufacturing rights.

The first production instruments were of limited range, usually 39 or 46 keys, and were the same size as the Treble English Concertina. Surprisingly, the right hand did not go below the G above middle C even on the larger instruments. Even on instruments that did go down to middle C some accidentals such as C sharp and B flat were likely to be missing. This suggests that the Duet would play higher than say the piano and certainly Duet music published rarely went below G on the right hand. The Lachenal catalogue of around 1890 listed six Duets in rosewood, with brass or steel reeds and 39 or 46 keys, with the option of 55 keys in better quality construction. However they were not listed with the new 'raised ends'. It is probable that a number of one-off instruments would have been made with various ranges and different constructions for individual players.

Many players became very proficient on the Duet, notably Alexander Prince and Percy Honri. As the range of music increased so did the size of the instruments. Numbers such as the 'Lost Chord' showed off the

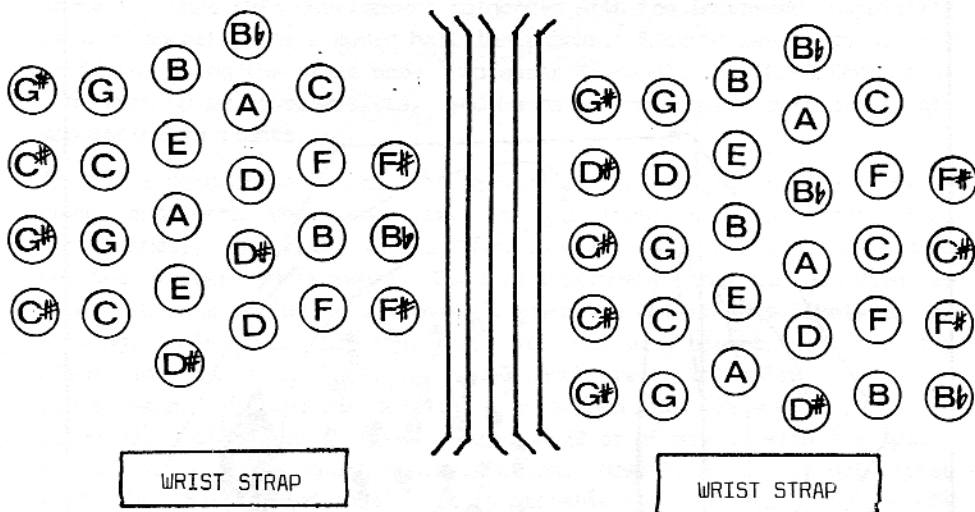


organ-like qualities of the Duet, and Prince spent four years learning the complete overture to Tannhauser for which the 81 key Duet was developed.

By 1900, the Lachenal catalogue was listing 46 and 55 key Duets with raised ebony ends, Baritone instruments of 50 and 62 keys going a further half octave down on the left hand, and also an 81 key Duet described as a Bass, Baritone, Tenor and Treble combined. However, no Edeophone Duets were listed. The Maccann patent would have run out around this time allowing Wheatstone to start making Duets. As with the English Concertina, Wheatstone concentrated on quality instruments and they soon became the preferred professional Duets. The Wheatstone catalogue of around 1910 listed 46 and 55 key Duets with rosewood ends and metal keys, and raised ebony or metal ended instruments with 46, 55, 62, 69, 72 and 81 keys. Slightly later catalogues had a 58 key Duet going down to C on the right hand, and also larger instruments in the eight-sided Aeola form.

LEFT HAND

RIGHT HAND

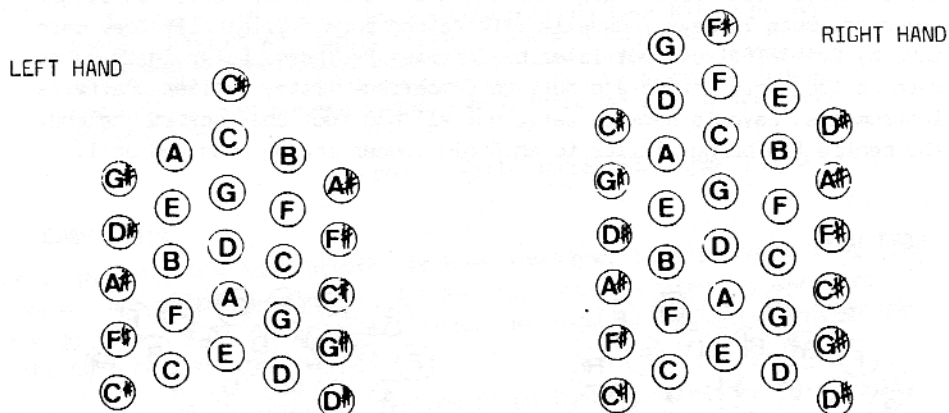


MODIFIED MACCANN SYSTEM

# THE HISTORY OF THE DUET CONCERTINA : Part III

The popularity of the Maccann Duet led to the development of other systems. In 1896, J. Butterworth patented a system with 5 rows; the centre 3 rows being the naturals and the two outside rows the accidentals. ( According to the late Harry Crabb, The Crane Duet system was invented by the Crabbs in th 1880's but was not patented and no instruments were made at the time. )

This system was adopted by Crane and Company, music dealers from Liverpool. They marketed instruments under their own name made for them for Lachenal.



## J. BUTTERWORTH SYSTEM AS PATENTED.

The system, known as the Crane system, had a better flow to the keyboard than the Maccann system and was easier to learn. Like the English system, which it resembled, the basic chords fell into simple patterns and it became popular for song accompaniment. The Salvation Army marketed Crane system instruments under the 'Triumph' label, again manufactured by Lachenal. Instruments were made with 35, 48 and 55 keys, although larger instruments could be ordered. Unlike Maccann Duets, all Crane Duets went down to middle C on the right hand.

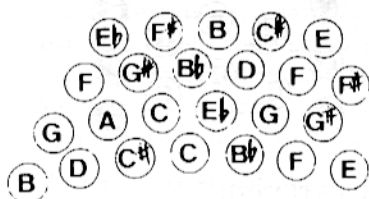
The Crane system does not appear to have been as popular as the Maccann system, certainly among the professional players. This is reflected in the large proportion of cheaper Crane Duets made. Lachenals were by far the largest manufacturers, particularly of the cheaper ones. Crabb also made Crane Duets, mainly professional instruments, ( the Crabb family

were all Crane Duet players ) and Jeffries made some excellent smaller instruments. Wheatstone does not appear to have made Crane Duets as standard, although they could be made to order. However some quality Crane Duets were made by Wheatstone.

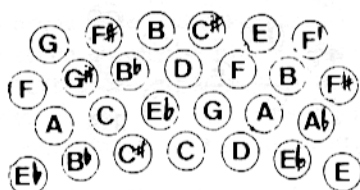
The other system which gained some popularity was Jeffries' own Duet system. Jeffries specialised in Anglo concertinas, and when these went out of favour, devised a Duet system based on the Anglo. This allowed an Anglo player to pick up the system easily and also allowed Jeffries to use parts from Anglo concertinas.

Unlike the Maccann and Crane systems, the Jeffries system was not fully chromatic. It was biased towards one key, usually Bb, C or G, but could be played in other keys. Early instruments had 44 to 50 keys and were indistinguishable from Anglo concertinas. Later instruments had larger keyboards upto 72 keys, usually with raised ends. Originally they were made by C. Jeffries, but later by Jeffries Brothers. Later instruments were often very crude and bore no comparison with earlier Jeffries instruments. Layouts seem to vary, but all had four rows across the end, the centre two being similar to an Anglo concertina on push and pull.

LEFT HAND



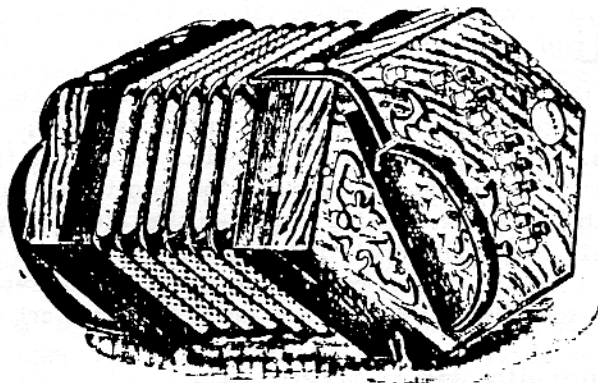
RIGHT HAND



### 50 KEY JEFFRIES DUET SYSTEM IN Bb.

Other systems were devised, often made to order or by modifying a standard system. For example, I have come across a system with four rows made from a three row Anglo, one with seven rows made from a Maccann Duet, and a specially made Crabb with the keys arranged in a triangle. Around 1920 P.H. Taylor patented a number of Duet systems, all based on six rows. Another system was the piano system Duet. These had keys across the end in octaves, each row of naturals having the accidentals above and between them as on a piano. These were mainly cheap Lachenals with white and black plastic buttons, and of very limited range. They were mostly produced late in the concertina development and at that stage

## GEORGE JONES' NEWLY IMPROVED PIANO CONCERTINAS.



The keys of this Instrument are arranged in the same form as the keyboard of a piano; with duplicate G on left, and an F on the right hand side. Being used with the thumb, it enables the performer to play with smoothness. It is double action, sounding the same note either by pressing or drawing the bellows. The compass ranges from G below the stave in the treble clef to E above.

[ From an early JONES catalogue, c. 1890(?) ]

were probably the last attempt to keep the concertina alive in face of competition of the accordion. I have only seen one piano system Duet of any quality - a 67 key Edeophone that, strangely, had more keys on the left than on the right hand.

That there are so many Duet systems is an indication of the difficulty of devising a perfect system. As late as 1950, K.V. Chidley was proposing modifications to the Maccann Duet system to make it more uniform. I doubt if any Duets were made to this modified system. Ultimately this variety probably accounts for the failure of the Duet Concertina to compete successfully with the piano accordion. All the systems were compromises and had their good and bad points. All suffered when playing in keys with a number of sharps or flats, and all lacked uniformity. Yet undoubtedly, in skilled hands, all systems were capable of playing the most complex and difficult music. This must be obvious to anyone listening to Alexander Prince recordings for example.

It is a pity that with the Concertina revival there has been little interest in Duets. Certainly they are less suited to the Folk and Morris music so popular with many of the the English and Anglo Concertina players. Fortunately, players are now becoming more interested in other types of music, and gradually the Duet is gaining in popularity. It would be nice to think that soon all those grand and beautiful Duets that have been neglected will be played and enjoyed once again.