The Three Row Diatonic Melodeon
A Comprehensive Guide

Part 5 — The Right Hand (or Treble) Keyboard

Terminology

"Chin-End/"Knee-End"
(Please note — "Chin-End" refers to the end of the instrument nearest to your chin with it strapped to your body. I use two straps!

Therefore "Knee-End" refers to the end of the instrument which is nearer to that part of your body. If you have a right-handed instrument, the right hand keyboard (more buttons) should be on your right and the left hand keyboard should be on your left.)

"On The Push/"On The Pull"
This refers to the two different directions that you can steer the bellows. Pushing means closing the bellows towards the shut position and pulling means opening them. In either direction you are applying air to the reeds.

"Bisonoric"/"Unisonoric"
"Bisonoric" means two notes per button — Melodeon "Unisonoric" means same note in both bellows directions per button — Piano Accordion, Chromatic Button Accordion.

The Hohner Compadre has 31 right hand buttons - two notes per button on the push and the pull of the bellows providing a total of 32 different notes with many repeated on various buttons —not 62 different notes as you might expect!

Other instruments might have more buttons/notes e.g. Hohner Xtreme series — these have more notes up the top end which is not particularly useful — I would have preferred more at the bottom like on a Castagnari Benny.

The range of the instrument's right hand keyboard is from the A below middle C up to the B which is two octaves above the B which is above Middle C. So basically it's a little over 3 octaves with the vast majority of the notes being above Middle C. I find most of the very high notes pretty useless!

There are more A notes than any other (9).
Bb only appears once.

At first sight the instrument seems to have a bewildering amount of buttons set out in a haphazard manner however, this is not the case. In fact there is a rather beautiful logic to the layout.

The instrument is set out in three rows named after the major scales that they are based on. In general, as you progress from the chin-end of the instrument to the knee-end the notes become progressively higher pitched.

The row nearest to the outside of the instrument is the A row and has 10 buttons which provide all the notes found in the scale of A major. The middle row is the D row and has 11 buttons which provide all the notes found in the scale of D major. The row nearest to the bellows is the G row with 10 buttons which provide all the notes found in the scale of G major. The buttons at the chin-end of each instrument provide you with all the notes not found in any of the three main keys of the instruments. These are called accidentals and for the most part, sound out of place when combined with notes on the same row. They do, however, have their uses and I will come to that a little later on.

The Compadre is a "third button start" box as far as the D and G rows are concerned – this means that the root note of the scale is on that button on the push – and a "second button start" on the A row.

In other words, the third button from the chin-end on the G row is the note G on the push. The third button from the chin-end on the D row is the note D on the push. The second button from the chin-end on the A row is the note A on the push.

Apart from accidentals (first buttons on each row (chin-end)) - notes on the push are all part of the major chord (1st,3rd and 5th degrees of the scale) of that row. In A that's A, C# and E. In D it's D, F# and A and in G it's G,B and D. This works out very conveniently because if you lay three right hand fingers over any three consecutive buttons on any row — excluding the 1st button chin-end accidentals — you will hear a major chord (albeit with different inversions) if you press those buttons whilst pushing the bellows in.

Notes on the pull are part of the major scale of that row but not part of the major chord (2nd, 4th, 6th and 7th degrees of the scale). This is B, D, F# and G# on the A row. E, G, B and C# on the D row and A, C, E and F# on the G row.

In effect, apart from the accidentals, the rows give you only the notes that you would find in the major scales of A, D and G. This is known as diatonic — a description often applied to this instrument.

  Notes on the A row - A B C# D E F# G# + Eb & F
  Notes on the D row — D E F# G A B C# + G# & Bb
  Notes on the G row — G A B C D E F# + F & Eb

Notes on the push repeat every 4 buttons (apart from accidentals) — (leave two spaces). It therefore follows that your first and little fingers should sound notes that are an octave

apart. Notes on the pull (not accidentals) repeat every 5 buttons — (leave three spaces).

You can play a major scale in two octaves on each row using a sequence of buttons combined with various pushes and pulls of the bellows.

e.g. A row (A major scale):-

It's all push/pull for the first three buttons..

Button 2 push A
Button 2 pull B

Button 3 push C#
Button 3 pull D

Button 4 push E
Button 4 pull F#

Here is where, because there are an uneven number of different notes in the scale (7 — (8 of course counting the upper A)), the pushing and pulling swaps over to keep all the major chord notes on the push.

Button 5 pull G#
Button 5 push A (an octave above the first A that you played).

You have now played the major scale of A up one octave.

To play the next octave you can replay this button so…

Button 5 push A

maintaining this new pull/push pattern for a couple of buttons

Button 6 pull B
Button 6 push C#
Button 7 pull D
Button 7 push E

Button 8 pull F#

Again, another change in the pattern here because of the uneven number of notes in the scale.

Button 9 pull G#
Button 8 push A

Second octave completed.

Same idea for the other rows.

The scale of D major can also be played crossrow and all on the push

D row Button 3 D
A row Button 4 E
D row Button 4 F#
G row Button 3 G
A row Button 5 A (or D row Button 5)
G row Button 4 B
A row Button 6 C#
D row Button 5 D

This can be repeated up one octave.

Now go to Part 5a:-

The Three Row Diatonic Melodeon — The Accidentals