**Introduction**

Hi there,

I’d like to tell you a little bit about the English Concertina and how I came to play it.

I started playing the melodeon, another squeezebox instrument, in 2011 and after a year, I decided to try the concertina.

After a bit of research, I decided on the English concertina and posted a Want\_AD on melodeon.net which is the forum for melodeon players worldwide.

To my amazement, I was contacted by a really nice guy from the United States who said he wanted to give me his English Concertina. I’d made several blogs and lessons on the melodeon and this was his way of expressing his gratitude to me . I couldn’t believe it! Such kindness in this day and age is rare indeed.

Sure enough, a few days later I received this lovely Jackie Treble concertina in the post and I’ve been playing it ever since alongside my other squeezeboxes.

**Different Types Of Concertina**

If you don’t already know, there are several types of concertina.

The Main ones are:-

The Anglo – which, like the melodeon has different notes on the push and pull. This is called bisonoric – i.e. each button gives you two notes depending on the direction of the bellows.

The Duet - which has the same notes on both sides but an octave apart. Unlike the Anglo this is a unisonoric instrument – meaning you get the same notes on the push and pull.

And the English (like this one) which is fully chromatic and just like the Duet has the same notes on the push and pull (unisonoric).

**Deeper Into The English Concertina**

If you can read music - all the notes on the lines of the treble clef are on the left side and all the notes that are on the spaces of the treble clef are found on the right side of the instrument. This was the first type of concertina invented by Charles Wheatstone in 1829. There are several sub-divisons of English concertina – including the baritone which is one octave below the Treble – this is ideal if you want to accompany yourself singing. The Treble concertina is perfect for playing tunes unaccompanied although with practice, harmonies and bass notes can be introduced alongside the melody notes. When you start, you’ll probably only play single note melodies but that’s fine and it’s great fun too!

**The Arrangement Of Buttons**

The instrument has four horizontal rows of buttons on each side. The middle two rows carry all the notes found in the key of C major (all the white notes on the piano) and all the sharps and flats, the black notes, are found on the top and bottom rows.

This concertina has 30 buttons (so 30 different notes) ranging from the G below middle C on the piano up to the C two octaves above middle C and I find that I can play all the tunes I want to using its range.

You can also get 48 and 56 button models where the notes go even higher but so far, I have found that this 30 button model has given me all the notes I have needed to play the tunes that I have figured out.

There are a couple of ways of distributing the fingers over the buttons but most beginners start in the following way:-

For both hands, finger one is used to play the buttons on the top two rows (nearest the thumb straps), finger two deals with row three and finger three deals with the lowest row nearest the finger rests. At this stage, the little fingers are used only to hold the instrument.

**How To Hold It**

The way I hold the instrument is with my legs crossed (left over right) – I place the right end over the top of my left knee. Place only the first section of the thumbs in the straps, not too far and the little fingers of both hands lightly under the finger rests. In this way, when I play, the right side of the concertina is static whilst the left side moves in and out.

Of course this can reversed if you like – hold the left side of the instrument over the left knee and pull in and out with the right side. It’s up to you.

There are other ways to hold the concertina including the use of a neck strap but this one works for me.

You definitely shouldn’t place the bellows over your legs as this will cause them to be damaged by the constant rubbing of your clothing.

As far as I’m aware – the air button on the right side is only used to open and close the bellows at the start of a piece or at the start or end of a practise session and is not incorporated in the playing as it is with the melodeon.

**How It Works**

Opening the bellows lets air in and closing them lets air out. When you do this whilst pressing the note buttons the instrument sounds as the flow of air causes the reeds inside to vibrate. This instrument is fully polyphonic – that is, several notes can be played at once. In this way, chords are perfectly possible.

I usually start with the bellows closed but of course, if you prefer, you can start with them open. I tend to plan my pieces so that I play for say four bars with the bellows opening and then four bars with them shutting – i.e. an equal time for both. The bellows control the volume and the expression of the instrument. Think of them as your lungs when you are singing.

If you do run out of air – you can always reverse the direction as you get the same note in both directions (unisonoric). Try and plan ahead and keep an eye on the bellows so that you are aware if they’re about to close or be fully opened – the result is the same - no sound!! It’s not ideal to reverse the direction of the bellows mid phrase but in an emergency of course you can.

**Posture and Aches and Pains**

You should be relaxed and as comfortable as possible when playing the concertina. Of all the squeezebox instruments I have tried – the English Concertina is the one that puts the least strain on the human body. I would say that you should not spend too long practising when you start and if anything starts to hurt – STOP and have a rest. Listen to your body. If you keep on going when muscles and joints are hurting you might be out of action for a long time whilst things heal.

**Buying Your First Concertina**

If you don’t currently own a concertina I strongly suggest that you buy one from a reputable dealer. A lot of instruments that you can pick up on eBay need work doing to them to make them playable. This work can be expensive as there are very few people in the world who are capable of doing it.

If you look on [melodeon.net](http://melodeon.net) or concertina.net you will hopefully be able to find a suitable dealer in your country who can supply what you want. Prices range from a few hundred to a few thousand so be sure of what you’re doing before you part with your cash. If possible, borrow one first to see if you like it before you commit to a purchase. If you do get hold of a concertina that needs work I would recommend not trying to do this yourself – again, a proper dealer is the place to go for this. Concertinas are pretty complicated inside and not for the amateur to tinker with.

**Conclusion**

Anyway, I hope you found this interesting and useful. Be sure to check out my other concertina videos on You Tube. In particular, I have devised a form of tablature which will get you up and running very quickly whether you’re a music reader or not and you will see me using this in my videos.