

# Introducing The Anglo Concertina

The concertina is a compact six or eight sided free reed instrument, held between the two hands with a set of bellows between. The fingers operate spring-loaded buttons which, when depressed, allow air to act upon a single reed. This single reed gives the concertina its somewhat plaintive sound, as distinct from the fuller sound of button accordions where two or more unison and/or octave reeds sound together when a key or button is pressed.

The concertina was invented by Charles Wheatstone in the 1820's, this being a fully chromatic instrument with the range of a violin, and is commonly known as the **English system**. Buttons when depressed make the same note irrespective of the bellows direction because there are two reeds tuned the same for each button, one on the inside of the reed pan and one on the outside. The four verticle rows contain all the natural notes and the accidentals, the white and the black keys on a piano, and the scale is played by alternating left hand, right hand, left, right etc. up the rows.

In 1834 Carl Uhlig in Germany married the concertina mechanics with the blow/draw principles of the harmonica to come up with the diatonic **Anglo concertina**, a simpler and more compact instrument than the English system. In 1843 the British added a third row of 'accidental' notes. Thus the 30 key Anglo German system concertina came into being, basically a diatonic instrument set in the keys of C and G but offering some chromatic possibilities when required.

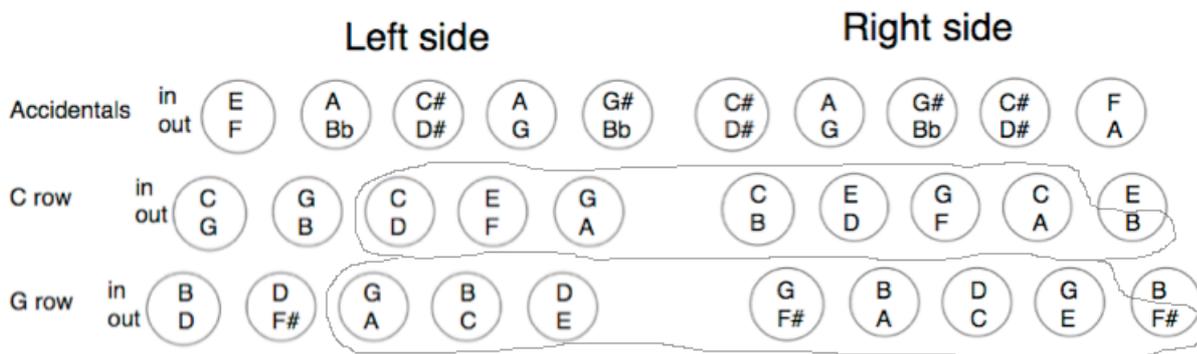
The German instruments were cheap with a mouth organ type block of reeds inside, usually brass, and had large sluggish bellows. By the 1890s the British improved this German system by using the single steel reed arrangement of the Wheatstone type. It was the British manufactured Anglo German system concertinas that were the best and the principle dance instruments. They were relatively cheap, compact and easier to play than the more exotic English system and other variants used in the salons and concert halls. Hence their early appearance on the bush tracks or on board sailing ships, in the hands of working folk like sailors and shearers accompanying the songs of these trades. Improvements such as higher quality steel reeds in the early 1900s and cheaper manufacture and ease of repair caused button accordions to displace the concertina.

The Anglo concertina is similar in principle to the 10 hole harmonica, or the melody side of a button accordion, with the advantage that the bass end can be played with the left hand and the treble end with the right hand, adding possibilities not available on the harmonica. Three note major triads of C and G can be constructed easily with adjacent buttons, and with a little fancy fingerwork a dedicated player can also find most other major, minor and seventh chords on the left hand or bass side.

Aside from their thinish sound Anglos share the advantages of fluid response with the button accordion when playing lively dance tunes, and their simple chords make a nice accompaniment for the voice. A bass chord vamp can be played on the left while a melody is played on the right, or a semblance of a melody on the lower octave to match that on the upper octave. Two row 20 key Anglos come set in the keys of C and G, or D and G, and give a range of about two octaves. The three row 30 key models have a selection of accidentals and some duplicated notes on the top row for the odd occasion when an accidental is needed. The key of F can be constructed on the C row and by using the Bb

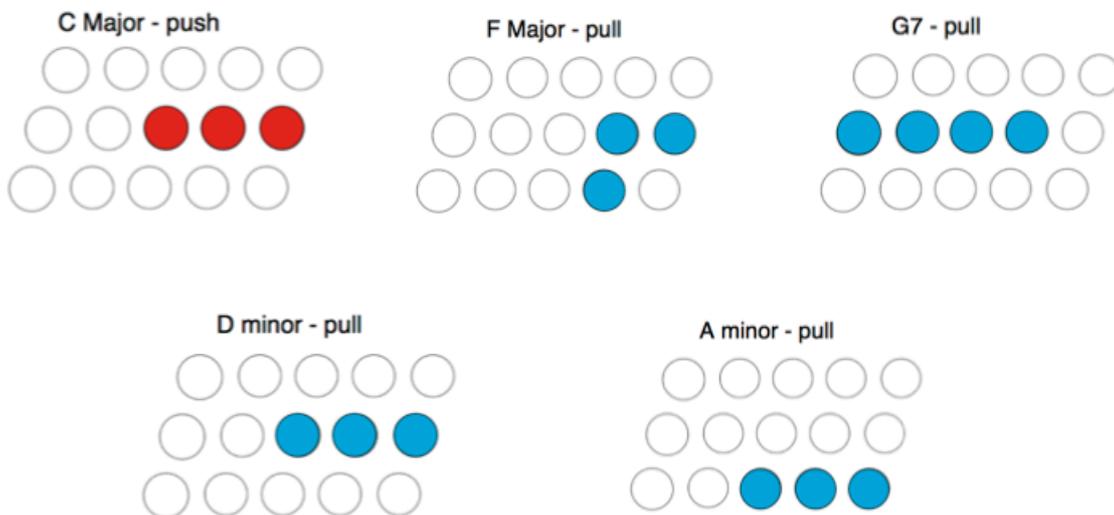
from the accidental row, though with a different push/pull pattern.

This diagram shows the layout of a 30 key C/G Anglo concertina. The two octaves in each key are outlined, the start or tonic note being Left side / button 3 / in, or push. The top row has accidentals and alternative choices for some of the other notes.

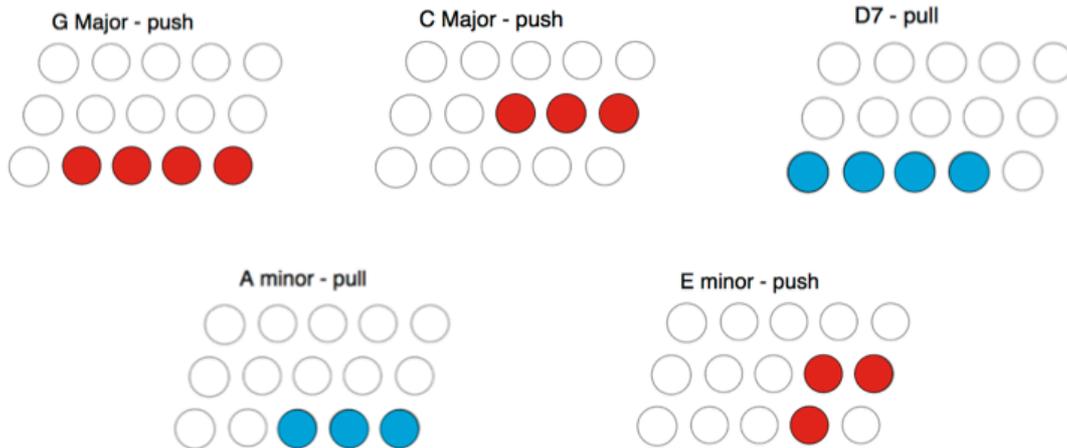


The following diagrams show how accompanying chords of tonic, sub-dominant and dominant 7th can be constructed on the left side. The minors on the second and sixth degrees are also shown.

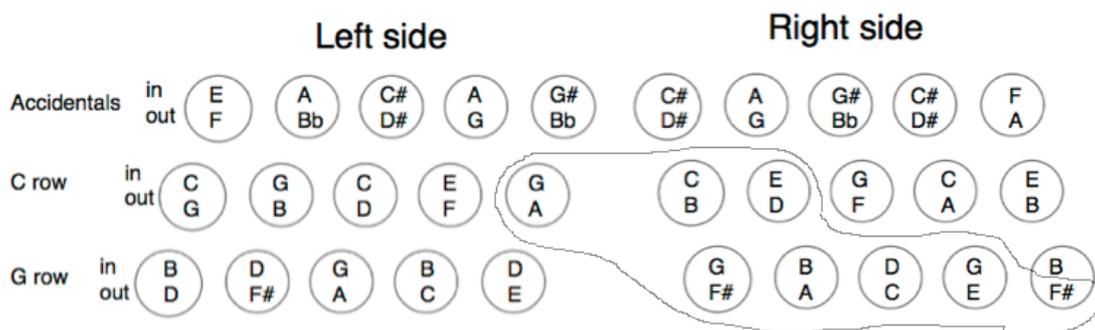
**Chords for the key of C** (red = push the bellows in, blue = pull the bellows out):



### Chords for the key of G:

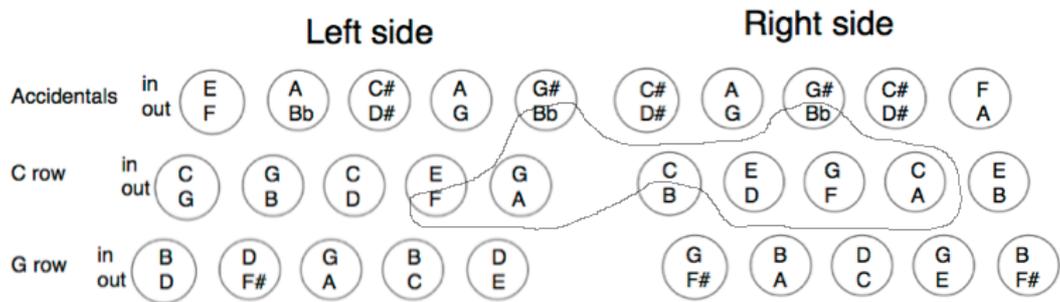


Cross row playing can sometimes make for easier fingering. Experiment, here is another way to get the key of G:



While the Anglo concertina only comes in the keys of C and G (or D and G) it is possible to construct major, minor and seventh chords in most of the other keys on a 30 key instrument. So if you have a song that just has to be done in Eb for instance then the Eb, Ab and Bb7 chords can be found. But we'll leave that for the more adventurous. Have a look on the internet.

### Fingering the key of F:



### Left side chords for the key of F:

