

REVIEWS

Dan M. Worrall. *The Anglo-German Concertina: A Social History*. 2 vols. Fulshear, TX: Concertina Press, 2009. xviii + 322 pp., viii + 272 pp., with 440 illustrations, 28 transcriptions. ISBN 978-0-9825996-0-0. \$38.00.

Reviewed by Graeme Smith

As this detailed and broad ranging history demonstrates, the Anglo-German concertina was one of the most popular free-reed instruments of the second half of the nineteenth century. Dan Worrall's book tells its social history, and spans four continents and many styles of playing and genres of music. It places the instrument within the rapidly changing and emergent popular cultures which swept over all the sites he documents, while at the same time presenting the distinctiveness of local histories.

Worrall has drawn heavily on the resources recently made available by the digitisation of nineteenth-century out-of-print books and the ever expanding online availability of nineteenth-century newspapers and contemporary public records. Other researchers—Lewis Jones comes to mind—have demonstrated the power of this for folk song research.¹ Worrall tracks the instrument with meticulous and exhaustive use of manufacturers' records, advertisements, published tutors, and what he refers to as 'sightings', references to the instrument in journals, newspapers, court records, travellers' tales, and the like, and through these he plots the rise and decline of the instrument over seven different locations.

The instrument, usually six-sided with two or three rows (each of five buttons) on each end derives from the 'German concertina,' which was first made by Carl Uhlig of Chemnitz' Saxony' in 1834. His instrument adopted the single action diatonic pitch layout of the accordion, with a major scale disposed in the familiar single-action push-pull alternation, and usually with the two rows playing a C and a G scale. These earliest 'German concertinas' were cheaply produced in great numbers. From 1851 some English manufacturers started producing higher quality instruments, dubbed 'Anglo-German concertinas', using design and techniques derived from the Wheatstone English concertina, and almost always with a third row of accidental pitches allowing a certain level of chromaticism.

Wheatstone's English concertina, a double-action instrument with a fully chromatic array of buttons, was designed for the concert stage and middle-class parlours, and for a composed music repertoire. The German model, unerringly found its market amongst the relatively poor, while the better quality Anglo-German models reached a middle level. One writer in a musical journal of 1898 notes that the 'genuine'

concertina is the English model “associated with the names of musicians prominent in the higher ranks of the musical profession”. By contrast the German and Anglo-German concertina had ‘usurped the name’ and was ‘a spurious order of instrument proper to the music hall and n-----r minstrelsy (p. 37). Worrall presents a number of similar elite dismissals of this consistently low-brow instrument, which was enthusiastically taken up by working-class musicians wherever it was available. Its socio-musical position was set by its price, by its societal associations, and by its musical limitation to a few keys, which guaranteed its suitability for lower-class vernacular musical styles and un-tutored ear players.

In successive chapters Worrall documents the instrument’s use in England, Ireland, at sea, in Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and North America. England saw the first flush of popularity. While we now associate the instrument with rural, traditional dance music, Worrall shows the instrument making its first inroads amongst urban street musicians and buskers. With careful reading of historical sources, Worrall gives fascinating accounts of the lives of London street musicians who used it. He shows that some concertina-playing street musicians were able to earn a middle-class income, others, perhaps with less skill, led a hand-to-mouth existence, wearing out the cheaper instruments that they played on. The London street of the nineteenth century was a cacophony of competing sounds, where buskers and concertina-equipped street beggars added to public entertainment and, to some ears, brought new possibilities of noise pollution. Henry Mayhew, in his account of the London poor, interviews street musicians who describe targeting the house of an invalid, and refusing to be moved on by the annoyed residents until they had extorted two shillings from them. The concertina was adopted early into the standard instrumentarium of the minstrel show, and here its use, particularly for dance music and sentimental and comic song, along with the banjo and the bones, cemented its popularity in low-brow entertainment. Skilled stage acts demonstrated the musical capabilities of the humble instrument. At the same time, the Salvation Army adopted the instrument into its street performances. But its great penetration was amongst the many amateurs who took it up, and Worrall documents its use on picnics, outings, and the like.

Meanwhile the instrument spread to the countryside, and by the late nineteenth century, it was affordable by at least some agricultural labourers. It was used for social and seasonal ritual dancing, in domestic households as well as in pubs and churches, augmenting its urban street entertainment and theatrical uses. In such a context, in 1899 English folk music collector Cecil Sharp met with the concertinist William Kimber of the Headingfield Morris dance team and initiated the Morris dance revival. German and Anglo-German concertinas were being used for Morris and other dance throughout a number of areas of England, and expanded in their use amongst revivalist Morris dancers. Worrall presents biographies of and stylistic commentary about many other English traditional players, demonstrating the varied playing

approaches which they took in solving problems of range, in providing octave and other chordal support for a melody, and aiming for, or alternatively in eschewing separate or legato bellows actions. The instrument began to decline in popularity after the 1920s, until the second English folk revival of the post-W.W. II period, and especially the English dance movement of the 1970s and 1980s, brought new players and musical approaches to the instrument. These new players and markets stimulated demand for and production of quality instruments.

The instrument's trajectory in Ireland followed a slightly different path, musically and socially. The English concertina was used by middle class and Anglo-Irish players, but as in England, German and Anglo-German concertinas were hugely popular from the late nineteenth century, in Dublin as in London, and they soon took their place in providing music for social dance in the countryside. The great Irish nationalist music revivalists of the turn of the century were troubled as this instrument replaced pipers and fiddlers, but concertinas, along with melodeons, became the popular choice for rural house dances. In Clare in particular, a group of players developed a more complex technique to play fast dance tunes in keys of D and even A on the instrument. These players, as well as players in less fluid styles, continued the instrument's use through the twentieth century. The instrument has been entirely embraced by the post-war Irish traditional music movement. As in the documentation for England, Worrall provides a well-judged history of the musical venues in which the concertina found a home in Ireland.

The sailor with a concertina became a cinematic and popular cliché in the twentieth century, and Worrall interrogates this association. Given that many folk music revivalists have been suspicious of such popular distortions, his conclusions of extensive and distinctive use on naval and merchant ships is perhaps surprising. Here he points out that both romantic imaginings and sceptical rejections of these can be evaluated with internet-based document searching. His conclusions here demonstrate the power and potential of his research techniques.

In Africa, the concertina hitched a ride on the colonisation of the continent and it became part of the transplantation of European dance styles while being absorbed into new musical uses which were fundamentally based on African musical aesthetics. Afrikaner musicians developed what was one of the most vigorous uses of the instrument in their Boerenmusiek, where farm house dances provided the most important context. Here the emblematic vastrap, or stamp down dance, is associated with compacting a beaten earth floor. Worrall points out that the Afrikaners continued to favour the concertina until much later than comparable English players and audiences, and that they developed sophisticated 'modernist' playing styles thorough the twentieth century. Its continued use now is mediated by a self-conscious cultural

movement, even though the place of Afrikaner culture in post-apartheid South Africa is a fraught one. However, its concertina music remains a vital popular genre.

Amongst Africans the concertina was also adapted into many neo-traditional and popular musical styles through the twentieth century. Given the great impact of touring minstrel troupes on South African popular music, it is not surprising **that** South African Sotho and Zulu musicians took to the instrument. Here it was often used to provide accompaniment for walking, a role which it took over from other indigenous portable instruments. The cyclic repetitive forms played in 'squashbox style' to add rhythm and entertainment carried walkers on 'concertina transport'. Often, where European players used the instrument to play the symmetrically phrased melodies of dance and song tunes, Africans saw the instrument as a resource to play repeated rhythmic patterns. Sometimes tuning arrangements were modified, neutralising the diatonic effect of the row, and opening up new approaches to the connections between motoric patterns of finger and bellows and musical output. Although the concertina was most consistently adopted in South Africa, Worrall finds evidence of its use in small ensembles in Kenya, Congo, and especially in west Africa. In Ghana and Nigeria it was easily adopted into the palm wine and early highlife and juju music which developed from the 1920s onwards. Although the instrument was generally eclipsed by other instruments in the many developing African popular genres of the later twentieth century, one suspects that further deep research into historical sources would find more evidence of its use.

I turned to the chapter on Australian uses with **a** forensic eye, having a greater familiarity with sources and uses here, in comparison with some of the other sections of the book. Worrall's documentation and interpretation are almost flawless. The mass production and marketing of concertinas coincided with the rapid white settler migration to Australia which followed the gold rush period of the 1850s and 1860s, the urban expansion, and the progressive settlement of the agricultural land, both in large scale pastoral properties and small family farms. Worrall is able to follow the instruments importations, as well as its use in gold rush settlements, and amongst the new rural proletariat of itinerant workers, as well as amongst the settlers in areas of denser population. Here local dances in small rural halls provided contexts for dance music. Worrall points out both the stylistic and social similarities of the uses of the concertina in rural England, Ireland, South Africa, and Australia, a convergence based on the similar social and musical demands of public domestic playing. Though concertina players became less popular as the twentieth century wore on, skilled players like Dooley Chapman of Northern NSW and others were discovered by folk enthusiasts and folk music collectors such as Chris Sullivan and Peter Ellis from the 1970s onwards, and their polkas, schottisches, varsoviennas and other quadrille-style and couples dances were taken up by traditionalist sectors of the folk music movement. In New Zealand in the settlement period, similar uses are documented, which is not

surprising, given the degree of migration between Australia and New Zealand in the period. The different patterns of land expropriation and indigenous displacement in the two colonies are reflected in the use of the instrument by the indigenous populations. While there is only limited use of the concertina by Australian aborigines, New Zealand Maoris were able to adopt it for native dances as well as using it when they participated in wool shed balls. No players comparable to those of England, Ireland, or Australia were able to be located when a new folk awareness reached New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s, and the relatively few current New Zealand players are more likely to be influenced by Australian or Irish movements.

The last regional chapter, ‘The Concertina in North America’, documents patterns similar to those of England and Australia, with some modifications. American sources reiterate the same class distinctions between the English and the German systems, as well as the typical uses of the instrument in public space amateur playing, for social dancing, and by the Salvation Army street bands. Given the demonstrated importance of concertinas in minstrel shows, Worrall produces only a scant history of its adoption here. Further the German, Czech, and Polish musicians who developed polka music into a thriving popular music in the Midwest abandoned the smaller German concertina for larger rectangular Chemnitzer instruments, which were outside of the remit of this book.

Worrall finishes his book with twenty-eight transcriptions of tunes referred to in the text. Fingering indications illustrate some of the musical strategies of the styles which Worrall describes, such as octave playing, two-row octave playing, along-the-row playing and others. For player or scholar, this is an invaluable illustration of the music, especially when coupled with listening to the recordings of these players (to the extent that they are available).

Worrall’s work is monumental in its breadth, and makes exemplary use of new internet-based resources in amassing hundreds of illustrations and threads of documentary evidence. He has used these to provide convincing quantifications of such elusive ideas as ‘popularity’, where number of ‘sightings’ are seen to rise and fall over a period of a century. Thus his work moves the study of the concertina into an area some have labelled as a new ‘empirical musicology’. Fruitfully, this emphasis allows him to range over musical genres, and to judiciously evaluate uses across social and geographical divides. This book is a monumental achievement, which sets a high standard for following authors writing a social history of an instrument.

NOTE

1. See Lewis Jones ‘Bound for Botany Bay’, *Musical Traditions* (2009), available at <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/transprt.htm>.

CONTRIBUTORS

ALLAN ATLAS (aatlas@gc.cuny.edu) teaches at The Graduate School, The City University of New York; his latest concertina-related publication is *Victorian Music for the English Concertina*. Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, 52 (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2009)

ROGER DIGBY (rdigby@hoppits.demon.co.uk) has been playing the Anglo Concertina for nearly 40 years and is well known as a player of 'Traditional English Music'. He will argue with anyone who suggests that the Anglo is a 'limited' instrument; and he has very strong views on Traditional Music (which he loves) and Folk Music (which he does not).

RACHEL WELLS HALL (rhall@sju.edu) started playing English concertina in her late teens. In 1991, she received a Watson Fellowship to study traditional music in Scandinavia and the British Isles. She has toured the Mid-Atlantic states since 1995 with the folk trio Simple Gifts and recorded three albums. She plays a variety of styles, including Scandinavian, Eastern European, North American, and British Isles music, and has appeared as soloist with the New Philadelphia Classical Symphony in 2006. She has led concertina bands at the Northeast Squeeze-In, the Northeast Concertina Workshop, and Folk College. Rachel is an associate professor of mathematics at Saint Joseph's University, where she researches applications of mathematics to music.

RANDELL C. MERRIS (rmerris@merris.org) is an economics consultant and an amateur concertinist. Recently retired from the International Monetary Fund, he has been an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago; an economics and finance professor at the Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University; and a consultant to Asian governments on economic policy and financial reform. His concertina-related articles include 'Instruction Manuals for the English, Anglo, and Duet Concertina: An Annotated Bibliography', *The Free Reed Journal*, 4 (2002), available online at www.concertinas.com/merris/bibliography, and a series of articles in *PICA*: 'Dutch Daly: Comedy and Concertinas on the Variety Stage', (2007), 'Carlo Minasi: Composer, Arranger, and Teacher, Concertina and Piano' (2009); and with co-authors: with Faye Debenham, 'Marie Lachenal: Concertinist' (2005), and with Viona 'Elliot' Lane and Chris Algar, 'Tommy Elliott and the Musical Elliots'(2008).

GRAEME SMITH (graeme.smith@arts.monash.edu.au) lectures in Ethnomusicology in the School of Music, Monash University, Australia, with research interests in

music and identity, folk revival musics, country music, neo-traditional musics, and free reed instruments. His study in this general area followed a period of playing in the English and Australian folk scenes in the 1970s and 1980s. He has written on the Irish button accordion, relating playing styles to modernity and emigration. His *Singing Australian: A History of Folk and Country Music* (Pluto, 2005) studies the place of these popular music genres in the construction of national identity in Australia.

DAN WORRALL (danworrall@msn.com) has written *The Anglo-German Concertina: A Social History*, published by Concertina Press in 2010, and *The Anglo-Concertina Music of William Kimber*, published by the English Folk Dance and Song Society in 2005. He has also written numerous articles on the history of the concertina to be found at the Concertina Press website (www.angloconcertina.org), at *The Concertina Library* (www.concertina.com), and in the *Papers of the International Concertina Association*. He has played both Anglo and English concertinas for over 35 years, and belongs to a small group of acoustic musicians that plays for various types of traditional dances in his area. For a number of years he has organized a concertina workshop at the Palestine Old Time Music Festival in the small town of Palestine, Texas. Worrall holds a Ph.D. in geology from the University of Texas at Austin and is retired from a career in petroleum industry research. Married with two grown children, he and his wife raise peaches, figs, and longhorn cattle on a small farm in southeastern Texas.

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