The Concert Accordion

Contemporary Perspectives

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Introduction

An Artistic Imperative

My earliest memory of the accordion is an experience of sound as sensation. On a crisp Canadian autumn morning, I returned home from my first lesson and began to practice my assignment. I played a C on the bass keyboard, and felt the vibrations beginning in my fingertips and breastbone spreading through my body, a phenomenon every musician knows.

This encounter with sound as sensation was followed by the discovery, based on my interpretive experiences as a student, that my early relationship to music was in fact an ironic engagement with the past through palimpsest, a very natural process and artistic function in a living art.

During this early period I experienced palimpsests as transformative, a concept that affirms the fundamentally social nature of music making, a process in which memory, change, variation, and craft allow the interpreter to become a "re-creator" while transmitting a composer's text across a span of time to modern audiences. Through those early years, before I had access to classical training and a formal canon, my repertoire consisted of adaptations, including Charles Magnante's versions of *Finlandia* (Sibelius), *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart), and the *Grand Canyon Suite* (Ferde Grofé). This experience later led me to

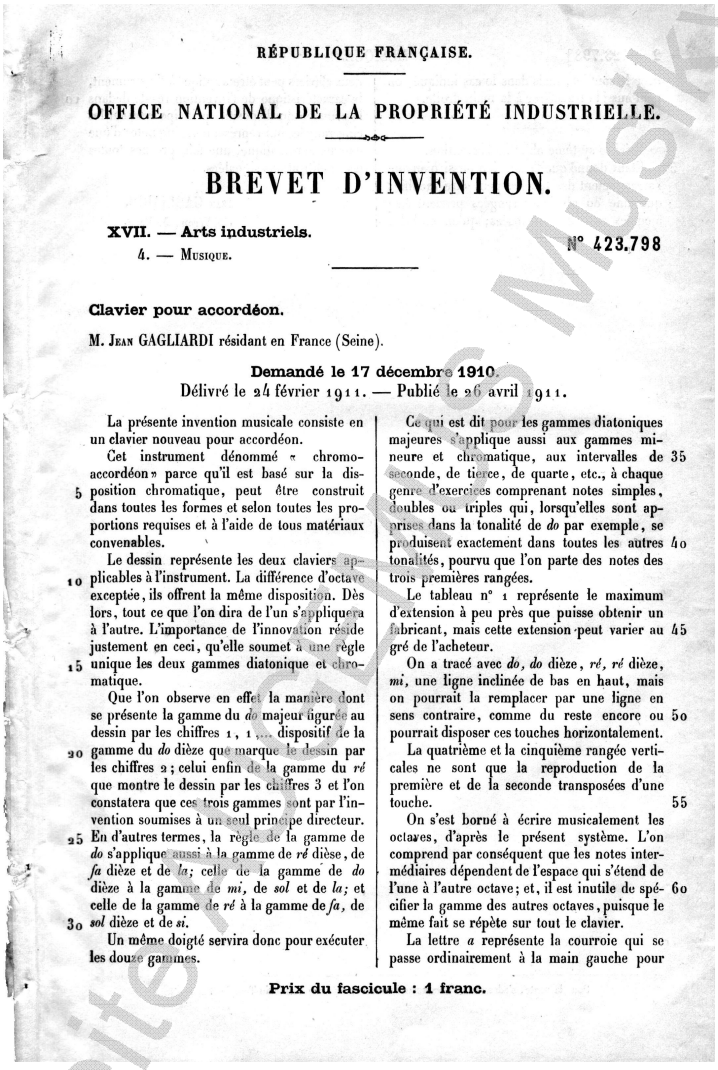
1. Early Contexts

Giovanni Gagliardi

Giovanni Gagliardi (1882-1964), the earliest documented exponent of the concert accordion in the modern era, was born in Castelvetro Piacentino, Italy, on 14 February 1882. His father worked his small plot of land, and his mother was a street vendor who also ran the local inn. Despite the family's modest circumstances during a deep economic depression, Gagliardi and three younger brothers received a basic education, which allowed them to read and write. We have no further details about Gagliardi's schooling or musical training, but his correspondence reveals that he was largely self-taught and was driven by a musical passion that began in his childhood when he was given an ocarina as a present.

In one letter Gagliardi states that he began to study with Raffaele d'Alessandro, an accordionist and skilled teacher from Cremona who taught him music theory, general music studies, and accordion technique. By 1902, Gagliardi, aged 20, had acquired an accordion made by Luigi Savoîa in San Giovanni in Croce, a town in the province of Cremona. This instrument, with Gagliardi's modifications, is extant and fully functional.

"ideal accordion" has a five-row right-hand, and a five-row left-hand layout placed in mirror image; the left hand has two extra rows of fundamental and counterbass stradella that can produce organ-like pedals and colours. It is interesting to note that although Gagliardi referred to the 1911 Schénardi design as his "ideal" accordion, he never performed on it.



RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE.

OFFICE NATIONAL DE LA PROPRIÉTÉ INDUSTRIELLE.

BREVET D'INVENTION.

XVII. — Arts industriels.
4. — Musique.

N° 423.798

Clavier pour accordéon.

M. Jean GAGLIARDI résidant en France (Seine).

Demandé le 17 décembre 1910.
Délivré le 24 février 1911. — Publié le 26 avril 1911.

La présente invention musicale consiste en un clavier nouveau pour accordéon.

Cet instrument dénommé « chromo-accordéon » parce qu'il est basé sur la disposition chromatique, peut être construit dans toutes les formes et selon toutes les proportions requises et à l'aide de tous matériaux convenables.

Le dessin représente les deux claviers applicables à l'instrument. La différence d'octave exceptée, ils offrent la même disposition. Dès lors, tout ce que l'on dira de l'un s'appliquera à l'autre. L'importance de l'innovation réside justement en ceci, qu'elle soumet à une règle unique les deux gammes diatonique et chromatique.

Que l'on observe en effet la manière dont se présente la gamme du *do* majeur figurée au dessin par les chiffres 1, 1 .... dispositif de la gamme du *do* dièze que marque le dessin par les chiffres 2; celui enfin de la gamme du *ré* que montre le dessin par les chiffres 3 et l'on constatera que ces trois gammes sont par l'invention soumises à un seul principe directeur. En d'autres termes, la règle de la gamme de *do* s'applique aussi à la gamme de *ré* dièse, de *fa* dièze et de *la;* celle de la gamme de *do* dièze à la gamme de *mi,* de *sol* et de *la;* et celle de la gamme de *ré* à la gamme de *fa,* de *sol* dièze et de *si.*

Un même doigté servira donc pour exécuter les douze gammes.

Ce qui est dit pour les gammes diatoniques majeures s'applique aussi aux gammes mineure et chromatique, aux intervalles de seconde, de tierce, de quarte, etc., à chaque genre d'exercices comprenant notes simples, doubles ou triples qui, lorsqu'elles sont apprises dans la tonalité de *do* par exemple, se produisent exactement dans toutes les autres tonalités, pourvu que l'on parte des notes des trois premières rangées.

Le tableau n° 1 représente le maximum d'extension à peu près que puisse obtenir un fabricant, mais cette extension peut varier au gré de l'acheteur.

On a tracé avec *do, do* dièze, *ré, ré* dièze, *mi,* une ligne inclinée de bas en haut, mais on pourrait la remplacer par une ligne en sens contraire, comme du reste encore ou pourrait disposer ces touches horizontalement.

La quatrième et la cinquième rangée verticales ne sont que la reproduction de la première et de la seconde transposées d'une touche.

On s'est borné à écrire musicalement les octaves, d'après le présent système. L'on comprend par conséquent que les notes intermédiaires dépendent de l'espace qui s'étend de l'une à l'autre octave; et, il est inutile de spécifier la gamme des autres octaves, puisque le même fait se répète sur tout le clavier.

La lettre *a* représente la courroie qui se passe ordinairement à la main gauche pour

Prix du fascicule : 1 franc.

Figure 2
Gagliardi's Paris patent registration 423.798 for his concert accordion published 1911 with a written description of the features of this instrument for the French National Office of Industrial Property

2. The Italian Accordion Universe

This chapter will examine the impact of Italian accordion design from 1860 to 1914, including the Austrian origins of the instrument, innovations made by Italian builders and craftsmen, the role of the accordion in the context of Italian unification during the 1860s, domestic and international Italian marketing success, the role of the Italian diaspora, and the continuing influence of Italian accordion design today.

The earliest traces of the concert accordion have been elusive and enigmatic until now. In his *Petite histoire de l'accordéon* Pierre Monichon expresses puzzlement regarding the lack of detail surrounding the rise of the accordion in Italy.

> La surprise est grande quand on apprend que l'Italie, qui joua et joue encore un rôle prépondérant dans la fabrication des accordéons à travers le monde, ne laisse aucune trace en n'apporte aucun document valable en ce qui concerne l'histoire de cet instrument dans la patrie des AMATI et des CHRISTOFORI [sic]. (Monichon 1958: 75)

Figure 6
Antonio Ranco's 1908 Accordion
with full frontal view of the right-hand button keyboard
and 125 button left-hand keyboard with a combination
three-row free bass (bassetti) and five-row stradella bass

The work of Venanzio Morino (1878-1961) might be considered a third design stream in a unique way, though Monichon's curious claim that Morino built Hohner's first nine row chromatic free bass instrument in 1912 from his city of residence, Geneva is baseless. A skilled craftsman born in Piedmont who developed his skills as an apprentice in the Italian tradition (see Monichon 1971: 89, 101) Morino had established an atelier in Geneva in 1900, and was contracted by Hohner to create only the design for the nine row left hand keyboard, not to build an instrument. The ramifications of this design would reach into the mid and late 20th century and was found in the production of

The Socin Model 40 is found below, with a description of the accordion clearly indicating the instrument was made for the artists Renzi and Turco:

F. SOCIN

45

Harmonium- und Harmonika-Fabrik, Bozen, Tirol.

Nr. 40.

Harmonika für die zwei Virtuosen Renzi und Turco.

34 Tasten, Doppelstimmen, alle 3 Reihen Semitono, Stahlstimmen auf Aluminium-Platten, 24 dreifache Bässe, welche in Zug und Druck den gleichen Ton geben, an der Baßseite ferner 25 chromatische Stimmen in 2 Reihen, welche in Zug und Druck den gleichen Ton geben, die Kästen sehr fein eingelegt mit Metall und Perlmutter, der Balg inwendig mit Leinwand, auswendig mit Leder gefaßt, zwischen den Falten mit Goldpapier belegt . . . . . Kronen

Armonica per i due artisti Renzi e Turco.

34 tasti in tre fille, tutte tre le fille a semitono, voci doppie in acciajo con piastre in aluminio; 24 bassi tripli che in aprire e in chiudere danno il medesimo tono, 25 voci cromatiche dalla parte dei bassi, che pure danno in aprire e in chiudere lo stesso tono, la cassa fata in lusso, e intarsata in metallo, il mantice legato all'interno in tella, all'esterno in pelle, e fra le falde con carta in oro. Corone

Accordéon pour les deux artistes Renzi et Turco.

34 touches en 3 rangs, les 3 rangs sont tous à demi ton, voix doubles d'acier avec plaques d'aluminium, 24 basses triples qui en ouvrant et en fermant donnent le même ton, 25 voix chromatiques du côté des basses, qui donnent aussi le même ton, caisse en luxe marquetée en métal, soufflet plié en toile au dedans et en cuir au dehors, entre les plis avec du papier doré . . . . couronnes

Figure 12
Fidel Socin Model 40 from his pre-1913 catalogue, p. 45

"31 right hand keys, double reeds, 3 rows set in semitones, steel reeds on aluminum plates, 24 triple low reeds, playing the same note on the out and in bellow; 25 more chromatic voices set in 2 rows, playing the same note on the out and in bellow. The body of the instrument is very finely inlaid with

3. An Expanding Concert Art

Early Formations

By the mid 20th century German accordionists and accordion builders were making significant contributions to a contemporary canon. With the onset of Allied bombing raids on Stuttgart in 1944 the German wartime administration had moved the staff of the Stuttgart Hochschule für Musik to Trossingen, a town in southwest Germany. In Trossingen a number of composers – including Georg von Albrecht, Hans Brehme, Gerhard Frommel, Hugo Herrmann, Ernst-Lothar von Knorr, Alfred von Beckerath, Siegfried Borris, Hans Lang, and Philipp Mohler – who might not otherwise have come into close contact with the concert accordion had the opportunity to meet and work with accordionists such as Karl Perenthaler and Fritz Dobler. This artistic convergence became a foundation for the establishment of Hugo Noth's international accordion program at the Trossingen Hochschule in 1973, among others. The backgrounds of some of these composers and accordionists can give us some idea of the depth of artistic activity in Trossingen in the 1940s.

Hans Brehme (1904-1957), a prominent composer during the Weimar Republic, studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin during the 1920s, and then moved to Stuttgart where he taught piano and later composition at the Hochschule für Musik. From 1945 to 1949 he

4. A Dynamic Other

Positivist Presumptions

In *The City of Words* Alberto Manguel describes the Other as one through whose presence we become aware of our own being, one that we transform into our enemy at our own cost, since whatever we do to the Other we do to ourselves (2007: 32). Thus, everything is interconnected, interwoven into a richly textured whole: to demonize the Other is to abuse ourselves. This concept might be applied to the ongoing tension created by the positivist accordion ideology that denigrated the intertextual values of the accordion in a 20th century America. For example, Giovanni Gagliardi, writing in 1911, noted the denigration of the accordion Other in a broader European Romantic culture. Given this background, we might expect that accordionists would respect the Other among their own, but this has not been the case. In his essay commemorating the tenth anniversary of the death of Mogens Ellegaard, we quote Owen Murray from London's Royal Academy of Music:

Figure 13
Frosini with his Rosario Porto
free bass accordion on the cover of his
Care Free March, 1905

Here it is helpful to establish the lineage of Frosini's concert accordions in the United States. Based on the two row template seen in the photograph above, the schematic below confirms the following

Figure 21
Frosini and his Excelsior U.S.A.
free bass accordion with
53 free bass notes and
79 ground basses

5. The Rise of the Academic Accordion

Foundations

By the 1980s the artistic practice of the concert accordion had coalesced into three streams. The first was a positivist accordion culture based on an exclusive "first-is-best" view of original works and a modernist rejection of the past. The second stream was a contextualized concert art embracing inclusive and complementary artistic processes and products. The third was a socially engineered Soviet bayan art dating back to 1927, which metamorphosed into an avant-garde bayan culture that developed in the 1980s and was marketed to the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The approach of Mogens Ellegaard was based on positivist exclusivity and an ideological rejection of the concert accordion's contextualized past. As noted in chapter 2, Ellegaard received his early musical training in Denmark, and was influenced by performances of Toralf Tollefsen (1914-1994) and Karl Perenthaler (1925-2013). Ellegaard also spent several years in the United States. During his time there he met conductor Leonard Bernstein and auditioned for arts impresario Sol Hurok: Bernstein invited him to a visioning conference, and Hurok offered to manage his career. Ellegaard declined both invitations.[64] By the early 1960s Ellegaard was established in Europe and teaching in

6. International Academic Currents

"We really can't afford to write books which have no historical consciousness."

Winfried Georg Sebald (1944-2001)

The positivist academic culture described in chapter 5 promoted a fading awareness of the accordion's past in direct correlation to the rising tide of its own self-validating authority. The latest theories, commissions, and pronouncements were valued more than the art of interpretation while the history and contextualizations of both the accordion and the bayan were confused and obscured. The artistic and aesthetic tensions arising from academic assertions precipitated a theoretical dilemma driven by a lack of self-reflexivity, creating a short circuit in what might have been a healthy artistic dialogue.[77]

However, during the period that saw a strong positivist academic impulse from international centres, there was a parallel development in a postmodern accordion art through the activities of European and North American artists. Italian jazz accordionist Gianni Coscia was a colleague of Umberto Eco and the dedicatee of Luciano Berio's *Accordion Sequenza XIII*. Jon Faukstad, an accordion professor at Oslo's Royal Conservatory of Music, was equally passionate about both Scandinavian folk music and the commissioning and interpretation of contemporary works. The inclusive and later, palimpsestic approaches of Parisian composer and jazz accordionist Richard Galliano are renowned and unique. His colouristic fusion of American jazz, French musette, and Argentinian tango (mentored by

7. A Pluralistic Accordion

Contemporary Perspectives

In 1939 Canadian philosopher Northrop Frye, then a young Rhodes scholar, was aboard a ship sailing through the Gulf of St Lawrence on his way to Oxford University in England. Looking north to the shores of Quebec, south to the outline of Cape Breton, west to the horizon of the St Lawrence, and east to the expanse of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, he reflected on the pluralistic orientations of a Canadian identity – two

8. An Authentic Musicology

"Connection counts for more than explanation … everything is interwoven"

Yves Bonnefoy

Complementary Voices

The preservation of the accordion's history at the end of the 20th century is due to the dedication of three scholars: Pierre Monichon, Pierre Gervasoni and Helmut C. Jacobs. Accordionist, scholar, and pedagogue Pierre Monichon (1925-2006) was born in Lyon, France. He taught at the École César Franck, in the Région d'Aubervillers of France, and in 1950 formed the first accordion class at the École Nationale de Paris. His students include Alain Abbott[111], Lucien Deloirs, Jacky Gilbert, Monique Lecoq, Charles Taupin, and Daniel Tessedou. Monichon began research on the accordion in the 1950s. During this period, as noted in chapter 1, he corresponded with and visited Giovanni Gagliardi, then in his seventies. Gagliardi subsequently presented Monichon with a manuscript copy of his *Petit Manuel de l'Accordéoniste* in French and Italian.

Figure 22
Giovanni Gagliardi with his Savoîa 1905 and Pierre Monichon
in San Giovanni in Croce, 1963

Some years later Monichon gave a copy of Gagliardi's manuscript to German linguist, academic, accordionist and musicologist Helmut C. Jacobs, thus preserving an important primary document of concert accordion history.

Monichon's two important works – *Petit Histoire de L'Accordéon* (1958) and *L'Accordéon* (1971) – trace the historical detail, design, construction, and pedagogy of the concert accordion back into the 19th century, and are notable for their thorough, respectful, and understated style. At the time of his death in 2006 he was working on *L'Accordéon à travers le Monde*, a study of the accordion's role in world music. Monichon's scholarship is validated by parallel research of other scholars. His ideas on the artistic complementarity of the accordion and the concertina, discussed in *L'Accordéon,* were expanded independently by Hugo Noth, who visited the Library of the

9. The Possibility of Artistic Complementarity

"Deliverance ... [is] expanded energy and freedom ... a heightened consciousness by which one may actively shape reality rather than remain passively dominated by it."

Northrop Frye, *The Great Code*, 50

The English Concertina

The invention of the concertina (1829, in London), the accordion (1829, in Vienna), and the Konzertina (1834, in Chemnitz, Germany) reflect a Romantic predilection for the sound of free-beating reeds. This chapter explores the history of the English concertina with fresh perspectives of its artistic relatedness to the concert accordion.

The concertina was patented on 19 June 1829 by British scientist Sir Charles Wheatstone (1802-1875), a polymath and physicist whose work included experiments with light, electricity, magnetism, and sound.[116] His research with reeds made of gold, silver, and various alloys suggest he may have had a particular acoustic in mind. Hexagonal in shape, the concertina has button keyboards on each side

10. A Palimpsestic Bibliography

A Way of Operating

This chapter – a bridge to the artistic equilibrium offered in the palimpsestic repertoire lists that follow – is based on the premise that a text is not so much about purity and fidelity as it is about artistic possibility, communication, and creativity (Benjamin 1923: 17). In "The Task of the Translator" literary critic Walter Benjamin describes storytelling as a time-honoured art that denies privilege, prioritization, or disparagement, and focuses instead on the aesthetic dimensions of a personal interpretive and creative act (see Benjamin 1923; Hutcheon 2006: 111). Adaptation, as Hutcheon suggests, has a paradoxically subversive quality that artists and audiences find desirable. An artist who brings an infusive quality to the illumination of a text allows an audience the comfort of ritual, recognition and the delight of surprise and novelty (Hutcheon 2006: 173). Within a postmodern context the accordion creates triggers for the listener that may not exist with any other instrumentation.