

Elise Duet Concertina

Lesson 1

I should say right at the start that this is going to be a series of lessons for absolute beginners on the Hayden duet concertina and I do not assume any prior knowledge of the instrument or music reading in general on the part of the student. Please remember that these tutorials are specific to the Elise duet concertina although can be applied to the Hayden system in general.

First a bit of background...

The Concertina

The concertina is a fascinating instrument which has been around for a very long time.

There are three main types:

The English, the Anglo and the duet.

There have been numerous duet concertina layouts (*or arrangements of notes*) over the years including the McCann, the Crane, the Jeffries and the Hayden which was invented by Englishman Brian Hayden in 1967.

The Duet Concertina In General

One common use-case for this type of concertina is to play tunes on the right-hand side of the instrument and either single bass notes or chords on the left. In this way, oom pah-type accompaniments are possible or solid blocks of sustained chords. Chords can also be arpeggiated where the player breaks up the chord into its separate notes.

Of course this is a massive generalisation as it's perfectly possible to play tunes that use notes on both sides of the instrument. I've also seen people who play a tune in octaves - in other words, the same tune on both sides of the concertina - an octave apart. Sometimes players will simply sustain chords as an accompaniment to singing much like a guitarist would strum.

With this type of concertina you hear the same note on the push and the pull of the bellows. This is the same as the English concertina but different to the Anglo which generally gives you two notes per button (push/pull).

I won't go into a technical description of how the duet concertina works, however, here is a brief explanation:

Inside the instrument are little strips of metal called reeds which vibrate when air is applied to them either on the push (closing) or pull (opening) of the bellows. The air will flow to a reed when a particular button is pressed. These reeds are tuned to the required notes and vary in size according to the pitch - larger reeds produce lower notes and smaller reeds, higher. Lower notes need more effort from the player than higher notes in terms of the pressure exerted on the bellows. The air button on the right hand side allows air to escape from the instrument when you push and air to enter the instrument when you pull. This button is no different to the others except it is not connected to a reed and therefore makes no sound. It just provides a temporary leak and is mainly used to open and close the bellows prior to or after playing.

Several buttons can be pressed at once to provide simultaneous notes which can give us chords - major, minor seventh etc. More of this in another lesson.

Please note: the buttons are not touch-sensitive so it makes no difference how hard or how softly you press them. I would advise against pressing them down too hard!!

Let's talk about the Elise

The Elise Duet Concertina, made by Concertina Connection Incorporated in Valleyford, Washington State in the U.S. - is an entry-level instrument for those people wanting to try out the Hayden system. These so-called "budget" instruments are over £400 at the time of recording this video so most beginners would probably be amazed to learn that a top of the range Hayden instrument will cost many thousands of pounds! Suffice to say, the concertina is not a poor person's instrument (as it perhaps was 100 years ago).

That being said, the Elise is still perfectly playable and great value for money. I use the Jackie which is the English Concertina variant of this instrument made by Concertina Connection in my everyday teaching of that instrument.

The Elise duet concertina has 34 buttons - 17 on each side plus an air button on the right hand side.

A full-range Hayden will have far more buttons. I've seen a layout with 67 - this will give you many more notes above and below the range of the Elise.

Nevertheless, this instrument works on the same principal which is both logical and musical. It is not fully chromatic as the larger duets are, so you are limited as to which keys you can play in.

If it were fully chromatic you would be able to play all the white notes and black notes on a piano keyboard. The following notes are missing: D sharp (E flat) and G sharp (A flat).

From this point on I will write sharp as "#" and flat as "b".

The F#, C# and Bb accidental notes as well as all the white notes of the piano provided, at least give you access to the keys of C major, A minor, G major, E minor, D major, B minor, F major and D minor.

Let's talk about the notes provided commonly known as the range

The two sides of the Elise provide identical notes an octave apart (12 notes). There is a certain amount of overlap so you will find some notes of the same pitch on both sides - e.g.

Right hand side/ Row 1 Button 1 = C (Middle C on the piano)

Left hand side/ Row 3 Button 2 = C (Middle C on the piano).

There are seven notes in all which have the same pitch on both sides of the instrument:

The Middle C as previously mentioned plus the following notes just above that note:
D E F F# G and A

The complete range of the instrument is from C on the left hand side up to A on the right hand side which gives us two octaves plus six more notes. The lowest C note on the left hand side is the C below Middle C on the piano. The lowest C note on the right hand side *is* Middle C and the highest note on the right hand side is the A which is above the C an octave above Middle C.

From a bird's-eye view perspective - on each side of the instrument, the lowest pitched note (C) is in the bottom left corner and the highest pitched is the third note on the row furthest away from the player. In the case of the left hand, this highest note is on Row 4 Button 3 (R4B3) and is a note of A - the A above Middle C.

In the case of the right hand, this highest note is also on Row 4 Button 3 (R4B3) and is also a note of A an octave above the highest note on the left hand side.

In general, the notes get higher as you progress along the rows (*upwards on the left-hand side and downwards on the right-hand side*) however this order is disturbed by the presence of sharp notes on the last buttons of rows 1-3 on both sides and a B flat note at the start of Row 3. Sharps and flats are the black notes on a piano keyboard.

So the F# note at the end of Row 1 is higher pitched than the F note which is on Row 2 Button 1.

Similarly, the F# note at the end of Row 3 is higher pitched than the F note which is on Row 4 Button 1.

The C# note which is at the end of Row 2 is higher pitched than both the Bb and C notes which you can find on Row 3 Buttons 1 and 2 respectively. Also notice that the B note which is on Row 2 Button 4 is higher pitched than the Bb note which is on Row 3 Button 1.

All this applies to both sides of the instrument.

It's not vital that you memorise this at the moment.

Starting to play

Sit on an upright chair with no arms and support one end of the concertina on your preferred leg - for me it's my right. Keep the bellows away from clothing that's going to rub and damage them. The other end can "float free".

Make sure the instrument is the right way round - if it is, the isolated air button will be on your right hand side and can be easily reached with the side of your right hand thumb. The straps will be at the back, nearest to you, the player. The small thumb screws will be visible on top. You use these to change the tension of the straps.

Place the fingers of both hands through the straps and the thumbs on top.

Adjust your straps as necessary. Make sure you can reach and curl your fingers over all the buttons, bending them at both joints. Don't go too far forward or too far back with your fingers. Don't attempt to play "flat-fingered". Fingernails must be kept short! The straps should not be too tight or too loose. Experiment until you get it right as this set-up is vital to being comfortable.

Before you start to play your first tune, open the bellows slightly by pressing the air button on the right hand side and placing pressure against the right-hand strap.

I tend to keep my instrument fairly horizontal although I've seen many players curling the instrument by means of the bellows. You will hear many different opinions about this.

Twinkle, twinkle little star

Everyone knows this tune so it's a great one to start with.

I am using standard musical notation to teach this instrument. Don't worry if you have never read music before as I will teach you how to alongside teaching you the instrument.

Remember: music is a series of sounds and silences played over time and is represented as notes on staves which we read left to right, top to bottom, like words on a page of writing.

Although some teachers will tell you otherwise, learn to play the **right hand** tune first - don't worry about the left hand bass accompaniment until you are confident with the tune. These are the notes on the top stave in each pair with their stems pointing upwards. This tune uses the first six notes of the scale of C major - C D E F G & A. Get comfortable with these notes first and know how to finger them. Notice that in this tune - button 1 is played by finger 1, button 2 is played by finger 2 and button 3 is played by finger 3 on both rows.

Each note has its name written underneath together with a simple code for its position - *this is peculiar to my music:

e.g.

C (name of note)

*R1B1 (position on the instrument)

This means you are playing a note of C on Row 1, Button 1.

The small number 1 by the side of the note indicates that you should use your index finger, right hand, to press down the button.

I have also included the words to help you find where you are in the tune.

Nomenclature: UK: "Bar" US: "Measure"

In this tune you count four beats in each bar or measure. *There are 12 bars in this tune. All bars are equal - that is to say they all last for the same amount of time regardless of how many notes are played in each.* This is indicated at the start of the first bar by the 4 - this is called the

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time signature.

Every tune also has a key signature. The key signature of this tune is C major. In this key you probably won't play any sharps or flats at this level and it's certainly true of Twinkle, twinkle little star.

The whole tune is made up of crotchets {one-beat notes} (notes with stems which have their oval-shaped heads filled in) and minims {two-beat notes} (notes which look the same as crotchets but have their heads unfilled). When we talk about one-beat and two-beat notes - this is what is meant by the **value** of a note i.e. how long it lasts!

In Bar 1, you have four crotchets so these are simply played on each beat of the bar and each note lasts for one beat. Press the appropriate button down and keep it held for the correct length of time but giving yourself time to lift off and play the next note. In this tune this will either be for one beat in the case of a crotchet or two beats in the case of a minim.

In reality you rarely give a note its full value as written. It's largely a matter of common sense.

In Bar 2, you have 2 crotchets on the first two beats and a minim on beat three which lasts for two beats - beats three and four. Therefore, a minim lasts twice as long as a crotchet.

Please notice that the entire tune is made up of alternating bars of four crotchets followed by two crotchets and a minim.

Count:

crotchet	crotchet	crotchet	crotchet	crotchet	crotchet	minim	
"1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4"
Twin-kle	twin-kle	lit	-tle	star			

Nomenclature: UK: "Stave" US: "Staff"

The **pitch** of the note (how high or low it sounds) is dictated by the position of the head of the note on the stave (staff?) (the five lines). Think of these lines as shelves for placing your notes on.

The higher the head of the note appears on the stave, the higher its pitch will be. The heads of the notes are either written **on the lines** of the stave or **in between the lines** in what we call the **spaces**.

The first note of the tune (Middle C) is a special case as it is written on a little extra mini-line underneath the stave called a ledger line. You can have several ledger lines above and below the staves to house notes that are too high or too low to fit on them.

We will only need two notes on ledger lines for our Elise instrument - the Middle C that I have already mentioned and the A which is on the ledger line directly above the upper stave. This is the note on Row 4 Button 3, right hand side and is the highest pitched note on this instrument.

Please note that the tune (*right hand notes*) is written on the upper stave which has a special sign at the beginning called the treble clef or G clef. The first curl of the sign hooks around the second line up fixing that note as G - hence the name. All the notes that we will play on the left side of the instrument (which will form our bass accompaniment) are drawn on the lower stave which has a bass clef at its beginning. The bass clef has two little dots either side of the 4th line up setting this note at F. For this reason, this clef is sometimes referred to as the F clef.

I will explain more about this when we start to add in our bass accompaniment with the left hand. The two staves are joined together with a large bracket on the left of the music. In this way, we can see how the notes of the two hands coincide and relate to each other from a point of view of timing. You won't see this until we put both hands together from Bar 13 onwards.

As you play the first two bars ("twinkle twinkle little star") - pull the bellows open gently and gradually by placing pressure against both straps.

When you start Bar 3 - start to close the bellows up by pushing against both sides of the concertina - going "the other way".

Make sure that the bellows never fully close or are extended to their maximum. If this happens no sound will be heard from the

instrument. If you find this happening try opening the bellows a little wider before you start playing your first "pull" section.

The movement of the bellows should be gentle but positive. No wrenching is necessary which will result in wrist strain!

Please notice how Bars 7 & 8 are a repeat of Bars 5 & 6 and that Bars 9-12 are a repeat of Bars 1-4. So there are only 6 unique bars in the tune.

Also notice how the rows of buttons are "staggered" with the F, G and A notes in Row 2 situated slightly above the C, D and E notes in Row 1. There is a reason for this and it is to do with the way we form our chord shapes but we'll deal with that another time.

Practice regularly but not for too long at a time. Try playing more when you're enjoying yourself and less when you're not! Don't make practice sessions a chore that you feel has to be done. Don't worry if you don't play everyday. Sometimes life gets in the way!

Play as slowly as you need to. Don't rush certain parts and play other parts slowly but rather, play the whole tune evenly at a pace you're comfortable with, however slow!

You can always speed up as you progress.

When you feel that you can play the tune fluently then you are ready to move on to adding the bass accompaniment which starts from Bar 13.

I'll show you how to play that and understand the bass clef (*which is different!!*) in the next lesson.