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# HINTS ON PLAYING ONE ROW MELODEON

from

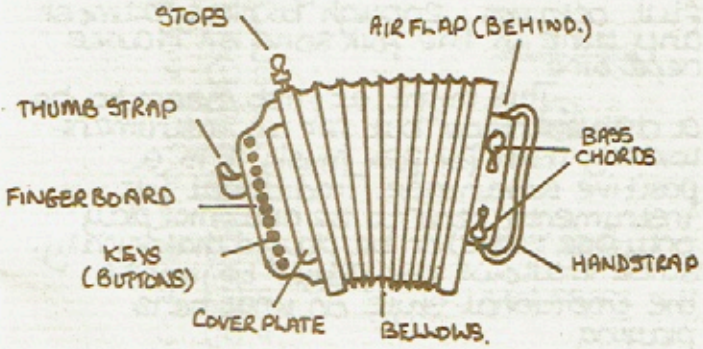
Tufty Swift

# THE ONE-ROW MELODEON. 1

There have been instruments similar to the one-row melodeon around for a hundred and fifty years and next to the mouthorgan they've been one of the most popular instruments here and abroad.

You can still buy one-rows made in East Germany, West Germany, Italy, America and even China.

The melodeon you've got or are thinking of getting is probably like the one below. These are sometimes called 'German Stop Accordions'.




TREBLE BASS.

Accordions have always been popular because with the right hand you can play a melody whilst the left hand plays a bass accompaniment. The one-Row was, and is, popular for another reason, they are cheap, and the fact that they have four banks of reeds on the right hand (one under each stop) makes for a very full sound.

The particular feature of the one-Row is that it can only play in one key with no accidentals outside that key. So a one-Row in C plays a major scale of C only. This means that in a span of nine buttons you have two full octaves, enough to play almost any tune in the folk song or dance repetoire.

This might, at first, seem to be a disadvantage but for an instrument widely used for folk music it is a positive advantage. Traditional folk instruments tend to be diatonic (play only one scale) or be played diatonically, since it allows the player to impress the traditional style on what he is playing.

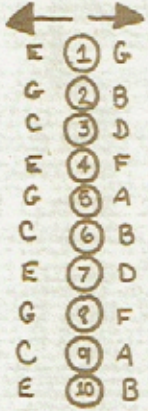
# FINGERING CHART FOR A ONE-ROW. KEY C.

Below is the fingering chart for a one-row in the key of C. as an example of the note pattern you will find on a melodeon of this type.

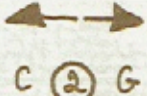
Many players prefer the one-row C. though for playing with fiddle players melodeons in the keys G, D and A are useful. The notes on these melodeons have the same relative positions to each other as on the chart below.

The arrows show the direction to move the bellows for each note.

← PUSH. PULL. →




RIGHT HAND.







LEFT HAND.

# BEGINNINGS.

To play comfortably you need to hold the melodeon firmly. Most traditional melodeon players hold the melodeon right hand using the fitted thumb strap. The thumb strap will probably be too long to get a firm grip on it so slip your thumb through and wrap the strap around so:-




The melodeon is firmest if you sit down and cross your legs when playing. Press the right hand end against your right leg. This means that when you pull the strap holds the melodeon steady and when you push your knee holds it.

Some players use a shoulder strap and at the end of this booklet there is a description of how to fit one.

Put your left hand through the left hand strap, it should pull across the back of your hand.

# PLAYING THE RIGHT HAND.

If you consider buttons 3 to 6 of your melodeon then you've got, under four fingers, a complete octave. For a start you could use one finger for each button.

| FINGERS | BUTTONS. |
|---|---|
| 1 | C (3) D |
| 2 | E (4) F |
| 3 | G (5) A |
| 4 | C (6) B |

Practice playing the octave up and down. Get used to the pattern of pushes and pulls.

| | |
|---|---|
| push (C) | pull (D) change button |
| push (E) | pull (F) change button |
| push (G) | pull (A) change button |
| pull (B | push (C) |

You'll notice that all the buttons, if pressed together, will give a major chord of C (or whatever key your melodeon is in.) on the push.

When you've got used to the pattern try to play these tunes:- Wurster Gallop, Dorset four hand Reel, Two lovely Blackeys.

When you're tried a few tunes you can start to develop a good technique by practicing lifting your fingers off the buttons between each note, even when the note happens on the same button.

Make sure that your fingers aren't doing any gripping whilst you're playing, this slows down your fingers and means you're not holding the melodeon correctly.

Looking at the top octave on the right hand, page 4, you'll notice that the note on the push is higher than the one on the pull, on the similar button on the bottom octave the note on the pull is higher than the note on the push.

EXAMPLE:- E (4) F BOTTOM OCTAVE

E (7) D TOP OCTAVE

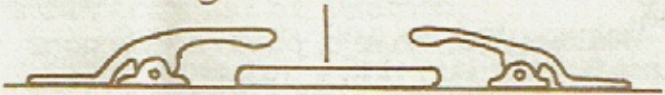
Don't worry, the pattern is still push, pull, push, pull, push, pull, pull, push. When you can play up and down both octaves try playing British grenadiers, Little Brown jug, The girl I left behind me.

## THE LEFT HAND

The two chord buttons, spoon bass, are probably best played with the first and third finger on the left hand. Work the air flap with the ball of the hand not the thumb as this puts the hand in the wrong position.

The springs break very easily on the bass chords, mending a broken spring is dealt with later but as preventive measure you can put some folded card under the levers to prevent them going all the way down.

LOOSELY FOLDED CARD.



## PLAYING THE LEFT HAND.

Learning to play the left hand often lags behind the right hand, tunes come easily on the right but the bass accompaniment is much slower.

Here are a few excercises to help get over this problem of the left hand following the finger movements on the right hand.

If we take the Um (1) low note, Pah (2) chord, then a good start is to forget the right hand and just practice :- Um pah, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, very regularly - count. Then change direction and repeat.
Now try :- In 1-2, out 1-2, in 1-2, out 1-2. And finally in 1 out 2, in 1 out 2, in 1 out 2, stop out 1 in 2, out 1 in 2.

Now pick the 4/4 tune you feel most confident on, E.g. Winster Gallop, practice playing the regular 12,12, whilst playing the tune.

Jigs, 6/8, are only slightly different, they skip, 1 and 2, 1 and 2, 1 and 2. Try The Runaway Train or any simple Jig.

Waltzes, 3/4, have a pattern everyone knows, 123, 123, 123, - linger a little on 1 'till the pattern feels right.

Try Two lovely blackeyes.

Drop Step tunes, often called Hornpipes, 2/4, have a bass accompaniment half the speed of 4/4 tunes, You'll recognise the heavy beat, try Kafoozalum.

For most tunes each note of the bass accompaniment is best played 'Clipped', this makes the bass much softer, It can over power the right hand if not used carefully.

## CONTROL OF AIRFLAP AND BELLOWS.

The main job of the airflap is to avoid the embarassment of wanting to go in or out for a note and being unable to do so. Caress the lever gently all the time and aim to never have the bellows nearer than 5 or 6 inches or further out than 12 inches. Use the airflap to go out on out notes to give you air to come in on in notes.

More important, the airflap controls the pressure inside the bellows and so the pressure on the reeds. Too much pressure and the low note reed in the right hand won't sound and the high note reeds will be strained.

Open the airflap slightly on fast passages and move the bellows quickly, this will give gentle pressure but enough power for the volume you need. Open the flap too far and you'll get a few quiet notes before you come to the limit of the bellows.

If you find that you can't make any sense of using the airflap in this way use it when you can and eventually you'll reach a stage when you can control the bellows automatically.

# FURTHER RIGHT HAND TECHNIQUE.

Most melodeon players don't consider decorating a tune, it seems enough to get to the end of it without any mistakes.
This is a pity as most traditional players decorate their tunes to some extent. Here are a few well tried decorations.

play the same note twice in the time it should be played once.

play the note and then play the note on the opposite direction of the bellows as a quick, quiet grace note in the time you'd take for one note.

use two fingers on one button to double the note or even treble it in the time of one - this gives a very different effect to playing the same button with one finger.

At the end of this booklet there's a modification to the melodeon to help with this.

Occasionally you can put in a two note chord which helps with the rhythm of a tune, always use it on the beat only.

# GENERAL PLAYING HINTS.

If you want to use the melodeon to accompany yourself or others singing, you should, above all else, learn to play quietly. If you cross your legs to play then the right thigh can be lifted and the melodeon tucked against it, this makes it quiet and softens the tone greatly.

You can then put in chords or octaves to fill out the accompaniment without drowning the song. Remember, if you try to play in octaves, on the push the octave is four buttons apart and on the pull five buttons apart.

To play in a country dance band will probably put you under pressure to get melodeons in D and G to make it convenient to play with others used to playing in those keys. Do so if you wish, but most instruments can accomodate C very well - particularly Concertina, Banjo, Dulcimer, Fiddle and all brass instruments. In the past all the other players must have fitted in with the melodeon whatever key it was in.

## USING THE STOPS.

The best tone of melodeon are in either C or D, those in G, F and A tend to be a bit muddy because of the low reeds on the right hand.

To help this you can adjust the stops (P.1). On a 4 stop melodeon you can have a bank of reeds under each stop. Two banks play the same note and one bank is an octave below and the other an octave above. You can brighten the sound of G, F and A melodeons by stopping off the low bank of reeds.

## TUNES IN TWO KEYS.

It is possible to play tunes in two keys on a one-row by avoiding the note you haven't got. This alters the pattern of push and pull and changes the feel of a tune wholly.
Tunes to try are:- Jenny Lynd, La Russe and Blue Bell Polka.
On a C melodeon these go G for the first part and C for the second. It's even possible to play Jenny Lynd C into F but using G to supplement C is most useful.

Another way to play tunes in two keys is to play both parts in the same key. La Russe sounds just as interesting with both parts played in C as it does G into C for the second part.

## CAJUN PLAYING.

American Cajun players use one-Row melodeons but they often cut out the bank of reeds which give the tremelo - the second bank playing the same note. On most melodeons this is the third stop from the back. This is known as dry tuning the melodeon.

These players often play tunes in G, F and even B♭ and D on a C one-Row. They either avoid the notes that aren't in the key or play them wrong! In a loud rock-band style setting this doesn't seem to matter. Try to listen to some recordings of Nathan Abshire. Cajun players generally play from a shoulder strap as they are usually standing up to play.

# TRADITIONAL MELODEON PLAYERS.

There is a great tradition of playing melodeon in many parts of England particularly Suffolk. Here the melodeon was used in pubs to accompany step dancers and for playing popular songs.

The traditional player who comes out of Suffolk most often, if you want to hear good solid style, is Oscar Woods. He plays the common Hohner 4 stop and has keys C and D usually.

His style is very relaxed though he is always in total control of the instrument. He often plays popular songs, though he never sings, and because of his style these are as much traditional tunes as the dance tunes he plays.

Oscar will play a tune very straight then decorate it more each time with double grace notes and so on. Any notes he hasn't got he decorates around so you think he has played them.

The best way to understand traditional melodeon playing is to listen and at the back of this booklet there is a short discography.

# RUNNING REPAIRS.

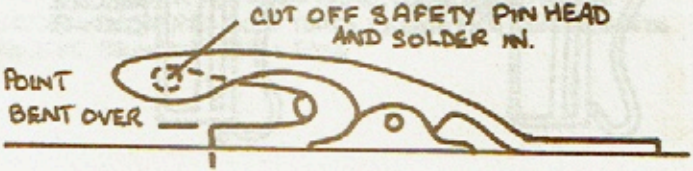
A badly out of tune or worn melodeon will need attention from an accordion tuner but for repairs 'on the road' you'll need a small tool kit.
Viz:- A pair of pliers, an electricians screw driver and a small roll of tape.

## REED OUT OF TUNE:-

Use the stops to isolate the reed that's out of tune. Remove the pins that hold the bellows on and take the end off. Use a small piece of tape to blank off the offending reed.
If it's a left hand reed a bit of trial and error will be needed.

## MENDING A LEFT HAND SPRING:-

The springs on the spoon bass break easily when you first play one row.
Don't take out the pivot, you'll destroy the 'float' and it won't cover the hole.
Proceed so:-



## MENDING A RIGHT HAND SPRING.

All the levers on the right hand pivot on the same rod. Take the end off, unscrew the cover plate and from inside unscrew the finger board. Loosen all the springs. You can then draw the rod out with pliers.
If the broken spring is in the middle use a spring from buttons 1 or 2 and in its place put a safety pin bent so:-



to give enough pressure.

## FITTING A SHOULDER STRAP.

If you want to play standing up a shoulder strap is essential.
Accordion strap fittings are too big for the top of the bre-rod so screw the fittings behind the melodeon; or buy two small padlock staples  and mount them top and bottom.



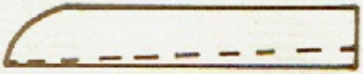
ACCORDION FITTINGS



PADLOCK STAPLES.

## MODIFYING THE COVER PLATE.

To make more room on the finger board take it off and remove all the fittings from the wood and modify so:-



plane off to dotted line and refit.

## DISCOGRAPHY.

you can hear melodeon or similar music on the following records.

ENGLISH COUNTRY MUSIC FROM EAST ANGLIA':- TOPIC 12TS229
BOSCASTLE BREAKDOWN:- TOPIC 12T 240
EARL OF SOHAM SLOG':- TOPIC 12TS 374
BOB CANN. WEST COUNTRY MELODEON':- TOPIC. 12TS 275
PLAIN CAPERS':- FREE REED. FRR 010
VARIOUS ALBUMS FROM TOPIC BY JOHN KIRKPATRICK & SUE HARRIS
HOW TO MAKE A BAKEWELL TART. TUFTY SWIFT. FREE REED. FRR 017
NO REELS. OLD SWAN BAND':- FREE REED.
OLD SWAN BRAND. OLD SWAN BAND':- FREE REED FRR 023
NATHAN ABSHIRE:- GOOD TIME'S KILLING ME - SONNET SNTF 776
PHILIPPE BRUNEAU:- PHILO 2003

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