# A Beginner's Set
# of Duet Concertina Arrangements
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*Available on the web at www.maccann-duet.com/cornell/*

# CONTENTS

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## of Duet Concertina Arrangements

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I've put together six arrangements for the relative beginner. Some knowledge of music and bit of ambition is assumed.

The arrangements should be challenging but accessible and interesting enough that when you are through you'll have a piece to play rather than just an exercise. The fingerings and comments assume a standard MacCann keyboard layout with a middle C on the right hand, but conceptually apply to all duets and can easily be adapted to other keyboard layouts.

All arrangements are all in the key of C, use the same notes in slightly different ways and progress from easy to more difficult in the order *On Top of Old Smokey I, On Top of Old Smokey II, Oh, Susanna, The Battle Hymn of the Republic, Sweet Sixteen* (chorus) and *Scotland the Brave.*

The duet concertina is intended to play harmony as well as melody. As duet players, we will usually have to figure out the harmonization for ourselves and that involves learning chord basics. A great deal of music we encounter is in the form of lead sheets, with just the melody and the chord names. When we adapt music for the duet from music for other instruments we need to recognize the underlying harmony in order to modify the music appropriately. When playing duet arrangements we want to recognize in the written music familiar chord patterns. Many pieces and almost all folk like tunes can be thought of as embellished chords, that is, the strong beats either land on a chord tone or resolve to a chord tone, so if you know the chords you are half way there.

Initially, we can learn basic chord positions, much like beginning guitar players learn the finger patterns for chords, but we also want to understand what we are playing so that we can build further on what we learn and so that the vocabulary of music becomes meaningful to us. So that phrases like "sharp the $5^{th}$", "play that as a dimished $7^{th}$", "add a $6^{th}$ to major and minor chords and a $9^{th}$ to dominant 7ths" make sense. A quick browse through lead sheets will show chords such as "A minor $7^{th}$," "E flat sharped $9^{th}$," "B flat $13^{th}$," "D/F#," "sus 4," etc. All these have their basis in an understanding of simple three note triads.

A basic knowledge of chords is essential. Fortunately, the basics are very, very simple.

Charts for basic chords can be found at  http://www.maccann-duet.com. In addition, at the end of this document there is a chart with the left and right hand buttons of the MacCann. You can print out copies of this and mark in patterns, scales, chords and inversions to help you with a particular piece. An example of how this might be done is shown in some "oom-pah-pah" patterns.

Start with an awareness of a C scale – the white notes on a piano.

C – D – E – F – G – A – B – C

Chords are made by stacking up thirds, that is, playing every other note. That's all there is to it.

To make a  C chord you start with C and play every other note:          C – E – G
To make an F chord you start with F                                                  F – A – C
To make a G chord you start with G                                                  G – B – D.

(You can keep stacking thirds to make more complex jazz and popular music chords, but that it getting well ahead of ourselves.)

If you count from C to G, starting with "1" on C you get  C/1 D/2 E/3 F/4 G/5
The interval from C to G is a 5$^{th}$, the interval from C to F is a 4$^{th}$, etc.

Only chords made from the C scale are considered to be in the key of C. All other chords that appear in a piece in the key of C are spoken of as being "borrowed."

The root of a C chord is C (surprise!).
When a C chord is played with C on the bottom (C – E – G) it is in the Root Position (surprise).

When the E is on the bottom, (E – G – C) it is still a C chord but in the 1$^{st}$ inversion.
The root of the chord is still C, the third is still E and the 5$^{th}$ is still G. This logical and harmonic relationship is constant no matter how the individual notes are distributed.

And that's really all we need to know to get started.

In the arrangements the measure numbers are above each measure.
Fingers are numbered with the index finger being 1 and the little finger being 4.
More complete documentation on the notation is found on http://www.maccann-duet.com, but this is all we need to know for these simple pieces.

Start with *On Top of Old Smokey I*.

The left hand is a simple waltz vamp with all the chords in root position (one exception). Go to a chart of the left hand for your instrument and mark off the patterns for the notes shown for C, F and G root position chords. Be able to visualize the finger position before you push the buttons.

Now play the left hand. Be aware that each downbeat is the root of the chord. Observe the fingering. Use all your fingers and try to have them resting over the buttons they are going to play. In this way your fingers are in position prior to playing and you start to get the sense of a chord as a single thing and of comfortable positions on the keyboard..

Go through this a few times. You should soon start to feel that you are going a little on autopilot with this simple vamp pattern – thus leaving more of your brain for the right hand.

The exception to root position is in measure 15. It is an F chord, just like measure 2, but the C has been moved down to the bottom making a 2$^{nd}$ inversion chord. It's still made from the same notes F – A – C. It's an "Amen" ending thrown in for a little variety.

The right hand is pretty straightforward with the exception of one clumsy transition. It occurs going from the G in measure 1 to the C at the beginning of measure 2 and wherever that same sequence shows up. Your playing will be smoother if you don't try to play successive notes with the same finger. You can't play smoothly and you can't prepare your finger positions properly if you do. Sometimes you simply have to, but when there is a choice, it is better not to, particularly in the right hand. In this case, a slightly awkward transition is preferable to using the same finger.

In these vamp patterns it is a good idea to short change the duration of the notes in the left hand. This gives a sharper rhythm and makes the left hand seem softer in volume.

Now take a look at On Top of Old Smokey II. This is a more interesting arrangement built with the same chords and the same buttons for basic harmonies with a couple of notes added.

**Measure 1**    the left hand plays a little arpeggio pattern to harmonize with the melody. The notes are, (obviously, I hope) just the notes of a C chord, $1^{st}$ inversion, played 1 at a time.

**Measure 2**    We still play an F chord, but rather than play it in root position, we play it in $1^{st}$ inversion (Root = F A C, $1^{st}$ inversion = A C F). Playing the A on the $1^{st}$ beat harmonizes with the melody. Note that the A is held for the full 3 beats.

**Measure 4**    is the same chord and inversion as in Version I, but played as an arpeggio.

**Measure 5**    just extends the arpeggio up to the next chord tone, the F and octave above, played with the same finger as the $1^{st}$ F.

The notes under the phrase marks (measures 1, 4, 5, 8, etc) should be played smoothly. The vamp, as mentioned, should be played with a sharp rhythm.

I think at this point it is obvious why we want to understand basic harmony. Version II is much more interesting than Version I. Version I just pounds away at root position chords and gets tedious very quickly. Version II has variety and interest just by using different inversions of the same chords and treating the chords differently (arpeggios instead of block chords).

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*Oh, Susanna* uses the same chords patterns but in 4/4, or march time, rather than 3/4 or waltz time. Go over the vamp pattern in measures 1 and 2 a few times. The notes and finger patterns should be familiar from *On Top of Old Smokey*.

**Measures 9–12**    add a little variety to the piece, although you certainly could just keep the Vamp going. Measure 11, in both the right and left hands is just a C chord broken up into an arpeggio. By starting on a different note in the left hand, we get a harmony.

*The Battle Hymn of the Republic* uses the same C chord finger patterns but with a "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp" rhythmic accompaniment. The third is left out of many of the chords and a couple new chords from the key of C are introduced (A minor and D minor, both made from the notes of the C scale) and one borrowed chord is introduced.

I picked this piece because everybody knows it, it's a great piece and the repeating "Tramp, Tramp" accompaniment, with its repetition, should be easy to learn and play. I forgot about one thing that may make this more advanced than is ideal and that is the repeating notes in the right hand. Try to play these with the fingerings shown. It will probably seem more difficult in the short run, but in the long run you get much cleaner articulation from using alternate fingers. In keyboard instruments such as the piano, with well-developed techniques for playing, one always alternates fingers. In the concertina world, with most people being self taught, there isn't a well-developed pedagogy. Do whatever works best for you at this point in your playing but be aware of long term issues.

As noted, the duration of the left hand notes should be reduced. This makes the left hand sound softer, lets the 16th notes in the right hand sound through and generally gives a snappier rhythm.

*Sweet Sixteen*

At first glance this may look different, the chords aren't as obvious as with the vamp patterns, but it is really things we have seen before. Measure 1 has the same C arpeggio pattern as *Smokey II,* the left hand in measure 3 is the root position G chord from *Smokey I*. When you see it your fingers should go to a root G position so that by the first beat all your fingers are in place for all the notes in the measure. The A and G diminished chords are new, but most of this should, by now, be familiar.

What I tried to do is come up with group of easy pieces that build on the same patterns. *On Top of Old Smokey I* introduced basic root position chords, then we expanded that and picked our notes a little bit more carefully to give interest and harmony – but they were just the same notes.

I say "easy" but I recognize that working things out for the first time will be tedious. "Tedious and unfamiliar" shouldn't be confused with "difficult." Do use charts of the keyboard to get a sense of positions for the chords while at the same time learning the buttons' names.

Once you've got them, the vamp patterns will work for about a zillion folk tunes. Try working out something like *Way Down Upon the Swanee River* with the vamp patterns from *Oh Susanna.*

Take things a step at a time.

# Comments to Scotland the Brave
## *C major version*

This arrangement may seem a bit more difficult . It is, however, in C, as were the pieces above and uses the same buttons.

In C, on the MacCann, the C-G-C progression in the right hand is particularly clumsy and this music shows a number of ways of dealing with it. (Probably, it would be a bit better in D.)

In general, the technical approach here is much more rigorous than would usually be pursued. I believe, however, that attention to these details will make a great contribution to musical playing as well as understanding the nature of the duet concertina.

Fingering is important. You cannot play legato, smoothly or quickly if you use the same finger for two successive buttons. Sometimes there is no alternative, sometimes the cure is worse than the disease, but often a little thought given to fingering will make a great contribution to musical quality and ease of playing.

## Measure 1
Right Hand     Finger 1 is used for the repeated C. This is the only place where the same finger is used for two successive notes. In this case, since a small break is needed between the notes it does no harm. Note however that, other things being equal (which they frequently aren't) you will always get cleaner articulation as well as more speed by using different fingers for successive notes.

Left Hand     The accompaniment is simply an open chord (no third) drone. The grace note adds interest.

## Measure 2
Right Hand     The C on the first beat is played with finger 2, not finger 1. Finger 1 played the preceding G. The C on the second beat is played with a different finger, finger 1.

Left Hand     The accompaniment moves up to and open $2^{nd}$ inversion, in other words, up one button. The fingering is exactly the same as in measure 1. Repeating patterns are easy as you can sort of go on autopilot.

## Measure 4
Right Hand     The repeated G is played with alternate fingers. We want to end with finger 2, as finger 1 is the best choice for the C that is the first note of the next measure.

Left Hand     In the C major run starting on the G on the third beat, note that you can rest all your fingers on all the buttons at the same time. Use the second beat rest to move your fingers so that each finger is resting on the button it will play. The goal is to develop muscle memory (really somewhere in the brain) that treats these patterns as a group, not as a series of dots. Similarly, as you play the last note, the D with finger 2, simultaneously move fingers 1, 3, and 4 into position for the grace not and first beat of the next measure.

**Measures 5 – 8**   A repeat of measures 1- 4 with a cadence back to the tonic.

**Measure 8**

Right Hand      Depending on the range of your instrument, the B may need to be played with
                the left hand.

**Measure 9**

The next two measures take advantage of the range overlap between the two hands to make for
                smoother playing. It will be a little confusing at first.

Right Hand      Alternate fingers are used on the D for clean articulation. Although at slower
                speeds a single finger can be used it becomes a spasmodic twitch rather than
                clean articulation as the tempo picks up. Note that the last three notes are just a
                G major chord in root position. The right hand does not play the $4^{th}$ beat. The
                G-C interval is clumsy; a C is coming up on the next beat, so the left hand plays
                the G. The top note is written in the top staff to show that is it logically part of
                the melody.

Left Hand       The left hand is playing a G major arpeggio. To avoid clutter and confusing
                ledger lines, the left-hand notes are moved to the top staff. A "lh" (left hand)
                and different stem directions indicate the note are to be played by the left hand.
                On the $4^{th}$ beat, the left hand plays the melody note along with the harmony.
                The harmony note is written in the lower staff.

**Measure 10**

Right Hand      Finger 1 plays both the G and the C. As in Measure 9, the right hand does not
                play the melody on the $4^{th}$ beat. It is given to the left hand so that the right has
                time to prepare for the C on the $1^{st}$ beat of the next measure.

Left Hand       The accented beats move to the weak $2^{nd}$ and $4^{th}$ beats for variety. Purists will
                probably complain. The notes played on the $2^{nd}$ and $4^{th}$ beats are exactly the
                same, something that is obscured by notating them in different staffs. The G on
                the $4^{th}$ beat is logically part of the melody and so is placed with the melody on
                the top staff.  Note the shortened note values to let the right hand melody come
                through.

**Measure 11**

Left Hand      The A and E are played with a single finger. Fingers 4 and 3, which might otherwise have been used played the previous notes. If the full value of the previous notes is observed, there is no time to move the fingers. Note the difference with measures 1 and 2, when there is a full beat rest in which to reposition the same fingers.

**Measure 12**

Right hand      Note the change of finger on the G. You first play the note with finger 1, then slide finger 1 off and finger 2 on while keeping the button depressed. The point, of course, is to free up finger 1 for the next note. This is a very important technique and is, of course, a required and standard technique for legato playing on all keyboard instruments, particular those such as harpsichord, organ and accordion, which do not have a means of sustaining a note once the key is released. It may be tricky at first, but rapidly becomes intuitive. In this particular case, the fingering could be changed to 2-1-4-3-2 to achieve the same result, but was done as it was to introduce the technique.

**Measure 13 - 16**

These repeat the main melody, but are arranged differently.

**Measure 14**

The melody alternates between hands. The grace note on the first beat can be left out or played by the right hand.

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Note that all these arrangement are somewhat spare, that is, not a lot of notes in the harmonies. They will sound terribly empty on a piano, but conversely, a piano arrangement sounds thick and muddy on the duet concertina. My own feeling is that a more spare texture better suits the instrument. It allows the melody to come through and avoids sounding like a barrel organ. Some people disagree. (Surprise).

To reduce the overpowering effect of bass notes, in addition to short changing the duration of the notes in the left hand, I also take the left hand harmony up higher than I would on the piano or other instrument. When the notes are closer together there is less tendency for the low notes to overpower the higher ones (since, relatively speaking, they aren't that low). You can see and hear this most clearly in *Sweet Sixteen.* There is a caveat to this in that with thirds, the lower note tends to predominate and the higher, melody note seems to stand out better when the closest harmony note is a $6^{th}$, $5^{th}$ or $4^{th}$.

As you get more comfortable, experiment to see what you like.

Most of my arrangements are going to be a little advanced (some I can't play). Two of the easier ones are *Waltzing Matilda, Barbara Allen.*

A written explanation is, of course, a less than ideal way to present and discuss musical ideas. I hope that, nonetheless, you have found some of this helpful.

David Cornell

# On Top of Old Smokey
## I

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# On Top of Old Smokey
## II

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# Oh, Susanna

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Left hand vamp, as in measures 1, 2, 5 - 7, etc.
always short, quasi stacatto

# The Battle Hymn of the Republic

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Left hand short. Play the quarters as though they were
dotted 8th notes so that the 16th notes in the right hand are clearly heard

# Sweet Sixteen

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*finger 1 plays both buttons*

In practice, I would probably play these notes with the left hand. It makes for smoother fingering in the right hand.

While holding the E I change the finger from 3 to 4. This frees up finger three to play the A on the 3rd beat.

In the final measure I would hold the C button down and get the final note by changing the bellows direction instead of restriking the button. ↔

# Scotland the Brave

*Off the top of my head as a beginners piece*

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# Left Hand Bass patterns for 56 key concertina

## OOM - Pah, Pah in G

OOM-  PAH, PAH  OOM-  PAH, PAH
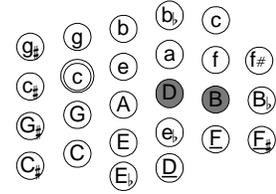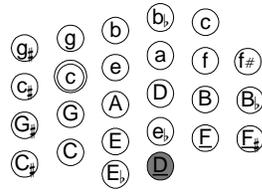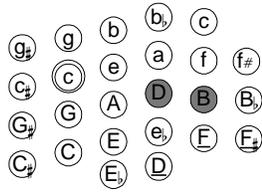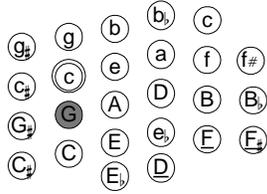
## OOM - Pah, Pah in C

OOM-  PAH, PAH  OOM-  PAH, PAH
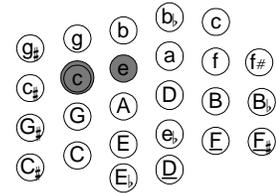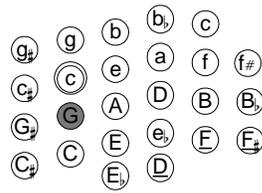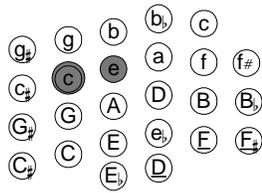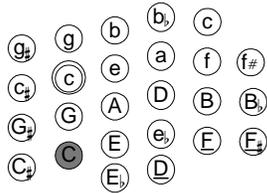
## OOM - Pah, Pah in D

Oom-pah,pah in D with D as the "oom" is clumsy. When the melody is above F# in the right hand, the following works well. Try also runs and apreggios, i.e, D-F#-A, D-A-F#, F#-A-D, etc.

OOM-  PAH, PAH  OOM-  PAH, PAH
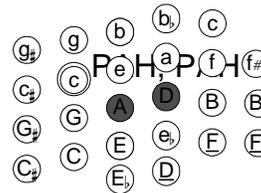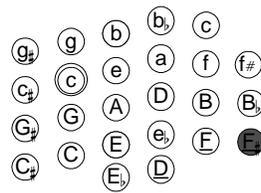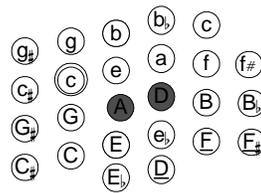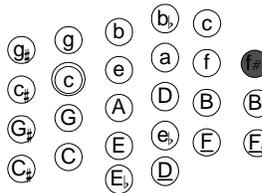
## OOM - Pah, Pah in F

OOM-  PAH, PAH  OOM-  PAH, PAH
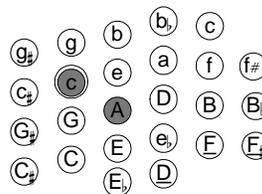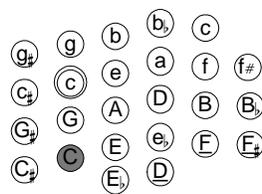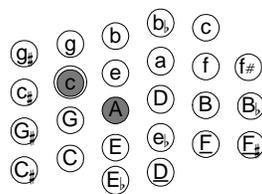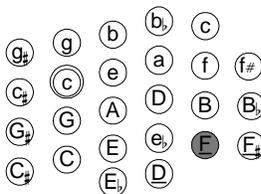
# MacCann Duet
## 67 key

Left Hand · Right Hand