

PLAYING CHORDS : Part I

In response to previous articles in Concertina Magazine on chords, I thought I would like to explain the system that I use when teaching players about chords, their structure, and placement. Chords are what I am most requested to explain at folk music workshops or gatherings as I tend to use chords a lot in my own playing. Chords are of course very easy to play on my own system. (Ed: Brian is the inventor of the new system of fingering discussed in Issue No.8). In discussing chords there are three main points: 1) The relationship of chords and harmonies to each other, 2) the exact nature of each element in a chord and 3) what to leave out.

I use sets of chord diagrams to explain things, and examples for the English concertina and the McCann Duet concertina are included in this first article: other systems will be covered in future issues.

First you will notice that these do not show a series of black dots on a standard keyboard. Instead, each button (or key) is marked with a letter. The letters mean as follows:

M is the Main and Most important note of the chord and, for the Major chord it is the root note.

Each M has a Reflection or R note. These are the two notes to learn first for each chord.

The diagrams show the M and R notes for three different useful chords F, C and G. A beginner can practice playing these two notes alternately whilst another is playing a tune. (In England the most popular keys used by folk musicians are G, D and A, mainly caused by the hoards of G/D melodeon players who are trying to eliminate all other keys! I hope the same is not so in Australia.) Coming back to the chord chart, select one of the chords that you know in the M, R form and add a J note:

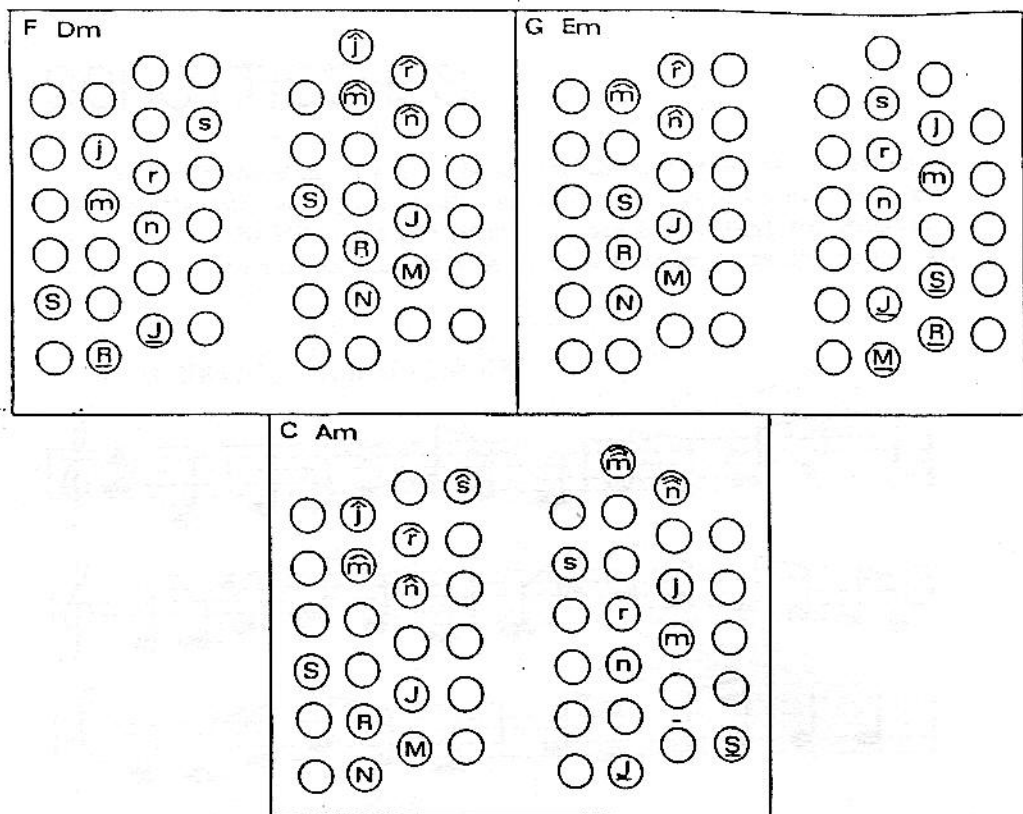
The J note is a nice Jolly note to add, and together makes the MaJoR chord!

Now coming back to the M and R again:

Find a Nice New note named N and add this to the M and R notes to give a slightly Nervous chord, the MiNoR chord.

See how closely these two chords are related; holding down the M, R

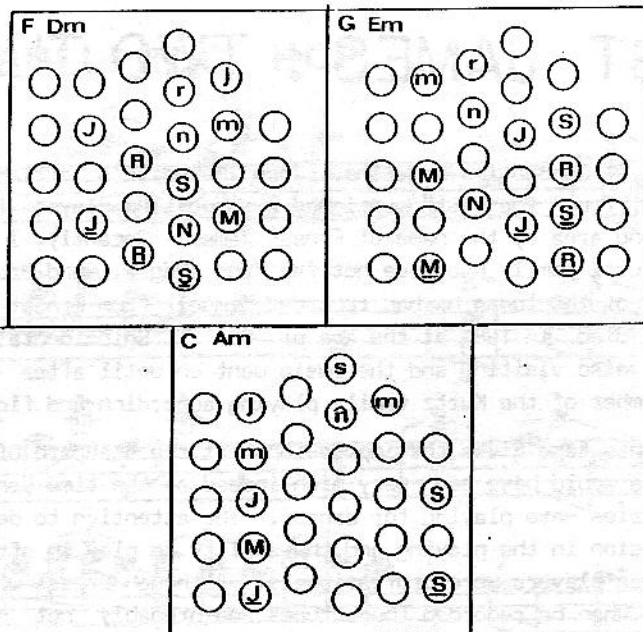
This article was written by Brian Hayden and is the first of a series on Playing Chords on concertina.



notes play the J and N notes alternately with them. Note that the N note is the root of the MiNoR chord. In the accompanying illustrations each box is marked with the symbol for the MaJoR or MiNoR chord which it describes. For example C, Am, are shown; these symbols stand for C major and A minor and are used on a good percentage of written music these days. Notice the similarity between these chords, both using many common notes. Because of this close relationship between the chords they are said to be related, and so Am is often called the relative minor of C major and vice-versa. This relationship is very important as the relative minor chord is often substituted for the major when playing in the major, and vice versa. This can add a lot of strength and interest to what is otherwise a mundane or pedestrian accompaniment.

The diagrams are also marked with some S's; these together with the full major notes M, J, R form the dominant Seventh chords.

This chord is the Sergeant MaJoR who commands everything back into line before the final Tonic chord. (The Tonic chord is the major or minor chord on which the music is based. For example, in a piece of music based on the key of C major the Tonic chord would be C major.)



The chord pattern boxes are arranged on the page in a way not unlike the major chord on the English concertina, i.e. as a triad. In this issue, only three linked boxes are shown. The manner in which other boxes add on to these will be illustrated in a future article. To find which chords to use in any key, first find the key note of the piece of music. (The key signature is a good indication, though it does not differentiate between major and minor.) If the key note is C, find the box marked C. When playing, you will use some chords on this box plus chords from the box diagonally to the left (F) and the box to the right (G); the relative minor chords are also shown for each box. When playing in a major key you use only the major and minor chords from the centre keynote box and the box on the left, but all the chords in the box to the right (favouring the seventh chords rather than the relative minor). In certain circumstances you may also borrow chords from other boxes.

Space prohibits us printing all of the different keyboard diagrams marked with the letters of Brians system. Next issue will allow us to print the Anglo and perhaps the Triumph Duet system.

This is the first part of an article dealing with chord playing on the concertina by Brian Hayden. Brians article will continue next issue, going further into the correct chords and when to use them.

PLAYING CHORDS : Part II

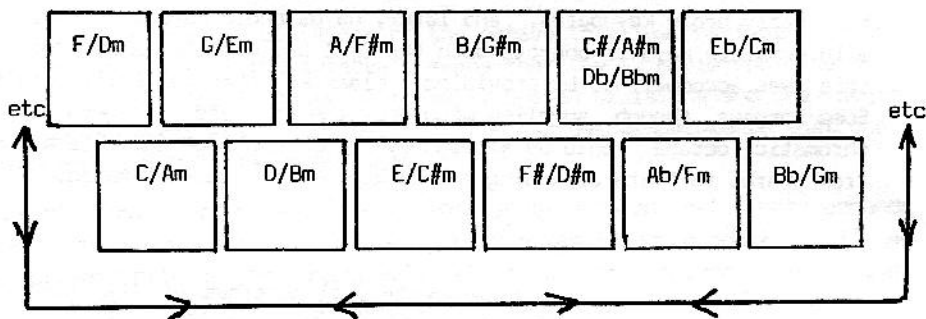
In the first article in this series I introduced the basic concepts of my chord diagrams and the different categories of notes that each show. Rather than showing a series of black dots on a standard keyboard, instead, each button is marked with a letter. When learning from this system it is important therefore that the meanings of the letters are understood; therefore before continuing we will review them. The letters mean as follows:

M is the Main and Most important note of the chord and, for the Major chord it is the root note. Each M has a Reflection or R note. These are the two notes to learn first for each chord. The J note is a nice Jolly note to add, and together makes the MaJoR chord!

Alternatively, coming back to the M and R notes again, a Nice New note named N can be added to the M and R notes to give a slightly Nervous chord, the MiNoR chord.

Finally in the last article I noted that the diagrams are also marked with some S's. These S's together with the full major notes M, J, R form the dominant Seventh chords.

In the last article, three individual diagrams (for the keys of F, C and G) were given for the English and the Maccann Duet systems. These three diagrams are only individual members of a full series whose relationships are shown in the scheme below. The figure is really continuous, and the left hand side joins onto the right hand side. For each box there is a complete keyboard patterns which must be constructed. Hopefully we can arrange to publish the entire patterns for various keyboard systems at some point.



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If we now return to the M, R, S and J notes, you may find that four notes are quite a lot to play at once; very often only three are played. The most usual notes used are M, R, S; here it is the MRS calling us home and back to order. These chords with notes missing are called partials, of which the M-R-S is the most usual. The M-J-S is also a useful combination on the Concertina, being easy to reach on my own system and fairly easy to finger on either the English, Anglo or McCann Duet. The third partial is R-J-S, a chord in its own right (the diminished chord) but it can be used as an alternative to the dominant seventh to give a slightly different feeling. The only partial we haven't got as something else is N-M-J.

Also, the diagrams show the Minor Seventh chords which some people call the sixth chord, M-R-N-J. Thus overall, these combinations of notes as chords include most of what is needed to start with. I have not included the augmented fifth chords but there are only four of these that are different on the whole chromatic scale so they only need a total of four diagrams. Also, I have not included the diminished seventh where only three diagrams are needed for the whole instrument, nor diminished fifths which I must admit to have never used. All the other more complex chords simply consist of additions of simpler chords to make a combined complex chord, sometimes entailing the use of both hands to hold down the required number of buttons.

Needless to say, when in minor keys different rules apply! This is particularly the case if the key is a melodic or a harmonic minor. These can generally be recognised because the written music will have a scattering of accidentals in it. In this case, use the diagrams as before; for example, in A minor use the diagram marked with Am along with the one diagonally to the left, Dm, and the one diagonally to the right, Em, using the relative majors (F/C/G) but rather select the seventh in the diagram the next but one to the right on the same row (the E diagram, hence E7) rather than Em or Gm. It is quite alright to use G and some traditional tunes, especially hexatonic relative minors, might be suitably harmonised (if in A minor) using only the chords of Am and G. Also use the Em sometimes, but not the G7 unless the tune goes for a few bars into its relative major, C, and this G7 is then followed by the chord of C.

Incidentally, I think that any sort of minor tends to imply all the various possibilities, Relative, Harmonic and Melodic, and I tend to borrow chords contained in all these including the augmented fifths and diminished sevenths which sound right to me, in the appropriate context, though this may not be accepted in music theory.

The other piece of information on the diagrams gives the register of the notes. That is to say, a note marked M is a low note, m is the same note an octave higher, \hat{m} is two octaves higher than M, and \underline{M} is a very low M an octave below the M. However the octaves overlap; this is intentional so as to enable a player to see which inversion he is playing.

If you play for instance the notes M-J-R or m-j-r, etc, this is always the chord in its root position and this applies also to minor chords, for example M-N-R or m-n-r, to dominant sevenths, for example M-J-R-S or m-j-r-s, to minor sevenths, for example M-N-R-J or m-n-r-j, or to diminished chords, for example R-J-S or r-j-s.

If you move the root note up into a higher octave, that is the M notes in the Majors and Dom7 become m notes, and the N notes in the Minors and Min7 become n notes, then you get the first inversion of the chord; for example m-J-R or M-n-R are the first inversions. If you put the root and the counter note into the higher octave then you get the second inversion; for example, the chords m-J-r or m-n-R are the second inversions. Alternatively, if you only move up the counter note into the higher octave you begin to get open chords, as for example M-J-r and m-N-R.

The system therefore allows you to know which chord and which inversion you are playing. Open chords sound particularly good on the Concertina I think. Try some for yourself when you are practising and getting familiar with this system.

The ready availability of the inversions to chords makes a whole lot of difference to the way music on the Concertina sounds compared with the accordion or melodeon. In these instruments the chords are any splurge of notes that may be thrown at you by the whim of the manufacturer. It is very easy to produce this effect on the Concertina if you use unnamed black dots on concertina keyboard diagrams!

I hope that this doesn't all seem too complicated! All that remains now is to discuss what chords go with what in a melody. However, I will deal with this very briefly in the final article; this will allow you time to practice all the chords and their possibilities in the mean time.

[The final article in this series will be in the next issue.]

PLAYING CHORDS : Part III

In this last article on chords I will explain how to match the chords discussed in the first two articles to one another and to the melody line of a piece of music.

There are two simple ways of doing this. The first is to use the chord symbols of the published version. Practically all Folk, Pop, Rock, Popular, even complete Musical Shows and of course Electronic Organ music and other music of all kinds has the chord symbols written in. These chords can be used as a jumping off point for an accompaniment, modifying or altering them following the principles outlined in the previous articles, playing them higher or lower to follow or run counter to a melody.

The second method of using the chords is to go back to the simple M and R diagrams. Select the M and R for the key note; hold this down and start playing the melody. If this doesn't sound right try the dominant M and R, and if it still seems wrong try the subdominant M and R. When you have sorted out the skeleton of the harmony, these can then be turned into majors, minors or sevenths according to your ability, or opened out, reinverted or pared down to less notes until you have a good accompaniment.

Finally, it is important to decide what to leave out; it is very easy to overdo chords. 'Krashing Kimber Kords' are fine for a group of Morris Men out of doors, but something much lighter might be better when playing tunes for listening to, or perhaps when playing for your own entertainment. I find that the English Cotswold Morris Tunes, many of which are beautiful melodies, have all sorts of interesting harmonic possibilities, which is surprising when you consider that they were originally intended to be accompanied by tabor and morris bells!

[ED: I have included a well known, although not necessarily beautiful, Morris tune, the Adderbury version of the Black Joke, for people to use for developing a chordal accompaniment. In future issues I hope that more Morris tunes, specifically those collected from Concertina players will be included in Concertina Magazine. These should be of particular interest to Anglo players, but are equally suitable for playing on the English, and I hope will include some of those tunes with the beautiful melodies referred to above.]

Good contrasts in accompaniment can often be obtained by occasionally playing a phrase or a few bars without any harmonisation at all, or by

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F MAJ., D MIN.

B R R F
 J J O O
 N O O R

PUSH

alt

M S O O
 O N M R
 R O R J O

PULL

G MAJ., E MIN.

N O O O O
 M O N M
 B J M R J

PUSH

S O O M
 M R J S
 O O O O N

PULL

C MAJ., A MIN.

R N O N
 J M R J
 O O J O O

PUSH

S O J S
 J O O N
 N O N R O

PULL

THE BLACK JOKE.

[Adderbury version]



playing in octaves or playing alternate notes in octaves and running the lower note on, or even using a drone note. One useful effect that I use, although it should not be overdone, is to play in a manner similar to the Uilleann pipes, using a single low drone note and a scattering of one and two note 'chords' to imitate the sound which the pipers make with the regulators. Oscillating thirds or fifths are other useful accompaniments, again based on the full chords as in the diagrams. Finally arpeggios can be used to great effect again based on the chord diagrams.

[ED: The chord diagrams are to be found in the previous two issues, plus in this issue where one for the Anglo Concertina is included. This Anglo diagram relates specifically to a 30 Key instrument tuned in C/G. Instruments pitched in other keys will produce different chords but the fingering pattern shown is equally applicable.]

Generally I find that most English and MacCann Duet players are helped by these chord charts and appreciate their usefulness. Crane (Triumph) Duet players usually seem to know all about their chords, following some of the simple patterns of its keyboard, but find the information on relative minors and inversions useful. Anglo players often prefer to play the melody high up on the right side of their instrument and ad lib on the left hand bass notes. My system may therefore be of particular interest to many Anglo players. An arrangement for the Anglo based on my chord system will work perfectly well and an Anglo keyboard system diagram appears with this article showing the appropriate M, J, R, and S notation.