

Generic Anglo Concertina Tablature - Instructional Notes

I have produced this method of showing the notes on the anglo concertina to address two issues.

Firstly, as I teach tunes for anglo concertinas in at least two configurations (C G and G D) I will now be able to record one video tutorial which I will be able to use for both these and any other similarly tuned instruments e.g. Bb F.

Furthermore if you own a CG *and* a GD instrument you will be able to play the tune on both instruments without the need for different written instructions.

Secondly, I know that there are still very many musicians out there who either dislike reading musical notation or who simply do not understand it. Using a tablature ("tab" for short) such as mine, avoids having to worry about this and I still think will be sufficient for a student to learn a tune when coupled with the good old-fashioned "listen, watch and learn" approach. Each tablature is accompanied by a full-length video tutorial and performance of the piece. It is very important the student uses these videos alongside the tablature.

Purists may frown upon the use of tablature but if it gets more people playing the instrument that's got to be a good thing. As long as you reach the destination it really doesn't matter how you get there!

I will always tell you which key you will be playing in depending upon what concertina you have, however, no actual note names will be mentioned in my tutorials. Where there are possible differences in note positions due to the layout of an instrument i.e. Jeffries or Wheatstone, I will mention that in each tutorial and provide an alternative tab. The default will always be for a Jeffries layout as that is what I have! Problems with different layouts only usually occur when you are playing notes on the Accidental Row, right hand side and very occasionally elsewhere on the instrument.

Please understand that this tablature is designed for a standard 30 or 20 button anglo concertina. Currently, it doesn't cater for instruments with more buttons but of course it can be used by owners of this type of concertina.

Let's get our bearings.

As you hold the instrument, the “vertical” row nearest to you, the player, I am calling Row One. This is the G row on a CG anglo concertina and the D row on a GD instrument. Rows are very often slightly curved. The next row further away from you I am calling Row Two (the middle row if you have three!). This is the C row on a CG box and the G row on a GD instrument. The row farthest away from you is the Accidental Row which, of course, is its proper name. If you only have a 20 button instrument with two rows you will not have this row. This Accidental Row is so called because it contains, amongst other notes, a lot of notes that you wouldn't normally find in the keys of the two main rows. These notes are called “accidentals”.

At the top of each page you will see the buttons numbered 1-5 for the left hand side of the instrument and 6-10 for the right. I number the buttons on all the rows in this way. There are other methods for numbering the buttons but this is the one I have devised and it seems to make more sense to me than others. If you open and slightly bend the bellows into a shallow “U” so that the ends with the buttons are facing up to you - (*don't force this too much!!*) - that's the correct orientation.

On the far left of the page you will see the bar numbers and the counting to assist you with timing. These are both read vertically. The vertical “depth” of each bar depends on how many notes there are in the bar but remember, no matter how many notes occur in a bar it doesn't affect the length of it. Look for the numbers “1 2 3 4” to see where the main beats fall.

Now look at the numbers in the main part of the page directly underneath the words “LEFT” and “RIGHT”.

The contents of each cell give you four pieces of information:

- 1) which button you should play
- 2) which finger you should use (this is the number you see in the cell)
- 3) which row the note is found on
- 4) whether the bellows should be pulled or pushed

The actual button you play is determined by tracing upwards to the top of the page and seeing what button column you are in.

If you own a Mac, let me know as I can give you the Numbers version of the tablature which will have the header rows and columns frozen to help you when scrolling side to side or up and down. Numbers is a Mac-only software which is very similar to Excel.

*(Remember, the number in the cell is the finger used **not** the button number! As there are five buttons in each row on either side of the instrument you often have to “re-set” your fingering to accommodate the sequence of buttons being used as you only have four fingers on each hand.)*

The number in the cell represents the finger you use :

- 1 = index finger,
- 2 = middle finger,
- 3 = the ring finger and
- 4 = the little finger or pinkie

Notes on Row One and Row Two of an anglo concertina (i.e. the G and C rows of a CG instrument or the D and G rows of a GD instrument), will appear as single numbers in a cell.

In any tune either Row One or Row Two will always be used far more than the other. I call this the “main row” and you will see this information at the top of the first page. Cells containing notes found on the row *least* used in a tune will have a thick border around them.

Notes found on the Accidental Row (if you have one!!) are shown as numbers plus a lower case “a” (for accidental).

If a number has a minus sign to the left of it this indicates that you should be pulling the bellows out as you play this note - known as playing “on the pull”. If there is no minus sign present, the note is played while pushing the bellows in towards the closed position - known as playing “on the push”.

If numbers appear in brackets this means that I want you to give the note or notes you’ve just played an extra pull (or push) without repressing the buttons. This might be for a small “eruption” for emphasis.

So, how do you read the tablature and play the notes?

Start at the top of Page 1 and read downwards looking left and right. As numbers occur in cells check to see what button, finger, row and bellows direction are indicated. Press the appropriate button or buttons and operate the bellows to make the note (s) sound, keeping an eye on the counting on the left hand side.

When I want you to sustain a note I vertically merge the cells. Check the counting on the left side of the page to see how long the note is sustained for. Constantly listen to or watch my performance to check that you have the timing right. Thick black horizontal lines indicate the end of one bar (measure) of music and the start of another.

Bars will either be counted in twos, threes, fours or sixes. Refer to my video tutorial to get the “feel” of the music.

If two or more numbers occur on the same row of the grid this means these notes should be played simultaneously. This could mean pressing buttons on the two sides of the instrument at the same time or perhaps just on one side. You may be playing notes on all three rows of the concertina at the same time in which case you may see more than one number in a cell if you are using buttons in the same column e.g. button 5, left hand side, Row 1 and Row 2.

Remember - you read downwards playing everything that occurs on both sides of the instrument. Notes that occur on the left hand side of the instrument that are part of the tune are appropriately labelled. Always assume that notes played on the right hand side of the concertina are part of the melody unless I tell you otherwise. When you approach the end of the piece on the last page keep an eye out for any special endings or instructions to repeat either part or all of the tune.

That's it!

Tablature can never give you the detail that musical notation does but if you have a pretty good ear for music it's not a bad substitute.

Les Titford

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