

Getting Strapped In!

Look at the video : “How To Play The Chromatic Button Accordion – Lesson One”

Ok, so before you start playing you need to attach the instrument to yourself and get comfortable. If you haven't already done so, make sure you fix the straps to the brackets which you will find at the top and bottom at the back of the instrument.

Getting the straps adjusted correctly is key to playing properly so invest plenty of time in this. If you're uncomfortable you certainly won't be spending much time playing! You may find, like me, that you have to have your right shoulder strap slightly shorter than your left. There is no hard and fast rule for this as we are all different shapes and sizes!

Sit yourself down on a comfortable, upright, armless chair so that your feet are on the floor. Place the instrument on your lap with the back facing you and the right hand buttons (the big ones!) to your right. Ensure that the straps are not twisted and simply put your left arm through the left shoulder strap and your right arm through the right shoulder strap, pull the straps over your shoulders and then lift the instrument up slightly so that you are taking the weight. If you find that the weight is too much for you, try placing your left leg over your right. Alternatively, you could use a guitarist's footstool to raise the height of your leg. This will give you a nice support for the instrument provided you haven't set the straps too short. If you find that the instrument is tucked right under your chin then you definitely need to lengthen the straps!!

Occasionally the straps that come with instruments may not have enough adjustment for your particular needs. If this is the case, I would strongly recommend CGM Musical Services based in Scotland who will be able to supply you with what you need. Having said that, I'm 6ft 4 inches and I have found the straps that come with this particular instrument to be excellent and totally adequate for my needs. If you have to order straps make sure you get them long enough and wide enough. You may have seen some people playing squeezeboxes with just one strap. These are not chromatic button accordions but melodeons. Believe me, you need two straps with this particular instrument!

Take a look at the “Lesson One” video and you will see how all this looks in real life. You may need to take the instrument off several times and make many adjustments until it's right for you. I know this seems a bit frustrating when you're desperate to get on and play something but this really is well worth spending time on and once you've got it right you'll never need to change it.

Place your left hand through the strap on that side of the instrument (the bass strap). On the Black Diamond CBA, this strap is adjusted by means of a rotella or dial. Some left hand straps have a Velcro adjustment. Again, experiment! Your hand must be free enough to roam across those tiny bass buttons but if this strap is set too loose you won't be able to control the pushing and pulling of the bellows properly.

Finally, undo the bellows straps top and bottom and park them on the studs and you're ready to go. If you want to try opening and closing the bellows simply press

the small button at the top of the left hand side and pull gently outwards with your left hand. You won't hear any sound as you are pressing the air button which lets air in and out of the bellows. Once you've opened the bellows a fair way simply keep pressing this button and push the bellows gently until they close. If your instrument is in good condition this will take a little while so don't be impatient. If you try to open and close the bellows without using the air button or any of the right hand or left hand note/chord buttons you will really struggle and indeed, you may damage your instrument. By the way, it's always a really good idea to close your bellows and re-attach the bellows straps when you've finished playing as this will help to protect your instrument when you lay it down.

Now you're ready for your first tune!