

The bold
RICKY RACKIN
joins Ace Photographer
PETER TRIMMING
for another amazing



A Bevy of Rambunctious Squeezers!
Back row [l-r]: Phil Hopkinson, Reuben Shaw, Gavin Atkin, Dave Townsend, Harry Scurfield, Peter Honri, Jenny Cox, Rosalie Dipper, Charlotte Oliver, Colin Dipper. Front row [l-r]: Robert Harbron, Danny Chapman, John Dipper

CONCERTINAS

at

WITNEY



took an autumn holiday in England last year, to collect my long-awaited Dipper English, and to drop in on *Concertinas at Witney*. Neither was a disappointment, to say the least!

Continuing the good work of '91, this festival was well-organised by Jenny Cox, and musically directed by maestro Dave Townsend. My introduction to the apparent *modus operandi* came Friday evening, when I stepped out of the heaviest of English rains into the cacophony of a "Free-Reed-For-All" at the Saddler's Arms, a pub in nearby New Yatt. A pint and a window seat brought welcome comfort, as the friendly fellow beside me showed me his unusual Duet. I inquired which Duet system it was, and he replied: "Hayden". I asked if the inventor of the system were still living, and he assured me that the man was not even that old; "around my age," he admitted with a sheepish grin. It took several seconds before it sank in that *he* was the inventor himself—**Brian Hayden!**

The cacophony subsided as Mr. Townsend called all to attention with a rousing song, but it soon returned in yet a new form of "scat" singing, in a scurrilous one-upmanship between Harry Scurfield, on Anglo, and Dave Townsend on English!

That session night held many surprising introductions for me. There was a marvelous "Ladies' Bass Section" which included some enormous boxes played by Charlotte Oliver and Lyn Law. The remarkable playing of Rueben Shaw hushed the room and gave me my first taste of the huge McCann Duets that would later rule the festival. Anne-Marie Boisard closed the evening with a haunting French original played on a similar Duet.

Saturday provided the real "beef" at Witney.

Ninety of us assembled at the Corn Exchange for tutoring in the English system with Dave Townsend, Anglo-playing with Harry Scurfield, and the Jeffries Duet with Gavin Atkin. Having a brand-new and unfamiliar English in my hands, I could only muddle (or should I say "muddy"?) through Dave's *Concertina Band* selection, and miss the Anglo and Duet workshops entirely. However, other Saturday workshops I attended were more applicable to the music I have played over the years. Dave's explanations of "good" (open, spread interval) versus "bad" (close chording) harmony, and tips on arranging from pieces originally scored for other instruments, were inspirational. Also, Colin and Rosalie Dipper held forth on the do's and don'ts of concertina repair—nice to know the points at which to quit our tinkering!



Peter Honri (McCann Duet)

The evening concert opened with Dave Townsend playing a brilliant set of Yorkshire fiddle tunes. Then Harry Scurfield gave a fascinating demonstration of South African *Squashbox* music, played on his marvelous wooden-ended Dipper Anglo. Danny Chapman brought forth the festival's oldest musical offerings, exhibiting a maturity of style beyond his 19 years. Trevor Vale then gave us a great set of folksongs, ac-

companied himself on the now-ubiquitous McCann Duet. However, the apogee of the evening came with Peter Honri masterfully echoing his famous grandfather Perci Honri, the English music hall's premier exponent of the McCann Duet. The elder Honri's signature pieces, *Concordia March* and *The Lost*

Chord, truly came to life in Peter's capable hands. A "showman" in every sense of word and image, his little miniature concertina flashed in the lights and emitted sounds from beyond this earth!

Sunday activities proved much more relaxed and enjoyable for me. Gladys Thorp led two nice "Go-Round" sessions of demonstrations by my intermediate-English peers. Charlotte Oliver helped a mixed group find its way through the pitfalls of learning song accompaniment. The afternoon and festival closed pleasantly with an informal concert from the floor.

Huzzah! Well done—I hope that *Concertinas at Witney* continues to instruct and dazzle Squeezers each September to come.

Much obliged, Ricky, for this amiable report; sounds like you had a great time. 'Must be nice to attend a festival and pick up a new, custom-built concertina in the bargain! I am sure that few of us would have a problem with that kind of synchronicity.



**Reuben Shaw & Anne-Marie Boisard
with McCann Duets**

*Readers interested in the life and music of Perci Honri (the original "Crown Prince of the Concertina", as he was called by Professor McCann) should read Peter Honri's book *Working the Halls*, ©1973 by Saxon House (ISBN 0-347-00013-4). An excellent account of the British music hall, packed with superb photographs and illustrations; you can probably get a copy through inter-library loan. We*

will, of course, bring more detailed coverage of the various Duet systems to these pages in issues to come.

*For those who may be in Britain this autumn, the next *Concertinas at Witney* takes place at the Corn Exchange, Witney, on September 25th & 26th; workshops will be hosted by Dave Townsend (English Concertina), Tim Laycock (Crane Duet Concertina) and John Kirkpatrick on Anglo. Enquiries may be addressed to: Jenny Cox at 26 Hill Grove, Henleaze, Bristol BS9 4RJ, England. I hope to make it myself one of these years! In any case, Witney sells out quickly; to avoid disappointment it is highly advisable to book early. —Ed.*