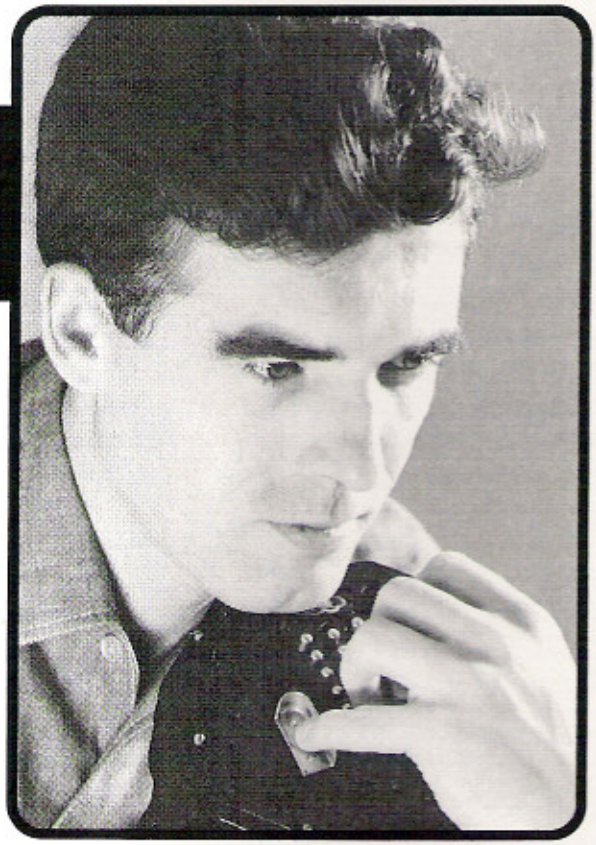
# CONCERTINA & Squeezebox

No. 31

*The International Magazine for Free Reed Musicians*

*Our Special Interview with*

## LOUIS KILLEN



*Memoirs of the Legendary*

## SCAN TESTER

*David Taylor on the*

**Etiquette of the Session!**

*plus*

**REPAIRS, NEWS, REVIEWS & MORE**

*Summer 1994*

*$4.00*

*A Conversation with*

# LOUIS KILLEN

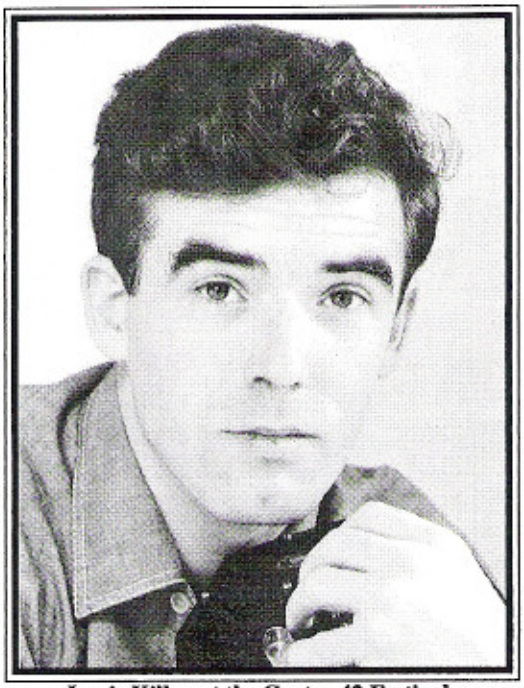


Photo by Nicholas Wright

**Louis Killen at the Center 42 Festival, October 1962**

**By Ricky Rackin**

***Transcribed by Joel Cowan***

***Louie, was it Newcastle where you first found the concertina?***

Well, Gateshead; I was born in Gateshead, across the bridges from Newcastle. I'm the youngest of four sons, and Vincent, the third in the family, was taught concertina by a colleague of my father's, a very fine concertina player. Vincent died when he was seventeen and I was fourteen. He had been an invalid from the age of nine—the valves of his heart closed up. It's ironic that the year after he died they developed the surgery for that particular problem. It made him an invalid he couldn't do much; he tried to learn the piano and it was too strenuous. He couldn't do anything; he'd walk

from one room to the next and would have to sit down and rest for twenty minutes. That's when this colleague of my father's came to teach him the concertina; George Pearson, I think his name was; he worked in Gateshead. A rather rotund and silvery-haired guy, a single gentleman, by that time at least in his late forties.

***Did he play dance tunes, or classical music?***

Classical, parlor music—he didn't play folk music. It was classical songs, Victorian parlor music. When I say "classical" I don't mean classical music, I mean "classical" in the sense of what the great body of concertina music was written in. Very few English concertina players from back around the turn of the century and certainly up to the beginning of the folk musical revival played "folk" music. Like Alf Edwards, who was a "classic" concertina player, played a *wide* variety of written music, often written for the concertina or for violin.

And this man taught my brother to play the concertina. He played pieces from the light classical repertoire, like *La Golondrina.* That's one of the pieces he played. *[Sings]* When my brother died, the concertina was there; I squeezed it a little bit and then I sold it to a guy who was in the Sea Scouts because he wanted that kind of sound. I bought it back from him several years later *[laughs]*. I remember when I started playing it was incredibly emotional. I knew *La Golondrina,* it was in my head like so many other tunes, so I worked them out on the concertina. I remember playing that for my mother, and it was devastating—that was a tune Vincent played, only ten years after he'd gone. Very difficult.

***What was it?***

It was a Lachenal, a Lachenal beginner with the red, white and black ivory keys, probably brass reeds. They were great little instruments. That's what I started on. We were a very musical family. We sang a great deal; all my brothers, we all sang in harmony. My father sang harmonies. My mother occasionally sang harmonies—she had a beautiful contralto voice. She should have done something with it and never did.

***Why?***

Because she was a servant! She was a poor Irish girl who was put into service when she was fourteen and worked her way up to being a cookhouse keeper, and then met and married my father; that was the end of her career.

***But your parents didn't play instruments?***

My father played mandolin. He'd pick out tunes on it.

***Dance tunes?***

Tunes; songs! Hey, we're singers in our family. We all sang. We had a repertoire of everything from catholic liturgical music—my second oldest brother and I were both in Catholic choirs—oh, everything. We always sang in the family. And why sing in unison when you can sing in harmony? So regardless of what it was, we always sang in harmony. Singing was a very common thing in families then, like the Copper family always sang ad-libbing harmonies. None of us could read a note of music—I'm still a bad sight reader—although my brother learned to play concertina from music.

***So you didn't touch the concertina until he died, and you didn't play by music with the concertina—you played by ear.***

I started lessons on the piano, and it died the death! Because I wasn't prepared to practise. It was George who suggested the concertina to my brother—as a light instrument he could lay on his knee. So the last two or three years of his life, that's what he played.

***When you got the concertina, you moved directly to folk music?***

I bought it back because I wanted a concertina to accompany folk songs; sea songs and folk music. I was probably about twenty-four. I sold it when I was eighteen; it wasn't being used. I think I got £15 for it. My father paid £5 for it, and that was thought expensive. I was not focused on British music then—I was focused more on blues and American folk music, cowboy songs, and all that mass of stuff my childhood, from Victorian parlor songs to local male voice choir songs. Everything was was grist for the mill in my family. If it sounded good you did it, but you did it in the way it was supposed to be done, i.e., in the style. It was never talked about, but if you sang cowboy songs or anything from America you sang it in that peculiar type of harmony and feeling. My brothers imbued me with a sense of style—when they wanted to sing stuff, it had to be in the right style. They learned from records, the radio—it was all aural. They developed sharp ears for a given manner of playing music, the idiom in which it was played.

***What kinds of things were you doing? Did you play melody or were you playing chords?***

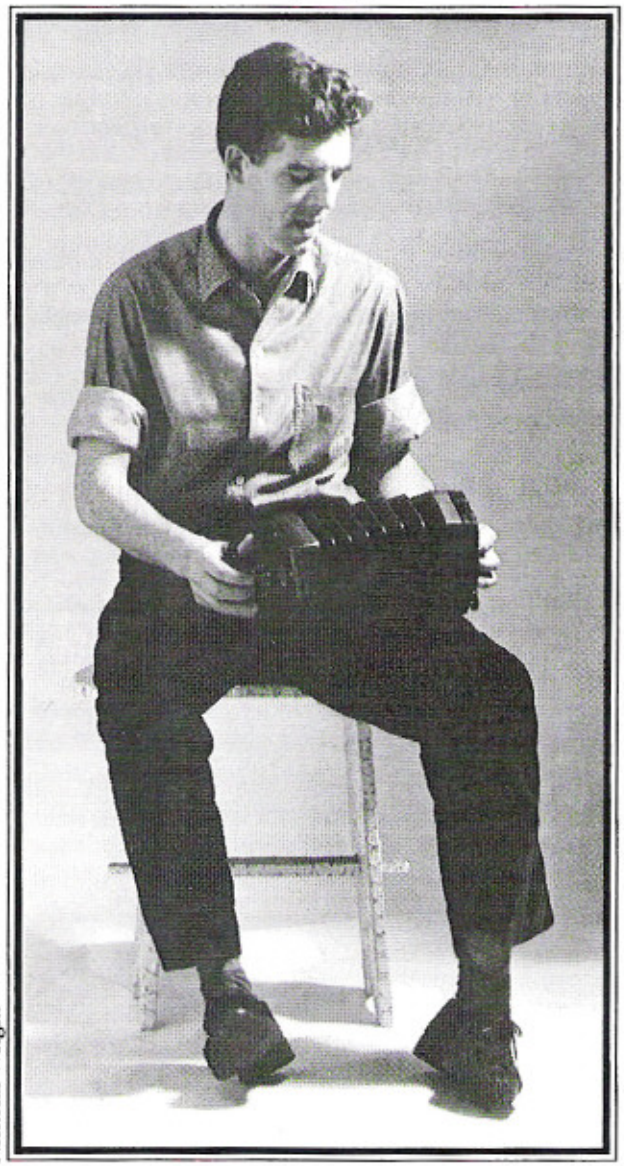
I was accompanying things like *The Jug of Punch,* and some sea stuff. I know *The Jug of Punch* was the first thing I started on. I played melody and chords; *The Jug of Punch* was done mainly in thirds and a few fifths below the melody line. The concertina is a great instrument for doing that, as you well know, and I played it in C! *[Laughs]* I just worked those triangles.

***It sounds like way you based the accompaniment for* The Jug of Punch *is not all that dissimilar to what your playing is like now.***

Ah, the concept was the same: learn the melody line, play it. Put the harmony around the melody line. But compared to the way I work out accompaniments now, when I do, they're much more complicated and spread out. It was mostly thirds, inverted sixths really, the same triangle. It was boring harmony, but it was harmony! At that time, that's all I could do; I thought of the concertina in terms of chords. The triad and the octave.

***When did you start performing British Isles music?***

When I was about nineteen, with guitar. Also American stuff at the same time. I had a mixed repertoire of British and American songs. I went crazy over jazz at the Newcastle Rhythm Club. I started listening to country blues; Robert Johnson, Leadbelly, B.B. Broonzy—Broonzy was like an idol. The BBC would play stuff—I picked up some folk songs from the BBC. I even wrote away for a song called *The Cropper Lads* because it was the signiature tune of a play that was being serialized on BBC Radio. Things like this were all going on for me at that time, along with all the other music; grand opera, classical symphonic music, jazz, modern jazz, and then New Orleans jazz.



Nicholas Wright

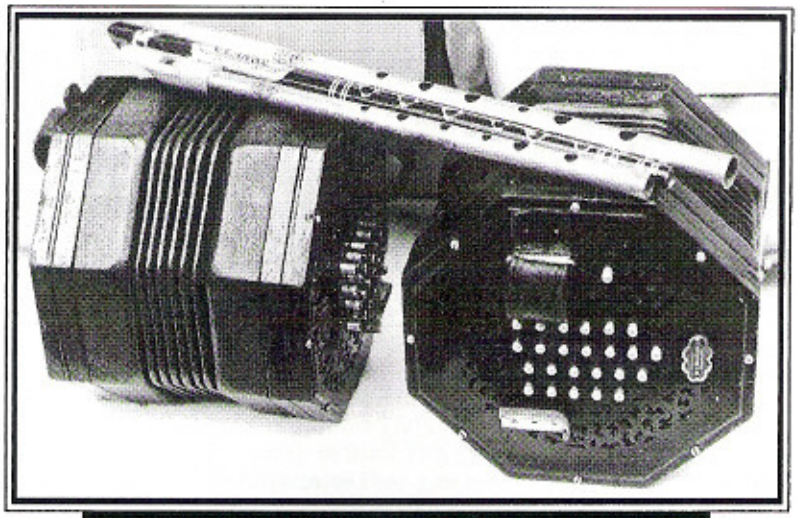
I had a banjo I was trying to play, and I went to Oxford, to the Catholic Workers College, when I was twenty-one; I had all this repertoire of music but I didn't know anybody who sang this stuff. Up in Tyneside, I learned to play a few chords from a laborer in the cabinet making factory I was serving my apprenticeship in; he taught me the basic chords on the guitar. But my brother would never let me touch his guitar—my eldest brother was an excellent bandsman. All he could get to teach him were band musicians. He broke his arms in a lathe, which paralyzed two fingers, and after that he allowed me to play his guitar—he still plays a little.

***Did you play with Johnny Handle [piano accordionist of High Level Ranters fame—Ed.] when he was into that kind of music?***

This was before I met Johnny. I was going through all this in my teens. At the same time I had Irish songs, I had border ballads; when I was in the Rover Scouts at eighteen I was learning border ballads from anybody who knew them. I'd pick up anything I could; I had a bunch of ballads from *The Bonny Earl of Murray* down to *Barbara Allen,* God knows what. A lot of Tommy Moore stuff which my mother adored—things like *The Snowy Breasted Pearl* and other classics of the Irish folk repertoire. At the same time I was singing tunes, making them up. Amazing stuff. All this was what brought me around to British folk music, which had always been there.

I remember when I was ten, we were taught the standard Cecil Sharpe repertoire, you know—*English Folk Songs for Schools*—I'd get up and sing those and cowboy songs like *As We Were Walking One Morning*

*for Leisure;* you know that cowboy song? *[Sings]*. This was all part of it; my brothers also listened to and picked it up, and I sang too. And I listened. It was the growth material which set up the scene when I started British Isles stuff...this river of music I lived in. I didn't do anything else really, because this was what was most important to me. By the time I was nineteen or twenty I had this repertoire of American blues music, some white music from the cowboy repertoire, railroad songs, local Tyneside songs, Irish songs, border ballads.



Killen's Instruments (c.1974)

***And where did sea music fit in?***

No sea music. Well, there were some sea songs, but not sea music. I hadn't heard it until I heard sea shanties sung by the BBC British Mens Choir—it was like listening to the US Navy's choir, whatever they call it. It's not sea shanties, it's not the traditional stuff.

***So you got into playing British Isles music on the concertina at about twenty-five. Was there a "scene" in Newcastle at the time? Were there other concertina players?***

No! But there used to be a concertina band that met in the Half Moon Inn in Gateshead, which I learned of through other contacts as I started playing the concertina. I knew there was another player named Frank, from Consett, up the Derwent Valley about fifteen mile from Newcastle. who was a member of this band. He was the first guy I ever saw work up an electronic accordion, by putting transisters and microphones inside, so he didn't even have to blow the bellows! We're talking about what, 1955, 1956. He also played English concertina for the local Morris group and sword dance team from Consett. I went to see him; aside from George Pearson, if Pearson was his name, they were the only concertina players I'd met other than Alf Edwards.

***Did you know Alf Edwards?***

Yes. Alf Edwards was backing up Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd, whom I'd heard when I was nineteen, on a record called *Singing Sailor* put out by Topic. I met MacColl in 1957.

***Where?***

In London, at the *Ballads & Blues* at the Princess Louise. The first night I went there it was MacColl, Seamus Ennis, and Bert Lloyd—it was incredible. I sang a couple of songs I'd collected up in the border, the *College Valley Hunt* and *When Fortune Turns the Wheel;* they hadn't heard the *College Valley Hunt* before.

***Were you playing concertina at the time?***

No. I think Alf may have been there backing them up, I don't know. But I'd heard some of his playing on records, and thought: this is what I want. Basically I moved to the concertina because I'd heard Alf Edwards play this music. You had Lloyd and MacColl backed by Alf, vamping mainly, straight from the music. This was about the same time I started the folk club with Johnny Handle—The Folk Song & Ballad in Newcastle—which started in 1958 in a place called the Barrett's Bridge Hotel, commonly known as the "Sink", and eventually ended up in the Bridge Inn.

***So you were familiar with Alf's playing?***

Not with his general playing. Alf Edwards came from a family of musicians; music hall and circus performers. They used to do acrobatics and play the instruments. When I met him his was no longer playing with the big bands, but he used to play with one of the British big bands—trombone was his instrument. He had spent most of his life playing that. When I met him and he was playing the concertina, the way he actually made his living was by transcribing music. This man was the most *incredible* transcriber of music I've ever come across. He could transcribe music that he listened to faster than you could write a letter.

***Did he ever do any for you?***

Yes he did, and I've still got some of the stuff he did.

***How did you end up with his concertina?***

Because I'd met him on the Radio Ballads—he was always used by MacColl and Lloyd. I guess it was in 1959 that I went back and re-bought the concertina and started to learn to play it. It may have been even earlier. The first Radio Ballad I did with MacColl was in '59—*The Song of the Road.* It was about the building of the M-1, which was a remarkable civil engineering feat by any standards. He asked if I would be interested in taking part in it. What was I going to say? MacColl and Lloyd *were* the British folk scene, basically, as far as traditional music was concerned. They were the be-all and end-all, the driving force that brought folk music back to the English working class, in some ways. They'd been involved with Charlie Parker and Alan Lomax and others in British radio from the early 50's, maybe even from '48.

So when I went down for *The Song of the Road,* that's what got me back on to the concertina, because when I got back from that I bought the instrument back and started playing. In '61, two years later, I went down because MacColl asked me if I wanted to be part of *The Big Hewer* because I'd been a major source for people like Jack Elliott, Johnny Handle, mining people that he could record talking about their experiences in the mines. I knew these people; they were my neighbors, I sang with them. When MacColl and Charlie Parker came up with this whole idea in mind for a program on the Big Hewer—on mining—up they came to Newcastle and I was the only contact they knew. They came up and knocked on my door and said, who do you know? So I took them to Johnny Handle first and then to Jack Elliott. These were tremendous sources for them, and they got a lot of songs too.

Anyhow, they asked me if I would sing, and I became part of this group that was in the broadcast of the Big Hewer. Alf was there then, and I had my little Lachenal concertina, and I asked Alf would he look out for one for me—a good one. A few months later he said well I've got a couple of concertinas I want to sell. One was a Lachenal—a beautiful Lachenal Edeophone with amber buttons and sort of tortoiseshell ends.

***I've never been impressed with the playing on those instruments though.***

It was a beautiful instrument, it had a nice sound to it; but the other one was this brand-new Wheatstone, made in the Fall of '61. He bought it for £60 but it was going for £100 plus tax, something like £130 when you were finished. They gave it to him for half that price because he had produced the Wheatstone tutor the year before. So this was the reward—a half price instrument. It was the last *good* concertina that Harry Minting ever made. It was an Æolian. The firm went bankrupt between the making of that instrument and the next time they made an Æolian, which I think they made for Peggy Seeger. And it wasn't half the instrument—mushy sound.

***She was a good player.***

A *very* good player. She was taught by Alf. Alf didn't teach me, because I was up in Newcastle. He gave me some exercises, and told me how to hold the thing—

***What was the best way to hold it?***

It was thumbs in, pinky fingertips on the *edge* of the finger hold—not all the way in, but just on the edge to allow that freedom of movement of the hand. And you could take your pinky out and use it to hit a button, too. Alf used his whole hand.

***Did he rest it on his knee ever?***

Hardly ever. When he was sitting he might, but mostly no—it wore your bellows. I have an image of Alf Edwards with a music stand in front of him in his house, in his music room, playing a violin concerto by Bach or one of his contemporaries—that's what Alf loved to play. On this beautiful, sharp, *bright* metal-ended Æolian that he played.

***Is that the one you ended up with?***

No no...the one I got was the one he had for sale, which was this brand-new one. But he didn't like it because it was too mellow for him—it wasn't bright enough. It was ebony-ended, it was very mellow, and I thought—that's what I need. It was sharp enough and loud enough for me.

***Is that the one you have now?***

No, the one I have now I bought from Annie Briggs. I was hunting for concertinas for Ethel Raime in New York, and I got one from Annie and one from Alistair Anderson—whom I've known since he was sixteen. I bought one from him for Ethel, and I kept the one I got from Annie because I'd wanted that one years before when Annie first got it.

***How come you don't play Alf's concertina?***

Ah, I had to sell that. I sold it to John Townley. Basically what happened was, in the early years up in Washington State, there was very little work—times were hard and the wages low, like in the old shanties.

***Do you feel it was worth more because it was Alf Edward's concertina?***

I don't know if it was worth more. John paid me the market price then, and he did that, well, because I needed the money; he didn't need an English concertina then. But it was a worthwhile instrument even if just that it was the last instrument that Wheatstone made as a company in its own right, and I had got it from its first owner who was the great concertina player, Alf Edwards. That was a great instrument, I tell you, my first real instrument.

***Alf was certainly my introduction to this whole thing.***

I think he was for so many people—so many. And folk music was not his thing.

***But in the* Art of the Concertina, *the only recording I'm aware of where he's solo, it's all folk music. Why is that?***

Because, one, where was he going to sell his concertina stuff? Probably to folkies. He had also come across my copy of *The Northumbrian Minstrelsy* that he took most of that stuff from. I was down there a number of times, not just to buy the concertina. We'd talk and he'd play, and he'd give me hints—I didn't have lessons—and remember that I'd been involved in three of MacColl's Radio Ballads, and Alf was in all these things.

***Would you say he was your mentor?***

On the concertina? No. I didn't really have a mentor, I found my own way to play my own stuff.

***When did he die?***

I think he might still be alive. He was two or three years ago—he developed Parkinson's Disease. He might be dead by now; I don't know. I'll have to enquire. But he hasn't been playing for many years. It became too much. *[Alf Edwards died several years ago; his passing went largely unnoticed in the concertina and folk music community. His last visitor was Arthur "Ten Fingers" Clements.—Ed.]*

***Were you around when Alistair first got into the concertina?***

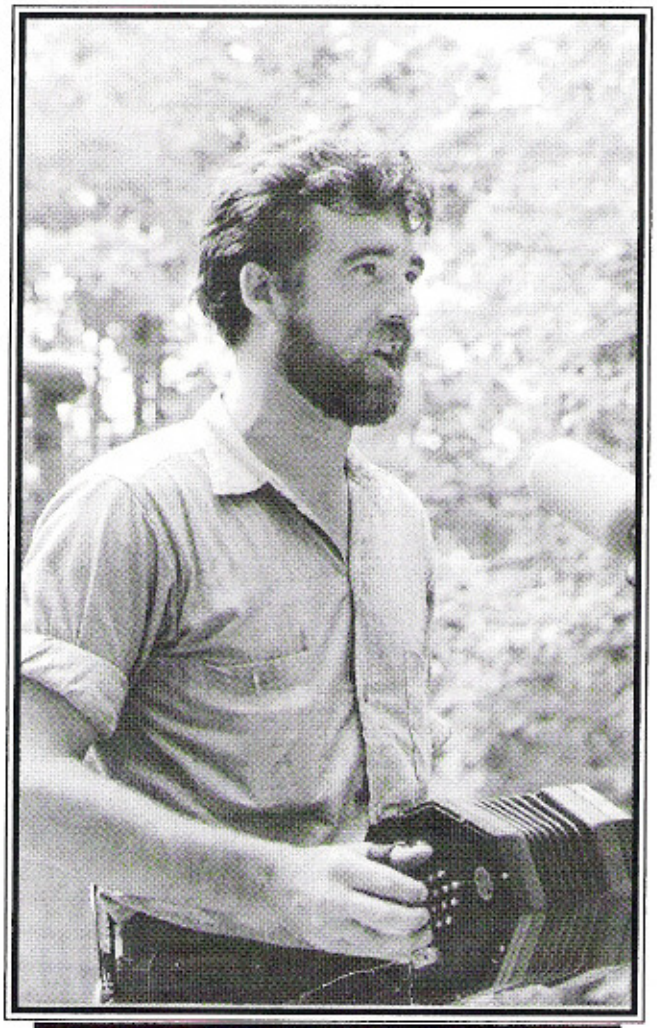
Oh yeah. He got his concertina from somebody down the street. He was looking for an instrument to play. He was sixteen or seventeen, coming to the folk club at the Bridge Hotel, in its heyday, in its high period between 1961 and 1965, when I ran it with Johnny Handle.

***When did you feel like you were really progressing on the concertina?***

I guess about the time I bought the second one. I had probably about half a dozen accompaniments laid out, from the very simple *Jug of Punch,* and I think I had already figured out *Pleasant and Delightful* by then, which is not a simple accompaniment; but it didn't seem that complex to me at the time.

***Do you ever think them out in a complex fashion?***

Yes; that accompaniment to *Waltzing Matilda* was quite deliberately thought out. How could I really lay out the chord work in a manner which would be interesting, which would be almost like a counter-melody? This is something I have constantly done with the concertina; I'll play the melody, and play the inverted sixth and fourth below, and on one part of the chorus in *Waltzing Matilda* this is what I do *[plays].*



Louis on stage at Fox Hollow, 1968

***Every time I've seen you I believe you've had this Æola, that you got from Annie Briggs. What is it?***

I got this from Annie in 1971. It was made in January 1931...

***How did you find that out?***

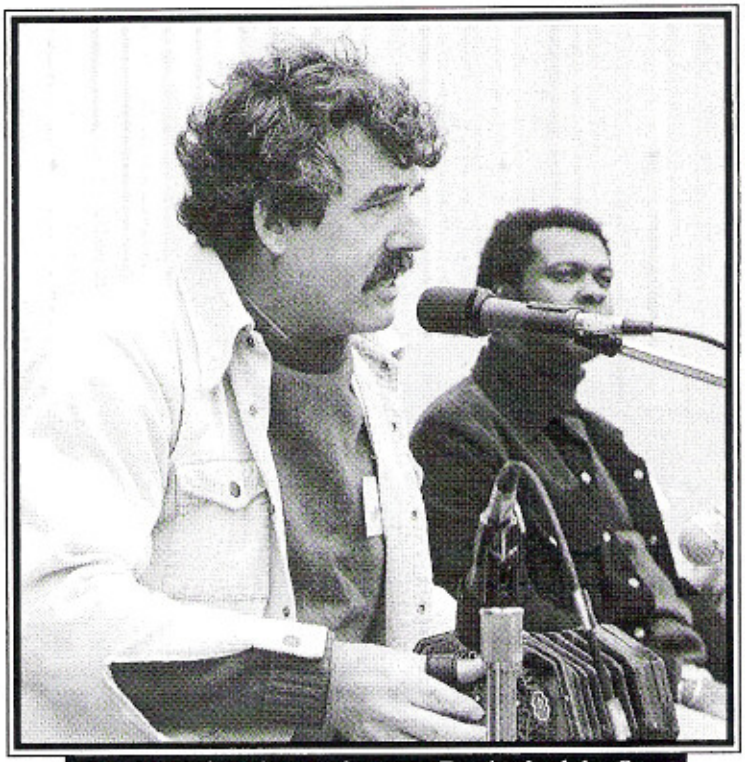
Steve Dickinson has all the books. He inherited the production records. I'll say something now, and this is not to knock Colin Dipper, but despite all the English concertina stuff that's done within the magazine, because of the bias of the Editors, of like John Townley—and I love John Townley, we're very good friends—but John's an Anglo man. And Colin's an Anglo man. So with this whole thing Colin Dipper has been able to develop a reputation here—and thank God, I'm glad he did. But Steve Dickinson, who is the *English* maker, and has all the Wheatstone equipment, and has refurbished all this ancient stuff, and is making *English* concertinas, seems to be ignored. He's making *excellent* concertinas. They all make them—Colin Dipper will make an English, but it's not the one he really works at. *[We would be delighted to give the excellent Mr. Dickinson his fair share of publicity in these pages if he—or anyone else, for that matter—would send us information and photographs, etc. We can't print what we don't have.—Ed.]*

***Have you seen Hamish Bayne's concertinas? The Holmwood?***

I've heard of him; I've not played one, so I have no idea what they're like. But I will say that Dickinson and Dipper have a great respect for each other.

***What ever happened to all of Harry Crabb's equipment and shop—it sort of faded away?***

I have a feeling—I'm not quite sure—who was the concertina king, the guy who started *Free Reed?* Neil Wayne. I'm not sure whether Neil was making some play for the machinery, the jigs and tools—I don't know. I'm not interested enough in that, who's buying what and where. All I know is that it has not emerged into a concertina maker's hands. I was thinking about being a concertina maker—there was a course being offered in Redwing, Minnesota.



Louis performing at the 1981 Festival of the Sea at Hyde Street Pier, San Francisco

***For Chemnitzer-style concertinas.***

That's what it turned out to be; this was an accordion and concertina making class. And the lady who was teaching was trained by Hohner; her mother had worked all her life with Hohner, a German lady who'd come to the States. And she was starting a class at the Redwing Vocational College; it has a reputation for making instruments, brass instruments; they have people who come from all over the world to learn how to make brass instruments. I went to visit with her, to find out about the course. As I discovered, she had never touched an English concertina, and unfortunately I didn't have mine with me. It was regretable, because she was saying she had never heard a "concert" concertina; she'd never played a Wheatstone—the only English concertina she'd ever played was a Bastari, which is not too different from those

bandoneons; which is what she thought was a true concertina.

So I was thinking, hey! I would like to maybe start in business because for me at that time the joy was going right out of the scene. I was casting around, thinking what else can I do?

***Sorry you didn't do it, Louie.***

No, I'm glad, because I spent a day with Steve in his shop, and saw what it was. The cost alone! I don't know how Hamish Bayne makes his instruments—where he got his jigs from, for example. *[See issue #28. —Ed.]* But Colin Dipper is a machinist, I mean he's a *toolmaker,* an industrial artist, but basically he's a toolmaker, it's what his training is, so he *made* all his jigs, all his tools—his head was into that to begin with. Steve *bought* his tools through the Art Council from Boosey & Hawkes, who had the Wheatstone stuff—you're talking about fifty to a hundred thousand or more to buy those jigs, or to make them. And he could sell his for that. You figure, if you're lucky, to make ten concertinas a year, $2000 a concertina maybe. You're talking fifteen or twenty years before you're even making a profit. Before you've paid off what you've had to invest just to get the machinery to build complete concertinas that were *good.* Repairing's another thing—I didn't get into it. I said no, I don't want to get into it, and I don't really want to be an accordion repair man. So I let that drop—let somebody else do that.

***Don't you feel it's hard to teach concertina, particularly English concertina?***

Well I have discovered a way to teach it, to teach what I do. I taught Liam Clancy to play this way; I teach people to play exactly what I play. I think as far as song accompaniment is concerned, they learn how to play the chords, they learn the intervals, moving the fingers around the way that I do. And they go their own way. There's only two people that I've really taught that way.....I tell everybody; if you play a treble and you want to accompany song, get an F key down there instead of the low Ab.

***When did you join the Clancy Brothers?***

I joined the group in 1971, and I was with them until '76. At that time I was basically with the group on banjo and concertina and tin whistle. We were old friends—I'd met them in Edinburgh in 1961 or 1962.

***Tell me about the other concertinists whose playing you enjoy.***

I adore Alistair Anderson. He took the concertina to such heights—there are hundreds of players now, or it seems like there are hundreds; I read the magazine, I hear about these people—I have no idea who they are—who are all "super" players.

***Have you heard Dave Townsend? He's fantastic.***

No, I haven't. But these are young kids—in my book! Alistair was the first one. Basically, concertina players of superb musicianship, even virtuosity, well, Alf Edwards was about the last there was. There was no one who played like Alf—there were other concertina players around, yeah, but I don't think there was anyone who played with the majesty that Alf played with, until Alistair came along. And Alistair went even beyond Alf, I think, because he took the concertina and he *created* a new style of playing based on the Northumbrian pipes. A very staccato style of playing. That set Alistair off on the concertina. He started himself. He came up and asked a few things, more of Colin Ross on how to read the music, timing things—he never asked *me* how to play the concertina; he didn't have to. He knew what he wanted to do and got going at it. And he did it. I have the utmost admiration for Alistair—he was a pioneer, and that's something none of the others, no matter how good they are, can claim. He was there first, he showed the way of what could be done with the English concertina. Always willing to give, and fanatic about it! *[Laughs]*

***You don't play dance tunes.***

I had Colin Ross teach me a few hornpipes, jigs and reels way back when I first started playing the concertina, but I haven't really learned too much since then! Things like the *Boys of North Tyne,* the *Redesdale Hornpipe,* a few reels the sword dancers dance to, things like that. I learned things at a time when nobody was playing these in the folk song clubs—Colin was not in the folk song club, he was playing these things for Morris dance teams, or in country dance bands, which was quite a different scene from the dance music sessions that have since become popular.

***Louie, why did you emigrate to the States?***

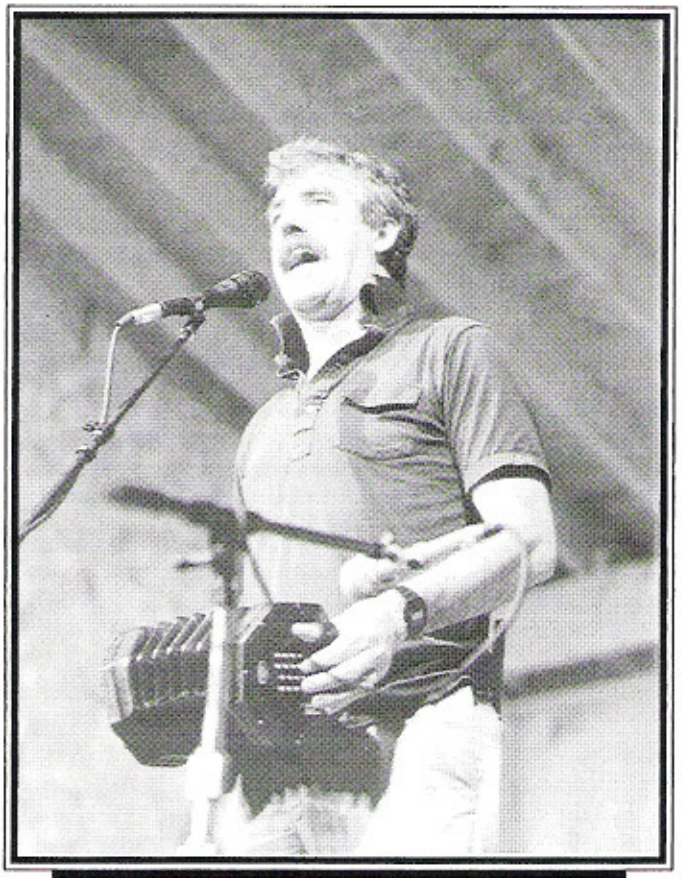
It's very difficult to really go back, there are lots of reasons why I emigrated, as I discovered years after.

***There was a lot of jealousy in Newcastle even in 1971, five years after you'd emigrated; they were still really angry that the Yanks had gotten to you.***

Er, yeah. Actually it was only three or four years—I didn't emigrate until '67.

***Was it because you weren't getting the recognition there, or you weren't able to make a living at music?***

No, no! *[laughs]* I was making a better living than probably anybody else on the British folk scene between 1964 and 66. I didn't know it, 'coz we didn't compare what we were making. But I was working my butt off—four clubs a week,



Pinewoods Camp Folk Music Week, 1983

often, in 1964. It thinned out in '65 when I put my price up, because I'd got an agent!

I came here for a visit in '66, for three months, and I'd always been a bit of a Yankophile—I don't know, all the cowboy songs, all the movies—you know, America was a fascinating country. I came here in '66 and it sort of blew me apart. The culture blew me apart. Also, I guess another thing was the reaction to my singing, which was incredibly positive, and in a way which was expressed in a very positive way; and in England, as you know, they don't express themselves that way. They don't give you standing ovations! *[Laughs]* The first standing ovation I ever had was at the Pinewoods folk music camp that first visit. It was under spectacular circumstances, I must admit; we had a thunderstorm that blew he lights out in the middle of my concert—I just kept going. It was a good concert; I was enjoying myself. It was unique music. I've always loved singing to a receptive audience that has not heard the music before—it's the best situation. It was great. And that was the kind of reaction I had in most places. And the country fascinated me, and, of course, you're dealing with a working-class kid who hates the class system. For me in '66, I felt you can do whatever the hell you like here; you can be whatever you want. I had the classic emigrant's reason for coming to the States—opportunity, freedom to be whatever you want to be. That's really what brought me to the States.

If I'd come two years earlier, I probably would have developed a following within the coffeehouses; and Americans are the most incredibly loyal audience I've ever come across. When I worked with the Clancy Brothers it was unbelievable—the same audience, but not just that; they had children! It was generational. I mean by the time I joined them the Clancy Brothers had been working for twelve years, and then I worked with them for six years. They had kids of fifteen or sixteen who were Clancy Brothers fans, who'd been brought up on the Clancy Brothers. It was like a pilgrimmage to Lourdes, that's how I used to think of it. And that kind of reaction, to anybody brought up on the scene in England, has a seductive effect; it's incredible. Albeit, most of the venues were inevitably on the east coast—that's where you make your living, you can't make a living on the west coast.

***Then why do you live here?***

Because I'm a west coast person.

***Particularly up in the Northwest there, you were really hidden away for a long time.***

Yep, and amongst all those musicians! We'd hide away and make music together. I don't get around much any more—I have a hard job going out to see or hear people, unless I hear that there's somebody exciting, when I'll go and suss it out. For the most part, I'm a singer, I'm not an instrumentalist and I don't go to hear them. I don't go to hear people just because they're singing English folk songs or playing the concertina; I'm primarily a singer, and I go to hear singers I admire. For the most part they're of my generation. There aren't too many singers of the quality of Joe Heaney, of Paddy Tunney, of Martin Carthy, of Martin Wyndham-Read; man, people with *good* voices and who know what they're doing.

***Do you practise at all?***

No. If I'm about to go off I'll work over some tunes, but often I don't. I enjoy teaching; I've given a few lessons. There are some nice players around here who accompany song; I don't think they expand the instrument enough for song accompaniment, but then I'm biased—I have my own style on the English concertina. It's a really versatile instrument—it fits itself to people who play it. Band-wise, as I've said I haven't heard the musicians, it's not something I seek. But I like to hear people who are accompanying themselves with these instruments.

You've always got to watch what you do with it. I mean it's incredible, you develop something that sounds good, sounds great maybe—I like what I do with that *Waltzing Matilda* accompaniment—I think it really separates things out, where you hear this range of counter-melodies. But compared to the singing, it's got to be supplementary. If you let the concertina dominate, well—remember, I'm a singer, that's what I am. And I ask, why Lou Killen? I'm not that well known on the scene, I haven't been around it in a long time.

***I think that a lot of people play concertina because you've played the concertina—whether they play something that has anything to do with what you do—but their playing the concertina started with you.***

Well that's very gratifying. It's like I did with Alf. That sound of Alf accompanying Bert and Ewan on that record way back in '52 or '53. It was just like, wow! Especially when I heard them later and I was really into it, it was "God, strewth, that's the right sound! Why did I sell that concertina?" *[Laughs]*

*Well, at least you got it back, Lou, to the everlasting and universal gratification of Squeezedom. Our thanks for sharing these thoughts and memories, and for the really splendid photographs which accompany the interview. I have taken the liberty of editing out quite a long and occasionally rather bloodcurdling discussion of Lou and Ricky's various mastoid and sinus operations down the years, and, though I am as fond of praise as anyone, I have felt obliged to suppress some very kind comments directed at Mr. Editor's dexterity, such as it is, on the concertina.*

*Louis Killen has appeared on innumerable recordings, some of which are available from* ***Andy's Front Hall*** *(see their usual advertisement in our classified columns). They may even have copies of* Bright Shining Morning *(1975) lurking about the premises.* ***The Country Dance and Song Society*** *also offers* Steady As She Goes, *a collection of sea songs and shanties with Lou, Jeff Warner and others. Write to them at 17 New South St., Northampton MA 01060 or call (413) 584-9913. Lou contributed three tunes to our own* Son of Readers Tape, *as well, though remember that the recording quality of the tape is rather noisy.*

*The best source for Lou's out-of-print lps is a dealer.* ***Peter Loughran*** *(42 Castledene Road, Delves Lane, Consett, Co. Durham, England DH8 7HQ. Telephone & Fax 0207 507115) offers a catalogue boasting a number of original Killen recordings from the early 1960's, all in good to excellent condition, including* Along the Coaly Tyne *(Topic 12T 189) and* Tommy Armstrong of Tyneside *(Topic 12T122), both of which also feature Colin Ross and Johnny Handle. Peter's huge catalogues are a goldmine for any collector; there's much of general interest besides, including a good selection of the old Topic/Free Reed concertina field recordings from Ireland. Four catalogues a year cost $20(US) for airmail service to the USA and Canada, £15 to Australia and Japan, £10 to Europe, and £5 within the UK. Recommended—tell them C&S sent you!*