

Accordion Types

To many of us, an accordion is an accordion. The seasoned player, however, knows that there is much more to this age-old instrument.

Also known as squeeze boxes, accordions belong to the handheld bellows-driven free reed aerophone family. When an accordion is played, the compression and expansion of the bellows generates airflow across the reed. The air causes the reed to vibrate, and creates a musical tone. Accordions also feature keyboards, which control the airflow to the reeds, and produce a greater variety of tones.

Physical Features

Today's modern accordions consist of a two-part body. Bellows separates these two rectangular halves. On each half of the body there is a keyboard with piano style keys, buttons or levers. When pressed, these buttons travel in a direction perpendicular to the movement of the bellows, or toward the performer. Most modern accordions have buttons that are capable of producing entire chords, while traditional concertinas have buttons that only produce single notes.

Types of Accordions There are a number of different styles and key notes systems that differentiate the types of accordions. These include the Chromatic, Concertina, Diatonic and Piano accordions.

Chromatic Accordion: This instrument is capable of playing a 46-note chromatic scale. Because the buttons are not diatonic, it has the greatest range of treble notes of any accordion style available these days. Chromatic accordions range in size from those with 20 treble keys and 12 bass buttons, to modern chromatic models featuring 6 treble button rows and 160 bass buttons. These styles are now very popular in Russia.

Concertina: Noted for its unique shape, the concertina can have anywhere from four to twelve sides in cross-section. It has two keyboards, one at each end of the bellows. Every one of the buttons delivers an individual note, so there are no fixed chords on a concertina. Also, the different notes and systems vary so greatly that it is almost impossible for a performer of one system to pick up a concertina of a different system and play it having to relearn the instrument from scratch. There are other unique characteristics that set this particular instrument apart from the rest. Unlike modern accordions, the concertina's buttons never produce chords and they travel parallel to the motion of the bellows, or toward the opposite end of the instrument. In addition, the internal materials, mechanics, construction and tone colour are all different from other styles of accordions, but the basic standards of sound production are identical.

Diatonic: This style of accordion is often the instrument of choice of folk and dance groups. The great sound output, light weight, low cost and playing simplicity make the diatonic one of the world's most popular accordions. Players find it easy to perform on the diatonic, as the note pattern on the keyboard is similar to that of the mouth harmonica.

Piano Accordions: The piano accordion has become the first truly standardized universal type since the development of the Stradella bass system. This means that a performer can play in a number of styles without changing the system, making the piano accordion the easiest type to play.

Unlike most other types of musical instruments, there is more than the "basic" style of accordion. If you're interested in learning to play the accordion, try a few different types to find the one that suits you best.