

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ACCODION

Gorka Hermosa (February 2018)

The accordion, despite being a very widespread instrument throughout the world, is a great unknown to the general public. We will try to contribute with this brief writing some ideas that will give a broader and real vision about the history of this instrument.

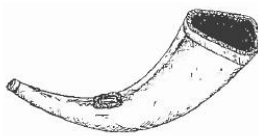
DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND:

The accordion is an aerophone keyboard instrument that emits sound thanks to the vibration of some reeds that it contains inside.

This sound principle, called free reed, has its origin in the leaves of trees that whistle when being stirred by the wind. The first known free-reed instrument is the guimbarde, a simple instrument composed of a single free reed. Some 5,000 years ago in Southeast Asia there was an important development of these instruments that would result in the creation of the Asian free reed organs, of which the best known is the Chinese Tcheng.



guimbarde



free reed horn



free reed flute



flute with pumpkin



tcheng

In 1770 the Danish physicist Kratzenstein made an important study on the free reed that would be the beginning of the development of free reed instruments in Europe, from which modern free reed instruments would emerge.



harmonica



melodica



concertina



bandoneon



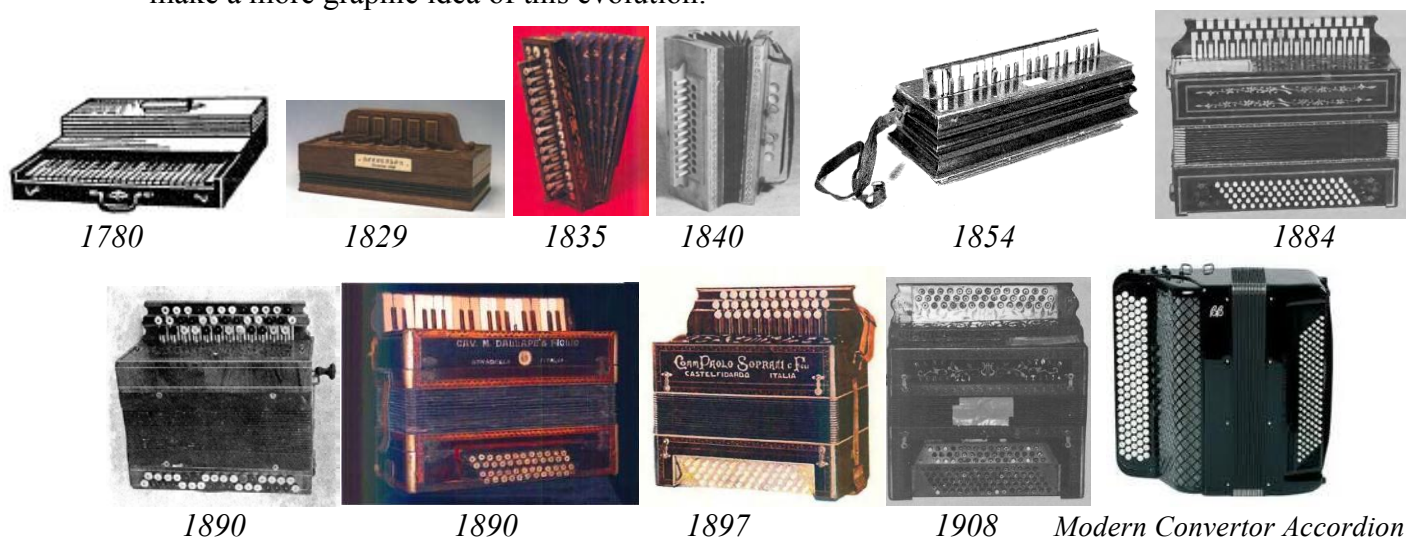
harmonium

It is interesting to know that already in the Renaissance Leonardo da Vinci designed a musical instrument that surprisingly reminds us of the current accordion: the “organi di carta” (paper organ, whose reproduction we show in the photo on the right), which although he did not build it, it supposes another bright idea of one of the most exciting brain in the history of humanity.



INVENTION AND EVOLUTION:

Although generally the dictionaries say that the instrument was invented in 1829 in Vienna by Cyrill Demian, the certain thing is that the present accordion is fruit of a long evolution that goes from the invention of the first instrument of keyboard of reed free in 1780 by Kirsnik and Kratzenstein , until the creation in 1959 of the modern converting accordion by Vittorio Mancini, which is the instrument taught in music conservatories. During this evolution the accordion has undergone numerous organological evolutions, which have resulted in different branches of the instrument. Here are some photos that will help us to make a more graphic idea of this evolution:¹



TYPES OF ACCORDION:

Today there are mainly 2 types of accordions:

1- Diatonic Accordion: In these accordions at the touch of a button, a different note sounds when opening or closing the bellows. They are used almost exclusively in folklore.

2- Unisonor Accordion: Pressing a key or button sounds the same note when opening or closing the bellows. There are two types: the **standard accordion** (it has two keyboards: one to make the melody, which is usually of piano keys, although it can also be of buttons, and another for accompaniment.) They are mainly used in popular music and jazz) and the **convertor accordion** (it has two keyboards and both can make melody or accompaniment.They usually have buttons on both keyboards, although there are also keys.It is used in classical and contemporary music).



Diatonic accordion



Standard bass accordion



Convertor accordion

¹ The dates written under the photos refer to the year of construction of the accordions in the photos. The most important dates in the evolution of the accordion were: 1780 (organ by Kirsnik-Kratzenstein), 1829 (patent of the Demian accordion), 1831 (accordion that gives individual notes of Isoard), 1834 (accordion with left keyboard by Müller), 1840 (first unisonoric accordion by Douce), 1850 (right chromatic manual similar to the current one by Walther), 1853 (manual right of keys by Titeux & Rousseau), 1880 (standard basses by Jovani), 1890 (free basses by different constructors such as Bauer, Spadaro or Dallapé), 1898 (added basses by Ficosecco), 1959 (Mancini's current convertor system)... Although there is no consensus on these dates in the different books about the accordion.

THE DIATONIC ACCORDION IN THE FOLKLORE

In the nineteenth century the diatonic accordion spread like wildfire around the world and at the end of the 19th century. XIX was already a representative instrument of popular folklore and music from very different countries: Viennese music, French mussete waltz, Celtic music, polka, Tuscan music, Basque trikitixa, cajun from Louisiana, norteño from Texas, Dominican merengue, Colombian vallenato, Panamanian cumbia, forró of the Brazilian northeast, Brazilian gaúcho music, Argentinian chamamé, funaná of Cape Verde...

Some of the best known players in the 19th century were:²



*Peter Nevsky
(Russia)*

*Wyper Brothers
(Scotland)*

*John Kimmel
(USA)*

*Alfred Montmarquette
(Canada)*

*Francisco Moscote
(Colombia)*

*"Nico" Lora
(Rep. Dominicana)*

Some of the most important diatonic accordionists of the 20th century have been:



*Emile Vacher
(France)*

*Amedée Ardoin
(Louisiana, USA)*

*Jimmy Shand
(Scotland)*

*Rogelio Córdoba
(Panamá)*

*Alejo Durán
(Colombia)*

*Salias Koroma
(Sierra Leone)*

Some of the most famous diatonic accordionists of the final of the 20th century:³



*Flaco Jiménez
(Texas, USA)*

*Sharon Shanon
(Ireland)*

*Kepa Junkera
(Basque Country)*

*El Prodigio
(Rep. Dominicana)*

*Renato Borghetti
(Brazil)*

² And others like: Nicolai Beloborodov (Russia), Edvard Mathisen (Norway), "Pamby" Dick (Great Britain), Pierre Vanderhaegen (Belgium), Victor Gibelli (Switzerland), Anton Ernst (Austria), Armand Thibodeaux (USA), José Santa Cruz (Argentina), "Con" Klippel (Australia)...

³ And others like: Marc Perrone (France), Ricardo Tesi (Tuscan music), Joseba Tapia (Basque trikitixa), Marc Savoy (zydeco from Louisiana), Yves Lambert (music from Quebec), Samy Sandoval (Panamanian cumbia)...

THE BASS STANDARD ACCORDION IN POPULAR MUSIC

The standard bass accordion began to popularize with the beginning of 20th century. His greater possibilities to be able to play in any tone and to make harmonic accompaniments richer made it possible for him to introduce itself to new popular music and, in many cases, to replace the diatonic accordion.

At the beginning of the 20th century accordionists stood out as:⁴



Pietro Deiro
(USA)



Antógenes Silva
(Brazil)



Toni Murena
(France)



Ernst Borgstrom
(Denmark)



George Scott-Wood
(Great Britain)

In the middle of the 20th century they became very popular:⁵



Clifton Chenier
(zydeco from Louisiana)



Luiz Gonzaga
(fornó from Brazil)



Dermot O'Brien
(Irish Celtic Music)



Calle Jularbo
(Swedish music)



Will Glahé
(German Polka)

Famous accordionists of the final of the 20th century:⁶



Raúl Barboza
(Argentine chamamé)



Dominginhos
(Brazilian fornó)



Phil Cunningham
(Celtic music)



Alain Musichini
(French bal musette)



Cheb Khaled
(Algerian raï)

⁴ And others like: Heimar Gellin (Denmark), Aca Krnjeva (Yugoslavia), Yangos Pandelonas (Greece), Peter Piccini (Australia), Tommy Renzetti (Canada), Ren Shirong (China)...

⁵ And others like: Aimable and Yvette Horner (French bal musette), Mick Foster (Celtic music from Ireland), Ivan Panitzky and Nicolai Risol (Russian popular music), Gasparín Erman (Argentina, light music), Vili Vesterinen (Finland, light music), Boris Karlov (Bulgarian music), Peppino Principe (Italy, light music), Enrike Zelaia (Basque folklore), Dick Contino (USA, light music), Frankie Yankovic (USA, polka), Walter Ostanek (Canada, polka), Lou Campara (Australia, light music), Nico Carstens (South Africa, light music), Antonie Wendo (traditional music of Zaire), Alex Menakian (Lebanon, light music)...

⁶ And others like: Jerzy Bawol (Kroke, klezmer music, Poland), Jerome Richard (French bal musette), Joxan Goikoetxea (Basque music), Maria Kalaniemi (traditional Finnish music), Sivuca (Brazilian fornó), Chango Spasiuk (Argentinian chamamé), Kobayashi (Japan, light music)...

The unisonoric accordion has also been used by bands such as Beatles, Abba, Beach Boys, Frank Sinatra, Elton John, Patti Smith, Talking Heads, Pink Floyd, Paul Simon, Tom Waits, Sex Pistols, Chuck Berry, Bruce Springsteen, Mike Oldfield, Sting, U2...



The Beatles

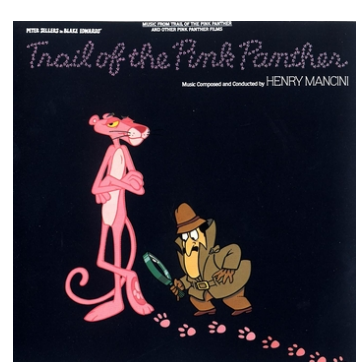
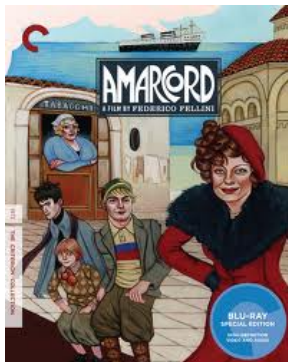


Pink Floyd



Sex Pistols

The accordion has been the protagonist of the music of films like Amarcord, The Godfather, Amelie, Dr. Zhivago, The Pink Panther, The Lion King, Schindler's List, Indiana Jones, Grease, The Adams Family...



THE ACCORDION IN THE JAZZ

There are chronicles that indicate the presence of bands of diatonic accordionists playing blues in New Orleans before 1900. At the beginning of the 20th century, many accordionists were seduced by the new music created in New Orleans. In the United States, many of the most popular bands and orchestras had accordionists on staff such as Paul Whiteman's orchestra. That tendency was growing until the 1930s and 1940s, decades of the accordion's "Golden Age" in American jazz.

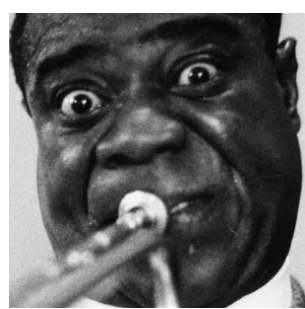
The list of musicians who played with the most popular accordionists of the time contains most of the greatest jazzmen of the time: George Gershwin, Ray Miller, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus, Joe Pass, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald... Between the large number of good accordionists before World War II, perhaps the most outstanding was Cornell Smellser, who after playing with some of the aforementioned, had to stop playing at age 31 because of the tuberculosis.



George Gershwin



Duke Ellington



Louis Armstrong



Ella Fitzgerald

After the war, the accordion-jazz declined in the US, but even so, soloists such as Alice Hall, Tommy Gumina, Art Van Damme and Frank Marocco, who is also the interpreter of hundreds of Hollywood productions, stood out.



Cornell Smellser



Alice Hall



Tommy Gumina



Art Van Damme



FRANK MAROCCO

In Europe, at the beginning of the 20th century, the country where the new music coming from New Orleans had the most success was France. A new style of jazz emerged, with manouche influence and swing rhythm, differentiated from the American. In the French accordion-jazz, in addition to these ingredients was added the influence of the musette. The most outstanding accordionist was Gus Viseur who played with Django Reinhardt and Edith Piaff (he was the accordionist of the classic "L'accordeoniste" in 1940) and is the only accordionist member of the famous "Hot Club France". After the 2nd World War, the genre declined and the musette decided more on the dance side, rather than on the jazz side.

In other European countries, are remarkable accordionists such as the English Sir George Shearing and Tito Burns, the Dutch Johnny Meijer and Mat Mathews, the Italians Gorni Kramer and Luciano Fancelli, the Finnish Toivo Kärki...



Gus Viseur



Tito Burns



Johnny Meijer



Gorni Kramer



Toivo Kärki

At the moment the great star of accordion-jazz is the French Richard Galliano, although also it is possible to emphasize the Italians Luciano Biondini or Renzo Ruggieri and the French Didier Ithursarry or Vicent Peirani. Also noteworthy are artists who make music

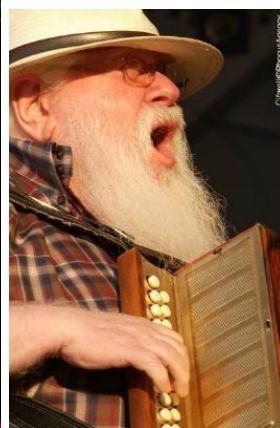
very difficult to classify such as the Polish minimalist trio Motion trio, the Finnish Kimmo Pohjonen (electronic music), the French Jean-Louis Matinier (who plays with Renaud Garcia-Fons) and Ludovic Beier, Guy Klucevsek (who has collaborated with John Zorn, Kronos Quartet...), the Spanish Victor Prieto (Yo-Yo Ma, Paquito D'Rivera...). Brazilian multi-instrumentalist and composer Hermeto Pascoal deserves special mention, one of the most original jazzmen of the second half of the 20th century, who usually uses the diatonic accordion and the piano accordion in his recitals.



Richard Galliano



Kimmo Pohjonen



Hermeto Pascoal



Luciano Biondini

We can not fail to mention two important figures of the free reed instruments in the 20th century: Astor Piazzolla and Larry Adler. Piazzolla was an Argentinian bandoneon player who managed to merge tango with jazz and contemporary classical music, until he became an essential figure in the music of the second half of the 20th century. Larry Adler was an American harmonica player, who acted with great artists like George Gershwin, the quintet of the Hot Club of France (with Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli), Fred Astair, Duke Ellington, Paul Whiteman, Peter Gabriel, Sting, Cher, Jon Bon Jovi, Meatloaf, Sinéad O'Connor, Elvis Costello, Elton John... His composition for the film Genevieve was nominated for the Oscars in 1953.



THE ACCORDION IN CLASSICAL MUSIC

The introduction of the accordion in classical music, has meant a great effort for the accordionists, who have not been able to normalize their instrument in this music until the final of the 20th century.

The first appearance of the free reed instruments in classical music was that of the guimbarde, for which Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, who was probably the best contrapointer of his time, professor of great masters such as Beethoven, wrote 7 concertinos for guimbarda, mandora and string orchestra between 1764 and 1771.



During the 19th century the accordions that existed at the time (the diatonics) did not manage to integrate into classical music. Those rudimentary instruments has not much in common with the modern convertor accordions, whose equivalent of the 19th century was rather the harmonium, which did manage to integrate into the conservatories and iwhom they wrote composers such as Schubert, Rossini, Saint-Säens, Liszt, Berlioz, Verdi, Johann Strauss II, Franck, Elgar, Dvorak, Sibelius, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Liszt, Richard Strauss, Hindemith, Mahler, Puccini, Schönberg, Berg, Webern, Stravinsky, Shostakovitch, Kagel, Vaughan Williams...



Franz Schubert



Gioacchino Rossini



Franz Liszt



Arnold Schönberg



Igor Stravinsky

The concertina was very fashionable in the classical world from London between 1840 and 1860, highlighting performers-composers such as Giulio Regondi (pictured), Richard Blagrove and Catherina Pelzer, who also premiered hundreds of works, including those by composers such as Moliue, Mcfarren, Harcourt, Benedict...



Already in the 20th century other free reed instruments also had their importance in classical music: the guimbarde (for which they composed Ives, Morricone...), the harmonica (Villalobos, Vaughan Williams, Milhaud, Rodrigo... with great performers like Larry Adler or Tommy Reilly) and the bandoneon (Weill, Kagel, Rodrigo, Takemitsu, Berleta... with great performers like Piazzolla, Troilo, Arolas, Laurenz, Maffia...).

We will divide the history of the accordion in classical music in 3 stages:

1st Stage: Pioneers approaching classical music: 1883- 1927

The first accordion concert was in 1831 in London by Johann Sedlatzek, one of the most prominent flutists of his time (he was the flutist of the premiere of Beethoven's 9th symphony), who finished one of his recitals playing a piece with the accordion.

The first original work we know was the “Thème varié très brillant” by Louise Reisner (pictured), premiered in 1836 at the Hotel de Ville in Paris by herself.



In the last years of the 19th century and early 20th century some important composers (Tchaikovsky, Giordano, Berg, Hindemith, Ives, Weill, Prokofief, Shostakovitch, Françaix, Milhaud...) used the accordion in their works, but in all cases making an almost anecdotal role.

Some of the most outstanding accordionists of the early 20th century began to play repertoires that began to move away more and more from folk music: some began to play more and more faithful transcriptions (Gagliardi, Decornoy, Magnante, Sabatier-Bonnal, Prez, Saive,...), others played virtuous variations of popular melodies (Orlansky-Titarenko, Yachkevitch...) and some began to compose classic works with influences of light music (Pietro Deiro, Guido Deiro, Pietro Frossini...).



Giovanni Gagliardi



Guido Deiro



Pietro Frossini



Charles Magnante

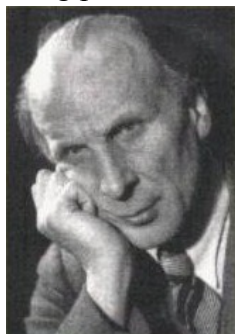


It is worth pointing out that the great painter Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) was inspired by the accordion in several of his paintings: “Accordionist and children” (1903, in the left photo), “Study of a clown with accordion” (1905), “Saltimbanquis: dance to the sound of the accordion” (1905), “The accordionist” (1911, in the right picture), “Accordionist (man with hat)” (1916) and “Sailor playing the accordion” (1912).



2nd Stage: The standard basses accordion in classical music

An important milestone in the history of the accordion was the creation of the accordion movement promoted by the German house Hohner, whose main contributions were the creation in 1931 of the Accordion School of Trossingen, where accordionists from all over Europe came, and the commission from 1927 of more than 250 works for solo accordion, chamber music and concerts for accordion and orchestra to neoclassical composers (Hugo Herrmann, Hans Brehme, Wolfgang Jacobi...), creating the first original classical repertoire for accordion. The first work was the "7 new compositions" by Hugo Herrmann (1927). The most outstanding performers were Hermann Schittenhelm and Rudolf Würthner.



Hugo Herrmann



Herman Schittenhelm



Rudolf Würthner

George Gershwin gave his permission to record the Rhapsody in Blue for accordion and orchestra, when he had only allowed the versions of the Paul Whiteman's Orchestra, organist Jesse Crawford and Gershwin himself on piano. This work, written in 1924, on the way between jazz and classical music, is one of the best-known classics of the 20th century. The accordionist who received this honor was Joe "Cornell" Smelser in 1931, who recorded it for an NBC program, accompanied by the Ohman-Arden Orchestra, formed by more than 40 leading musicians of the time.

In the USSR there was already a remarkable classical movement around the accordion since the 1930s. At the beginning of the 30s Rubtsov and Stotnikov composed the first concerts for accordion and orchestra, albeit with a folkloric air, still far from classical aesthetics. Both concerts were premiered in 1937 by Gvozdev and the Philharmonic of St. Petersburg. Also they wrote in the following years of the decade of 1930 concerts of this type Klimentov and Andreyev. Around the 1940s there were accordionists who gradually moved away from folklore, emerging the figures of several composers-accordionists who composed virtuous variations on popular themes with classical air (Chenderev, Panitsky, Surkov, Motov, Rizol...) or others with a language closer to Russian post-Romanticism (Tchaikin, Repnikov, Kholminov, Miaskov, Podgorny...).

In Italy in the 1950s there was a remarkable movement around the classical accordion with composers such as Fugazza, Melocchi, Pozzoli, Volpi, Ferrari Trecate, Cambieri, Anzagui..., although their works were neo-baroque and neoromantic aesthetics not too modern. As an interpreter, Gervasio Marcosignori stood out.

In other countries there were also notable accordion composers: the Finnish Lasse Pihlajamaa, the Maltese Charles Camilleri, the French Médard Ferrero or André Astier, the Hungarian Matyas Seiber, the Englishman George Barton, the Israeli Jehuda Oppenheimer...



Felice Fugazza



Gervasio Marcosignori



André Astier



Lasse Pihlajamaa

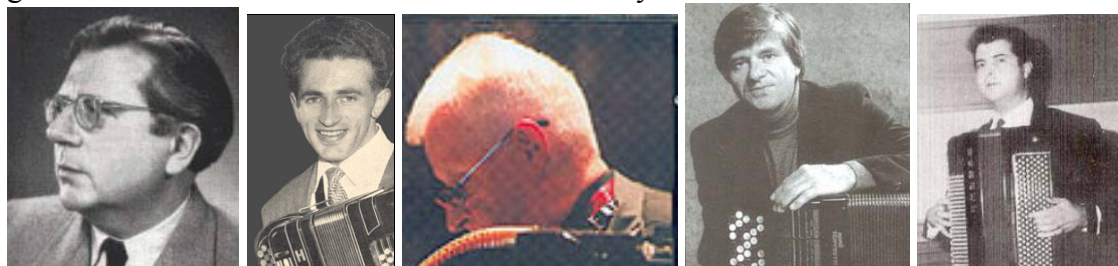
Some of the most important players were: Anthony Galla-Rini, the Norwegian Toralf Tollefsen, the French Freddy Balta, the Italian Aldo Rizzardi (based in Mexico) and the Russian Yuri Kazakov, who was on tour for a year in duo with the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich on a tour organized by the Soviet government, playing for small towns from Bach to 20th century music.

3rd Stage: The Free Bass Accordion in contemporary music

The first known composition for free basses was the Paganiniana by Hans Brehme from 1951, premiered by the German Fritz Dobler. In 1952 the Danish composer Per Nørgård composed "Introduction and Toccata" for the Danish accordionist Lars Dyremose.

But probably the most important accordionist of the history was the danish Mogens Ellegaard, who turned the accordion of free basses into protagonist of the avant-garde of the scandinavian contemporary music between 1957 and 1995, premiering more than 200 works of composers like Schmidt, Bentzon, Norgard, Rovsing-Olsen, Lundquist, Nordheim, Kayser, Norholm, Holmboe, Pade...

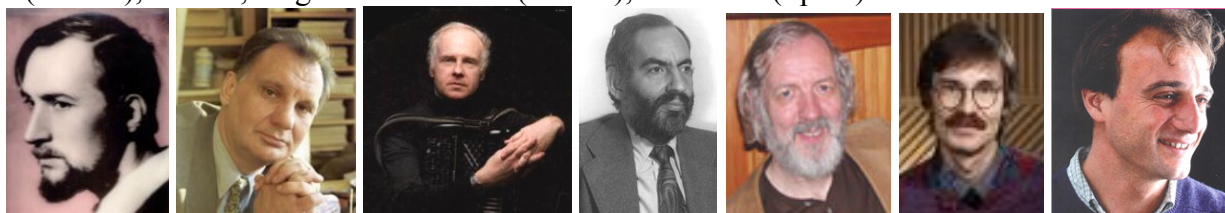
Another of the pioneers of free basses at that time was the Frenchman Christian Di Maccio, of whom Igor Stravinsky said "The accordion finally found its genius". In 1959 he gave a classical recital with free basses in the Pleyel hall in Paris.



Hans Brehme Fritz Dobler Lars Dyremose Mogens Ellegaard Christian Di Maccio

In the old Czechoslovakia, from the 1950s there was a remarkable musical movement around the accordion with composers with a very modern language for the repertoire of the time as Feld, Trojan, Truhlar, Fiala, Burian, Hurt...

In the USSR, around the 1970s a new generation of accordionist composers emerged with a language close to Khatchaturian or Shostakovitch such as Kusyakov, Semionov, Nagayev, Subitzky, Derbenko, Vlasov, Pushkarenko, Rundchak... But if there is an accordionist composer who stands out outstandingly it is Vladislav Solotarev. In addition, in other countries, many accordion composers have composed works of interest such as Philajamaa, Makkonen, Murto, Saira or Jutila (Finland), Oliveros, Schimmel or Klucevsek (USA), Ganzer (Germany), Hugo Noth (Switzerland), Krzanowski, Olczak, Dowlasz or Precz (Poland), Abbott, Angelis or Busseuil (France), Gurbindo (Spain)...



Wladislav Solotarev Viatcheslav Semionov Alain Abbott Fermin Gurbindo Jürgen Ganzer Petri Makkonen Franck Angelis

Following the model of Ellegaard, in recent years other accordionists have worked worldwide with the most important composers of contemporary music: Stockhausen, Berio, Françaix, Gubaidulina, Kagel, Murray Schafer, Creston, Hovanhess, Lindberg, Donatoni, De Pablo, Hosokawa, Takahashi...⁷

⁷ Performers who have premiered works by contemporary composers: the Canadian Macerollo (Murray Schafer, Dolin, Avril, Surdin, Pentland...), the American Carmen Carozza (Bennett, Cowell, Creston, Hovanhess, Kleinsinger, Leuing, Pisk, Riegger, Seigmeister, Still, Surinach, Thompson, Tcherepnin...), the Russian Lips (Berinsky, Denisov, Volkov, Gubaidulina...), the Finnish Rantanen (Lindberg, Tiensuu, Jokinen, Aho, Valpola...), Draugsvoll and Crabb in Denmark (Mossonmark, Lorentzen, Aaquist...), the British Murray (Finnissy, Clarke, Webb...), the Dutch Dekkers (de Leeuw, Von Beurden, Badings...), the Italian Jacomucci (Berio, Kagel, Donatoni, De Pablo, Iges, Nicolau...), the Japanese Mie Miki (Hosokawa, Takahashi...), the Chinese Cao Xiaoqing (Jia, Qin...), the French Bonnay (Sciortino, Bosseur...), the Mexican Barberena (Macias...) and Contet (Françaix, Bussotti...) and in Germany accordionists of different nationalities like the Swiss Noth (Berio, Rovenstrunck, de la Motte, Kapr...), the Swiss Moser (Firsova, Pintscher, Gubaidulina...), the Italian Anzellotti (Berio, Kagel, Holliger...) and the German Hussong (Gubaidulina, Hosokawa, Huber...), the Basques Castaño (Marco, Prieto, Soler, Torres, Camarero, Igoa, Brncic, Del Puerto, Rueda...) and Alberdi (Erkoreka, Gerenabarrena, Martinez, Gaigne, Lazzano, Del Puerto, Torres).... Stockhausen, one of the most important composers of the 20th century, has also used the accordion in chamber music.



Friedrich Lips



Joseph Macerollo



Mini Dekkers



Max Bonnay



Elsbeth Moser



Hugo Noth



Steffan Hussong

Finally, we will name as a curiosity some illustrious players who played the accordion, such as the writers Charles Dickens, Mark Twain or Rudyard Kipling, the actors Charlie Chaplin, Fred Astaire or Bruce Willis, politicians such as Jacques Chirac, Richard Nixon or Prince William of England and musicians like John Lennon, Stephane Grapelli, Ella Fitzgerald, Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, Tom Waits, Benny Anderson (ABBA), Karl-Heinz Stockhausen, Michel Camilo...



John Lennon



Elvis Presley



Tom Waits



Benny Anderson (ABBA)

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