

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8845

# THE ENGLISH CONCERTINA

RICHARD CARLIN / HARRY CRABB / ALFRED EDWARDS / THE FAYRE FOUR SISTERS / BORIS & GREGORY MATUSEWITCH / HARRY MINTING / WILFRED PEARCE / REUBEN SHAW

Compiled and Annotated by Richard Carlin



M  
179  
E58  
1976

MUSIC LP

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8845

**SIDE ONE**

1. The Flight of the Bumblebees/Forgotten Dreams  
The Fayre Four Sisters
2. Cavalleria Rusticana  
Wilfred Pearce and Reuben Shaw
3. The History of the Crabb Concertina Firm  
Harry Crabb
4. Czardas  
Gregory Matusewitch
5. Santa Anna's Retreat/Greasy Coat  
Richard Carlin
6. Russian Fantasy  
The Fayre Four Sisters

**SIDE TWO**

1. Grieg's Morning  
The Fayre Four Sisters
2. Chrysanthemum (S. Joplin)  
The Boris Matusewitch Quartet
3. Waltz Impromptu  
Alfred Edwards
4. Haste to the Wedding/Smash the Windows  
Harry Minting and Richard Carlin
5. Speak Easy  
The Fayre Four Sisters
6. Raggin' the Scales  
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43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., U.S.A.

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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## SIDE TWO

1. Grieg's Morning - The Fayre Four Sisters
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Quartet
3. Waltz Impromptu - Alfred Edwards
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Harry Minting and Richard Carlin
5. Speak Easy - The Fayre Four Sisters
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## THE ENGLISH CONCERTINA

featuring the music and reminiscences of The Fayre Four Sisters, Harry Crabb, Boris and Gregory Matusewitch, Wilfred Pearce and Reuben Shaw, Alfred Edwards, Harry Minting, The Matusewitch Quartet, and Richard Carlin. Recorded and annotated by Richard Carlin.

The current folk music revival has brought new interest to many musical instruments, from hammered dulcimers and hurdy gurdys to bagpipes and the English concertina. Unlike these other instruments, the concertina did not originate as a "folk" instrument, despite its association with sailors and sea chanteys in the popular mind. In fact, until very recently, the concertina was played solely as a "classical" instrument. Some of the greatest masters of the instrument have been ignored by the current folk revival, simply because they don't play folk music. This album gives a selection of some of the best concertina music, from 78's recorded in the twenties and thirties to recent field recordings made in England and the U.S.

The English concertina was invented by Charles Wheatstone in or about 1835. Wheatstone is best known today for his scientific work; in later life, he developed the telegraph and the stereoscope. At the time, he became interested in designing free-reed instruments through the experiments of Grenie, an organ builder of Paris, and Buschmann, the inventor of the mund-harmonica (mouth-organ or harmonica). Wheatstone wished to invent an

instrument that would be both easy to master but suited to the most difficult music of his day. He developed two instruments, a delicate mouth-organ called the Symphonium and the English concertina.

The concertina was an immediate success with the aristocracy, and quite a few of these instruments were sold by the Wheatstone firm to dukes, lords, and prominent clergymen. Several virtuosi began touring with it, most notably Giulio Regondi, a handsome guitarist who was well-loved by high society. Although the concertina was denounced by the musical establishment as a "mere toy," it enjoyed a good deal of popularity among the leisured classes until the close of the nineteenth century.

Towards the close of the century, the instrument was more-or-less forgotten by the aristocracy. Inexpensive used instruments became available to working men. Music Hall artists in the early years of this century took up the instrument and popularized it among the working classes. Circus performers learned it in order to enhance their acts; at the time, circuses gave regular Sunday concerts of serious music. Concertina marching bands were formed in the north of England, and contests were held regularly up until the Second World War.

In Russia, the concertina gained popularity in the secondary schools. From the late 1800's until the revolution, concertina was taught to all women attending public schools. Several virtuosi began touring in Russia and Eastern Europe, some of whom came to the United States.

The concertinists that you will hear on this record play in the "classical style." Unlike the popular folk style that can be heard today, the classical style features counterpoint, rapid runs and rich harmony. I recorded these musicians in their homes, playing the music that they enjoy most. None of this material was rehearsed. Although some of the pieces that you will hear were popular over fifty years ago, I think you will agree that the musicianship exhibited by these concertinists just can't be beat.

### The Musicians:

The Fayre Four Sisters: Inga, Sylvia, Tina, and Lillian Webb were popular Music and Concert Hall performers, from the early 1920's right through the early 1950's. They performed all of the "popular stuff," although, as Tina comments, "we never let ourselves be bullied by the publishers." Uninterested in commercial success, they nevertheless became quite popular and toured extensively on the continent and with the Keith-Orpheum vaudeville circuit in the U.S. They are probably the single most influential

concertinists who ever performed. They recorded four 78's for a small Scottish record company in 1933, and one 78 in the early 1950's. Four of these performances are featured on this LP.

Gregory Matusewitch was one of the most talented of the Russian virtuosi. He performed in East Germany in the early 1920's and then came to this country to perform. He recorded eight sides for Victor in 1927 or 28, one of which is included here. Gregory's son, Boris Matusewitch, continues to play and teach concertina in New York City. His concertina quartet has been performing throughout the New York area, playing everything from Bach and Mozart to Scott Joplin, and earning no small fame among folk and classical music fans.

Harry Crabb operates a concertina manufactory in Islington, an industrial section of London. The firm was founded in 1848 by Harry's grandfather, and is well-known for its high-quality instruments. Harry Crabb is also a well-known performer on the duet concertina, and teaches a class in London.

Wilfred Pearce and Reuben Shaw are two of the finest concertinists from central England. Reuben Shaw plays a duet concertina on this LP, which is a larger instrument than the normal English concertina with a totally different fingering system. Wilfred Pearce plays a tenor-treble concertina. Their performance of "Cavalleria Rusticana" won them the prize at the 1975 International Concertina Association festival in London.

Alfred Edwards is one of the best-known concertinists from England. He is primarily known for his folk playing, although he recorded a number of light classical pieces for the Nixa label in the early 1950's. His tutor for the concertina is still available from Boosey and Hawkes and is quite good. His playing, in both folk and classical styles, is extraordinary.

Harry Minting was the last manager of C. Wheatstone and Co., the concertina makers, and also a performing concertinist. He learned from Charles Rutterford, a famous teacher of the early years of this century. He performed with Ernest Rutterford's jazz band, playing rhythm concertina and guitar. He formed a concertina school in London in the '50's and now owns a music shop in Kent. He plays everything from folk to ragtime to the "classics."

Richard Carlin, the editor of this recording, has researched the concertina and its history for over four years now, in libraries and homes throughout the U.S. and England. He has written an instruction book for the concertina, to be published in Spring, 1977 by Oak Publications, New York, which also includes some history and lots of illustrations. He has played concertina both as a solo artist and as member of the Chicken Hill Ramblers and the Icy Mountain Stringband.

## The Music:

### SIDE ONE

1. The Flight of the Bumblebees/Forgotten Dreams - The Fayre Four Sisters (Tina Webb - lead treble concertina, Sylvia Webb - second treble, Inag Webb - baritone, Lillian Webb - bass). Recorded by John Hessel in the early 1950's; Master no. 01-748-7150 B.

The Fayre Four recorded this promotional record for C. Wheatstone and Co., the concertina manufacturers, early in the 1950's. Tina Webb arranged all of the group's music, which typically features first treble and baritone taking the lead, with the second treble and bass playing accompaniment. Tina's lead on Bumblebees features many rapid runs; her speed and agility is nothing short of astonishing. At the time when this piece was arranged (around 1930), big band jazz was quite popular in England, so Bumblebees is given a jazzy, syncopated rhythm. Forgotten Dreams was a popular song of the day.

2. Cavalleria Rusticana - Wilfred Pearce (tenor-treble concertina) and Reuben Shaw (duet concertina). Recorded by Richard Carlin, January, 1975.

The concertina was very popular in the Nottingham mining district where Wilfred Pearce grew up. Also popular on the music halls was the large duet concertina, which features a complete keyboard for both left and right hands. Reuben Shaw and Wilfred Pearce have played together for some years, and their arrangement of Cavalleria Rusticana is quite a good one indeed.

3. The History of the Crabb Firm - told by Harry Crabb. Recorded by Richard Carlin, Jan. 1975.

Harry Crabb is the grandson of the founder of today's best concertina manufactory, and he continues to make a fine, hand-crafted instrument. At the time that John Crabb, Crabb, Harry's grandfather, broke away from Wheatstone to form his own firm, many tiny firms were assembling concertinas in London. Crabb's firm was one of the few to do all their own work on every instrument. This interview was taped above Harry Crabb's workshop in Islington. You can hear the trucks go by on the street below while we talked.

4. Czardas - Gregory Matusewitch, concertina, with piano accompaniment. Recorded c. 1928 by Victor Records, no. 73616-B.

This is a fine example of the artistry of Gregory Matusewitch. Gregory's son Boris comments that the speed of this performance is pretty amazing.

5. Santa Anna's Retreat/Greasy Coat - Richard Carlin. Recorded by Richard Carlin, September, 1976.

Two American square dance tunes learned from Dana Loomis of Athens, Ohio. These are played in a folk style that is popular today.

6. Russian Fantasy - The Fayre Four Sisters. Recorded in 1933 by Great Scott Records, no. A 152.

This fantasy features everything from The Volga Boatmen to the 1812 Overture. Tina also managed to work in towards the end an Imitation of Church Bells, which was quite popular on the concertina. The lead instrument on this record is the piccolo concertina, pitched one octave above a treble.

## SIDE TWO

1. Grieg's Morning - The Fayre Four Sisters. Recorded by John Hüssel in the early 1950's; Master no. 01-748-7150 A.

Another classic performance by the Fayre Four.

2. Chrysanthemum - Boris Matusewitch and Christine Di Napoli, treble concertinas, Ruth Weiss - tenor concertina, William Knapp - baritone concertina. Recorded by Richard Carlin, July, 1975.

The Matusewitch quartet is, as far as I know, the only concertina quartet that performs today. They play a wide selection of classical music and also some piano rags, all arranged for the quartet by Boris Matusewitch. Their performances have attracted large audiences, from Lincoln Center to the Focus II Coffee House in New York.

3. Waltz Impromptu - Alfred Edwards - treble concertina, with Arthur Dulay, piano. Recorded by Nixa records in the early 1950's, NICA N.Y. 7041.

Alf Edwards is one of the best-known players of the English concertina, particularly for his work accompanying Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd. However, few folk players have heard his classical solos, which are as impressive as his folk work. Although some of the classical pieces that he plays might be considered "dated," the technique displayed on these 78 records can't be beat.

4. Haste to the Wedding/Smash the Windows - Harry Minting and Richard Carlin, treble concertinas. Recorded Jan., 1975 by Richard Carlin.

Harry Minting learned to play concertina when he was very young from Charles Rutterford, one of the last great masters of the concertina of the late nineteenth century.

Harry's musical career lead him to become plant manager of Wheatstones, the concertina manufacturers. He has played "rhythm concertina" in a jazz band and classical concertina, both solo and in groups. In the 1950's, Helen Kennedy of the English Folk Dance and Song Society introduced him to folk dance music, which he enjoys to play. On this selection, Harry improvises a harmony to my lead on two well-known country dance tunes.

5. Speak Easy - The Fayre Four Sisters. Recorded by Great Scott Records in 1933, no. A154.

6. Raggin' The Scales - The Fayre Four Sisters. Recorded by Great Scott Records in 1933, no. A151.

Two final pieces by the Fayre Four Sisters. By far the most influential (and charming) concertina players of their day, their performances are both enjoyable and astonishingly complex.

## A Note on The Recordings

The fidelity on this record is not of the best quality. Many of the selections were dubbed from rare 78's. In the case of the Fayre Four and Gregory Matusewitch selections, these 78's are so rare that, as far as I know, only a few copies of each are extant. Some of my own recordings were made under difficult circumstances. I hope that the listener will understand that in order to present these fine performances I have drawn on many older recordings.

Most of the selections that I recorded were unrehearsed, and recorded in the home of the performer. A great effort has been made to preserve the atmosphere of the original recording sessions, as I feel that this music is a part of a larger environment, that of working and middle class men and women in England and America, than simply the concert hall.

My own recordings were made with the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities, grant no. Ay-2245-75. Thanks must also be extended to Frank Butler, Boris Matusewitch, Benson and Robert Carlin, and the performers on this record for their hospitality and willingness to share.