

North Staffs Accordion Club

Newsletter July-August 2023 No 507



HI EVERYONE. I HOPE YOU ARE ALL WELL. HERE IS THE BI-MONTHLY MISSIVE - WHICH IS A LITTLE EARLY THIS TIME AS I'M OFF TO SAMPLE THE PLEASURES AND DELIGHTS OF LLANDUDNO.
CHEERS LILY



JUNE CLUB NIGHT

Tuesday 20th June 2023. The night started with background music from Mike Richards as we set out the room for our June club night and the players and audience gathered.

With Peter Cowie as compere we started proceedings with our usual playalong led by Paul Hobbs. Following this, Derek Wilton took the floor with his harmonica giving us a medley of cowboy songs which included *Shenandoah*, *Streets of Laredo*, *Red River Valley*, *Wandering Star*, and *They Call the Wind Maria*. Meanwhile the 14 accordion players were set in a semi-circle and, over the night, played the following pieces:



Rosie Galley & John Cordon (duet)	<i>La Mer, Moulin Rouge Waltz</i>
Mike Richards	<i>Dark Island (Ben Bechula), Dance tune - Duke of Perth</i>
Betty Nixon	<i>Make the World go away</i>
Jacquie Flather	<i>Wild Rover, Donauwellen Waltz</i>
The A Team Quartet	<i>You Raise Me Up</i>
Tony Britton	<i>Men of Harlech, We are Sailing</i>
Viv & Pete (vocals) Cowie	<i>Sentimental Journey (duet), Kristina's Sommervisa (solo)</i>
Moira Hague	<i>The Boys of Mullaly, Calibrisella Mia</i>
Steve Hughes	<i>Bei Mire Bist du Shon, Black Orpheus</i>
Paul Dickinson	<i>Easy Peasy Polka, Red Roses for a Blue Lady</i>

Paul Dickinson, a member of the beginner's group was playing on club night for the first time and did an excellent job of Easy Peasy Polka and Red Roses for a Blue Lady

John Jones	<i>El Choclo, Medley - I Could have Danced all Night, Wouldn't it be lovely, I'm Getting Married in the Morning</i>
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Geoff Capewell

Answer Me, Oslo Waltz

Paul Hobbs

A Man Without Love, The Way You Look Tonight

Charlie Walker, (pictured above right) also one of our beginners' session players and another first-timer, playing ukulele, sang a rendition of *Eye Candy* by Josh Turner, the story of a man whose fancy was a girl on his TV.

Steve Hughes

JULY CLUB NIGHT

Behind every successful club night is a lot of planning and preparation work and this month was a prime example. Our guest artists **Julie Best** and **Jean Corrighan** were nice and early and sitting patiently in the car park as our troop of helpers zoomed into action. A well-oiled machine bringing order to a mass of tables, chairs, music stands, raffle prizes, microphones, amplifier, speakers, publicity material and printed music.



Just enough time to get a drink before MC Pete Cowie and MD Steve Houghton called the band to order to begin the evening with

a 20-minute programme of new and familiar band pieces. We included two of the pieces from the Knutsford Accordion Day, *Bella Romantica* and *Stand by Me*.



Then it was time to relax and enjoy the exquisite programme and playing of duo Julie Best and Jean Corrighan. I run out of superlatives when describing Julie and Jean, the most delightful and supportive accordion enthusiasts you could ever meet. Across the evening, I lost count, after 40, of the number of pieces played, but have no fear; Viv was there to record every detail, including the photos and video clips.



Julie said they vary the name of one piece depending on whether appealing to a French audience *Rouge et Noir*, or Italian, *Rosso e Nero*. Well, next time you're in Wales, you can use '*Coch a Du*'.

The mid break quickly passed with lots raffle prizes and a roll-over attendance award of £40. Excitement grew as multiple balls had to be drawn before we had a winner from the members in attendance. A special treat this month was lots of cakes given by our master baker, Barbara. It was good to see new faces including Pat and Les from the one year old Shropshire Accordion Club.

Before we started the second half, we had great pleasure in inviting **Helen Rich** (above) to play a couple of impromptu numbers. Sign of a true enthusiast, she just happened to have her accordion in the car, and wowed us with pieces from memory.

The second half went too quickly, with the band (right) playing a few numbers, including a welcome return of *Vienna City of My Dreams*, and not so welcome *Gallop* by some band members.



Julie and Jean then kept us mesmerized well beyond our normal ending time with not only their duet repertoire but some gorgeous solos, like *Forgotten Dreams*, and *Spanish Gypsy Dance*. It was 11pm and it took Jean and Julie until 2am to get home to Carlisle. That's dedication for you.

Tony Britton

AUGUST CLUB NIGHT

The theme for the August club night on the 15th of the month is **French Music**. Thematic apparel is encouraged.



COMMUNITY PLAYING - CONGLETON



We were invited to play for the Congleton Less Able Club, an organisation specifically for people with mobility problems. They hold regular monthly afternoon events with entertainment and refreshments, and on Friday 14th July we were the entertainment providing lots of singalongs and a few band pieces.

As usual Pete did a sterling job leading the singing and engaging with the members who responded well with the names and dates of the original artists for the music being played. It must have been a successful event because they would like us back and we attracted interest in our beginners/accordion loan scheme. No wonder 12 of us turned up, braving the inclement weather, as we were treated like royalty with cups and saucers and chocolate biscuits. Another enjoyable and colourful event.

Tony Britton

PLAYING FOR PLEASURE IN NEW VENUE

Our July Playing for Pleasure (P4P) session took place (indoors!) at a new venue, the Basford Lawn Tennis Club. The club is located just below the New Vic theatre, Newcastle under Lyme, and we used a room overlooking the tennis courts and lovely gardens. It is also next door to the home of our member, and member of the Lawn Tennis club, John Plumb, who was instrumental in arranging our use of it.



A few members beat me to it and when I arrived John was entertaining them on the resident piano. The gathering was larger than normal and we formed a circle, or rather an oval, around two tables, (I'm afraid we missed the photo opportunity) each person playing their selected piece and those that could, and some who thought they couldn't, joining in by ear for the second rendition. It was good fun.

Thanks to our previous host, Geoff Capewell, it was customary for this group to have trifle with their tea or coffee in the break so we continued the habitude in the new venue much to the delight of the sugar-resilient members, and we were very fortunate in having indefatigable non-player, Peter Cowie, in charge of kitchen affairs sandwiched between his daily crossword. It has even been suggested that we change our name to 'The Trifle Club'!

We followed the same format for the second half and so ended a pleasant afternoon.

Steve Hughes

EFFECTIVE PRACTISING FORWARD

In order to extend and improve our accordion playing abilities, a planned and purposeful approach to practising is essential.

If we want to improve it is vital to select the right music, and the easiest and most certain way of doing so is to follow graded music lists for accordions. You do not have to take the examinations, but taking them, after being trained by a good teacher, does produce the best results.

The practical examination syllabus includes scales, arpeggios, playing by sight, studies and pieces, so dividing our practice time between these items is a good approach.

Our club currently uses the Palmer Hughes tutorials in its beginners' classes.

Regardless of the reason for our practice sessions, effective practising is essential, and the following text endeavours to lay down advice by answering some fundamental questions.

WHAT IS PRACTISING?

Practising may be defined as 'a voluntary and persistent attempt to make skill a habit'.

We all know that bad habits are just as easy to learn as good habits and sometimes easier, so it is vital from the very start to practise correctly.

If you do not practise correctly, you may only succeed in developing a bad habit; and this habit may be extremely difficult to break once it has become ingrained.

WHY IS CONCENTRATION IMPORTANT AND HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO REGULAR PRACTICE?

In order to learn a piece of music, or develop a particular playing technique to the point at which its reproduction becomes automatic, it is necessary to consciously repeat exactly the same finger movements over and over again. This process causes the brain to remember the pattern of movement and the muscles in the fingers to develop the necessary strength and dexterity.

The key words in the above paragraph are 'exactly the same finger movements' and, in order to achieve this objective, concentration is absolutely essential.

Most people can only concentrate for about 20 to 30 minutes, so focused practising for any longer than this is not beneficial; on the contrary, due to lapses in concentration you will fail to repeat exactly the same finger movements, so you may well unlearn what you have already learnt.

This is the reason why you will improve far more quickly with regular practice sessions of say 30 minutes every day, than you will with irregular practice sessions of longer duration.

Please note that this does not prevent those of you who want to practise for more than 30 minutes a day from doing so, but it does suggest regular rest breaks.

HOW IMPORTANT IS FINGERING?

If the learning process involves repeating exactly the same finger movements over and over again, the correct fingering must be written on the music before you start. This is especially important for those difficult areas, where there is a tendency to use different fingering each time you play them.

HOW IMPORTANT IS SPEED?

Many people put too much emphasis on speed when they are practising; they try to speed up far too soon.

Accuracy is far more important than speed and, moreover, if you speed up to the point at which you fail to repeat the same finger movements over and over again, your practising has become ineffective.

If you concentrate on accuracy, and do not worry too much about speed, you will eventually be pleasantly surprised by the natural way in which your playing speed has increased.

HOW MUCH OF THE PIECE SHOULD I ATTEMPT TO LEARN AT ANY ONE TIME?

Divide the piece into small sections, and learn each section thoroughly before moving on to the next section.

BOTH HANDS TOGETHER OR HANDS SEPARATELY?

When you start a new piece, or section of a piece, you should practise each hand separately until you can play at speed without making mistakes. At this point you should start to practise both hands together; start very slowly at first and make sure that treble and bass are 'together'. Emphasising the first beat of the bar, and other beats as indicated by the music, will help you to achieve this objective.

WHAT COUPLER?

When you are learning a new piece of music you must be able to hear both treble and bass clearly; so, play the treble section with a single reed, and experiment with the bass couplers until two clearly distinct sounds are produced. Play staccato bass (except where the music dictates otherwise), and make sure that those treble and bass notes which should be played at exactly the same time are 'together'.

WHAT ABOUT THE BELLOWS?

The bellows are the lungs of the instrument, so if you are going to make good music, proper bellows control is essential.

As you begin to learn the piece and your finger-work becomes more proficient, start to concentrate on bellows control. Add 'colour' by increasing or decreasing volume in accordance with the music; do not forget to emphasise the first beat of the bar and other beats where appropriate.

As the learning process involves repeating the same thing over and over again, it is advisable (especially for beginners) to write bellows direction changes on the music. At the end of the piece your bellows should be closed.

Change direction of the bellows at an appropriate point; for example, at the end of a phrase where a singer would take a breath. Phrases are sometimes shown with legato slurs and any bellows change should be at the end of such articulation and never during a long note or tied notes.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I FIND THAT A PIECE CONTAINS TWO OR THREE BARS THAT I CAN NOT PLAY?

Do not give up!

Inevitably almost every piece of music contains two or three bars which are much harder to play than the rest, but mastering these bars is the key to extending and improving your accordion playing abilities.

Bearing in mind that most people can only concentrate for twenty or thirty minutes, it is essential to spend this time where it will do best; so, you should not waste time playing sections of the music which you have already learnt. Instead, concentrate all your time and effort on those bars which you are having difficulty with.

Before you start practising the difficult bars, you should review your fingering and ensure that it is correct and clearly written on the music.

When you are convinced that your fingering is correct, you should start to play the difficult bars very slowly over and over again. If necessary, practise each hand separately. Be patient and do not hurry.

As you begin to speed-up select a new starting point two or three bars ahead of the difficult bars; this will give you a lead in.

Do not revert to practising the whole piece until the difficult bars have been mastered.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO USE A METRONOME?

In order to successfully learn a piece of music, it is essential to start the learning process by playing the right notes, with the right fingers at the right time; but unfortunately, many people, especially beginners, do not place sufficient emphasis on rhythm. Consequently, they build-in timing errors (they make some notes too long and others too short), and these are extremely difficult to remove once they have been learnt.

It is almost impossible to over-emphasise how important it is to check your rhythm with a metronome when you are learning a new piece of music. Metronomes, these days, are available free as phone or laptop apps.

As you learn the piece, and your speed increases, checking it with a metronome and comparing it with the correct speed for the music will give you some indication of your progress. Scales and studies should be treated in exactly the same way.

If you are experiencing difficulty with a particular section of music, and you suspect a timing problem, play the difficult section very slowly accompanied by a metronome ticking on the fast notes (quavers, semi-quaver, etc). This is a very effective way of identifying and eliminating timing errors.

HOW USEFUL IS A RECORDING?

An audio or video recording is an extremely useful practice tool!

It is far easier to hear faults when you record and re-play music than it is when you are actually playing it; so when you have a new piece of music in reasonable shape record it, listen to it (do not be too disheartened), and concentrate on eliminating your faults.

Recording also makes practising duets and band parts far more interesting, Try playing duets by yourself, for example, by using the recording for accordion 1 and playing accordion 2 (or vice versa). It's great fun!

PRACTISING IS HARD WORK SO HOW CAN I KEEP MYSELF MOTIVATED?

We all get tired and de-motivated from time-to-time, but we can recharge our batteries by being involved with other accordionists.

An Accordion Festival is probably the most up-lifting experience in the calendar, but on a more regular and local basis your involvement with the activities organised by your own club is just as beneficial.

Setting yourself an objective, and concentrating on achieving that, is another extremely useful way of keeping yourself motivated. Targets such as 'learning a new piece for the next club night', or 'passing the Grade 3 Examination next year', are ideal.

Listening to a variety of good accordion music is another good way of generating interest; it will also 'train your ear' which will improve your playing. YouTube is a good source.

CONCLUSIONS

There are probably as many questions and answers on Effective Practising as there are days in the year, but hopefully this article has answered some of the most important ones.

Mike Richards (Updated 22/07/2023)

Diary

Club Nights at Bradwell WMC ST5 8JA (normally third Tuesday of the month)

August 15 th	Theme Night
September 19 th	Guest Night tbc
October 17 th	AGM and Band Performance
November 14 th	(Second Tuesday) Guest Night - Leonard Brown
December 19 th	Christmas Party

Beginners/Improvers at Bradwell WMC

Mondays **August** 7th and 15th **September** 4th and 25th **October** 9th and 23rd

Playing for Pleasure at Basford Lawn Tennis Club 2 pm on 2nd Thursday of month.

Other club events

Band rehearsals at Bradwell WMC Every Tuesday except 3rd of the month 8 pm

Band Concert at Alsager United Reform Church, Saturday afternoon 9th Sept 2023.

Community Playing at Longton Methodist Hall for u3a, Thursday Nov 30th.

External Events

Bradford Accordion Band Grand Charity Show, Bingley Arts Centre, West Yorkshire Sept 30th 7.30 pm

Midland Accordion Festival, West Bromwich November 10th-12th

Stockport AC's charity concert, Broken Cross Club, Macclesfield. Dec 3rd, 2pm

Club Contacts

President Steve Houghton

Trustees:

Chair	Steve Hughes	07939 362294
Secretary	Paul Hobbs	07707 732756
Treasurer	Tony Britton	07923 580760

John Corden, Rosie Galley, Betty Nixon, Miriam Umpleby

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