

JOHN ABBOTT



Instrumentalist and arranger **Gil Goldstein** started accordion at age five, and entered jazz as a pianist in the 1970s, performing with Pat Martino, Billy Cobham, and Jim Hall. In the early '80s, Goldstein began working with legendary bandleader Gil Evans, and his interests turned to arranging. Most recently, Goldstein's arrangements have been featured on recordings by David Sanborn, Michael Brecker, and Chris Botti, as well as upcoming projects by Esperanza Spalding and Bobby McFerrin. Jon Regen

THE WORLD ACCORDION TO GIL

The often-misunderstood accordion is now taking its rightful place in the halls of modern music. The consummate world traveler, the accordion is basic to the music of Europe, South America, and beyond. In the United States, esteemed pop artists like Paul Simon, Bruce Springsteen, and Bruce Hornsby have all featured it in

their live and recorded efforts. It has also been featured prominently in jazz, blues, and cinematic music. It's a nimble beast, able to leap tall musical passages with its singular, sinewy sound. So for those who've been curious, here's a quick-start guide to this truly universal instrument. Gil Goldstein

1. Bellows Workout.

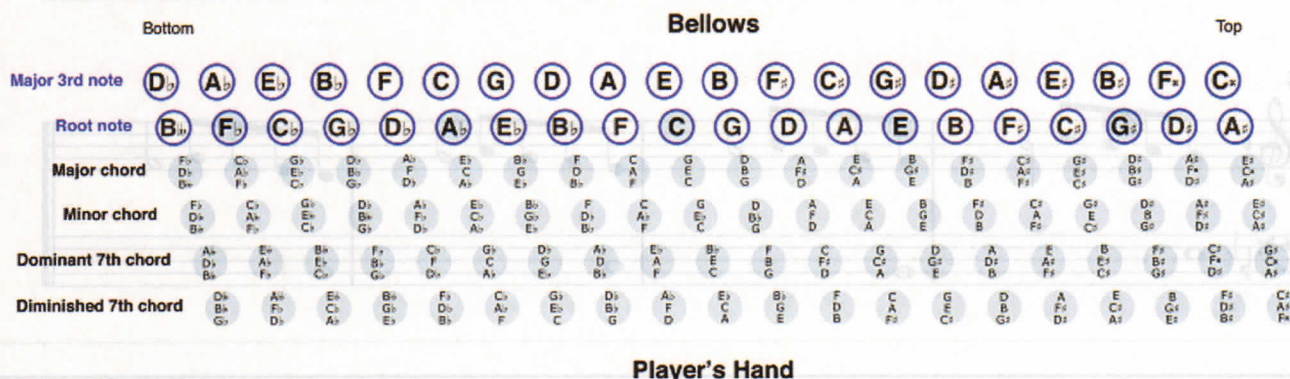
One thing that makes the accordion unique is its system called the *bellows*, which moves air throughout the instrument by pumping it over the casings of metal reeds. Because of this moving air, when you depress a key or button, a particular note sounds. Often times, you start playing with the bellows closed. When you begin a musical phrase, you use your left hand (which is strapped to the bass mechanism housing) to open the bellows. One secret is not to pull too hard, but instead, to let the weight of the instrument help. I generally like to sit when I play, resting the instrument on my left thigh. That way, I can maximize the gravitational effect. To close the bellows, you tilt the instrument to the right with the body and both arms, letting the bellows fall closed, applying only slight pressure with the inner part of the wrist and forearm.

Here's a five-note, right-hand phrase to help you practice the bellows. Play this at a medium tempo, and stay on the last note until you come close to the end of the open or closed position of the bellows, then *change* directions. I recommend you finger each phrase with an open hand and use no crossing of the thumb—try 2-3-4-5-4 or 1-2-3-4-3. Use this fingering even on the phrases that start with black keys—just put your thumb up there! We're not taught this in piano lessons, but it's quite comfortable once you get used to it. This is a lot like the way that guitarists and bassists can play a similar shape at any point on their instruments' necks.






2. Button Up!

The buttons on the accordion can play everything from single-note bass lines to full chordal accompaniment. The most popular accordion button layout in America is called the *Stradella* system, which features two rows of single-note buttons arranged in fifths, known, respectively, as the *bass* and *counter-bass*. The *bass* row is the second row down, with its central C usually marked by a rhinestone. The neighboring A \flat and E buttons are also marked. The *counter-bass* is the top row, and is a major third away from the bass row. Below the bass row's C are chords in the following order: major (C, E, G), minor (C, E \flat , G), dominant seventh (C, E, B \flat , no G), and diminished (C, E \flat , A, no F \sharp). Relative to each neighboring bass button, these chord shapes repeat in each key.

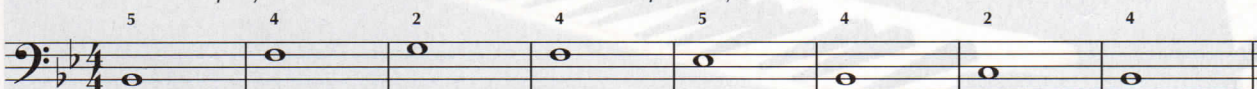


Player's Hand

-  **Button with concave depression**
Use as navigation points.
(Bass-note button)
 -  **Bass-note button**
Sounds one or more of the same note (in different octaves) when played.
 -  **Chord button**
Sounds a three-note chord when played.

Try playing this repeating shape in the left hand, starting on the $B\flat$, two notes down from the C. First, locate the C with your middle finger, then place your hand over the buttons so that finger 4 hits the F and finger 5 hits the $B\flat$. Next, play $B\flat$, F, G, F by using the fingering 5-4-2-4. Next, let your pinky find the $E\flat$ (again, two notes down from the last note you played: F), and play the same shape starting on $E\flat$. Like the previous right hand exercise, start with the bellows closed and play each note, this time, the whole length of the in or out motion, then change directions and switch to the next note. Let your left hand guide the instrument so that you have freedom and mobility in the fingers to play the notes.

all notes played on the second line down (the primary bass)



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Audio examples recorded
by the author.



Videos: Gil Goldstein
with Bobby McFerrin
and Pat Metheny.

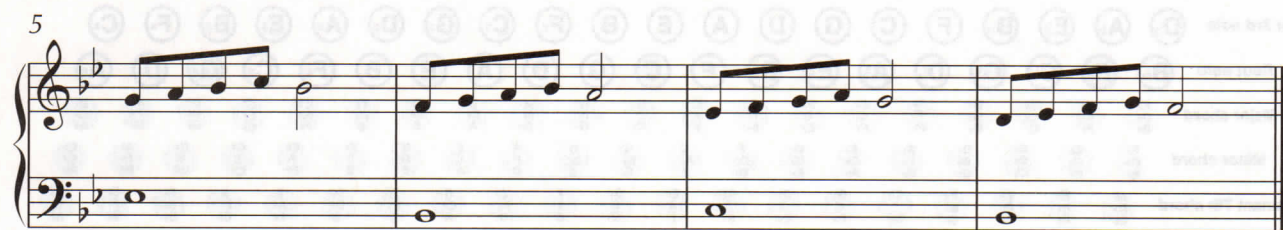


Gil's Choice: Victoria Accordions

LESSONS

3. All Together Now!

Once you have practiced both hands independently on their own, try putting them together. Play this *slowly*, taking time to get the feeling of the bellows and how it affects the accordion's sound.



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