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From chromatic to diatonic – and back

Exploring the different ways of playing the melodeon

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ABSTRACT

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In this bachelor thesis, I explore the different ways of playing the melodeon: in a diatonic way, in a more chromatic way, and the whole spectrum in between. After comparing the styles of four different melodeon players, I place them on the spectrum and reach a conclusion as to what kind of melodeon player I want to be myself. Since I realize that I want to get better at the diatonic way of playing, I focus on that in my lessons with the French melodeon player Lucas Thébaut. After having learned a lot of tunes from him, I also want to challenge myself to use the diatonic mind-set in the rest of my music. In the practical part of this study, I relearn a melody in a diatonic way, make a diatonic-inspired accompaniment and write a tune in the diatonic way. The results show me not only that I can use the diatonic mind-set if I want, but also that I can enjoy it and be inspired by it.

FROM CHROMATIC TO DIATONIC – AND BACK.....	1
Exploring the different ways of playing the melodeon.....	1
Lies Hendrix	1
ABSTRACT	2
1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 Goal.....	5
1.3 Thesis questions	6
1.4 Method	6
2. THE MELODEON.....	7
2.1 The right hand.....	7
2.2 The left hand	8
2.3 The bellows and the air button	8
2.4 Evaluation of my button system.....	9
3. ANALYSIS OF FOUR MELODEON PLAYERS.....	10
3.1 Anne Rivaud	10
3.2 Lucas Thébaut	11
3.3 Didier Laloy.....	11
3.4 Anne Niepold	12
3.5 Conclusion.....	12
4. MY PROCESS TOWARDS A DIATONIC WAY OF PLAYING	13
4.1 The lessons.....	13
4.2 My own practice.....	14
4.3 Challenges	15
4.4 Where am I now?	15
5. THE DIATONIC STYLE AS AN INSPIRATION	16
5.1 Relearning an old tune.....	16

5.2 Making a diatonic accompaniment.....	17
5.3 Writing a tune.....	18
5.4 Am I inspired?.....	19
6. CONCLUSION.....	19
7. BIBLIOGRAPHY	21
APPENDIX: OVERVIEW OF MY BUTTON SYSTEM.....	22

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

I started playing melodeon when I was around 13 years old. It was the time of a big folk music revival in Belgium: the start of the balfolk tradition¹. I played and listened a lot to French-style modern folk music and got especially inspired by a couple of Belgian and French melodeon players.

When I moved to Sweden, I was suddenly far away from the balfolk culture and did not really have any melodeon idols around me. Instead, I was surrounded by a lot of skilled folk and jazz musicians and I felt a lot of pressure to become a flexible musician that can handle many styles and keys. I started practising different scales and chords, trying to create a routine to master my instrument more and really know the buttons. I also started playing complicated tunes, for example in the musette² genre, because I felt that the challenge made me know my instrument better. I have done all that with mixed success: I have definitely become more flexible, but trying to master your instrument in all keys, while it is in fact (kind of) diatonic and made for playing in certain keys, can be very frustrating as well...

In the summer of 2018, I was at a balfolk festival in Toronto (!) with a lot of French musicians. Although I have listened a lot to modern French folk music, this was the first time in many years that I listened a lot to (and jammed) traditional French folk music. Suddenly, I was reminded of the origins and the character of my instrument: it is made for playing diatonic dance music and the bisonority³ is perfect to create a groove and make the music swing. It made me want to go back to those origins.

At the same time, I am really happy with the 'chromatic knowledge' of my instrument that I have gained under the past few years and I definitely do not want to give up my goal of being a flexible musician. All that has made me think a lot about the different ways in which the melodeon can be played and my own identity as a melodeon player.

1.2 Goal

Listening to melodeon players from different countries and styles, it is clear that the instrument, even though it is traditionally diatonic, can be played in many different

¹ Balfolk is folk dance that is danced in a number of Western and Central European countries to live music. The dances are a mix of (mostly French) partner dances, group dances and chain dances.

² Musette is French jazzy accordion music that was/is played on chromatic accordion.

³ A melodeon has two tones for every button: one when you push the bellows and another one when you pull. See paragraph 2 for more detailed information.

ways: more diatonically or more chromatically. In this thesis, I want to investigate those two (or more) possibilities, while also exploring my own identity as a melodeon player. At the same time, I want to dig into the diatonic way of playing and see how it can contribute to my playing.

1.3 Thesis questions

The questions I will be answering, are:

- What are the characteristics of the chromatic way of playing the melodeon, and what are those of a diatonic way of playing? To what types of melodeon are these ways of playing usually connected?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of these two ways of playing?
- I have been playing the melodeon rather chromatically. How do I get better at the diatonic way of playing?
- How can I use the diatonic way of playing as an inspiration when I play, arrange and compose tunes?

1.4 Method

To fully understand my questions, it is necessary to know how my instrument works. In section 2, I will be providing information about the way the buttons of my melodeon are organized and the strengths and weaknesses of that particular button system.

Next, in section 3, I will analyse the playing of four melodeon players that I have been listening to: Anne Rivaud, Lucas Thébaut, Didier Laloy and Anne Niepold. Do they play in a more diatonic or a more chromatic way? What can I learn from their different styles of playing?

Since I want to get better at playing diatonically, I have been taking lessons with Lucas Thébaut, a French traditional melodeon player. From him, I want to learn how I can get better at the diatonic way of playing. A description of my work and my progression can be found in section 4.

Finally, I want to take everything that I've learnt about the diatonic way of playing and use it in a creative way. I will be doing three things:

- Take a tune that I have been playing for a long time and 'relearn' it, using the techniques (ornaments, pushing and pulling, swing) that I have learnt from the diatonic way of playing;
- Find a way of accompanying (playing chords) that is inspired by the diatonic way of playing;
- Write a tune inspired by the diatonic way of playing.

The result can be found in section 5.



Fig. 1 My melodeon

2. The melodeon

It is unclear who invented the melodeon (American English: ‘button accordion’), but it was either the German Friedrich Buschmann in 1822 or the Vienna-based Romanian Cyrill Demian in 1829. The first melodeons had a very simple design: they were entirely diatonic and had only five buttons. Soon, however, numerous variations and extensions followed. One of those new developments was the

chromatic accordion, the nowadays more famous and established sister of the melodeon⁴.

The melodeon (Fig. 1) might look similar to the accordion, but it works completely differently. I have already mentioned the principle of bisonority: every button produces two tones. One tone when you pull the bellows and one tone when you push it. That makes the instrument similar to the harmonica: you get a different tone when you inhale (blow) through a hole than when you exhale (draw).

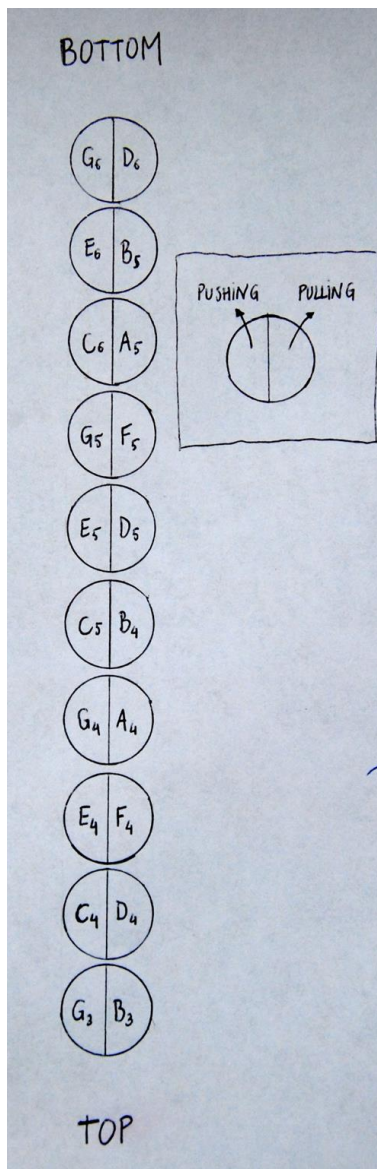
2.1 The right hand

A row of buttons on the melodeon’s melody side (the right hand) contains one key and works like a harmonica: when you push the bellows (cfr. when you blow on the harmonica), you can play the 1st, 3rd and 5th degree of the key (= the triad of the tonic). When you pull the bellows (cfr. when you draw on the harmonica), you can play the 2nd, the 4th, the 6th and the 7th degree of the key (= everything else). See Fig. 2 for a schematic overview of the C major row on my melodeon.

Note: as there are three tones of the key that are pushed and four tones that are pulled, their placement shifts in every octave. The higher you go, the bigger the interval between the pushed and the pulled tone on one button becomes. As a result, no two octaves are the same on the melodeon. Unlike on the accordion, where you can simply use the same fingering when you change octave, I have to relearn a melody when I want to play it in a different octave.

The basic version of the melodeon is one that has one diatonic row like this. However, the most common one is probably the two-row melodeon. My first melodeon was a two-

⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “accordion”, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/levels/collegiate/article/accordion/3488>



row melodeon: it had both a G and a C row. Other common combinations are C/F, A/D and B/C⁵. In modern folk music, especially in France and Belgium, the three-row melodeon has become very popular. It contains two diatonic rows, often G and C, and a third row with all the tones that are not included in those two keys. That is the type of melodeon I play. It makes it possible to play in all keys, although some of them are much harder than others.

2.2 The left hand

The left hand of my melodeon has 18 buttons. Those 18 buttons are 18 (9 pushing and 9 pulling) sets of a bass button and a chord button. There is no real logic in how those sets are placed.

Unlike the accordion, that has a lot of buttons for the left hand, including major, minor, dominant and diminished chords, the melodeon only has one chord for every bass note. That means that, to be able to play anything in any key, those chords can only consist of the tonic and the fifth. I do, however, have the possibility of combining certain bass and chord buttons into more 'colourful' chords. Some examples:

- The C bass and the E chord make a Cmaj7 chord.
- The C bass and the Eb chord make a Cmin7 chord.
- The C bass and the G chord make a Cmaj9 or Cmin9 chord.

See the Appendix for a full overview of my button system.

Fig. 2 My C row

2.3 The bellows and the air button

Since you cannot just play any tone in any direction, the melodeon player needs to be constantly aware of whether he/she should pull or push. On an accordion, you simply change the direction when you are out of air, but on a melodeon, everything depends on the melody you want to play. This requires full control over the bellows, the middle part of the melodeon. Since it often happens that a tune has more tones that need to be pushed than tones that need to be pulled, or the other way around, an important part of

⁵ B/C is common in Irish music. It is a smart design, since only two rows (+- 20 buttons) give you all the 12 tones!

the melodeon is the air button. It is pressed with the left-hand thumb and allows the player to either open or close the bellows without having to make any sound by pushing buttons. In other words, it is a way to make sure that there is as much air in the bellows as the player wants in order to be able to play a certain melody.

In short, playing the melodeon is a constant four-part dialogue between the fingering of the right hand, the fingering of the left hand, the direction of the bellows and the air button.

2.4 Evaluation of my button system

There are countless different button systems for the melodeon, which are all variations and extensions of the basic 'harmonica logic'. Some of them, like 'Pignol/Milleret' and 'François Heim' were thought out and spread by established melodeon players. But it is also common to make small variations according to your own preferences.

My button system is called 'Laloy/Letron', after a Belgian and a French melodeon player. It has many advantages, but also some limitations. These are the advantages:

- The third row contains all the tones that are not included in my G and C rows. That allows me to play in any key.
- It has stayed close to the 'original' version of the melodeon: unlike some other systems, the 'harmonica logic' in the two main rows is completely intact. That allows me to – besides chromatic music – also play music that was originally made for the diatonic one- or two-row melodeon.
- It is a quite common system in Belgium and France, which has made it possible for me to be taught by other melodeon players, without having to make changes to the fingering. It also means that there are many melodeons in Belgium and France that I can play on.

There are also a couple of disadvantages:

- Even though I can technically play in any key, that might be misleading. A lot depends on the combinations of tones I can make. For example, since I can only push my Ab chord on my bass side and only pull my Gb on my melody side, it is impossible for me to play an Ab7 chord.
- There are quite many tones (A, F, F#, C#) that I cannot play⁶ while pushing. In many keys, the easiest solution is to just pull everything. There is, however, one tone I cannot pull: Eb.⁷ The result is that I know my buttons much better in the pulling direction than in the pushing direction, and whenever I need to use Eb, I

⁶I do have an A and a C# on one of the extra buttons on the top of my accordion, but since they are only in one octave, and in such an illogical and awkward place, they are not very smooth to use.

⁷I do have an Eb on one of the extra buttons, but same comment as in footnote 5.

suddenly play much worse. Of course, it is something that can get better with practice, but I will never be able to use the Eb in the same way as the other tones.

If you see the parameter diatonic-chromatic as a spectrum, you could say that my melodeon is quite chromatic, compared to many other melodeons. As we will see in section 3, however, there are melodeon players whose melodeon is even more chromatic.

3. Analysis of four melodeon players

In this paragraph, I will analyse the playing of four melodeon players: Anne Rivaud, Lucas Thébaut, Didier Laloy and Anne Niepold. For that, I will be using one tune of each. That might sound like a very limited sample to make an analysis of, but I will make sure that the tunes are representative of their styles. Furthermore, I will use the knowledge I already have of their playing. Since I have listened so much to them, had lessons with three out of four of them and transcribed and played some of their music, I'm confident that I can get a fairly accurate image of their placement on the diatonic-chromatic spectrum.

3.1 Anne Rivaud

The French melodeon player Anne Rivaud plays on a two-row accordion. That means that she basically only can play in two keys and that she only has 8 different basses (as opposed to my 18 basses).

It is therefore no surprise that the music she plays is very diatonic and traditional. 'Las dròllas dei Lonzac/Bourrée/Bourrée du tacot' (Audio 1) are three bourrées (a dance from central France) in D mixolydian. She basically plays them on one row of her accordion, which means that she constantly needs to change the direction of the bellows to produce the right tones. The basses are very simple: when she uses her left hand in the first tune of the set [00:55-01:20], for example, she only plays the D and A basses. Those basses are always adapted to the pushing-pulling pattern that the melody dictates: since the direction of the bellows changes all the time, the notes in the left hand are usually very short. This music is not very innovative and the fact that everything she does is bound to the pushing-pulling pattern of the melody, means that she has a very limited freedom.

There is, however, one big advantage of this music and this way of playing: it is groovy and danceable. The constant alternation of pushing and pulling makes the melody sound far from smooth and lyrical, but it is exactly this feature of the melodeon that creates its distinct character – which is very different from the accordion – and makes it the perfect instrument for traditional dance music.

3.2 Lucas Thébaut

Lucas Thébaut is another French melodeon player. He plays on a couple of three-row melodeons with slightly different button systems. Although he has not gone far away from the traditional button systems and the 'harmonica logic' is still intact, he has not been afraid to add his own personal touches to them either.

In 'Scottish à Chloé' (Audio 2), which is one of Thébaut's compositions, you can clearly hear his background. He has a profound knowledge of the French traditional music and, being an excellent dancer himself, most of his music is connected to the dance scene. Even though he uses all three rows to play the tune (and is therefore not as bound to a rigorous pushing-pulling scheme of one row), you can hear that he still creates the same kind of danceable groove by pushing-pulling a bit more than strictly necessary. By doing that, he keeps the clear melodeon identity.

Even though the tune is mostly diatonic, Thébaut makes use of the possibilities that his three rows offer him: there are some chromatic notes in the melody (like the C# in [00:08]) and he plays relatively 'jazzy' chords (like in [02:45-03:05]). His basses are also much more interesting than Rivaud's: in [02:26-02:45], for example, you can hear him create a harmony under the melody, by playing A-G-F# in the left hand. I would like to add that much of the music he plays is more chromatic than this tune. However, he has a very solid diatonic basis and an excellent pushing-pulling technique. While I often revert to pulling the whole melody because it is the easiest option for me, he masters his buttons 100 percent in both directions. In other words, even though his playing is rooted in the traditional diatonic style, he is an adventurous musician and has expanded his skills to a more chromatic level. The result is that he can now use the two ways of thinking.

3.3 Didier Laloy

Didier Laloy is a Belgian melodeon player. His music could be called the opposite of traditional: almost all he plays is his own compositions, and throughout the years, he has developed a very distinct, almost genre-less, style that has very little connection to folk dancing. He plays on a three-row melodeon with the same button system as mine.

The first thing that is striking when you listen to 'Tragédie Légo' (Audio 3) is that it sounds very chromatic. It is true, Laloy makes full use of his three rows and is not afraid to combine the most unexpected tones, play in many different keys and use chromaticisms. There is, however, something very interesting about many of his compositions. While they sound like strange, chromatic – sometimes almost random – tunes, they are actually built upon the limitations of the melodeon. While transcribing his music, I have discovered that much of it, although it sounds very complicated, is in fact relatively easy to play. Laloy for example uses a lot of easy fingering patterns that

are repeated in different places, or pulling-pushing patterns that are easy to play. Much of his music is clearly not written based on what he heard in his head, but based on the buttons that were available to him in certain situations and possible to play without too much effort (for example a lot of pushing and pulling). 'Tragédie Légo' is a perfect example of such a tune.

You could therefore say that Didier Laloy's music is very chromatic and non-traditional, but at the same time inherently bound to the limitations (the bisonority and the complicated placement of the tones) of his instrument. He neither plays diatonic music with lots of pushing and pulling, nor music with a lot of freedom that has no connection to the melodeon (like jazz). That makes it hard to give him an exact place on the diatonic-chromatic spectrum.

3.4 Anne Niepold

Anne Niepold is a Belgian melodeon player with an interesting type of three-row melodeon. Her button system stems from the original 'harmonica logic', but with some changes. The result is that she can play all the tones while pulling the bellows. This makes her really free, especially when improvising: she doesn't have to think about the direction of the bellows all the time. The consequence is that she is very good at playing chromatic music and improvising, but what happens is of course that she ends up playing a lot pulling – even more than me. Another interesting feature of her button system, is that the third row of her bass buttons consist entirely of basses instead of sets of basses and chords. As a consequence, she has more basses that she can play in two different directions, which means that she is also freer when it comes to combining the right and the left hand.

You clearly hear how free Niepold is compared to the other three melodeon players when listening to 'Flâneuse' (Audio 4). It is virtuoso, jazzy music with lots of improvisation (like in [01:46-02:23]), complicated chords (like in [01:10-01:27]) and fast, melodic bass lines (like in [00:50-01:27]). Anne Niepold is probably the best melodeon player I know when it comes to technique, improvisation and expression. But at the same time, she has almost completely lost the connection with the original instrument. Her melodeon is more like a compact version of an accordion.

3.5 Conclusion

Anne Rivaud, Lucas Thébaut, Didier Laloy and Anna Niepold are all very different melodeon players with different instruments, different backgrounds and different styles. If I were to put them on an imaginary diatonic-chromatic spectrum, it would look like this:

get exactly the answers that I wanted. Even though he has a very good technique, he could not really give me a lot of technical tips and exercises. Nevertheless, I did get more insight in how to treat my instrument as a diatonic one and how to deal with the pushing-pulling. For example, Lucas showed me that there are way more possibilities than just playing in C and G major. Mixolydian tunes are very common in French folk music. He taught me that the way to play them is not by playing in G on the C row (because that would make the pushing-pulling logic too different from playing in a major key), but by playing C mixolydian on the C row and 'borrowing' the Bb from the third row. The same goes for lydian tunes: I also play them in C on the C row and 'borrow' an F# from the G row.

The second time we met, we spent most of the time working with accompaniment. What is an effective way to accompany a waltz? A bourrée in three? A cercle circassien? Those lessons have turned out extremely useful for me: I now have a duo that plays French dance music with a fiddle player. Without Lucas's tips, my accompaniment would have been way less interesting and groovy.

Lucas has also given me a lot of material to work with: he recorded many tunes for me, of which I still have some left to learn. He also made me listen to a lot of music and showed me a bit of the different regions and musical traditions within France. That was both very inspiring and a bit discouraging. It left me with the feeling that I have so much left to discover and nuances to learn: a bourrée from Gascogne doesn't sound the same as a bourrée from Auvergne. And what is actually the difference between a bourrée, a sautière and a giate?

4.2 My own practice

After both times, I arrived home full of inspiration and motivation. It was not always easy to practise, however, since my exam concert was going to be about what you could call 'the opposite' of the French diatonic music... At the same time as I realized I wanted to get better at the diatonic way of playing, I had started digging into musette, which is maybe the most chromatic accordion music there is. That meant that I had two completely different projects at the same time. Luckily, I started my French fiddle-and-accordion duo in March 2019 and that helped and stimulated me a lot to work on that music too. After a while, I decided that this duo would also play some tunes in my exam concert.

Since Lucas had not given me any technical exercises, I basically have been practising the style by learning the tunes he had given to me. This had proven to be quite a good method for me before, because I usually quickly get bored otherwise. So far, I have mainly focused on playing the tunes and accompaniments exactly like Lucas. It will probably take a while until I have internalized the style enough to start being creative with it.

4.3 Challenges

The pushing-pulling has turned out to be a big challenge for me. Not only is it technically difficult to synchronise the fast movements of the bellows with those of my fingers, it is also very tiring to play in that way. My left arm constantly has to change the direction of the bellows and move the whole weight of the left side of the melodeon. Whenever I practise this music, my left arm gets tired very quickly. Often (depending on the tune), I need to take a short rest every five minutes and after half an hour, I give up because I get tired more and more quickly.

The problem with my left arm gets even worse when I play in C, which means that I use my little finger a lot to play the basses. I do not know exactly what happens, but it seems like the pressure I need to put on my little finger, combined with the pressure that I need on my thumb for pressing the air button, creates a bit of a tense, awkward position for my hand. I have been thinking a lot about it and have tried to keep my hand relaxed, but I have not found a solution yet.

The reason why the pushing-pulling puts so much strain on my left arm, is that my three-row melodeon is relatively heavy and not really made for playing this style. The brand, Castagnari, is famous for its great sound and the perfect balance between the melody and the basses. On top of that, I have four different registers and am able to play in any key. However, the downside of all that is that I always have to carry 5.9 kilos. That is a lot, considering that a nice two-row melodeon often only weighs around 3 kilos.

Luckily, a solution is on the way. In the summer of 2019, I went to the festival *Le son continu* in central France, where there is a big instrument market. For four days, I walked around and tried all kinds of different melodeons. In the end, I ordered one from the builder Jérémie Vanglabeké that weighs 4.8 kilos. I was not willing to compromise on the number of buttons and possibilities, but his models are simply lighter. Also, I will have 3 different registers instead of 4. This melodeon is supposed to arrive in the autumn of 2020.

4.4 Where am I now?

At this point in time, about a year after my last lessons with Lucas, I can play most of the tunes he gave me. I have really taken my time to learn them slowly and in detail. I did not want to work on too many tunes at the same time, but instead I chose to practise the same tunes over and over again, until they felt right. They sound better and better.

I am also way more comfortable to play a melody on one row. Especially in the higher octave, I now know way better where the notes are and how to connect them. I have noticed that is in great deal an unconscious process that has to do with muscle memory: I don't think 'if I push this button, I get a G and if I pull it, I get an A'. Instead, it seems like

my fingers often automatically know where to go and my left arm automatically knows whether to push or pull, in order to play a sequence of tones. Sometimes, when I learn a not too difficult tune in a group of people, I try to learn it on one row. A little more than a year ago, I could not have done that, but now it goes surprisingly fast. One thing that is still hard for me, is deciding how to play the basses when I play a pushing-pulling melody. I obviously have to adapt them to how the melody goes, and depending on the tune, it can still be very difficult to find a way that feels natural.

Finally, I have become much more confident when it comes to accompanying dance music. My duo project has given me lots of opportunities to put Lucas's tips into practise and has helped me in developing my skills. I would say that my accompaniment is still a bit more boring than I would like it to be, but at least it sounds much better now.

5. The diatonic style as an inspiration

After mainly copying Lucas's tunes and playing strictly French traditional tunes in the diatonic style, I feel that I have become much better at the pushing-pulling and at seeing my instrument as a diatonic one. However, the style does not come very naturally to me yet. Whenever I learn a new tune, I keep learning it the way I have always played, simply because it goes faster and it is easier. Whenever I accompany someone, I keep playing chords like I used to play them. And whenever I write a tune, I notice that I keep using my old way of thinking. That is why in this bachelor thesis, I want to do those three things, leaving my 'chromatic mind-set' that I am used to. By setting up this challenge for myself, I am forcing myself to try out working with the 'diatonic mind-set' instead.

5.1 Relearning an old tune

I have chosen to relearn the French traditional scottish 'Dans un pré' in a diatonic way. Even though it's a diatonic tune, I never learned to play it on one row, because I thought it was too difficult to make it interesting that way and not really worth the effort. But now I simply had to try it out, and it went surprisingly well.

In the attached recording (Audio 5), you can hear the result of this exercise. It includes both a version of how I played it when I first learned it [00:00-00:42] and a new, 'diatonic' version [00:43-01:26]. When relearning the tune, these are the things I had to think of and the changes I made.

- The tune is in C mixolydian, which means that I play it on my C row, except for the Bb, which I play on my third row.
- For the drills, I do not use the closest tone within the key (e.g. C-D) anymore. Instead, I use the closest button on the row, whatever tone comes out (e.g. C-E)
- I have to adapt the basses to the direction of the bellows that I use to play the melody. As a result, I need to play another rhythm in the bass when I play the

Bb chord than when I play the C chord in the A part (see for example [00:43-00:48]). Also, in the beginning of the B part, I have chosen to play the basses on the back beat, because it is impossible to play them on the beats (see for example [01:14-01:16]).

- Of course, all the pulling and pushing is (both technically and physically) not easy, so I had to practise the tune for a while until I could play it well.

In the end, I am happy that I tried this out. It was refreshing to find out that this challenge was easier than I expected. There is only one thing that I have doubts about: I just cannot decide which version I like more. I like the grooviness of my new version and I am proud to hear that I have achieved a lot. On the other hand, I have always liked the tune as I played it before and I really enjoy the possibilities it creates for my left hand, for example. I suppose time will tell which version is my favourite.

5.2 Making a diatonic accompaniment

I wanted to create a kind of accompaniment in which I use pushing-pulling while playing chords. This is not easy and cannot just be done with any chords in any key and any octave, since the buttons that I combine to play a chord need to sound good and fit inside the chord/key both when I push them AND when I pull them.

I decided to focus on the key of F major for this challenge. I had two reasons for that. Firstly, almost all the tones on my C and G row are part of F major, so it would not be too difficult to find combinations of buttons that work together. If I chose a key with more accidentals, it would become much more different. The second reason is that the Bb flat is a very useful tone to use for this purpose, since the Bb in my higher octave is one of the only two buttons on my whole melody side which have the same tone pushing and pulling. That means that I could create an accompaniment in which the Bb is a tone that creates a certain steadiness.

I started from a Gm-C7-Gm-C7-F chord progression and kept exploring from there. In Audio 6, you can hear the different steps I went through:

1. [00:00-00:32] For Gm, C7 and F, I figured out these combinations of two buttons that sound good:
 - For Gm, I use the Bb/Bb button and the E/D button, so I play Bb and D when pulling, Bb and E when pushing.
 - For C7, I use the Bb/Bb button and the D/C button. Bb and C when pulling, Bb and D when pushing.
 - For F, just C and F sounds the best, but it is also possible to push the same two buttons. If you do that, you get C and F when pulling and D and G when pushing. Those are parallel fourths, so they do not sound great, but they can still be effective. You can also add the G/A button below the C. In that case the result is A, C, F when pulling and G, D, G when pushing.

2. [00:33-00:49] I added the G/F button to the Gm chord and the G/E button to the C7 chord. This is the result:
 - Gm: Bb, D and F when pulling, Bb, E and G when pushing.
 - C7: Bb, C and E when pulling, Bb, D and G when pushing.
3. [00:50-01:05] I added both the G/F button and the G/E button to the Gm and the C7 chord. This is the result:
 - Gm: Bb, D, E and F when pulling, Bb, E and G when pushing.
 - C7: Bb, C, E and F when pulling, Bb, D and G when pushing.
4. [01:06-01:24] I started trying out some variations in the basses. One possibility that works well is playing C-D-F-F# on the C7 chord.
5. [01:25-01:46] I explored the possibilities to play the other common chords in the key of F major: Bb, Am and Dm.
 - For Bb, I simply swapped out the Gm bass for a Bb bass. The result could either be seen as a Bb chord or as a Gm chord with the third in the bass. All of the voicings I have described fit with it.
 - For Am, I use the D/C button and the G/E button. C and E when pulling, D and G when pushing.
 - For Dm, I use the E/D button and the G/F button. D and F when pulling, E and G when pushing. Just like in the F chord, it is possible to add the G/A button below. In that case, the result is A, D and F when pulling and G, E and G when pushing.
6. [01:47-02:04] I realized that all the six chords I play, even though I use both pulling and pushing, are mainly pulled. So I decide to create an alternative way of playing the two most commonly and easily pushed chords: Gm and C7:
 - For Gm, I use the D/C button instead of the E/D button and start the movement pushing instead of pulling. Bb and D when pushing, Bb and C when pulling.
 - For C7, I use the E/D button instead of the D/C button and start the movement pushing instead of pulling. Bb and E when pushing, Bb and C when pulling.

5.3 Writing a tune

Since I have played more diatonic tunes on my C row than on my G row, I decided to write a tune in C. This was an interesting challenge: I do not find the key of C major especially inspiring and the limitations that the pushing-pulling system creates, did not help either. After a while, though, I started to have fun and I managed to write a tune. The result can be heard in Audio 7. To clarify how I did it, here are the different steps in my thought process:

1. I quite quickly come up with the simple melody of the A part [00:00-00:15]. Even though it is not an innovative masterpiece, I decide to keep it. It makes great use of the pushing-pulling groove, which feels really good when I play it.

2. I want to make a B part that is a bit more interesting than the A part. I want to make use of the arpeggios that are very easy to play on one row, but without avoiding more complicated melodies with scalar motion, for which you need a very quick and precise bellows movement. I think I ended up with a good mixture of the two, which gives me just the right amount of challenge [00:15-00:23].
3. Since C major is not particularly inspiring for me, it does not take long until I decide that I can also use chromatic tones. After all, some chromaticisms will not change the challenge of thinking in a diatonic way, because I never leave C major and I always keep the pulling-pushing logic of the row. This decision makes it much easier for me to get inspired.
4. For the C part [00:30-00:46], I want to have a more interesting harmony, because so far, I have only used the tonic, dominant and subdominant. The decision to use some chromatic tones helps me in that. I write this part quite intuitively and play the melodies I hear in my head (which is sometimes very hard).
5. I decide to challenge myself even more and try out some variations in the basses. In the C part, I play a 'walking bass' for two bars [00:24-00:28] and in two other bars, I play a harmony that is a third lower than the melody [00:28-00:31].

When I started this challenge, I was a bit afraid that I would regret setting it up. I cannot say I had a lot of feeling. But I am really happy with the end result. The tune is maybe not exactly my style, but I decided to not care about that. I now really enjoy playing it.

5.4 Am I inspired?

To be honest, I was not that optimistic before I started this practical part of my study. But even though I did not feel that inspired, each of the three challenges I set up ended up easier than I was expecting. This has taught me that it is possible for me to use the diatonic mind-set.

And that is not the only thing: it has also taught me that the result of using that mind-set can sound nice and that I can even enjoy it! I realize now that the diatonic way of playing does appeal to me not only because it is groovy to listen to and great for dancing. It also appeals to me because it is groovy to play and that gives me a lot of feeling when I play. This might sound obvious, but I think it is an important insight that makes me even more excited to keep diving into this way of playing.

6. Conclusion

In this study, I wanted to explore the different ways of playing the melodeon: the diatonic way, the chromatic way and everything in between. The diatonic end of the spectrum is usually quite traditional: the melodies are often in one key and the basses are simple, because they have to be adapted to the movement of the bellows that is

needed to play the melody. This music is very much connected to the simple one- or two-row melodeons that have limited possibilities in the left hand). The chromatic end of the spectrum, on the other hand, is characterized by more complicated melodies in a wide range of keys, more freedom to improvise and (not endless, but) countless possibilities when it comes to playing chords and basses. This music can only be played on more extended versions of the melodeon: those with three rows for the right hand and many options for the left hand.

I quickly came to the conclusion that both ends of the spectrum have clear advantages and disadvantages. Although the chromatic way of playing opens up a lot of possibilities and freedom to improvise and play different styles, it has also lost the connection with the 'true' nature of the melodeon and is less fit for dance music. The diatonic way of playing, on the other hand, has a lot of limitations, but can sound incredibly groovy.

Since I had been quite 'chromatic-minded' during most of my life as a musician, I decided that it was time to go back to the roots of my instrument and get better at the diatonic way of playing. That has been an interesting process with ups and downs for me. Lucas Thébaut introduced me to playing on one row and to a lot of French dance music. I have learned a lot of tunes and accompaniment patterns from him and have developed a lot. The biggest challenge, however, was the pushing-pulling technique, especially because my melodeon is particularly heavy. I hope that my new melodeon, which will arrive later this year, will make things easier.

While I have been playing a lot of Lucas's tunes, I still find it hard to really take on the diatonic mind-set and use it in the rest of my playing as well. The practical part of this study has helped me with that. I am still nowhere near where I want to be, but forcing myself to relearn a tune, work with chords and compose in the diatonic way have shown me that it is possible to move in the right direction. If I challenge myself enough, I will be able to do more than I initially thought. All this has been very inspiring and motivating for me; it only makes me more excited to keep on working on it.

Possibly the most valuable – and unexpected – conclusion of this study is that I now have a much clearer idea of what sort of melodeon player I want to be. While I used to look up to more chromatic melodeon players, like Didier Laloy and Anne Niepold, I now want to strive towards keeping the connection with the dance music and the original version of the melodeon, while at the same time continuing to use the chromatic knowledge that I already have. I have a long way to go, but I am sure that it will be an interesting, enriching and fun way as well.

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Appendix: overview of my button system

