

Take, for example, Benjamin Ickies, 28, who attended his first accordion festival this week. Mr. Ickies moved to New York in 2002, looking for professional rock gigs as a pianist or guitarist. He found the market saturated until he told people he played the accordion.

"I had tried to keep it a secret," said Mr. Ickies, whose father taught him the instrument. "Then, lo and behold, I started getting more offers to play." A new play and much else to worry about Also in Theater: Love and starshine Antsy adolescents romp at Edinburgh festivals A guide to understanding "[title of show]"

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Now part of an 18-member rock group called This Ambitious Orchestra, Mr. Ickies sits in with other bands looking to add the accordion's versatility and also gives lessons to aspiring accordionists. He chalks up the instrument's newfound status to what he called the Pac-Man theory: The squeezebox had become so uncool in recent decades that like that video game hero, it popped back out the other side, becoming cool once again.

Accordions are currently being used by groups like the Canadian indie darlings Arcade Fire and the offbeat duo They Might Be Giants, while younger accordionists are starting to squeeze out their favorite radio hits. Mr. Moceo covered Green Day on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" in 2005. Anthony Falco, an 18-year-old Rhode Island resident and a competitor at this week's festival, has translated guitar-heavy hits from Guns N' Roses, Maroon 5 and other bands to his instrument.

"A lot of our teachers, they're old-timers," said Mr. Falco, who, like Mr. Moceo, has been attending festivals since grade school. "It's up to our generation to bring in those rock songs.'

But even though Mr. Ickies sprinkled in some less traditional compositions during his performance, including "Life on Mars?" by David Bowie, rock was still more of an afterthought at this year's convention.

At Wednesday's kickoff, where the most modern hits squeezed off were written by the Beatles, an impromptu trio of Mr. Falco, Mr. Moceo and Mr. Busso held court in a small room off a hotel lobby. They serenaded fellow festival attendees with hits like "Sway" and "Where or When," both popularized by, among others, Dean Martin.

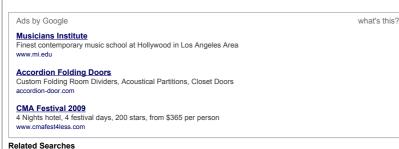
That ability to bridge the gap between the Rat Pack and rock 'n' roll, Mr. Ickies said, is one reason for the accordion's rising popularity among his generation.

"The accordion's in our cultural past, so it sounds somewhat familiar," he said. "But for 30 years it's also been a complete outsider, so it also sounds new and fresh. No other instrument has that dichotomy."

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