

Excerpt by Jenny Neal from '[An A to Z of the Accordion](#), Volume 2', by [Rob Howard](#), 2005

I started learning the piano accordion at 12 years old. I had pestered my mother for several years to find out where I could learn to play. I had had piano lessons from the age of 7 years and violin lessons at school from 11 years onwards.

At a chance read of the local paper my mother came across an advertisement: Piano accordion loaned for a course of 6 lessons. She secured me a place and...

My first [NAO](#) competition was the London & Home Counties competition at the Central Hall, Westminster, in 1954. Although my duet partner and I received prizes, both my parents and I realised special accordion tuition was needed.

I left my local teacher, to be taught by Jerry Mayes in Southend, a 45-mile journey (90 miles round trip) on a bus taking two and a half hours to get there and at least a mile walk to his studio dragging my 120 bass instrument.

Jerry encouraged me to attend the [BCA](#) summer music courses at the [BCA](#) in Farrington Road, London, where I received daily classes with tutors Conway Graves, Eddie Harris, Graham Romani, Ivor Beynon, Gerald Crossman, Ronald Nolan and others. All musical subjects were covered including orchestral work and conducting.

In 1956, my duet partner, a young girl drummer and I took part in the Hughie Green area talent competition. We won! Subsequently we went on to the finals, held in Birmingham, which was broadcast live on national television. Quite something back then.

I played out regularly locally and before I could even leave school I was being asked to teach 'little Johnny or little Jane'. In 1958 the Colchester Cooperative Society asked me to start up an accordion group so that it could play at their functions when required.

I approached Bell Accordions for help: several small accordions were sent to me to loan out to beginners and my great teaching career was launched. My pupils and bands were soon taking part in examinations.

I married in 1963 and my three sons were born in 1965, 1968 and 1971. In 1972 (hurrah) my Junior (under 12 years players) Band, Elementary and Intermediate bands all achieved first prizes at the All Britain Competitions, our first real national win. I had, however, had Junior Solo and Bell Trophy and Duet national winners prior to that.

From then on my players went from strength to strength and over the years they have achieved first prizes in every section (with the exception of the Virtuoso Solo Section) at the All Britain competition – Solos, Duets, Bands and Orchestras - many times over.

With my Youth Orchestra, (all players under 19 years), Jenny's Accordionists took part in the National Festival of Music for Youth over a period of 12 years (1978 to 1990). We played at the National Finals each year at the Festival Hall, London and received seven outstanding performance awards and four highly commended awards.

We were invited to take part in the Schools Prom at the Royal Albert Hall six times and broadcast on Radio 3 and BBC TV. On our first Schools Prom night in November 1979 the composer of Dalmatinische Tänz (our performance piece), [Adolf Götz](#), came to hear us play his composition at its debut at the Albert Hall. A very special time for all of Jenny's accordionists.

[Adolf Götz](#) then invited Jenny's Accordionists to Hersbruck in Germany twice, once for his 30th Jubilee celebrations.

Our first trip abroad was in 1974. Since then we have made numerous trips to the continent, playing in Holland, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland and Germany, making reciprocal visits that have involved concerts and orchestra competitions.

In 1983 Jenny's Accordionists took part in the first European Accordion Competitions in Innsbruck. We attained a third prize in a section of 60 or more orchestras from all around Europe. In 1989 we were asked to give an exhibition performance of a 45-minute programme in the prestigious Donnan Halle in Innsbruck as part of the evening concert for the third European Accordion Competitions. It was wonderful; 5,000 accordion enthusiasts all cheering and wanting an encore, which of course we supplied, and then still wanting more. Our best concert ever, it will never be 'upstaged'.

In 1992 Jenny's Accordionists was invited to perform at the Royal Festival Hall by the school Music Association as part of their annual concert in February 1993. An extremely prestigious affair. I contacted [Gary Daverne](#), our composer and conductor friend in New Zealand, and asked him if he would write an accordion orchestral piece for that occasion especially for us. He readily said, "Yes, but only if I can come and conduct it!"

So another exciting and memorable time happened. The composition, "A Pocket Overture", arrived in England in December 1992 and concentrated rehearsals started immediately. Gary arrived in England from New Zealand just four days before the Royal Festival Hall performance for rehearsals with him conducting. At that concert in February 1993, we also performed Time for School, by our favorite composer [Adolf Götz](#), which of course I conducted. Wonderful!

Since then Jenny's Accordionists has performed at numerous concerts, locally, nationally and internationally. During all of the years I have constantly prepared students for examinations and competitions, taking part in solos, duets and groups - many receiving high marks and trophies.

The accordion has been a way of life for me since my childhood. I was the [BCA](#) local representative for over 30 years. I have taken every opportunity to show the instrument's assets and musicality to the greater musical world by talking to many eminent musicians that I met over a period of 12 years whilst my sons attended the Royal College of Music Junior and Senior Colleges and by taking part in the National Festival of Music for Youth with subsequent performances at the Royal Festival Hall and Albert Hall.

I am very proud of 'my' instrument. It has given me immeasurable and unlimited pleasure.