

Melodica

The **melodica**, also known as the **pianica**, **blow-organ**, **key harmonica**, **free-reed clarinet**, **face piano** or **melodyhorn**, is a free-reed instrument similar to the pump organ and harmonica. It has a musical keyboard on top, and is played by blowing air through a mouthpiece that fits into a hole in the side of the instrument. Pressing a key opens a hole, allowing air to flow through a reed. The keyboard is usually two or three octaves long. Melodicas are small, light, and portable. They are popular in music education, especially in Asia.

The modern form of the instrument was invented by Hohner in the 1950s,^[1] though similar instruments have been known in Italy since the 19th century.^[2]

The melodica was first used as a serious instrument in the 1960s by composers such as Steve Reich, in his piece titled *Melodica* (1966).^[3] Brazilian multi-instrumentalist Hermeto Pascoal developed a technique consisting of singing while playing the melodica, resulting in a wide tonal and harmonic palette.^[4] It is associated with Jamaican dub and reggae musician Augustus Pablo who popularized it in the 1970s.^[5]

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Types

Melodicas are classified primarily by the range of the instrument. Melodicas with different ranges have slightly different shapes.

- **Soprano** and **alto melodicas** are higher-pitched and thinner sounding than tenors. Some are designed to be played with both hands at once: the left-hand play the black keys, and the right-hand play the white keys. Others are played like the tenor melodica.

Melodica



A Hohner melodica

Keyboard instrument

Classification	Wind/Percusion instrument; free reed aerophone
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Hornbostel–Sachs classification	412.132 (Free-reed aerophone)
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Developed	1950s
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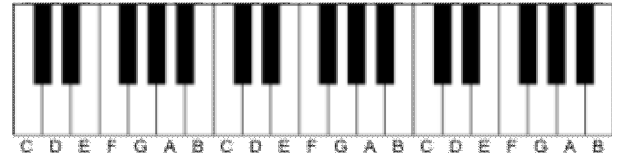
Playing range

Usually 2 or 3 octaves

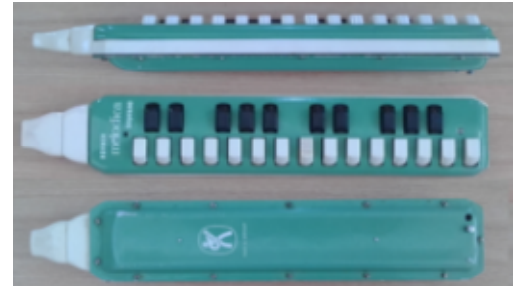
Related instruments

accordion, harmonica, pump organ, yu

- **Tenor melodicas** are a lower-pitched type of melodica. The left-hand holds a handle on the bottom, and the right-hand plays the keyboard. Tenor melodicas can be played with two hands by inserting a tube into the mouthpiece hole and placing the melodica on a flat surface.
- **Bass melodicas** also exist, but are less common than another tenor, alto, and soprano.
- The **Accordina**, generally made of metal, uses the same mechanism as a traditional melodica. The keyboard is replaced with a button arrangement similar to a chromatic button accordion's keyboard.



Layout of a melodica keyboard with three octaves (36 keys)



Hohner Melodica Soprano: right side, keyboard and bottom views

Wooden melodicas

Although the majority of melodicas are made of plastic, some are made primarily of wood. The Sound Electra corporation makes the *MyLodica*, a wooden melodica designed "...to produce a warmer richer sound than that of its plastic relatives."^[6] The Victoria Accordion company in Castelfidardo, Italy, produces a range of wooden melodicas and accordinas that they market under the name *Vibrandoneon*.

Alternative names

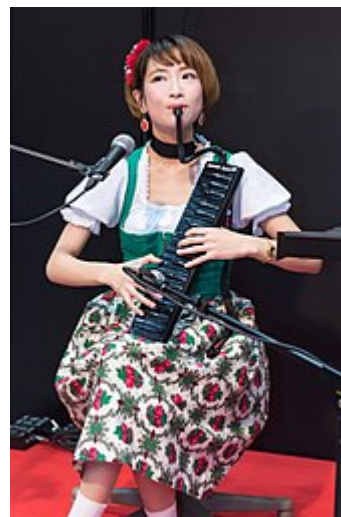
The melodica is known by various names, often at the whim of the manufacturer. *Melodion* (Suzuki), *Triola* (Seydel), *Melodika* (Apollo), *Melodia* (Diana), *Pianica* (Yamaha), *Melodihorn* (Samick), *Pianetta* and *Clavietta* are just some of the variants. When a recording technician who did not know a melodica called it a "hooter", the band The Hooters used that as their name.^[7]

Two hands

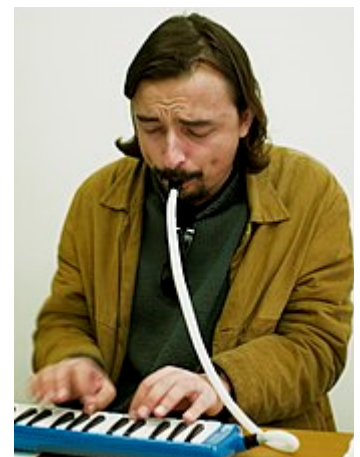
Melodica can be played with two hands employing an air tube. To blow air, a foot pump can also be used.^{[8][9][10]}

Comparison with traditional woodwind instruments

Melodicas are unusual because unlike most conventional woodwind instruments, they make use of a piano keyboard rather than a specialized fingering system using holes and/or buttons. This allows the player to use a single finger to play any one note of the instrument's range, rather than requiring several fingers to play individual notes, as is the case with most other woodwinds. The player can then play chords by using their remaining fingers to press additional keys,



Played vertically, with two hands and an air tube



Played horizontally, with two hands and an air tube

Solo melodica

0:00

MENU

and thus, sound additional notes. In other words, whereas most woodwind instruments such as saxophones or clarinets are monophonic when played by trained musicians, the melodica is polyphonic. Additionally, for a beginner, a melodica can play accidentals more easily than a woodwind, which requires special fingering.



Recording of a Clavietta melodica playing traditional Irish music, "Rakes of Kildare", played by Troy Banarzi

Problems playing this file? See media help.

Gallery



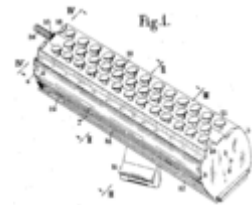
A Suzuki melodion



Hohner alto melodica



Melodica being played vertically, without air tube



Patent drawing for accordina



Accordina being played

See also


- Claviola
- Couesnophone

References

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3. "Steve Reich – *Melodica*" (<http://www.boosey.com/licensing/music/Steve-Reich-Melodica/3275>). Boosey & Hawkes. 1966-05-22. Retrieved 2013-07-03.
4. Hermeto Pascoal – Rebuliço (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6maZJA0-Yc) on YouTube

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10. Blow keyboard bagpipe mod (<http://makezine.com/2008/06/23/blow-keyboard-bagpipe-mod/>) in magazine *Make*

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