

Handbells as The Sound of Music: Lets Start at the Very Beginning

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Alleluia Conference, Waco TX July 24, 2014

Handbells continue to evolve as an instrument of worship. While this session will “start at the very beginning”, up to date tips and tools for techniques and healthy ringing will be shared with an emphasis on stopped sounds.

Repertoire

Etudes from Tunes That Teach Martha Lynn Thompson AGEHR
Campana Sonos Wissinger Alfred27058

Basic Handbell Beginnings & Pedagogy

To wear or not to wear?

- In the shoulder area avoid buttons, zippers, snap clasps, name badges, jewelry
- Avoid floppy or long necklaces
- Warmer weather: a cap sleeve, rather than tank or spaghetti strap tops
- Do wear comfortable shoes

Hair and/or Gloves

- Best: hair pulled back so it is not in the damping area
- Gloves: will assist in tarnishing bells IF they are kept clean and ringers refrain from any contact with hair or skin while wearing them. Each person should have their own pair.
- Safety pin together to wash so they don't vanish to join the socks. Hang to dry.

Unwelcome table companions

- Drinks (other than enclosed bottled water under the table)
- Chewing gum
- Food of any kind

Anatomy

- Lip
- Waist
- Crown
- Handgard
- Handle: logo, octave designation
- Clapper

How does the clapper work?

Movement from north to south which defines English handbell

Where does the sound come from?

- NEVER ring bell and hold next to an ear, it could damage hearing
- Bell sound “speaks” from the waist not the top

How do you hold it?

- Don't loop fingers through the handle
- Shake hands and lift to shoulder– firm but not crushing
- Wrap fingers around handle like an ice cream cone
- If thumb points straight forward to the director it brings the wrist in to alignment.
- Stay up against the hand guard.

Ready to Ring Position

- R to R position: lip is resting on shoulder, not out in front
- Find flesh not bone as a resting spot
- Keep shoulders relaxed
- At shoulder -clapper should be tilted back
- Elbows close to ribs - NO chicken wings!
- Arm & wrist relaxed

Stance

- One foot in front of the other
 - This creates best position for body to become part of the instrument
 - Ringers are less tired after extended standing

How do you execute a straight ring?

- When a bell is in your hand – the ring occurs with the change of direction from down to forward. (It's the change of direction from down to forward and up that moves the clapper.)
- Bell should stay above the elbow at all times – never lower
- Keep the wrist firm and the motion smooth –fluid – circular lift. (Don't spill your ice cream or favorite libation.)
- When the casting returns to eye level come back to the shoulder

Initially, sometimes the dominant hand exhibits better coordination

Watch for consistency between RH & LH

PRACTICE – ringing both hands so they ring & circle together /self match

1) use half notes RH / LH ; then quarter, then whole to create different circles

- Use full arm extension for long note values
- Ring short note values close to shoulder
- Minimize arm extension for rapid passages

Air Bell practice

- Provides muscle training before putting sound or weight in your hands
- Air Bell practice is always perfect – no mistakes are ever heard!
- Make a fist at your shoulder to practice the circular motion with out the bell. Or use taped roll of bubble wrap.

Why circular motion is important?

- Remember where the sound comes from
- Create mental pictures that encourage a steady continuous motion (sliding board, ferris wheel, going down a waterfall, down the roller coaster)

- An elliptical path describes the shape of the stroke but doesn't encourage motion

What do you need to do to create the best sound?

- Mouth of bell faces up so the wall of sound goes forward
- Keep a vertical alignment of the bell - not twisted to the side
- Maintain circular movement in the follow through
- A bell that stops in mid stroke does not sustain note values
- AVOID forward hammering motion

TECHNIQUE: The Damp

Stopping the sound of a bell at the right time for tonal clarity takes as much discipline and is of equal importance as starting the sound at the right time.

When you drive a car you anticipate using the break.

Damp means press (not touch) into flesh to stop the sound.

TECHNIQUE: Table Damp

Use instead of shoulder damp to change bells.

LV Ringing in coordination with Note Value Damping

Establish out & up position for LV

OTHER BASIC TECHNIQUES:

SWING Ring from the shoulder on beat one. Arrows indicate a swing on subsequent beats. Do not swing beyond your stance.

SHAKE Initiate a rapid articulation of the clapper which strikes both sides of the casting.

MARTELLATO Ring and gently strike the full body of the bell horizontally into foam. Think of the fist making contact. To insure safety of the casting and best sounds utilize three components: stance, shoulder over the bells, use of thumb on the back of the casting if this is comfortable.

MARTELLATO LIFT Immediately lift the bell from the foam after a Martellato

ECHO Begin the ring at the shoulder. During in the follow through gently bounce the lip to the foam each time the technique is repeated within a measure. This is usually, but not always indicated on each beat.

GYRO After bell is rung rotate wrist in circular pattern.

VIBRATO Ring bell normally then move side to side like a wind shield wiper.

THUMB DAMP Ring with the thumb or sometimes additional fingers on the outside of the casting for a short detached sound.

RING TOUCH Ring as close to the shoulder as possible and immediately damp at the shoulder resulting in the shortest sounding note possible regardless of the note value.

PLUCK Place the bell on the table and move the clapper manually. For bells E6 and higher the clapper is flicked up. For bells below E6 the clapper is thrust down. Position your thumb on the top of the clapper at 12 o'clock. Fingers 1 & 2 should be positioned at the bottom of the clapper (5 & 7 o'clock). For these lower bells flick the clapper down. Do not flick the clapper of lower bells up because the weight of the clapper will create a double ring.

MALLET TECHNIQUES

Mallet on the table: Designated as a plus sign with a dot under it, indicates the handbell is played by striking on the outside of the casting which is resting on the pad.

TECHNIQUES for: Mallets on the Table

For the best technique and sound provide two mallets per ringer.

Grip:

- Rest hand on the padded table - palm side up
- Lay the mallet in hand so the shaft is between the thumb and the index finger
- Close thumb in towards the index finger near the 2nd joint
- Other three fingers wrap loosely over the mallet
- Turn hand over so the palm is now facing down
- Adjust the mallet so it's not being held too far toward the end or too close to the ball
- Mirror image the other hand
- Final grip should be firm but not tight (Like shaking hands with a stick)
 - Tight grip creates tension
 - Looser grip allows the mallet to lift off the casting easier

Mallet Practice Before malleting on the bells:

- Practice on the bell handles and/or foam pads
- Correct arm positions and control the height of the rebound stroke before going to the actual bells
- Arms should be relaxed and all motion from the wrist
- Arms should NOT move up and down from the elbow, but rotate

Mallets on the Bells

- Position mallets on the lip of the casting where the clapper strikes & bell is tuned
- DO NOT mallet at the waist
 - Metal at the waist is much thinner than the metal where the clapper strikes
 - The lip (being thicker) absorbs the impact of correct malleting whereas the waist and rest of the casting over time cannot
- It only takes one “hit” in the waist of a large bell with improper malleting to crack the casting.

Practice on bells:

- Mallet RH on beats 1 & 3
 - Strike the casting and rebound no more than 4” from the bell
 - Mental image of drawing (or lifting) the sound out of the bell rather than hitting into the bell
 - Think tap not hit.
- If a mallet sits too long it deadens the sound
- Emphasize the UP stroke not the down stroke with quick wrist

Practice variation: two bells, one mallet each hand

- 1) Work for even L to R alternation, then add dynamics
R RL R RL R RL RL RL

TECHNIQUES for Malleting Suspended Bells

Mallet Suspended Bells A plus without the dot indicates the bells are held (or racked) off of the table so the malleted sound is sustained.

While holding the mallet strike the casting in the same place as mallets on the table

Positioning & malleting suspended bells:

Easiest – hold one bell in its normal ringing position, but away from the shoulder

- Lightly tap the casting lifting the sound from the bell
- Don’t “stun” the bell, but complete follow through of the stroke
- Keep the mallet in motion