



Area 8
Handbell Musicians
OF AMERICA

QUAVERS

AREA 8: ILLINOIS, IOWA, KANSAS, MISSOURI, NEBRASKA
MARCH, 2013

Captions from the Chair

All I really need to know I learned... is the beginning of the title of the 1986 book on such "uncommon thoughts on common things" by author Robert Fulghum. Let us create a handbell adaptation of that familiar title: *All I really need to know about handbells and handchimes I learned...* Where did you first learn to ring? Who was your first director/teacher/leader? Are you still seeking information, new techniques and trends, or have you put the title of our adaptation in the past tense?

Every time I step before a bell ensemble or team, whether they are rookie ringers or experienced community ringers, I remember and am thankful for my first mentor! In 1979 before being appointed to my first full-time ministry, I had helped at least two other churches explore purchasing handbells. However, between the time of the order being placed and the receiving of the sets of bells, I moved to another part-time church position! First United Methodist Church of Ponca City had a long history of ringing bells dating back to 1960. So as a rookie full-time director of music, I struggled that first year directing ringers playing Whitechapel bells using 1" foam spread across 1/2" x 2' wide plywood lying across saw horses. Can you imagine?

Conducting was not a problem as I had directed school bands and choruses, and completed a master degree in choral conducting. The issue was *bells!* Handbell ensembles are the only single musical instrument played by many people! The director must know how to perform on bells to be successful in conducting bells. I have conducted civic orchestras in the past and I cannot play nor do I need to know how to play *every* instrument in the orchestra. One must know the bell instrument to be a successful leader.

That is the story of the "where," now to the story of the "who." A colleague in Ponca City convinced me in the summer of 1979 to attend the Texas Conference Choir Clinic. Besides choral experts, a significant number of the participants at that camp focus on bells and, in addition, a noted handbell expert is brought in as the handbell clinician. My first handbell clinician that taught me many skills and concepts during that week was an up and coming handbell composer by the name of Hart Morris. I followed Hart around that week, learning how to ring, taking any class he offered, quizzing him at great length over meals, and probably asking far too many stupid questions. I am indebted to Hart for his patience and the foundation of knowledge that he instilled in me. That began a long friendship! Of course, I have learned from many outstanding clinicians along this journey in ringing, but it was Hart Morris who set me out on the path to success.

As you read this edition of *Quavers* and find helpful words that will affect how you ring and direct handbell/handchime ensembles, remember the "where" and "who" in your musical life. Then, after reflecting and learning, look at the Area 8 or National website to find a seminar or workshop to attend so that you are not a past-tense director or ringer!

Dolan Bayless ~ Area 8 Chair

www.area8iii.org



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Three Things They Never Told Me

www.il-agehr.org

I'm an engineer by training, and a handbell musician since junior high school. My story is similar to many others—I was drafted to become the handbell director when someone resigned some twenty plus years ago. As I look back, here are three things "they" never told me about conducting or being a handbell director.

It's not just about the mechanics. Yes, you need to wave your hands in a pattern they can interpret, and it needs to be reasonably consistent. But music making, especially in handbells, is about collaboration and relationships. It's the conductor's role to bring the parts (and the people) together. Your attitudes and behaviors (how you feel and how you act) will directly impact the group. Do your ringers know you're happy to see them? Do you acknowledge each as they enter the room? Can you build some fellowship time into the schedule? Do you encourage them to help each other? That's just the beginning of the list of questions...

Music choice is critical. You need to be as picky as Goldilocks – not too hard or too easy. Your first criterion is that whatever you select is within **your** skills as a conductor or at most, a small stretch. Then, you have to judge your group's skills, the amount of time they have to learn the piece, and what you want them to learn. I tend to err towards easy, because there's ALWAYS something that could be better: chords together? Dynamics? Phrasing? Memorization? Yet there is at least one piece per year that pushes their skills, and occasionally that selection never makes it out of the rehearsal room. But that's OK as long as I don't blame the ringers, and make sure they understand what we (me included) learned from the experience.

You get what you expect (provided you selected the right music!) Corollary – your musicians need to hear the difference between exceptional and acceptable. Note I didn't say the difference between exceptional and NOT acceptable—don't settle for sloppy chords, bad technique or less than full effort. Ask your ringers if they can hear when something is exceptional. Seek out passages where they can excel, and ensure that they have pride in that accomplishment – it may be as simple as fully recognizing a beat of silence! I think this quote represents this mindset very well.

"One of the ways to make your sound better is to make it really obvious that you're really listening and that it really matters to you what it sounds like. That's not actually conducting. It's kind of embodying or representing a kind of aspiration, if you will, and it's uncanny how that actually can make a difference. As soon as it's apparent that your ears are open and that you're interested and you're following the contour of the sound, then that very contour is affected by that."

Gilbert, music director, New York Philharmonic

And I'm going to sneak in a fourth – **never stop learning.** Attend a festival, workshop or masterclass. See you there!

Sharon Schmidt ~ Illinois State Chair



Happy 
St. Patrick's Day





What I Wish I Had Known

Less is more

Maybe I had been taught this, but I didn't learn it until a reed player in an orchestra pit that I was conducting said "if you want us to look at you, you need to conduct less." Embarrassed, put in my place, but determined to fix the ensemble problem we were having, I did as he said and reigned in my gestures. Probably this was the most valuable advise I got—it completely fixed the problem that I was working so hard and so unsuccessfully to fix. If you are a flailing conductor, subdividing every beat, making "ictus" points at ridiculous high and low points, conducting with both hands (mirroring), consider making smaller, more conservative gestures that remain more within the "box" of your torso. The problem is often the conductor and specifically the things the conductor does to solve musical "problems." You have several pivot points – 1. baton with fingers 2. wrist 3. forearm/elbow 4. shoulder. Use only the ones you need at any given moment so you have somewhere to go. If something is rhythmically apart, for example, and you are using all four pivot points in your conducting gestures, take one away starting with 4, then 3, then 2, then 1. It might be that your group simply needs to listen.

Listen = Silent

Another thing that I learned late in the game is that I need to listen to my choir. This sounds pretty simple, but I heard a great quote from a colleague who was teaching at a choral directors' seminar: "You have to 'get over' the moment when you think 'Wow! They're singing!'" This is very important for handbell directors as it is our job to make our musicians successful. We can't do that if we're constantly counting out loud, or worse, *singing along*.

Those of us who by choice or necessity direct from within the ensemble are especially challenged with this – e.g. "well, it sounded like most of them played up there ... how am I going to solve *my* passage?" Taking time to really listen to your group is valuable and is an important skill to transfer to your handbell musicians. Sometimes ringers get themselves into trouble by counting out loud, or doing some other kind of "external processing."

Baton vs. Hand

I think baton. Good use of the baton gives the director excellent beat clarity and gives huge possibilities for expression. Also, and perhaps most importantly, you can put the baton down and conduct with your hands if you wish. If your musicians are used to a baton, they will be more easily "shown the hand." If you never use a baton, and try to transition to it, you may find your musicians are challenged to figure out what information you are trying to convey. Having said all that, if you are clear and concise, it probably doesn't matter what you choose.

Patrick Gagnon ~ Acting Iowa Chair



www.agedherria.org



What We Wish We Knew

From Kevin McChesney: The top two things I wish I'd known earlier and wish every director would learn more about are:

1) Choosing music—This is an involved subject, but generally I see a lot of groups taking on music for which they aren't ready. Directors need to choose music that challenges, no question about that. But they need to take the program step by step, and choose music for the group they *have*, not the one they *wish* they had.

2) Attendance!—Also a very involved subject. We all know we need a sub list and can't really rehearse with two or three missing ringers, even with subs. But people are busier today than ever before. We wonder why the bell world is shrinking: the primary reason is people are so busy they just don't have time for the bell program any more. If that's true, we need to find ways to set a calendar where everyone participating can be there all the time! In Pikes Peak Ringers, we keep a list of ringers going and say for this season here's the concert weekend and we need 10 or 11 rehearsals with *everyone* there. If that's at 6am on Monday or midnight on Thursday, I'll be there - as long as everyone's there! Some ringers bow out of a given season because of other commitments, but we end up with fifteen or sixteen players who put the puzzle of their schedules together and are there for all the rehearsals that season. At that, someone is bound to get sick or other things come up, so we still miss one for a couple rehearsals. But it sure beats not knowing what you're going to have from week to week, which I'm certain is where most groups live.

From John Behnke: In College you learn all about music. In real life you learn it's really about people. Great people make a great group!

From the Kansas Chair: Write everything down. Get a notebook or keep an electronic document and write down the services you play. Write down the services you wish you played. Don't presume you can't play for Easter because bells haven't played those services before. When you see that there's a workshop or a concert, write down the dates and details. Ex: Ring in the Spring – The Kansas version usually happens the first Saturday of March, every year. Early registration is due before Christmas. Don't miss out on this event because you didn't remember it. If this edition of *Quavers* gets to you before March 2 and you aren't attending the workshop part of Ring in the Spring, try to get to the free concert at Church of the Resurrection, 13720 Roe Ave., Leawood, KS. The concert starts at 3pm. If it's too late for that, write it down for next year.

Cherryl Cox ~ Kansas State Chair

www.agehr-k.org





My Five Wishes

When I started teaching and directing I didn't realize how inadequate my college preparation had been in so many areas of music. After a few weeks of teaching I soon realized I needed help in several categories, but it took several years to discover other weaknesses in my preparation. At the first two handbell festivals I attended there was some pretty awful conducting, including mine! I was pretty judgmental about other conductors, not realizing mine was just as bad. Over the years as I attended professional meetings, took William Payn's conducting classes, and studied other handbell director's styles, my skills gradually improved. **I wish** I had known sooner to seek help and find professional coaching for my inadequacies.

For a new teacher, discipline can be one of the biggest issues. Lack of classroom management skills affects everything one can accomplish in an ensemble. **I wish** I had known the techniques and principles of group dynamics and discipline that were outlined in the last issue of *Quavers!* My teaching and conducting would have been more effective and my groups more musical. I encourage you to find anyone who can help you take control of the situation if that is a problem.

I wish I had had the wisdom and humility to seek out a mentor who could support and encourage me through the early years. Whether for conducting skills, teaching techniques, planning resources, help with discipline, or whatever one's inadequacies, a more experienced colleague can be an immense source of ideas and encouragement. Never hesitate to seek out a talented teacher, church music associate, or someone accomplished in the skills you lack and ask for help. They will be pleased to be asked and happy to assist, and often you will make a friend for a lifetime.

I wish I had known how to plan a program for the church year, how the handbell program fits into the whole music program, and how to work and plan more effectively with the whole church staff. I wasn't very good at long range planning and seeing the big picture. **I wish** I had been more effective at communicating with staff and parents about dates, times, and events.

We are so fortunate to have such a wealth of opportunities in the Handbell Musicians of America (Guild), National Association for Music Education (MENC), American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Chorister's Guild, American Guild of Organists (AGO), our denominational music groups, and in all of our professional organizations. Everything that my handbell choirs have accomplished is because of the festivals, workshops, and seminars of the Guild. The classes and rehearsals at these events greatly enhance one's effectiveness as a director and ringer, and the art of handbell ringing is still developing rapidly. I encourage you to make it a practice—take advantage of all the professional opportunities that your time and budget can afford.

Suanne Comfort ~ Missouri State Chair



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If I Had Only Known...

Unlike many handbell choir directors with strong musical backgrounds, I fell into the job of handbell director by accident. My mother had been our church organist/pianist for 50 years before passing away so it was logical to consider some musical offering with the memorial funds. My younger sister, with the music degree, suggested purchasing a set of handbells. I said sure but what are they? I didn't know a handbell from a doorbell. 20 years later I am into my third year as the Nebraska state chair and thoroughly involved in the handbell community, but not without some trials and tribulations. **If I had only known** what I was getting myself into, I might have put up more resistance when we began our choir. You see, since it was my family who gave the two octave set of Malmarks, I automatically became the one expected to become the director, go figure. In fact, had it not been for the VHS tape of Don Allured for beginning handbell ringers enclosed with our bells, I wouldn't be writing this today.

Practice/Performance Preparation: With any journey, if you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you get there? A key responsibility I learned early on was getting myself prepared. I required my ringers to prepare their parts individually, but if I wasn't prepared in designating various bell assignments, how could I expect them to prepare adequately. It became imperative for me to listen to lots of tracks to find pieces of music which would fit our church, the minister's/congregation's expectations, and the skills of my ringers, purchasing the music in advance, analyzing the scores, assigning parts to get optimum performances, and then allowing enough rehearsal time to get the music fully prepared for our performances. On occasion I would misjudge my choir and choose a piece that I thought was doable, only to struggle within the time allowed until finally realizing I had bitten off more than *they* could chew. We would table the piece until our abilities caught up with the difficulty of the piece. A concept Kevin McChesney expressed at a workshop several years ago was that I, as the director, should not expect my choir to perform a piece without first having allowed sufficient rehearsal time to learn the piece to the degree that they would all have total confidence in their ability to play it as expected.

Improve thyself: A key to the success of any endeavor is taking the time to make yourself better. As a beginning director, I could get the piece started, and we tended to end together most of the time and I always felt good about that (one thing I had remembered from my high school band director was to begin and end the piece well and if things were less than perfect in between that was tolerable ... audiences tended to remember the beginning and ending of numbers and not so much what happened in the middle). I am grateful for being encouraged to attend several state handbell workshops which helped to educate me in so many things. One often doesn't know what they don't know. I found a mentor in Mary Kettelhut, who took me under her wing and helped me to understand a lot of what was expected of a director. We spent many hours chatting about choirs, music, etc.; she was a blessing to me. Find a mentor! Attend state workshops, area festivals and workshops, and national seminar. Learn what you don't know. Get better and transfer that knowledge to your ringers. You will all benefit!!

Become more creative: Handbell choirs are creative musical organizations. Of course you may not be a John Williams, or a David Weck, but you are the director and as such you have a lot of creative control over how your choir performs. Musicality—what is it? Basically, it means to perform the music beyond the written notes on the page; making it truly a piece of art. Incorporate your passion into the music, make it your own. Accentuate the volume changes, make the tempo changes dramatic, add some flare to your techniques. Handbell ringing is more than just playing the bells, it is a visual art form. Spend rehearsal time practicing technique. Don't be afraid to show off a little. Watch professional choirs and try to emulate their performance style to a degree. Your audiences will enjoy not only the joyful noise you create, but also the way that *noise* is performed. Expand your horizons, select challenging music, put your twist on it and get out of the rut of doing the same old stuff year after year. You and your ringers will appreciate it and your audiences will enjoy it!!

Dr. J. Michael Allen ~ Nebraska State Chair



Things You Should Know

2014 Festival: June 25-28

Beth Watson-Judd

Michael Glasgow

Distinctly Davenport: TBD

2016 Springfield, IL

2018 Omaha, NE

Calling all Handbell Enthusiasts! Area 8 is putting together a teacher database. We need your help to spread the word and make sure we don't miss any qualified and capable teachers. If you or someone you know has taught (or would like to teach) handbell related classes at local, state or area events, please contact the Area 8 Education Chair, Lauran Delancy

Education.area8@handbellmusicians.org

Do you have ideas for topics you would like discussed in *Quavers*? Drop me an idea at NewsletterEditor.Area8@handbellmusicians.org

The Raleigh Ringers

David M. Harris, Director

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A community handbell choir



Upcoming Concerts

2013	CONCERT	LOCATION	CONTACT
Mar 17 4:00p	The Agape Ringers	Oswego Presbyterian 1976 Illinois Route 25 Oswego, IL	www.agaperingers.org
Apr 13 4:00p	Embellish & The Agape Ringers <i>20th Anniversary</i>	First Presbyterian 7551 Quick River Forest, IL	www.agaperingers.org
Apr 19 7:30p	Rezound! Handbell Ensemble	Grace Covenant Presbyterian 1110 College Blvd Overland Park, KS	www.rezound.org
Apr 20 3:00p	Rezound! Handbell Ensemble	Bishop Spencer Place 4301 Madison Ave Kansas City, MO	www.rezound.org
Apr 21 4:00p	Rezound! Handbell Ensemble	Venue Visitation Concert Series 5141 Main St Kansas City, MO	www.rezound.org
Apr 28 3:00p	<i>Ring to the Lord</i> Concert	Wesley UMC 502 E Front St Bloomington, IL	Gail Joslin 309.825.4402
Apr 28 5:00p	Chicago Bronze	Enmanuel Lutheran Belvidere, IL	www.chicagobronze.org
May 4 7:00p	Bells in Motion	Zion Lutheran Church 500 S Old Route 66 Mt Olive, IL	www.bellsinmotion.org
May 5 4:00p	Bells in Motion	Douglas Ave UMC 501 S Douglas Springfield, IL	www.bellsinmotion.org
May 18 7:00p	Handbell Choirs of 1st UMC	First UMC 1032 Maple St Downers Grove, IL	Pattie Barnes bellhog@juno.com
May 19 4:00p	The Agape Ringers	St Francis Xavier 524 9th St Wilmette, IL	www.agaperingers.org

Think Spring





Upcoming Events

2013	EVENT	LOCATION	CONTACT
Mar 2	Ring in the Spring Cynthia Dobrinski Kipp Willnauer Cherryl Cox	Church of the Resurrection 13720 Roe Ave Leawood, KS	Gwen Gepford
Mar 2	spRINGfest John Behnke	Peace Lutheran Church St Louis, MO	Burnell Hackman burnell@bhackman.net
Apr 12-13	Spring Ring Handbell Workshop for intermediate & advanced choirs Monica McGowan	St Paul's Lutheran Church 13225 Millard Ave Omaha, NE	Linda Ashley LSAshley56@gmail.com www.agehr-ne.org
Apr 20	Spring Handbell Workshop	Wilson Performing Arts Center Red Oak, IA	http://www.agehr-ia.org/ Events/Events.htm
Apr 20	Handbell Musicians Workshop	St Mark's Lutheran Marion, IA	Laurie Stock laurelstock1@aol.com
Apr 28	Spring Ring	Raytown Christian Church 6108 Blue Ridge Blvd Raytown, MO	music@raytowncc.org
Jul 24-27	National Seminar Various	Portland, OR	www.handbellmusicians.org
Jul 25-27	Distinctly Teen Ron Mallory	Portland, OR	www.handbellmusicians.org
Oct 13	Webster City Handbell Festival Cathy Moglebust	Webster City Middle School Webster City, IA	Patrick Gagnon PGa1820@gmail.com