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Handbell

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(Redirected from Handbells)

A **handbell** is a bell designed to be rung by hand. To ring a handbell, a ringer grasps the bell by its slightly flexible handle — traditionally made of leather, but often now made of plastic — and flicks their wrist to make the hinged clapper inside the bell strike. An individual handbell can be used simply as a signal to catch people's attention or summon them together, but handbells are generally heard in tuned sets.

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Image:Handbells Whitechapel.jpg

Change ringing

Tuned sets of handbells were originally assembled to give change ringers a way of rehearsing outside their towers. Rather than standing for hours in the draughty towers and annoying neighbors with their practice, they could sit comfortably indoors while they practiced the complicated algorithms of change ringing. The handbell sets used by change ringers had the same number of bells as in the towers — generally six or twelve tuned to a diatonic scale.

The bells themselves

The bells used in American handbell choirs are almost always English handbells. "English handbells" is a reference to a specific type of handbells, not to the country of origin. While some American handbell choirs do use bells made in England, a large majority play bells made either by Malmark Bellcraftsmen or by Schulmerich Carillons, both based in Pennsylvania.

The two major defining characteristics of English handbells are their clappers and overtones. The clapper on an

English handbell is on a hinge and moves back and forth in a single direction, unlike a school bell in which the clapper swings freely in any direction. It also has a spring which holds the clapper away from the casting after the strike to allow the bell to ring freely. The overtones on an English handbell are a 12th (an octave and a perfect fifth) above the fundamental, while Dutch handbells — such as Petit & Fritsen — focus on the overtone a minor 10th (an octave and a minor third) or a major 10th (an octave and a major third) above the fundamental. Manufacturers give their attention to each bell's overtones, being especially careful to give all the bells in a set a consistent harmonic profile. Each of the foundries has a unique formula for emphasizing or de-emphasizing certain harmonic overtones to produce that bellmaker's unique sound.

In the United Kingdom there is a distinction between "American handbells" and "English handbells" — "English handbells" are of a traditional type, with leather clapper heads and handles (e.g. Whitechapels), while "American handbells" instead use modern materials such as plastic and rubber to produce the same effect (e.g. Malmarks and Schulmerichs). In America, however, they are all called English handbells.

To ring the bell, the ringer moves it in such a way that the clapper strikes the inside surface of the bell, usually holding it against his or her shoulder, bell-upwards, and then swinging the bell down and forward, using the wrist to snap. The tone of the bell will continue to resonate, decaying naturally until it stops completely, or until the ringer stops the tone by damping the bell with a hand, on the body, or on a padded surface.

Handbells can weigh as little as 4 oz. or upwards of 22 lbs.

Handbell performance

A **handbell choir** or **handbell ensemble** is typically armed with a fuller set of bells, as it aims to ring recognizable music with melodies and harmony, as opposed to the mathematical permutations used in change ringing. The bells generally include all notes of the chromatic scale within the range of the bell set used. While a smaller group uses only 25 bells (two octaves), the sets are often larger, ranging up to the eight-octave set used by Westminster Choir College. The bells are typically arranged chromatically on foam-covered tables; these tables protect the bronze surface of the bell, as well as keep the bells from rolling when placed on their sides. Unlike an orchestra or choir in which each musician is responsible for one line of the texture, in a bell ensemble each musician is responsible for particular notes, sounding his or her assigned bells whenever that note appears in the music.

Handbell techniques have changed very much over the years. Donald Allured, founding director of Westminster Concert Bell Choir, is credited with fully realizing an American "off the table" style of ringing that includes many non-ringing sound effects including stopped techniques such as plucking the clapper with the bell on the table. He is also credited for promoting precise *damping* or stopping of the bell sound by touching the bell casting to a soft surface, in the service of more musical results.

In the United States, handbell choirs have become more popular over the last thirty years. They are often associated with churches, although the past decade has seen a dramatic rise in the number of community groups. Most community groups use larger sets of handbells than an average church handbell choir, twelve to fifteen members being a common size for a four- or five-octave choir.

There is some ambiguity regarding the phrase "handbell ensemble," as some in the handbell world use "ensemble" in reference to smaller groups than a typical handbell choir — four ringers playing three octaves of bells, for example. However, several American groups have elected to change their names to use "ensemble" instead of "choir" to reduce confusion when touring internationally, as overseas concert venues did not understand that they were contracting a handbell choir rather than a voice choir. (The concept of a musical handbell is difficult to translate into some eastern European languages.)

Well-known U.S. handbell choirs include the aforementioned Westminster Concert Bell Choir

(http://www.rider.edu/888_2107.htm) in Princeton, N.J.; Sonos (<http://www.sonos.org>) in the San Francisco area; The Ringmasters of the San Francisco Bay (<http://www.ggbc.org>) ; The Raleigh Ringers (<http://www.rr.org>) in North Carolina; Cast of Bronze (<http://www.castofbronze.com>) in Dallas, Texas; Bells of the Cascades (<http://www.bellsofthecascades.org>) in Portland, OR; The Agape Ringers (<http://www.agaperingers.org>) in the Chicago area; the Pikes Peak Ringers (<http://www.pikespeakringers.org>) in Colorado Springs, CO; Los Angeles' now retired Campanile (<http://campanilemusic.com>) , Bells of the Lakes from Minneapolis, MN; The Allegro Handbell Ensemble of The Union Church of Hinsdale, IL [[1] (<http://www.allegrobells.org>)], and Strikepoint (<http://www.strikepoint.com>) in Duluth, MN.

Handbell music

Handbell choirs generally ring music composed or arranged specifically for the instruments because of their highly resonant sound and the unique pitch-by-pitch division of the staff among the ringers.

The coordination of the bell ringers requires a different approach from other ensembles. All the ringers read off of a complete score. This score is similar to a piano score, but with an additional convention: The C# above middle C and all notes below are always written in the bass clef, and the Db above middle C and all notes above are always written in the treble clef. (This formatting is not always the convention for solo and small-ensemble handbell music.)

Handbell music is written one octave lower than the actual sound the bells make, so a "middle C bell" or bell is actually playing a note with a high C frequency. (For simplicity, the bell would still always be referred to as middle C or as C5.)

There are also a number of abbreviations and notations used exclusively or almost exclusively in handbell music: LV ("laissez vibrer" or "let vibrate," similar to a piano's sustain pedal); R ("ring," meaning to end the LV); SK ("shake," i.e. shaking the bell continuously during the duration of the note); TD ("thumb damp" — ringing the bell with a thumb on the casting); PL ("pluck," which means to throw down the clapper while the bell lays on the table); a small, solid triangle ("martellato" — to hit the bell on to the table, pushing most of the lip into the table); SW ("swing" — to play the bell in a normal position, swing it down to the waist, then bring it and back up); BD ("brush damp," brushing the rim of the bell against the ringer's chest to cause a quick diminuendo); and an upward arrow, usually with a curve at the bottom ("echo," — ringing the bell and then touching it very briefly to the table, creating an echo effect).

Four-in-hand/Shelley/Six-in-hand

Two alternative ways of ringing multiple upper handbells are four-in-hand and Shelley. In four-in-hand, ringers hold two bells in one hand with the clappers at right angles to each other, either by putting one handle over the other or by putting one handle through another. By ringing each hand normally ("ring") or by ringing knuckles-first ("knock"), a ringer can produce two different notes with the same hand. The British variant of this is to twist the bells 90 degrees. This method is far more comfortable for playing the bell between the index and middle finger as the handle is held with the narrow part between the fingers instead of the width. The two notes can also be played together holding the wrist at a 45 degree angle. Four-in-hand is typically used to ring multiple positions or pick up accidentals.

Shelley ringing is similar, except that the clappers are each positioned the same direction; a ringer can then produce two notes with one ring. Shelley is typically used to ring octaves.

There are several ways to six-in-hand -- i.e. to ring three bells in each hand. The most common involves the linking of the handles of either two of the bells or all three of the bells.

Assignments

Three-octave handbell music is often assigned in diatonic note pairs starting at low C (C4) — i.e. one ringer has low C and the D above (along with the corresponding accidentals), one ringer has the E and F above that, and similarly until the final ringer has the B below high C and high C. Bells are not always assigned in this manner, however, particularly in smaller ensembles. Ensembles that have 4 or more octaves also tend to create their own custom assignments for the highest and lowest bells.

Major works for handbells

Due to handbells' relative rarity outside of the confines of church services -- although less so now than in the 1980s and early 1990s -- the vast majority of pieces composed and arranged for handbells are no longer than approximately four minutes. There are a few composers and arrangers, however, writing longer and more intricate works for handbells; generally these pieces use handbells in combination with other instruments.

A partial list of major works for handbells, each 10 minutes or longer:

- Ernst Bacon, "The Constable Cycle"
- Benjamin Britten, "Noye's Fludde"
- Cynthia Dobrinski, "Virginia Highlands Suite"
- René Eespere, "In Dies"
- Daniel Feinsmith, "Yahweh"
- Kevin McChesney, "Ring of Fire Concerto"
- Jim Meredith, "Kodo Tryptich," "Smirti"
- Cathy Moklebust, "Reflections on the Plains," "Sky-Tinted Waters," "Vision Quest"
- Susan (Nelson) Sylvester, "The Divine Office: A Suite for Handbells"
- John Tavener, "The Last Sleep of the Virgin"
- Peeter Vähi, "Handbell Symphony"

See also

- Belleplates

External links

- AGEHR - American Guild of English Handbell Ringers (<http://www.agehr.org/>)
- From the Top Music (<http://www.FromTheTopMusic.com/>)
- HRGB - The Handbell Ringers of Great Britain (<http://www.hrgb.org.uk/>)
- Ringem.org (<http://www.ringem.org/>)
- Jeffers Handbell Supply (<http://www.handbellworld.com/>)
- Handbell Services, Inc. (<http://www.handbellservices.com/>)
- Malmark Bellcraftsmen (<http://www.malmark.com/>)
- Schulmerich Carillons (<http://www.schulmerichbells.com/>)
- Petit & Fritsen Bell Foundry (<http://www.petit-fritsen.nl/>)
- Whitechapel Bellfoundry (<http://www.whitechapelbellfoundry.co.uk/>)
- Recordings of Change Ringing on Handbells (<http://www.changeringing.co.uk/handbells.htm>)
- The Handbell Podcast (<http://www.handbellpodcast.com/>) ja:ハンドベル

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