

# Rehearsal notes for Big Sky Festival 2010

## Kathleen Wissinger

### General Rehearsal Notes

With a little score study, directors can improve the learning process of ringers by preparing them with the skills and knowledge they will need before they are faced with applying those challenges in the music.

**Practice rhythmic patterns and handbell techniques first in rote exercises.** Once the mind and body know how to perform a skill, finding and performing it in the music is much easier. (See the Jan/Feb 2008 Overtones for my article on Unison Exercises.) Some pieces offer these exercises on the last page. If not, make up your own!

**Watch transition points.** Whenever anything changes, ringers find extra challenge: key changes, time signature changes, technique changes (from ringing to marring to mallets), bell changes (picking up a sharp or flat or moving from bells to chimes), fermatas, slowing down, speeding up, page turns, starting, stopping. Practice these issues in isolation and repeatedly, so they become the "easy" sections of the piece.

**Practice the end of the piece, first.** Usually the final measures of a piece are the weakest in performance because they are different, and have been practiced the least. The remedy? Practice this part first. Then move back and practice the final page, then the last 2 pages. In this way, ringers will be moving into familiar territory as the piece reaches its end.

**Practice dynamics as you learn.** We tend to perform what we know best, and if a spot has been rung loudly during practice, it's hard to perform it softly for performance.

**Stress ringing presentation.** It is unfair of us to not guide our choirs to ring beautifully. They CAN make circles and ring with style, complementing the music. We just have to help them remember to do it. And again, we perform what we practice.

**Encourage your ringers to count out loud for themselves.** Counting out loud when learning a piece solidifies a ringer's understanding of where they are in a measure and how to move from one measure to the next. Resist the temptation to count for them.

**Encourage your ringers to look up at you as often as possible,** in transition spots always and on the first beat of each measure. And directors must look up from their own music to be available to the ringer. By ringing phrases, and not just from note to note, ringers will feel more a part of the music and less tied to their score every moment.

### Repertoire Notes:

#### **Hymn of Promise - arr. Thompson**

A wonderful arrangement of this beloved tune, we need to keep it light, since it would be easy to over-ring. Changing from bells to the optional chimes and back should be seamless and unnoticeable. Balance of all ranges in this piece is important since often the entire expanse of bells is being used. We will wind it down like a music box at the end. This is a wonderful piece for congregational singing.

### **Broken for You – Wissinger**

Based on Luke 22:19, there are two themes in this piece. Theme 1 (m. 6-14 and 15-22) represents Jesus breaking bread at the Last Supper, trying to explain to his disciples what will be happening in the next few days. Each passage ends with “so here’s my body broken for you.” Theme 2 (introduced in m. 25-32) represents the disciples – confused, angry questioning. This second theme may be played on chimes – just follow the melody of the cross-staffed beamed notes as much as possible. The two themes then twine (m. 37-54) as in conversation, and Jesus has the final word.

Make sure the melodic lines are sure and clear with broad phrase shaping (we’ll talk about this.) Carefully check the accidentals in mm. 43 and 53. The patterns are not the same, and the key changes, too. (AB5 ringer may wish to start on beat 2 of m. 53 with Left hand ringing Bb5 – so their pattern will be L-R-L-R (on B5) – L (A5) – R.) Watch stem directions to follow which voice your bell plays.

Ringling style needs to be flowing and gentle for the most part. A slow tempo enhances the emotion. Try to make changes to accidentals in synch with the rhythm of the ringers around you. Melodic lines can be rung higher in the air, to increase both volume and vision.

### **Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? - arr. Edwards**

Get ready for some fun! We will really swing on this one! Try singing the first page before playing it, to get the feel. The counter melody in m. 20 (upper bass part) needs to swing equally as well, with a purposeful drive down to the Bb3 in m. 24. M. 25 and 26 eighth notes must be very cleanly damped. Mallets need to be rhythmic and aggressive.

### **Celtic Farewell - Lamb**

This lyric piece will ebb and flow with the rise and fall of the phrase. We will stretch the tempo a little to make it breathe. M. 67 top the end, the quarter note chords must be performed in unison feel and form - lifting each note in the measure. I will subdivide the final line for rubato and rit.

### **Crosswind - S. Tucker**

I encourage everyone to try this piece. It's not as difficult as it first appears, since it's very pattern oriented and a major section is contained within a repeat. (Learn it once, play it twice!) The syncopation is what really brings this to life, so we will punch all the tied eighths and 6/8 measures.

The moving countermelody in mm.12-14 is very important to pop out. Remember all eighth notes are EQUAL throughout the entire piece - so keep a ticker going in your brain to stay on track.

At 132 beats per minute I, will direct the piece starting in m. 6 in "3" - 1, 2, 3+a: 1, 2, 3+a: 1, 2, 3+a: 1+a, 2+a.

Take care at mm.17/18 which be counted in 3 as well: 1+a, 2+a, 3+: 1+, 2, 3+a. Try listening to the audio clip at [handbellworld.com](http://handbellworld.com) to get a feel for your part in the big picture.

M. 40 luckily has isolated parts, so you only mallet/mart or ring - but not both. It could be fun to work with your partner (either B4C5 with G4A4 or D5E5 with F5G5, who are not employed in this section) for one of you to mallet (using two mallets!!) and the other to perform the marts. I'll let each choir work this out, so long as this passage is performed cleanly and rhythmically. I suggest the G5 player mallet/mart the Ab5 in m. 50.

### **When We Gather - Wissinger**

This piece can stand alone, accompany a vocal solo, or accompany congregational singing with the bulletin insert. An easy guitar part is optional in all cases. It builds in strength with each verse, so make sure you don't reach the peak too soon. We'll work on ensemble ringing when ringers share a common rhythmic pattern or voice. MM. 71 showcases alternating intervals in both ranges. M. 80 introduces a strong rhythmic chordal pattern (lift the quarter note a little.) The single line moving eighths in Mm.81 (D5, C#5, B4, D5, C#5), 83, 89, and 91 are very important to pull out.

### **Dance Africana on Dix -arr. Honore**

I am a proponent of alternate hand malletting, especially with repeated notes, so practice playing each part with 2 mallets per ringer, using the strong hand on the beat and the weaker hand on the "ands" when possible. Remember that a 4/4 measure has a major pulse on beat 1, a secondary pulse on beat 3, beats 2 and 4 are next, and all the "ands" fall below that in energy.

M. 8, the D6 might want to substitute a light mart on beat 4 for a mallet. Same idea in m. 12.

Highlight the time changes at the page turn, and again at m. 16, 20, 35, etc. etc.

To preserve the integrity of alternating mallets (especially important in bass bells) - consider assigning the rung D4 to someone else, either by shifting D4, E4, F4, up one notch, or giving the D4 to the GA4 ringer (and give it back before m. 39)

How wonderful to have a bonus Fanfare for this hymn tune. Keep the 16ths short and close to the body for clean damping.

### **Joy and Elation - Dobrinski**

One key to the success of this piece is balancing the dynamics among all the different techniques and ringing. Nothing should jump out as louder just because it's performed as a percussive stroke. Careful not to speed up in this piece, since repeated notes tend to want less space between them.

### **Rise Up Shepherds - arr. Dobrinski**

Lots of techniques here! Make them support the music, not just a show in themselves. Mallet rolls should use two mallets if possible. We'll swing the last section from m. 58 to the end - 1-a, 2-a, 3-a, 4-a..... (triplets are not swing.) We'll make a big deal out of the 16ths in m. 73.

### **God of Grace - arr. McChesney**

With so much malletting, let's do it all the same - try holding mallets loosely in the hand, palm down, no fingers resting on the top, elbows slightly out, mallets hitting the bells at about a 45 degree angle at the sweet spot (the outside of the bell, opposite the clapper.) This requires a slightly springy stance, knees bent, an attitude of anticipation.

Watch for time changes. Sweep long shakes upwards in circles together. The 16ths for the C5 might work best with a shake "front, back, front" ....try it.

Bass ringers will need to carefully assign bells for these runs. Ideally no ringer plays more than two bells in a row. Shoulder damping is preferable to table damping. i.e. for m. 54, the C4 ringers can play C4, B3, the next ringer plays A3, G3, and the next ringer plays F3, C3...if you lay them in keyboard order. If you rearrange bells, this won't pose a problem.

Take an actual breath at the breath marks as you damp for Mm. 64, 65 for clean breaks and unison attacks.