

Bell Trees

by Barbara Bocker



a resource for members of
Handbell Musicians
O F A M E R I C A

Bell Trees

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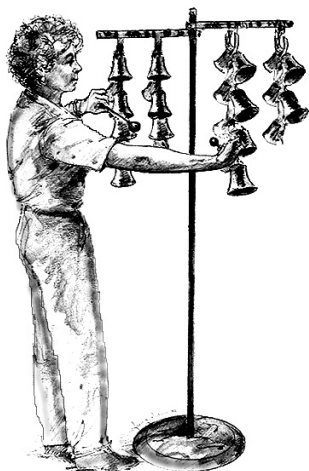
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Introduction

Ringers and directors are finding a renewed interest in bell trees, as they can enliven a performance, challenge a ringer, and bring rich beauty to our art form. Bell trees can even save a schedule when there are not enough ringers.

Bell trees are for everyone, from the elementary student just learning music to the most advanced ringer. They can be played by a soloist, by a small ensemble, or with a full bell choir, playing music from easy to advanced. In this article we will discuss bell tree setup and technique, where to find music for bell trees, and when to use bell trees in worship, concerts, and special settings.

Bell tree setup

The first decision is whether to string only the bells needed or to string the bells in some kind of consistent arrangement. If only a few bells are used, stringing only the bells played makes the most sense. This is called the *adaptive method* (adapting to only the bells needed). If used for a processional, the fewer the bells to carry, the better. The disadvantage is that the ringer needs to learn a different location for each bell in each piece.

If a major piece is to be played, or if the ringer is interested in playing several bell tree compositions, there is an advantage to having some sort of standard setup. This way, each bell is always in a particular location, so music can be learned more quickly. The bell tree can be set up like a keyboard with the notes being in one position consistently. Currently called the *keyboard method*, multiple bell tree strings can be hung on the arms of a bell tree stand from front to back. See drawing at left.

Playing the keyboard setup is similar to the movements used in playing a harp. Parts of the basic setup can still be used if only a few bells are needed, keeping the bells in the same position relatively, even though all the bells are not strung. The disadvantage of the keyboard setup is that keys with many sharps and flats become more difficult to play. Some want to see all the bells instead of having the bells front to back. If depth perception presents challenges to a ringer, this method would not be the best choice.

Some ringers extend the length of the arms left to right, to make it possible to see all the bells “flat” on all of the strings, or they place two stands close to each other, to have two arms going to the left and two arms going to the right, again enabling the ringer to see all the bells “flat.”

Separating the bells that touch

When stringing bells, often the casting of a higher bell will touch the casting of the bell below it, resulting in a “clunk” sound when malleted. The task is to “lift” the higher bell from the lower bell. Several solutions have emerged:

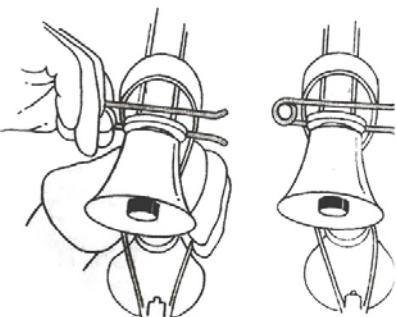
Stringing the lower bells at the top

The bells are less likely to touch each other in this setup. This is infrequently used because many find it illogical to mallet a larger low bell at a higher place than the smaller bell. Most ringers currently string the bells with the larger bells on the bottom of the string.

Plastic ring

Some ringers place a plastic ring (much like the circular divider found on store racks to divide clothes into sizes) at the base of the handle. These rings are inexpensive and available at most handbell vendors. Because the plastic ring needs to be added as the string is built, it requires knowing which bells will be touching prior to assembling the string. Disadvantage: The rings are quite visible on the string. They also do not prevent the string from turning while it is being malleted.

Wire Clip



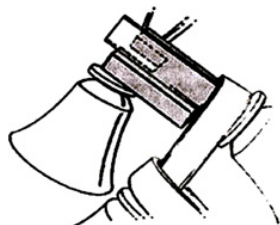
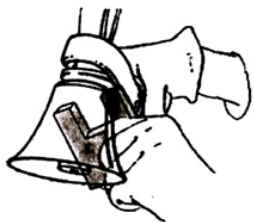
Wire clip for C6 and above

A u-shaped wire clip can be slid sideways between the handle guard and the handle, lifting the casting from the casting below. It can be placed after the string is built and separate only the bells visibly touching. It also prevents the string from twisting. The clips can be commercially purchased through most handbell vendors. A clip can also be made out of a coat hanger. If cut from a clothes hanger, the sharp cut edges need to be rounded to prevent accidentally scratching the bell castings. See drawing of wire clip at left. Disadvantage: The clips are visible.

Larger handguard

On the smaller bells, a permanent solution is to replace the handle guards with blank ones, size B5, available from the handbell manufacturer. It eliminates the need for separators and makes it possible to easily assemble the bell tree during performance. This method is more commonly used on solo bells, owned by an individual, rather than on the handle guards on a bell choir's set.

Plastic Clip



Plastic clip for B5 and below

A plastic clip shaped like a fat "U" will lift the bell from the bell below it. Because it can be added after the string is assembled, it is placed only on the bells that are touching. It also prevents the string from twisting while being malleted. A clear plastic clip is available at most handbell vendors, but one can also be made out of wood. See drawing of plastic clip at left. Disadvantage: If made out of wood, they are visible on the string.

B4 bell and below

Bells in the fourth octave and below begin to have bigger castings than the handle. Stringing more than two lower bells together becomes almost impossible. Creative placement of these large bells (perhaps separated, at the bottom of smaller strings) becomes necessary.

Selecting stands

Stands are not always required. A strong arm (the ringer's or the arm of a strong person holding them for the ringer) will work fine. When a stand is desired, there are several options:

Homemade stands

Many creative stands have been constructed in many a handyman's home shop. They've been made out of wood, copper piping, and even large tin cans with a board soaring from the base and hooks on the top. One design is a PVC pipe attached to the pole of a common music stand. Several ringers have offered their directions for homemade stands at no charge. They can be reached by e-mail at sguilliams@cox.net, les@chamberscable.com, ssparlin@dakotacom.net. Sonologymusic.com offers a free article with instructions to build the PVC stand.

Commercial stands from other purposes

A number of items have been used as stands, including bird feeders, plant stands, clothing racks, and even IV stands. Depending upon the weight of the string and the number of strings used, many will suffice as long as they have a wide enough and heavy enough base to avoid tipping.

Commercial bell tree stand

A commercial stand made for bell tree ringing is available through most handbell vendors. The 15-pound base (measuring 25 inches in diameter) has adequate weight and breadth to hold three octaves of bells securely. The 12-inch arms are removable, freeing up the ringer to use one arm or add a multitude of arms. Rubber spacers on the arms keep the strings apart. The telescoping pole allows for differences in heights of different ringers. With wheels on the base, moving



[CLICK HERE](#) to find Sonology.com's free article with instructions to build a PVC bell-tree stand.

the stand is easy, even with three octaves of bells on it. This is helpful when moving it into place during a concert, out of the way for communion, into storage, etc. The base also detaches from the pole, making transporting easier.

Portable stand

Newly created for the ringer who uses a few strings during a performance, the portable stand weighs just over six pounds, is lightweight, is made of wood, and will separate for carrying in a suitcase. Pegs on the sides of the arms also allow for the option of hanging the strings flat, resulting in the ringer being able to see all of the bells. This could be the future of bell tree design. This stand is useful for a solo ringer who travels. Contact Christine Anderson at vbronze@yahoo.com for further information.

Processional stands

Processing while holding a heavy bell tree string can be difficult. However, holding the arm straight up (instead of at a 45-degree angle) is easier on the arm. Processional stands can be used in ways other than processing. The ringer becomes more mobile, making it possible to ring a melody from anywhere in the sanctuary or concert hall.

To remove the burden of holding up the weight of the string while processing, homemade processional stands have been made. At its most basic, a pole with a hook on the end will work. Inserting the pole into a pouch attached to a belt or rope tied at the waist will take the weight of the bells off the arm and transfer it to the hip. Holding both the top of the string and the hook area of the stand will reduce the swaying of the bell tree.

An additional design developed by Monica McGowan forces a dowel through all the handles and is secured at the top with a peg. The advantage to this design is that the bells don't sway. The disadvantage is that the bell tree cannot be disassembled quickly. Contact Monica at msmcgowan@integraonline.com for more information.

A commercial stand is now available through most handbell vendors. It has a telescoping pole allowing for differences in height of the ringers.

Further Suggestions for Processional Use

The following are some practical suggestions from Louise Frier, the founder of the bell tree movement, about processional bell tree use:

Your mind must be focused on many things simultaneously while processing and ringing a bell tree. Your visual, auditory, and muscle memories are cooperating to remember everything about this musical performance. Remember that processional bell tree music must be memorized. Your eyes must be constantly aware of your surroundings.

Even though you have practiced walking this path at least once to become familiar with the wrinkles in the carpet, an additional electric cord crossing your path, and the contour and texture of the floor, it is important to practice while wearing the same shoes that you will perform in. When your audience is eagerly awaiting your entrance, there may be new variables for you to check out before you take the first step. A member of the audience may have placed a purse in the aisle. Perhaps a tall person has his or her foot in the aisle. A child may dart in front of you unexpectedly. Without interrupting the flow of your performance, you solve these problems as they appear. Now a word of encouragement. Your brain will take care of these unexpected moments more easily than it sounds! Just be alert.

Carrying the bell tree

It is extremely important that you insert your fingers through the loop of the handle of the highest bell on the bell tree. Your thumb will close this grip, forming a fist. Do not grip your hand around the outside of the handle of the top bell. The bell tree may easily slip out of your hand. With only a very slight bend in

your elbow, raise the bell tree up quite close to your arm. This brings the bell tree in closer alignment to your center of gravity. It may appear to you that it would be easier to carry the bell tree lower, with your hand about shoulder level. This would put you off balance and stress parts of your arm and back. You will discover that you will have longer endurance and be able to carry a bell tree with more comfort when you hold it high and close.

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Choosing mallets

Mallet choice is a matter of personal preference, and this varies widely. In choosing a mallet, both the size of the room and the character of the piece affect which type of mallet which is best. For instance, for a processional in a large gym, the white, hard-plastic mallet heads may be the only mallet which will carry a sound. Having someone listen in different parts of the performance space is sometimes the only way to make a decision on which mallet to use.

A mallet commonly used for C6 and above is the Malmark grey plastic mallet head, which performs well on both Malmark and Schulmerich bells. It has a brightness which can be heard without being strident. It also can be used down into the 5s with some caution.

For B5 and below, Schulmerich's pink yarn mallet head performs well on both Malmark and Schulmerich bells, as it carries the lower notes effectively. For soft pieces, the pink mallet can be used up into the 7s.

The search is still on for a mallet which will perform well in the range from G4 to G7. And other mallets have been used. The operative word is experimentation.

Mallets sold commercially as “bell tree mallets” have shorter handles and are preferred by some. They work well when processing, as there is often little space between the ringer and the bell tree. Some prefer the shorter handle because it provides them more ability to get speed. If reaching to the back of four or six strings is needed, the length of regular mallet shafts seems to be preferred.

Malleting the bell

The mallet is not a hammer, and the bell is not a nail. The most common mistake ringers make is to “hit” the bell. It is more like a “lift,” drawing the sound out of the bell. Graceful movements are also desired. A marching strike is not appealing and is dangerous for the bell.

More practical advice from Louise Frier:

Remember to use graceful movements as you move the mallet from bell to bell on the bell tree. My preference is to use a mallet with about a nine-inch handle which is approximately 1/4 inch thick. A clear strike and resonance is projected best by using a mallet with a hard rubber head, one that does not give when squeezed between thumb and fingers. For practice purposes, it is good to use a little softer mallet due to the bells being so close to your ears. Repetition of these high pitches produced so close to your ears may have negative results which could be permanent. Before your performance, be certain to play it once or twice using the harder mallet. You may need to adjust back to the bounce of the harder mallet.

I discovered that my favorite mallets are used with rhythm band instruments. Check with an elementary school music teacher. Keep your eyes open to handbell equipment distributor catalogues.

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Finding bell tree music

When searching for published music for bell trees, most people think first of the anthem or stand-alone piece played at a special music slot in the church service or as a piece of music in a concert. This section will deal first with stand-alone music for bell trees.

When looking for published music for bell trees, some handbell vendors have search screens, sometimes with a box to check to sort specifically for bell tree music. Vendors also will sometimes have a knowledgeable person on site who knows bell tree music and can offer suggestions.

Some class instructors will distribute bell tree anthologies, listing music as easy, medium, etc., with levels of difficulty and number of octaves needed. Performances at bell festivals which include bell trees are another excellent sources of ideas.

Bell tree ringers have also formed an online conversation space, called BellTree-L, to discuss ideas, music, worship suggestions, etc. It's a great place to ask for music suggestions. To subscribe to BellTree-L, send a blank email to BellTree-L+subscribe@googlegroups.com to subscribe. Alternatively, you may contact the moderator, Megan Reishus, directly at mbreishus@gmail.com with a subject line of "Bell Tree-L Subscribe", including your preference between individual emails (sent as they come in) or a digest of all messages posted each day.

You can also use published music not specifically coded for bell trees. Look for ***C Instrument parts*** (or similar instrumentation) written into handbell choir music. Often the instrument part can be played on a bell tree. Hymn accompaniments written for handbell choirs can also be a resource. Sometimes playing only the top line can provide a nice descant on a bell tree. Descants for hymns can be created by simply playing the hymn melody on verse one, the alto part on verse two, skipping playing on verse three, and playing the tenor line or other fast

harmony on the last verse. Music published for other instruments (i.e. violin, flute, etc.) also can sometimes be played on a bell tree.

Creating your own bell tree music

Bell tree music is now available for soloists, small ensembles, and full choirs. However, although there are over 14,000 titles of music currently available for handbells, only about 100 titles are specifically coded for bell trees. When dividing that number into solo, ensemble, and choir music, and then adding difficulty level, number of octaves, and season of the year, a wide selection is not left for the bell tree ringer. Until more bell tree music is published, being creative is almost a necessity. Fortunately, creating your own bell tree music can be quite easy. There's also lots of help available.

The "LV" nature of bell trees can provide both beauty and dissonance. Playing a tune on the piano while pressing the sustain pedal will quickly demonstrate what might sound well on the bell tree.

Pentatonic notes (the black notes on the piano) work well on a bell tree in almost any combination. If non-pentatonic notes are only passing notes, that will work, too.

Simple see-saw patterns can be quite effective. For instance, beginners could play two-note bell trees (i.e. G and A on "Holy Holy Holy," if in the key of C, with a second person playing E and F, alternating phrases.)

Arpeggios, ostinatos, and even random ringing in the same key can add interest to a melody.

Melodies with few accidentals are the most pleasant sounding. Accidentals, especially chromatics, create dissonance. Some accidentals or passing half steps are fine, but too many half steps clash because of the LV of bell trees. Unless dissonance is the goal, numerous accidentals are best avoided. When ringing a piece with accidentals,

consider damping the accidental note relatively quickly to minimize the dissonance. It can be dampened by lightly touching the bell with the mallet head after the next bell is malleted.

When to use bell trees

Bell trees can save the day when there's a spot in the yearly worship schedule that needs to be filled and the full choir is not available to perform. One or two bell tree ringers (or a small ensemble with a bell tree) can give a bell presence in a service when needed. Even a simple melody on the bell tree, supported by singing bells underneath, can provide a unique offering to a service or concert.

Bell tree music can help expand the number of pieces in a concert. Full choirs have limited time to rehearse. Adding a bell tree piece which can be prepared outside of the full choir rehearsal will expand the concert repertoire while preserving valuable full choir preparation time.

When there are fast passages in a choir piece, sometimes playing the phrases on a bell tree can make it possible to play the piece musically. When space is an issue, a bell tree can squeeze into a tiny spot.

When no accompaniment is available, a bell tree ringer can play a series of melodies unaccompanied. The bell tree community has developed lists of simple melodies which can be played on two bell tree strings (C6 to C7 and C5 to B5). Starting notes are indicated, and the melody is played by ear. See Tunes with their Starting Notes at left. The PDF contains both general tunes and tunes for Christmas and Lent.

Another situation that works well is when large bass bells are too heavy for the ringer to lift; it's possible to add arms to a stand and mallet multiple bass bells. But using a bell tree is also good when something more exotic is needed for a concert or that certain something is needed for a special church service. Even a simple peal can provide that added zest.



CLICK HERE to
download the
"Tunes with
Starting Notes"
List.

Use in traditional worship

Bell trees are made for worship services! There are so many ways of enhancing worship beyond the handbell anthem. For example, peals add energy to a moment, create excitement for what's to come, and cause the congregation to anticipate something. Peals are simple and can be as easy as malleting a bell tree down the scale, then repeating the scale. See "Peals" at left.

Processionals add grandeur to a special service. Announced by a bell tree leading, the congregation can experience a moving moment. Processionals can be as simple as repeated chords on bells or chimes while the more interesting tune is provided by the bell tree.

A bell tree is also useful for a call to worship. A melody on a single bell tree can gather the congregation's attention and focus the people to the beginning of the service.

Whereas it is sometimes more work to add a hymn accompaniment played by the entire choir, a bell tree descant can add some unique without taking time out of rehearsals for the bell choir to learn another piece. It's also difficult to hear the lower choir bells when organ or keyboard is strong. Bell trees in the C6-and-above range carry well and can add an exciting element to a normal hymn. It can also engage and challenge a more advanced ringer in the choir.

We often think of a bell choir anthem for the a "Special Music" slot. But this also could be a bell tree solo, a small ensemble involving a bell tree or two, or even a full choir piece with a bell tree part added. Many of our congregations are accustomed to full choir pieces, but what if we mixed it up a little and added bell trees? Most congregations would appreciate it.

A bell tree, playing melodies unaccompanied, can create a meditative mood during communion and other quiet points in the service. (See sidebar above for list of melodies with starting notes.) Other meditative songs, played with accompaniment, can provide quiet reflection.



[CLICK HERE](#) to
download the Easy
Bell Tree Peal.

Consider using a bell tree for the closing, recessional, or benediction. A bell tree playing a lively peal, a quiet melody, or a familiar benediction can convey the feeling that the service is ending. Playing a familiar melody at the end of one service and at the beginning of the next service can tie the services together (i.e. Maundy Thursday to Good Friday).

Bell trees in concert

Bell trees add a beautiful visual component to a bell choir's concert. We are still predominantly an auditory art. Whereas our bells are beautiful to look at, our normal way of presenting ourselves to our audiences is in standing in a row or behind tables and ringing our bells in a circle. For some reason, the bell tree draws interest. Even seeing the bell tree hanging from a stand causes the audience to anticipate what will happen with the bell tree. It engages the audience.

Including a bell tree solo, an ensemble using a bell tree, or a bell tree with a full choir piece in the concert program provides variety for the audience and makes the concert not seem all the same. Additionally, a bell tree can open the concert, notify the audience that the intermission is ending, and be rung from any place in the concert space as a surprise to the audience.

Bell trees can also engage more advanced ringers who will be able to add variety and musical excellence to the concert. Choirs often have a few advanced ringers who sometimes end up not being challenged. Giving them a bell tree part to learn can stimulate them to perform at greater heights.

Bell trees in contemporary worship

Bell trees are beginning to be used in praise worship services. Because the bell tree takes up such a small space, it can easily be incorporated into the praise band.

Most bell tree work so far has been done by one individual playing melodies, harmonies, and descants with the praise team. Lead sheets for other instruments have been used for music. Using a recording of upcoming songs and figuring out harmonies by ear has been done. Playing ostinatos, arpeggios, see-saw patterns, or even random ringing in the key of the song have also produced simple harmonies. A simple idea would be to find a piece which has few chords (I, IV, V) and play a few simple arpeggio patterns. You can also play the melody alone to introduce a song.

Much work needs to be done in this area. Because there's often little room for the full choir's bell tables, bell trees are a natural for praise worship.

Bell trees for special services or occasions

Weddings

A peal is an effective addition to a wedding ceremony as the bride enters. (See "Peals" above.) If played after the attendants enter and before the bride processes, it can energize the ceremony. It also can be played when the newly married couple is announced or before the couple processes out, making a memorable moment. Bell tree pieces have been used as the processional and as the recessional. Playing a special music selection as the couple lights the unity candle is also effective.

Taize or contemplative services

Reflective songs which repeat verses can be enhanced marvelously with bell trees. On one verse, the bell trees can take the melody. On another verse, harmony is possible. It's also effective to have a simple note malleted at the beginning of each measure. It doesn't take much to give variety to the repetitions. Lead sheets from other instruments can be used, but simple harmonies played by ear intermittently seem to be the most effective.

Retreats

Having a full bell choir play at a retreat requires extensive organization, but bringing a bell tree setup is simple. Retreaters who have been awakened by the sound of simple melodies on bells have said it was like they had heard angels. Playing tunes as retreaters are going to bed can be relaxing. Melodies can also be played during meditative times. (See “Tunes With Starting Notes” above.) Bell trees can also enhance group singing when melodies and harmonies are played along with the singers.

Are additional bells needed?

Do you need a second set of bells if you use a bell tree with your bell choir? In most cases, no. Much music has been written for choirs using one set of bells, often written to play with chimes. Louise Frier has made an art out of composing for choirs and smaller ensembles using bell tree, chimes, and malletted bass. Other music is available which uses only one set of bells. Realistically, advanced or auditioned choirs usually have several sets available to them because the choirs are often composed of ringers who direct or ring in other choirs. Bell tree music is just now beginning to be composed for Level 4-and-above choirs. This usually requires one or two extra sets of bells and is providing a new chapter in the development of our art. For other choirs, there are two choices. One is to select music requiring only one set of bells. The other is to borrow. Many communities have unused “closet bells.” Neighboring directors often will help out another director. Checking insurance to make sure this is covered is important.

As mentioned before, audiences are accustomed to seeing a row of tables with ringers playing their own bells in circles. Adding a bell tree can wake up the audience. It can be as simple as finding a passage in the music which has space before or after it to build it on the fly.

Seeing a small bell tree emerge from the line of ringers can add that something unexpected to a presentation. Adding bell trees to a table solo can bring a spark to the performance. It can be easily accomplished by playing the solo on chimes while using the bells on the tree. Stringing bells in a different key can free the rest of the bells for table ringing. Fast passages can sometimes be executed better on a bell tree, though this sometimes requires a second set of bells.

Bell trees as a learning tool

Bell trees are also a wonderful tool for working with children. Success can come quickly for a child just learning music. Bell trees can also be a vehicle for an advanced student to excel. For some reason, children seem to be fascinated by bell trees. Engaging them in playing them can enhance their music learning. Louise Frier, the founder of the bell tree movement who also has had extensive experience working with children, offers the following practical suggestions:

It is easier to introduce new techniques to children than it is to any other group! To hold their interest, they need to experience success early on. There's nothing like using the pentatonic scale and random ringing while a pentatonic melody is played on a keyboard or other instrument. There is no such thing as a mistake with this experience. As they become comfortable learning the striking skills of using a mallet, they can be introduced to playing a pattern on the bell tree. From there they will easily move to either learning their melody by rote or reading the music on the staff.

Due to a limited number of bell trees available in one set of handbells, I determine what chords can be rung on the remaining available handbells and handchimes. Write these on music manuscript paper and run off copies for the ringers at the table. It takes some planning time to do this but it is worth it. Using the pentatonic scale, two to four bell trees can be formed using

from C6-C8. You can begin by playing the pentatonic melody that you have chosen. Then, have the random ringing bell trees play with the melody. The bells and/or chimes can join of the next repeat of the melody. Ringers then rotate from one location to another until all children have had an opportunity to ring the bell trees. I have found this to be an enjoyable introduction to bell trees for any group of ringers.

Once they feel comfortable with bell trees, it is time to introduce them to a piece of handbell music that includes the use of a bell tree. The question arises, "What do I do with the rest of the ringers while I am working with a bell tree ringer?" I check with parents in advance to see if we can set up a short rehearsal time with their child, and I work with that one child privately a time or two in advance. The rest of the ringers will be ringing either handbells or chimes at the tables. As usual, they will have their part already assigned to them. There will always be moments when the director has to work with each group separately. This happens from time to time while learning any piece of music. Learning how to make good use of this down time for the other ringers is an important lesson. They can spend time studying their part or "air ringing" their part while the director takes this short time to help the handbell, chime or bell tree ringers.

Processing for some elementary age children may be too demanding on their body. They are still developing, and I never take the chance of causing any health issues. Bell tree stands can be adjusted to their height. I am also very careful when assigning bells to children. The weight of the bells and proper ringing techniques are extremely important to keep in mind while working with children. I prefer to begin handbells with fourth grade children. Handchimes are safer for most third graders and younger children."

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In *The Bell Tree Keyboard Manual*, an entire section of the book is devoted to music for children in the schools. Tunes are provided for each string that is built. With letter chords indicated on the melody line, a music teacher can accompany the student on piano, guitar, or harpsichord. Stringing three melodies together can make a medley to play at a school concert. The other students in the class could also chord using the remaining bells.

Bell trees are also great for use with special needs groups. One of the new arrangements written for bell tree and bell choir was written for a nine-year-old boy with cerebral palsy who loved bells but had difficulty ringing one. Physically it's easier to mallet a bell tree than ring a bell. We are only beginning to explore how bell trees can be use by those with physical challenges, interpersonal issues, or mental limitations. Since the bell tree can be strung in any configuration, a tune could be played simply by learning patterns. An advantage to bell trees is that once the bells are strung, the bells don't change places, increasing the chances for success for a special needs ringer.

Bell trees with other instruments or vocal

Descants to hymns are very effective on the bell tree. The low bass of an organ blends well with the higher notes on a bell tree. When a full bell choir plays with a loud organ, it is difficult to hear bells below C6. Often it works just as effectively to take the top note of the bell choir score and play it on a bell tree.

Instruments which complement the bell tree are those with lower tones (cello) or a different timbre (guitar, harp, chimes). Partner songs (with two melodies intertwined) played with other instruments are currently being explored because they can complement both instruments. Playing a bell tree with a variety of other instruments, in general, is a new area being developed.

Vocal scores that have an instrument score included can also be beautifully enhanced when the instrument part is played on a bell tree. Also, accompaniments to vocal choirs often have interlude passages which, when played on bell trees, enhance the sound of the singers. Harmonies can also be played along with the singers. The sound of the bells with vocal is best used sparingly or intermittently.

Conclusion

Bell trees are on the move. Ideas are beginning to spring up through presentations and classes at festivals, internet discussion groups, and personal experimentation throughout the country, as well as overseas. It's an exciting time for bell tree ringers and composers. Yet we have only begun to explore the use of bell trees.

There's a need for more composers to write music for bell trees. Until there is music to play, few directors will add bell tree ideas to their already full schedule. They need music already figured out. We also need more classes on ways to use bell trees, taught by the increasing number of bell tree ringers who are actively creating these new ways of playing bell trees in their own communities.

Bell trees are an exciting and developing part of our bell world. We need to continue to encourage this creative effort.

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Additional Resources

Belltrees by Louise Frier. Basic information on building and playing bell trees. Available from AGEHR Publishing, AGEHR R-211.

The Creative Use of Handbells in Worship by Hal Hopson. Many worship ideas playable on bell trees. Available from Hope Publishing, 1956.

The Bell Tree Keyboard Manual by Barbara Brocker. Available from Tree-O Publishing, 117.



a resource for members of
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