

# Rehearsal Notes for Area VIII Festival-Topeka

"Ringling on the Range" - June 2010

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## 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 face extra challenge: key changes, time signature changes, technique changes (from ringing to marning 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 solid sections of the piece.

**Practice the end of the piece, first.** Usually the final measures of a piece are the weakest in performance - perhaps 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.

## Festival Repertoire Notes:

### TINS

#### **Twos In the Moon of Wintertime,**

Moklebust, Level 2, 2-3 oct., finger cymbals, tambourine, chime tree, MCGB155, \$3.95.

3-5 oct. version CGB402

This wonderful 2-3 oct. piece from 1994 was reissued and also expanded in 2005 into a 3-5 oct compatible version (both with colored covers). Use whichever version suits your choir best. The older 1994 issue of the 2-3 oct. score (gray wintry scene) has some slightly different notation.

Note the percussion parts are almost universally *mp*. I like the tambourine to be crisp (try holding it at a 45 degree angle.)

To keep this piece feeling mystical and frosty, we'll use a light touch on the bells both in ringing and for percussive techniques. At m. 18 the subito (sudden) fortissimo should be clean, definite and abrupt. Then we'll pull back in m. 22 and resume our wintry walk.

M. 37 introduces a more lyric line, so our ringing style will soften and smooth out. Note the diminuendo in m. 41 - we'll need to lighten up at this transition and then markedly and rhythmically attack the chords in m. 42. I'd like to slow down just a little towards the end - so we'll stretch the tempo from m. 54 to the end.

#### **Enter With Joy,**

Wissinger Level 2, 3-5 oct. MAP25342, \$3.50

Enter with Joy is written in independent 8-measure blocks designated by letters for easy reference. Note that the sections may be mixed, repeated or even omitted as needed for your performance needs.

Mm.1 through 24 offers processional options. Repeat whichever sections which work for you. By Section D all ringers should be at tables. M. 28 beats 2, 3 and 4 should be very smooth and lead into m. 29. Bring out the melody on rung eighth notes in m. 30/31.

Section E introduces echoes as a rhythmic element - echoing on beats 2 and 4. The melody spans the entire 3 octave range (in m. 37, the E5 on beat 1 is the melody note.)

Section F - we might try playing only the upper Shelley octaves (the 7's) for the obbligato part instead of playing both the 6's and 7's, for a lighter touch.

M. 59/60, only the C7 shakes. One flourish I like to include is a thumb or hand damp (in the air!) after the gyro, so the bells remain "up" after the last chord damps.

### GOLD

#### **A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,**

Moklebust, Level 4, 3-5 oct., CGB362, \$4.50

The shimmering trebles on top and the rhythmic bass malletting bracket both the metrical and rhythmic versions of EIN FESTE BURG, originally written by Martin Luther. The top treble bells ring in a repeated 2-measure pattern, easily memorized. The bass mallets do likewise (also easily memorized.) The melodic line and chords can be sung. Listen to where you fit into all of these sections and internalize the rhythmic patterns. Throughout the piece - the more "eyes on the director," the more successful we'll be in holding the piece together and getting it "near" tempo.

A strong sense of rhythm throughout the piece is absolutely necessary - remember that beat "one" gets the major stress and beat "three" gets a secondary stress....These two mega-pulses will help hold the entire piece together. The broad chordal melody in m. 48 feels more like cut time, and I will probably direct it more markedly in "2" to not infer a frenetic feel to that section.

All transitions and variation spots should receive special attention in your rehearsals and become natural, seamless passages into the following section - M. 20, Mm 31-40, Mm. 68-72, Mm. 86/87. At m.104 all bells should be tabled except for the lone C7/C8.

## **Broken for You**

Wissinger, Level 3, 3-5 oct (opt. chimes - see note below) MAG35179, \$3.95

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 inter-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.

Ringing style needs to be flowing and gentle for the most part. A slower 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?**

Edwards, Level 3, 3-5 oct. MCGB464, \$4.50

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.

## **MASSED**

### **Prairie Suite** (*People of the South Wind, Sunflower Dance, Reach for the Stars*)

Wissinger, Level 3, 3-5/6 oct. (opt. chimes) Release date - Jan 2010 AGEHR

Embracing the culture and history of Kansas, "Prairie Suite" is a three-movement suite commissioned by Area VIII specifically for this event. Each section is subtitled for a broader use in various venues.

*People of the South Wind* (Dignity) - The opening movement celebrates a native people of this region, the Kansa tribe. The main theme is somber and dignified yet positive, even in a minor key. There is a stretch to the sequencing (patterns that repeat), each one reaching higher; build on this pattern with longer strokes and more definitive strikes. A calm ostinato signature in the bass, introduced in m. 7, recurs throughout the piece, tying it all together.

*Sunflower Dance* (Fibonacci Rondo) - This quirky little melody is based on a Fibonacci series of notes, representing the same numeric pattern found in the seed swirls of the sunflower, the state flower of Kansas. Note the accompaniment part follows a strict pattern - the 6/8 measures are completely malleted, while the 5/8 measures end in a mart.

*Reach for the Stars* (Destiny) - Based on the state motto: "*To the Stars through Difficulty*" - this piece features an introduction with dark, mallet-rolled chords, then the skies clear for the finale. All eighth notes should be very smoothly played. Mm. 26 - 33 features an unusual notational device, which allows for a fuller sound than conventional Shelleying offers, by indicating a separate stems-up chordal part for 5 and 6 octaves. The coda (m. 44 to the end) offers an option to play a snippet of the Kansas state song, "Home on the Range" on chimes (or bells.) If this option is used, bass bell part is omitted (unless you have extra hands to cover bells and chimes.) The last chord should "sparkle like stars" on suspended mallets - bells upright, please - (switch to the next harder mallet if necessary) and the malleting will fade out from the lowest bell to the high bells, ending with only the top few trebles shimmering.