

Chapter Eight

Combining Cardinal Numbers and Direct Cueing Denton Bell Band – the work of Joseph Pinson Scoring and Charting for the Bell Band The Benefits of Public Performance

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Combining Cardinal Numbers and Direct Cueing

Every method that has been described up to this point has some significant merit in the area of handbells and/or hand held chimes for special groups. For many years the idea of combining the methods never occurred to me. I was so conditioned to the usual: one choir – one director, one band – one director, etc. Someone told me about a special choir in Pennsylvania known as the Joy Bells that uses two directors. WOW! What a concept! All of a sudden I realized that in one choir I could accommodate many different levels of ability. It was a day of salvation for me and for my choir. Today we use three directors directing the following groups simultaneously.

Group I

Scroll chart (like Stanley Williams)
- single digits (1 through 9 + X for 10) and same circled) = 20 bells

Group II

Direct Cueing
Larger Bells
(one bell per ringer) 8 bells with optional accidentals

Group III

Direct Cueing
Hand Held Chimes
- playing two note chords that complement the harmonic motion

Group II may also include some electronic ringing devices for persons with physical disabilities.

With this combination you can have a four octave choir with **no** color coding (a time saver and only one less academic hurdle for the ringers). Experience has shown that yellow highlight in the circled numbers helps ringers, but it is not required.

Damping is not required. Arrangements are carillon style in which large harmonic clashes are avoided.

Synthesizer accompaniment is recommended – not because it is absolutely necessary, but because it adds interest to the music and works as a metronome for the ringers – many of whom do not have well developed internal rhythms. (see Chapter Five)

Denton Bell Band – the work of Joseph Pinson

Our logo says “Making Joyful Music Together Since 1978”. The Bell Band was organized under that name in 1997, but more than half of the ringers were in the first bell choirs I started at Denton State School in the seventies.

I remember that the two octave set of Schulmerich bells were locked in a closet in another area with the directive, “**Handle these very carefully. They cost a lot of money.**” This was translated “**DO NOT TOUCH**”. When I gained access to the bells, we began touching them – and playing them – and occasionally dropping them – but, we learned that special people can be taught to treat the bells with respect and to handle them carefully.

This book is a history of my various experiments with handbells. I went from direct cueing to lightboards, and after hearing Stanley Williams and his fine choir, I began charting with color coded letters. Since my choir was not auditioned, I had ringers who were not able to track the scroll chart. We struggled with this method for several years until the time that the idea of more than one director came across my desk.

In the early stages of more than one director we had one group with smaller handbells (each ringer with two bells) following the scroll chart. A second direct cue group played larger bells (one per person). It was a definite improvement on what we had done before.

We played without accompaniment until a young female savant sat down at the piano and started improvising as we played. Our sound was improved again. I eventually added the synthesizer to her improvisation, and the combination moved our sound another step forward. In a few years she graduated from her special education program and returned to her parents in another city. To this day we miss the innovative notes that she added.

We continue to use the synthesizer, because it improves our sound and acts as a metronome to help players stay close to the beat of the music. I know that the “purists” don’t want to hear handbells with a synthesizer, but it works for us and for our audiences.

This is the Bell Band PLAN (as it is used presently):

Group I: Seven ringers (each person playing two bells). Each person has an active bell (rung often) and a less active bell (rung less often). For instance, number 1 is **C5** (active). Number **1 circled** is **F#5** (less active). The **circle 1** may also play **Ab5** or **F6**, if one of those bells is more important to the arrangement than the **F#5**, but ringers **do not** change bells as the piece is played.

Group II: Seven ringers (each person playing one bell). These represent the C scale (**C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4**) except the seventh person who has a choice of **F#4, Ab4, or Bb4**. The choice is made according to the plan of the arrangement, and this ringer **does not** change bells as a piece is played.

Below are the bell assignments in music notation. I have not included enharmonics (C#=Db, F#=Gb). Since the players are reading cardinal numbers, these musical considerations are not something that concerns them.

Chart Bells

Direct Cue Bells

All played by one person.

Group III: Four persons play hand-held chimes (each person playing two chimes simultaneously) following direct cues. They are lined up as shown below (from the perspective of the director). Roman numerals are included in the score to indicate when the chimes are played (usually on the downbeat of the measure).

| | | | |
|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| I | II | III | IV |
| C5 A5 | D5 B5 | F5 D6 | G5 E6 |

The director of the chime group will follow the numbers in the chart and point to each player when it is time for his/her chimes to be played. Each person plays **TWO** chimes simultaneously to be part of the harmony at that particular point in the arrangement.

These two note chords are representative of the chords used in the arrangements as shown below:

I **II**

F Am D7 Dm7 G Bm E7 Em7

III **IV**

Dm Bb G7 Gm7 C Em Am7 A7

Scoring and Charting for the Bell Band

A sample of the principal score for Bell Band arrangements is shown below. The information in the treble clef is transferred to the scroll chart. The director of the larger bell group follows the bass clef and cues his/her players accordingly. The director of the chime group follows the Roman numerals in the score and cues his/her players (each person playing two chimes simultaneously on the downbeat).

Sample Score

Chart Bells

Cue Bells

Etc.

The Bell Band scroll chart looks like the example below. The information is pulled into place across the top of a modified projector stand – a method developed by Stanley Williams. The ringers follow the larger numbers. The director (on the other side of the table) follows the small numbers that indicate the beats in the arrangement. When a vertical line appears above one of these numbers, the director cues for a response. The baton moves just ahead of the next response (in the manner of a preparatory beat).

If there is only one number in the rectangle, that bell plays alone. When two numbers appear, both bells ring simultaneously. If one number and the same number circled appear, one player rings both bells.

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | 5 | ⑦ | ⑦ | ② | ② | ⑤ | ⑤ | ① | 5 | 5 |
| | | | | 5 | | 5 | | | | |

The Benefits of Public Performance

In many music therapy situations public performance may not be an option, because of physical limitations, transportation, confidentiality, etc. In those instances where it is possible, there is no better way to build self-esteem, to create more appropriate relations with the non-disabled community, and to just bring joy to your participants than to give them the opportunity to perform in public.

When I directed choirs (handbells, percussion ensembles, vocal ensembles) at the state school, I was fortunate to have a supervisor who understood the importance of public performance and a community that embraced the concept of serving the needs of persons with disabilities. This combination meant that public performance was a rather natural occurrence for us.

Since the formation of the Denton Bell Band, I have expanded this concept to include performances in the Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex and in many other cities throughout the state during our annual three day tour. The tour not only lets audiences see our ringers in a very positive light but also gives the members of the choir the opportunity to develop skills in adapting to new environments as they learn more about their world through the medium of travel.

In summary, these are some of the benefits of public performance:

1. Audiences see that persons with disabilities can create music that is listenable and organized in an appropriate manner.
2. The participants learn to set up equipment for performance in new environments and develop organizational skills.
3. The participants learn that to travel together means being cooperative with one another and sharing space in the close quarters of the tour bus.
4. The participants learn to take directions from those persons in charge and to follow through with their assignments.
5. The participants experience the great feeling of joy when an audience recognizes their efforts with applause, the directors know that their efforts are making a difference.
6. The participants enjoy shared experiences of travel with their peers that transfer into more quality in everyday life.