

Music and Worship Arts Week, Lake Junaluska, NC

June 20—25, 2010



Warm-ups: Before you reach for that bell, reach for the sky

As with any physical activity, ringing bells requires a physical warm-up. Ringing bass bells is hard on the body, but with a good warm-up you can minimize the strain put on your wrists, arms and back. The following exercises represent a few of the myriad of stretches that are helpful for ringers. Be creative and invent your own. If you experience any discomfort during your warm-ups, stop immediately and try something different.

- Roll shoulders forward and backward
- Stretch arms towards ceiling, then down to toes
- Roll your shoulder back and pull that arm across your chest
- Palms and fingers together and press
- With arms out in front of your body, gently pull one hand back with the other and hold
- Spread fingers and relax hand
- Press hands into foam

Remember :

Hold each stretch for 5 seconds and stretch both sides of your body....whatever you do to the right, you must do to the left.

Ring the Bell – See Page 2!

Damping - Stop That Sound!

Just as you need to ring the bell musically, you must also find a way to stop the sound musically. The way you damp your bell must be in character with the music. But how do you damp without creating the dreaded “whomp?” A “whomp” is created when a bass bell is laid on the table while still ringing or if a bell is damped too aggressively on the body. To avoid this sound, damp on your body as much as possible. Because bass bells are bigger, you need to use more of your body to take out the sound. Find a spot on your body that has the most “padding” and use that area to damp your bells.

Remember, it’s not abdominal excess, it’s damping space! The best way to damp on your body is to roll the bell either from lip to crown or from crown to lip. This will take out the harmonics and eliminate the “whomp.”

Of course, damping on your body is not always going to work. Sometimes you will need to damp on the table. When table damping, you need to be careful to damp the bell fully as it lands on the table—otherwise you will get that carry over of harmonics (the dreaded “whomp”). There are two ways to lessen this undesirable sound. One way is to take a free hand and place it on the casting as it comes in contact with the table. Realistically, though, the bass ringer rarely has a free hand, so the second way involves pressing the casting quickly and firmly into the foam with the same lip-to-crown roll that you would do on your body.

One Final Important Note

Gloves

Ringing bass bells can create a lot of wear and tear on a ringer’s hands. Ordinary cotton gloves tend to do more harm than good. They slip around, making it difficult to get a good firm grip on the bell, and forget those page turns! To reduce the friction, blisters, and calluses on the hands, we offer these alternatives to cotton gloves:

- Weight-lifting gloves without fingers can be found at any sporting goods store. Be careful not to buy gloves with too much padding as it hinders your ability to grip the bell. You can check out harkensport.com for the Black Magic Classic.
- Bicycle gloves are perfect for bass ringing as they have no fingers and are leather.
- Sports tape, foam tape or moleskin will also work in a pinch when applied to the correct areas of your hands.

Wrist Supports

Many bass bell ringers are seen wearing braces and/or wrist supports. Braces and supports are necessary when injured but they can also function like crutches, creating a false sense of strength, support and security. For healthy ringers, their use can actually inhibit the natural motion of the body when ringing and cut off vital circulation, creating more problems than they solve. Wearing a support may temporarily eliminate the hurt, but it doesn’t solve the problem. Unless you strengthen the hand, arm and shoulder muscles that support your wrist, forearm and upper arm, the discomfort may continue. Always consult with your health-care professional if you have **any** pain while ringing. They will discuss the proper use of braces and supports as well as a recommended course of action for treatment and exercises.

Ringing Technique—A Step-by-Step Guide to Bass Bells

Step 1
Posture - Start with the bell on the table and your hands at your sides. Make sure that your weight is centered and your knees are bent.

Do not lean over the table to pick up the bells. Keep your body centered and upright.



Ready to Ring - Make sure the bell is in a resting position on your shoulder with the clapper at the back of the casting.

Step 5

Step 2
Grip - Wrap your entire hand around the handle; grip should be firm but not tight. Gently squeeze the handle and feel the muscles in your wrist, forearm and bicep flex and lock.



Push the bell up and out through the strikepoint at a 45° angle from your body. Remember to use your legs and the larger muscles in your arms and shoulders to do this.

Step 6

Remember: your grip needs to be generated from the muscles in your forearm and bicep to prevent injury to the wrist.

Step 3
Lift - Press the handle slightly into the foam so that the casting raises off the table. “Kick” the handle out from under the bell and pop the bell upright.

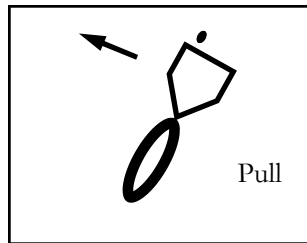


While continuing to push forward, quickly pull the casting back into the clapper. Your elbow is pulled straight back past your body.

Step 7

Breathing: Inhaling helps focus your energy. For additional muscle control, exhale while lifting.

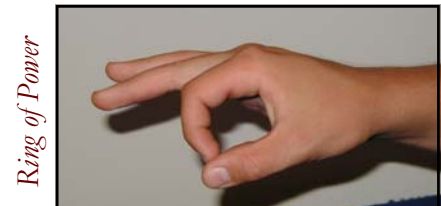
You may use your free hand to grasp the casting and help lift the bell off the table.



This action causes the casting to tip forward slightly. The momentum of the sudden stop of pushing motion, like pulling a rope, will cause the clapper to travel forward, ringing the bell.

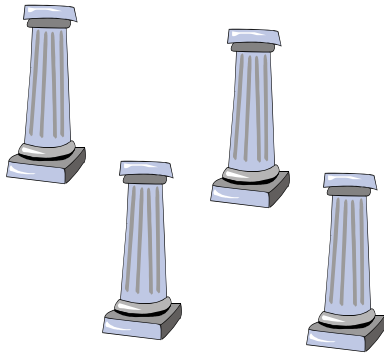
Step 8

Step 4
Hold - Once the bell is in the air it should be held up--balanced on your “Ring of Power”—by the muscles in your biceps and forearms...
NOT BY YOUR WRISTS.



Ring of Power

Remember - *Let the bell ring itself! The wrist will flex as a **result** of ringing the bell, but it **must not** be used to **initiate** the ring.*



The Four Pillars of Bass Bell Ringing

There are four basic rules to follow when ringing bass bells.

Rule Number 1: If you don't need it, get it off the table.

Rule Number 2: There is no set way to assign bass bells.

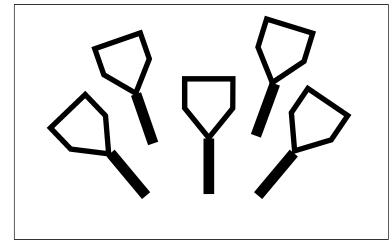
Rule Number 3: Learn to work with your bells outside of keyboard order!

Rule Number 4: Share your bells with your neighbors further up the table.

Setting Up Your Ringing Space

How you set up your ringing space has a direct impact on how successful you will be when ringing. Here are a few hints:

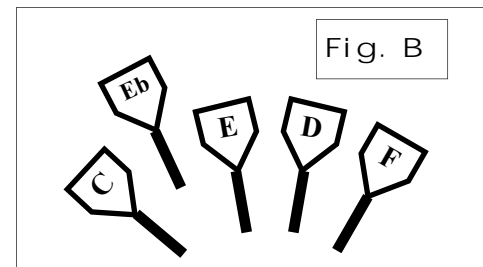
- Turn the handles inward to make them easier to reach.
- Put your most frequently rung bells directly in front of you....These may be different for each song.
- Make your “ringing space” as compact as possible.
- Use a floor music stand instead of one that sits on the table. This will give you more room to place bells in front of you on the table.
- Displace your bells. Put some bells up between other ones (see diagram). This allows you to have more bells directly in front of you. It prevents reaching and overextending, and it takes up less space on the table.



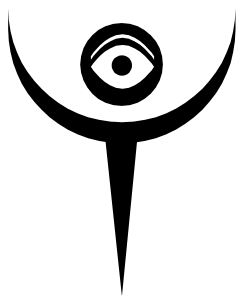
Insights - Practical Applications and Hints



Figure A shows a stepwise passage much like you will find in many handbell pieces. With a traditional keyboard order setup (C D E F), this pattern would be very difficult to execute quickly or musically. However, by simply flip-flopping the two middle bells in your setup (C E D F), the pattern becomes easier. Figure B demonstrates how this setup would look. Changing your bell setup takes a bit more thought and a little more concentration, but you will find in the end it makes playing more musical and less frantic.



Insights - The Art of Zen Bell Ringing



To help facilitate ringing in a non-keyboard order setup, or even in a traditional setup where you have many bells in front of you, we offer the practice of Zen—the use of your inner sight. Try this exercise at home:

- Set up your bells as in Figure B above.
- Take a quick moment to look at the bells and memorize their positions on the table.
- Close your eyes and visualize where the bells are in front of you in your mind.
- Say the letter name of any bell in your setup and lift it off the table.
- Now try to replace it back in its “home” without clinking other bells on the way.