



# HANDBELL MUSICIANS OF AMERICA

## ILLINOIS, IOWA, KANSAS, MISSOURI, NEBRASKA

### QUAVERS NEWSLETTER

MAY, 2016

Handbell Musicians  
OF AMERICA

## Listening is NOT the same as Hearing

Hearing refers to the sounds that you hear, whereas listening requires more than that: it requires focus. Listening means paying attention to not only the notes, but how they are being played, the use of emotions, the use of dynamics, and how the person uses their body. It means being aware of both musical and non-musical messages.

## 6 Principles of Listening

1. Stop talking: *If we were supposed to talk more than listen, we would have been given 2 tongues and 1 ear.* Mark Twain
2. Prepare yourself: put other things out of your mind. Focus on the choir and what they are saying musically.
3. Put your ringers at ease: help them feel safe to try new things. Maintain eye contact but don't stare.
4. Remove distractions: focus on the job at hand. Don't send messages that imply you are bored or uninterested in what you are doing.
5. Be patient.
6. Wait and watch for non-musical communication: a smile, the twinkle in an eye, a sigh.

# LISTENING

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**THE WORD  
LISTEN  
CONTAINS THE  
SAME LETTERS  
AS THE WORD  
SILENT**

|                  |          |
|------------------|----------|
| NE               | <u>8</u> |
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| Thank you        | <u>3</u> |

| ELECTED   | ELECTED  | APPOINTED   |
|---|--|---|
| CHAIR: <u>Patrick Gagnon</u><br>211 S Victor (P.O. Box 314)<br>Hubbard, IA 50122<br>641.373.2972        | CHAIR-ELECT: <u>Kristin Kalitowski-Kowal</u><br>295 Town Center Blvd<br>Gilberts, IL 60136<br>630.699.3802                                 | COMMUNICATIONS: <u>Pat Latshaw</u><br>QUAVERS: <u>KC Congdon</u><br>WEBMASTER: <u>Wendi Calkins-Levitt</u>      |
| TREASURER: <u>Sharon Schmidt</u><br>28 Oriole Ct<br>Naperville, IL 60540<br>630.369.9879                | SECRETARY: <u>Kathy Leonard</u><br>1st UMC<br>612 Poyntz Ave, Manhattan, KS 66502<br>785.317.0598  | FINANCIAL ADVISOR: <u>Stephen Swanson</u><br>MEMBERSHIP TEAM: <u>Beth Ann Edwards</u> /<br><u>Michael Allen</u> |
| PAST CHAIR: <u>Dolan Bayless</u><br>c/o Kirkwood UMC<br>201 W Adams, Kirkwood, MO 63122<br>314.966.8167 |  Like us on <u>Facebook</u><br>Visit us on the <u>WEB</u> | EDUCATION: <u>Debi Robey</u><br>HISTORIAN: Open<br>RESOURCE LIBRARIAN: Open                                     |

|           | <u>ILLINOIS</u>  | <u>IOWA</u>  | <u>KANSAS</u>  | <u>MISSOURI</u>   | <u>NEBRASKA</u>  |
|-----------|--|--|--|---|--|
| Chair     | <u>Ben Hafner</u><br>1S175 Dillon Ln<br>Villa Park, IL 60181<br>630.696.6929   | <u>Lori Fenton</u><br>3213 45th St<br>Des Moines, IA 50310<br>515.229.6712   | <u>Staci Cunningham</u><br>21370 Harper Rd<br>Chanute, KS 66720<br>620.433.7223      | <u>Cathy Benton</u><br>2739 Autumn Run Ct<br>Chesterfield, MO 63005<br>314.640.7053   | <u>Linda Ashlev</u><br>9107 Meadow Dr<br>Omaha, NE 68114<br>402.320.5312<br>402.397.9551 (h)   |
| Treasurer | <u>Open</u>  | <u>Mary Lee Parks</u>  | <u>Karla Denton</u>  | <u>Suanne Comfort</u>   | <u>Janet Chiocchi</u>  |
| Secretary | <u>Beth McFarland</u>  | <u>Donna Sprague</u>   | <u>Open</u>  |   | <u>Byron Jensen</u>  |
| Web       | <u>Micah Pegman</u>  | <u>Wendi Calkins-Levitt</u>  | <u>Wendi Calkins-Levitt</u>  | <u>Wendi Calkins-Levitt</u>   | <u>Janet Chiocchi</u>  |
| Other     | <u>Events</u><br><u>Sharon Schmidt</u><br><br><u>Registrar</u><br><u>Kristin Kalitowski-Kowal</u><br><br><u>Chime Mentor</u><br><u>Diane Oster</u><br><br><u>Chime Coordinator</u><br><u>Aimee Legatzke</u><br><u>Shelley May Hutchison</u><br><br><u>Food Coordinator</u><br><u>Anna Piro</u> | <u>Historian</u><br><u>Tina Gehrke</u><br><br><u>Chimes</u><br><u>Aaron Hansen</u><br><br><u>Eastern Rep</u><br><u>Cat Walker</u><br><br><u>Western Rep</u><br><u>Yvonne Johnson</u> | <u>Past Chair</u><br><u>Cherryl Cox</u><br><br><u>Chimes</u><br><u>Shirley Myers</u> | <u>Membership, St Louis</u><br><u>Sherry Boland</u><br><br><u>Chime Chair</u><br><u>Anne Miller</u><br><br><u>Kathy Harrison</u><br><br><u>Christie White</u> | <u>Registrar</u><br><u>Deann Nicolaus</u><br><br><u>Chimes Coordinator</u><br><u>Nancy Youngman</u><br><br><u>Jessica Kite</u><br><br><u>Mike Allen</u><br><br><u>Joyce Miller</u><br><br><u>Angela Wright</u><br><br><u>Natalie Radcliffe</u><br><br><u>Charles Cohen</u> |



**David M. Harris, Director**

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*A community handbell choir*

Interpretive listening can be described as the study by which our ears “see” the music, and our eyes “hear” the music. This ability—to play music at first sight or to play music without having seen it—is something that helps a handbell program immensely. Often my ringers know that “something is wrong,” but can’t describe specifically what the problem is. Too long? Too short? Wrong bell? Correct bell at the wrong time? Am I holding G6 and G#7 in my left hand and ringing away happily because I can’t actually hear either one? Sometimes!

Breaking down the problem area is extremely helpful during rehearsal. If this is an issue for only one ringer, perhaps the entire group can ring that assignment as if it were their own. Most standard assignments follow the “space = left, line = right” rule, so this is not difficult to figure out once explained.

Playing with the rehearsal tempo is also effective - ring the passage twice as slowly as indicated, then at the suggested tempo, then twice as quickly. Playing with different techniques can also help a problem area. Mart a troubled passage. “Knuckle Knock” a troubled passage by simply tapping lightly on the casting as if you are malleting, using the knuckle of your index finger. This really forces the issue of *listening*.

Sometimes, however, the thing that is wrong can have to do with those ringers in our choirs. We all have THAT ringer who just can’t figure things out on the first try. Often we have several of them. Usually, we also have *that other* ringer who got it on the first go and verbalizes frustration with the group or with the director. *That* can be a problem that festers in a close-knit endeavor like a handbell ensemble. I suppose the goal is to be neither of those people. Learn to listen so that your eyes and ears are collaborating. Learn your manners when dealing with your colleagues and directors so that everyone’s hearts and souls are united.

*Patrick Gagnon ~ Area 8 Chair*



I can’t tell you how excited I am for our June Festival/Conference! We have wonderful music to see and hear! We have awesome people to meet and we have important lessons to learn. Four stellar performances, an exciting new worship track, a tremendous Bronze Festival Ensemble, dozens of classes, and of course 500 of your best friends together in massed and divisional ringing.

Many thanks to our awesome Area 8 board for all of the long hours already invested in Festival/Conference 2016 and for the ones you are about to give in the near future.

Respectfully submitted,

*Patrick Gagnon, Area 8 Chair*

“I DON’T WANT KIDS LISTENING TO MY MUSIC  
THINKING IT’S FOR THEIR PARENTS. I WANT  
THEM TO FEEL IT’S THEIRS.”

MAYER HAWTHORNE

© Lifesack Studios

Listening critically to music can be learned.

- Recognize and listen for repetition and variation. Mark the repetitious parts in your score so that you relax when you see a familiar spot. Make a mental note of how the variations have been altered in comparison to each other.
- Rhythm and meter. Can you figure out the time signature by listening? Are there rhythms layered on top of one another? Can you recognize the syncopation? Listen to Ravel's *Bolero*—the rhythm and melody never change but the instrumentation does.
- Interpret the tone, mood and feel of the music. Is it happy or sad, bright and bouncy or somber and thoughtful? What would be going on during the movie if this was playing in the background? Is this a full choir piece or two simple notes entwined together? How is the balance—can you hear the melody over the accompaniment?
- Listen for specific techniques. Are these representing something? For instance, a Lenten piece might include repetitive mallets using big, angry chords which might represent the mob prior to the crucifixion. Ending with three painful chords might demonstrate Peter denying Christ before the cock crowed.
- Search for a crucial outside text to help make the song more meaningful to you, the choir and the audience. *In the Garden* had awful nursing home memories for me until I learned the story behind it. Now I understand fully why that generation wanted to sing it over and over again every time I visited.

*KC Congdon ~ Quavers Editor*



## Level 1 Certification Thurs, June 30—Sat, July 2 Missouri Baptist University St. Louis, Missouri

Complete Level 1 of Handbell Musician Certification in **Handbell Techniques, Music Theory and Conducting** this summer in Area 8! Conveniently located in St. Louis, Missouri, we are offering these elements of our Handbell Musician Certification Program for the first 15 applicants on the beautiful campus of Missouri Baptist University.

Presented by Handbell Musicians of America National and Area 8, we will also be offering Accreditation for faculty to teach Level 1 Certification courses in Handbell Techniques, Music Theory, and Conducting. Each Accreditation class is limited to six faculty candidates.

Accreditation application details are now available!

See more at: <http://bit.ly/1UKkD1e>



This month's topic was posed as "How do directors fix what they hear?" To me, this includes not only the obvious things like notes, rhythm, unity of chords, and dynamics, but musical expression as well.

With advanced ringers, directors expect most things that are *on the page* to be addressed by the ringer so that more time can be spent on making music. Wood-shedding only happens when there seem to be issues collectively. But even with advanced ringers and advanced music, in the heat of the moment, the wrong bell can be picked up and rung. I've been in a mass ringing event of 100+ ringers, with several people ringing the same bell, and when a wrong note is played by just one person, the director will know exactly who it was and send an "evil eye" in that direction. All of the concerts I played under Don Allured were recorded, so any audible mistakes during rehearsal always generated "You don't want that to be recorded for all time."

In less experienced groups, directors have all sorts of preferred approaches for dealing with common issues. Counting out loud is my preferred approach for dealing with rhythm issues. "If you count it you'll get it, if you don't, you won't." Clapping as a group is my least favorite but I know it works. Mnemonics can also be helpful with tricky rhythms. The quintuplets in Handle's *Passacaglia* can be managed with "Min-ne-a-po-lis".

Key changes, accidentals, or switching between chimes and bells may require the director to spend some time helping ringers choreograph those changes. Weaving exercises can often help with this.

Regardless of the difficulty of the music or the ability of the ringers, connecting the ringer to the emotion or the spirit of the music can make the difference between a good performance and a great performance. The ringer's connection will translate to the audience. If there is a story to the piece, share it. If there's no specific story, use imagery to describe what the music seems to be saying. Feel free to share with your ringers what you see when you hear the music. Or ask them what *they* see when *they* hear the music.

Not every ringer is going to connect with every piece every time, and sometimes you have to program pieces that are more about the audience than the ringer. I have played Arnold Sherman's arrangement of *Misty* more than once. It's probably one of my least favorite pieces (sorry, Arnold!) but it evokes a lot of memories for a lot of people so I just try to ring it with a smile on my face.

I think one of the best things a director and their ringers can do to avoid having to fix some of the issues with what's *on the page* is to review the music ahead of time, with pencil in hand. An initial run through can be greatly improved if the

ringer has already marked potential pitfalls.

It's always a challenge to know when to actually stop a rehearsal to address something mechanical (maybe it's a fluke) or how much time to spend on fixing something. I think it's always worth it to at least try to address it, whether it's during rehearsal, calling a sectional, or working individually. If something is consistently wrong and the director doesn't address it, it doesn't help the ringers learn. Sometimes the ringers just might not be ready for what you've asked of them so take that into consideration with the next piece so you can spend less time "fixing" things and more time making music.

*Lori Fenton ~ Iowa State Chair*

## HAPPINESS IS



...listening to  
good music.



Head  
to

tilted  
the

side, eyes shut, arms flapping to the beat. Something must not be sounding right if I have assumed this position. When I am like this, my choir knows (if they are watching me!) we will either be stopping soon to fix an issue or we will be working on that spot in the near future. How does one fix a spot that has some sound issues? Well, one first needs to determine what that sound issue is. It could be a wrong bell issue, a timing issue, or a mental issue.

When a wrong bell is played, it is fairly easy to correct. "Check your bells!" is usually heard from the director if this happens. Or "Watch your sharps!", or even, "B flats there!" And those of us playing quickly check what is in our hands to see if we are the culprit. Sometimes that doesn't work and as a director we have each beat played in very slow motion to try and determine where the sour note is located. But again, it is a matter of making sure the correct bell is picked up at the correct time. A ringer can keep that from happening in the future by circling the troublesome note, or even writing in what is needed a measure earlier. Marking a key change can also be very helpful.

Timing issues can be a bit trickier to tackle. Sometimes a director will slow the measure down to work through a particular spot. Another trick is to have "sectionals" where certain bells play. For example, the upstem trebles are trying to work out triplets while the down stem trebles and basses are running eighth notes underneath them. The director may work just the up stem trebles, then just the down stem trebles and basses, and finally put both together. As a ringer, a helpful trick would be to write down the counts underneath or above the notes. Make sure to mark the "&'s" or "e-&a's", too. If it helps, circle the beat, or part of the beat, you play on. Another helpful trick would be to count! Tap your foot, or move to the music a little to keep your mind on the beat. Make sure you're keeping an eye on the director though so you are both staying together!

The last issue is the hardest of all to fix. Sometimes, our mind tends to, well, do its own thing. I was playing an eighth note run with three other people one time and just couldn't get my part to fit in there. I would practice and practice and could do fine on the counting, but once I got with the others, it just wouldn't flow. I got so frustrated with it that I couldn't figure out how to fix it and no one else could seem to help me either. During our concert...yep...I messed it up. How could I have fixed it? I'm not sure. I know the pressure I was putting myself under didn't help. Perhaps if we had run it more I would have eventually gotten it. I do know that I shouldn't beat myself up over it. As ringers and directors we do the best we can and look forward to improving ourselves...not look back at what should have been.

*Staci Cunningham ~ Kansas State Choir*





I'm writing this article a few hours after I finished a rehearsal with my handbell choir. In keeping with the topic of this issue, I decided to focus on what I heard in **today's** rehearsal that needed to be fixed and how I chose to fix those specific issues.

**Piece #1:** This is a fast, energetic piece that has multiple meter changes, extreme dynamic changes and uses lots of mallet and martellato techniques. Our basic challenge is to get comfortable with the tempo (144 to the quarter note) and to get secure with the meter changes (3/4, 2/4, 4/4) at the fast tempo. The main theme of this piece occurs three times—each time the theme returns there is some kind of rhythmic change. We are really insecure with the last return of the main theme—this is the spot where the rhythmic changes are the most varied. We needed to drill this section the most to get our comfort level up! However, repetition of something can be dangerous unless the ringers are actively engaged and not just on automatic pilot. It can be more productive to repeat things using different techniques, different dynamics, different tempos, etc.

We drilled this problem spot in several ways—the first few times we chose slower tempos, and softer dynamics. The bass clef ringers have a malletted pattern throughout so I had the treble clef ringers clicking mallets together to be our “metronome.” I know several directors who have the capability of running their metronome through a sound system so it can be heard over the bells—what a great advantage! But we don't have that ability, so the clicking mallets are a nice substitute. Having the bass clef ringers play softer forces them to listen to the “metronome” and really focus on solidifying the tempo. After several repetitions we added the treble clef ringers, took away the metronome, but still continued to drill the spot with different combinations of dynamics—again, stressing active listening and mental focus. Repetition is a necessary part of the rehearsal process and in some pieces we need more repetition than others. There are those spots in many of our pieces where we need multiple repetitions to build up our stamina and our confidence and this may require doing 3, 5, 10 or even more reps—similar to building up our muscles at the gym. But we always need to strive to make those repetitions meaningful and productive!

**Piece #2:** This is also a faster piece (120 to the quarter note), lots of syncopations, lots of mallets, and a “swing” rhythm throughout. This piece is newer to the group—the notes are fairly secure, but we are really under tempo at this point. In today's rehearsal we listened to a recording of the piece, drilled spots for accuracy, and focused on getting the whole piece at one tempo. Listening to the recording really helped—it gave the ringers a fresh perspective, a model to strive for, and a renewed enthusiasm for the

piece. They were able to hear for themselves how their individual parts fit into the whole piece.

As directors, we have to be the listening ear for the group. My ultimate goal is that my groups develop their own “listening ears.” Recording our rehearsals and/or performances is an excellent way to help ringers accomplish this. When listening to their own recording (or a recording of another group), we can ask questions to help them learn to listen critically:

- How is the balance between melody and accompaniment?
- Is the phrasing correct?
- Are the dynamics obvious?
- Was the tempo consistent? Too fast, too slow, etc.

As a piano teacher, one of my main goals is to prepare students to practice carefully so we don't have to spend lesson time “just fixing mistakes.” We break the piece into sections, isolate difficult rhythms, identify key signatures, practice hands separately—always with the goal of learning things correctly and always with the goal of playing musically! This is the same basic approach I use with my ringers. It takes much more effort to fix something that has been learned incorrectly, so we want to be proactive about how we learn a piece initially.

*Cathy Benton ~ Missouri State Chair*

I posed this question to the members of the Nebraska committee as we have several directors, representing church, community, high school and college handbell programs.

Listening - can be your first fix-it. Listening for wrong notes, chords not together as well as marts and mallets. In certain sections of music, spend time working on getting the chords or techniques together when it is a problem. Slow practice with soft dynamics and then gradually increasing the tempo.

Everyone must count the rhythm, which means having a counting scheme. You can use 1 2 3 4, 1& 2&, 1e&a, 1lali (for triplets) so that everyone is on the same "beat." If there is a very tricky rhythm, make up words to it to help the ringers remember just how it goes when you first learn it. A little phrase can go a long way! Body percussion is another way to practice and internalize various rhythms. Have the entire group speak a particular rhythm that is difficult, even if it is not a rhythm they play this time around. Building those reading skills always pays off in the long run.

Tapping the handles. A lot of directors do this, but at the same time, you want the players to visualize how the size of the bell may affect their efforts. Knuckles on the castings also work, while giving a hint at the tune along with the rhythm.

Singing! Feeling the flow and the phrasing through singing equates to a more musical flow in their playing.

When working on a bass clef-only section, ask trebles to also play the section. This helps everyone read bass clef. (Obviously, trying to have bass bells play some of the treble stuff would be a bit too much to ask.) Have half of the choir listen while the other half plays a section when working on dynamics or timing. This gives the ringers more ownership in detecting errors and helps build listening skills.

Just keep going over the same thing...incessantly. If it works, "cycle" through a section, meaning that as it ends, you rhythmically/metrically start right up again where you started. (This is ineffective where a page turn is involved.)

Try to memorize what happens before or after a page turn. This is possible for every choir, and perhaps even more possible if every player has a binder of music and is "encouraged" (use your own verb here) to spend some time between rehearsals looking at the music.

Record your group. Technology makes this very easy and even a basic recording at rehearsal can help your group listen for mistakes that need work. There are demo recordings of most pieces out there. Encourage your ringers to use these recordings to practice on their own.

Even when you know what you want to fix, when your ringers stop playing, ask them, "What did

you hear?" Keep them involved in assessing how they are doing and what they can improve.

You as a conductor need to "own" the music. Yes, we learn things as we rehearse the piece, but you must spend time looking over the music before you rehearse it with the group. Survey the parts, and make assignments based on overall ability and/or opportunity to instill some education, such as four-in-hand playing.

I use a blue pencil for all of my musical markings in my own music, and I'm thinking of doing the same for the players. Blue stands out from the printed black, and it seems less "offensive" to me than red which conveys "stop." I mark everything: crescendos/decrescendos, dynamics, phrasing, accents, bell movement, chord progressions, cues, techniques, etc. I strive to "own" as much of the music as possible so that when we come to a performance, all of us are comfortable. Set the expectation that your ringers mark in their music the things that you emphasize in rehearsal (dynamics, cut-offs, etc). When it is time to perform, my goal is always that I will only need to give cues that fine tune for the particular venue and performance, not give every single dynamic marking and cue through my directing. We work hard in rehearsal to make sure that the ringers know how to play their part musically and know their notes.

*Linda Ashley ~ Nebraska State Chair*



# Upcoming Events

| 2016      | EVENT                          | LOCATION                           | CONTACT                       |
|-----------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Jun 4     | Illinois State Reading Session | Fourth Presbyterian<br>Chicago, IL | <a href="#">Illinois</a>      |
| Jul 10-14 | Handbell Camp                  | Heartland Camp<br>Kansas City, MO  | <a href="#">Handbell Camp</a> |
| Jul 12-16 | National Seminar<br>Various    | Hyatt Regency<br>Rochester, NY     | <a href="#">National</a>      |
| Jul 26-30 | International Symposium        | Vancouver, Canada                  | <a href="#">IHS</a>           |

# Upcoming Concerts

