



Anticipating our June 2024 Area 8 Festival

by Chris Peck, Area 8 Chair

Happy Spring, fellow ringers and directors! When you read this, we are less than 500 days until Area 8 Festival 2024!

Handbell Musicians of America was about 40 years old when I was involved at my first Area Conference.

My first memory of an Area 8 Festival is very fuzzy, and maybe somewhat like that dream you can remember bits and pieces from. It was mid-1990s, maybe 1994 or 1996, it was at Coe College (Cedar Rapids, IA), and I was tagging along to help with the youth festival. Somewhere along the lines, it involved moving a keyboard around in a space with a dirt floor. Like I said, fuzzy memories.

More recent memories are a little clearer.

Generally, I either helped move equipment around or I rang with someone's choir or some of both.

Meeting new friends was unavoidable and seeing familiar faces brought a sense of joy to me. After all, it was difficult not to meet someone new when you often had strangers to your left, right, in front of, and behind you.

I remember being stuck in my room during the storm in Omaha and times with friends in the bar on the top floor of the Omaha hotel.

I had the opportunity to ask for advice from a guest director-composer on a piece that I wrote in college: advice from one composer of music with irregular meter to another composer of music with irregular meter.

I remember leading a class where I presented the results of a survey project that I initiated regarding resources and ideas for small church bell choirs.

*Meeting new friends
was unavoidable and
seeing familiar faces
brought a sense of
joy to me.*

What's Inside

- 1 Anticipating our June 2024 Area 8 Festival
- 3 Learning Together
- 4 Ringer Spotlight: Joshua Hearn
- 5 Technique Class: Thumb Damping
- 6 Three Generations, One Choir
- 9 The Power of Music
- 10 Handbell Music for Choirs of All Sizes
- 11 Easing the Transition
- 12 Springfest 2023
- 13 Purchasing Music: My Personal Conundrum
- 14 The Past is Prologue: Handbell Ringing in the Early 20th Century
- 19 Area 8 State Committees
- 20 Upcoming Events

Occasionally, I see titles in the handbell libraries of the churches that I've been involved with, that take me back to a conference. Charles Peery's *Jesus, We Want to Meet*, for example.

My acting career began at one of Raleigh Ringers concerts as a security officer/bouncer in one of their humorous selections. I was also assigned to be David Harris' shadow that year, so I had the pleasure to drive him around from location to location in my new pick-up truck and I got him his coffee from across the street.

I remember performing with River City Ringers in a theater in Davenport and I remember being involved with surprising our then-director, Joyce Miller, with a commissioned piece composed by Cathy Moglebust.

I'm sure you all have many memories of past Area 8 festivals, as well; many of which will date my 30 years. Friendships are made and experiences shared over this unique musical instrument called the handbell. It's been said that less than 1% of the population has ever run a marathon. Well, I'm guessing it's also less than 1% of the population that has rung in a handbell choir. That's special.

Come meet some new and old friends and make some new memories at our next Area 8 festival: June 2024. Stay tuned to your emails, as there might be important announcements that will probably be emailed before the next *Quavers* is published.

I'm still not that good at Maori stick games. Maybe I need a refresher class, Janet?

In closing, I would like to invite you to help support each other, by attending in-person or virtual concerts. There are also several choirs touring in Area 8 this spring/summer; maybe there's one in your area...? Check our website for an up-to-date calendar of events. Happy ringing this Spring!



Area 8 Board

CHAIR

Chris Peck

CHAIR-ELECT

Lori Fenton

SECRETARY

Sara Washington

TREASURER

Tami Kofron

PAST CHAIR

Sharon Schmidt

COMMUNICATIONS

Amy Knudsen

CHIMES CHAIR

Nancy Youngman

FINANCIAL ADVISOR

Stephen Swanson

MEMBERSHIP

Lori Fenton

RESOURCE LIBRARIAN

Open - Contact Chris Peck

WEB MASTER

Wendi Calkins-Levitt

EDUCATION

Rick Richards

QUAVERS EDITOR

Beth Ann Edwards

HISTORIAN

Laurie Austin

ILLINOIS CHAIR

Beth McFarland

IOWA CHAIR

Dick Crusinberry

KANSAS CO-CHAIRS

Julie Assel, Janelle Flory Schrock

MISSOURI CHAIR

Trey Bures

NEBRASKA CHAIR

Byron Jensen

Learning Together

by Rick Richards, A8 Education Chair

First, let me introduce myself. I am Rick Richards. I have the privilege and honor of serving as your Area 8 Education Chair. I have been enthusiastically involved in music since grade school. And I hold a bachelor's degree in Music Education from Wichita State University. I spent much of my professional career as a high school band director and worked for many, many years as a church musician, mostly as an organist. In the fall of 2015 I became involved with handbells when I accepted the job of organist/handbell choir director at Augustana Lutheran Church here in Omaha. And in the spring of 2020, I became the Music Director for the River City Ringers – Omaha.

I see my role as Education Chair for Area 8 as two-fold:

1. First, to support handbell activities in schools. Our national HMA office is coming out with new ways of supporting school handbell groups and I am hoping to have more to share with you about that soon. In the meantime, keep in mind the handchime loan program that Nancy Youngman coordinates. What a great way to expose school kids to our art!
2. The second focus of my job is to organize educational sessions at the Area 8 festival in the summer of 2024. That sounds like a long way off, but we all know how time flies. So, with that in mind I would ask you to consider what sessions you would like to see offered. What session topics from past festivals would bear repeating and what are topics have not been covered that should be? And what expertise do you have that could be shared with the ringers in Area 8 to strengthen them as individual ringers and improve the choirs in which they ring? Keep in mind that sessions could cover a wide range of topics beyond the obvious, such as ringer health, community choir development and organization, group dynamics, financing handbell groups, concert organization from repertoire to venue, the possibilities are endless!

Best wishes for your spring handbell activities and I look forward to working with you.



*Rick Richards
Area 8 Education Chair*

Please reach out to me here with your ideas for potential session topics and with ideas for sessions you would like to see or present at the 2024 Area 8 Festival.



Ringer Spotlight: Joshua Hearn

Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where do you ring? How long have you been ringing?

I am approaching the completion of my first year as Artistic Director of Rezound! It has been a wonderful experience, and I am truly blessed to have an excellent ensemble to work with. Each member of Rezound! brings their unique personalities and breadth of skills to the table. It is a great pleasure to have these fine and fun ringers in my life. Prior to Rezound!, I rang with the Lawrence Community Hand Bell Choir of Lawrence, Kansas, for several years as well as church handbell ensembles for many years. I have been ringing for more than three decades, and I have directed ensembles for more than twenty years.

What is your favorite handbell ringing position?

Large or small bells... I enjoying ringing them all. Having said that... E/F 678... oof! That can be quite the challenging position!

What is your favorite piece to ring?

It's like you are asking me to name a favorite child. I plead the fifth.

Describe one of your most memorable handbell events or road trips.

I am relatively new to large handbell events or conferences. One of my favorite memories is of ringing for a regional event when I was very young. We were the only public school with a handbell ensemble, and most of the audience had never seen or heard a live handbell performance. That has stuck with me for all of these years.

Any additional information or stories you would you like to share with your Area 8 friends?

I am a classically trained musician by profession. I have a bachelor's and master's in organ performance with concentration in sacred music and choral conducting. I am originally from central Illinois, and I came to Kansas for graduate school several years ago. I am the Director of Music Ministry for Southminster Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village, Kansas, and I am currently Dean of the Greater Kansas City Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

Quick Quavers Eight:

1. **Schullies** or Malmarks?
2. **Marts** or mallets?
3. Gramann or **Payn**?
4. Clothespins or **dogears**?
5. **Raleigh Ringers** or Sonos?
6. Hard copy or **tablet**?
7. **Polo shirt** or anything but?
8. One assignment, or **move around**?



Joshua Hearn

I am about to embark on my first tour with Rezound! in June of this year. This is also my first handbell tour ever. Keep us in your thoughts and prayers!

Spotlight your Awesome A8 Friends!

Nominate a ringer for our next Ringer Spotlight, or nominate yourself! For more information, visit the Area 8 home page [here](#), and click on the link for Ringer Spotlight. To access the form directly, [click here](#).



Nancy Youngman
(Professor Bell)

Hello all. This is the esteemed Professor Bell. You may have caught my lessons on handbell technique with my wonderful and eager student, Clapper on our Area 8 Fourth Friday on-line classes in 2021. Clapper was kind enough to ask me to share with all our ringers, as he learned so much!

Technique Class: Thumb Damping

by Professor Bell

Hello all—Professor Bell is back with you in this issue to talk about TD. With the sports history of our states, I must point out that in handbells, TD does NOT stand for “touchdown,” but rather the quite simple phrase “thumb damp.” This technique is among the easiest to do, but there is some variance in performing the technique, depending on the bell size, the ringer’s hand size, and the brightness of the bell. Basically, the ringer places the thumb on the casting and keeps it there as they ring, it to produce a staccato sound. There should still be the note’s tone, but a shortening of it. Be careful not to have too much of the thumb on the casting, which would produce a “clunk” instead of the staccato bell tone.

For the upper treble bells, the thumb really is all that is needed. Sometimes with the smaller bells, the thumb should be pulled down some to avoid the “clunk” sound. Really, for most bells and most ringers’ hands (unless the ringer is very young) the thumb alone works pretty well for the G5 on up.

Below that, sometimes the thumb alone is not enough, so the ringer should also put the index finger on the casting, basically holding it between the thumb and finger. In the 4s, most people will need to use at least one, but maybe 2 fingers along with the thumb on the casting to get the desired staccato effect. Below C4, a TD would not be used. Malleting or plucking would be better to get the staccato effect on those bells.

The video on thumb damping can be found [here](#).

Sometimes, a high treble ringer will have a TD while playing in the 4-in-hand or shelley position. To perform this, simply move the hands up from the handles to the castings to hold on. Where the fingers are touching the castings, the staccato will occur. This might take a little practice, but is not difficult once the ringer tries it a few times.

As I direct in two different churches, I have noticed that there is a difference in each set of bells as to their brightness. Sometimes, even two bells next to each other can have a difference in the ring. If I notice in a piece that the tone quality is not even when using a thumb damp, I have the ringers thumb damp a scale up and down. They will immediately hear which bells need less thumb and which ones may need a thumb AND finger. We work on hand position until all of the staccato notes have a similar shortness and tone. This exercise does not take long, but does a lot for the quality of ringing the piece.

Happy ringing, and may you always have a winning TD!!

Three Generations, One Choir

by Beth Ann Edwards, *Quavers* Editor

The Des Moines Community Handbell Choir (DMCH) is honored to have three generations of one family among its members. Erin Leiran, the mother and daughter, is a founding member and has rung in the choir since 2017. Her mother, Jo Broadston, joined a year later, and Aiden Leiran, son and grandson, began ringing with DMCH in 2022. I asked them a few questions about this unique situation. Here's what they said:

1. How long have you been ringing together?

Jo: Erin and I first played together in our church's handbell group when she was in middle/high school. That was probably around 1990. Aiden, Erin, and I first played together about 3 years ago. We started as a family group which included not only Aiden, but his brothers Parker and Emery. All three boys loved getting out the bells and playing together.

Aiden: This is the first year we have played together outside of family.

2. Tell me a little bit about your ringing background.

Jo: I come from a musical family, so I grew up surrounded by music. I started playing bells about 35 years ago with my local church group and have played there since then. Many of my closest friendships have developed through playing in my church group.

Aiden: I started ringing chimes when I was in 4th grade. So, 5.5 years. I have helped DMCH for years with polishing and setting up concerts. I have played in Plymouth Youth Bells, Plymouth Bells, and DMCH.

Erin: I think I've been ringing since about 1990, so ~33 years. In middle school, I joined the adult bell choir with my mom. I probably played in that group for 6 years before heading off to college. We didn't ring together again until my mom joined DMCH. I've been helping out with Aiden's bell choirs since he started ringing in 4th grade (2017), but this year is the first year that we've really been in the same choir. He plays in youth choir at church as well as the "adult" choir with me at Plymouth Church and with DMCH. My mom purchased 2 octaves of bells a couple of years ago (maybe beginning of covid?). We've played some 12-bell pieces together as a family, but not in public. This year is the first year that we've really played together in a group. My first memories of handbells are playing underneath the tables while my mom was in rehearsal. I believe handbells were new to our church at the time. The director was very animated and moved around and often stomped her foot to the beat. I remember feeling the floor shaking to the beat of the music.



Jo, Erin, and Aiden work out some tricky spots during rehearsal.

“While we are all in different life stages, music is certainly something that brings us together.”
—Erin Leiran

3. What do you enjoy about ringing together?

Jo: I enjoy having another way that I can connect with my family and do things together. I am especially happy that Erin and Aiden (and Parker and Emery) like playing bells because it has been so important to me over the years. I am proud of how well they all play. When we play as a family group I love the laughter and the fun we have together.

Aiden: It can be more comfortable to ring with family. I don't have problems taking a bell from my family if I need it.

Erin: The upside of having family in the same choir is that if you have to miss a rehearsal, there's someone that will pass along notes from the rehearsal to you. The down side of being in the same group, is a family event can pull ALL of us away from rehearsals.

4. What are some challenges you have to work through as ringers in the same choir?

Jo: We get along really well; I haven't seen any real challenges.

Aiden: N/A - Can't think of any

Erin: I think we all have very different personalities when it comes to ringing. While I want to play music correctly, I also like to have fun and worry less. I might be quick to pass off a bell that I might struggle too much to worry about.

5. Do you like to stand next to each other? Why or why not?

Jo: It really doesn't matter to me. When we're rehearsing I'm just focused on what I need to do to ring well.

Aiden: It doesn't matter to me. My mother and my grandmother are both good ringers.

Erin: I prefer not to stand next to my family while we ring. Somehow, it's harder to stand next to family members for me. I also think of ringing as a social event. I see my family frequently, it's kind of fun to get out and see others. I also don't want them to think I'm critical of them if I point out a mistake or something that I think should be different. Somehow, that seems easier with other ringers. It's fun to just enjoy being in the same group and not worrying about what the others might be playing or doing.

6. Are there any friendly competitions among the three of you?

Jo: No.

Aiden: Surprisingly, none.

Erin: No.

7. Do you talk about handbells at home?

Jo: Sure. Sometimes we talk about what is happening in our church groups, such as what we are playing or news of the group. Sometimes I've asked Erin for suggestions about concerns I have about my church bell group, such as technique questions. We talk about which songs we like and don't like. Sometimes we share bell videos. It's nice to have this connection.

Aiden: We talk about how the latest rehearsal has gone. We discuss favorite and least favorite pieces.

Erin: Since my mom drives a couple hours to play for DMCH, she comes down the night before. Most certainly handbells get discussed to and from rehearsal, but we've also pulled out music to figure something out on a Friday afternoon. We also talk about the pieces we like or are struggling with, which always seems to be different pieces for each of us. I do enjoy playing in the same group. It's fun to have people to carpool with and to talk about how rehearsal went or to discuss any news or anything from the rehearsal. We also have people that know everyone else in the group and understand the group dynamics, so if it was a difficult rehearsal or something, they fully understand and can offer good perspective. It also helps when you think you heard something at rehearsal, but you don't quite remember it all, you can ask others what they remember.

8. What are your favorite ringing assignments?

Jo: I like AB5 or CD6.

Aiden: I like moving around on different pieces. It's fun to use a variety of techniques such as four-in-hand and weaving.

Erin: As for favorite ringing assignments...I think mine has been slowly changing. I do love playing DE5, but I'm finding more and more love for the bass clef bells and even down to GAB3. Last semester I spent some time playing the bass chimes. While I don't read music below the bass clef well, that was also a lot of fun and something different to try out. I don't know all the music theory, but I do like to figure out what chimes I can add to a piece. I am able to shelly ring, but not four-in-hand (my brain doesn't like to think that hard!) and stay as far away as possible from anything above G5 for that reason.



Erin, Jo, and Aiden talk about their favorite handbell pieces.

*“I enjoy having another way that I can connect with my family and do things together.”
—Jo Broadston*



Janelle Flory Schrock

Is your choir struggling with absences during rehearsals and/or performances? If you are located in Kansas and are desperately needing a substitute, please reach out to me at ks.area8@handbellmusicians.com. I'd love to help out (as schedule allows) and get to know your choir in the process!

Are you a ringer without a choir? I'd love to hear from you too!

The Power of Music

Janelle Flory Schrock, Kansas State Co-Chair

One of my fellow ringers in McPherson, Kansas, grew up in Sweden. On Easter morning this year, she and I were having a conversation about Swedish customs during Holy Week and she mentioned something that I had never heard before - the "dymmel."

In Sweden, the Wednesday during Holy Week is called "dymmelonsdag." "Onsdag" means Wednesday and "dymmel" is the name for a wooden clapper that traditionally replaces the metal clappers in the tower bells between dymmelonsdag and Easter morning. The wooden clapper gives the bells a duller tone to mark the time of mourning, and/or the clapper is wrapped in cloth to dampen



The clapper is wrapped in cloth (or replaced with a wooden clapper) during the season of lent, to produce a duller, more mournful sound.

the tone. Additionally, she shared that the organ is not played during this time, and hymns are sung a cappella. Then, on Easter morning, when the metal clapper is returned to the bells and the organ is once again played, the joyous celebration of the day is felt all the more.

These instruments truly contribute to a feeling of celebration and rejoicing in a visceral way. The contrasting use of muted instruments during the time of mourning adds to the felt experience of jubilation on Easter.

I'm curious to hear how handbells are used differently in your context during times of grief or mourning. What does that look like in your church or organization? Do you make music with handbells at all? Do you use chimes or mallets to create a softer tone?

During the Good Friday service this year, our director had us use the singing bell technique on several As and Ds as accompaniment to a trumpet introit. This approach was inclusive of ringers of all ability levels, simple to organize, and an effective, yet powerful, addition to this service of mourning.

Handbells and handchimes are such versatile instruments. They are capable of holding us in comfort during times of sadness. And yet they can also create feelings of exhilaration and near euphoria at other times. And almost all of the time, they just bring us the simple joy of music-making in the presence of others.

If you'd like to share or brainstorm different ways of utilizing handbells during various seasons of life, please feel free to reach out to me or another area representative in your state!

Handbell Music for Choirs of all Sizes

by Beth McFarland

The world is coming alive as we move from winter to spring and I have been reading other choirs' stories online seeing what size group they may have. This made me reflect on what a great time it is in the handbell world and the opportunities for small and large groups. Our resources for ensemble music have grown so much and have given a new life to smaller ensembles, allowing them to flourish. The medium- and large-sized choirs also benefited from so many good new and old favorites arrangements and original compositions. I personally have three different sized choirs: a small 12 bell/6 person ensemble at the United Methodist church of Libertyville, Illinois; a medium-sized 3-4 octave community choir, the Random Ringers; and a 5-octave choir at Our Saviour's Lutheran church in Arlington Heights, Illinois. All three choirs bring me such great joy as we share with all who hear us ring such great music that is right-sized for each choir. I am looking forward to the fall and finding more wonderful music to share with my churches and communities.



*Beth McFarland
Illinois State Chair*

Beth has served as Illinois co-chair and this is her first year as solo state chair. She invites and welcomes Illinois members to share this position with her.



Palm Sunday worship with one of Beth's church handbell choirs



Dick Crusinberry

Easing the Transition

Dick Crusinberry, Iowa Chair

I recently experienced two rather significant life events in a short time. In January of last year, I retired from my medical practice after 30 years. In May, my wife was offered a new job in Iowa, meaning we would have to move hundreds of miles away from our lives in Nebraska. Both are positive life events—while I enjoyed practicing medicine, I have not regretted retiring, and my wife and I are happy to return to our home state after a long absence. However, within a few months I had quit my daily routine, left my work associates, stopped constantly thinking about my patients, and moved away from our children, grandchildren, and nearly all the friends we had made in our adult lives. Needless to say, I had some concerns that I would feel lonely and disconnected after making these major changes in my life.

Significant life events are thought of as experiences that change the regular flow of people’s lives. They are generally inflection points— “turning points”—that lead to substantial changes in behavior. Some of these are negative, like the death of a loved one or a serious illness; others are positive, like the birth of a child or a marriage. The thing they all have in common is that they are disruptive to routine and have the potential to cause significant stress and illness.

What I discovered was that making music, and particularly playing handbells, smoothed this transition. I was able to make new friends in the handbell choirs I joined here, and I have enjoyed being part of the communities created by these groups. Making music gives me a sense of purpose and fulfillment. I’ve found music provides structure to my day and gives me something to look forward to each week. My fellow ringers are supportive and encouraging, and we all share a common passion for making beautiful music. Ringing is both intellectually and physically stimulating, and the performance aspect of making music is definitely exciting.

When I started ringing years ago, I wanted to try something that seemed fun and challenging. Retirement was a long way off, and I certainly didn’t anticipate moving. But now I understand how music can instill a sense of purpose and help make new friends. I feel blessed to have the opportunity to play.

Significant life events are thought of as experiences that change the regular flow of people’s lives.

The Raleigh Ringers

STAY UP TO DATE WITH US!



www.rr.org



/RaleighRingers



@RaleighRingers



@RaleighRingers

Handbell Services, Inc.

Shop online for unique gifts & supplies for Handbell & Handchime Musicians

www.handbellservices.com
toll-free: 800-37-BELLS

Artisan-made gifts, unique designs on promotional products. Educational resources, table foam, gloves & shirts.

DETROIT, MI • FOUNDED BY SUSAN & DAVE BERRY

Springfest 2023

Burnell Hackman, Guest Columnist

The Handbell Association of Greater St. Louis presented Springfest on February 25, 2023. Springfest is a mass ringing event held every other year on the last Saturday in February. This year's event was the first in-person mass ring in the St. Louis area since 2020 and the pandemic shutdowns.

Springfest was held at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Fenton and ringers from eight churches participated. Nick Hanson was the conductor and featured repertoire included:

- Peal Con Brio – Karen Thompson
- Celtic Grace – Tammy Waldrop
- Holy Manna – Nick Hanson
- Meditation on Beautiful Savior – Cathy Moglebust
- Triumphant Spirit – Nick Hanson

Long-time St. Louis area handbell director Dolan Bayless was honored with a surprise commissioned piece. Dolan retired from Kirkwood United Methodist Church and has recently moved to Utah to be near family. John Behnke's commission is titled *Prelude on Ar Hyd y Nos* and will be published later this year.

L to R: Cathy Benton, Chair; Jill Kirk; Sherry Boland; Bill Wade; Nancy Helmich; Dolan Bayless; Rick Burk; Secretary/Treasurer; Julie Bender; Burnell Hackman; Nick Hansen, clinician



Trey Bures
Missouri State Chair

Look for articles submitted by
Trey in future issues!

*Our next Springfest
will be on
February 22, 2025.
Repertoire and
other information
will be announced
on the Handbell
Association of
Greater St. Louis
website: [www.
stlbells.org](http://www.stlbells.org).*



Purchasing Music: My Personal Conundrum

Byron Jensen, Nebraska Chair

How probable is it that your handbell library has one hundred or more titles? My church's library dates to the mid-1960s. The earliest selections generally used less than three octaves and were devoid of LV, mallets, SB, and martellato. Names like Daniel E. Hermany and Alinda B. Couper ("Organ Loft and Belfry" series from 1964) are rarely found in today's market. My favorite from 1963 promotes classical melodies arranged by the "Dean of Handbell Ringers," Mr. Scott Brink Parry. These early compositions never venture from the file cabinet as we rely on music purchased over the past twenty years.

My college library is twenty years old. Many selections are considered "staples" of the repertoire, along with "hits" at the time of purchase. It would be intriguing to study how music purchased in 2010 and wholly embraced by those students now finds indifference among same-age students a decade later. What happened here?

By way of full disclosure (chime in "Addams Family" musical tune), I have purchased few handbell titles over the past two years. Why? It has nothing to do with a lack of finances. It has nothing to do with being sluggish in searching for and learning new music. I do support composers and publishers. My conundrum with constantly purchasing music is personal.

When I bring out an "oldie but goldie title," I renew a friendship with the composer/arranger, and with the music itself. I recall challenging placements; how musical elements depict musical syntax; and nuances expressed by rubato. I reconcile with tricky transitions, and find something "new" that I missed when last performing the piece. There is comfort in reconnecting with these old friends and marveling as the music permeates the air with renewed breath.

When do I purchase new music? Every time I attend a workshop or a festival. Here, there is a chance to stand behind the tables and ring, to listen to a clinician's insights, and observe ringers as they react to what is performed. These workshops and festivals are tangible ringing experiences that physically inform participants of what is "good and possible" in the music.

Listening to and reading music online or through mail order catalogs/compact discs is a visceral experience that taps more into an inner ratings scheme ranging from usable—to possible—to no way. Few (including me) go to the tables and play these excerpts to get a real feeling for the music.

Handbell directors typically choose repertoire and disperse it to their ringers. In this capacity, perhaps directors should ring through the promotional excerpts to "feel" if the music meets our personal ratings system.

Ultimately, we should attend workshops and festivals, talk with colleagues about what works and doesn't work, and strive to select music not viscerally, but from our physical efforts to play the music before we purchase.



Byron Jensen

*When do I
purchase new
music? Every
time I attend a
workshop or a
festival.*



The Past is Prologue:

Handbell Ringing in the Early 20th Century

Laurie Austin, Area 8 Historian

In writing her early history of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers (AGEHR—now known as the Handbell Musicians of America), Isabel Meldrum said that at the dawn of the 20th century, Whitechapel was casting a set of bells that would be “the first English Handbells brought to this country.” She was talking about a set of bells that Margaret Nichols (later, Margaret Shurcliff) brought from England to her home in Boston in 1902. Readers of my previous article on handbell history (2023 Winter Quavers) will know immediately that Meldrum was mistaken. Nichols was certainly not the first to bring handbells from England into the United States, but she was largely responsible for the resurgence in their popularity in this country.

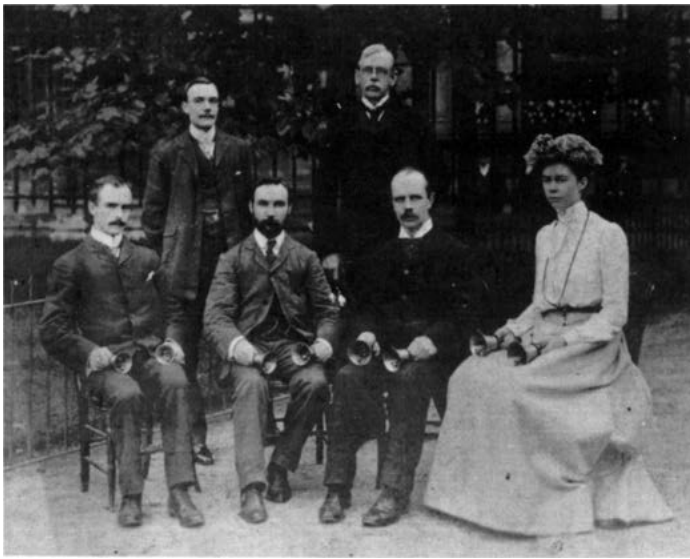
In the 19th century, handbell ringing had been a popular concert attraction that morphed into minstrel and vaudeville performing acts, and several troupes travelled across the US incorporating them into their performances. Some performances were serious attempts at making music; others were parodies on tuned cowbells. By the turn of the 20th century, handbell popularity was waning.

Enter Margaret Nichols into American handbell history. Margaret was born in 1879 and grew up in Boston’s wealthy Beacon Hill neighborhood. Her parents, Dr. Arthur and Mrs. Elizabeth Nichols, ensured she had a progressive, well-rounded education that included vocational training and advanced science classes at MIT. Margaret particularly excelled at carpentry and her love and talent for woodworking would continue throughout her adulthood. She was also a skilled tennis player, a suffragist, a pacifist during World War I, and among the founders of the Massachusetts American Civil Liberties Union.

Margaret Nichols Goes to England

Margaret’s father, Dr. Arthur Nichols, had a keen interest in tower bell ringing, which he passed along to his youngest child, Margaret. He had grown up in Boston’s North End, ringing the tower bells at Old North Church. (Old North’s tower is better known as the place where revolutionary Bostonians lit the lanterns to warn that the British Regulars were on the march “by land” to Concord on April 19, 1775.) He first encountered change ringing in London, probably in the 1860s, when he stopped there on his way home to Boston from his medical studies in Berlin. He gained more change ringing experience on subsequent trips to England in the late 1800s. Margaret’s first tower bell lesson in Boston was c. 1900, and in 1902, father and daughter traveled to London to learn more.

I do not pretend to understand fully the intricacies of change ringing, the difference between bell peals, and the mathematic reasoning it takes to execute the more complicated variations, so I will not dwell on the details here. If you care to know more about Margaret’s change ringing accomplishments, I recommend starting with Michael Foulds’ excellent article on the Whiting Society website. To make a long story short, Margaret stayed in and around London for about seven weeks, learning more about ringing as she went, and successfully executed different peals on both tower bells and handbells with other highly skilled ringers.



The band which successfully rang two handbell peals, both Grandsire Triples and Stedman Triples, at Challis Winney's house on 17th August 1902. Ringers (front row, left to right): George N. Price (1-2), Herbert P. Harman (3-4), Challis F. Winney (5-6), Margaret H. Nichols (7-8). Margaret's father, Dr. Arthur Nichols, is the taller man standing in the back. Reprinted from "The Bell News and Ringers' Record." Image and caption info generously provided by Michael Foulds.

Margaret's feats were notable not only for her quick study and her skill, but also that she was accepted as a woman in an activity that was dominated by men. There are only a few examples of women handbell ringers in England during this period—a group called the Walford family with at least two girls performed in the late 19th century and into the early 20th century. Another woman, Ida Anderson, performed with handbell ringers in a contest that hosted 165 men and one woman in 1903. Margaret's achievements were recognized in the City of London when she was made a member of the Ancient Society of College Youths, an exclusive ringing society.

Also on this trip, Whitechapel foundry presented Margaret with a set of eight handbells. We can only speculate why, but it was probably a combination of Margaret's achievement and her father's patronage of Whitechapel for two tower bell projects he had already undertaken in Massachusetts. (Arthur Nichols would continue to use his influence to bring Whitechapel bells to the US in the years to come. All told, he helped bring Whitechapel tower bells to Boston, Groton, Hingham, and Watertown, Massachusetts; as well as Chicago, Illinois.) Margaret and her father left Liverpool for the US at the end of August, 1902, bringing the handbells with them to Boston. She expanded the set over the coming years, and it was with this set of bells that she enticed her family, friends, and neighbors to take up handbell ringing.

Margaret Nichols Shurcliff's Relentless Handbell Enthusiasm Sparks a Ringing Movement

Margaret Nichols married landscape architect Arthur Shurtleff in 1905, and they proceeded to have six children. They made their home on Beacon Hill, and built a summer home in Ipswich, Massachusetts. The spelling of their name would be legally changed later, and for consistency I will refer to them by their later last name, "Shurcliff." Armed with skill, enthusiasm, and a small set of bells, Margaret slowly found ways to interest her friends and family in bell ringing. In 1923, Margaret, five of her children, and some friends, became members of the Beacon Hill Handbell Ringers. The Beacon Hill Ringers would soon begin their annual tradition of ringing Christmas carols in the doorways of the homes on Louisburg Square, which is still going strong to this day. They were also in demand to play other community and social engagements, and as more people heard them, the more interest they generated.



The Beacon Hill Bell Ringers play carols on Christmas Eve, 1941. Copyright (c) Richard Merrill. This work is licensed for use under a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivatives License.

Membership in the Beacon Hill group changed over the years as the children grew up and branched out. Other people joined, left, and started their own groups radiating out from the greater Boston area. Some, like the groups at Groton School and the Whitechapel Ringers of Gloucester, concentrated on change ringing with handbells. Others, like the Quincy Bell Ringers, were corporate groups who played tunes. Another early group started at Old South Church in Boston, and Margaret's daughter, Elizabeth, started a group at Bennington College in Vermont. By 1932, a group called the American Alps Swiss Handbell Quartet was started in Pennsylvania; although they were moving away from it, tuned handbell ringing still couldn't escape the "Swiss" moniker.

The New England Guild of Handbell Ringers - On the Cusp of the American Guild

With so many ringing bands in the area, handbell enthusiasts met at Shurcliff's home and organized the New England Guild of Handbell Ringers in 1937. The organization was formed "for fraternizing, exchanging ideas and techniques, and for circulating manuscript copies of music that was good for ringing." Starting in 1938, there were well-attended public concerts to accompany the guild's yearly business meetings.

Bell bands popped up all over eastern Massachusetts and beyond. In very short time, people who had either rung with or heard the Beacon Hill Ringers were starting handbell programs in their communities, and those groups were influencing others to start their own groups. Handbell ringing had spread west to San Francisco and north to Canada and everywhere in between. A lively exchange of information was going back and forth between the members of



the New England Guild, communicating who owned what kinds of bells, and where. Forget Kevin Bacon, we could easily play a game of Six Degrees of Margaret Shurcliff in this era of handbell history.

By mid-century there were handbells in all sorts of environments, from community performing groups, to church groups, to change ringing groups, to therapeutic music groups in medical institutions, to school groups, to advanced college and university groups. Handbell ringing was grabbing national attention, as evidenced by an article about the Beacon Hill Ringers in a December 15, 1947 article in Life Magazine.

Life Magazine ran a two-page article highlighting the New England Guild of English Handbell Ringers and the Christmas Eve ringing tradition on Beacon Hill, December 15, 1947.

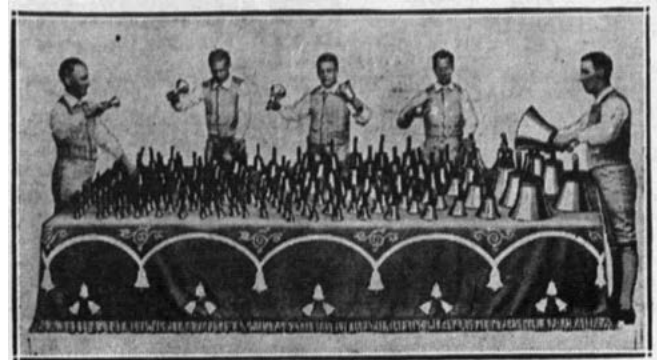
The Scandinavian Bell Ringers Dominate the 1920s Performing Landscape

Most of the focus of American handbell history during the first half of the 20th century is on Massachusetts and the outgrowth from there. But that doesn't mean there were no handbells in our area during this time. Home grown groups were starting to bud, but before they did there was another significant touring group that was fighting the instrument's vaudeville reputation.

The Scandinavian Bell Ringers, also known as the Temple Carillon Players, was a male quintet of Swedish bell ringers who toured the country off-and-on from 1923-1932. Newspapers show they appeared throughout what is now Area 8 between 1924 and 1931. The Brookfield Suburban Magnet, in their 1924 advertisement for "An Unusual Concert" says that the Scandinavian Bell Ringers had spent an entire week making records for the Victor Company while they were on the east coast before making their way to the middle of the country. I couldn't find any 1924 recordings, but you can hear their 1928 Victor recording of a waltz, "Beautiful Star of Heaven" [here](#) on the Internet Archive.

An early 1924 article said they played a set of 125 bells; a 1926 article says the group of five ringers played a set of 189 bells, not seen since the “Swiss Bell Ringers some fifty years ago.” In 1930 they were playing “the largest collection of musical bells in the world.” The Oak Park Leaves revealed that they were using a new set of 200 bells, made from the specifications of the players at a firm in England, an ancient firm, “the only firm which today can make perfect bells.” A 1931 article in the Chariton Leader suggests the group had worn through two sets of bells and have had to return to London to get more. Another article confirmed they were playing on Mears & Stainbank (Whitechapel) bells. Their 189-bell set was valued at \$2000 in 1931, which in today’s dollars is about \$38,500.

Since their first appearance in 1923, the Scandinavian Bell Ringers played for over 300,000 people in the US, giving over 1200 concerts coast to coast. Wherever they played the praise was unanimous. Their director, Alfred Josephson, was called “masterly” and each member of the quintet “an artist” or “geniuses.” In a 1930 article, the manager of the group, J. Holmstrom, explained that the Swedish ringers learned to ring handbells after an English group had toured their country in the late 19th century and left a set of bells for them to ring. The Scandinavian ringers were originally from Helsingland, Sweden, but they were so well received in the US that they settled down in Jamestown, NY and used it as their home base. They took at least one break to return to Sweden and tour Europe around 1927, but returned to the US and resumed performances here until spring, 1932. I believe they went back to Sweden for good in 1932. Later articles called the group the “Temple Carillon Players” but I haven’t yet figured out why they went by two names.



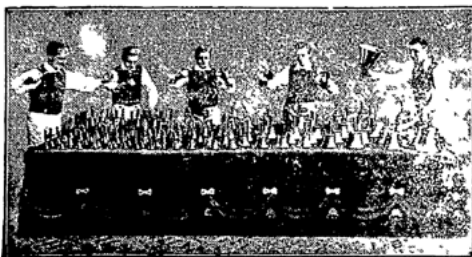
THE FAMOUS
Scandinavian Bell Ringers
 The Greatest Bell Ringers
 in the World
 WILL GIVE A CONCERT
 At the CITY HALL

An ad for an appearance in the Scandia Journal (KS), April 1, 1926.

GALVA NEWS, GALVA, ILLINOIS

SCANDINAVIAN BELL RINGERS AND LOCAL ARTISTS TO GIVE CONCERT TUESDAY NIGHT

On Tuesday evening, January 26, at 8 o'clock a concert program will be presented at the Lutheran church by the Scandinavian Bell Ringers, an organization of musicians which is unique at the present time. They will be assisted by local artists, Mrs. Helen Headland appearing in cello solos, accompanied by Miss Edith Nordgren, and Miss Marie Cronk in vocal selections. This concert company of five Swedish musicians present a performance different from anything in America since the visit of the celebrated Swiss Bell Ringers some fifty years ago. They use a set of 189 specially constructed bells, ranging in weight from a few ounces up to 18 pounds. They were made in England by a firm which builds bells for the great European cathedrals, and took a year to make. The musicians appear in native Swedish costumes. Press reports state that they have appeared before over three hundred thousand people since coming to this country, the audiences numbering as high as 5000.



The program which will be presented in Galva follows:
 1 Scandinavian Bell Ringers
 (a) Last-puel Overture, Op. 7: Keler Bela
 (b) Intermezzo (Rococo)
 (c) Landkjending W. Alecter
 Eduv. Grieg
 2 Mrs. Helen Headland, Violoncellist
 (a) The Swan Saint Saens
 (b) Gavotte in D David Popper
 Miss Edith Nordgren, Accompanist.
 3 Scandinavian Bell Ringers
 (a) The Iron Count K. L. King
 (b) Evening Chimes Marzian
 (c) The Blacksmith's Shop in the Forest Parlow
 Intermission
 4 Miss Marie Cronk
 (a) Vocal Solo Selected
 5 Scandinavian Bell Ringers
 (a) Svenska Folkmelodier (Swedish Folk Songs) arr. O. Arno
 (b) Vagsvalp (Dashing Waves) Knut Soderstrom
 (c) Bjorneborgarnes March.
 (d) The Star Spangled Banner
 Tickets have been placed on sale at Hoegren & Swanson and Johnson Brothers' grocery stores.

The Scandinavian Bell Ringers appeared in every state of Area 8 during their almost 9 years of touring in the US, often visiting the same city multiple times. They were frequently hosted by churches, schools, city halls, and colleges—particularly in locales that had residents of Scandinavian heritage.

In Illinois they visited Princeton, DeKalb, Brookfield, Chicago, Moline, Galva, Bloomington, Oak Park, and Sycamore. In Iowa they visited Sioux City, Burlington, Fort Dodge, Ottumwa, Algona, Swea City, Albert City, Spencer, Swedesburg, Chariton, Ogden, and Pomeroy. In Nebraska, they visited Oakland, Aurora, Omaha, Holdrege, Ceresco, Swedeburg, Wahoo, Stromsburg, Lincoln, Concord, Wakefield, Valley, Pender, Wayne, Rosalie, Blair, Walthill, Tekamah, Wausa, Osceola, and Hartington. In Kansas they visited Scandia, Lindsborg, Axtell, Clay Center, and Salina. In Missouri, they visited Kansas City a few times, but I can't find evidence of any other locations.

This article includes an example of the repertoire in its description of an upcoming appearance of the Scandinavian Bell Ringers appeared in the Galva News (IL) on January 21, 1926.

Their concerts were frequently structured to include a mix of local musical talent and their own music. They would open with a set, then the local musicians would perform during the middle interval, then the ringers would return to play the last set. Their repertoire adapted a wide assortment of songs by European and American composers, including Scandinavian pieces, popular music, classical favorites, marches, minuets, and spirituals. The musicians wore “neat costumes consisting of knickers, white shirts, black bow ties and patent leather slippers.”

The Oak Park Leaves went into great depth about an upcoming performance, saying “The Mission of the Scandinavian Bell Ringers in America is to reveal the extent of their accomplishment, the boundless range of bell music, the perfect musical consonance obtainable, the rhythmic expression and charming resonance. Ordinarily the suggestion of bell-music is received with a mental reservation. Curiosity is aroused rather than the anticipation of unalloyed pleasure. But under the spell of these five men all other impressions are lost in the delight which follows the superb artistry displayed.” This group was demonstrating across the country that handbells could be taken seriously, just like any other musical instrument.

The Momentum is Building

In the first half of the 20th century, there were still no formal instruction books or handbell music publications in the US. Handbell ringing on a local level was starting to take hold, and examples of skilled handbell ringers were touring the country proving this music could draw a crowd. There was an increasing need for something more than a once-yearly regional meeting to exchange ideas. In our next article we will finally explore the first American handbell festival, and the early days of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers.

Sources

Bradford, Elizabeth. *The First Quarter Century*. American Guild of English Handbell Ringers, 1979.

Nichols House Museum online biographies (<https://www.nicholshousemuseum.org/margaret/> etc.)

Foulds, Michael. *The Nichols Family of Boston, Parts 1 and 2*. The Whiting Society of Ringers. <https://www.whitingsociety.org.uk/articles/american/nichols-family-part1.html> AND <https://www.whitingsociety.org.uk/articles/american/nichols-family-part2.html>

Fawcett, Peter. *Ringling For Gold: Hand-bell Ringing, the Living Tradition*. Donald A. & Philip Bedford, 2012.

Digital Commonwealth, Massachusetts Collections Online, <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:m900tz073> .

Life Magazine, “Bell Ringers,” December 15, 1947.

Parry, Scott Brink. *The Story of Handbells*. Whittemore Associates, 1957.

Scandinavian Bell Ringers, “Beautiful Star of Heaven,” Victor, 1928. https://archive.org/details/78_beautiful-star-of-heaven_scandinavian-bell-ringers-temple-carillon-drumheller_gbia0421131a/

Tuned Handbell Manufacturers Operating in the Early 20th Century

ENGLAND

Whitechapel Bell Foundries (AKA, Mears & Stainbank), London, at least 1805 (probably earlier)

J.F. Mallaby & Co., by 1822 – 1914

Bond & Sons, Burford, 1828 - c. 1940

John Taylor & Co., Loughborough, c. 1860

White & Sons, Appleton, c. 1867-1925 (limited handbell work thereafter)

John Warner & Sons, London, by 1876-1922

Shaw, Son, & Co., Bradford, by 1871-1912

Gillett & Johnston, Croydon, by 1881-1954

James Barwell, Birmingham, 1886-1918

Llewellyns & James, Bristol, by 1892-c. 1912

William Moore, Salisbury, 1900-1930

Alfred Howell, Ipswich, c. 1900-c. 1915 (limited handbell work thereafter)

William Haley, London, 1922-1927

Thomas Miller, Birmingham, by 1928-1940

UNITED STATES

Rowland Mayland, Brooklyn, NY, 1866-1942

Edward Street, Hartford, CT, 1880-1920

J.C. Deagan & Co., Chicago, IL, 1890-1920

Foundries changed names over time. Names given are how they were known in the 20th century. Foundries made all kinds of bells, including tower bells, ship bells, clock bells, and house bells. Dates given are approximately when they are known to have produced tuned handbells.

Illinois Committee

Illinois State Chair

Beth McFarland

Western IL Rep

Don Wood

Secretary

Beth McFarland

Registrar

Kristin Kalitowski-Kowal

Events

Sharon Schmidt

Music Librarian

Beth McFarland

Handbell Services Rep

Debi Robey

Hand Chime Loan

Program Coordinator

Patti Mangis

Hand Chime Loan

Program Mentor

Open - please contact

Kendall Ladd

Food Coordinator

Anna Piro

Iowa Committee

Iowa State Chair

Dick Crusinberry

Treasurer

Mary Lee Park

Secretary

Donna Sprague

Historian

Christina "Tina"

Elwood Gehrke

Western Representative

Yvonne Johnson

Eastern Representative

Cat Walker

Missouri Committee

Missouri State Chair

Trey Bures

Past Chair

Suanne Comfort

Treasurer

Suanne Comfort

Membership

Sherry Boland

Chime Chair

Christie White

Nebraska Committee

Nebraska State Chair

Byron Jensen

Secretary

Natalie Radcliffe

Treasurer/Registrar

Linda Ashely

Chimes

Nancy Youngman

Scholarship

Janet Chiocchi

Members

Michael Allen

Jessica Kite

Deann Nicolaus

Brian Lew

Angela Wright

Kansas Committee

Kansas State Co-Chairs

Julie Assel &

Janelle Flory Schrock

Treasurer

Karla Denton

Secretary

OPEN - Contact

Julie or Janelle

Chimes

OPEN - Contact

Julie or Janelle

Does Your School Qualify?

Area 8 offers a handchime loan program to schools in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. *Qualifying schools will receive:*

- 3-octave set of handchimes for one semester (approx. 4 months) with teaching materials
- support network and/or mentor
- one-year membership to Handbell Musicians of America.

To check availability of handchimes for loan or to submit an application, please contact Nancy Youngman, Area 8 Chimes Chair.

To learn more about the Chime Loan Program, visit the [Area 8 website](#).

A video featuring Nancy Youngman describes in detail the Area 8 chime loan program and can be found [here](#).

Upcoming Area 8 Events

May 2023

May 5, 2023

7:30 pm Lawrence Community Handbell Choir in Concert
Trinity Lutheran Church, Mason City, Iowa

May 6, 2023

2:00 pm River City Ringers Concert: Rondos, Rhythm, and Swing
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Omaha, Nebraska

4:00 pm Chicago Bronze Handbell Ensemble Concert: It's About Time!
St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Park Ridge, Illinois

7:00 pm Bells in Motion Concert: On the Road Again
First Presbyterian Church, Macomb, Illinois

7:00 pm River City Ringers Concert: Rondos, Rhythm, and Swing
Presbyterian Church of the Master, Omaha, Nebraska

May 7, 2023

3:00 pm River City Ringers Concert: Rondos, Rhythm, and Swing
Augustana Lutheran Church, Omaha, Nebraska

3:00 pm Handbell Ensembles of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church Ring for Joy!
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Olathe, Kansas

4:00 pm Bells in Motion Concert: On the Road Again
First Congregational United Church of Christ, Geneseo, Illinois

4:00 pm Joyful Blessings Concert
Marion Methodist Church, Marion, Iowa

4:00 pm Chicago Bronze Handbell Ensemble Concert: It's About Time!
First Congregational Church of Dundee, West Dundee, Illinois

May 15, 2023

6:00 pm Chicago Bronze Handbell Ensemble Concert: It's About Time!
Friendship Village, Schaumburg, Illinois

May 20, 2023

3:00 pm Lawrence Community Handbell Choir in Concert
Central United Methodist Church, Lawrence, Kansas

May 21, 2023

4:00 pm Chicago Bronze Handbell Ensemble Concert: It's About Time!
Madonna della Strade Chapel, Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois

7:00 pm Lawrence Community Handbell Choir in Concert
Trinity Episcopal Church, Lawrence, Kansas

June 2023

June 2, 2023

7:00 pm Des Moines Concert Handbells Concert
Plymouth Church, Des Moines, Iowa

June 3, 2023

7:00 pm Des Moines Concert Handbells Concert
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Urbandale, Iowa

Publishing in Quavers

4 publications per year,
published once each season.

Articles

Articles are due on the
10th day of January, April,
July, and October.

Advertising

[Click here](#) for more details
about advertising in *Quavers*.
6 ads for the price of 5!
Run 5 identical ads in 5
successive *Quavers* and get
the 6th ad free.

Events & Concerts

must be submitted by the
25th of January, April, July,
and October to be included
in *Quavers*. To submit
a concert or event for
inclusion, click [here](#) or
go to the A8 Website,
Events page.

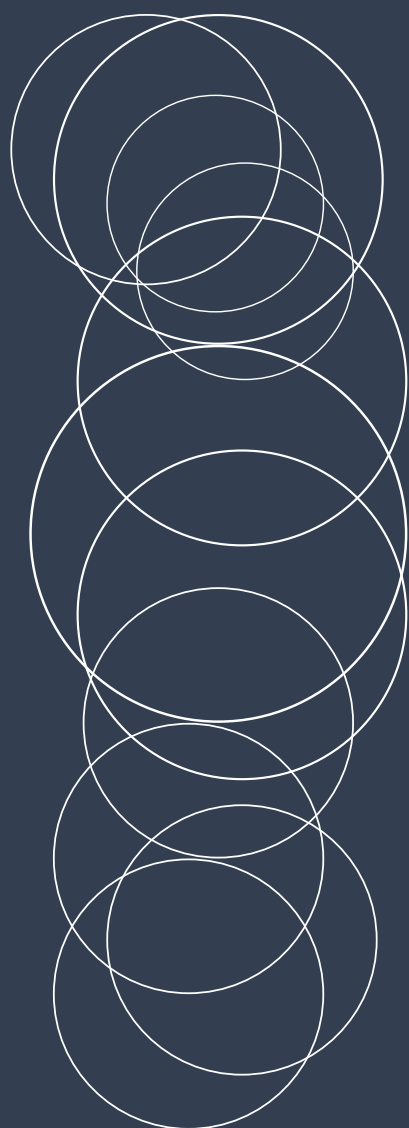
Questions?

Please send all questions
and comments about
this and future *Quavers*
publications to Beth Ann
Edwards, Editor:
newslettereditor.area8@
handbellmusicians.org

*Find the most up-to-date
calendar and details
about events on the
[A8 website](#).*

Please check websites for
updated calendar and event
information.

*Find the most
up-to-date
calendar and
details about
events on the
A8 website.*



June 9, 2023

7:00 pm Rezound! Handbell Ensemble in Concert
St. James Lutheran Church, Kansas City, Missouri

7:30 pm Bells in Motion On the Road Again Concert
St. James UMC, Danville, Illinois

June 10, 2023

7:00 pm Rezound! Handbell Ensemble in Concert
Rainbow Mennonite Church, Kansas City, Kansas

7:00 pm Bells in Motion On the Road Again Concert
Meridian Street UMC, Indianapolis, Indiana

June 11

3:00 pm Rezound! Handbell Ensemble in Concert
Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Prairie Village, Kansas

4:00 pm Bells in Motion On the Road Again Concert
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Altamont, Illinois

June 15, 2023

7:00 pm Rezound! Midwest Concert Tour
Trinity Lutheran Church, McPherson, Kansas

June 16, 2023

7:00 pm Rezound! Midwest Concert Tour
First United Methodist Church, Owasso, Oklahoma

June 17, 2023

7:00 pm Rezound! Midwest Concert Tour
Central United Methodist Church, Fayetteville, Arkansas

June 18, 2023

7:00 pm Rezound! Midwest Concert Tour
Calvary United Methodist Church, Wichita, Kansas

June 19, 2023

7:00 pm Rezound! Midwest Concert Tour
First United Methodist Church, Emporia, Kansas

June 23, 2023

7:00 pm The Agape Ringers Concert
St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

June 24, 2023

7:00 pm The Agape Ringers Concert
Plymouth Church, Des Moines, Iowa

June 25, 2023

4:00 pm The Agape Ringers Concert
First Presbyterian Church, Davenport, Iowa

National Events

Click [here](#) for more information

July 8-15, 2023

Handbell Musicians of America National Seminar,
Distinctly Teen, Masterclass Series
Irving Convention Center/Westin Hotel, Irving, Texas