

introduction

Handchimes were invented as a tool to help engage children and the elderly in ringing in the tradition of handbell ensembles. These hollow aluminum tubes each represent one pitch on the chromatic scale and are available in up to five and a half octaves. When gently rung, they create a beautiful sound similar to that of an Orff Metalophone. Handchimes are becoming increasingly popular with music educators as an alternative performance instrument. Handchime ensembles, using music arranged for handbells or handchimes, are engaging and can provide a positive musical experience for children. However, the value of handchimes in the school music program goes far beyond what can be found in the ensemble experience.

These instruments spark creativity and imagination within our students. This session will focus on exploring creative ways to use handchimes in the general music classroom by exploring the following ideas:

- Correct ringing technique
- Adapting Orff arrangements for use with handchimes
- Chimes and recorder
- Other applications

correct ringing technique

While handchimes are far more durable than the bronze handbells, care must be taken to protect these instruments and to create the optimal sound.

- Hold the chime straight up with the label facing the ringer.
- Place the thumb on the side of the chime, not on the label. (The label looks like the perfect thumb rest, however the thumb should be wrapped around to the side of the chime, pointing forward and leading the way for the ringing path.)
- Balance the chime in the hand just below the label. Each ringer will find a balance point that feels most comfortable for him or her depending on the size of the chime being rung. Do not encourage ringers to hold the chimes at the bottom of the chimes.
- To sound the chime, allow the top of the chime to tip towards the ringers slightly, then with a gentle bounce or flick of wrist, ring the chime forward, thinking of the bottom of the chime as coming in towards the ringer's stomach.
- When being rung, the chime should stay upright, flicking only slightly forward during the initial strike.
- After the ring, the chime should stay in motion and follow a circular ringing path away from the ringer's body. This ringing path is easily thought of as "back pedaling" on a bicycle.
- To stop the sound of the chime, turn the chime in towards the ringer's body and touch the top of the chime to the shoulder of the ringing hand. Stopping the sound is called the "damp."

Unlike handbells, there are very few special techniques that should be used with chimes. The manufacturers warn that "stopped" sounds (ringing techniques that stop the sound immediately after ringing,) can harm the chimes and therefore are not recommended. When ringing handbell arrangements that include these special techniques it is best to simply leave them out.

adapting Orff arrangements for use with handchimes

One of the values of the Orff approach is how it allows children to explore music through a variety of creative musical experiences. Handchimes are another quality instrument that may be added to a traditional Orff instrumentarium.

- Cluster Chords- Many arrangements often incorporate cluster chords, which typically allow the performer to use any of the notes in the given pentatonic scale. Using chimes in a higher range for these cluster chords allows the teacher to engage many students for this one simple part.
- Borduns- Chimes can easily be used to create the open fifth bass bordun found in many of the Orff arrangements. Children can either have one or two chimes for a harmonic ostinato that can accompany many simple folk songs and instrumental pieces.
- Octave or Fifth sound color- Using either a tonic octave or an open fifth (using scale degrees 1 and 5) at the beginning or ending of phrases is typically found in instrumental pieces as well as folk song arrangements especially when there is no movement in the melody. These sound color examples are also easily played on handchimes.

chimes and recorder

Handchimes blend beautifully with the sound of the recorder. Chimes can be used as an accompaniment instrument with recorder pieces or the handchimes can be used to play melodies written for recorders.

- Chimes as accompaniment for recorders- There are two basic ways chimes can be used as accompaniment instruments for recorders. It is possible to use the typical bordun accompaniments, if the melody of the recorder piece lends its self to a bordun style accompaniment. These simple ostinato accompaniments can be beautiful with recorder, chimes and handdrum or other light percussion instruments. If the recorder melody is harmonically more involved, writing a simple chordal accompaniment for the handchimes is easy and serves as a great introduction to reading music on a grand staff.
- Chimes as melody instrument- When students are beginning to learn to read music from a staff, saying the letter names may be one effective way to practice the connection between the lines and spaces on the staff and the correct letter names. Although this may help students, it is not the most musical way of approaching this concept. Handchimes can help add some musical interest to this activity. When introducing a new

recorder piece from standard musical notation, hand out the handchimes that match the pitches found in the melody. Have the students say the letter names and ring their chime when they say their letter. After practicing this just a few times, have the students say the letter names silently and play the melody on the chimes. Students who do not have a chime can finger their part on the recorder and think the letter names. This activity brings pitch to simply saying the letter names, and makes this activity joyful. This can also help students track music written in standard musical notation.

Once the students are able to play the melody on the handchimes and the recorder many options open up for expanding the form of even the most simple recorder songs.

other classroom applications

Teaching musical concepts- Theoretical concepts, such as accidentals, composition of scales and melodic motion (steps vs. leaps) are all examples of complex topics that be presented in a very hands on, and concrete manner using handchimes.

Call and Response- Simple call and response songs are a wonderful way to elicit "solo" singing from young children. Adding chimes to one or two note responses provides a tonal context that can help some children feel more secure in finding the pitch. I would not advocate always using chimes as part of call and response songs, but it is engaging for the students and may be beneficial to many students who find it difficult to establish a sense of pitch.

Ostinato compositions- Using a pentatonic scale, students can create simple ostinato compositions that work as wonderful processions. Divide the class into small groups and pass out a collection of neighboring chimes in a pentatonic scale. (Each group should receive two or three pitches that are close together so they can create a simple pattern they can successfully perform.) In addition to chimes, handing out hand drums, claves, and other small non-pitched percussion instruments will enable more children to be actively engaged in the music making. When the groups have had sufficient time to practice and possibly notate their patterns, begin to layer in the patterns to create the composition. Depending on the age level and the recorder playing ability of the students, either ask a student to improvise on the pentatonic scale the group is playing in, or the teacher may improvise on the recorder, flute or other instrument. This activity can be a great quick assessment for creating and notating simple rhythm patterns, and can create a wonderful procession for the opening of a concert or worship service.

Rhythmic pattern practice- Echoing, reading and improvising rhythmic patterns is fun and easy with handchimes. Adding movement to rhythmic improvisation can make rhythmic practice more exciting. Here are three examples of rhythmic games that work well with handchimes.

- **Echo circle-** Class is seated in a circle, on the floor, and the teacher hands out chimes to students in a pattern, every other child or every third child. The chimes should all be part of a pentatonic scale. The leader plays a four beat rhythm pattern and the students echo that pattern. While the leader plays the next pattern, the children pass the chimes to the child sitting on their left and the next child echoes the new pattern. As children become more familiar with this, students can take over the leader position.
- **Poison Pattern-** Teacher hands out chimes in a pentatonic scale. The teacher performs a four beat rhythm pattern that is the poison pattern. After reviewing this pattern with the class, the teacher explains if the teacher plays this pattern, the children must freeze. If they ring the poison pattern they are out. The game begins by playing simple four beat patterns on the chimes with the children echoing these patterns. When the teacher plays the poison pattern, the children freeze and glare at the teacher. Any child who rings the poison pattern sits down until the next round.
- **Clap my note-** When the students are able to read basic rhythm patterns, assign groups in the class to a particular note value, (quarter notes, eighth notes etc.) The groups are then responsible for playing their assigned note value. This game promotes the ability to hear the whole pattern internally and respond only to their assigned note. This game is excellent practice for beat competency, and rhythmic fluency, plus it helps prepare students for ringing music from a standard handbell score where they will be responsible only for a limited number of notes.

Materials featured:

Peace Round, Source: [Christmas Revels Songbook](#), Revels Inc.

John the Rabbit, Source: [The Book of Call and Response](#), Compiled by John M. Feierabend, GIA Publications

Sleep, Baby Sleep, Source: [American as Apple Pie](#), Randy Delelles and Jeff Kriske, Kid sounds

Elementaria, Gunild Keetman, Shott

Conversational Solfege Teacher's Manual, John M. Feierabend, GIA Publications

For other questions, please contact me at ggall@backbayringers.org