

The Author

Barbara Broome is a ministry assistant and handbell director at Broadmoor Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She has been ringing, teaching, and directing handbells for more than thirty-three years. Since 1980, Barbara has been active in the work of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers, Inc., now known as Handbell Musicians of America. She has served in several capacities in Area 6.

In 1995 Barbara and Sandy Purdom formed the *Broadmoor Belles* handbell duo. Duet ringing has provided them many opportunities for performance, worship, education, and entertainment. They regularly ring for church services and perform for community groups and Guild events. Two of Barbara's duet hymn arrangements have been published.

The information presented in this book comes from the personal experience of the author as well as from many reputable ringers, directors, and leaders in the ringing world. The AGEHR *Handbell and Handchime Notation* manual has been a primary source of information. Other sources are listed in the Resource Guide.

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Barbara R. Broome
262 Kirkley Place West
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70815

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Introduction— Why Ring Handbells?

Handbell ringing is an art form as well as an exciting and enjoyable activity. Joining a handbell choir offers a person an opportunity to participate in a unique musical group. There is a sense of belonging when one becomes associated with a handbell choir. Membership in a choir provides a means of contributing to a select group and in turn to a church, school, or organization. It is a place where ringers may use their talents. Handbell ringing is a musical challenge which requires mastering physical skills. A handbell choir provides an avenue for musical expression and a means of emotional and spiritual communication with an audience.

As a member of a handbell choir, what if the challenge is not great enough? Then consider the benefits of ringing solo or participating in a small ensemble—and for the main purpose of this writing, duet ringing. There are many books available which provide in-depth instructions on handbell techniques and other physical aspects of ringing. This book focuses on the aspects of ringing duets and the interaction of two ringers—a handbell duo. It is hoped that the ideas presented here will lead to the commitment to quality in ringing and to the ultimate musical duet performance.

Barbara Broome

Why Ring Handbell Duets?

1. Friends enjoy sharing and working together. Family members may find a common interest in a musical endeavor. Music as a foundation for a relationship makes that relationship very worthwhile. Two people may commit to a unique ministry or community service for themselves and their church. In a secular setting, a duo can provide entertainment and educational experiences.

2. In a handbell choir, a ringer is usually responsible for two diatonic notes and their corresponding sharps and flats. In solo ringing, one person rings all the handbells required for a piece of music. In duet ringing, two ringers, using solo techniques, cover all of the bells needed. This may present an intriguing challenge. Duet ringers can "bell hog" to a certain extent, yet they must share the bells with a partner.

3. In a handbell duo, there is always someone with whom to share the *blame* or the *acclaim*. If one ringer makes a mistake, all is not lost if the other ringer can continue ringing and assist with the recovery. Adversely, there is a sense of pride when all goes well or a catastrophe is averted. Having someone to lean on can be calming and can ease performance anxiety.

4. It usually takes a person with a strong personality to be a solo artist. Being part of a duo allows a less confident person to be successful due to the support of the other person. Two people can feed off each other and share ideas. They can be creative and bring life to a piece of music when they work together.

5. Duet ringing provides an opportunity to ring interesting, ambitious music of a high level of difficulty. If ringing abilities differ, one ringer may compensate for the other. Four hands can certainly cover more bells than two hands. Bell partners depend on each other to place the bells where they are supposed to be. This is achieved by damping bells for each other, handing off to each other, positioning set-ups, and taking care of other housekeeping duties while ringing a piece.

6. It is certainly easier for two ringers and an accompanist to come together to practice and to perform. Partners share the load when dealing with bells and equipment as well as managing the business part of the team. Individual talents can become an important aspect of the group. One ringer might be better at organization or arranging music while the other might have the ability to maintain the equipment and set up the bells. One may be an outgoing speaker while the other would rather stay behind the bell table. Duet work demands teamwork.

7. The greatest benefit of ringing in any ensemble is acquiring the ability to handle multiple bells. In addition, ringers develop excellent sight reading ability becoming adept at reading more than the usual two diatonic notes. Coordination and rhythm skills are greatly improved. Ringers become capable of performing advanced techniques with ease. Ringing with another person builds confidence. A real bond forms between bell partners. Ringing duets can be a satisfying and enjoyable life-long activity.

Ringling Techniques

Published duet music has performance notes and suggestions included with the score. The composers have probably spent considerable time analyzing the score and making the marks for the most efficient handling of the bells. Many publishers are now producing accompaniment CD's, some even with varying tempi.

Adapting a piece for duet will require creativity and trial and error to determine the mechanics. With either published music or your own adaptations, you will encounter problems. The following suggestions will assist you in working out some of the mechanical difficulties of a piece.

- **Lead with the other hand.**

Even though you usually begin with the higher pitch in the right hand and the lower pitch in the left hand, that may not be the most efficient position. Try starting with the other hand to set up for a leap, a pass, or a progression of notes. Once the best solution is found, mark the notes with *l* or *r* to denote which hand to use.

- **Switch hands.**

Many times, you will find a bell in the *incorrect* hand for the next move. Simply move the bell over to the other hand. The hand giving the bell is on top. Open the lower fingers to allow the other hand to slide up the handle and take over the grip as the first hand moves away. The bell must remain vertical and balanced. Mark this move with Sw for switch or more preferably, *l-r*, or *r-l*. Always attempt to make the switch on the longest note values. Continue the circular movement of the bell after the hand-off.

- **Pass to the other ringer to re-ring, to damp, or to displace.**

The pass or transfer is marked by a horizontal arrow (→). In duets, passing off a bell to be re-rung or damped can free up a hand for another technique, a leap, or another movement. Passing allows for more careful damping. A pass may also be used to set up a configuration or to displace a bell. To initiate a pass, the ringer holding the bell opens the grip by encircling the handle with only the thumb and index finger. Using the adjacent hand, the second ringer slides his hand up under the open fingers of the first ringer and takes over the grip. As with the switch, the bell must remain vertical and balanced. Continue to circle after the move.

- **Table damp before a bell change or a table technique.**

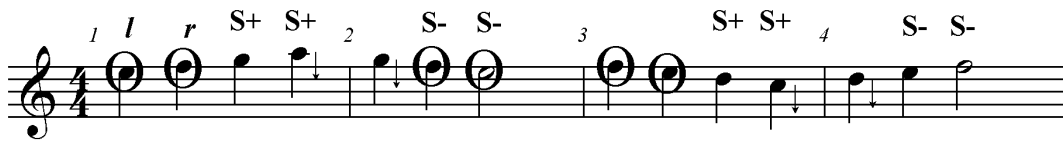
Never damp on the shoulder before a bell change. To prevent mistakes, the bell is damped on the table and the new bell is immediately picked up. Donald Allured calls this the "Discipline of Accuracy" principle.¹⁰ It saves time and prevents the panic when a needed bell is still on the table. Develop a mental discipline for graceful, error-free bell changes. The same principle applies when a change from regular ringing to a table technique occurs. Table damp first.

¹⁰ Donald E. Allured, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, Broadman Press, 1992, p. 36.

8. Traveling four-in-hand¹⁹

The traveling four-in-hand should be considered as a means of ringing multiple bells more efficiently and with significantly less movement. This technique allows the ringers to add harmony to the melody without sacrificing the legato line. Allow plenty of rehearsal time to plan the moves and to perfect this technique. In Figure 7, the circled notes are constants and remain in the hands while picking up and damping the succeeding notes (Shelley +, Shelley -).

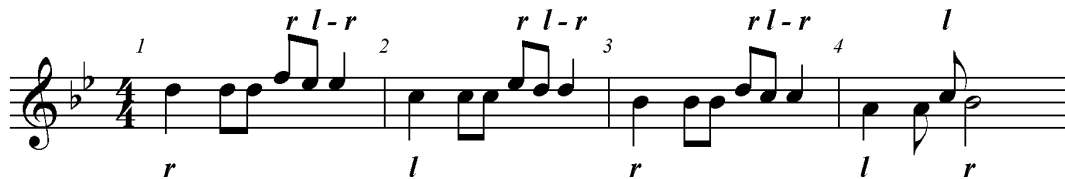
Figure 7
Traveling four-in-hand



9. Switches

Figure 8 from *Angels' Canon*²⁰ contains an interesting series of switches on a descending melody line. Ringer I damps and quickly makes a switch on the beat 1 quarter notes in mm. 2 and 3. Ringer II reverse weaves the descending line.

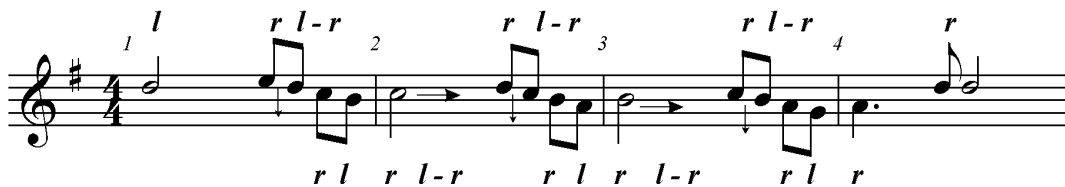
Figure 8
Switch or transfer



10. Passes and switches

In this example, bells are shared by a series of passes. Many times a pass is followed by a hand switch. In Figure 9 from *Angels We Have Heard on High*²¹ the passes are made on the half notes. Ringer I rings and damps the right hand bell on the table and then switches the left bell to the right hand to receive the pass from Ringer II. After the pass, Ringer II switches left to right.

Figure 9
Pass and switch



¹⁹Hascall, p. 17.

²⁰Michael Larsen, *Angels' Canon*, Agape, 1992.

²¹*Angels We Have Heard on High*, GLORIA, Traditional French Carol.

Chapter 13

Drills for Skills

In duet and ensemble ringing each ringer must be adept at changing bells and damping on the table. Table damping prior to every bell change assures that the correct bell will be in hand and it saves a beat in the process. The following exercises will improve coordination and damping skills. Remember that every bell must be returned to the exact position from which it came. Increase the tempo of each exercise to improve agility.

Key for these exercises:

<i>l</i>	Left hand
<i>r</i>	Right hand
C	Center bell
N	Neighbor (adjacent ringer)
S	Shoulder damp
<i>r-l</i> or <i>l-r</i>	Switch hands
/	Constant

Exercise 1

Shoulder damp the constant bell (right hand); table damp the changing bells (left hand).

1 *r* *l* 2 *r* **C** 3 *r* *l* 4 *r* **C**

Exercise 2

Shoulder damp the constant bell (left hand); table damp the changing bells (right hand).

1 *l* *r* 2 *l* **C** 3 *l* *r* 4 *l* **C**

Exercise 3

Shoulder damp the constant; table damp the changing bells.

1 *r* *l* *r* **C** 2 *r* *l* *r* **C** 3 4

Notation for Traveling Four-in-Hand³³

For the advanced solo/ensemble ringers, the technique of the traveling four-in-hand provides a means for handling multiple bells more efficiently and smoothly. The notation devised by Nancy Hascall is extensive. The following are some of the basic symbols for this technique. For more in-depth study refer to “Traveling Four-in-Hand: Using Multiple-Bell Techniques in Solo Ringing” by Nancy Hascall cited in the Resource Guide.

G6 / **B6**

Bells in four-in-hand for the left hand.

G6 / **x** **B6**

Disassemble the four-in-hand, returning each bell to the table.



Keep the circled bell or bells in hand as constants.



Return the bell to the table.



Return the pair to the table, leaving them in four-in-hand set-up.



Return both bells to the table separately.

³³ Hascall, p. 17.

Putting It All Together

Included in this guide is a hymn arrangement of *Abide with Me* which demonstrates many of the techniques unique to duet ringing. The text for this hymn was written by Henry F. Lyte in 1847. Even though the hymn is about death, the imagery suggests the ebbing tide of life. It has brought faith, courage, comfort, and triumph to many. Much of the appeal of this hymn "...is undoubtedly due to the music which Dr. [William] Monk wrote which so perfectly interprets it."³⁴

The relaxed tempo and the use of slow note values make *Abide with Me* an ideal choice for handbell duet. The key of Eb modulating to the key of C provides a good range for G4 through C7 bells. The strong melody is easily carried by the bells.

This arrangement is appropriate for any setting of worship. It would be most meaningful during a meditation time or as a prayer response. As you ring, reflect on the text and the spirit of the music as inspiration for musical expression and communication with the audience.

³⁴Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, Charles Scribner's Son, New York, 1950, p. 172.

Abide with Me

Handbell Duet with Keyboard

EVENTIDE, William H. Monk
Arr. by Barbara R. Broome

Andante

Piano

mf cantabile

1 2 3

4 5 6

mf

mp

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Abide with Me

2

Musical score for measures 7-9. The system consists of three staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment is divided into two parts: the right hand (treble clef) and the left hand (bass clef). Measure 7 shows the vocal line with a dotted quarter note and a half note, and the piano accompaniment with a half note in the bass and a quarter note in the treble. Measures 8 and 9 continue the vocal line with quarter notes and the piano accompaniment with eighth notes.

Musical score for measures 10-12. The system consists of three staves. Measure 10 features a vocal line with a half note and a piano accompaniment with eighth notes. Measure 11 includes a vocal line with a half note, a piano accompaniment with eighth notes, and a dynamic marking of *f* with a hairpin. Measure 12 shows a vocal line with a half note, a piano accompaniment with eighth notes, and dynamic markings of *mf* and *a tempo*.

Musical score for measures 13-15. The system consists of three staves. Measure 13 features a vocal line with a half note and a piano accompaniment with eighth notes. Measure 14 includes a vocal line with a half note and a piano accompaniment with eighth notes. Measure 15 shows a vocal line with a half note and a piano accompaniment with eighth notes.

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