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A Study Plan for

Arthiss Kliever's "Song of Jubilation"

(CGB-118)

by Arthiss Kliever

Having written several handbell pieces for 3-5 octave choirs, I was curious to see if I could come up with a musically satisfying composition for the more limited two-octave range. The result was "Song of Jubilation," a lively piece that is suitable for worship, concert or festival settings. It can be challenging and enjoyable for any two-octave handbell choir with eight or more ringers.

Introduction

The composition of handbell choirs is perhaps more diverse than that of any other musical ensemble. This is especially true of two-octave choirs. A two-octave handbell choir could be composed of 8- to 10-year-olds who have never held bells before, experienced adult four-in-hand ringers, senior citizens with varied musical backgrounds, bright high school students with excellent musical training, physically disabled persons of all ages, or more likely, some interesting combination of the above. The wonderful accessibility of handbell music to virtually anyone who can hold a bell is one of the most exciting things surrounding the advent of handbell choirs in our churches and schools.

Handbell literature at its best is quite versatile, and a study plan for any particular handbell piece must try to address the wide diversity of groups that will be rehearsing and performing the music.

Bell Assignment Chart

This chart offers suggested bell assignments for choirs of 8, 10 or 12 ringers. One could combine or divide different positions to accommodate the number of ringers in the choir.

Position	8 Ringers	10 Ringers	12 Ringers
1	G4	G4	G4
2	A ^b 4, A4	A ^b 4, A4	A ^b 4, A4
3	B ^b 4, B4, C6	B ^b 4, B4, C5	B ^b 4, B4, C5
4	D5, E ^b 5, E5, [F5]*	D5, E ^b 5, E5	D5, E ^b 5, E5
5	F5, (F#5), G ^b 5, G5	F5, (F#5)	F5, (F#5)
6	A ^b 5, A5, B ^b 5, B5, [G5]**	(G ^b 5), G5	G ^b 5, G5
7	C6, C#6, D6	A ^b 5, A5, B ^b 5, B5	A ^b 5, A5
8	E ^b 6, E6, F6, (F#6, G ^b 6), G6	C6, C#6, D6	B ^b 5, B5
9		E ^b 6, E6, F6 (F#6)	C6, C#6, D6
10		(G ^b 6), G6	E ^b 6, E6
11			F6, (F#6)
12			(G ^b 6), G6

*Pos. 4 plays F5 in m. 46

**Pos 6 plays G5 in mm. 4, 8, 22-27, 37, 50, 54.

NOTE: In choirs with 8 ringers, Position 8 requires an experienced four-in-hand ringer.

The Study Plan

This study plan has four main objectives, each with progressive steps that can be taken to reach the objective. Work on some part of each objective at every rehearsal. The capabilities of the individual choir will dictate the rate and degree of mastery of the four objectives.

Ringers can benefit by studying the form of the piece and discovering how their individually assigned bells are part of the whole.

1. Talk through the form very briefly with the ringers. The form of "Song of Jubilation" is AABA:
A1 (mm. 40-20) introduces the melody.
A2 (mm. 23-38) repeats the melody an octave lower, plucked.
B (mm. 39-50) is the contrasting section.
A1 (mm. 51-66) goes back to the original melody.
2. Discuss some aspects of the structure of "Song of Jubilation:"
 - a. The song is in the key of C minor. Discuss the different feeling of major and minor. How can a minor melody be a happy little tune? How could it be played differently to feel more like minor?
 - b. A four measure introduction sets up a repeated harmonic pattern in the lower range.
 - c. Section B is a sequence made up of three quick key changes, beginning in Eb major, the relative major key, and ending back in C minor.
 - d. There is a short coda added in mm. 67-71.
3. Discover form within form in the piece:
 - a. There is a secondary AABA form suggested by the four phrases within the A section (complete with a mini-sequence in the third phrase).
 - b. The transition between A1 and A2 in mm. 21-22 is the last two measures of A1 repeated an octave lower.
 - c. The third phrase of section B serves as a transition back to the original melody.
 - d. The coda imitates the beginning of section B.

Objective II: Learning the Piece

The main portion of the first few rehearsal sessions will be used to learn the notes and rhythms, and work on bell changes, key changes and page turns. To introduce the piece, play it on the piano so that ringers can hear the overall sound.

1. The indicated tempo of "Song of Jubilation" is pretty lively. Begin rehearsing the piece under tempo and gradually increase the tempo as ringers become familiar with the piece. For the first play-through, establish a beat well under tempo and have the ringers sight-read the piece. If playing the entire piece seems like too much all at once for the choir, divide it into smaller sections.
2. The difficulty of keeping eighth notes steady and accurate in 6/8 time is always a challenge. It is especially tricky in the melody line of "Song of Jubilation" because of the quarter, eighth repeated note pattern. Suggest that ringers keep the pulse of the eighth notes going in their heads throughout the piece. Work on this by having ringers play the piece (or short sections of the piece) as a steady eighth note pulse is tapped out with pencil or baton.
3. The succession of quick key changes in mm. 39-50 combined with the page turn create potential trouble spots in these measures. Give the ringers an opportunity to mark bell changes and/or make other notes in their music. Practice playing through this section several times until the page turn and key changes are smooth. It may be necessary for some ringers to memorize a few notes before or after the page turn.

Objective III: Mastering Techniques

"Song of Jubilation" provides many opportunities for ringers to become more proficient with their handbell techniques.

1. Ask ringers to ring their bells with a quick snap of the wrist within a small circular motion as they play mm. 4-20 and mm. 51-66. Use these same passages to concentrate on damping cleanly and precisely. If bells are rung one after the other, the first bell should be damped just as the other is rung, so that there is no break between notes.
2. Keeping the rhythm steady and precise will be the biggest challenge of the plucked melody line in mm. 23-38. Rehearse the melody line only, while the other ringers clap or tap the eighth note pulse. When the plucked line begins to sound secure, add the harmonic chords above the melody.
3. *Martellato* chords, as in section B (mm. 39-46) and the coda (mm. 67-71) are always fun to play, but they can make a piece sound messy if they

are not well executed. Train ringers to listen to themselves: Do the *martellato* chords sound “plunk, plunk plunk” or “pa-lunk, pa-lunk, pa-lunk”? Make the chords crisp and precise by having ringers hold their bells parallel to the table and an inch or two above it, thrusting the full length of the bell into the table (as opposed to a hammer-like motion with just the lip of the bell hitting the table). Work on the coda to achieve the humor in the punctuated, abrupt ending.

Objective IV: Interpreting the Piece

Ringers should be encouraged to play the piece “musically” from the very first reading. As the notes and rhythms are mastered, more rehearsal time can be allotted to interpretation.

1. “Song of Jubilation” should be played with great energy and enthusiasm. It brings to mind images of children dancing or skipping about in celebration or joyful praise. Correctly interpreting the piece would almost certainly guarantee a sense of enjoyment from the ringers and smiles of pleasure from the listeners. Encourage the ringers to enter into the spirit of the piece.
2. Consider the dynamics and phrasing of the melody line. Have the ringers express the natural rise and fall of the first phrase (mm. 5-8) musically on the bells by creating a subtle crescendo and decrescendo that follow the phrase. The dynamics of the second phrase (mm. 9-12) should also mimic the melody line, with a very slight crescendo throughout. The third phrase (mm. 13-16) builds in intensity toward the first note of m. 17, and the fourth phrase (mm. 17-20) rises and falls like the first. This same melody line is heard an octave lower in mm. 23-38. Despite the fact that it is plucked, the same phrasing and dynamic interpretation are possible. Work on these concepts when isolating this plucked melody to help ringers learn it (see Objective III, step 2). Measures 51-66 are the same as mm. 4-20, and can be interpreted musically the same way.
3. The repeated two-measure harmonic pattern that introduces the piece (mm. 1-2, 3-4) is also a phrase that has its own dynamic pattern of rising and falling. Repeat this pattern with ringers until they can play it very smoothly and evenly with a sense of continual ebb and flow. Harmonic phrasing is also important in the chords above

the plucked melody line. The natural rise and fall of the chords (mm. 22-25, 27-28, 35-37) dictate the phrasing here, too.

4. The final step in interpretation is putting all the parts of the piece back together again, and hearing and feeling the overall effect. All of the different sections of the piece must complement and flow into each other, and the tempo should remain steady throughout. Ringers should be confident and comfortable with their parts, and ready and eager to perform the piece.

Conclusion

The capabilities of individual choirs will dictate how much of each objective can be covered. More advanced groups may be able to master them all in three or four rehearsals, whereas beginning choirs might not progress beyond the first one or two steps of each. Either experience can be considered positive and successful. Whatever the make-up or expertise of the choir, the “Song of Jubilation” can be instrumental in furthering the musical education of the ringers, and a lot of fun for them to play, as well. □



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