

Original Chime Unit

Created by Barb Walsh

EQUIPMENT NEEDED:

3 Octave Choirchimes	3-ring binder
Table – minimum of 18 feet	Music Books
Same amount of foam pad for top of table	1 floor music stand
Fabric to cover foam pad	Charts

PREPARATION:

In order to have the first choirchime class be successful, directors must prepare both themselves and the students. This preparation will allow the rehearsal to flow much more smoothly and will help the students and director feel as if they have accomplished something musical together.

STUDENTS:

A general music teacher in the public school will have a chance to prepare the ringers before the first rehearsal. In previous grades, the students should have learned some basic music concepts. Of course, if they are not reinforced constantly, these concepts will be forgotten. Any type of music skill game would be good for preparing the students to play choirchimes. Skills/concepts that should be reinforced include knowing music notation such as a grand staff, measure, bar line, time signature, and being able to read notes on both the treble and bass clef staff. Students should know not only what to call these items, but what their functions are. Reading rhythms is perhaps the most important skill the students need to understand, even more than the letter names of the notes on the staff. In addition to knowing note values, students need to know how to count each note and where it lies within a measure.

Ringin' Basics, by Beverly Simpson, has an excellent chapter on helping students to count. Listed below are some of her ideas on how to begin students with counting.

“Count...in groups of 4, out loud, together. Look below. Focus your eyes on each number as you count:

1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4.

Use a vertical line instead of a comma to separate the groups of 4:

1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 |

Time is ‘measured out’ in music. In this case, we are ‘measuring out’ 16 (counts) in groups of 4. The vertical line is a bar line; the space between bar lines is called a measure.

|--measure--|--measure--|--measure--|--measure--||
bar bar bar bar double bar

A double bar is used at the end instead of a period. A few pages later, Simpson goes on to the beat placement within a measure.

“Be aware of where the beats are located within the measure. What beat would each of the following be, judging from its placement within the measure?”

- A. |__X| B. |X__| C. |__X_| D. |_X_|

From this introduction, the chime director can go on to other counting exercises to be clapped and counted such as:


| 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 ||

As a variation to clapping, percussion instruments can be used. Teaching the students how to count now, without having to worry about which chime plays will save time later on. These exercises will be used again later, but in conjunction with note reading and chime playing.

TEACHER

Visiting rehearsals and workshops. Since the teacher will need to be a good model, the teacher/director should feel comfortable ringing and dampening the chimes. If not, practice should be done on the school’s set. Better yet, the director should try to attend a few choirchime rehearsals. After ringing with another chime choir, the prospective director will have a chance to talk to the experienced director about beginning a chime choir. Reading some of the recommended method books in Appendix B will also help to prepare a prospective director. If there are any choirchime workshops, the prospective director should attend them. They are informative and motivational.

TABLE SET-UP

After the goals for the first rehearsal have been set, the director needs to know how to set up the equipment. The tables should be in a straight line. If the tables are excessively long, putting them in a U or V shape will work better, but the ringers need to know if there is a gap between the tables so that the chimes are not put there. There should be enough room behind the tables to allow for *tower rings* (see definition of terms) and extra student “waiters”. The foam pads should go on the table tops with the covers over them.

CHIME SET-UP

Next, the chimes are set up in “keyboard order”, meaning the lowest chimes are on the director’s right (the ringers’ left), ascending chromatically. To help identify the “black keys”, the director

should place the chromatic chimes slightly closer to the director's side of the table. For beginners, chimes that are not going to be used can be placed forward on the table out of the way so that there will be less confusion. When getting the chimes out of the case, care should be taken to not hit the chimes together. There should be enough room between chimes on the table to allow for elbow-room between the ringers. Clappers and letter/octave designation should be facing up.

MISCELLANEOUS SET-UP

If sheet music instead of charts is going to be used, the music stands/notebooks should be placed forward on the table between two diatonic bells (i/e/ between G4 and A4). The notebooks and music should be numbered so that marked music will stay in the correct folder; reading another ringer's writing can be very confusing. A pencil should be laid next to the music. If a choirchime needs to be adjusted, please check with the Music Office. After all the equipment is set up, the chime director should list on the chalkboard the order of music and/topics to be discussed. By having a list of music for each session on the board, the director allows the ringers to put their music and bells in order and to make any marks in the music while the other ringers are getting ready.

CHIME ASSIGNMENTS

Along with the order of music, the director should allocate a portion of the board or chart to a grand staff with all the choirchime notes and names in the corresponding lines and spaces. Under each note, a student's name should be written showing the student his/her assigned chimes. This staff will help students remember where their notes are from one rehearsal to the next. Chime assignments should always be made **before** the rehearsal and careful thought given to them. Success often depends on the director's ability to assign chimes correctly. Since most students will be playing only one diatonic note along with its corresponding flat or sharp (i.e. G, G^b, G[#]), the problem of assigning chimes is made easier.

Consideration of the basic nature of each chime should be given. The bass chimes (C4-C5) provide the foundation for the music, but there is not much rhythmic variety. These chimes are good for beginning music readers or those who need to develop their coordination skills. The middle chimes (D5-F#5) are the core of the harmony, but are busier than the bass chimes. Often, these chimes are good for beginning music readers with more coordination skills. The treble chimes (G5-C7) are generally responsible for the melody and have more complex rhythms. Music readers, quick learners, and those with good coordination skills will find these chimes the most challenging. The G6-C-7 chimes play less often and are easier to identify on the staff than the other treble chimes. So these chimes are also good for beginners. Size and strength of the student is also a consideration with the bass chimes. Generally, very physical students do well on these chimes.

Unless a change is needed, the director should leave the students on the same chimes until they feel very comfortable with the chime and where its note is on the staff. Rotating chime assignments after a while, especially with alert groups, is a good idea because this will let the

ringers become more facile with the chimes as a whole and will encourage further note reading skills. Because the chimes have different weights and clapper speeds, though, the director should allow the students time to experiment with their new chime first before ringing a piece.

SUGGESTED METHOD

There are endless ways to teach any skill and choirchime ringing is no different. Some choirchime directors use color-coding and some use numbers to begin their chime choirs. The method presented here is just one of the many successful ways to teach a chime choir. The prospective choirchime director should keep the following items in mind when planning and conducting a rehearsal:

GENERAL REHEARSAL OBJECTIVES

1. The director should be consciously aware of the musical concepts and skills that are being reinforced with each rehearsal.
2. The objectives for each rehearsal should be prepared by reviewing the choirchime score for specific problems and skills.
3. The appropriate approach and objectives should be planned prior to each rehearsal.
4. When planning rehearsals, the director should include warm-ups, works nearing performance, sight-reading, and previously performed pieces.
5. The director should choose literature with varying styles, tempi, key and meter signatures, and ringing techniques.
6. The attitude of the director should be enthusiastic and patient. This attitude will allow the students to develop a love of music and self-esteem.

GENERAL REHEARSAL PROCEDURES

1. Specific rules and consequences should be posted and enforced by the director.
2. Care should be taken when handling the chimes; they should not be hit against each other.
3. The chimes can be wiped off with a soft cloth and alcohol solution as necessary.
4. The director should count out loud, including measure numbers when conducting a *new piece*.
5. Conductors should insist that the ringers watch them while they are conducting.
6. Ringers should be allowed to mark their notes and counting on a copy of the music. Over-marking and circling the notes should be discouraged by the director.
7. When using class charts, the director should point at the chart to help keep the ringers' eyes on the correct spot.
8. Because chime playing is very visual, the choir should practice lifting their chimes at the same time as the conductor lifts his/her hands. Ringers should also have good posture and pleasant facial expressions.

THE FIRST REHEARSAL

By the end of the first rehearsal, the students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate care and handling of the chimes.
2. Ring and dampen the chimes correctly.
3. Perform a melody from a letter chart.
4. Know how the octave numbering system works.
5. Follow a conductor.

At this point, the director should explain how the chimes are set up and demonstrate how the chimes sound going up a C scale. The director should show the class the size difference between the C4, C5, C6 and C7 chimes and ask the class how and why they think the chimes sound different.

The octave numbering system should be explained at this time because this will confuse the students later on when counting out rhythms. For example, students may think the G4 chime always rings on the fourth beat because of the number four after the letter G. The director should demonstrate good ringing technique without a chime and have the class imitate the procedure. The process of ringing a choirchime is as follows:

1. The Grip:

The hand is positioned below the designation label in a comfortable, balanced placement for the individual ringer. The thumb and forefinger should be in a circle, completely surrounding the chime tube. The remaining fingers grip naturally. (See example.) This places the hand in a position similar to hold a baseball bat.

2. Hold the chime upright, but tilt it slightly towards the shoulder so that the clapper falls back.
3. Always keep the chime between the waist and shoulder.
4. Begin the ringing stroke by moving the arm down and out in an arc.
5. At the end of the arc, quickly snap the wrist away from the body and return the wrist to its former position immediately.
6. After ringing, lift the chime back toward the shoulder by continuing the circular motion.
7. Allow the chime to ring for its full value, then dampen it by turning the wrist inward and touch the chime to the chest length-wise just below the collarbone.
8. The chime may also be dampened on the foam padding or with the forefinger depending upon the special ringing technique used.

Problems that may arise with ringing a chime are as follows:

1. The students should move their arms in a fluid, circular motion...no “hammer strokes”.
2. When the students snap their wrists, they should think of holding a glass of water that they do not want to spill. This will keep the chime upright.
3. The students should snap their wrists out away from themselves, not toward themselves. It may be necessary to demonstrate next to the student rather than having him/her mirror the director.
4. When the students dampen the chime, it should not be on a necklace, button, or other hard surface.
5. The director should make sure the students dampen their chimes at the proper time; otherwise, the resulting sound is like a piano with the damper pedal constantly down.

After the students have practiced without the chime, they should be shown the chime assignment chart. In small groups, the students should find their chimes and wait behind their chimes at the table. No student should pick up his chime at this time. If your class is large and there are not enough chimes for each student will become “waiters”. The “waiters” should stand behind, but out of the way, of the ringers.

When all of the students are behind the chime table, they should try the ringing procedure a few more times without the chimes. If any ringers are too close or are not ringing straight, the director should correct them at this time. When they are ringing correctly without the chimes, the ringers should be instructed to pick up their assigned chimes. The students should then ring with the director in slow motion. Even though all the notes in the C scale will sound at the same time, the resulting sound mass will be pleasant. The director and students should try ringing a few more times in slow motion, with the director correcting any problems that may arise.

Next, the students should ring rhythm patterns. The patterns should begin with whole notes, then half, and then quarter notes. After this, the students should try ringing and counting rhythm patterns that have been previously practiced by clapping (see pages 2 & 3).

At this point, the director may notice that the ringers are not playing all at the same time. This problem may be due to the director’s conducting technique. The ringers should know where the “point” of the beat is and the director should include a preparatory beat (Allured, 1978, p. 2). Practicing this “point can be done by conducting with the right hand and holding the left hand, palm up, where count one is in the conducting pattern. Whenever the right hand comes down to count one, it should audibly strike the left hand. This precision exercise is easier to do loudly, so the director should begin with forte and work down to piano (Allured, 1978, p. 2).

The students will be anxious to ring by themselves, so an ascending and descending C scale should be tried. Other than ringing correctly the students should work on dampening “the exact second” the next student is to ring. Also, work should be done on matching dynamics with the ringer on either side. Students should not rush the tempo.

Next the students should try ringing a simple melody such as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” (see Appendix C). Only letters should be on a chart and no differentiation should be made between the different octaves; all the G’s should ring at once to give the students confidence. The conductor should point at the chart and not the ringers at this time. If they do well, the director should conduct instead of pointing. Generally, this is the place most classes will end their first rehearsal.

THE SECOND REHEARSAL

At the end of the second rehearsal, the students should be able to:

1. Locate their assigned chimes.
2. Explain what a chord is.
3. Play their chimes on the correct chord when the director holds up a corresponding finger.
4. Play the melody and the accompanying chords at the appropriate time for a lettered and numbered chart.
5. Read and locate the appropriate note on the staff.
6. Play the appropriate notes on the choirchime for the corresponding music.
7. Play whole notes with the correct rhythm.

At the beginning of the second rehearsal, chime assignments and rules should be reviewed. When the students are at the table, ringing technique should again be reviewed without the chimes, then with the chimes using the rhythm patterns. At this time, the director should explain what a chord is to the students. Directors should tell their students that each chord will be given a number. The I chord (designated by the director holding up one finger) will be played by the C, E, and G chimes; the IV chord (designated by the director holding up four fingers) will be played by the F, A, and C chimes; the V chord (designated by the director holding up five fingers) will be played by the G, B, and D chimes. This is the beginning of teaching chord structure and cadences. After synchronizing the chords, the students should be shown the chords to “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” and try playing through the chords. Next, the students should play from a chart with both the melody (in letters) and chords in Roman numerals properly lined up under the melody. The bass chimes will play the chords and the treble chimes will play the melody. Switching the melody and chord parts should be done after each group knows its part. The B chimes should stay on the chords since they do not play on the melody.

After this initial success, the students should draw a large chart of chord progressions in whole notes on the grand staff with counting underneath (see Appendix C). The director should help the students locate their notes in each measure and remind them that a whole note begins on count one and ends after count four. The students should play through this chart several times, then be introduced to the same chord progression in half notes, then quarter notes. After the students have mastered this they should be ready for their own individual music on the table. “Opus I-IV” in Beverly Simpson’s Ringings Basics are good beginning pieces.