

**VocalEssence & American Composers Forum
2010 Welcome Christmas Carol Contest
for chorus & handbells**

Scoring for Handbells

When scoring for handbells, please incorporate the structure that is used in handbell compositions. For example, each measure is numbered, rather than at the beginning of each system; middle C (except when paired for melodic or rhythmic continuity) always appears in the bass staff, etc. The latest versions of Finale have handbell templates available and noteheads to differentiate between handchimes and handbells.

Octave Ranges for Handbells

3 Octaves: C4 – C7

4 Octaves: G3 – G7

5 Octaves: C3 – C8

For point of reference: C4 is notated as second space bass staff. C5 is middle C, but always notated in the bass staff, except in the limited case of rhythmic, melodic or harmonic exceptions.

- G3 is notated on first line of the bass staff.
- C3 is notated two ledger lines below the bass staff.
- C7 is second ledger line above the treble staff.
- G7 is fourth ledger line above the treble staff.

Styles for Handbells

- Handbells can be treated as a significant accompaniment “voice”
- Handbells can be treated as a separate “voice” to the choral SATB
- Handbells can provide accompaniment and harmony to the unison voice
- Handbells can be the unison voice to the SATB harmonies
- Handbells can be featured in interlude, bridges and/or transitions restating original thematic material or introducing a complimentary idea to the choral score
- Handbell part can be integral to the choral score and does not stand alone
- Handbell part can be written in such a way to be marketed as a stand alone piece
- Handbell part should be of interest to the ringers as well as accompaniment to the “voices”

Difficulty Levels

The American Guild of English Handbell Ringers (AGEHR) established the Handbell Notation Guide several years ago, which helps establish the difficulty, and thereby accessibility “ranking” to handbell choirs. Level 3 would incorporate all the criteria for Level 1 and Level 2 in addition to that of Level 3. From the “Handbell and Handchime Notation, Handbell and Handchimes Difficulty Level System, Solo and Ensemble Notation,” The AGEHR, Inc., 2006 Edition.

Level 1:

1. Meters: 4/4, C (common time), 3/4 and 2/4
2. Notes and/or Rest Values: whole, dotted-half, quarter

3. Rhythmic Elements: no subdivision of beats, simple use of ties
4. Techniques: ring, shoulder damp, SK, TD, echo martellato, Sw, RT - all with adequate preparation time
5. Handbell/handchimes changes: none (no accidentals)
6. Dynamic Levels: all from pp to ff in homophonic style (all ringing at the same level) with limited use of crescendo or diminuendo
7. Tempo: slow to moderate

Level 2 (Level 1 Criteria plus):

1. Meters: 2/2, Cut time, 3/2, and simple mixed meters of 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4
2. Notes and or Rest Values: eighths, the dotted-quarter followed by an eighth, simple combinations of eighths and quarters
3. Rhythmic Elements: syncopation - simple patterns such as eighth-quarter-eighth, anacrusis - pick-up notes or upbeats and their effect on the final measure
4. Techniques: table damp, Pl, martellato-lift, malleting, and any combination of two different techniques with adequate preparation time
5. Handbell/Handchimes Changes: limited number of changes per ringer with adequate preparation time
6. Dynamic levels: crescendo and diminuendo, polyphonic style with simple dynamic contrasts (such as two voices having different dynamic levels)
7. Tempo: slow to moderate

Level 3 (Level 1 & 2 Criteria plus):

1. Meters: 6/8, 3/4 (in one pulse per measure), 3/8, 9/8, 12/8 6/4
2. Notes and or Rest Value: sixteenth, dotted eighth and sixteenth note patterns, triplet
3. Rhythmic Elements: syncopation
4. Techniques: ring and damp sixteenth note patterns
5. Handbell/Handchime Changes: moderate number of changes per ringer with adequate preparation
6. Dynamic Levels: accents, more variety in dynamic levels
7. Tempo: slow to fast, some changes of tempo within the work.