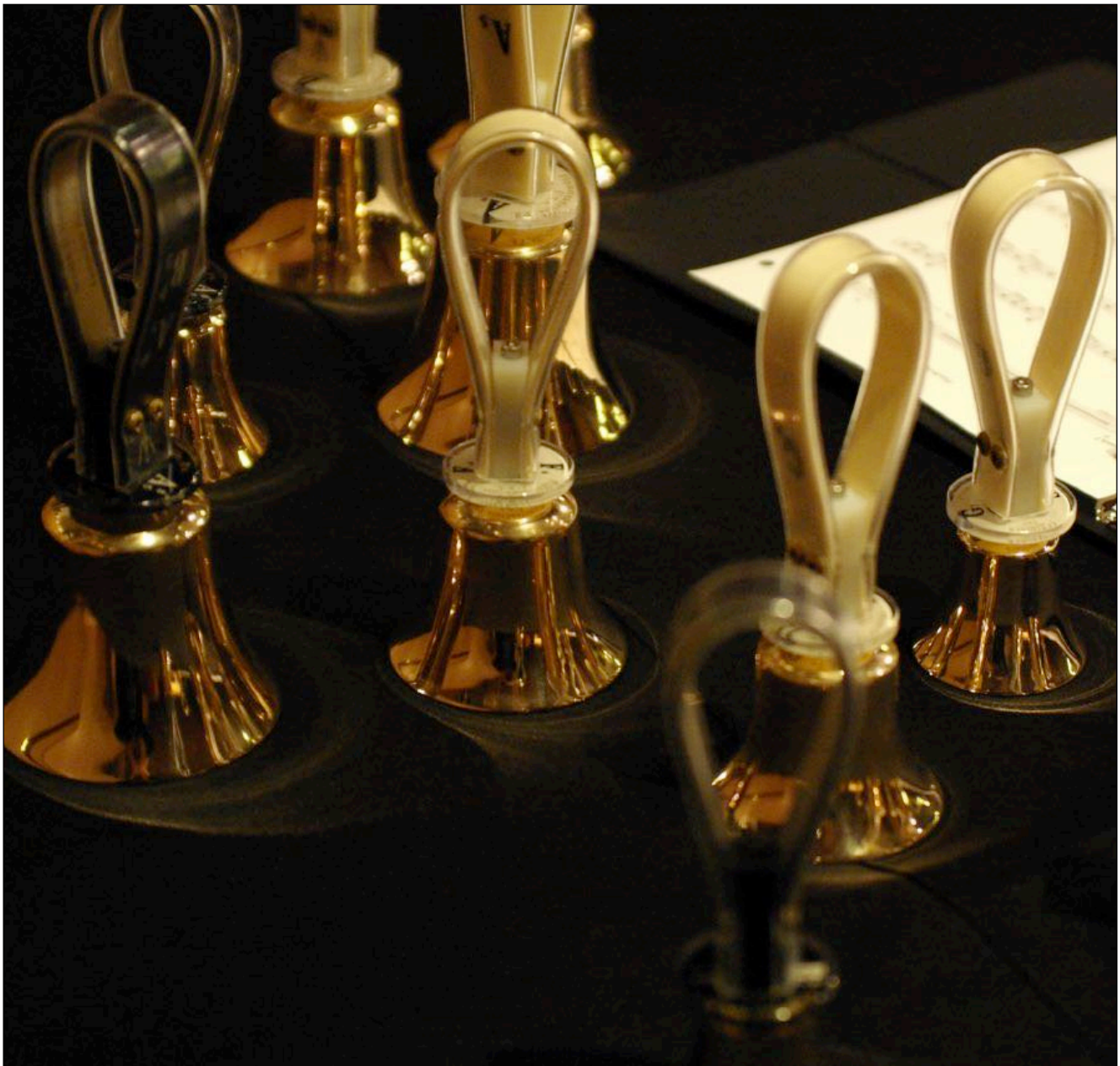

There's More Than One Way to

An Overview of Handbell Assignment Strategies

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Introduction

Over the course of handbell history, directors have tried different strategies to assign bells to their ringers with various goals in mind. Some strategies keep everybody busy all the time, while others allow for easier part-reading, and still others concentrate on assigning musical lines to as few people as possible. Add to this the desire to keep advanced ringers engaged while enabling beginning ringers to learn at an appropriate pace, or to keep the flow of a concert uninterrupted by excessive instrument changes, and one can see why there are several strategies available! This class will take a look at some of the most common strategies.

ALLURED

(For more information, please see: Allured, Donald E. *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*. Nashville, TN: Broadman/Genevox, 1992. Republished by LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, TN. 2000.)

Don Allured has been called “The Father of American Handbells”. In the 70s and 80s, he travelled throughout the US teaching handbell ringers new techniques and directors new methods of teaching ringers how to play the instrument. Along the way, he developed the assignment strategy that is perhaps most widely used throughout the US and abroad. It is based on each ringer having two consecutive notes on the staff, plus the related accidentals. This strategy resulted in each ringer having a “space note” in their left hand and a “line note” in their right, which Allured believed helped ringers without prior musical experience learn to read music more easily.

When he first developed this strategy, most handbell groups only had 3 octaves of bells, from C4-C7. His strategy used 11 ringers to cover those bells:

ALLURED ASSIGNMENT FOR 3 OCTAVES:

C4-C7, 11 ringers

Part 1: C4 D4

Part 5: D5 E5

Part 9: E6 F6

Part 2: E4 F4

Part 6: F5 G5

Part 10: G6 A6

Part 3: G4 A4

Part 7: A5 B5

Part 11: B6 C7

Part 4: B4 C5

Part 8: C6 D6

Eventually, bell choirs started increasing the number of octaves they played by adding bells to the top and bottom ends of their bell sets. Allured expanded his assignment strategy to accommodate them.

ALLURED ASSIGNMENT FOR 4 OCTAVES:

G3-G7, 12 ringers		
Part 1: C4 D4 (Share B3 with Part 12)	Part 5: D5 E5	Part 10: G6 A6 G7
Part 2: E4 F4	Part 6: F5 G5	Part 11: B6 C7
Part 3: G4 A4	Part 7: A5 B5	Part 12: G3 A3 B3 (Share B3 with Part 1)
Part 4: B5 C5	Part 8: C6 D6 D7	
	Part 9: E6 F6 E7 F7	

ALLURED ASSIGNMENT FOR 5 OCTAVES:

C3-C8, 14 ringers		
Part 0: D3 F3	Part 4: B5 C5	Part 10: G6 A6 G7 A7
Part 00: C3 E3	Part 5: D5 E5	Part 11: B6 C6 B7 C8
Part 1: C4 D4 (Share B3 with Part 12)	Part 6: F5 G5	Part 12: G3 A3 B3 (Share B3 with Part 1)
Part 2: E4 F4	Part 7: A5 B5	
Part 3: G4 A4	Part 8: C6 D6 D7	
	Part 9: E6 F6 E7 F7	

The Allured assignment strategy can be easily adapted for fewer ringers by re-assigning the top positions. Note that the numbering of parts remains constant, even if some parts are vacant. Many modifications are possible; the following are merely examples:

MODIFIED ALLURED ASSIGNMENT FOR 3 OCTAVES:

C4-C7, 9 ringers		
Part 1: C4 D4	Part 4: B4 C5	Part 7: A5 B5 B6
Part 2: E4 F4	Part 5: D5 E5	Part 8: C6 D6 C7
Part 3: G4 A4	Part 6: F5 G5	Part 9: E6 F6 G6 A6

MODIFIED ALLURED ASSIGNMENT FOR 4 OCTAVES:

G3-G7, 10 ringers		
Part 1: C4 D4 (Share B3 with Part 12)	Part 5: D5 E5	Part 11: Vacant
Part 2: E4 F4	Part 6: F5 G5 F7 G7	Part 12: G3 A3 B3 (Share B3 with Part 1)
Part 3: G4 A4	Part 7: A5 B5 B6 E7	
Part 4: B4 C5	Part 8: C6 D6 C7 D7	
	Part 9: E6 F6 G6 A6	
	Part 10: Vacant	

MODIFIED ALLURED ASSIGNMENT FOR 5 OCTAVES:

C3-C8, 12 ringers		
Part 1: C4 D4 (Share B3 with Part 2)	Part 3: G4 A4	Part 9: E6 F6 E7 F7
Part 2: E4 F4 (Share B3 with Part 1)	Part 4: B4 C5	Part 10: G6 A6 G7 A7
	Part 5: D5 E5	Part 11: Vacant
	Part 6: F5 G5 C8	Part 12: Vacant
	Part 7: A5 B5 B6 B7	Part 00: C3 E3 G3
	Part 8: C6 D6 C7 D7	Part 0: D3 F3 A3

IVEY

(For more information, please see: Ivey, Robert. *Handbell Assignment Book: The Eight-ten System*. Carol Stream, IL: Agape, 1993.)

Robert Ivey modified the Allured system to accommodate fewer ringers as well as ringers of varying abilities. The parts remain the same from C3 up through G5 (Parts 1-6, plus 12, 0, & 00); with parts 7-10 changed as follows:

IVEY ASSIGNMENT FOR 5 OCTAVES:

C3-C8, 13 ringers

Part 7: A5 A6 A7 B7

Part 8: B5 C6 B6 C7

Part 9: D6 E6 D7 E7

Part 10: F6 G6 F7 G7

Part 11: Vacant

Note: C8 "floats" between ringers

Parts 7-10 no longer follow the "left hand = space, right hand = line" rule of the Allured system. This requires ringers who are accustomed to the Allured system to make some mental adjustments, but Ivey felt that the adjustment was easily made and resulted in more mentally flexible ringers.

HILTY

(For more information, please see: Hilty, Everett J. "Handbell Distribution - an Alternative System." *Overtone: The Official Journal of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers* 32-03. May/June (1986).)

Everett Hilty found in his experience that using a two diatonic note assignment strategy often resulted in the top and bottom ringers having little to do, and thus quitting the bell choir out of sheer boredom. He experimented with assigning bells according to how often they played in a particular piece of music, with the assignments varying with each piece. When his group started attending massed ringing festivals, he found that such a strategy resulted in his group taking an excessive amount of time re-arranging bells between pieces, thus drastically slowing the pace of the festival concert, irritating the other participants and the conductor, and embarrassing his ringers. In order to balance the need to keep his ringers busy, while minimizing the set up time between pieces, he developed a strategy in which each ringer would play a "quartet" of bells - bass, tenor, alto, and soprano. He tried to assign each ringer two "busy" and two "not so busy" bells so that everyone could be involved in each piece of music, staying engaged without being overwhelmed, no matter what key the piece was in, or how thin or thick the musical texture.

HILTY ASSIGNMENT FOR 5 OCTAVES:
C3-C8, 13 ringers

Part 1: F#3 G4 G#5 A6 A7
Part 2: G3 G#4 A5 A#6 A#7
Part 3: G#3 A4 A#5 B6 B7
Part 4: F3 F#4 G5 G#6 G#7
Part 5: C#3 D4 D#5 E6 F7
Part 6: B3 C5 C#6 D7
Part 7: D3 D#4 E5 F6 F#7

Part 8: C4, C#5, D6, D#7
Part 9: A#3 B4 C6 C#7
Part 10: C3 C#4 D5 D#6 E7
Part 11: D#3 E4 F5 F#6 G7
Part 12: A3 A#4 B5 C7 C8
Part 13: E3 F4 F#5 G6

While Allured's and Ivey's strategies assigned accidentals according to letter name - meaning that D# was played by the ringer with the D, while E-flat was played by the ringer with the E, Hilty's strategy explicitly assigns each pitch to particular ringers. If a ringer had a C# bell, they were also responsible for the enharmonic D-flat. This strategy spreads out the work among all ringers more or less equally, regardless of the key of the piece or its range.

Hilty believed that his strategy made it easier for ringers to distinguish between their various bells quickly due to the differing sizes of bells in their assignment. He also believed that it helped ringers develop as musicians by requiring them to read the entire score, rather than just two adjacent notes on a single staff. He acknowledged that some "idiosyncracies" existed, such as the difficulty of ringing two bells of vastly different sizes (such as Part 1's F#3 and A7) at the same time, or the loss of the visual effect of scalar passages running up and down the table. However, he felt that his strategy resulted in a more "balanced" sound since both bass and treble notes sounded from the entire table rather than being isolated to one end or the other.



KATSIGNING

(for more information, please see: Howell, KatRyn. "Alternative Assigning." *Campanile Workshop Notes*. Ed. Rima Greer. Second Revised ed. Los Angeles: Above the Line, 2000, 2006. 15-18. ISBN 1-891803-01-8.)

KatSigning is a strategy of assigning developed by KatRyn Howell of Campanile, a 6-member professional "handbell percussion theater" ensemble based in Los Angeles. Her goals were to make sure that the assignments were challenging, but musically playable, and to make sure that nobody got bored.

This method may be used for assigning for groups larger or smaller than 6 ringers, or used as an adjunct to one of the above methods to help a group cover more bells or to take pressure off of more inexperienced or less-skilled ringers and challenge more advanced ringers and keep them engaged.

The distinctive feature of this assignment strategy is that the distribution of bells is different for each piece of music. In order for a group to play more than one piece of music, the bells must be re-distributed between ringers for each piece. This may be an unacceptable use of time in a festival setting, but may be managed in a regular concert setting by the use of narration, audio-visual aids, dance, drama, or similar things. If a group decides to use this strategy, they should be sure to take this into account.

Since each assignment is unique to a piece of music, and thus infinite combinations are possible, it would be impossible to list the assignments for various numbers of octaves. However, as an example, I have used this strategy to assign bells for 7 ringers for "Light of Peace" (Bigam, Veronica and Derek K. Hakes. From the Top Publishing, 2007. (3-6 octaves. AGEHR Level III. Code. 20178)).

EXAMPLE KATSIGNING ASSIGNMENT FOR 5+ OCTAVES:

G2-C8, 7 ringers

NOTE: all pitches are absolute (D#=E-flat)

Part 1: C4 F4

[share D4 with Part 2]

Part 2: C#4 D#4 G4 A4

[share D4 with Part 1]

Part 3: G#4 A#4 C5 C#5 D5 G5

Part 4: D#5 E5 F5 G#5 A5 A#6 A#7

[share A#5 & C8 with Part 5]

Part 5: E6 G6 G#6 A6 D#7 G7 A7

[share D#6 & D6 with Part 6]

[share A#5 & C8 with Part 4]

Part 6: E4 C6 C#6 F6 C7 D7 F7

[share D#6 & D6 with Part 5]

Part 7: All bells G2-B3, played via rack or tree. (Optionally, this part may be left out.)

Conclusion

There are a number of different strategies for assigning handbells to various numbers of ringers. No strategy is objectively “better” than any other strategy for all situations. Your choice of strategy should be based on how to achieve the best musical result with the personnel you have in your ensemble, with an eye to the availability of instruments and equipment to your group.

