

## Making an Inclusive Ringing Environment a Reality for Your Ensemble.

Thoughts by Ellie Hodder

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## HOW I LEARNED FROM A MIDDLE SCHOOLER

- I was asked by a sixth grader which of my 4 sections was my favorite. I replied, "You are. You're here!"
- That's the secret.
- When you can fill your toolbox, you have the ability to be engaged with whichever ensemble you are directing in that moment.
- Things that never occurred to you suddenly appear as miraculous choices to solve a ringer's (aka yours as director) challenge.
- Pre-COVID our ensembles were a bit more stable in number and commitment but the COVID years "beat us up" in ways that are challenging to overcome.
- Now, instead of noticing what Ringer A can do, we have the opportunity to ask ourselves "what can I learn, what modifications make sense so that Ringer A can be a fully contributing member or the ensemble as they used to be?!"

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## CAN YOU SEE WHO'S HERE?

- Physical challenges are a part of every stage of life. Can you see clearly? Can you stand for an hour? Can you see your music clearly all the time? Can you identify the little dot “over there” as the director?

### SOME OPTIONS

- Stools for seating for whoever needs one
- Risers
- Special stands



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## TURNING OBSTACLES INTO STEPPING STONES: VISION ISSUES

- If you purchased the music, you may make an enlargement for the ringer with vision issues.
- You can teach your ringer how to color code their music so they can keep up with their part at your speed!
  - Cut the score into individual pages and insert into sheet protectors.
  - Use markers (rather than highlighters) to mark the notes

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## AGE?

- It's not about age unless it's about age!
- If your voice says, "all God's children got a place in the choir" then, your heart has to figure out how to make that a reality!" (Harder than it sounded!)



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 Senior Chime Choir. Yes, they are older!



Early 30's to 80. Typical volunteer choir.

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## HANDBELLS ARE A MOTOR SKILL

- Can we agree that once we pass beginner-beginner stage, we look increasingly less at the handle of the bell or chime to identify the one we must pick up and ring?
- "Finding the bell" is increasingly "knowing" where it lives on the table before us and trusting that we will reach for the right spot (aka right bells!)

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## DECREASE THE DISTANCE FROM THEIR EYES TO THEIR MUSIC

- Risers/Music Stands: Acrylic Risers/ IKEA Wire shoe racks



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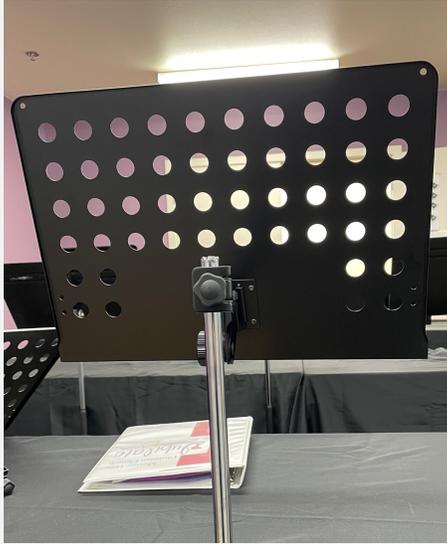
## SPECIAL MUSIC STAND

- The older Peery tables had acrylic holders that bent in towards the table bringing the music closer to the musician. The manufacturer closed many years ago. There are stands that can accommodate a platform with that angle.
- STAGG Music Stand Adapter. Remove the existing platform from an existing stand. The new platform attaches to the post and comes over the table roughly 10-inches.

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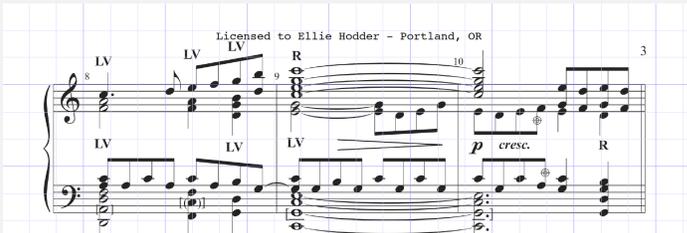
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# PRACTICE "WHERE'S MY BELL?"

- This is especially useful for ringers struggling to break the habit of looking down most of the time in order to find the correct bell.
- Look at score, touch the correct bell



Impressions on "Balm in Gilead," Kurt Meyer  
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# ALSO A USEFUL PRACTICE WITH 4IH



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## WHEELCHAIRS

- Ringers who need a wheelchair or walker need a size appropriate place at the ringing table.
- Meet Julie G. 4'8" tall, pre-COVID able to move around with 2 canes and manipulate herself onto a stool.
- If a ringer needs a wheelchair, ringing at a normal height table will require most folks to ring with their elbows at at the height of the table which is likely to cause shoulder issues. AND it's hard to see one's music or turn pages from below the table top.
- SOLUTION?.....

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## AN ADJUSTABLE TABLE!

- Here's Julie at her table. A 4' adjustable height, foldable one. She can roll up to her table, set up her book and be a valued member of the choir!



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## HOW IT WORKS IN CHURCH

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## SENIORS (& ANYWHERE ELSE IT HELPS A RINGER TO SUCCEED)

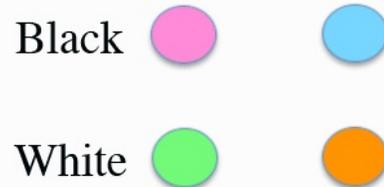


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## ELLIE'S COLOR MARKING SYSTEM



ELLIE'S "GO-TO" FOR SENIORS. AUTOMATIC FOR ANYONE WHO ASKS.

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## OTHER TOOLS FOR MARKING MUSIC

- Tyvek bands are available online in multiple colors and can be cut to fit the diameter of the bell/chime.
- Colored rubber bands are also available online. A "lifetime supply" is available at a fairly low price. These fit over the bell handle or chime casting.

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## MARKING MUSIC

Turtle Dove, arr. Billy Brandt

- For beginners, a tool on the path to learning reading independence.
- For imperfect vision, a saving tool to help pick my notes out of the crowd!

“Shmeer” for diatonic Notes. “Box” for Sharps/flats.

Anyone with color blindness will struggle with green/blue and orange/pink.

“Box” gives immediate information to grab the accidental

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## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS SENIORS ONLY SETTINGS

### THE SPACE

- Tables set end-to-end (rows)
  - Each ringer has  $\pm 2'$  table space
  - Chairs set such that no one is straddling the table legs
- Lots of room around tables so that folks with canes, walkers, wheelchairs or scooters can easily navigate to their spot and away from the tables.
  - Adequate lighting from fixtures and/or outside windows.
  - Some will also need stand lighting.

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## REMEMBER

- Seniors come to your class for the love of making music, the joy of community and the boost they get from music
- Seniors want to be engaged. If you have more musicians than instrument, **BORROW** more so that everyone can participate.

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## MUSIC BINDERS

- I use easel binders for *each* musician. It's very hard from some people to see music on a stand "over there."
- **PROS:** these are movable on the table to adjust for different focal lengths. They are fairly sturdy and last several years (make sure to ask that all clips and clip flags are removed each week to prevent prematurely breaking the binder.
- **CONS:** They are expensive

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## WHERE DO MUSIC SCORES COME FROM?

- I have had 18-43 musicians each season. Purchasing individual scores for everyone.
  - Reproducible Books
  - Free Music (check online)
  - Arrange for yourself <https://imslp.org> is an excellent source for public domain scores

Since none of my Independent Living Communities are faith based, I always ask before bringing in sacred music. Usually Christmas music is okay.

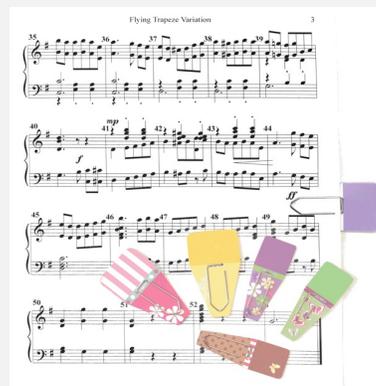
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## TURNING PAGES

- Turning pages can be challenging for fingers
- That may be losing dexterity. Some helpful tools include:
  - Clip flags (office supply store)
  - Mini clothes pins
  - Dog Eared page corners
- CAVEAT: Left in book, these can break
- The binder.



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## WORKING WITH (LEGALLY) COPIED MUSIC

- Music copied from a book can generally be enlarged to 106-108%
- If you can, enlarge scores. Everyone will thank you.
- If you are scoring your own music
  - Enlarge the entire document say 110-120%

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## TEACH . . . ALWAYS

- Musicians of all ages want to learn how to improve
- Be sure to have access to a chalk board or dry erase board
- Counting and pitch are constructs rather than magic for the chosen! Be willing to demystify notation.
- Honor that there are multiple ways to count rhythm. "Pie, pie, apple pie" is as legitimate (functionally) as "one, two, three and , four"
- If you have a preferred system, teach it, use it and be constantly willing to re-explain it.

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## PROPER STROKE & TECHNIQUE

- Demonstrate and practiced how to hold the bell/chime. “My turn, Your turn”
- Play together learning stroke and damping
- Use non-dominant hand in the learning phase when you can
- Instrument away from the shoulder so it can be rung on time more easily that it can at rest
- There’s more than one way to damp!

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## PERFORMANCE

- Performance is a great tool for helping your musicians overcome anxiety.
- Remember your peeps are there for the love of the class. They have low expectations to making it on Broadway by tomorrow.
- If you want to offer a concert and receive significant push-back, give in. Host an Open Rehearsal and invite guests to come sand see how much fun we have each Monday at 10!
- Interact with the audience to take some pressure off
- And periodically call out a measure number just like you would for class.

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## CLOSING THOUGHTS

- You are smart and committed to excellence for all your ensembles.
- You are creative and capable of figuring out new ways.
  - Consider posing questions to Facebook handbell groups such as “Handbell People.”
  - If you see something you think may work, actively pursue more information from colleagues, support groups online, host a Saturday morning brainstorming session with directors in your area. Worth the coffee and goodies.
  - Always put yourself in a position to learn.
  - If your new “great idea” falls flat, remember “FJI!”—“Failure is Just Information” and keep going.

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