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***Handchime FAQ***

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**How Do We Get Started With Handchimes?**

Teaching musical concepts to people of varying interests and abilities is a challenge faced by music instructors at many levels.

Younger students or those who have little or no musical background must be taught basic music principles, and be given the encouragement they’ll need to participate in the music program in the years ahead. For those with music knowledge, the task is to encourage continued participation, and to refine and build on the musical skills they’ve learned in the past.

Conventional music programs, with their emphasis on band and choral participation, may not always be the answer. Many people, for example, find it difficult to sing before others, even as part of a group. And still others may lack the interest or dedication required to master a traditional musical instrument. The result can be discouragement, frustration, and even an unwillingness to continue with music education in the future.

Instead, the answer may lie with two different looking, but similar musical instruments:  Handbells, which have been used as a learning tool for more than a thousand years, and handchimes, a product first developed in the 1980s.

**Are Handchimes for Today?**

In today’s institutions, handchimes are used for a number of reasons.  First, they offer a sound unlike any other instrument. They’re beautiful to listen to, making them an attractive and motivational choice for hundreds of years.

Second, handchimes are easy to use, putting them within reach of even the least musically inclined.

And third, handchimes are easy to afford.  Institutions can equip a music program for a relatively modest cost-per-individual, especially when compared against traditional band or orchestra instruments.  A single set of handbells can be shared across multiple classrooms and choirs for added economy. It’s also possible to start with a small set and build to larger and larger sets as budgets and programs dictate.

**Where Do Handchimes Fit Within The Music Program?**

Handchimes can fulfil several important functions:  development of individuals’ musical skills, encouragement of teamwork, socialization and self-esteem, and expansion of the music program.

Teachers can readily address rhythm, dynamics, key signatures, and notation in a group setting with handchimes, and over time teach everything from duration and loudness to timbre, texture, and style.

Handchimes also teach individuals the importance of group cooperation and team spirit, an important concept in any ensemble program. The very nature of a handchimes choir requires individuals to work together if their instruments are to make music.

Participation in a handchime program can also help build confidence and self-esteem for those who have difficulty finding achievement elsewhere. Since handbells are easy to play, success can come quickly--even to those not particularly gifted, either musically, artistically, or academically. What’s more, it can provide the pleasures and commitment of a musical ensemble experience to students who have not invested years in learning more traditional band and orchestra instruments. Perhaps most important, the flexibility and growth inherent in a handbell program lets students begin at the beginning and progress as far as they might desire.

Handchimes can also fulfil at least two important objectives:  the educational objective of challenging individuals with a limitless range of ever more demanding arrangements, and the performance objective of presenting magnificent music to public audiences. As such, a performing choir can help any institution establish and maintain a visible presence in its community--not just by staging concerts within the facility itself, but by reaching out to those in nursing homes, hospitals, shopping malls and other public venues.

**Where to Begin: The Instruments?**

The size of your first handchimes set depends both on your budget and on the number of individuals to be served. Although single-octave handbell sets are available, the practical minimum for making music and teaching an appreciable number of individuals is the two-octave set, 25 handchimes from G4 (the G below Middle C) to G6. The maximum practical number of individuals to simultaneously play a two-octave set is fifteen; the ideal number is seven or eight.

Both handchime sets grow by the addition of additional handchimes on both ends of the set. A three-octave set, for example, comprises 37 handchimes from C4 to C7. A set of this size can be rung by as many as 22 individuals, but a more practical number--allowing each ringer to handle two diatonics--is eleven students. Eventually, large or musically adventurous groups can work toward playing handchimes sets as large as five octaves:  6-note handchime sets, from C3 to C8.

But growth through acquisition of instruments is only one side of the story; growth through instruction, practice, and commitment is the other. Even with a limited range of handchime sets, the devoted instructor and ringers can pursue complex music of an almost limitless scope. With the possible exception of the small, two-octave range, truly challenging music is available for choirs of every size. It’s worth pointing out that easy material is available for choirs of all sizes, too.

It’s also worth pointing out that teachers of music have little to fear when embarking on a new program for the first time. Basic playing techniques aren’t only easy to teach; they’re easy to learn from readily available training materials that Schulmerich can provide.

**Where to Begin: Care and Performance Supplies?**

Handchimes are relatively self-contained instruments and need little in the way of support equipment. Schulmerich of <https://schulmerichbells.com/> and Malmark of <http://www.malmark.com/> are two companies which supply handchimes of a very good quality.   Although little maintenance is required, the proper care, handling, and cleaning of handchimes should be carried out by individuals, as part of the basic instructional program.

**Where to Begin: Resources and Support?**

A key resource is the Handbell Society of Australasia (HSA) [www.handbells.org.au](http://www.handbells.org.au); Handbell Musicians of America (HMA) <http://handbellmusicians.org/>. HSA has a convenor of the Chimes Special Interest Group. Cynthia Delaney can be contacted on chimes@handbells.org.au

**Once You’ve Begun Now What?**

There’s little doubt that an educational handchimes programme will evolve into a performance program, so it’s important to keep in mind the basics of managing any performance program, however informal it may be.

First, establish and stick to a rehearsal schedule that’s conveniently worked into your program.

Second, keep performances and rehearsals fresh by periodically updating your choir’s music. This is also important in keeping pace with a ringer’s abilities.

For many individuals, participation in a handchime choir is the ideal way to put into practice the musical skills they’ve learned. Your choir can perform during the same programs as your choral or instrumental ensembles. Or it can perform in other venues, such as shopping areas, hospitals, nursing homes, churches and other schools.