Technique Tip - Stickin’ It with Mallets

Although we are privileged to see the beauty of bronze handbells every day in the factory we also see bells sent to us with damage from improper mallet use leaving cracks or holes in castings! We are also asked frequently to instruct customers on the proper mallet ranges for their bell set. So, this month we are sharing basic information about choosing the proper mallet for the ringing job.

The first step in proper mallet technique in ringing is to select the correct mallet. This means choosing the stick with a mallet head of the proper density (or hardness) for the instrument. A too-dense mallet head on the incorrect bell can cause a crack or hole in a casting whereas one that is too "soft" or not dense enough will produce a sound that is muted and lacking in resonant tone.

Malmark mallets have been designed by the experts at Malmark to safely produce a clear tone of each pitch so the ensemble sound will be properly voiced and suited to each bell or bass Choirchime. We'd like to emphasize the importance of using the proper mallet on low bass Choirchimes C2 to B2. Hazards of over-ringing are greatly compounded for low bass Choirchimes (below C3) if the player uses a mallet that's too dense or a mallet whose shape includes a hard edge in the center. (Some brands of mallets have a ridge or edge in the center which has potential for damaging a chime.)

Now that you've got the correct mallet for the job, what should you know about correct playing technique?

1. Aim the mallet head for the same area of the casting, just below the lip, where the clapper strikes inside the bell. This is muy importante (very important!) because Malmark bell castings are thinner toward the middle by design and this is usually where we see holes or cracks from mallets. Also, the fundamental pitch comes from the lip, and this being the labeled pitch, is exactly what you want to hear!
2. Next, hold the mallet shaft near the center with thumb and first finger (other fingers loosely curled in support) so that the mallet is balanced: it shouldn't drastically dip forward or back in your hand.

This playing position is important so that the player isn't fighting against gravity to play and the rebound will be even. You should be able to hold the mallet with the shaft resting easily against the fingers of your hand and the mallet head able to bounce up and down easily. (Have you wondered why our 3 lowest bass mallets have larger shafts? This Malmark design allows the larger, heavier mallet head to be off-set by the larger shaft and provide balance. Try it and you'll see! The thin shaft on other bass mallets causes you to continually fight against the weight of the head before you've ever played a note.)

If you're a director or a seasoned ringer you may be able to recite exactly which mallet is used for each ringing position. Or, do you find yourself repeating from week to week which mallet belongs to which ringing position? If you or your ringers could use a quick reference for matching mallets to correct bells, Choirchimes or Cymbells then you will find the accompanying graphic useful. You may even want to post it in your rehearsal room or print for each ringer notebook for easy reference.

Choosing the correct mallet for the job will give you more musical, satisfying and hazard-free ringing experiences and give you confidence. Happy ringing and happy sticking!

[Download the Mallet Chart Here](http://www.malmark.com/pdf/Mallet_Chart.pdf)