

Performance Notes

by Douglas Mears

The hymn preludes in this collection are arranged for a quartet of handbell ringers holding two or three bells in each hand. They can, however, also be performed effectively by two to three octave handbell or handchime choirs.

When played “four-in-hand” and “six-in-hand” by quartet, the use of bell tables is unnecessary. Each hymn prelude in this collection has been arranged to eliminate the need for bell changes if performed by four ringers, each holding four to six bells. The visual effect of ringing in this manner is stunning, especially if performed from memory.

These hymn preludes are generally intended to be played *LV* throughout. A minimum number of damping points has been indicated in the score at key changes and other places where harmonies shift suddenly. Other possibilities for damping are left to the discretion of the performers, based on the type of ensemble, the acoustics, and the desired effect. Since the nature of bells, however, is to “ring”, it is hoped that performers will take advantage of this inherent characteristic and not attempt to damp after every note.

When holding two or three bells per hand, ringers might find it helpful to wear extra-thick gloves or even two pair of gloves. If the weight of the bells becomes unmanageable, and if there is a three-octave handbell set available, it is possible to ring smaller bells by transposing the music up, usually a minor third. This makes it considerably easier, especially for the ringer of the lowest bells, who would then hold Bb, C, D, Eb, for example, instead of the heavier G, A, B, and C. In transposing bells, ringers simply ignore the fact that they are holding higher, transposed bells, and read their music as if holding the original bells printed.

If you have enough handbells and eight ringers are available, it can be most effective to perform the hymn preludes in this collection in two quartets, the second quartet doubling the first, either at the unison pitch or an octave higher.