

Massachusetts Spring Ring 2026

Rehearsal Notes

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Hello, participants! I'm very excited about working with you in April, and I hope these notes will be helpful in your preparation. They are long ... so if they seem more discouraging than helpful, JUST IGNORE THEM and come to the event, and we'll do all of this together! One of the most effective strategies we have in creating handbell artistry is **contrast** — both **sonically** and **visually**. I like to use movement vocabulary to help with contrast, so I will ask you to mark your music with the **action words** below as you prepare. They mimic motions that we do in everyday life, but we will go over how they can influence your ringing stroke when we're together.

General Comments

1. The order of the pieces below does not necessarily reflect the order in which we will perform them. We will order our binders during the event.
2. Please follow the composers' markings in the score such as rit., cresc, etc. I won't be addressing each one in my notes, but we will follow all of them.
3. I will not be providing suggestions for low bass assignments since I do not know how many musicians you have in your ensembles.

Please feel free to contact me at LabanBells@gmail.com with any questions you may have about these notes.

Courage and Grace - Michael Joy

1. General Comments:

- This form is a traditional ABA, with the same kind of material at the beginning and the end and contrasting material in between. The beginning and end are written in a detached (staccato) style, while the middle section is sustained (legato).
- Please watch all of the meter changes on the first page — all of those measures feel different, and that movement needs to be anticipated rather than just counted.
- You will see both eighth note triplets and quarter note triplets. Remember that a set of eighth note triplets (m. 21) have the duration of one beat, while a set of quarter note triplets (m. 14) takes up two beats. You can count the triplets as "tri-pa-let," or as in m. 22 ... 1 2-la-le 3 4-la-le. I would not count them "2-and-a" "4-and-a" because then the "and" has two different durations — a longer "and" when it's not part of a triplet, and a shorter "and" when it is. I personally count the quarter note triplets as a slow "o-ver-two" because it's three notes played "over two" beats.

2. Action Words:

- Please think the word **PUNCH** for a strong and detached style of ringing in mm. 1-11.
- Please think **DAB** at m. 12 to keep the detached style but to lower the volume by using less force.

- Please mark m. 32 as **GLIDE** to make a sustained/legato and quiet sound. At m. 44 you can think **PRESS** to keep the legato stroke but to add some more force. **PRESS** all the way through m. 56.
- At m. 57 we're going back to **PUNCH**

3. Techniques:

- The F/G5 and A/B5 ringers need to watch their stem direction for correct technique in mm. 12-21.
- The word **DAB** will help bass ringers to execute their triplets by keeping the bells close to their body, so they have more control over the clapper. Resetting the clapper in between eighth notes to strike the next note will require practice and control.
- In mm. 78-81, I would like the shakes to be static and low to the table (not circling). At m. 82 I would like the shakes to be a bit higher (maybe shoulder level), but still static and not circling. And at m. 84 the composer encourages ringers to shake as high as you can ring them. This is what is meant by the crescendo in m. 84 — "pull out all the stops." And m. 85 should be marked **fff**.

4. Tempo Setters:

- The A4 ringer in m. 32 resets the tempo to 92 from the previous speed of 104. However quickly or slowly they come in on the "and" of beat 1 will set the tempo for the rest of the measure.

5. Influencers:

- The bass note triplets (because the bells are heavier and the clapper shafts are longer and take more time to reset) will have an effect on the tempo. The music will slow down unless the bass can really ring all three notes within a single beat.
- The G/A4 ringer will definitely influence the forward movement of the music in mm. 32-45 because they are often playing by themselves on the "ands." They need to start moving their bells (like a prep) *before* their notes so that they're not late. C5 has some of that forward movement as well once you hit m. 40.

The Lord Now Sends Us Forth - Cathy Moklebust

1. General Comments:

- This form is a traditional ABA, with the same kind of material at the beginning and the end and contrasting material in between. The beginning and end are written in a detached (staccato) style, while the middle section is sustained (legato). Same as "Courage and Grace."
- This piece is in A minor, so G#s are your go-to bells unless you see otherwise. Gnats and C#s also change the chord quality on beat 4 of mm. 24, 32, 40, 48, 136, 144, 152, 160, and 172. You'll also see them in mm. 88 and 104.
- You'll also see F#s. They are less frequent but very important when they do show up because they make the chord major and bright sounding — mm. 39, 55, 151, 167, 171, 177.
- If your ensemble does not own the lower bass chimes, please practice the middle section with quiet bells, and we'll see how it sounds when we're together.

2. Action Words:

- Please think the word **PUNCH/DAB** for a detached style of ringing in the beginning and ending sections, and **GLIDE** in the middle chime section.
- Please think of all marts as **TAPs** They are a quick motion but use **less force** than the notes leading up to them.
- C6 is a pitch that cuts through just about anything, so this ringer will need to practice a very gentle **DAB** on beat 4 of m. 168 to ring very quietly.

3. Techniques:

- Please play the malleted rhythm beginning in m. 5 with the last two notes after the rest played softer than the first three notes of each measure.
- Think through how to turn your page from 3 to 4 and have a mallet in your hand by beat 1 of m. 5.
- The F/G5 ringer will mallet throughout the malleted sections except in mm. 15 and 127 where they have a rung G# on beat 4.
- Please practice the transition from m. 56 into 57 and m. 112 into 113. This is not only a change of instrument, but also a change in dynamics.
- The treble will need to brush damp (BD) a their volume away by beat 4 of m. 168 so that the C6 can ring very quietly without any other leftover sound from what was struck on beat 1. This can happen by moving a thumb onto the casting on the “and” of beat 3.
- Be careful that malleting does not become too strong of a down stroke when mallets are asking to play suddenly very loud (*sub. ff*) at m. 172. Make the up motion of the mallet strike stronger while still controlling the amount of force you are using on the down motion into the casting.
- There are mallet rolls in mm. 174 and 175. Make sure you are striking closer to the lip than at the curve in the casting.
- Shakes in m. 174 and 175 should be static (not circling) and at shoulder height so that you can RT in m. 176. Shakes in m. 178 should be strong but lower towards the table so that you can mart on beat 3. Use those two beats leading up to the mart to think about how you will need to release most of the force you are using to shake so that you can TAP the mart more gently on beat 3.

What Wondrous Love Is This - arr. Susan E. Geschke (Tins)

1. General Comments:

- This piece generally moves in a sustained/legato manner. However, I'd like to create some contrast between the introduction (mm. 1-8) and coda (mm. 73-80) and all of the melodic material that comes in between m. 8 and m. 73. So I'm going to ask that you use different kinds of ringing strokes to make those sections sound different.
- In mm. 28, 30, 34, and 38 you'll see voice leading lines between the A4 and D5. There should also be one in m. 40. The A4 and D5 are the only bells moving in those measures after everyone strikes on beat 1. They shouldn't get buried because they outline an important interval happening within the measure.

2. Action Words:

- Please mark your music at m. 1 and m. 73 with the word **DAB**. This stroke is gentle, but not legato. It does not circle around. It stops the casting in front of your body and uses very little space away from your body. Some composers call this “cold” ringing because it creates a sound that is not warm.
- At m. 8, the whole notes on beat 1 should still use **DAB**, while the half notes in m. 8 and everyone beginning in m. 9 should use the action word **GLIDE**. This stroke is gentle and legato/sustained. The stroke leads with the handle so that the casting is moving when the clapper strikes. This creates a less percussive sound than DAB because it circles around and uses more space away from the body.
- At m. 15, beat 4, please use the word **PRESS**. PRESS is the same legato type of stroke except you will use more force. It takes practice to ring more loudly but not more harshly/ percussively. Make sure the casting is traveling when the clapper strikes. We’ll practice this together.
- Please mark all *mp* sections with **GLIDE** and all *mf* sections with **PRESS** between m. 8 and m. 72. The *f* section should also be **PRESS** and will work together on making it different than the *mf* sections when we see each other.

3. Assignments/Techniques:

- When we’re together we’re going to talk about using different pathways for the ringing stroke. In the meantime, please write the following into your scores: **2D** at m. 8, **3D** at m. 62 beat 4, and **2D** at m. 70 beat 3.
- In m. 52, I would like the shake to be very controlled and static (not circling).
- For any five octave choirs ... the C7 ringer will need to write something into their scores at m. 62, beat 1, and m. 66, beat 1, to remind them to ring (they double up the C6’s).

Serenity - Kurt Meyer (Coppers)

1. General Comments:

- There are no terribly difficult rhythms in this piece, so I think the general challenge with this piece is the bell changes and switching back and forth between bells and chimes. So the majority of these notes are going to address how I would handle those assignment/ technique challenges. Please feel free to solve those challenges in any way that works best for your ensemble, but please also keep in mind that quick or awkward movements inconsistent with the sustained style of the music will interfere with the visual artistry of the piece.

2. Action Words:

- Sections where the dynamic marking is soft, I would like to use the word **GLIDE** to encourage legato ringing.
- Anywhere the dynamic markings are louder, please think **PRESS**, which is the same movement as GLIDE but uses more force. PRESS is not a quick movement like PUNCH; it’s sustained and produces a loud but less percussive sound.

- The tenuto markings in mm. 31-38 mean that those notes should get their full value and be emphasized.

3. Tempo Setters:

- Please make sure that the F4 understands that in m. 1 and in m. 11 (after the rit.) they set the tempo.
- The F6 resets the tempo in m. 31 (after the rit.)

4. Assignments/Techniques:

- Rather than 4-in-hand the Bnat5 in m. 4, I would play it with the left hand (LH) because there are no A5s before or after m. 4.
- If the B4 ringer cannot pick up the Bnat in a 4-in-hand position (and ring it close to the table before putting it back down), they will need to practice a weave. The right hand (RH) puts down the C5 after beat 2 and picks up the Bnat. Then the LH puts down the Bflat after beat 3 and picks up the C5. Then the C5 is transferred back to the RH after beat 1 of m. 5. This will take significant repetition to make it smooth. Four-in-handing the Bnat is the less disruptive option.
- If the A4 ringer cannot get the Anat in m. 6 and then back to the Aflat in m. 7 smoothly, the E/F4 ringer can get the Anat if it's placed to the left of the G/A4 ringer at the beginning of the piece.
- The C/D6 ringer has all of m. 9 to switch both bells to Cflat and Dflat. The B4/C5 ringer has the same amount of time to put down C and pick up Cflat.
- In m. 18, the C/D6 ringer can play the Cflat with the RH. The B4/C5 can 4-in-hand the Cflat.
- For mm. 27-28, the D/E5 ringer can transfer the Eflat to the LH in m. 27, pick up the Dflat with the RH, put down the Eflat and pick up the Dnat with the LH, put down the Dflat and pick up Eflat with RH.
- In mm. 28 and 38, the C/D4 can play the Dflat with the LH.
- In m. 39, the C/D4 ringer puts down the Dnat and transfers the Dflat to the RH, and the LH picks up the C during m. 40.
- I would have the C/D6 ringer play the Bflat chime in m. 41, and put it down in m. 42. Everyone else has sufficient time to smoothly switch to chimes.
- From mm. 41-48, the D/E5 ringer up through the C/D6 ringer have to plan for switches from bells to chimes and back again. The switch from the D6 chime to the D6 bell in m. 48 is the most challenging. To solve that you could pick up the D6 bell in a 4-in-hand position under the D6 chime during m. 47, so it can be rung at the end of m. 48. Then you have all of m. 49 to reset your RH.
- The D/E5 and E/F4 ringers have a half beat to put down their Eflats and pick up their Enats. Play that measure close to the table to make that quick transition smoother.
- The A4, A5, and A6 ringers keep their flats through the key change at m. 49 until m. 53.
- The C5 and D5 ringers have a beat or more to switch to chimes (and back for the C5).
- If the E/F6 ringer 4-in-hands the Eflats from m. 69 into m. 70, I think the movements will be awkward because of the rhythm — the dotted eighth note requires a quick movement that is

supposed to be played softly. Instead I would suggest putting down the F6 after its played in m. 68, and pick up the Eflat with the RH, giving you more control of m. 70.

- If m. 72 is to be played f and m. 73 to be a soft mallet on suspended bells, then a brush damp (BD) will need to happen on the “and” of beat 4 in m. 72. Whichever hand is holding the mallet should reach with a finger or thumb to lightly touch the casting. This will “brush” away some of the vibrations and lower the volume on the bell just before it’s tapped with the mallet in m. 73. This is especially important in the bass.