



2009 Scranton University AGEHR Area II Young Ringers Festival



Rehearsal notes - Area II Young Ringers' Festival General Suggestions

by Kathleen Wissinger

A little score study will assure ringers' success, preparing them with the skills and knowledge needed before they are faced with applying those challenges in the music.

Practice rhythmic patterns and handbell techniques first in rote exercises. Once the mind and body know how to perform a skill, finding and performing it in the music is much easier. (See the Jan/Feb 2008 Overtones for my article on Unison Exercises.) Some pieces offer these exercises on the last page. If not, make up your own!

Watch transition points. Whenever anything changes, ringers find extra challenge: key changes, time signature changes, technique changes (from ringing to marring to mallets), bell changes (picking up a sharp or flat or moving from bells to chimes), fermatas, slowing down, speeding up, page turns, starting, stopping. Practice these issues in isolation and repeatedly, so they become the "easy" sections of the piece.

Practice the end of the piece early on. Usually the final measures of a piece are the weakest in performance because they are different and have been practiced the least. The remedy? Practice this part during the first rehearsal. Then move back and practice the final page. In this way, ringers will be moving into familiar territory as the piece reaches its end. Practice other "unusual" sections of a piece with considerable focus. A rondo with a repeating "A" section will be weakest in the B and C sections, since they don't get played as often. Give these sections more attention during rehearsals as well.

Practice dynamics as you learn. We tend to perform what we know best, and if a spot has been rung loudly during practice, it's hard to perform it softly for performance.

Stress ringing presentation. It is unfair of us to not guide our choirs to ring beautifully. They CAN make circles and ring with style, complementing the music. We just have to help them remember to do it. And again, we perform what we practice.

Encourage your ringers to count out loud for themselves. Counting out loud when learning a piece solidifies a ringer's understanding of where they are in a measure and how to move from one measure to the next. It also emphasizes the group concept of the pulse. Resist the temptation to count for them.

Encourage your ringers to look up at you as often as possible, in transition spots always and on the first beat of each measure. And directors must look up from their own music to be available to the ringer. By ringing phrases, and not just from note to note, and by being able to rely on the director for cues and direction, ringers will feel more a part of the musical momentum and less tied to their written score every moment.