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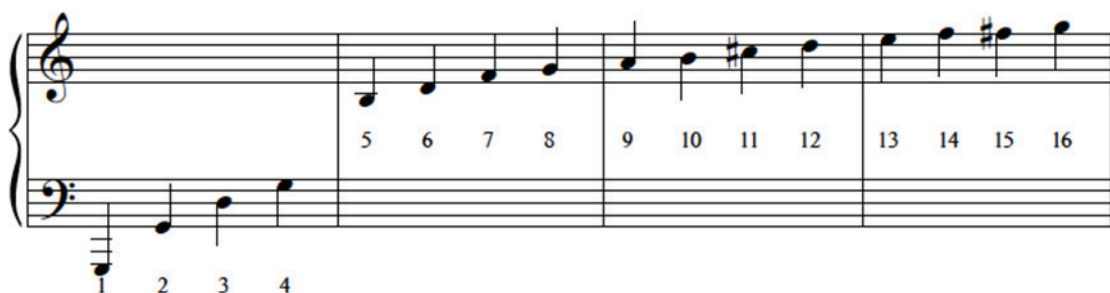
The Overtone Series-2 (Session 17) “Advice from Douglas E. Wagner”

By Dr. Ona Pinsonneault

Douglas E. Wagner in his *Scoring for English Handbells, a Practical Guide for Composers*, (1986) provides us with the following insight:

“In handbell scoring, as with any other medium, the voicing of chords is an important consideration. Because of the unique acoustical characteristics of the handbell, the arrangement of notes in a chord can mean the difference between a mediocre and a highly successful endeavor. This very simple concept should be kept in mind: Thicker textures (notes very close together) will be most effective in the middle to upper register, while chord notes in the lower register should have more space between them”. (Page 5)

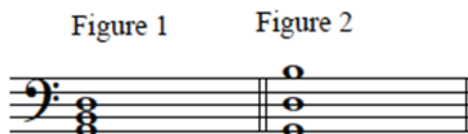
This is how the overtone series looks, more space between the lower notes and closer spacing between higher notes.



When a chord is scored in this manner with wider spaces between lower notes and closer spaces between higher notes, the overtone series is aiding in the confirmation of the vibrations. Our ears find this “pleasing”. The vibrations are “in sync” and sounding “consonant”.

He goes on to say,

“ . . . chords with thicker textures (notes closer together) sound more effective in the upper register. Chords using the lowest bells available should have more space between the notes. A listener would find it a much easier task to differentiate individual chord tones when listening to figure 2 rather than figure 1, because of the additional space between the notes.” (Pages 9-10)



When scoring the above chord simply take the 3rd of the chord in Figure 1, and move it up an octave, as in Figure 2. Please notice that this scoring replicates partial numbers 2, 3 and 5 in the given overtone series. These, along with the octave, are the overtones most audible in an overtone series. When a chord is scored replicating the arrangement of overtones in a given series it creates a pleasing sound, one where vibrations are working together rather than vying with each other. Look for music written in this manner, and score your own music in this way.

Until next time,

Dr. P

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November 2014