

How do I ensure that the performance of a piece written for handbell choir creates the sound that the composer intended?

The composer's most straightforward indicators are those of tempo, dynamic and articulation. The composer has reasons for fast, slow, speeding and slowing; loud and soft, getting louder and getting softer; ring, damp, let vibrate or mallet. And the reasons for these indicators are for ultimate aural effect of the composition, not, as we sometimes think, to challenge the performers!

A wise person suggests that we create one sentence that summarizes the expression of the composition. Write this sentence on the first page of music and be certain that all sound that is created is related to this expression.

Expression: Are we all familiar with **tempo** markings, and **changing tempo** markings? Tempo indicators tell us the speed of the composition. A few tempo indicators are "Adagio, Lento, Allegro, Vivace, Presto." Endings can be added to these words to indicate gradations in the tempo, such as, Allegretto and Prestissimo. Slowing down and speeding up can happen with, for example, "ritardando and accelerando". Of course, the composer can also give an exact tempo by indicating the number of beats per minute, for example "the quarter equals 60."

Expression: Dynamic markings; "Pianissimo, Piano, Mezzo-Piano, Mezzo-Forte, Forte, Fortissimo" can be used for softness and loudness. "Crescendo, diminuendo, decrescendo" and others can indicate a slight change in dynamics. (Translate this: "poco a poco cresc. al la fine")

Probably the best investment for a musician is a pocket dictionary of Musical Terms, available in most music stores.

Expression: Are we familiar with **articulation** markings? Most handbell scores include the use of special techniques. Techniques include Martellato, Mallet, Swing, Pluck, Damp, Let Vibrate, etc. There are a couple really good books available that discuss the many different kinds of articulation markings that handbell players use; "Handbell and Handchime Notation" published by AGEHR is one.

Expression: The language of tempo, dynamic and articulation indicators can be English, but also common languages are Italian, German and French. Pocket dictionaries of these languages are also very useful tools.

Expression: How do all these indicators tell us the meaning of the composition? They all work together to enhance the notes and rhythms in order to create one successful whole. "Create one sentence that summarizes the expression of the piece." What is your idea of the meaning of each composition?

Until next time,

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