

MUSIC THEORY.aargh©

Performance – 2 (Session 29) Every Rehearsal is a Performance: Melody

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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 as we discussed last time. (See Session 28) The composer's score notation also tells us about the **melody**, rhythm, harmony, texture, tone color and form.

Melody: The **Melody** is one of the fixed foundations of a musical composition. Technically a melody is based on some type of scale. Some of the more common scales in handbell music are major, minor, pentatonic and modal. The tones of a scale have definite relationships among themselves. The first tone, or tonic, is the focal center followed by the fifth tone, or dominant. These two tones (also supported by harmony) become the main force of the vertical flow of music. Composers will strategically place these tones, and their main supporting tones, in critical locations in the flow of the melody. They become the framework for the melodic pulse of the composition.

In the mid twentieth century one of our more famous American composers, Aaron Copland, talked about the importance of melody. He said that it should never be lost to the listener. "It should be followed like a continuous thread which leads the listener through a piece from the very beginning to the very end. Always remember that in listening to a piece of music you must hang on to the melodic line. It may disappear momentarily, withdrawn by the composer, in order to make its presence more powerfully felt when it reappears. But reappear it surely will."*

Can you sing the melody in the handbell composition you are preparing? Can your handbell choir sing the melody? Can you notice that when singing the notes are smoothly connected and are uniform in color and intensity? Can you isolate the melody from the rest of the notation in order that the handbell choir, the director, and the listeners will be able to recognize it when it is present? Can you ring only the melody?

Copland goes on to suggest, "Most melodies are accompanied by more or less elaborate material of secondary interest. Don't allow the melody to become submerged by that accompanying material. Separate it in your mind from everything that surrounds it. You must be able to hear it. It is up to composer and interpreter to help you hear it that way."*

In rehearsal when your choir rings only the melody, does the melody connect one note to the next with the same tone color and intensity? Does the melody follow the dynamic and changing dynamic indicators? Don Allured says "blending and matching consecutive notes in a melodic line, especially when *crescendi* and/or *decrescendi* are involved" is one of the components of musicianship (skill as a musician) at its highest level.

*Copland, Aaron, **What to Listen For in Music**, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957.

Allured, Don, **Mastering Musicianship in Handbells, Broadman Press, 1992, p. 81.

Until next time,

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