

# Beginning Four-in-Hand

**Four-in-Hand** (hereafter “4iH”) is a method of holding four bells “in hand” (hence the name) and having individual control over the ringing of each bell. It is called “four”-in-Hand even if you have two bells in one hand and one in the other because if we start allowing “three-in-hand” and “five-in-hand” things just get a little, well, out of hand.

**Why** do we want to do 4iH at all? It allows fewer people to handle more bells which is handy for smaller groups. It allows ringers in the 6s, for example, to pick up and play the 7s simultaneously when needed. Having additional ringers on the 7s, if they don’t play throughout the entire piece, makes for bored ringers, and bored ringers cause trouble! It also allows you to quickly pick up an accidental that is used in a measure and put it back down.

There are several different ways of doing 4iH. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Different people choose different techniques depending on what they’ve learned and what they like. Some people even switch back and forth depending on the demands of the music. Since this is beginning 4iH, we are going to stick with four methods.

Primary bell – held between thumb and index finger.

Secondary bell – held with other fingers.

Understanding how the bell works helps in understanding the set up and ringing of 4iH. The clapper only goes in one plane. If the bell is turned sideways, it won’t ring.

## Ring and Push (formerly Ring and Knock)

To form this 4iH, hold one bell in the standard ringing grip (primary bell). Rotate the arm around  $\frac{1}{4}$  turn until the back of your hand is up toward the ceiling and the bell is horizontal facing inward. Bell symbol on primary bell is facing you. Bring the bell down on top of the secondary bell sitting on the table (figure 1).



Figure 1: Assembling ring and push



Figure 2: Where to place fingers

The primary bell is held between the thumb and index finger. Open up the index and middle fingers and grasp the handle of the secondary bell close to the collar (figure 2). This is considered 1-1-3. The handles should be facing perpendicular to each other; *ie*, the primary bell’s handle should have the bell symbol toward you (you can see the table through the handle) and the secondary bell’s handle should be facing up (you can read the name of the bell).



Figure 3: Back side of ring & push



Fig. 4: Ringing primary bell

Pick up the group. The primary bell is rung with the standard ringing motion (figure 4).

To ring the secondary bell, rotate your arm so you see the back of the hand and make a motion pushing it forward. Using some lift also helps (figure 5).



Fig. 5: Ringing secondary bell

To strike both bells together, hold the bells up so you can see both bells but no space between them. You will find the sweet spot. Arm movement helps ring them together. Another way to look at it: There is a clock face parallel with the table. Hold the two bells at 2 o'clock and 8 o'clock for the right hand and 4 o'clock and 10 o'clock for the left hand and.

**Damping:** Shoulder or thumb damp the primary bell as you would when ringing just one bell. Secondary bell more challenging—touch on table, rotate inward to upper chest or tummy, use hip, or tilt hand back to shoulder.

**Articulations:** Thumb damps can be done by shifting the grip upward so the castings, rather than the handles, are grasped between the fingers.

Marting can present some challenges. For the secondary bell, simply bring the set straight down into the pad. Placing your thumb on the casing of the primary bell insures no sound from it. Best to thumb damp the top or primary bell. To mart both at the same time, try quickly changing to a Shelley. Shaking is a breeze. Keep in mind having the clapper go straight out to the audience. If you are shaking the secondary bell and the top one wants to ring, simply put your thumb on it.

For mallets, just leave the 4iH cluster on the table and mallet away.

For suspended mallets, hold the cluster up with bells toward you and mallet. If you need 3 bells, hang one from your ring finger and pinkie.

**Dynamics** are easy to control and with practice you can be very consistent from one bell to the other.

## British Style

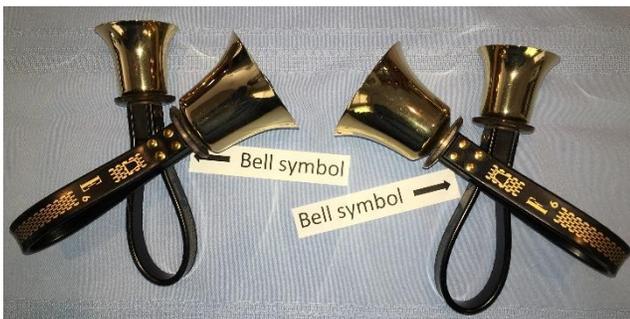


Figure 6: British Style set up

Turn the handles for the secondary bells so the bell symbols face inward and you can see through the handles. Bring the primary bell down on each so the flat handle/bell symbol is facing up (figure 6). Pick up the cluster the same as you would Ring and Push.

Secondary bell rings in normal ringing position.  
Primary bell rings with hand in normal ringing

position by rotating arm slightly so bell tips inward.

**Damping:** Shoulder or thumb damp the primary bell. Secondary bell can come down to table or hip.

**Articulations** are similar to Ring & Push except marting is quite easy. Secondary bell simply comes down to the table. For primary bell, bring arm down and rotate arm so the bell taps the table.

### Interlocked British Style



Figure 7: Interlocked British style

Take the secondary bell from the British style and slip its handle through the handle of the primary bell (figure 7).



Figure 8: Where to place fingers

To pick this up, you will do 1-2-2: thumb, two fingers between the bells, and two fingers on the outside. The primary and secondary bells will ring the same way as in the regular British style.



Figure 9: Back side of grip



Figure 10: Finger damp secondary

With this method, you can use your thumb to damp the primary bell and your index finger to damp the secondary bell; extremely easy to switch between TD and R. It also reduces the bulk of what you are holding. However, it is a little trickier to make bell changes.

## Shelley



Figure 11: Shelley configuration

To do this, compose a 4iH cluster with handles flat on top of each other so clappers are facing the same direction. Bell symbols of both bells are up. Ring with both clappers going forward and looking at the back of your hand, like the “push.” Both bells will strike simultaneously when rung. The Shelley method is most often used when you want both bells to be struck simultaneously.

## Notation

To keep straight which way the line goes for left and right, hold your hand out in front of you looking at the back of it with fingers going up. The line follows your thumb.

Four-in-hand for left hand:  $\begin{array}{l} G6 \\ \diagdown \\ B6 \end{array}$  G6 is in the primary bell  
B6 is in the secondary bell

Four-in-hand for right hand:  $\begin{array}{l} A6 \\ \diagdown \\ C7 \end{array}$  A6 is in the primary bell  
C7 is in the secondary bell

Shelley position for left hand:  $\begin{array}{l} E6 \\ // \\ E7 \end{array}$  E6 is in the primary bell  
E7 is in the secondary bell

Shelley for right hand:  $\begin{array}{l} G6 \\ // \\ G7 \end{array}$  G6 is in the primary bell  
G7 is in the secondary bell

**What does it take to feel comfortable doing this? Lots of practice!!!**

## Arrangement of the Bells

What order should you put your bells in? If you are ringing the 6's and picking up the 7's, the 6's should be the primary bell. If you are ringing four scalar notes (*ie*, CDEF), you can arrange bells by seconds (*ie*, CD-ED) or by thirds (*ie*, CE-DF). Choice of which scheme you use really depends on the music. If you have a lot of fast scales through your range, it might be best to arrange in thirds so you can alternate hands more. It also keeps space note in left hand and line note in right hand if you are covering two typical positions such as G6-C7.

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# So Many Bells! - Bell Changes

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## 3 bells: LH-1; RH-3

LH 1 is constant - shoulder damp.  
RH changes between 2 & 3.

1

1 3 1 2 1 3 1 2 1 3 1 2 1 3 1 2

## 3 bells: LH-1; RH-3

RH 3 is constant - shoulder damp.  
LH changes between 1 & 2.

2

1 3 2 3 1 3 2 3 1 3 2 3 1 3 2 3

## 4 bells: LH-2; RH-4

Always alternate hands.

3

4 2 1 2 4 2 1 2 2 3 4 3 2 3 4 3

## 4 bells: LH-2; RH-3

One hand is constant for 2 measures.  
Always alternate hands.

4

2 3 1 3 4 3 2 3 2 3 2 4 2 1 2 3

**4 bells: LH-1; RH-2**RH plays 2 & 4  
LH plays 1 & 3

5

1 L 2 3 4 4 3 2 1 1 2 3 4 4 3 2 1

**4 bells: LH-2; RH-1**RH plays 1 & 3  
LH plays 2 & 4

6

1 R L R L 2 L R L R 3 4 4 3 2 1 1 2 3 4 4 3 2 1

**3 bells: LH-1; RH-2**

7

1 R-L 2 L-R 3 1 2 3 2

**3 bells: LH-1; RH-2**

(always alternate hands)

8

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

**3 bells: LH-2; RH-3**

(always alternate hands)

9

3 2 1 3 2 1 3 2 1 3 2 1

**10 Play a scale up and down, alternating hands. First begin with LH then begin with RH.**

Remember:

1. Do not cross arms. Get bell you are ringing up and out of the way.
2. Keep bells in line with shoulder as much as possible.
3. Move to the bell.
4. Table damp bell you are setting down.
5. Put bell back in "home" position unless you intentionally plan to set it elsewhere.
6. Plan ahead - make bell change as soon as you are finished with a bell.
7. It's okay to mark your music!