Cue Sheets & Chord Charts for Handbells

Where printed music has a melody, lyrics and chord symbols, this session will show how handbell groups can join with other musicians in adding creatively, and with flair, to the musical mix in accompanying singing

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1

Here's ideas for accompanying a hymn or praise song with handbells, handchimes or belleplates, starting from the simple chord symbols shown on hymn books or praise song books and developing rhythmic patterns

2

The following ideas can be used with handbells and singing alone

or along with keyboard

or add to the mix of praise band instruments accompanying a hymn or praise song

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Praise Bands can have a mix of instruments, from keyboards and drums, guitars and flutes, to trumpets, synthesisers and tambourines and more!

And handbells, handchimes or belleplates can be a part of that mix

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Rehearsal time may be very limited so the following ideas show how you can quickly combine handbells without needing special arrangements written out

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So with what do you start?

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Songs will often have melodies written out for unison singing with chordal accompaniment

For example a hymn or praise song may show something like this:

G   C
Al-le-lu-ia, Al-le-lu-ia

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So, for example, if a chord says G, then write the letters GEB, and if a chord says C, then write the letters CEG
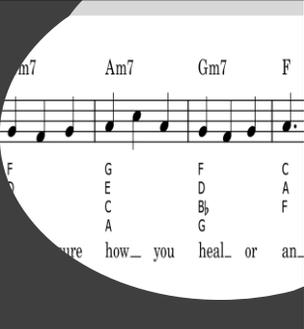
Here's the example above with the addition of the notes of the chords added:

D   G
B   E
G   C
Al-le-lu-ia,   Al-le-lu-ia

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You may well know which notes make up a chord but if you are working with a group of handbell musicians you may find for speed of reading that it is easier to write out the notes of each chord above or below the lyrics

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If you are not sure which notes make up a named chord then a simple online search will provide the answer

Or if you prefer your ringers to add the chord notes to their own copy of the lyrics/music then you may wish to provide them with a chord chart

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As there will usually be no formal handbell part musicians work with the provided lyrics/melody and chord symbols

If there are several instrumentalists they can all play all of the time or will plan in outline form in advance which instrumentalists will play in each verse or chorus but must be prepared to be flexible

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It may be as groups become more experienced the choice of instrumentation can be done by a simple nod from a director to cue which instrument should take the lead with a melody or counter-melody

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If you are varying accompaniment from verse to verse, and adding or reducing which instruments play in any verse, then it's important that there's an agreed cue for finishing!

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Confidence is the key!

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Being creative with chords

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Handbells can start off playing chords as written, one per measure (or as often as the chords change, if more frequent)

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In subsequent verses vary the rhythms of the chord notes for each measure – determined by what will complement the lyrics and the melody

Verse 1

Verse 2

Verse 3

In subsequent verses vary rhythms of chord notes for each measure – determined by what will complement lyrics & melody

Simple progression illustrated of rhythms for accompanying "Here I am Lord / I the Lord of Sea and Sky" by Daniel L Schutte

17

Vary octaves/ringer parts playing on each beat

18

3

Slightly more complex – depending on number of handbell musicians and range of notes you have available

Verse 1:

On beat 1 play only notes in chord F5 and below;

On beat 2 play only notes F5 and above

Verse 2:

Illustrated example for "He is Exalted" by Twila Paris

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Adding passing notes to notes in chord

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Play notes of chord (on each beat) followed by note above (in between each beat as notated in verse 2 in this illustration), or below (as notated in verse 3) thus two notes per beat - *only if ringer is in control of both notes affected*

Verse 1

Verse 2

Verse 3

Illustrated example for Iona Community "We cannot measure how you heal" by John L Bell and Graham Maule

So if normally ring D5 and E5, and music says chord notes are GBD (so contains D5), then ringer plays: D, D-E, D-E

This has effect of passing notes for some of the notes at any given point in the music

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Improvising within & around chord notes

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Each ringer independently improvises within & around chord notes with free rhythm in each measure - starting & finishing each measure on printed note but varying other notes in between

As long as notes within chord are played on each beat the ringer can play other notes between, and vary the rhythms

Verse 1 – play chords   Verse 1 Chorus

Verse 2 and Chorus

Verse 3 and chorus: start each measure with designated chord note but improvise free rhythm above and below that note on subsequent beats

Illustrated example for "Shine, Jesus Shine" by Graham Kendrick

23

Some tips which may be helpful

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Allow for singers to take a breath at end of phrases!

Generally suggest not playing handbells when voices are not singing (eg introductions, interludes)

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Whatever is decided, in advance of the performance, the group should agree what is going to happen in each verse or chorus and write short instructions beside each verse

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Remember:

Confidence is key!

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If you'd like to let me know how you get on then do get in touch via my website:

www.claganach.net

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