









## **Donald E. Allured: Composer, Conductor and Teacher**

Donald E. Allured has been called the “Father of Handbell Ringing in America”. He is a composer, conductor and clinician. Allured’s many contributions include developing techniques that accentuate the artistry of the handbell choir. As a composer Donald Allured has written some of the most exquisite music for handbells. Although Allured is well known in the handbell choir realm, his teachings outside this milieu are relatively unknown. This paper will highlight several of his compositions and show how the ringing techniques he developed have brought musicality to today’s handbell choir. This paper will also explore Allured’s conducting methods and his dedication to music education.

Sources referenced will include articles written by Donald Allured on handbell ringing and conducting techniques. Another source for this study will be his handbell methods book, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*. Testimonials by friends and colleagues will show how Allured is regarded by his contemporaries, and interviews with Allured himself will provide information regarding his methods and his philosophy of music. This paper will introduce a master musician whose contributions have not only benefited the English handbell choir but has been an inspiration to the music world.

Annette A. Kenyon  
Falk Seminar  
Spring 2002



## **Donald E. Allured: Composer, Conductor, and Teacher**

Donald E. Allured has been called the "Father of Handbell Ringing in America". His many contributions include developing techniques that accentuate the artistry of the handbell choir<sup>1</sup> and composing brilliant music for handbells. A native of Lansing, Michigan, now residing in Pensacola, Florida, Donald Allured graduated from Alma College, Alma, Michigan, and earned his Master's Degree in Sacred Music from Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He has served as Organist-Choir Director in churches in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Louisiana. He started in handbells in 1963 at Central Methodist Church in Lansing, Michigan. In 1965, he became Minister of Music of First United Methodist Church in Lake Charles, Louisiana, where he organized the nationally-acclaimed Wesleyan Bell Choir. In its tours from 1969 to 1975, the Choir gave concerts in all 50 states. The Wesleyan Bell Choir consisted of a group of ten young people in seventh, eighth and ninth grade. They stayed together for six years almost without any change of personnel until the seventh graders graduated from high school. During this time they made four LP recordings which sold all over the country.

---

<sup>1</sup>Thomas D. Rossing, "Tuned Handbells, Church Bells and Carillon Bells", *Overtone 1955-1986*, Manhattan, Kansas: AG Press 1987. 605 p.

Although bells date from antiquity, they developed as musical instruments in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when bell founders learned how to tune the partials harmonically. The founders in the Low Countries took the lead in tuning bells, and their many fine bells and carillons became a source of national pride, which they still remain. Bells founded during the seventeenth century by the Hemony brothers and other Dutch founders are highly treasured today.

Bell founding in England developed along a slightly different line. Bells were rung so that they could be rung full circle, and rung one by one in sequence. During the eighteenth century change ringing became popular in the bell towers of England. Careful tuning of partials was less important since the bells were rung one at a time. What are sometimes called "Old English bells" varied in partial tuning, often having several prominent inharmonic partials. At least one authority of that time criticized the English founders, and challenged them to make their bells the equal of those cast in the Low Countries, which they came to do.

Tuned handbells, as we know them, developed in England during the eighteenth century, primarily to give tower bell ringers a convenient instrument on which to practice. It was during the twentieth century that handbells have come into their own as musical instruments.



From 1979 to 1988, Allured served on the faculty of Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey, where he developed a handbell Leadership Training curriculum for students enrolled in the Church Music Department. He formed and conducted the renowned Westminster Concert Bell Choir, a 10-member group which performed on the world's largest set of handbells, comprising seven and one-half octaves and 90 bells, recordings of which have inspired critical acclaim throughout the musical world. A past president of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers, he was awarded the distinction of Honorary Life Membership in the Guild, and has been given the Guild's highest accreditation, "Master Teacher" and "Master Conductor" Certificates. In May of 1999, he was awarded the Westminster Choir College Merit Award, the highest honor given to a non-alumnus of the school.<sup>2</sup> His third text, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, was published in 1992 and has earned the term, "The Encyclopedia of Handbells."<sup>3</sup>

Advances in handbell ringing have increased dramatically in the last thirty years. Today's handbell choirs are used not only in churches as a significant part of worship but are also featured in concerts that accentuate the visual and aural artistry of the handbell. Striving for handbell choirs to play with maximum precision and musicality is Allured's primary goal. Because of this, many of the ringing techniques used today were developed through his insistence on musical accuracy.

Allured's emphasis on ringing techniques starts with the basic facets of musicianship: (1) accuracy—desire and mental discipline for playing the right notes; (2) dynamics, with particular emphasis on soft ringing (3) the value or duration of the printed note (4) flawless legato from one note to the next and, (5) precision in getting the notes in chords to sound

---

<sup>2</sup> Personal Vita: Donald E. Allured (5-10-01)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



together.<sup>4</sup> To achieve the best musical result from a bell choir basic fundamentals must be taught such as legato ringing and precise damping. Legato ringing is achieved by the sound of one bell stopping precisely as the next bell is rung.<sup>5</sup> It is similar to that of playing a smooth scale passage on the piano. Legato ringing however cannot be achieved without precise damping.

Damping is the term used when the sound of the bell is stopped either by table damping or shoulder damping. Precise damping results when two bells are rung alternately and damping each bell precisely as the next bell is rung. However damping or stopping the sound of the bell must be used with discretion. In some instances, for example, the musicality of the piece must take precedence over the value of the note even when there are rests. Sometimes rests are used to facilitate counting not necessarily to indicate silence. Erratic use of dampening would have non-musical effects on the composition and only achieve a broken sound instead of the desired legato effect. To aid in precise damping skills Allured developed an excellent and extensive set of exercises to build proficiency in this area. Donald Allured firmly believes in honoring the note value and states that damping is necessary to maintain the desired musical effect. Some of his views on damping were met with disagreement especially when more complex music was beginning to be composed for handbells:

When I was starting in handbells in the mid-sixties, there was indeed SOME controversy about damping. A prominent musician and composer had the position that a bell was a free-ringing instrument, as it is in bell towers, and should not be damped. But as musicians, clarity of sound is most desirable, and as writing for bells evolved using virtuoso passages, the lack of clarity makes non-damping intolerable. So early on I started teaching and preaching note-value damping<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Donald E. Allured, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, (Nashville, 1992), 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24

<sup>6</sup> Donald E. Allured, Email of 11 May 2002 to Annette A. Kenyon.



Many ringing techniques while not developed by Allured became nationally recognized when he promoted these techniques at his workshops around the country. They were developed as a result of Allured's placing great importance on musical accuracy and giving the note its full value when it is played. In the 1965, National Festival in Washington, D.C., Lowell Riley of Columbus, Ohio first used the technique of holding the bells on the padded table to produce a sort of "plucked" sound by manually flipping the clapper.<sup>7</sup>

Plucking a handbell emulates a harp and adds color and variety to handbell music. To pluck a handbell the ringer places the bell or bells on the table and angles each bell 45 degrees, grasp the clapper head, then with a quick flick-of-the-wrist motion, flip it downward and release it.

An arrangement of a well known French Carol called *Variations on a French Carol* by Donald Allured became quite popular because it used the plucking technique. (Example 1) Plucking is indicated by the staccato notation above and below the notes.



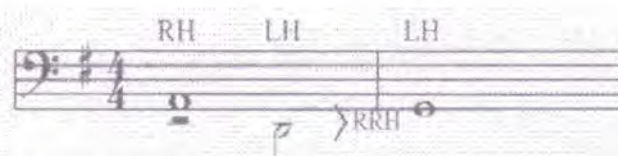
Example 1. "Variations on a French Carol", Donald E. Allured

Copyright 1970 in *Listen to the Bells!*, Broadman Press. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Used by permission.

<sup>7</sup> Litterst, *Overtones* 1955-1986, (Manhattan, 1987) p. 109.



Techniques such as *ring*, *ring, hook*, *sharing bells* and *Shelley ringing* were promoted as a result of achieving proficiency in handbell ringing. The *ring, ring, hook* technique is used primarily in the bass octave from C<sub>3</sub> (or lower) to C<sub>4</sub> with C<sub>5</sub> being middle C. (Example 2) A<sub>3</sub> is rung with the right hand, D<sub>3</sub> is rung with the left hand, and its handle is immediately hooked over the little finger of the right hand, leaving the bell hanging. Both bells are thus still sounding as the left hand picks up G<sub>3</sub>. Three things happen simultaneously in the double-damp-and-ring: D<sub>3</sub> is table damped, A<sub>3</sub> is shoulder damped and the left hand rings G<sub>3</sub>.<sup>8</sup>



Example 2. Ring, ring-hook.

*Shelley ringing* is the practice of placing two bells in one hand at a 90-degree angle and ringing them at the same time. It has many uses, but the most common is when a melody is played in octaves in the upper bells in 4- and 5- octave music. However, it can be used at any time it is expedient to play all notes as written.<sup>9</sup> Shelley ringing was developed in 1975 by Shelley Weaver, when she discovered she could not play all the treble notes written in her part.<sup>10</sup>

A shake or a trill is a unique technique among handbells in that it requires the ringing of one or more bells by making the hand and wrist vibrate in a forward-and-back motion causing the clapper to strike both sides of the bell in rapid alternation.<sup>11</sup> The shake is played in rapid motion somewhat compared to a quick trill. (Example 3) It is performed for the

<sup>8</sup> Allured, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, p.72

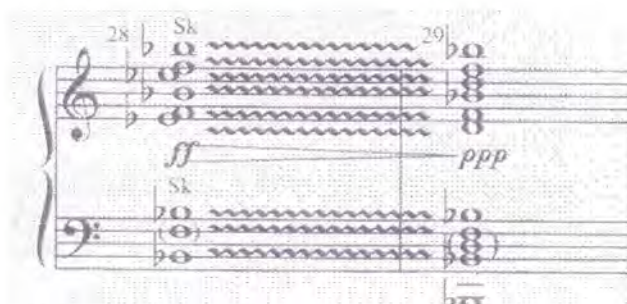
<sup>9</sup> Allured, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> Kathie Fink-Hein, *Shelley Ringing: The Rest of the Story, For Ringers Only*, 3 Jan – Feb 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Allured, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, p. 63.



duration of the note value and can crescendo and decrescendo as the music indicates. The difference between a shake and a trill is that the trill is a combination of two notes and the shake is performed on only one.



Example 3. Shake.

Like any percussive instrument the handbell is capable of producing tones with variances of volume. Various degrees of softness can be achieved through a number of techniques. Allured suggests that tightening the grip on the handle has considerable effect on a ringer's consistent control over the bell, psychologically as well as physically. As with any instrument, playing handbells softly requires more control and precision to create the desired dynamics.

Music composed and arranged by Allured is widely used by bell choirs in the USA Canada, England, and the rapidly growing handbell community in Japan where he conducted teaching seminars on handbells on two occasions<sup>12</sup>. At one time Allured had over 100 compositions in print but many he notes, were commissioned by advanced choirs and of a difficulty level that did not make them suitable for the average church bell choir.<sup>13</sup>

*Incalzando* in C Minor, is an original composition for a five octave handbell ensemble that Allured composed for the Walsh Memorial Bell Choir, Presbyterian Church, Morris Plains, NJ. The beauty of *Incalzando* lies in the symphonic nature of the piece. The

<sup>12</sup> Personal Vita: Donald E. Allured

<sup>13</sup> Donald E. Allured, Email of 7 March 2002, to Annette A. Kenyon



piece begins with an introduction in a brisk eight note pattern and is followed by the theme presented in octaves in both treble and bass bells.(Example 4) Rhythmically the theme does not vary but is built in layers throughout the composition. The element that makes this piece distinctive and gives it energy is the chromatic rise and fall of the main idea. The rhythm is another important element. It has such energy that it sustains most of the piece. In addition, the main theme uses a distinctive rhythm pattern that is followed by a syncopated rhythm.



Example 4. "Incalzando", by Donald E. Allured.

Copyright MCMLXXXIII, Malcolm Music, LTD. Used by permission. License No. HO510HF

This rhythm is one of two important musical ideas with the theme being the other. The major theme follows a sixteen-note pattern for twenty-two measures and is continuously built in layers modulating to E-flat major through the *poco a poco dim* that ends in *pianissimo* before giving way to a peaceful middle section.

Allured used several ringing techniques to add musical contrasts to the theme. One such technique is the tap pluck technique marked in measure 9 by the handbell notational device TPl. (Example 5) It is accomplished by positioning the thumb directly over the clapper and tapping the top of the clapper downward; the wrist is in a lateral position. With



**Example 5. *Incalzando*, Donald E. Allured**

Copyright MCMLXXXIII, Malcolm Music, LTD. Used by permission. License No. H0510HF

the wrist in the correct position, the side of the thumb comes down on the clapper, similar to the space bar being tapped on a word processor. The technique is used in two instances: (1) When fast repeated notes are to be plucked and (2) When a quiet plucked sound is needed.<sup>14</sup>

Allured used the technique called *let vibrate* to create an artistic and musical feeling in the expressive flow of the middle section. The handbell notation **LV** *Let Vibrate* (*Laissez Vibrer*) is written in handbell music when the composer wants the sound of the bells to sustain beyond their note values, such as broken chords or arpeggios of the same harmony.<sup>15</sup> (Example 6) The adagio leads into a finale at the Tempo I marking that is a variation on the theme and ends with a dramatic finale where Allured uses all the bells in the five octave range.

<sup>14</sup> Allured, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p.64.



Example 6. *Incalzando*, Donald E. Allured.

Copyright MCMLXXXIII, Malcolm Music, LTD. Used by permission. License No. H0510HF

The visual artistry of a handbell choir accentuates the dynamics of the music that is unique to a handbell choir. Allured blends into his arrangements a feast for the eyes as well as the ears. In arrangements of familiar tunes Allured builds on the melody in a series of variations. *Concert Variations on "The Ashgrove"* was composed for the handbell choirs of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Hickory, North Carolina. The traditional tune is used throughout, the variations being more in accompaniment of melody. The loveliness of the composition lies in the simplicity of the bells. In contrast to the grandiose style of *Incalzando*, the style of *Concert Variations on "The Ashgrove"* is more of cascading lines against a flowing melody. To project this fluidity of music, legato ringing is essential. What produces the musical result in this piece is the precise damping technique that Allured stresses is fundamental in handbell ringing. The melody varies in position—top, bottom, middle of range and occasionally it doubles in the octaves. The theme smoothly changes from G major to E flat major and Allured employs a progression of chords that gives the



distinctive choral effect only bells can produce. There are four main variations in this piece in which Allured uses different techniques to maintain the richness of color. This piece is lovely in its simplicity and exemplifies much of what is characteristic of Allured's artistry.

Donald Allured's dedication to creating beautiful music and his insistence on keeping the integrity of the written music when played with handbells is unparalleled. Carl Wiltse, handbell composer from Holland, Michigan writes that Donald Allured has dedicated his life not so much to teaching people how to play handbells, but to demanding (and getting!) the best possible effect from them. One cannot miss the uncompromising approach to producing music: The composer or arranger's intentions must be paramount, with no excuses or compromises.<sup>16</sup> Marilyn Hines, past president of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers 1991-1993, says his pieces have quality to them that no else matches. As a composer he has written some of the most exquisite music for handbells. The nuances of musicianship required to play his music as it was meant to be played, challenge the handbell choir to the utmost.<sup>17</sup>

The musical philosophy that Donald Allured adheres to in his music, his teaching and conducting is to strive for the best musical results. From 1976 to the present, as a full-time handbell specialist, Allured's emphasis has been more on teaching. As a professor at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey he stressed the importance of learning how to communicate as a conductor would to achieve a special sound. He taught his students how to teach the techniques that brings the music out of a handbell choir. His students

---

<sup>16</sup> Allured, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Marilyn Hines, Email of 28 March 2002 to Annette A. Kenyon



learned that these skills coupled with knowledge helps inspire personal and musical discipline that is so vital to any performance.<sup>18</sup>

Donald Allured is the founder of the prestigious Week of Handbells that for more than twenty years has been held in August at Bay View, Michigan. Marilyn Hines describes the Week of Handbells at Bay View the pinnacle of handbell ringing. The American Guild of English handbell ringing has now started a similar group, but for many years Bay View was the only place to go for this type of handbell experience. This handbell event features guest conductors, clinics/ workshops and intensive discussions for all participants including discussion seminars for directors on unique problems of handbell instruction, performance and education. A massed ringing concert is the highlight of the festival with many choirs performing selected works. Allured always composes a special piece for this festival. Another crowning glory at this festival is the premier of the winning composition of the Donald E. Allured Composition Award.

Officials at the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers estimate that there are about 450,000 ringers in the United States. Most perform in churches, though many semiprofessional and student groups have sprung up as well. Donald Allured has logged thousand of miles directing concerts and workshops to help these ringers keep the integrity of the music. The respect and admiration that many have for Donald Allured is due to his compassionate and caring nature. He has dedicated his life as a teacher and musician, always willing to explain how to achieve the expected results.

---

<sup>18</sup>Allured, *Mastering Musicianship in Handbells*, 7.



## Bibliography

Allured, Donald E., Mastering Musicianship in Handbells. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992.

Allured, Donald E. Presidents Letter. Reprinted from *Overtones*, Nov. 1974., Overtones 1955-1986. Manhattan, Kansas: AG Press, 1987, 119 p.

Hein, Kathie Fink, "Shelly Ringing. The Rest of the Story". *For Ringers Only*, Jan-Feb. 2000.

Litterst, Richard, The President's Box. Reprinted from *Overtones*, March 1968 & September 1968 respectively., Overtone 1955-1986. Manhattan, Kansas: AG Press, 1987, 109 p.

Rossing, Thomas D. "Tuned Handbells, Church Bells and Carillon Bells" Overtones 1955-1986. Manhattan, Kansas: AG Press, 1987. 605 p.

Personal Vita: Donald E. Allured, May 10, 2001.

### Electronic Mail

Allured, Donald E., EMail of 11 May 2002 to Annette A. Kenyon

Allured, Donald E., EMail of 7 March 2002 to Annette A. Kenyon

Hines, Marilyn, EMail of 28 March 2002 to Annette A. Kenyon

### Music Illustrations

Allured, Donald E., "*Variations on a French Carol*", Listen to the Bells, Copyright 1970; Broadman Press, Nashville, Tennessee. Used by Permission.

Allured, Donald E., *Incalzando*, Copyright 1973, Shawnee Press, Inc., Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania. Used by Permission. License No. H0510HF



## List of Works

### Arrangements

Annie Laurie  
 Choral and Alleluia  
 Come Thou Long Expected Jesus  
 Concert Variations on the Ashgrove  
 Carols in Color  
 Fugue a la Joy  
 Give us Peace in Our Time  
 Handbell Duo on Three Hymn Tunes  
 In the Bleak Mid-Winter  
 In Thee O Lord Do I Put My Trust  
 Introit and Processional  
 Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring  
 Joseph Dearest Joseph Mine  
 Linden Lea  
 Londonderry Air  
 O Holy Night  
 Sleepers Wake  
 Still, Still, Still  
 Music of the Nativity Season

### Books

Mastering Musicianship in Handbells  
 Handbell Composing and Arranging

### Compositions

Canticle of Peace  
 Concertante for Bells and Organ  
 Concert Overture for Bells  
 Concert Suite for Bells  
 Don't Let Us be Strangers  
 In Quiet Faith  
 Incalzando  
 Jubilate for Bells  
 Liberty Fanfare  
 Fantasia  
 Fountainhead  
 Grand Psalm of Praise  
 His Kingdom is Forever  
 Perpetual Motion  
 Prologue Fugue and Finale  
 Reflections on Aurelia  
 Sharon's Song  
 Silverthorne  
 Variations and Fugue  
 A Wesleyan Psalm  
 Wesleyan Rhapsody  
 With Mallets Aforethought



# Shawnee Press, Inc.

PO BOX 880 • 49 WARING DRIVE  
DELAWARE WATER GAP, PA 18327-0880  
PHONE: 670-476-0550 • FAX: 670-476-3247 • ORDER LINE: 1-800-882-8584  
E-MAIL: shawneepress@shawn.com • INTERNET: www.shawneepress.com

ATTN: Annette Kenyon  
10206 Steeplechase Ct.  
Chrousester, VA 23061

DATE 5/21/02

FAX: 757-887-4766

Thank you for your request concerning our following publication:

*Incolando*

*Allured, D.*

*HP 5160*

Permission is granted, *grants*, to use the abovesated work in your paper to fulfill a Seminar course in music research at Christopher Newport University under the following conditions:

1. The following statement must appear with the copyright notice by each example, or in an appropriate list of credits: Used by permission. License No. H0510HF
2. This is a one-time permission and all permitted copies will be made within a year
3. No copies will be further duplicated and all copies reproduced under the terms of this permission are for private use only and will not be made available on a sale for profit or rental basis to another party. Necessary copies are permitted for the University Library and for file as may otherwise be required by said University.
4. One copy of the page showing the copyright and additional words will be sent for files.
5. It is acceptable to use excerpts in your thesis/dissertation and for UMI to make necessary copies, but additional publishers will need another license.

If you agree to these terms, please sign below and return this letter to me. The rights granted herein will automatically expire within sixty (60) days from the date of this letter.

If you decide, for any reason, not to proceed, kindly return the unsigned letter. We certainly wish you success in the completion of your degree.

Sincerely,

*Michelle Williams*

Michelle Williams  
Licensing Department

ABOVE AGREED TO AND ACCEPTED

By *Annette A. Kenyon*  
License No. H0510HF

Date *May 24, 2002*



WebMail - Copyright Permission

Delete

File

Create

Reply

Reply All

Forward

Previous

Next

Options

Index

Help

Date Sent: Monday, May 13, 2002 11:38 AM

From: "Virginia Copelin" <vcopeli@lifeway.com>

Add to Address Book

To: akenyon

Subject: Copyright Permission

Status: ☐ Urgent ☐ New

Free permission is granted for you to use measures 28-31 from Variations on A French Carol by Donald Allured from Listen to the Bells in your paper on techniques and handbell ringing and not for any other distribution or for sale. Please use the copyright acknowledgement as it appears in the book and add "Used by permission."

Virginia Copelin  
Rights and Permissions Associate  
LifeWay Christian Resources  
Legal Services MSN 187  
FAX: 615-251-3727

As God works through us...  
We will help people and churches know Jesus Christ and seek His Kingdom by providing biblical solutions that spiritually transform individuals and cultures.

Powered by WebMail v3.51 - © Copyright 1995-99 by Infinite Technologies







