

# TREBLE TECHNIQUES

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The first thing to remember when starting any new technique is that in order to be successful, many hours of practice and study may be needed. This is particularly true of "four-in-hand" and "Shelley" ringing. But before long, however, you will find the technique to be second nature. Hopefully, the following information will be of help to you in developing techniques.

**Shelley Ringing** - One ringer covers two octaves of handbells (or handchimes) within one position by ringing two bells simultaneously in one hand. Handles cannot be interlocked, and the larger bell is usually placed on top. The bell assignments which require Shelley ringing usually start no lower than C6/C7. In some cases, bells which are not an octave apart are rung Shelley, for example G6 with B6. When ringing Shelley and four-in-hand, ringers often wear double gloves to protect their hands and fingers as blisters and nerve damage may develop if a lot of ringing is done.

**Four-in-Hand Ringing** - One ringer covers two octaves of handbells (or handchimes) or three or four consecutive notes within one position by ringing two bells separately in one hand. Again, the larger bell is usually placed on top because it makes the bells easier to hold onto. Handles can either be interlocked or not, depending on the type of bells you have and your personal preference. However, not interlocked is the method usually preferred because it allows so much more flexibility to change bells. For example, if you are usually ringing F6/F7 in one hand, you can quickly drop the F7 and pick up an F#6. The possibilities are endless, and each piece of music may require a different combination. This is particularly true if you are assigned, for example, the G6, A6, B6, and C7 and their sharps and flats; key changes or accidentals are usually easily accomplished by the way the bells are stacked. It is possible to ring both bells together by ringing at an angle toward the center.

**Weave** - Ringing three or more consecutive bells. For bells going up the scale, the left hand plays the lowest note, the right hand plays the next note, aiming toward the right a bit, then the left hand plays the next note, aiming toward the left a bit. This is to prevent the bells from hitting each other. Bells going down the scale are rung in an opposite manner. When weaving, remember to return the bells to their original "home" position to avoid picking up the wrong bell later on.

**Mallets** - A † or ‡ sign usually designates mallets. Depending on the directions given by the composer or arranger, you may leave the bell(s) on the table and strike with an appropriate mallet at about the same place the clapper strikes the bell casting, or you may hold the bell(s) off the table and strike the bell where the clapper strikes the casting. Be sure to watch for a uniform appearance among the bell choir members (hold bells at same height and strike the same way). A **Mallet Lift** is designated by a †↑ sign. Strike and immediately lift the bell.

(over)

**Shake** - **SK** means to shake the bell rapidly, causing the clapper to strike both sides of the bell. For soft shakes or to crescendo during a shake, allow the clapper to strike only one side of the casting.

**Trill** - **tr** means to shake two bells rapidly and alternately to achieve the effect of a trill.

**Martellato (Mart)** - ▼ means to strike the foam pad with the bell, causing the bell to ring. The sound should stop immediately. On treble bells, it usually helps to bury your fist in the pad so that some sound can be heard. Start from about 3-4 inches off the table to enhance the sound and to help assure a more accurate, "together" mart. A **Martellato Lift (Mart Lift)** is designated by a ▼ ↑ sign, and is the same as martellato except immediately lift the bell from the foam, allowing the bell to sound. The bell "bounces" off the pad.

**Ring Touch** - **RT** means to ring close to the shoulder and damp immediately. The resulting sound is very staccato.

**Tower Swing** – **SW** or ↓ ↑ means to ring the bell, then extend the arm and lower the bell to allow it to pass the body and return to "ready to ring" position, within the number of beats designated. Always know what is behind you before doing a tower swing, and be aware of what your neighbor is doing. In some situations, you may need to modify the tower swing by stopping the swing at your side rather than behind you.

**Thumb Damp** - **TD** means to put your thumb on the casting as the bell is rung. On lower bells, the first finger and thumb may need to be on the casting to produce a staccato sound.

**Pluck** - **PL** means the clapper should be thrown down against the bottom of the casting while the bell is laying on the table. Use the third finger and thumb to pick up the clapper, and snap the hand as you release the clapper. Make sure your hand moves straight away from the bell as you release the clapper or the bell will roll (especially with the smaller bells). A **Pluck Lift** is designated by a **PL** ↑ sign. Pluck and immediately lift the bell.

**Brush Damp** - **BD** means to lightly brush the bell against the chest in a downward motion instead of damping it. This technique is helpful when a forte note is immediately followed by a piano note with the same bell.

**Controlled Diminuendo** - **CD** means to ring a bell, particularly the larger bells, then slide a finger or the hand up the outside of the handbell to gradually diminish the sound.

**Gyro** - ☉ means to ring the bell, then slowly rotate the bell to achieve a variation in sound.

**Vibrato** - **vib.** means to ring the bell, then move the bell from side to side with the wrist to achieve a variation in sound.

If you have any questions or problems with these techniques, talk to other ringers who may have developed their own techniques, or feel free to call me at the numbers on the top of the first page. Good luck, and happy ringing always!