

Area I Music Performance Notes

Ed Rollins

Notes for the Coppers and Bronze: my focus on conducting is almost always centered upon making our ringing more musical. The following are some areas of focus:

- Dynamics can be broader than we generally play them;
- Damping is as much a part of musicality as is ringing – percussive damps ruin a line;
- Preparing to ring is the key to togetherness;
- Melodic lines must sing – and harmonic lines are way more important than you might think;
- Multiple techniques are often more distracting than musical.

These are just a few general thoughts as you read through the notes. The most important thing I can share is that we're getting together to make music and enjoy each other – plan for FUN!!

Coppers:

Toccata for a Joyous Day – Paul McKlveen

Great festive piece with high energy. With its high energy it is very important that we provide the listeners with contrasts, particularly in dynamics and in style of ringing. Speaking of dynamics...since there aren't many dynamics listed, plan to make them very distinct from each other. At ms. 18 go down one level from what is written – to give the four measure crescendo more depth (ms 25-29, 78-81), we'll bring down the dynamic in the measures before. At 29, the dynamic lists double forte – we can do that, but don't pound the mallets in the bass and be fairly gentle with the RT in the treble. Everything from 54-70 can be softer than is written – ms 71 does not increase much (keep it contained so that we can build to the end). Make 82 a forte, and then we'll increase to double forte at 89. We will also crescendo the whole back page, mf at 93, f at 96, and ff at 98.

Multiple techniques add to the tone color of the piece – transitioning easily from section to section is very important. (naturally, the first changes happen at a page turn, ms. 29, so be ready). Bass at 29 – I think I'd be more inclined to use mallets than plucks. First melody is at ms 8 – make it sing. Emphasize lightly beat one and even lighter beat three. Middle bells will need to bring out the melody in 18 – switches back to treble at 22 – keep it light. All of page 4 could become muddy – count and keep bells close to shoulder. There is great contrast on pages 6 and 7 – everyone soft, including chimes. There are just a few added flats to watch out for. I've heard it played loud and fast and by page three you'd wish it was done – let's challenge ourselves with great contrast throughout!!

King of Kings – arr: Ward

Bob Ward has given us a terrific rendition of the Hebrew melody to which we often sing “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” It's a short, catchy tune that you'll be humming all day, but it is also very rhythmic and will pose a few challenges.

- 1) The introduction utilizes the echo technique – dotted half note ringers ring on two and lightly bounce on the table on beats 3 and 4.
- 2) Ms. 5 – don't be too eager to damp – ring two notes before you damp
- 3) Ms. 8-17, bass clef – practice this rhythmic pattern. Play it slow and then speed it up. This is played with mallets – two mallets are better than one when you are playing 1/16 notes. Remember not to beat the bells with the mallets – think of it as a gentle bounce.
- 4) D5 ringers will notice that their note is sometimes written in the bass clef –ms. 10-17. ms. 30-38.
- 5) There are a few measures of 2/4 thrown in to drive you crazy...and don't forget the key changes at ms. 39, 52, and 65.
- 6) With each key change the idea is pick up the tempo, so get ready to rock and roll!!
- 7) We will plan to do the optional ending.
- 8) Except for about 4 measures, the melody is always in the treble – the biggest challenge is to add the mallet clicks where the “x” is printed in the music.
- 9) Practice slow – then, practice faster and faster. Speed only comes from training the eyes and muscles to move faster.

Carol of the Birds – arr. Carr

Deb has penned a gorgeous arrangement of this beautiful carol. It seems fairly straightforward but it has a great deal of intricacy. The first challenge is to play the opening and closing “bird” section with a light, soft, connected style of ringing. It's hard because sometimes those higher bells are tough to control dynamically. Portions of the melody are heard in a soft controlled style beginning in ms. 2. Measure 12-13 are a transition, both key and speed – we will slow down and I'll subdivide the last two beats of 13.

Ms 14 is buoyant and still very light, but it is in two and can seem frantic. Be in control. At ms. 21 we'll slow down into another wonderful “birds in flight” type of section. Mallets again are not heavy and not rushed. Melody is in an easy 4/4 while the bass are playing in triplets – keep the beat! Do not be swayed. We slow down again into 3/3 for the next four measure transition.

Big cut off at 37. And key change. Very soft – whatever speed I want...so watch. This section is all LV. Watch in 45 because the birds take flight in ms. 46 – we'll be in a quick two. When we come out of this section in 53 and 54, I'll conduct each note of the moving bass. It says forte in ms 55, but we're not there long – I'd like to get softer to the end.

There is so much great stuff in this piece – it's perfect to make ringers watch the director. Hint, hint.

Bronze:

We've got some doozies ahead of us!! Great challenge. The biggest challenge will be to get beyond the thinking that fast and furious is musical. ..to get beyond the thinking of panic...to get the arms in motion ahead of the beat.

Visions of Peace – Buckwalter

Perhaps the least frightening of the pieces but thinking that way could be a mistake. This piece is so wide open that we always need to be thinking beautiful ringing, follow through, connection, and very little abrupt damping.

The first challenge is thinking in two – 3/2 and 4/2 with four 1/8 notes per beat – they are LV but even from measure to measure you may not need to do much damping depending upon the chord changes. Ms 1 and 2 are the same, 3 and 4 are the same, 5 and 6 are the same, etc. Any damping in this piece should be brushed and not slammed to the chest. Beat one ringers are so important!! Watch and count and be ready. Arms in motion before the beat. Very light ringing with softer dynamics – we're thinking of peace.

Between ms 28 and 29, the beat is not changing – just moving from half note to quarter note. The dynamic mark at 29 is forte, but don't believe it – back off just a bit. SLANE is a gentle tune – bass do not get ponderous and heavy. The thick chords may get you thinking that way but resist. Keep the gentle damping. Watch from 46-48 as we slow down, pause, and move back to 3/2.

At 60 we move back to SLANE and it is played with three's against two's – be steady, no rushing. We do get louder during this section but it is a warm loud, not harsh.

Allegro, from Concerto in a minor – arr. Gramann

Lots of black notes and motion, so a few things are very important. #1 – don't rush. #2 – don't rush. #3 – don't rush. Then, #4 – keep ringing light and close to shoulder; #5 – transition to chimes is tricky – keep it as soft as possible; #6 - preparation to ring keeps you steady and not behind; #7 – take advantage of LV – it is your friend; #8 – moving from one bell to another on the table can ruin a line if they are just thrown down. If you can't get it easily, can someone else?

Slight emphasis on 1 and 3 will keep us thinking dance-like. For instance, in ms 5 – eight note pick up to ms 5 must be lighter than beat one – beat one must be slightly more pronounced than the same note on the end of one. Ms. 6 – beat one slight emphasis – repeated 1/16ths can increase in volume to beat three, then relax, then repeat.

Bass will keep us steady, but that means the bass can't speed up. Chime section can be harsh and abrasive – keep the enthusiasm in check – light and bouncy. Don't harshly damp – ring at least two before you even think about damping...this helps connect the line. Ms 37 treble should be very light and playful – keep the LV in mind.

Ms 42-45 could be the muddiest section – keep your main 1&2&3&4& beats as consistent as possible. Keep the arms flowing and ready to ring. For the most part, the dynamics will terrace.

Keep it light, sprightly, and did I say, “don’t rush?”

Waltz, from Masquerade Suite – Khachaturian/Griffin

Another challenging piece, but who doesn’t love a challenge? A few things to consider: #1 – 252 measures, but who’s counting. It’s hard to keep focus and intensity for that long a period of time. #2 – Easy to rush. #3 – There will need to be some creative assigning to cover the chromatic measures, 38-40, 66-67, 104-108, 133-135, 159=160, 175-177, 201-203, etc.

The oom-pahs of each measure (beats 2 and 3) should not be harsh – give emphasis to 1 and back off on 2 and 3. (though we are playing in a one). Choir one, ms 1 – the first treble note is a 1/16 and not an 1/8th – tricky.

Ms 13 drops to a piano – crescendos in 18 and 19 to a mezzo forte in 20, but again (and there’s a theme you’re hearing in all of these notes), not harsh – it’s a dance. 41 is our first forte.

Choir 1 treble in 20 – when there are hash marks over the notes, give them some emphasis, but not necessarily an accent. When you do have long notes, take advantage of them and stretch out the sound. Our first slow down is a rit in 87 – enjoy it through 88, and then, we’re back again with Choir 1 singing the melody, and Choir 2 lightly accompanying. Big rit and crescendo from 105-108 before we transition into the melody again at 116. Rit at 135-136 leading into our biggest double forte yet, only to drop to piano four measures later. The contrast of dynamics in this section are very important.

Much of the piece follows along just like the first half of the piece. Keep the tempo, do the dynamics, and think lightly. Will be great fun!

And All That Jazz – arr. Hanson

Love it!! Think of Catherine Zeta Jones and how she danced with such fervor. We need to play that way. First eight measures are so fun and set up the entire piece. Decrescendo every two measures.

Treble and bass at ms 9 – light and saucy! Melody needs to sing. 25 is an abrupt dynamic increase. Back off again at 29 – extremely light on top – there’s lots of notes that can cover up the chime melody. Increase volume beginning at 37, every two measures until 43. At 43, watch!!

We'll increase tempo but not too much – I like it a bit steadier. 47 and following are a bit tricky – bring out that top melody. Ms 50 and 54 – light – bass bring it out. At page turn, ms 59 – another good place to watch.

At 65, a slight increase. What is important here is that all the upcoming bell changes not be the focal point of the music by whomping on the table when you put them down. That will detract and make things appear un-saucy. Big transition in 81 to the big ending – need some creative assigning from 86 on. Final note is not loud or harsh – lightly touch.

Thanks all – we'll have a great time. Come with your game faces on!! See you soon.

Ed