

Bell Tree Composition Contest Narrative

This contest is focused on increasing compositions which will bring bell trees from the periphery into the mainstream of the handbell world.

The goal of the music is to have the bell tree and the handbell choir part interrelated, woven together musically. The bell tree part is not a descant, an ostinato, or a repeat of the handbell choir part. It is a significant part, equal with the handbell choir part. The handbell choir part is not an accompaniment to the bell tree nor a stand-alone part with the bell tree optional. Both are necessary for the whole.

The goal is to have a composition playable by the mainstream of handbell choirs, level 2+ through level 3. The challenge is to compose it with what many handbell choirs in this category have – that is, a 3-to-5 octave set of handbells and/or a 3-octave set of chimes. Other ideas will be considered, but top priority will be given to this arrangement of equipment.

The bell tree part is to be interesting and playable. It should require the skill of a moderately skilled handbell ringer but not require the skill of an advanced bell tree ringer. Compositions which limit the number of sharps and flats to 2 are encouraged. Key changes are acceptable as long as they use two sharps/flats or less. Standard setup is preferred but not required. (See A Bell Tree Keyboard Manual, Tree-O Publications 117.) While you are composing, be aware that many handbell choirs in this range do not have duplicate bells.

The compositions will be evaluated without identification of the composer on the manuscript. Two handbell choirs will read through the compositions, Bells of the Lakes in Minnesota, and The Bells of Sunriver in Oregon. Both handbell choirs have experienced bell tree ringers who can evaluate the bell tree part. Evaluations will be made by the ringers, the directors, and the bell tree players.

The winning composition will be published by Jeffers Handbell Supply and will be submitted for performance at the 2021 National Seminar. “Honorable Mention” manuscripts will be promoted for publication to support the goal of having more compositions for bell tree and handbell choir available.