



Dear Klapper Kat,

My sort-of-average church handbell choir is very dedicated, showing up faithfully for rehearsals, services, taking care of their music and our three octaves of handbells. They never complain about my repertoire selections, or anything else for that matter. When I tell people what a great group of ringers I have, someone invariably asks, “I’ve never heard them ring; does your group play outside engagements?” My simple answer is always ‘no’. My ringers and I have had discussions about playing at nursing homes or the local shopping mall, but they don’t think that experience will in any way make them better ringers, and they just don’t see the point. I see that other church, school, and community choirs do this all the time - especially at this season. How do I explain to my ringers that there are benefits to ‘playing out’? We do attend the occasional local ringing event, and have been to a few festivals.

Signed, Hesitant Director

Dear Hesitant Director,

The Klapper Kat is pleased that your group has at least participated in a few Area events; that is a great start. What was the group’s response to those activities? Did they learn something? Was it too much effort to prepare and attend? Did they feel uncomfortable playing in public? I ask those questions because it is unclear why your ringers are resistant to ‘playing out’. Here are some thoughts that may help you and your ringers approach this dilemma from a different perspective.

1. Building the confidence of your ringers to ‘play out’ is a challenge. You’ll have to start slowly. Perhaps you can encourage a few them to attend a program or two of neighboring choirs who play out regularly. Encourage your ringers to talk with performing ringers after the presentation to ask how the experience felt. There are wonderful videos online of choirs of all ages and abilities and your ringers might find some motivation there.
2. Playing for the same audience (church or school) is a comfortable situation for your group, but pushing them to expand into other venues and audiences is beneficial. Some choirs in this situation start by inviting a few family members to attend part of a rehearsal and performing just one or two selections for a sympathetic and loving audience. Staying on familiar ground, this idea could expand to a somewhat longer event, inviting other members of the community to attend; combine the handbell selections with other solos or duets to vary the program and take the sole burden off your ringers.
3. If equipment moving and transportation is an issue, engage family and friends to help. This takes enormous planning on your part, but it will work. Cases with wheels, hand carts, furniture moving dollies, and large plastic totes will help to organize your equipment. When you are playing out, always ask if tables are available at the performance venue.
4. An ‘outside’ gig need not involve your whole choir. Many concert requests seek small ensembles because they do not have space for a full handbell choir. This is an excellent reason to have a duo, trio, and/or quartets at the ready all year long. And, the smaller the ensemble, the less equipment is needed!
5. The opportunities for playing out at this season (and the rest of the year) are mind boggling: private parties, nursing homes, adult day-care centers, hospitals, shopping malls, historical sites, zoos, museums...the possibilities are endless. Initially, try to make ‘playing out’ as much a social as a musical experience. Consider taking your performing group out for coffee after the gig. Make it fun.
6. Finally, and getting back to the confidence issue, look for Area 1 workshops on performance anxiety/ building ringer confidence at the next Festival Conference. The ability and desire to perform in a variety of situations helps to build musical character and strengthens the notion of teamwork within your ensemble.

Happy Holidays!



Klapper Kat

All Area 1 handbell musicians and directors are invited to contribute handbell related questions or issues about techniques, repertoire selection, conducting and rehearsing, maintenance, choir management and assignments, or most anything else.

The Fundamental Tone editor and The Klapper Kat reserve the right to combine questions and edit submissions for content.

Address questions to The Klapper Kat and email them at any time to the:

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