



YOU TOO CAN BE A SOLO RINGER

By: Sue Wilber

Looking for something to do with handbells during your quarantine/down time that doesn't require a large group of people?

Now is the absolute PERFECT time to try your hand at solo ringing!!!

At the first Area I Festival/Conference I attended in 1989 at Roger Williams University, I became fascinated by several solo performances and attended a class on solo and / or ensemble ringing. I came home excited to try some of the things I learned and have never looked back.

I have found that solo ringing is a constant learning process and it requires patience and confidence in yourself that you can do it. It's not going to all come together immediately, but with practice and perseverance you will be amazed at what you can accomplish.

Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

1. You don't necessarily have to have bells to practice. Use what is in your home if you don't have access to bells at home, church, or school – kitchen utensils, silverware, etc.
2. Start with very simple tunes. Choose a hymn or a simple song you know well – I started with “Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee” – and just play the melody line, this way you are playing something you know well and can easily fix mistakes.
3. Remember that solo ringing is a very individual “sport” and how you ring a piece may not be the same way that another person rings it. Ring it in a way that is comfortable for you. If you have the ability, video yourself and see how it looks or ask a colleague or a friend that is a solo ringer to watch and coach you.
4. As you learn to feel comfortable ringing simple music, step up to the next level – again, an individual choice and what works best for you. For example, something with one or two 8th note patterns might be what you would look for in the next level.

One of the absolute necessities, in my opinion, for a solo ringer is an excellent accompanist! Find an accompanist who can play WITH you and not play OVER you and has some understanding of the uniqueness of our instrument.

Music selection is an individual preference, but there are MANY level one and two solos available for purchase from your favorite music publisher, and many solos are often sold as solos/duets so it's almost like having two pieces for the price of one!

If you are looking for a “first” solo for Christmas that is beautiful and easy, I suggest “Silent Night! Holy Night!” arranged by Christine Anderson who is a well known handbell soloist:

(<https://www.hanbellworld.com/music/MusicPiece.cfm?Piece=1214>).

This is actually the first solo I ever performed in public and it is relatively easy and the accompaniment is beautiful.

Another easy "first solo" is "Sweet Hour of Prayer" that can be performed as a solo or a duet, and it is another crowd pleaser.

(<https://www.hanbellworld.com/music/MusicPiece.cfm?Piece=1313>).

Many of the published solos often come with downloadable accompaniments which can be used to practice against; this is helpful so you can get a feel for the correct tempo of a piece and how it should sound. However, unless otherwise indicated, these accompaniments cannot be used for performances unless one has received permission for that from the publisher. There ARE some solos that have been arranged during the pandemic that DO offer a downloadable accompaniment, which can be used for performance - perfect if you are asked to do something for a church service or other event. The handbell world has been very proactive in this regard. Another valuable resource is the Handbell Notation/Solo and Ensemble Guide (<https://www.hanbellworld.com/equip/equipPiece.cfm?Piece=12109>), which can be inserted into your notebook and contains all the markings and notations usually found in solo and ensemble music.

In summary, solo ringing is a very rewarding experience and this time of not being able to be together as a group is the perfect opportunity to learn something new! Start small and don't be afraid to ask for help from others. Join the Handbell Soloist group on Facebook, and consider taking some classes on solo and ensemble ringing at Area or National Events.

Feel free to reach out to me also (spw226@comcast.net) if I can be of help as you try your hand at solo ringing!