Treble Techniques (and Teaching Them, Too!)

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Purpose

To review the most common techniques for playing multiple bells in one hand: four-in-hand (4iH) and shelley. By the end of this workshop, you should know how to:

- Apply healthy ringing habits when holding multiple bells in one hand.
- Recognize the difference between 4iH and shelley and determine which technique is best to use in a given musical passage.
- Quickly place bells into an appropriate formation.
- Comfortably play both bells simultaneously in a shelley configuration.
- Control each bell independently or smoothly play both bells simultaneously in a 4iH configuration.
- Execute common stopped-sound techniques while using either configuration.
- Recognize alternate methods for playing 4iH and advanced multiple bell techniques.
- Apply strategies for to help your musicians utilize these techniques effectively.

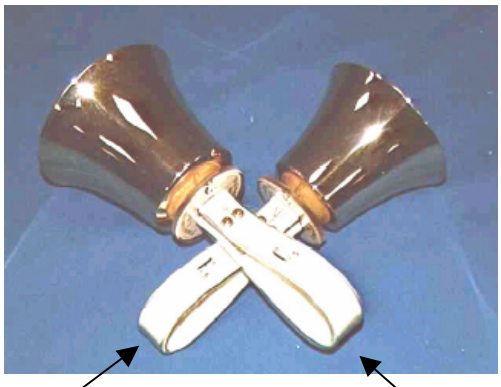
4iH vs. Shelley – Strengths and Weaknesses of Each

	4iH	Shelley
Ringing both bells at once:	good	best
Ringing one bell at a time:	best	possible (difficult to control healthily)
Damping:	no difference	
Thumb damping:	no difference (can be tricky either way)	
Marting both bells at once:	okay (louder)	better (more control of dynamics)
Marting one bell at a time:	better for bottom	better for top

The Basics of Shelley Ringing

Used mainly to ring two bells simultaneously in one hand.

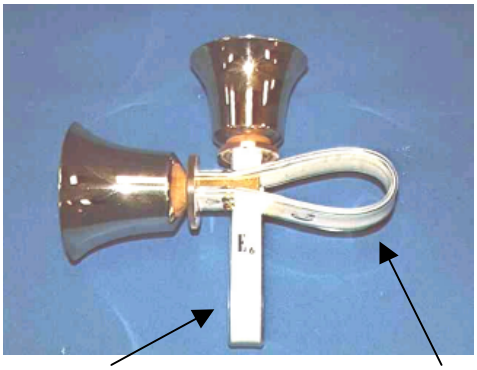
- Clappers move in the same direction and bell handles lie parallel to each other (see picture at right).
- Ringing motion demo: Knocking
- Used mainly to play octaves or build chords in solo/small ensemble ringing.
- Common formations keep octaves or thirds in the same hand since they often ring together. The top bell should be the one that is heavier or plays more often (in palm of hand).



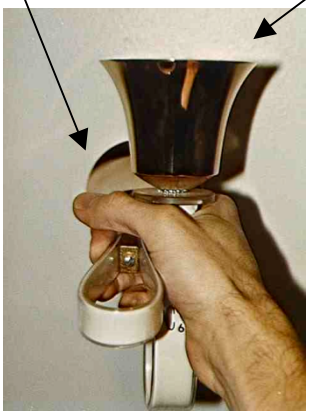
bottom/secondary bell top/primary bell

The Basics of 4iH Ringing

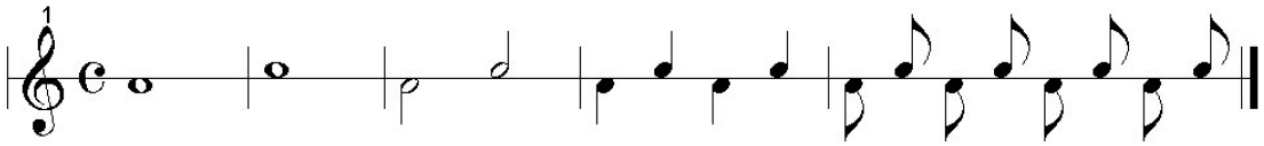
Provides more flexibility than shelley ringing since bells may be rung independently or simultaneously.



bottom/secondary bell top/primary bell



- Clappers move in perpendicular planes and bell handles lie <u>perpendicular</u> to each other (see pictures at right).
- Ringing motions demo:
  - Top bell alone – "Normal" ring/handshake
  - Bottom bell alone – Knock
  - Both bells – Aim for "sweet spot" between the two castings and flick wrist (squeeze handles <u>lightly</u> and keep wrist relaxed and flexible)
- Used mainly to play octaves when the octaves don't always ring together or to play more than two bells in quick succession when there is not enough time to weave (for example, to cover an F#6 when holding E6 and F6, or for one ringer to cover G6 – C7 in a 3-octave choir). 4iH is routinely used for bells C6 and above, and often used to manage tricky passages for bells C5 through B5. It is not recommended to use 4iH for bells below C5, and another solution (e.g., weaving, sharing with a neighbor) should be sought.
- Common formations keep octaves or thirds in the same hand. As for shelley ringing, the top bell should be the one that is heavier or plays more often (in palm of hand).
  - Demo: Two people hold bells in thirds and ring a scale. Allows for better damping and control in faster passages, plus thirds often play together.
  - BUT, always case specific, so figure out what works best for a given passage (e.g., seconds would work better for a passage with arpeggios).
- Drill: Practice ringing each bell independently. The notes below the line are the top/primary bell, and the notes above the line are the bottom/secondary bell. Try changing dynamics to see how you can control the volume for each bell.



Damping

- To damp just the top bell: shoulder or thumb
- To damp just the bottom bell: shoulder (flipping upside down is faster), table, or hip (less attractive visually)
- To damp both bells: chest/shoulder (flipping upside down is faster), table, hip (less attractive visually), or thumb plus index finger (can be tricky to maneuver)

Stopped-sound Techniques

Thumb damping (with bells oriented in either shelley or 4iH position)

- Grasp the castings as you would normally hold the handles. Then use the usual ringing motions to generate the stopped sound. This can be tricky because it is fairly time-consuming to set up.
- Use your thumb to damp the top bell and your other hand to damp the bottom bell.

Marting

- Shelley configuration
    - Mart both bells as you normally would when holding only one.
    - Mart the top bell alone by resting the bottom bell on the table and marting over the handle of the bottom bell.
- 4iH configuration
    - Mart both bells by flicking your wrist as you push the bells into the foam.
    - Mart the bottom bell alone by pushing it directly into the foam.

Other Techniques

- Alternate 4iH methods: locked handles (useful for holding larger bells more comfortably), alternate shelley, British/Japanese style
- Advanced techniques: six-in-hand, simultaneous bottom bell table damp/top bell ring

Remember

- Practice makes perfect! The only way to become comfortable holding two bells in one hand is to do it often.
    - Try holding an extra bell even when you don't need to just to get used to the feeling and to work on ringing the top bell without accidentally ringing the bottom one.
    - When using 4iH in a piece, don't be afraid to put the bottom bell down if it doesn't ring for awhile. The more you practice "dropping" the bottom bell and picking it back up, the faster you'll get. It is easier on your fingers to let go of the bottom bell when you don't need it.
    - Challenge yourself in rehearsals. If your ringing neighbor is absent and you are feeling comfortable with your own part, try using shelley and/or 4iH to cover both positions.
- Be creative. Don't be afraid to try something different or unusual to manage a tricky spot (e.g., "pinky damping").

Working on Treble Techniques with Your Musicians (Or, Help! I've Created a Diva!)

Assignments
Shifting among treble positions can develop facility and flexibility, but can also be a challenge!

Treble positions:
- C6-D6/7: "The best of both worlds" for a battery ringer ready for a new challenge.
    - Requires musical sensitivity, ability to follow both battery and treble lines.
    - D7 is easily overlooked by a novice ringer in this position.
    - C#7 bell is shared with B6/C7 ringer—can be a challenge.
- E6/7-F6/7: Has the reputation of being the most challenging treble position.
    - But . . . that's not always true! Score study can determine the best position to place your strongest treble ringer.
- G6/7-A6/7: The workhorse of the treble section.
    - This musician is often called upon to solve problems re: bell sharing, swapping 4iH setups, etc.
- B6/7-C7/8: The red-headed stepchild of the treble section.
    - There are *plenty* of pieces where this is a challenging position . . . or when it's not, figure out how to utilize this person to help out!

Healthy Ringing / Consistent Technique
- Consider appointing a more experienced treble ringer as "section leader" who can work with newer musicians on consistent style, help solve problems, etc.
- If a technique *looks* funny it's probably *not* healthy—analyze technique to stop problems before they start.
- Don't forget to warm up!

Treble Training
- Make ledger line "flash cards"—how fast can your ringers get?
- Develop straightforward (and *subtle*) techniques for marking music—perhaps each stand partner gets a different colored pencil. No need to highlight!
- Ring 8-bell quartet music as a duet or trio—lots of practice with thinking on your feet!

Healthy Attitudes
- Encourage bell sharing and cooperation, creative problem-solving
- "Showing off" rarely leads to a more musical performance (True 6iH is only required for a handful of pieces—can you find better solutions?)
- Practice conscientious damping—it's easy to get sloppy in the treble, and bad habits have a habit of spreading!
- Have fun! Mastering 4iH techniques builds musicians' confidence.