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## WRANGLERS MASED REHEARSAL NOTES

Conductor: J.-C. Coolen

### Introduction

I'm delighted to have the opportunity to conduct you at the 2011 Ringing Link! I thank the Festival Committee for the invitation, and I look forward to working with you all in Calgary.

In Calgary, I'd like to focus on ringing—coming together as one, unified, ensemble, and making great music. To aid in your preparation for Calgary, I've prepared the following notes. *General Notes* relate to issues common to all pieces, while the piece-specific notes highlight some matters from each piece.

If you have any questions on any of these notes, please feel free to contact me by phone (905-683-5757) or via email ([jccoolen@sympatico.ca](mailto:jccoolen@sympatico.ca))—I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Happy rehearsing, and see you in Calgary!

J.-C. Coolen

### General Notes on Massed Ringing

In your general preparation for massed ringing in Calgary:

***Prepare to ring visually with the conductor, rather than aurally with the ringers around you.*** The acoustics of the massed ringing venue are unpredictable. They will definitely be different from the acoustics you're used to ringing in at home, and they may include strange reverberations, echoes or frequency dead-spots. Also, the greater number of ringers in the massed setting, and the unsettledness of ringers ringing in an unfamiliar environment, increases the probability that there will be ringers ringing ahead of, or behind, the beat. Focusing on ringing your notes in visual synchronization with the conductor will help you minimize the chances of you being swept away by any of these auditory distractions—and will help you provide strong auditory leadership to those ringers who are having a difficult time watching the conductor.

In your home choir, practice watching your conductor and taking your cues visually from him/her, rather than listening to your fellow ringers for cues. Specifically, practice watching the conductor through each of your strikes, i.e. don't look at your score just as you strike, but maintain your gaze on the conductor until your strike is well completed; and, as you watch through your strike, practice synchronizing your strike with the conductor's beat/ictus. This will help increase our unity of ensemble in the massed situation.

***Prepare to deal with difficulties seeing the conductor in the massed setting.***

Depending on your placement on the massed ringing floor, you will probably be

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further away from the conductor, on a different height plane than the conductor, and/or looking at the conductor from a very different angle than in your home choir situation. Further, the conductor may be in front of a wall or background that matches his/her clothing and/or skin tone. Any combination of these factors will make it much more difficult to see the conductor than in your home ringing situation; in fact, you may not be able to see the conductor's baton at all in the massed ringing situation.

Being used to watching the conductor will give you a head start in dealing with any of these situations. Then, if you find yourself dealing with one or more of these difficulties in the massed ringing situation, try to find the beat/pulse the conductor is showing—it may be in his/her hand, or arm, rather than at the end of the baton (which you may not be able to see). Synchronize this pulse with your internal counting—and then place your strikes in this pulse+count matrix (regardless of what you hear other ringers around you doing), and you should be right on in your ringing.

**Prepare to ring with a wide dynamic range.** It's true that bells are a subtle instrument—yet often we don't explore the true dynamic range that is possible on bells. But also, in the massed ringing situation, we have the possibility of the synergistic combination of many ringers all ringing softly or all ringing strongly, together.

In your preparation at home, explore how you can create true pianos and true fortes, instead of variations of mezzo dynamics. Then, apply this to the repertoire you're ringing. Practice the dynamic markings as printed in each score, aiming for a wide and noticeable differentiation between dynamic levels. Also, practice effective and genuine crescendi and diminuendi—work each gradual dynamic change chord-by-chord if necessary, to get a gradual, yet noticeable, dynamic progression.

### Web Links

#### ***Dance of the Western Sky***

Programmatic statement:

[http://handbellworld.com/music/MusicPiece.cfm?Piece=4755&CFID=1367162&CF\\_TOKEN=726fc4e1039410d1-6BC850E5-E376-42E6-39CA92B19E019B61](http://handbellworld.com/music/MusicPiece.cfm?Piece=4755&CFID=1367162&CF_TOKEN=726fc4e1039410d1-6BC850E5-E376-42E6-39CA92B19E019B61)

#### ***Showdown!***

<http://handbellworld.com/music/Recordings/10405.asf>

#### ***Let All Things Their Creator Bless***

<http://handbellworld.com/music/Recordings/9924.asf>

#### ***Reflections***

<http://handbellworld.com/music/Recordings/9395.asf>

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## Massed Piece

### Dance of the Western Sky (Tammy Waldrop)

- Really bring out the dynamic contrasts in the opening passage: m. 1 *fff*, m. 6 *mf* → crescendo to m. 8 *fff*, etc.
- For accented notes (>), hold the handle tighter than the normal, loose/relaxed grip
- All tempo changes (and rubato): Watch, and match, the conductor through *at least* the first two beats of strikes, to securely actualize the new tempo
- Rolled suspended-mallet chords (m. 23+): end the (upward) roll on b. 2, vs. starting the roll on b. 2. (To get these rolls together, have the ringers say, fast: “1 2 3 **4**”, with 1 starting before b. 2, and 4 synchronizing with b. 2)
- Staccato dots (m. 31-32): Please use pluck-lift here, L’ving through to m. 32, b. 3. Consider having one ringer pluck more than one note, including bells an adjacent ringer is lifting, to actualize the pluck-lifts. (This will need some assigning attention—see pluck-lift note for *Reflections*, above, for more detailed tips.)
- Voices (m. 35-46): Prepare to sing this in Calgary. Please observe the direction for straight tone. Starting at m. 37, sopranos and tenors take the top note, altos and basses take the bottom note of each octave.
- Please replace the last eighth-beat of m. 40 with an eighth-rest, in both clefs; the effect will be to damp all bells when the voices breathe.
- Add a caesura (double-slash) between m. 46 and m. 47
- Syncopated accompaniment figures (m. 55+): Let the melody/bass figure lead here (and melody/bass ringers, ignore the syncopated accompaniment here, and just play your melody)—fit the syncopation into the melody, rather than the other way around. A couple tips for the syncopated accompaniment: First, feel the beat on the rests/damps, rather than on the first strike after the rests/damps; second, feel the basic pulse (as per the time signature) internally, and fit the syncopated notes into that internal pulse.

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- Thumb-damps (m. 75+): Make these juicy and resonant—there should be lots of pitch after the deadened strike; make sure to shoulder-damp on the rests (note-value-damp), so ring the eighths, especially, close to the shoulder, with a small motion.
- In m. 100, for Db3 and Ab3 only, replace martellato-lift with pluck-lift.
- Rolled chord (m. 109): Start the upward roll (Gb5) on m. 108, b. 4; fit the 8 rolled notes evenly into this one beat; end the roll with Db7 on m. 109, b. 1. With the rubato in this section, the pulse of b. 4 starts the roll, and the pulse of b. 1 ends the roll.
- Last chord (m. 110-113): For visual effect, strike m. 110 low, raise the bells throughout the duration of m. 110, then start to slowly lower the bells on b. 1 of m. 111, ending with a pad-damp on m. 113, b. 2. This visual effect will match the crescendo/diminuendo in the tympani part.

## Wranglers Pieces

### Showdown (John Behnke)

- I encourage you to wear western-wear accents (cowboy hats, bandanas, etc.) for this piece, if you so desire. If some of you wish to work out some shtick within your choir for this piece, that would also be appropriate—let's have fun with this piece!
- Repeated malleting (m. 1 C5s and all similar passages): Use the following alternate sticking pattern (S=dominant hand, W=non-dominant hand) – S SW S SW S SW. This puts your dominant hand on the quarter and eighth pulses, which gives a natural pulse to the line; the alternate sticking also allows you to achieve a combination of much faster and much smoother malleting.
- Malleted accents: Give a little more on each accented note, to make it pop out a bit from the surrounding texture.
- Dynamics: Practice achieving the difference between mf, f and ff malleted dynamics. (And don't be afraid to go for a true ff malleted dynamic!) Also, practice achieving a true fff rung dynamic (but without overdriving the bell).

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- Sixteenth-note rung passages (m. 13, 67, etc.): Treat the sixteenth notes on the eighth-pulse as short/RT eighth notes; then fit the other sixteenth notes into this eighth-note-pulse structure.
- Square-dancing for treble ringers (m. 27, etc.): Yes, please, incorporate square-dancing as indicated in the score! Work this out within your own choir, so that each choir is doing a unified dance.
- Chromatic accelerando (m. 43-45): work out sharing with your neighbours in this passage—try for no more than *two* consecutive notes per ringer; and, then, practice watching the conductor during the entire accelerando passage, to create a uniformly-paced accelerando.
- Final diminuendo (m 77-78): Practice achieving the indicated dynamic contrast in the diminuendo; and, let's try to make the last chord even softer than the unison on m. 78, beat 1!

#### Let All Things Their Creator Bless (arr. Hart Morris)

- Focus on the big shape in this piece. The details (syncopated, accented eighth-notes, etc.) are important, but primarily ensure that the main melodies and the large dynamic contrasts come through.
- Take care of the syncopation details in your rehearsal/preparation. Feel the pulse (as indicated by the time signature), and relate/integrate the syncopation into/to that pulse. Also, for each ringing position, find the patterns of physical movement (ringing action and circles) that match the rhythm of your notes, and feel/actualize those movements. Note that your ringing motions should generally be quite small for these fast eighth-note patterns.
- Practice achieving a wide dynamic range, noticeably differentiating all marked dynamic contrasts—in both horizontally (i.e. m. 48 vs. m. 50, etc.) and vertically (m. 14, etc.) contrasting sections
- Approach the 5/4 measures as 3+2. I will conduct these measures in 5, but subgroup my pattern into 3+2.

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- Prescribed crescendo: Please add the following markings in your scores—m. 55 beat 1, *mf*-; m.56 b. 1, *mf*; m. 56, b.3, *mf*+
- Work to achieve a *molto* crescendo through m. 63-65
- In the return of the main theme, please note that the main melody is in m. 66, not m. 67
- Bring out the internal octave doubling of melody notes in chords (m. 66, 67, etc.)
- In m. 74, crescendo the treble clef stems-down notes
- In m. 90, bass clef, please martellate C4-C5, but pluck C3-B3.

#### Reflections (Karen Lakey Buckwalter)

- Actualize the dynamic layers (m. 1, m. 45, etc.). The melody should always sing out over the rest of the texture, while the accompaniment should create a background texture
- Create an illusion of a legato line in the melody: For long notes, give more energy to the strike (so that the note sustains adequately); for short notes immediately following a long note, match their volume to the decay of the previous long note, then build through the next few short notes
- Quarter-note accompaniment: Please strike each chord differently than the previous chord, aiming to create the rise and fall of the overall melodic phrase; aim for the long phrase (4, 8, 16 bars), vs. a one-bar phrase.
- Duple and triple eighth-notes (m. 29+): Ensure that the underlying quarter-note pulse stays constant, and steady; and also that, within each beat, the eighths (whether duple or triple) get equal duration.
- *ff* dynamic (m. 60 – 85): Work for a full, strong, crying *ff*; and, note that this intensity lasts for 25 measures. Shape these phrases (both melody and accompaniment), but within the *ff* context.

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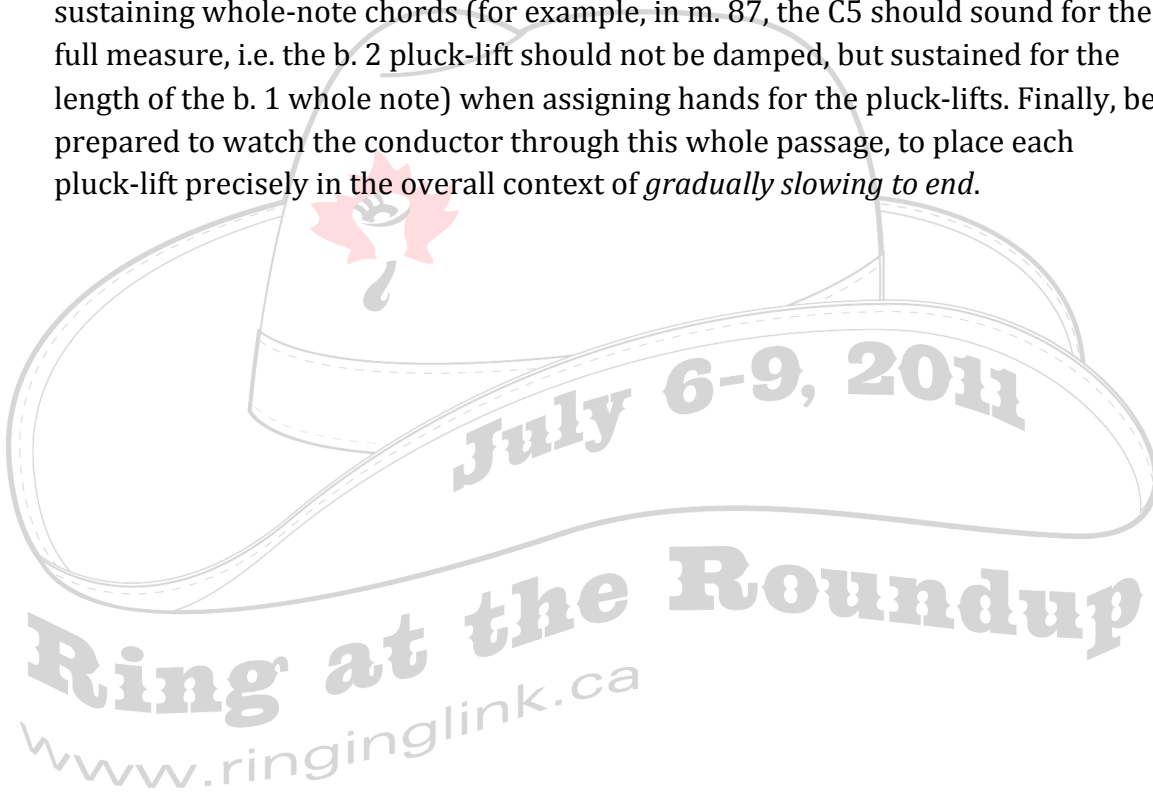
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- Pluck-lifts (m. 87-90): Please use Pluck-lifts (instead of mart-lifts—with the exception of G#6 and above in m. 90 only); please also note that each pluck-lift should be note-value-damped precisely on the pluck of the next pluck-lift. **Work out this assignment very carefully!** You will need lots of sharing and help between ringers to execute this passage. Note that each pluck-lift requires 3 hands: one hand to place the previous pluck-lift bell on the table (damp); one hand to pluck the new bell; and one hand to lift the new bell. Also factor in the sustaining whole-note chords (for example, in m. 87, the C5 should sound for the full measure, i.e. the b. 2 pluck-lift should not be damped, but sustained for the length of the b. 1 whole note) when assigning hands for the pluck-lifts. Finally, be prepared to watch the conductor through this whole passage, to place each pluck-lift precisely in the overall context of *gradually slowing to end*.



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