



Overtones

30 Years at Bay View, Michigan

Participants celebrate a very special anniversary

Don Allured premieres "epilogue"

Petit & Fritsen bells find a new home

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30 Years of Fun, Friendship and Fine Music

Bay View Week of Handbells Celebrates its
30th Anniversary



Story and Photos by J.R. Smith

Carl Wiltse conducts the more than 100 ringers at the 30th Bay View Week of Handbells in Bay View, Michigan.

*I*n northern Michigan, next to the Little Traverse Bay and adjacent to the town of Petoskey, sits a quaint summer community known as Bay View. And nestled among the village's nearly 400 turn-of-the-century cottages, lies the campus of the Bay View Association of the United Methodist Church, which every year sponsors the Bay View Conservatory of Music, an eight-week learning experience led by top music teachers and performing artists from all over the country. And for one week of the summer, the association hosts some of handbells' top directors and performers for the annual Week of Handbells. Started in 1978, the event attracts about 100 ringers and directors from all over the country, parts of Canada, and even abroad to rehearse and perform some of the finest and most challenging music written for the instrument. This year marked the Bay View Week of Handbells' 30th anniversary.

History of the Event

To get a true appreciation for the history of Bay View Week of Handbells, one must go back another 55 years to September of 1922 and the birth of a boy named Donald E. Allured. That same year, Don's aunt, Louise Strange (known simply as Auntie to the family), had bought a cottage at Bay View, where he and his family would often spend their vacation. And it was Bay View where he first became interested in organ and choral music.

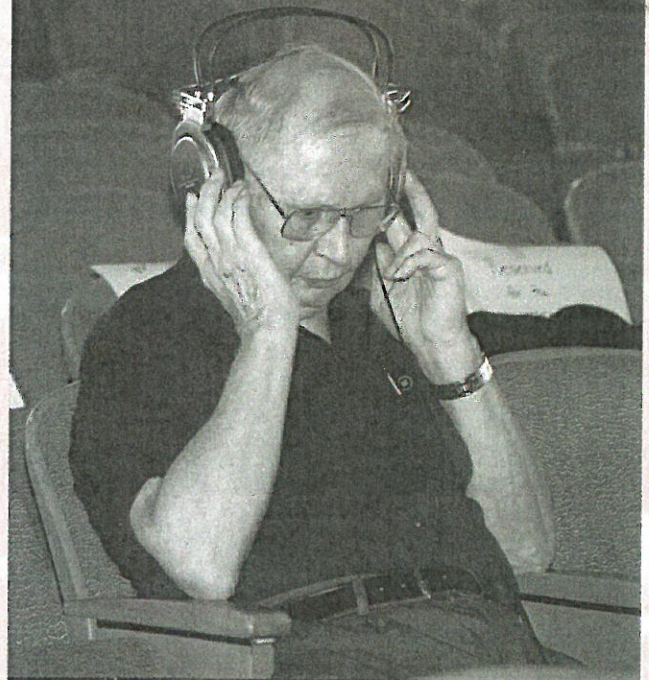
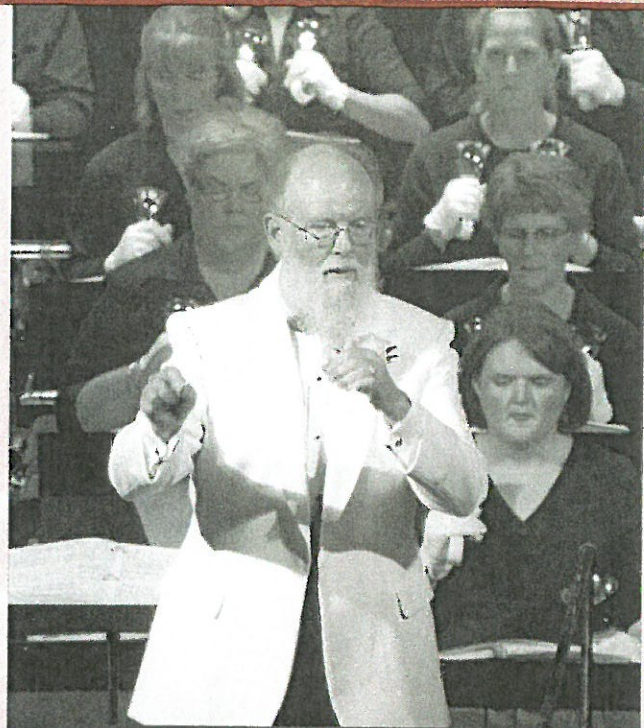
For eight weeks every summer, the Conservatory of Music offers to the Bay View community music and worship experiences, lectures, and seminars by way of its annual music festival. Don's sister, Janet, sang in the Bay View choir while in college and got Don involved when he was in the 7th grade. In an article he wrote for *Overtones* in 2000, Don said, "I was inspired by the choral director, Fred Patton from Michigan State University, who conducted with great emotion, feeling, and expressiveness. It had an impact on me as a budding musician that was the impetus for my eventual desire to become an organist and choir director on a full-time basis."

Some time later Don would go on to become the founder of Westminster Choir College's (New Jersey) famed handbell program and to help build the very foundation of modern handbell ringing.

Throughout the years, the cottage at Bay View remained in the family, and Don's family continued to spend summers there. In the mid 1970s, he started the Bells of Bay View, an ensemble that played on some Sunday mornings and for Sunday evening vesper concerts, which were part of the annual music festival. The bells were purchased with memorial funds in honor of his parents, Rev. Paul J. and Helen Allured, and the group was made up of people in the Bay View community, most of whom were involved in the summer music program, according to Don. Included in the group were Carl Wiltse and his wife, Pamela Bayes (Carl would eventually become the director for Week of Handbells upon Don's retirement).

In 1977, Dr. Ernest Sullivan, who was then the head of the Conservatory of Music, asked Don if he would consider hosting a handbell workshop there. Don recalled, "Dr. Sullivan was on the faculty of Alma College in Michigan, which is where I graduated. He knew I was working with handbells, and he asked me if I'd like to do a handbell workshop. I thought about it and said, 'yes, let's do it...' The next year we started, and we had about 30 people."

For the first several years, according to Don, the



Top photo: Carl Wiltse directs the audience in a congregational singing portion of a number. Middle photo: Don Allured listens to a live recording of his new piece, "epilogue." Bottom photo: WOH operations manager Luanne Barnes, left, talks with Pamela Bayes after the concert.



event was mostly a handbell leadership training workshop, with classes in the morning and rehearsals for a final concert in the afternoon. At the time it was one of the few places new directors—who were often musically trained but not in handbells—could find training in the basics. One of the event's first attendees, Laurie Sturm, of Lapeer, Michigan, attend-



Top photo: (Clockwise from upper left) Kim Finison, Barb Farnsworth, Paul Kingsbury, Sheena Hunter, and Chris Boilesen handle the very lowest bass bells in *The Pit*. Bottom photo: Don Allured speaks to the ringers at the post-concert reception, while Carl Wiltse and Carl's wife, Pamela Bayes, listen.

ed for that very reason and has been coming back ever since. Because of her musical training, she was asked to direct the bell choir at church, even though she didn't yet know much about the instrument. She first learned of the new event when she attended a workshop led by Don in Detroit. She said, "So I went to this workshop, and it happened to be by Don...he handed me information about Bay View, and that was the beginning of it. I came up, and it really helped learning all the techniques and bell assignments. Sure, I had majored in music education, but it didn't include handbells."

Carl Wiltse was also among the first attendees and came for much the same reason. He, along with his wife, Pamela, was a member of the Bells of Bay View and a longtime friend of Don's. He said, "We had a cottage here, and I stuck around for the workshop

because I was going to be directing handbells in the fall—something I had never done before. We would practice music and have workshops in the morning in all different subjects: bell assignments and a little bit of composing and arranging, and basics. It pretty much took people from scratch."

From Workshop to Ringing Event

For the first several years, the event remained largely a training workshop, and once attendees had learned most of the basics, they could return only for the rehearsal and concert portion of the event if they wished. As more of the same people started to return year after year, many of them began to express interest in doing only the rehearsal and performance portion. So eventually, the event was billed as a performance-based workshop, which is when it became known as the Week of Handbells. Many attendees agree that the performance-based workshop is the best way to continue learning. Laurie Sturm said, "For me, you learn more behind the table ringing than having someone just say, 'ok do this.' You have to get back there and do it so that you can show your ringers you can do it."

Don said the event is still very much a learning event. He said, "You're always teaching when you conduct handbells. The first workshops were all directors. Then we started attracting ringers because we were doing really advanced music, and some of the ringers just got a chance to do advanced music for the first time—they didn't have a chance to do that at home. So they started to come, and we have some very skilled ringers here as you know."

The advanced music is one aspect of the event that now attracts many of the ringers. Carl said, "They have a chance to ring music that they wouldn't ring otherwise. Whether they're in a choir that doesn't ring at that level or whether they're directors that don't ring at all except up here, or whether they're ringing or directing at church and don't ring any secular pieces."

Over the years, Week of Handbells has become one of the most prestigious handbell events anywhere. In his 2000 *Overtones* article, Don wrote, "We have a caliber of musicians who attend each year, which is unusual not only for its musical excellence but for the dedication they express to and for the occasion...we can unhesitatingly program music of Level 5 and 6, because these folks can handle it."

Week of Handbells was also the first event of its kind to regularly feature ringing on eight octaves of bells. In fact, ringing in the very lowest octaves is perhaps an even more prestigious honor for some than ringing in the event itself. Because of the number of ringers and the size of the stage, the largest

bass bells, when they were added, needed to be set up on the floor directly in front of the stage. This area quickly developed a life and personality of its own and became known as The Pit.

According to Don, "The Pit needs some explanation and justification...the particular caliber of ringers (led by then stage manager Bernie Turgeon and others of his ilk) assigned to it immediately gave it its own identity. It was all in great fun, and the pit ringers became totally obnoxious...formed their own clique, had their own T-shirts made up—and rang, plucked, and malleted those big bells magnificently." He also said, "Fred Gramann and Cathy Moglebust were at the first table in The Pit...so many really well known people have been there at least once."

Week of Handbells participants have also taken their art beyond just ringing. Don wrote, "We have happily discovered that the ringers also have excellent voices. Our enthusiastic and loyal audience truly loves to hear them sing—and they are good! It is now our policy to include choral music in every concert."

More Than Just Handbells

Week of Handbells perhaps owes much of its success not just to its high-caliber ringers, advanced music, and dedicated staff, but to the ambience of its location as well. According to Jane Johnston, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, staying in the dorms is one aspect that enhances the event. She said, "That's how you really get to know people better. And every night after dinner, everybody would gather around and talk about the music and count it out and mark music...so a nice bond was built." She continued, "even though you only see most of the people one week a year, you have such a solidifying common bond because it's an intense week; you become very good friends very quickly. And the friendship from one year to the next just grows."

A popular attraction for a number of years, according to almost anyone who talks about Bay View, were the "Sunset Cruises" aboard Don's boat in the bay. Don recalled, "A big part of the WOH was the enjoyment the folks had on my boats. From 1972-82 I had SILVERTHORNE I. When she died, SILVERTHORNE II was acquired and lasted until 1992. Both were great old wooden cabin cruisers—28-footers." He could take ten passengers at a time and scheduled the cruises during free times. He continued, "I was Cap'n Don in those days." Interestingly the boats were named after a handbell composition of his by the same name.

Passing the Baton

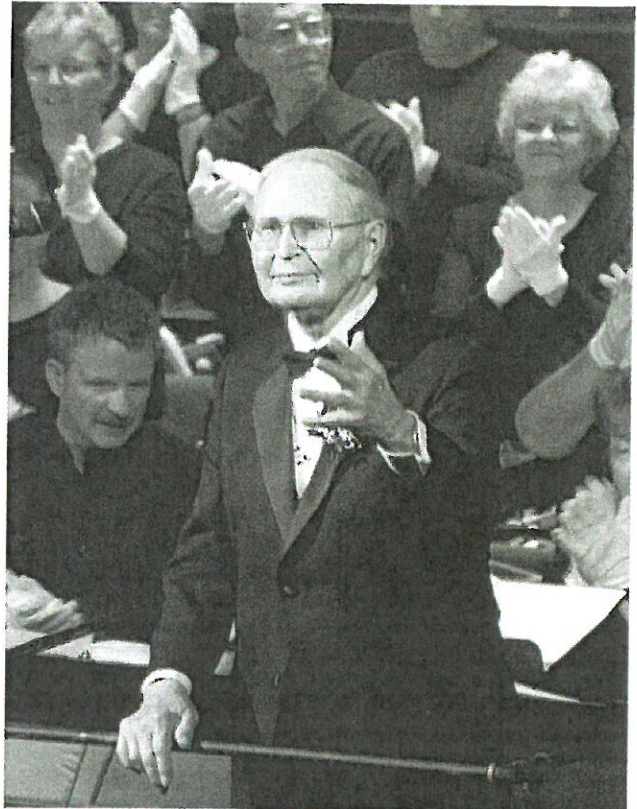
In 2003, Don began to experience heart problems that would force him to retire from conduct-

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Don Allured's "epilogue"

This year's Bay View Week of Handbells featured the premiere of a very special original composition by Donald Allured. Commissioned by the Donald E. Allured Original Composition Award committee, the piece, called "epilogue," will be the last major work written by The Maestro.

Don Allured retired from conducting the Bay View Week of Handbells in 2003 following some health setbacks, but that is not



Don Allured, composer of "epilogue," acknowledges the audience following the premiere of the piece.

the first time he thought he may have to do so. He began having health problems in 1992 and decided at that time he would probably have to give it up.

Each year the attendees would buy a gift for Don to thank him for the event, and for some time, WOH participant Marilyn Chandler had been the designated "gift selector." That year she decided something extra special needed to be done to honor the years of work Don had devoted to the Bay View event. She said, "In 1992, just before we went into concert, Don announced from the steps that the next year was going to be his last year, because the doctor told him he had health issues. I realized that the next year we had to get him something special—we always got him a little gift, but (this time) it had to be something extra special." Then, while riding on her lawn tractor later that fall, the idea came to start a fund in his name that would commission original works for handbells. She said that Don often talked about there being many arrangements and transcriptions at the time but not

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ing the Week of Handbells. It didn't take him long to decide who should succeed him. He said there was no question that longtime friend and event registrar Carl Wiltse should be the one to take over. Shortly before the event, Don was hospitalized. Carl recalls the episode, "Don had heart problems and ended up in the hospital. We came up to see him and he said, 'I'm not going to be able to do it; I want you to direct, Carl.' So he called a nurse over and said he wanted a straw. He took the straw out of the wrapper and said, 'Here, this is the baton and I'm handing it over to you.'" He added, "And I still have it."

Carl has been the conductor at Week of Handbells ever

Don Allured's "epilogue"...

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a lot of good original music. She said, "There were only a few composers who had written significant, original pieces specifically for the instrument. He himself had a number of original pieces published that were very well received by serious handbell ringers and directors world wide. Therefore, I thought, wouldn't it be great if the attendees started a fund that would provide the financing for good, original pieces and to name the fund in Don's honor."

Fortunately, Don's health improved, and he was able to continue his work at Bay View. But that didn't stop the attendees from fulfilling the idea to start the special fund. The following year, attendees passed envelopes among the ringing tables and collected nearly \$1300 to start the fund. Marilyn said, "It was done with much excitement and even more secrecy because Don's wife, Melissa, was an attendee, and we didn't want her to know about it either (until the reception after the concert)."

Since then the fund has grown, and a committee has been appointed to commission works approximately every other year. They have so far commissioned original works by Margaret Tucker, Hart Morris, Cathy Moglebust, Carl Wiltse, and Tim Waugh. And this year, in honor of Week of Handbells' 30th anniversary, the committee decided to commission a piece by Don, himself. The composition "epilogue" was the result.

Asked about his inspiration for the work, Don said, "(it) grew out of a motif that had been running around in my head for many months. When the commission to write a piece for Bay View came from the Allured Composition Award Committee, I already had that motif as a starting point. The opening fanfare was the theme, and it got me started. I knew I wanted to re-create the marvelous visual effect of those huge bass bells being rung conspicuously over their heads, a technique that was so spectacular and came from a Bill Payn piece we had done previously. The middle movement was simply improvisational as are most of my original pieces."

since, but Don is still on hand each year to conduct one piece. Asked if he plans to keep coming to Bay View Don said, "Well, it depends on how my health holds ... I'm doing well, but it's getting slow moving around. I got my heart fixed, got new parts, so I'm feeling good."

Asked if the event will continue to evolve, Carl Wiltse said, "musically it keeps changing because we continue to get a higher and higher caliber of ringers. Especially people (who have been coming from the beginning), who have progressed right along with the Week of Handbells. And the quality keeps getting better because we keep getting better and better ringers." 

An important requirement of a DEA Award commission is that the piece be an original work. But this year, Don asked for permission to add part of a very special hymn, "God Be With You Till We Meet Again," at the end of the piece.

Every year, the last Sunday evening concert of the Bay View music season ends with the congregation singing that hymn. The refrain says, "Till we meet, till we meet, till we meet at Jesus' feet; Till we meet, till we meet, God be with you till we meet again." Don said, "I cannot tell you how strong my association with that hymn is, from hearing it conclude every summer program since I started spending summers up there."

Current Week of Handbells director Carl Wiltse explained the significance of the hymn further. He said, "At the end of the (last Sunday night) concert, the congregation sings 'God be with you until we meet again.' And a large number of the population here is quite old. When we had a cottage here, we would sing that knowing that a lot of these people out here would not be here, would not be around next year."

Of the title "epilogue," Don said, "I'll be 85 next month; so I'm reaching the end of my career, and I can say that without regret. I decided that this will be the last major piece that I will write, so that's why I named it 'epilogue.' And I put it in all small case to maybe signify some humility."

The premiere of the piece, which Don conducted, was met with lots of tears and lots of applause by a respectful and appreciative set of ringers and an equally respectful and appreciative audience. Asked about the experience conducting the piece, Don said, "I was awestruck by the devotion the choirs had to ringing it. I had never heard it of course before our first rehearsal, but I got a chance to hear the recording of it during the final day and was really quite taken by it. I was very aware, emotionally, of my three sons and their wives being in the balcony, and it was an awesome feeling of gratitude to be able to conduct it for that special occasion, the 30th Week of Handbells." 