

THE BVWOH NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2019

by Fred Gramann

WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE?

**CHECKING
IN WITH A
CHECKLIST**

**The Secret
Behind the
Practice Files**

*Let There Be
Drums!!*

**The Red
Coats are
Coming**

CHECKING IN WITH A CHECKLIST

Hello 2019 BVWOH Musicians,

Fred here, checking in to see how you're doing. Have you been able to start on your Bay View journey? Here's a little checklist to help measure your progress.

- ☐ Ordered the music
- ☐ Received the music
- ☐ Started to copy the performance notes into the scores
- ☐ Have heard from my Position Captain
- ☐ Have responded to my Position Captain to let them know I've received their message of welcome
- ☐ Started listening to the audio practice files to get a feel for the music
- ☐ Have looked at the months ahead to see how best to fit in some time to start ringing the music
- ☐ Have already started to slowly learn some of the scores

What else might you do?

You may remember my suggestion in the last newsletter to those who rang last summer: watch the DVD and check yourself out. How did you do? Gently observe your technique, your mastery of the music, the amount of watching during the Watch Windows and your facial involvement during the concert. Where could you do better? Recently I received an email from a ringer who attended the BVWOH last year for the first time. I had seen this person ring a number of times in the past and consider them one of the best I have observed over the years. The note from this person said:

"I did what you suggested last fall which was to review the concert DVD. I came up with three areas of improvement. So this year should be even better."

Oh that everyone could be so willing to do some self-examination as ringers, seeking to continually grow in an effort to better serve the beauty of the music we share.

Best,
Fred

The Secret Behind the Practice Files

Every year the Bay View Week of Handbells is amazingly blessed to have audio practice files provided by Ed Krzes and Cheryl Onesky. The importance of these files is confirmed unanimously year after year on the feedback surveys. I thought you would all like know a bit more about Ed and Cheryl and how these files are produced.

FRED: Ed and Cheryl, each year you prepare audio practice files for the BVWOH, the most important tool the participating ringers have at their disposal. Tell us a little about yourselves as musicians. I believe you ring duets together.



ED: I've been a musician since grade school. Played woodwind instruments (primarily sax) up through high school and pep band for hockey games in college. I still pull out the alto sax for services a few times a year with the church's band. It's closer to a joyful noise now than my abilities in the past. My interest in bells started in 1998 seeing a choir play bells at a service. After the service I made a comment to my friend how interesting they were, not knowing the handbell director was standing next to me and invited me to attend their practice. I've been ringing ever since. I'm currently ringing in three church choirs, a community group (Stow Heritage Ringers), duets with Cheryl since 2002 (EKCO Ringers), and a trio (We 3 Ring). The small ensemble participation is all Cheryl's fault, so I'll let her expound on our duet work other than this note: If you believe or not in destiny or divine intervention, I can count at least 16 events I have encountered that if the outcome was different would not have allowed this duet team to exist and flourish.

CHERYL: I studied piano as a child, but once I started playing handbells I became totally addicted to bell ringing. Attending a workshop hosted by the Stow Heritage Ringers (yes, the same community group we eventually joined), I was enchanted by Cordetta Valthausen's solo ringing class, realizing that I could actually play this wonderful instrument by myself. I met Ed, discovered that he is a crazy bell nut like me, and we formed the handbell duet EKCO Ringers, which has just turned 16 years old! Our biggest challenge is finding new duet music that is arranged for more experienced ringers. I'm so excited to report that the first piece on our concert programs this year has been none other than Fred's *Change Ring Prelude on Divinum Mysterium* arranged as a duet by Kevin McChesney!

FRED: How did you first become interested in ringing at the BVWOH, and how many years have you attended?

ED & CHERYL: We had the great fortune of having Lynn Young/B & Y Music right in our own backyard! Lynn also played in one of the church choirs we rang with, and always spoke with great affection about going to Bay View every year. Lynn and Cordetta both encouraged us to give Bay View a try. We've grown to love the peaceful, gorgeous surroundings of this place, reuniting with other outstanding musicians and pushing ourselves to musically perform the repertoire. Our first year at Bay View was 2009, when we met Don Allured and had the opportunity to ring under his direction. Since then we have attended every year except for 2016 when we decided to attend the International Symposium in Vancouver immediately followed by Bells of the Cascades Alaska Cruise. (Side Note: Even though we did not attend in 2016, we still created the practice clips for those who did.)

FRED: What is the basic process involved in making an audio practice file? Approximately how many hours do you spend preparing them for our entire concert?

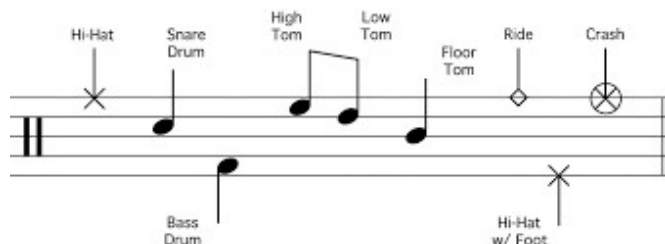
ED: We needed a method to play the accompaniment for our duet performances. You can view some of the songs from our website ekcoringers.com. We settled on the Midi version of SmartScore (along with Rain-X, the only products I feel compelled to endorse). It lets you scan the actual music, looks at the pictures and tries to decipher where all the notes and musical notations are on the page. An audio file can then be created. On average we spend about 20 hours per song. As the SmartScore Master, I've developed little tricks to make the results as musically accurate as possible. As the Grasshopper, Cheryl helps work on the files for both the duet team and Bay View (wanting to keep the title as SmartScore Master, it was fitting to advance Cheryl's status from Grasshopper to Praying Mantis).

CHERYL: SmartScore is not perfect, so you have to make corrections to make it sound good. There are a lot of variables that can impact the amount of time spent on preparing each piece of music for the sound file. The software offers settings for tempo and dynamic changes that must be adjusted. You then listen to the changes you made and readjust! The software also has trouble recognizing chime notes because of the diamond shape, and typically chime notes need to be added to the score individually. I just finished "Drive," and that piece has a lot of percussion, which necessitated adding individual notes. But the result is worth it. The percussion will add a lot for ringers as they learn the piece. SmartScore also allows you to assign different midi sounds to each voice. We use grand piano for bells, fantasia for chimes and woodblock for metronome clicks. Alumni may recall that we used gunshots for mallet clicks on Magic of Motown. The SmartScore Master taught me everything I know!

Let There Be Drums



TYPICAL NOTE PLACEMENT



Our encore piece, "I Got Rhythm", has a wonderful part for drums which Alex Guebert was willing to play. But where to get a drum set? (Alex quickly nixed the idea of stuffing one into the overhead bins on his flight from LA.) It was suggested that I ask Kathy McCreight as she has connections in the Bay View area. Lo and behold, Kathy knew a man named John Lockhard who lives in the same building who owns a drum set, pictured here. I wrote to him and this amazing man is not only willing to let us use the set for free, but has also offered to deliver it Monday morning and pick it up Friday after the concert. What a gift. Our rendition of this work will definitely have rhythm! Thank you, John!

The Red Coats are Coming!!

Meet Matthew Prins

Fred: Hello Matthew. Although I haven't met you in person, I am certainly familiar with your handbell music which is ever so creative. Could you please share a little about how you became a handbell ringer and composer?

Matthew: When I was 15, my family moved from the small town where I had spent my entire life to the "big city" of Ames, Iowa, population 47,000. The church we joined in Ames had a handbell choir – something I'd never seen before, let alone played -- and since I had always been part of any musical group that would have me, I was playing bells after my first month.

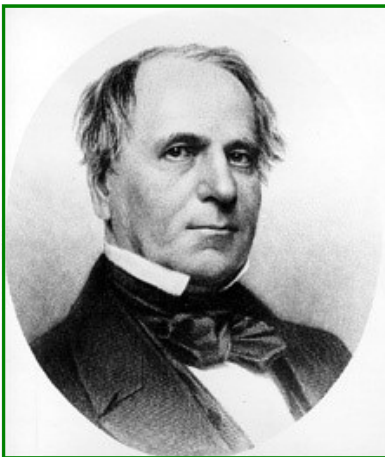


Matthew Prins

In my first church after college, I joined the new handbell choir it was starting. A year later our director went on maternity leave and I took over directing the group. Since the church didn't have much funding for new music, I thought, "Whatever. I know some music theory, I'll just arrange some pieces for the group to play." Then those pieces got accepted by publishers, and then more of my pieces did, and so here we are.

Fred: What gave you the idea to compose Samuel Prescott's Ride? Is there more than meets the hooves in this piece?

Matthew: Very, very few of my compositions have any kind of interesting narrative to go with them. Most of the stories would go, "Well, I sat down at the piano for an hour and doodled around until something interesting came up, and then I wrote a piece around that doodle, and then I tried to reverse engineer some sort of reasonable name around that finished piece."



Samuel Prescott

But this piece is the exception. When I was visiting the Minute Man National Historical Park in Massachusetts, I learned that it wasn't just Paul Revere riding to warn the colonists about the British. There were two others: William Dawes and Dr. Samuel Prescott. Revere and Dawes were dispatched from Boston to try to alert Concord (by way of Lexington and other small towns). Prescott was on his horse heading home when he met up with Revere and Dawes -- about a third of their way through their ride -- and decided to join up with them. A few miles before Concord, a group of British soldiers stopped the trio. Revere was captured; Dawes escaped, but decided not to head on further; but Samuel Prescott managed to evade the soldiers and warn the citizens of Concord.

I'm a mild American history buff, and I was shocked that I hadn't heard this story before. When I got back from vacation, I decided to see if I could help immortalize Samuel Prescott at least a little bit. So, after doodling on the piano for a while, I came up with the galloping melody that starts this piece, and the rest is, well, history.

Fred: How do you see your future in handbell composing? What interests you and do you have any specific goals for the coming years in this area?

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Matthew: Right now I do maybe ten bell pieces a year, mostly commissions and pieces for the three ensembles I direct. My main goal is not to let that lag. The bulk of my composing time right now goes toward producing music for television, commercials, corporate uses, etc., which is fun and helps pay the bills. But my first composing love will always be handbells, and I want to make sure that I always make time for writing for the instrument.

