

Chapter Six

Adaptive notation - Williams and McGrew Teaching Good Ringing Technique Basic Elements of Color-Coding Preparing Scrolls for Performance

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Adaptive notation - Williams and McGrew

Rev. Stanley Williams – pioneered the concept with his choir from the Woodhaven Learning Center in Columbia, Missouri. From 1972 until 1990 Rev. Williams developed a choir that had a national reputation. They played in all fifty states including Hawaii, performed for two presidential inaugurations, and for many years set the standard for accomplishment in special groups. The Woodhaven Choir is no longer performing.

Dr. Letha McGrew – started from the concepts of Stanley Williams and built the choir of the Woodson Skill Center (special education) in Abilene, Texas. In terms of playing ability the Woodson Choir is certainly the finest special choir in the nation. They have played for several national AGEHR conferences and have performed at the White House. The choir is now directed by Cathy Taylor, who replaced Dr. McGrew when she retired.

SIMILARITIES

Both use color coded letters on a scroll operating across a modified projection table.

Both give complete control of the rhythm to the director. There is no counting required. Ringers follow the rhythm of the director's baton across the top of the table as it points to each set letters.

Both demand good vision and attending skills. In many instances the latter can be taught to special learners with time and patience.

Both use sharps ONLY for accidentals in order to avoid confusion.

DIFFERENCES

Williams

Scroll chart is pulled across the table top toward the director.

Letter notation moves from left to right and from top to bottom.

Special effects limited to thumb damp and shakes.

Damping limited to changes that would create real harmonic clashes. Damp signal indicated on scroll. Arrangements are carillon style.

Used only two octaves of bells.

McGrew

Scroll chart is fed across the table top toward the performers.

Letter notation moves from left to right and from bottom to top.

Special effects include thumb damp, shakes, mallets, swings, martellato, & table land damp.

Ringers are taught to damp at all times. Special marks on the scroll tell them when to sustain a bell. Standard arrangements may be used with this method.

May use up to four octaves.

Teaching Good Ringing Technique

As music therapists we don't always engage in a lot of teaching in the traditional sense; however, if you are at one facility for several years, you may have the opportunity to combine special music education along with music therapy. The information offered here is a summary of information contained in Letha McGrew's booklet, *Adaptive Notation for Handbells*, which is available at www.agehr.org

Students in the Woodson Skill Center Choir go through an intensive period of training in basic ringing technique before they ever begin playing from scroll charts and rehearsing pieces for performance. Dr. McGrew believes that the foundation of a good choir is the ability to ring **on time** and to damp at the appropriate time. My special needs choirs (usually meeting one time a week) were never able to learn to damp. Handbell ringing is a priority at Woodson, and their schedule of training allows a lot of time to develop good ringing habits. On the next page is a summary of the work that they do.

BASIC RINGING: The director models appropriate posture and ringing. The students are taught to develop “fluid, circular ringing technique which will result in smooth, legato sounds.” In the early stages it is helpful for the director or an assistant to stand behind each student and physically assist them in the proper motions (sometimes called “hand over hand”). Work begins with one bell in the ringer’s dominant hand. When this is perfected, a second bell may be added in the other hand.

FOLLOWING THE DIRECTOR: Basic technique is established with random ringing – without direction. When a student is ready, he/she begins learning to ring on cue from the director. Each bell must sound at the exact moment that the director’s baton touches the table top. This principle is taught with slow notes at first, and as students make progress, faster notes are introduced. Students learn individually at first, and then learn to ring in combination with others. Ringing chords precisely is first taught by color coding bell handles and teaching ringers to respond to the baton as a colored card is held up. By learning chord combinations first, students find that ringing single line melodies is a very easy thing to do. They have already mastered the more difficult part of precision ringing.

DAMPING: Students are taught to think of damping as **turning off** the bell sound – much like one would turn off a radio. The concept of **on** and **off** seems to be one that they can comprehend. As individuals begin to ring when the baton touches the table top, they are taught to “turn off” the sound when the next player “turns on” sound. The same principle is carried over into combinations of notes. One combination “turns off” when the next combination “turns on”. Players who have a note in two combinations back to back are taught to ring again instead of damping.

It is important to remember that in the Woodson Choir the director is able to see the performing choir three times per week and has two “feeder” choirs that are seen twice per week. This method demands a lot of rehearsal time, and it does not lend itself to persons with visual impairment, physical disability, or to those who have difficulty tracking printed material. Each director must learn to produce music within the limitations his/her setting. If performances are not always perfect because of various limitations, we can be assured that there will still be the joy of making music together. In these pages we are presenting several options for including all persons with disabilities.

Basic Elements of Color-Coding

The chart below shows the color coding used by Stanley Williams and Letha McGrew. Stanley Williams used only the two octaves in the middle (G4 through G6). Letha McGrew used all four octaves.

McGrew used the “symbols” to prepare a “draft” of the scroll before adding the color coding. The symbols are used as a first step while developing the scroll chart. For the scroll she used butcher paper cut to the width of plastic tubes (golf club spacers). If a completed chart became useful to her choir, she would transfer it to more permanent plastic material much like that used in window blinds.

<u>Octave</u>	<u>Color Coding</u>	<u>Symbol</u>
G3 through F#4	GREEN	G A B etc.
G4 through F#5	BLACK	G A B etc.
G5 through F#6	RED	\bar{G} \bar{A} \bar{B} etc.
G6 through F#7	BLUE	$\overset{ }{G}$ $\overset{ }{A}$ $\overset{ }{B}$ etc.

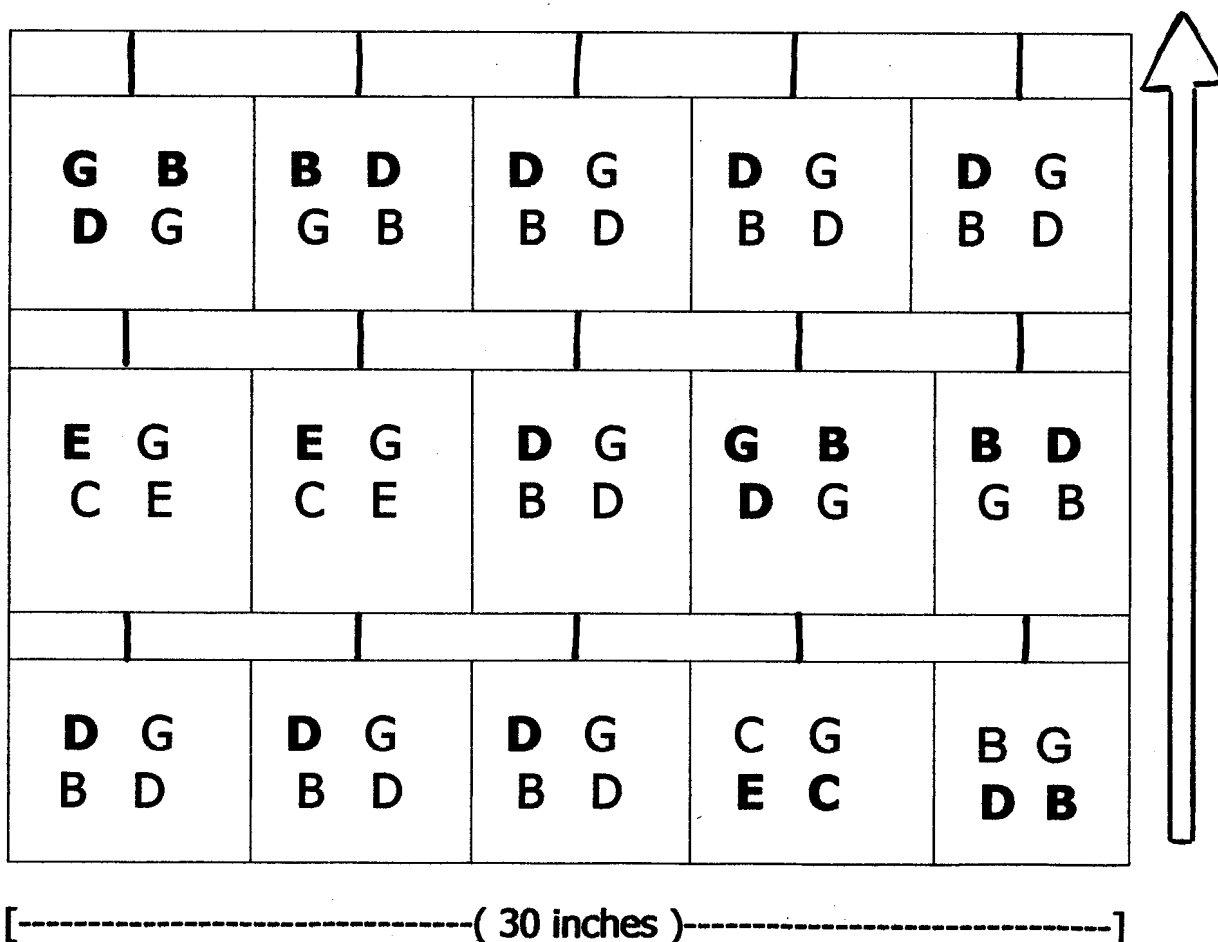
For a comparison on the charting of Stanley Williams and Letha McGrew we will use the following excerpt from a familiar melody, “Kum-Ba-Ya”. This is not necessarily written in the style of standard handbell arrangement – it just presented here to demonstrate the conversion from the notes on the page to the letters on the scroll. The style below does have some good qualities, which may be useful to special groups. The melody is doubled at the octave, and the players move together with the same rhythmic values.

Preparing Scrolls for Performance

In the representation of a scroll below the letters in **BOLD** represent **BLACK** color coding and the **STANDARD** letters represent **RED**. This example is charted the way Stanley Williams would do it. The information begins at the **top** and goes from left to right – just as in reading regular music. The arrow at the side indicates the motion of the scroll.

Williams pulled his scroll across the top of a modified projector table and would cue each square with a baton. Details about modification of the table may be found in the McGrew booklet mentioned previously. As he pulled the scroll across the table top, he rolled it up on the tube to which it was attached. I don't think he used the golf spacers but something similar.

The vertical lines above each square mark the point at which the baton touches the score. Williams generally worked with simpler rhythms as used in this example. He memorized his pieces and knew when to move the baton. This style of arranging is probably similar to what Williams used, since, by his own admission, he was not a trained musician.




McGrew used the same color coding, but her scrolls were usually much more complex rhythmically and contained many special effects. Remember that Dr. McGrew begins with the entire scroll in one hand on the table and feeds the scroll forward to bring the letters into position for the ringers to see. Her baton touches the vertical lines above each square at the time these bells are to be rung.

A beat count (facing the director and for his/her eyes only) appears above the squares in the long horizontal space. If you turn the page upside down, you can see the director's count more clearly.

Most of McGrew's arrangements are more complex than this example. They include notes sustaining while others are played, intricate rhythms, and special effects such as thumb damp, martelatto, and the use of mallets. Information about these techniques may be found in her booklet entitled *Adaptive Notation for Handbells*. It is available at www.agehr.org

1	2	34	5	6
D G B D	D G B D	D G B D	C G E C	B G D B
5	6	1234	5	6
E G C E	E G C E	D G B D	G B D G	B D G B
5	6	1	2	34
G B D G	B D G B	D G B D	D G B D	D G B D



[----- (30 inches) -----]