

## Chapter Three

### Aaron Champagne and the Bayou Bell Ringers Basic hand signals and chromatic variations Positioning ringers to emphasize melody Advantages and limitations

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### Aaron Champagne and the Bayou Bell Ringers

Aaron Champagne, a music therapist in Cut Off, Louisiana, has developed a very fine special needs bell choir using Kodaly hand signals to transmit information from the director to the choir. The Bayou Bell Ringers have performed extensively in Louisiana and south Texas and have also played at the White House and for national conferences of the handbell guild.

The choir is composed of about thirty adults with developmental disabilities. In his right hand Mr. Champagne has access to three octaves of Kodaly signals (in half steps) and in his left hand he commands a vocabulary of about sixty chords. Each choir member is taught to respond with one or two bells that may be melody or part of one of the chord combinations. In other words, each ringer responds to several different signals for each bell that he/she controls. All aspects of rhythm are controlled by the director.

This method requires a high level of concentration on the part of the ringers, and this can only be accomplished with many hours of rehearsal in which each ringer learns to respond quickly to the signals that apply to him/her.


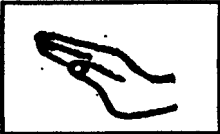






For many years the Bayou Bell Ringers performed without accompaniment, which meant that they were limited to slow moving melodies and harmonic changes. Today they perform with synthesizer accompaniment, which gives them a stronger rhythmic base and more flexibility with regard to style and tempo of the music performed.

More detailed information about Mr. Champagne's method may be found in his booklet entitled *We Can All Ring*, published by AGEHR and available at [www.agehr.org](http://www.agehr.org)

## Basic hand signals and chromatic variations

The basic signals shown below are given in front of the body (mid-level). Signals for additional octaves are placed at other positions.

### Basic diatonic hand signals (based on the key of G)

<u>Hand Signal</u>	<u>Pitch</u>	<u>Adaptations by Champagne</u>
	Do (G)	Same spelling, right fist at stomach level, thumb toward body
	Re (A)	Same spelling, right palm in incline just above stomach, thumb toward body
	Mi (B)	Spelled "me", right palm at stomach level, thumb toward body
	Fa (C)	Same spelling, right fist at stomach level, thumb pointed downward
	Sol (D)	Spelled "so", right palm at stomach level, palm toward body
	La (E)	Same spelling, formed like the Kodaly, but fingers on top, thumb on bottom
	Ti (F#)	Spelled "te", formed like the Kodaly at chest level, forefinger pointing up
	Do (G)	Called "hi do", fist against the right ear, thumb at back

## Chromatic variations (based on the key of G)

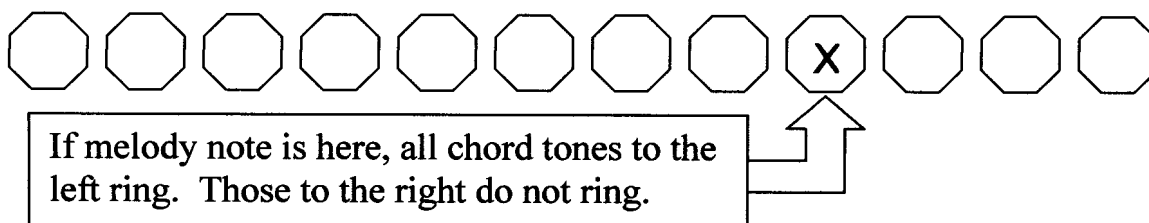
<u>Pitch</u>	<u>Adaptations by Champagne</u>
Di (G#)	Spelled "dee", right fist at stomach level, fingers up, thumb away from body (Do upside down)
Ri (A#)	Spelled "ree", right hand horizontal, thumb toward body, fingers angled down toward the floor
Fi (C#)	Spelled "fee", right fist at stomach level, thumb pointed upward (Fa upside down)
Si (D#)	Spelled "see", right palm at stomach level, palm turned away from body
Li (E#)	Spelled "lee", similar to Kodaly "La" with thumb and fingers pointed down

The alternative spelling used by Mr. Champagne was designed to help some of his ringers learn to read the signs, in order that they might eventually be able to direct the choir from a simple score based upon these spellings.

The **chordal harmony** (signed with the left hand) used by Mr. Champagne is based upon scale degrees, with the primary chords (I, IV, and V) being simply holding up one, four, or five fingers. Other chords, including minor, sevenths, diminished, half-diminished, augmented, etc. are cued with variations on these signs. This system is explained in *We Can All Ring*.

## Positioning ringers to emphasize melody

Aaron Champagne's method works, because it allows the melody to always be on top (the highest pitch) above the harmony. He accomplishes this by lining his ringers up in scale order from left to right (from highest to lowest pitch). Wherever the melody occurs, ringers to the director's left (and to their right) ring the chord. The persons on the other side of the chord do not ring at that time.



Each hand signal has an up stroke and a down stroke. Ringers are taught to recognize the signal on the up stroke and to ring at the bottom of the down stroke. When damping is needed, the director signals by touching his shoulder. As ringers become more skilled in a particular piece, they begin to know when a bell requires damping, so the signal is no longer necessary.

## Advantages and limitations

The **advantages** of this method are: (1) Each ringer develops increased attention span and eye-hand coordination. (2) It does not require preparing charts for the choir. (3) More advanced ringers learn to direct the choir. (4) The bond that develops between director and ringer (a valuable social skill) is very strong, and the effects of this relationship can be very positive.

The **limitations** of this method are: (1) Only slow moving melodies with chords attached (rhythmically) are generally possible. (2) Once a ringer learns to respond to a particular sign (or signs), it may be difficult to move that person to other bells or to find a substitute ringer in case of absence. (3) The rehearsal time required for this method is very demanding. The demands on the director are significant, as is apparent in one of Aaron Champagne's scores that is reproduced below.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a bell ringers' piece, consisting of four staves of music. The score is written in a style that combines musical notation with hand signals (up and down strokes) and lyrics. The lyrics are: "Me Me", "Fa Do", "Te Me Te Te", "La Do Re Do", "Te La Do Te", "La So Me la So Me", "Me Fa Me Fa Do", "Me Me Me la Me Re", "Re Do", "Do Re", "Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me", "Me Re Do", "Te", "Te".

The score includes various chords and hand signals. The chords are labeled with Roman numerals and accidentals: VI, iim7, V, #IV, III, #ii, III, VI, iim7, V, #IV, III, #ii, III, VI, I, IV, I, VI, III, vi7, vi6, IV, III, III. Hand signals are indicated by up and down strokes above the notes. There are also some handwritten annotations, such as "2#ii" and "3", and a large arrow pointing to the right in the second staff.