

Achieving Unity in Ringing

I HAD THE AWESOME PLEASURE RECENTLY OF MEETING A TRULY REMARKABLE *group of handbell ringers*. I refer to the members of *Music Made In Heaven*, the subject of our feature story on page 18. I also had the pleasure of watching a video recording of this group in performance. Getting to know some of the ringers and watching them perform gave me added insight as to just how special and unique our instrument is.



The ensemble consists of ten ringers, all of whom share a common and special bond—they have all at some time in their lives suffered the worst loss imaginable, the loss of a child. As I got to know the five members of the group that I interviewed, I was truly touched by their strength, their courage, and their joyful attitude. And I was further moved when they explained that not only have they all lost a child, but each of their handbells was donated by another parent who has suffered the same loss.

Each bell in the set carries an inscription in the handle in remembrance of the child to whom the bell is dedicated. The inscriptions are printed exactly as the parents request, something which gives each bell its own personality (a list of all the inscriptions accompanies the article).

I cannot think of any instrument more suited to the mission of this special organization. Just as each bell is unique in its tone and timbre, so is each life with whom the bells are connected. And just as an entire set of bells become a symphony when played together, so do the personalities of the people who ring them and the memories of the sons and daughters for whom they ring.

One thing we all try to achieve as handbell directors and ringers is to reach the point where our ensembles are truly playing the bells as one instrument. While the ringers of *Music Made in Heaven* are still learning and polishing their technique, playing the bells as one instrument

is certainly something they have down pat. To experience the connection they all have not only with each other as fellow ringers but with their special instrument, their memories, and their hope is inspiring to say the least.

According to their founder, Elizabeth Barnes, their goal is not necessarily perfection. But as far as being like one player on one instrument, they have already surpassed many of us who have been doing it for a long time.

I look for great things from this group in the future, and I consider myself fortunate to have spent some time with them and experience firsthand their joy and hope.

J.R. Smith
editor@agebr.org