

## Transcript of Making Joyful Music: The World of Handbells

[00:00:00]

**Eric:** Når er det tid til Nordisk på Tryk! (Now it's time for Nordic on Tap!)

**[Intro Music plays]:**

**Eric:** Welcome to our podcast featuring interviews, music, folktales, and lots of hygge, all with a Nordic flavor. I'm your host, Eric Stavney.

**[More intro Music plays]:**

[ A bell rings]

**Eric:** That's the sound of a brass bell that I bought at a tiny metal foundry near Hestenesøyra, Norway, along the Gloppen fjord. It has a pretty clear tone and pitch. You know, bells fascinate me because, for one thing, they're very old. They date back to Neolithic China in 3000 BCE. In Europe, bells were used as early as the 400s ACE and were used to signal the community in [00:01:00] churches for worship and celebration of Christmas as a warning of danger, a call to action. And if you were out in the fields and you knew that there was someone who was very sick down in the village and you heard the church bell play a single note, you'd know that person had passed.

Bells were used to symbolize and celebrate peace. They were definitely rung by several countries at the end of World War II. And don't forget those fantastic church bells in Moscow that were playing at the saving of Russia in Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture.

Then there are small bells, some with handles, that maybe in the 1800s, 1900s, years and years ago in the United States, I know, were used by teachers in small schools. These are bells with a handle that were used to signal the end of recess [00:02:00] or the start of lunchtime. Those are hand bells. But you can use cousins of the teacher bells, ones that play a very clear pitch as their fundamental tone.

You can use those to make music. Now, how do you make music if you don't have all the keys in front of you in all your multiple hands? You only have two hands, right? Well, you need a hand bell choir. How does that work? Well, I learned that one of my colleagues in my day job, Matthew Weed, is by day, whatever he does at work, but by night and on weekends, he is a handbell player at Faith Lutheran Church.

I thought he'd be a great person to help pull back the curtain on this fascinating world of handbell playing and handbell choirs.

Matt, welcome to Nordic on Tap.

Oh, thanks Eric, this is exciting, fun to talk about handbells.

[00:03:00] Why don't we start with, you're in a handbell choir at Faith Lutheran Church, right?

**Matt:** Yep, Faith Lutheran here in Redmond, Washington.

**Eric:** In Redmond, Washington. When you say choir, I always think of voices. What is the handbell choir that you're a part of?

**Matt:** Here in the U. S., they're usually handbell choir. So, it's the ensemble or group of people that ring. So, we often call ourselves just handbell ringers.

But a choir can be anywhere from 8 to 15 to more ringers who are responsible for a series of bells, each bell ringing one particular note. So, when we play as a choir, I don't, I don't get to play the melody or the harmony. I get to play. C above middle C, D, and maybe the sharps and flats. And my neighbors are playing the bells above me and the bells below me on the musical staff.

**Eric:** Boy, that suggests to me that it takes a lot of concentration and timing.

**Matt:** There are a lot of coordination because there isn't [00:04:00] usually a late ringer because nobody's carrying the melody. So, you have to be able to keep the rhythm in your own head and ring regardless of what your neighbors are doing. And trust that they will come in on the next sixteenth note, or eighth note, or whole note, in a timely manner.

So, there is a lot of coordination, and the volume of the bell, depending on how strongly you ring it. So, you need to be coordinated with the people around you. Bells can be rung very softly, bells can be rung very loudly, and the worst thing you can do is have a choir that, you know, everybody's ringing at their own volume.

You will not hear the music. You will not hear the melody line, for example, because it'll get lost by people's choices.

**Eric:** I know you've been doing this a while. How'd you get started in?

**Matt:** Well, the summer before seventh grade, a family at our church donated, purchased and donated, a two-octave set of bells. And so, they were delivered during the summer, and I was part of the youth group.

And so, we got to [00:05:00] unpack those and go, what are these? I think most of us that I've ever seen or heard of a handbell. And that was the beginning of our handbell choirs. And so that's like 50 years ago when I started. So, 50 years plus for our handbell choir here, we've grown over the years. We now have five octaves.

other donations, and then the handbell choirs raised their own funds to purchase an octave or two. And at one time we had five choirs simultaneously, from kindergarten age up through adults. Okay, five handbell choirs? Five handbell choirs, all varying degrees of proficiency. And usually our, our senior handbell choir was usually the most technically strong.

And most of them had grown up with the, as the years went by. They are the ones that grew up playing handbells. And they'd go on tours, they played Disneyland, they played Yellowstone, Old Faithful for a 4th of July concert where we'd traveled. I played once at Washington State University, we played for a, a class for non-musician's music class. [00:06:00]

Bells are actually a lot of fun for other people to pick up and play and ring because you immediately make the correct

**Eric:** sound. You are definitely a musician.

**Matt:** Yeah, definitely a musician. Yeah. We understand music. I don't play any other musical instrument, but our hand down music looks to most people like piano music.

It was a full sheet of black notes on lots of lines with all the notations that go along with that. We do need to learn how to read music.

**Eric:** So, it's 50 years, obviously people have hobbies, and they do stuff for one, three, four years and move on, but you have stayed in it and so. I'm always asking people, what is it that attracts you?

There could be a number of things in the, you know, fellowship, camaraderie.

**Matt:** Absolutely. Since this is the church, I grew up in, I know, I know everybody, families over the years, so there is that sense of camaraderie, fellowship, and a sense of belonging. There's also just something about the music, it's a, it's a beautiful [00:07:00] sound to hear hand bells rung, but the interesting thing is when you're in the choir, you don't hear the choir the same way that somebody in an audience does, because you're a little, you're a little closer to the bells.

I can always hear my bells better than anybody else. there's still something about it and it's, it's a very cooperative effort. Again, since you're playing designated notes, regardless of where it comes in the overall music, it's a highly coordinated and sometimes physically choreographed. I've only got two hands, but I may be responsible on a normal basis, I'm responsible for four bells

It could be the flats and the sharps associated with the bells I have. But, if the bells don't ring too frequently, I may pick up other bells also. And I can coordinate, and I can ring two bells per hand. We also have techniques for suspending the bells on what's called a bell tree and using a mallet, almost like a vertical xylophone, so I can play a dozen bells.

So, there's just a lot of creativity. But what I love about it is I [00:08:00] don't have to worry about being in tune. I don't have to have the light, the correct lips for playing the flute. I about tightening the strings on a guitar. The bell can get out of tune, but it doesn't happen easily. They do need to be adjusted a few times a year just to make sure they're actually striking correctly.

The effort is more than on the physical. Arm movement and the ear.

**Eric:** So, do you have robes, you know, do you have a uniform?

**Matt:** We have definitely varied over the years. There was a decade where we all wore tuxedo shirts, cummerbunds and bow ties. Other decades when we wore matching polo shirts and dark pants.

Today, our choir, we have, we have just had one choir. Well, it's all adults. It's a small choir of eight and we've just designed, we'll all be casual. So whatever works for being

in church is just fine. The only thing that's consistent throughout that, out all of that for us is to wear gloves. You don't want your hands to be touching the bronze casing of the bells because [00:09:00] they will pick up fingerprints, which can etch over time and can make them very difficult to keep clean, bright, and shiny.

So, most handbell acquirers will wear gloves, although there was a time when we were rebels and we decided we weren't going to wear gloves either, but we're back to gloves again. They're usually cotton gloves, and you can get them in white and black at least. And they also have the little rubber dots on the edge of the fingertips, so that you can turn the page of your music without that, it's a little hard to progress through a song that's more than two pages long, if you can't turn the music.

So, you do have page turning help. Are you laid out in rows? You laid out one row? Most choirs, I don't speak for most choirs. From my experience, we've either been in one row or two rows with, with eight players can do it in one row. We're on padded. Tables in front of us. Now these tables are waist high and have four inches of foam padding on them in addition to the tablecloth, so that you can lay the bell down on the table and not have it roll off.

And also, you don't want to make any [00:10:00] extraneous sounds. That's why it's padded. Larger choirs may end up being in two rows, so that you aren't spread too far wide. Again, we're playing with just eight ringers, we can always do it in one row. And our tables are on wheels, so we can, generally we'll try and put ourselves into a slight arc, so we have a chance of seeing our fellow bell ringers at either end of the, of the row.

And then the bells are laid out in sequence as they would just like piano keys. So, from your lowest bells on the left to your highest bells on the right. Unless you're picking up an incidental bell, some bell that only rings once or twice, then anybody in the choir could probably take care of that. But you'll always be adjacent to the ringers who are playing the bells that are adjacent to your bells.

**Eric:** I'm picturing people have specific stations they stand at.

**Matt:** It depends on the choir. Currently, we all have our, our regular bells. We always know which bells we'll generally be responsible for. Over the years, as I played some of the other choirs here at the church, just to keep things interesting and lively, we would move, or move ourselves around.

[00:11:00] If you normally play in the treble clef, you might for a while go down and play in the bass. Although bass clef bells can get fairly heavy. So, if you aren't used to ringing the bass bells, that can be a bit of a challenge.

**Eric:** Several pounds, I'm sure, huh?

**Matt:** Yeah, especially the lowest bells.

**Eric:** We talked about two things going on.

First of all, you have to know which bell to pick up to ring, and second, the timing. And then you also need to know when it's not supposed to be playing. I guess you mute them sometimes.

**Matt:** So, when you ring a bell, it will continue reverberating for quite a while. And, depending on the piece of the music the composer, his or her, desires, there may be a reason to dampen the bell so that it only rings for one beat or for a full measure or let it ring LV, let it vibrate.

**Eric:** Is that a notation in...

**Matt:** LV? Yep. LV is a notation in the bells, which means do not dampen the bell, let it ring until just naturally, the sound naturally dies out. I will often dampen them up [00:12:00] against my chest and just press them into my, my shirt or my vest. Obviously, when you put it down on a table, it will end up dampening, but when you're ringing bells, you want the bell to be upright.

If you think of the opening on the bell should be pointing up because the sound goes out at 90 degrees to that. So, you hold the bell out front of you. You don't point it at your audience because then the sound would go up and down. So instead, you hold the bell upright and that will allow the sound to go towards your audience.

So, it's easy to dampen it against your own body. If I need to switch bells, of course, I need to put the bell down onto the table without making a noise without having the bells hit each other and the pickup. Another bell, if I'm getting ready for another piece of the music.

**Eric:** I heard one gal on YouTube, The Bell Girl, also known as Portia Berryman, in Texas, USA.

She made a series of videos to say that holding a handbell is like holding an ice cream cone and presenting it to somebody.

**Matt:** When I ring, holding the ice cream cone. I love that analogy. Hold, hold the ice cream cone. [00:13:00] I'm going to scoop it down a little bit. As I push it out forward of me scoop. I like to allow, allowing the, there's a clapper in the bell that needs to ring, that needs to strike forward.

That's what's going to make the sound. Now the hand bells we have can be rung backwards. Also, there's a, a spring and a clapper inside that controls that, but can only be rung forward and backwards. It can't be rung sideways. Otherwise, you'd get lots of extraneous accidental. Ringing and sounds, but you've got to cut a little bit of snap at the end of that scoop in order to make that clapper hit just right.

**Eric:** You, we were talking about this previously about the challenge of playing a succession of notes that are short, 16 seconds. If it's made up of multiple people having bells, that's really tricky, right? To do exactly quick and right.

**Matt:** Yep. And that's where we spent a lot of time in practice, whether via run, at least it's visibly easier for us to figure out.

Cause you can see. People ringing bells to your [00:14:00] left coming close to you, and then they're going the other way. But if it's not a clear run, but it's still a very quick change of bells, again, you've got to know what the tempo is. So

**Eric:** you don't play just sacred music, you play what, what other things, for example?

**Matt:** Right now, our choir is focused mostly on church performances, so we do play mostly that. Over the years, we're going to play music from the Lion King and the Phantom of the Opera and the Muppet Show theme song. All the patriotic songs, you know, America the Beautiful, et cetera. We have done concerts where we'll have a mix, sacred and non-sacred music, obviously church.

Sunday morning church performances are along hymns and religious pieces.

**Eric:** Probably not just anybody makes handbells, right?

**Matt:** No, the vast majority of handbells in the United States are made by two companies, both out of Pennsylvania. Schulmerich and Malmark And our bells are Schulmerich I think they've been [00:15:00] in business about 50 years.

And there are other manufacturers in the world, but by far in the U. S. those are the two, the two big players. And their bells look roughly similar. They have a slightly different, so you don't really, generally don't mix your Malmark bells together. Schulmerich they won't quite match up. But we play Schulmerich, and those bells for both of those companies, the standard, kind of the standard of, Hand bell bronze is about 80 percent copper and 20 percent tin.

And it makes the beautiful, clear sound that this style of bell is known for.

That's interesting. And you mentioned that the biggest bells, because of the weight question, sometimes are made of some metal. It's not

**Matt:** brass. True. You get down to the absolute lowest bells available. And the largest hand bell choir spread is about nine octaves.

So that lower octave of bells, some of those bells may be actually made out of aluminum. Because you just wouldn't be able to pick them up. And be able to swing them. Certainly, wouldn't be able to one hand swing them like you do with most bells. [00:16:00] And very few choirs would have those because they're very expensive.

And you wouldn't even use them most of the time. So, typical choirs, two to three octaves are basically a starting choir, and then I would say most choirs that have been around for a while are probably in the five-octave range. We have five octaves of hand bells, and then we have three octaves of hand chimes, which is a different instrument, but along the same lines of, ours are tubular.

Square, tubular aluminum with a clapper on them and Schulmerich it makes a much softer sound than a handbell. And so, we have music where we use both.

**Eric:** It makes me think then about the evolution of handbells and how they came to be.

**Matt:** The handbell, for people who've seen handbells, in the United States are referred to as English handbells.

Not because they came from England, but it's the style. But the handbell the tuned hand bells have only been in existence [00:17:00] since the 17th century. Bells have

been around obviously for thousands and thousands of years. But the idea of having a set of bells that are tuned to each other. And they really were created to provide tower bell ringers.

So, think of a bell tower that's got bells suspended well above the town. Most towns would not appreciate having the, the bell ringers practicing all day. So, hand bells were created to allow those ringers to have something to practice. And in England bell towers play what are called changes. And a change is just a, it's mathematical.

sequence of ringing the bell. It doesn't normally play tunes, but you needed bells with the right notes in order to play this mathematical scale back and forth. And so those bells could be playing for hours and hours. If you were to do a full and these are people

**Eric:** standing, like, in a circle, pulling big

**Matt:** ropes?

Yep. They are pulling down on the ropes. Wow. Imagine the images of the monks, you know, flying up into the rafters. Well, I don't think they normally [00:18:00] fly, but, but they are physically pulling down on a rope in order to ring that bell. It's a very physically demanding. I watched a choir from, it was four or five men rang bells.

They were from Norway. This is years ago. And they were on tour, and they rang their bells by flipping them. So, the bell was on a table with the. The opening facing down, and they would lift up the handle and flip their wrist in order to ring it. But I remember reading about one of the players. He rang four tons of bells in a single performance.

So, you can imagine the arm strength for that style of ringing. Now that's not the style we use, but still. We can have sore arms at the end of the day. Carillon's a bell tower that has a set of two bells, and you could actually play it. It actually has a keyboard. I've only seen one once. I've got a chance to go in and the carillon player let us see it, but these keyboards, you don't push them down with your finger like a piano.

You're hitting them, slamming them with your fist in order to get enough force [00:19:00] to make those bells up in the carillon ring. So, the Dutch carillons would actually play recognizable tunes. Most English bell towers simply are playing a peal or a series of bells in sequence. But that's what the handbell were created for, to give a more neighborhood friendly means.

Of practicing the bell.

**Eric:** Anything else you can think of relative to the history of hand bells?

**Matt:** I, I only learned it more recently, but I was just surprised the hand bells weren't around much longer. The firsthand bell choir that was created in the United States was only in the early 19 hundreds. Oh. It was a set of bells that were gifted from, the English manufacturer was sent over, but PT Barnum brought the first bell choir.

To the United States. they were from England. We brought them in as a novelty act. But he decided to dress them up as if they were Swiss. Because apparently the English

wouldn't be as appealing in his advertising. So, they were labeled as the Swiss Ringers. [00:20:00] And they would travel with the P. T. Barnum show.

And people, that would be the first time they'd ever seen

**Eric:** A great showman and circus master. Absolutely,

**Matt:** yep. But then it was decades later before an actual choir was created in the United States. And today the Hand Belled Musicians of America is kind of the organizer, organizing entity behind the American Hand Belled Choirs.

Coordinates conferences and bell ringing. We'll have a conference that might have a hundred choirs simultaneously ringing. So, we'll learn pieces to ring, synchronized ringing with the other choirs as well as having solo shows and being able to show off. And then you'd have guest conductors come in who each of us would have been practicing for months most likely getting ready to come to this three- or four-day event.

But they're all over the United States.

**Eric:** Wow, I, I mean, the most, I've, I've been in a choir, we maybe sang with one or two [00:21:00] other choirs at the same time, and you're saying this is way bigger. Well, why don't we go see some bells? Sure. So, you brought me over to the alcove in the sanctuary where the congregation sits.

From the congregation's viewpoint, we're off to the left side

**Matt:** of our sanctuary. And this has a hardwood floor, so the sound bounces correctly. A curved wall behind us. Nice. So, the sound is pushed out into the sanctuary. The handbells come to us and are normally stored in cases that can hold anywhere from the smallest bells, you know, 18 small bells up to maybe only four or six of the larger bells.

But that makes them portable. And so, for many people, an organization suddenly to put their bells back into the case and then put the case into their locked cabinet or cupboard or music room. We're fortunate that we have several carpenters in [00:22:00] our congregation a few years back who built us a beautiful oak wall cabinet so we can put all of our bells upright on padded shelves right behind our tables where we play.

**Eric:** We're staying now next to these tables on wheels that that foam is pretty thick, isn't

it?

**Matt:** Yeah, generally four inches, I think you get a bigger one. so, this is just kind of like a felted piece.

**Eric:** And it's this thick perhaps because the big bells need.

**Matt:** Yeah. Cause if you set a bell down, it's going to sink a little bit into the table.

If you need to use the pattern to help you dampen the bell, you need a little bit more space. but it really does minimize the amount of clinking and clanking that can go on with a choir. And you definitely don't want the bells to hit each other. So, you don't want



them to roll around. cause they can get dinged, chipped, and that will change the tone of the bell.

The bells can develop cracks, very fine cracks that we don't even see, but you can hear it. And realize, oops, that doesn't sound right. So, all of our bells have been refurbished over the years. They're in sequence. Our [00:23:00] highest bell is known as the C8. So, we'll go up to eight, and then we go down to a C4, and that's for a five-octave choir.

**Eric:** Well, I see you've pulled out some bells.

**Matt:** Yep, I pulled out all of our C bells, from our C3 up to our C8.

And it looks like, so they all have handles on the top, so you don't shake them, you hold the handle, right?

**Matt:** Correct. Yep, and the handles all have marks on the front to indicate a front and a back, so that you know which way the clapper is aligned.

**[Music]:** Schulmerich.

**Matt:** So, there's a, there's a right side and a potentially wrong side so you're going to want all your bells. It's oriented the same way to make sure that you've got all the bells tuned to each other.

**Eric:** Can you demo making it sound and then turn it so that it's off axis?

So, this is the C5. That's kind of the middle of our bell ranges.

C5.

Pretty. So that's upright.

Upright. Now you hold an [00:24:00] ice cream cone.

**Matt:** Like holding an ice cream cone so the sound is going out at a 90-degree angle so it's going towards me and away from

me.

**Matt:** It's not sending any music up.

Yes.

**Matt:** But if I ring it and then. Reorient the bell itself, tip it forward, tip it back, see if you can pick up

the difference.

Hmm.

**Matt:** Yeah. Can you hear that? Nothing can sustain for quite a while. Yes, it is. And so, some of the bell techniques that will have you intentionally waver the bell, or like I said, that tower swing, so it's out and then it's all the way down, pointing to the ground next to my leg and then back up.

What keeps the clapper from hitting the back? Striking back?

**Matt:** Yeah. They all have adjustable [00:25:00] springs inside. And

it's interesting because otherwise you can imagine just picking up a bell that it could sound. There are ways to control it.

**Matt:** Because it's stationary, clapper system on the inside of the bell, you do need to ring it at the right angle away from your body.

Because if I ring it You know, if I'm looking forward and ring it, the clapper swings forward, but if I even shift it by like 10 degrees in my hand and I try and ring it forward, I might get a sound.

Okay.

**Matt:** If I shift it a little more, I'm going to get nothing, nothing because I'm not, I'm not in alignment with the clapper.

So again, when you pick up a bell, you've got to make sure you pick it up correctly. Handles make it much easier because they're not rounded handles so there's a flat feel so you can, you can tell when you pick up a bell if you have it oriented correctly.

**Eric:** And the clapper looks like it's metal with a plastic or rubber bumper on it.

**Matt:** Most of these are quick, quick change clapper adjustments so we can actually turn it, [00:26:00] click it to the left or the right for a soft, medium, or a hard sound. So, most of the time I'll have my bells on medium and I'll adjust. The volume by how hard I ring it.

Right.

Let me

**Matt:** see

your

**Matt:** Because I want the ice cream scoop to still be upright when I'm dampening it. Otherwise, you're going to create a wow wow effect. If you tip the bell and try and do anything else with it. Except that some music asks you to table dampen. So, you'd ring it. And you're going to be tipping your bell forward and pushing it into the table.

Like it's a slightly different sound.

**Eric:** Is that considered a martellato or mart for short?

**Matt:** No, a martellato would be ringing it into the table. I see. Very percussive. That's me ringing it from maybe like four inches above the table, into the table. I could do a thumb pluck. So, the bell is resting on the table.

It's not suspended at all. [00:27:00] And I'm just using my fingers to make them. clapper, ring it. So, it's similar sound to a

**[Music]:** mm-hmm.

**Matt:** Depends on which bells, like the bigger bells there. It's hard to swing. So, we're more likely to do a thumb dam. but the smallest bell's much easier to ring into the table.

Yes.

I can imagine, you know, the big bells. Mm-hmm. Huh? And the thumb dam simply is you have your thumb on it. When you're ringing it.

**Matt:** This is, again, the C5, the one I've been ringing, with my thumb resting against the bell. The tone is not as sustained, and if I move my thumb up, you'll get even less of it. And the bigger the bell, so this is the C3, which, I'm going to use my right arm.

It's my left arm. I don't normally ring this low anymore. I tend to ring the C6s. So, this is the C3. [00:28:00]

And it will sustain for quite a long time.

And it's still going. If you really wanted that to keep going, you'd get a, what, a mallet and go around the outside?

**Matt:** Yeah, then I could do the, the singing bell. Singing bell. Which also gives a slightly different sound, but it'll also get the tone.

Could you ring your octaves?

Yeah. So, that was a C2. And

**Matt:** just, and visually, if everybody's looking at the bells, it'll look like each bell about half the size as you go up. Okay. now that

one, almost as big as a soccer ball. It's about as

**Matt:** big as my toaster at

home.

**Matt:** Yeah. That's pretty large. So, this is a C3. C4. 5. That was a 6. This is a 7.

And this is a C8. [00:29:00]

And notice that C8. It just dies away within a beat or two. So, if I'm ringing the C8, I'm not too worried about dampening aggressively, because it's going to die off pretty quick.

**Eric:** I think you had told me that it's not just Whole note scale. You can be chromatic, you can do sharps and flats, right? Oh yeah,

**Matt:** yeah.

Just like the keys on the piano. So, it's the sharps and flats. So, we'll have 60 plus bells in our five octaves. And again, my standard position, I'll be playing the C and the D, and I'll probably pick up the sharp and I'll have the sharps and flats associated with it. Sometimes I'll double and that means I'm going to play my C six.

And depending on how the music's written, we may also need the C seven ringing at the same time. So, [00:30:00] I may be responsible for ringing both of them. Let's see if I can ring them both.

Oh, you could ring them both. Wow.

**Matt:** Yeah, but I do a little bit of a flick of the wrist in order to get both of them ringing simultaneously.

**Eric:** Because otherwise, if you do a standardized cream cone presentation, you only get one, right? I tend

**Matt:** to get only the, yeah, I only the one. Because the other bell is sticking out at 90 degrees. Think about how I'm going to physically ring. Now we do have one of our ringers who regularly rings what's called four in hand.

Well, that's two per hand. And so, she'll ring like an A and a C in one hand and the B and the D in the other hand or a combination. And she'll have the bells at 90 degrees to each other. And we'll have to ring kind of to the left or kind of to the right with her swing, so she's not doing the straight out in front of you swing that most of us are doing.

**Eric:** I think she referred to the, so if she had the two at right angles to each other, whatever, the regular ring, and then [00:31:00] she, she called it knocking, which I think is rotating her hand.

**Matt:** Yep, she might rotate her hand, but ice cream grip. But now if you turn you. Ice cream cone 90 degrees. Of course, the ice cream would fall out of the cone, but these aren't ice creams anymore, so.

**Eric:** Matt brought me to a choir rehearsal where I talked to Rene about playing two bells with one hand. So, you play them at, are they at like right angles? Yes,

**Renee:** they're at right angles. So, this, when a bell rings, it has to hit right here. So, what you do, you do, it's a knock. This is called a knock. Forward

motion, right.

And then, and this. And then you turn your wrist.

You turn your wrist to do the top one.

To do the top one. Right. And the same

with this. This one, and this is the knock. This is the bottom. So, the bottom one I'm always knocking. So sometimes you have to play the, this is the, yeah, the A and the C. A and the C, so it's in thirds.

On the scale. Yes,

right.

**Renee:** Right? So, this is a third, and [00:32:00] then you do this. There are other people who do it differently.

So, it sounds like knocking is a particular move versus something else. It is.

**Eric:** You hold it differently, and you turn your wrist.

So, which one is knocking?

**Renee:** It's the line. It's the C in the, the G in the C.

Sometimes the last move that we did was a mart.

The last note. The last note is the mart(ellato). So, we have a lot of different moves. We have this is called a gyro.

Wow, going around in a circle. Yeah.

**[Music – Single bell rings]**

And it's, it sustains a long time. Yes,

**Renee:** it does. This is the problem with these bells, the tiny ones, is they don't sustain very long. But you can do this, you can also do this.

There are different ways and shaking. Shake is another move. Oh yeah, we have these, oh I don't have any, but we have these wooden things that you go, it's like, I call it a stir stick. And [00:33:00] it, it, it's, it's a different sound altogether.

**Eric:** So, as we were talking, Howard came over holding a big C6 bell. And he was rubbing a mallet around and around and around the outside rim.

Can you hear that in the background? And you're using actually a, like a dowel? dowel. It

**Renee:** is a big fat dowel. And when you release it, it still goes.

That's a long sustain. Singing bell, and

**Eric:** we, it really is wonderful on the larger bells. Because these still, even with that dowel, will not suspend that long. So

you're rubbing a dowel around the outside flared edge.

The very edge,

**Renee:** yeah.

**Eric:** Round and round and round. I've seen that in Tibetan bells.

It's like that. It is like that.

For meditation or whatever.

**Renee:** Exactly.

Yeah.

Yeah, so.

**Eric:** And you can change the volume, sounds like. It's fast, not necessarily more pressure, it's faster.

**Renee:** No, you don't [00:34:00] use, it's not about pressure. Not a pressure.

So there's a lot of different things to do.

**Eric:** That's neat.

**Renee:** It's fun.

**Eric:** I can tell.

**Renee:** Thank you. We love doing it. I've been doing it for, I don't know, 40 years.

**Eric:** Obviously, these folks really enjoy ringing. I'll play you now a Christmas piece that they were rehearsing that night, one that I learned myself singing in a choir, the French carol, *Il est né le divine enfant*. Or, *He was born the divine child*.

**Eric:** Listen for the thumb dampened bells, thumb damped bells in the second verse. They sound kind of clipped or muffled. And at the very end, all the bells are damped with a martellato, as they were pressed down into the felt tables on the last note.

**[Music] (2):** One, two, ready, and.

Choir plays " *He was born the* [00:35:00] *divine child*. " [00:36:00] [00:37:00]

I Wasn't that neat? Especially that martellato at the end.

Hey, we touched on chimes.

**Matt:** Oh, yeah. I brought out the chimes. And again, our chimes are squared aluminum tubes. Yeah, hollow. With a clapper on the outside. And you ring it generally the same way as you do the handbell. And that is that you, you know, do the scoop even though it doesn't look like a handbell.

It doesn't look like an ice cream cone.

Yeah, so that's a C5 and a chime. Here's the C5 and [00:38:00] bronze bell.

Yeah.

**Matt:** Much more of a wow effect with the chime.

**Eric:** Sure enough. It feels much more directional. Waving it around, yeah. It looks almost like a, like a sort of a tuning fork. It's split at the top, right?

**Matt:** Yes, it does have a split in the in the part of square tubular in order to it looks like

**Eric:** that's really clear how Well, I mean, yeah, how, how to hold it because you've got all the,

**Matt:** yeah, it's much easier to hold.

There's less doubt about whether you have it held at the right orientation or if you have it up or down, which is why it's getting easier for particularly kids, but younger requires to read. So, this is a C6.

So, we'll often pass out the chimes to members of the congregation and have them play along with us. Oh, that's [00:39:00] because it's so much. You're not, you're not as likely to make a mistake with it or get no sound out of it. So, if I'm trying to involve people, you know, more, a light, a lighter service.

**Eric:** So, both you and I are getting on towards retirement from our day jobs and stuff.

Do you think you'll continue belling?

**Matt:** I expect I'll be ringing for a while. Yeah, I really do enjoy them. you know, it gives me a purpose on a Wednesday night and on those Sundays when we're performing. It is fun to ring with my fellow ringers. I've only ever rung, well, I've rung with our choirs here at the church for these going on 50 years.

**Eric:** Thank you, Matt, for spending time with us.

**Matt:** Well, my pleasure. Happy to tell the story of the bells.

**Eric:** I am indebted to these wonderful musicians who let me record their rehearsal. Starting with the high bells to the lows, Renée, Carla with a C, Matt, Carla with a K, [00:40:00] Dorothy, Jody, Howard, and their director, Dr. William Bryant. Thank you.

Matt reminded me that there are also community handbell choirs that are not associated with churches, such as in the greater Seattle area, the Emerald Ringers in Bellevue, and the Bells of the Sound. At Faith Lutheran Church, I'm told that they practice every Wednesday night, and they play in one church service per month.

According to various websites, there is at least one handbell choir in almost every state of the United States in almost every province of, of Canada. If you go to handbells. You can see that there are choirs in Canada. In various European countries, in the Nordics, Norway and Sweden and Iceland all have at least one handbell choir.

I know of one in Norway [00:41:00] in Trondheim. Not sure about Denmark. England and Scotland definitely have handbell choirs and in Finland they have six. Maybe there's one near you. Now look, you can even download a mobile phone app that rings like a handbell when you shake it. Form your own choir with real or digital handbells.

I hope to have a future podcast on community choruses. That's the vocal variety. You see, folks, there's lots of ways to get involved with music and great people. I'll put the links to the various videos and recordings we touched on the episode website, such as Portia Berryman's bell girl videos one on forehand ringing, carillon or tower bells, change ringing, and this business of overtones in bells, which we didn't even mention.

We mentioned the word [00:42:00] overtones in the natural scale back when we talked about the door in one of our podcasts. What's unusual about bells is that they vibrate differently from string instruments and air instruments. And as a result, sometimes they

definitely sound different. I'll also put a recording of the Faith Lutheran Handbell Choir rehearsing the Christmas carol Silent Night.

Listen for the second verse, where chimes instead of handbells play the melody. I commend your ears to Seattle's Scandinavian Hour radio show, streaming on Saturdays and Sundays at 6 a. m. Pacific Time, and then on Saturday at 9 a. m. Pacific. These are repeats of the same weekly show. Remember that.

Listening to radio streaming requires that you're present online at the proper time. Maybe you go to Scandinavian hour. org or to the KKNW Seattle [00:43:00] radio channel online too. There's a rumor that they may convert to podcast format. If they do, you'll hear it first here. Then you can hear Your favorite Scandinavian tunes that they play, folk, marching bands, choruses, vocals, occasionally interviews with interesting people, and community events.

Our introductory music is Ingeles Waltz as written by Alfred Morton Høirup and performed together with Ruthie Dornfeld. See [alfredmorton.com](http://alfredmorton.com) for more great music. Our outgoing music is written and performed by Daryl Jackson at [daryljacksonmusic.com](http://daryljacksonmusic.com). Based on your responses to our survey, yes, indeed your opinion counts, we're making podcasts about Sancta Lucia Day, about the Swedish [00:44:00] inventor John Ericsson, the Norwegian scientist Kristian Birkeland.

I pay attention to survey results and if there's one topic that everyone wants to hear about its history. Your feedback is very welcome at [nordicontap@gmail.com](mailto:nordicontap@gmail.com) and I want to give a huge shout out to Paula of the Danish Sisterhood of America for your support out of Illinois United States. And a heartbreaking goodbye and fond one to retiring editor of the Norwegian American News, Lori Ann Reinhall.

Your moral support has helped carry this show. And so, I wish you a great beginning to 2025. I am Eric Stavney. We'll see you next time. Vi sees, on Nordic on [00:45:00] Tap.