

BASS CHOIRCHIMES: What to do, what not to do, what's cool to do - by Douglas J Benton

Jacob Malta spent four years researching handchimes before creating his Choirchime® instruments. There have been other "chime" type instruments made before, but all had fairly serious design problems, so Jake, like he did with handbells, wanted to make the best. He discovered that aluminum worked very well and decided to use extruded aluminum tubes for ultimate strength. And, being aluminum, the tubes were lightweight. Additionally, he decided to use square tubes as he discovered every angle in oblong or rounded tubes produces a harmonic. This has the potential for some very strange sounds in chords, whereas the square chime – with 90° angles – energizes a very pure sound, nearly a pure sine-wave.

Choirchime instruments were originally designed to be used with small children in general music and for music therapy, and they have been very successful with each. As long as children don't sword-fight with them, they can't hardly hurt them! Of course, handbell groups have adopted Choirchimes as a secondary instrument to their handbells, adding a new sound to the handbell mix - almost like a French Horn added to strings.

Malmark has a 5-year warranty on Choirchimes, and certainly many groups have rung Choirchimes in excess of 20 years without any problem – Northern AZ University received their Choirchimes in 1989 and didn't replace them until 2016, but all of the original Choirchimes still work. When a chime loses its resonance, or has a "ping" like sound, it is starting to fail. When the pitch goes flat, the chime is cracked – whether or not you can see the crack – and will need to be replaced.

This is important to realize, especially with the big, bass Choirchimes. A C2 Choirchime vibrates at approximately 64 Hz (cycles per second), and the wave form is 8' long (the distance to make a complete sine wave). So, to be able to really hear a C2, you should be at least 8' away. What happens way too often, is the Bass Choirchime ringer will mallet the chimes too hard, so they can "hear" it better. In the process, they are immediately doing great damage to the chime, and if they keep ringing with too much force, indeed they will have to purchase a replacement chime!

Ring the Bass Choirchimes: Using an appropriate mallet, (a MH8, large yellow knit mallet on C3-F#3, a MH5, lambs wool mallet on C2-B2), strike the chime about where a clapper would strike, if there is/was one, approximately 2" below the top of the chime using a light, full stroke. Think pp – nothing louder. This will give you the best sound. You want a nice rumble, not an earthquake! If you opt to do the earthquake, buy your replacement chime from me! © If you ring C2, you should also add the C3 to give a fuller sound. It is not necessary to add the octave when ringing C3 or above, but if you do it will give you a fuller bass sound.

Absolutely no mallet rolls on any chimes! Bass chimes must be able to come to a complete rest before re-striking, or you might do serious damage to the chime. They should only be used on whole or half notes. Certainly nothing shorter than very slow quarter notes. They simply cannot be played fast!

How to damp – without hurting your instrument: First, never squeeze the tines (forks) together! Always either damp the Choirchime at the top with a flat hand, or a mallet at the top. I would not even get in the habit of damping on one tine from bottom to top – too much chance on putting too much pressure on one tine which might bend it, then a crack will be forthcoming. Be gentle with these great instruments. The lower you go, the softer you must be! Don Allured had a perfect term for Bass Choirchimes: LVUHC = let vibrate until harmony changes. Keep this in mind, and you will feel very good about your ringing, and so will your director!

Keep the Tine Protectors in the Bass Choirchimes® when not in use. This helps to protect them especially in heat/cold and when travelling. If you have a hard time getting the correct protector into its corresponding Choirchime, don't force it as you have already bent the tine by over-ringing or striking too hard (remember: pianissimo!). Forcing it will only add additional stress to the metal and premature failure is likely.

Warranty: Choirchimes in the C3 on up range include a Limited 5 Year Warranty. C2-B2 Choirchimes include a Limited 2 Year Warranty. Your Bass Choirchimes should last for many, many years as long as you take care of them and are gentle with them. Handbells in these same pitches require a lot of strength and power whereas the Bass Choirchimes require a lot of restraint and gentleness to achieve musical results. If you normally ring the buckets, then you simply must find your kinder, gentler self before malleting the Choirchimes. I promise – if you treat them well, they will treat you well!