

PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR BELL-RINGERS

Andrei A. Dyachkov,
Director of the Arkhangelsk School for Bell Ringing
Senior consultant of the International Center of Bell Art

1. Small bells. "Trio of treble bells" (*zazvonnye*)

The number of small bells (treble or *zazvonnye*) in one set may be different depending on the size of the set. In smaller ones, small bells commonly constitute two or three of the total number of bells. In larger sets their quantity can range from four to no more than five. In this computer program, the most widespread manner of ringing these three small bells is shown (Fig. 1). The three small bells are connected at the clapper by a rope and are united in a "lock" so that they can be managed by one hand. The "lock" enables you to use different techniques so as to ring a beautiful-sounding peal.

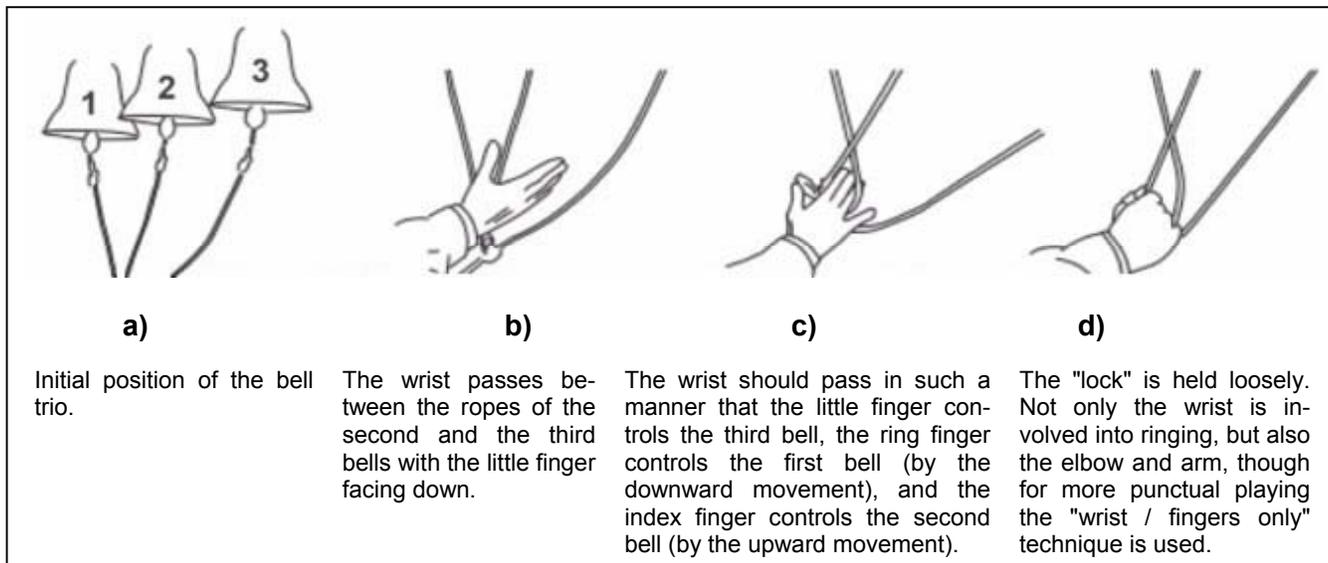


Fig.1. Ringing small bells (zazvonnye).

In this lesson, we shall study the method of playing the two main bells of the three small bells (the second and the third ones). This is similar to the manner of playing small bells when there are only two of them in a set. The essence of this method lies in striking each bell in alternating turns. It is achieved by moving the wrist up and down in the same plane (gradually shifting the movement to the elbow and forearm).

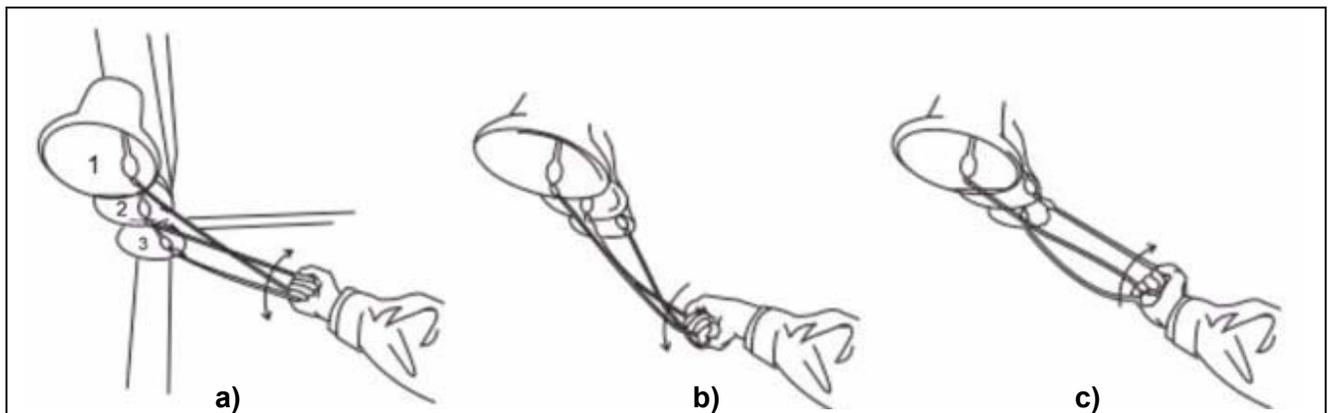


Fig. 2. The method of managing two small bells (No. 2 & No.3) is a part of this ringing system.

Before you start ringing, pull the ropes of the small bells so that their clappers approach the sides of the bells at an even distance — 1-2 inches from the skirt of the bell (Fig. 2a). After that, by moving the wrist up and down, you should strive for even and rhythmic pealing (Figs. 2b, 2c).

Unlike the two-bell system, the three-bell system allows you to apply pairs of different bells. For example: /2 and 3/, /1 and 2/, /1 and 3/, /1 and 2+3 (in a chord)/, /1+3 (in a chord) and 2/. Various decorative elements, for example: chords, grace notes, breaks (*перебивки*) are used to make the peal beautiful. Besides this, there are different rhythmical patterns: ringing by quarter notes, eighth notes or triplets.

2. Medium-size bells (alto or *podzvonnye*). "Fan system"

Medium-size bells are usually arranged in increasing order of bell pitch frequency, that is, from bigger bells to smaller ones (from left to right correspondingly). Normally, their number exceeds that of the treble or *zazvonnye*. One end of a rope or a stainless steel flexible wire is connected to a bell clapper (tongue) and the other end (encased in cushion tubing at ringing area— MDG) is fixed to the sounding board — a round metal plate, which is fixed on a stand. While the group of small bells is rung by the right hand, the medium-size bells are managed by the left hand. To derive the sound one must strike from the top down with the wrist on the string of the bell as illustrated in Fig. 3.

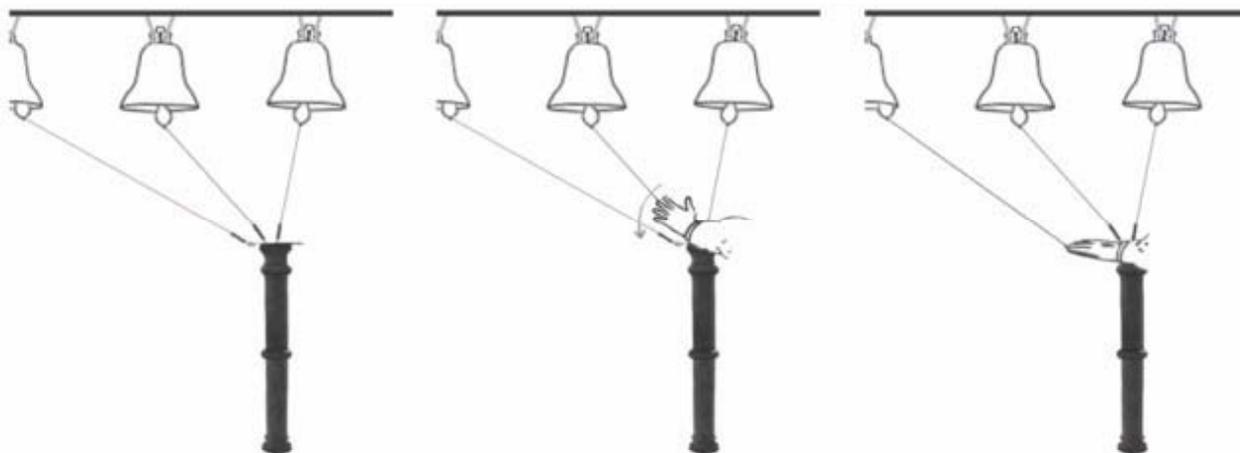


Fig. 3. Ringing medium-size bells.

It is important to ring the bell in a punctual manner: the clapper should not stick to the skirt of the bell. At the same time, however, the stroke should not be too jerky. It is necessary to make sure that the clappers of the bells do not swing about, because this causes the strikes to slide. As a result, the bell does not reveal the necessary timbre; it will not fully manifest its voice.”

3. Great bells (bass bells or *blagovestniki*).

Great bells are usually played by means of pedals (Fig. 4). In large sets of bells, there can be up to five great bells, though more often there are two or three of them in a set. To avoid sticking to the side in great bells, the clapper, after having struck the bell (that is, evinced the sound), should return to its starting position immediately (as is done when playing medium-size bells). Many bellringers define the contact point of the clapper and the bell incorrectly and strive to depress the pedal to the base (Fig. 4b). This is wrong, as the sound originates much earlier (Fig. 4c). The pedal should be returned to the starting position immediately (Fig. 4a).

The most difficult thing in ringing bells is to coordinate the arm and leg movements so that the rhythm, the tempo and the volume level of all bell groups are equal.

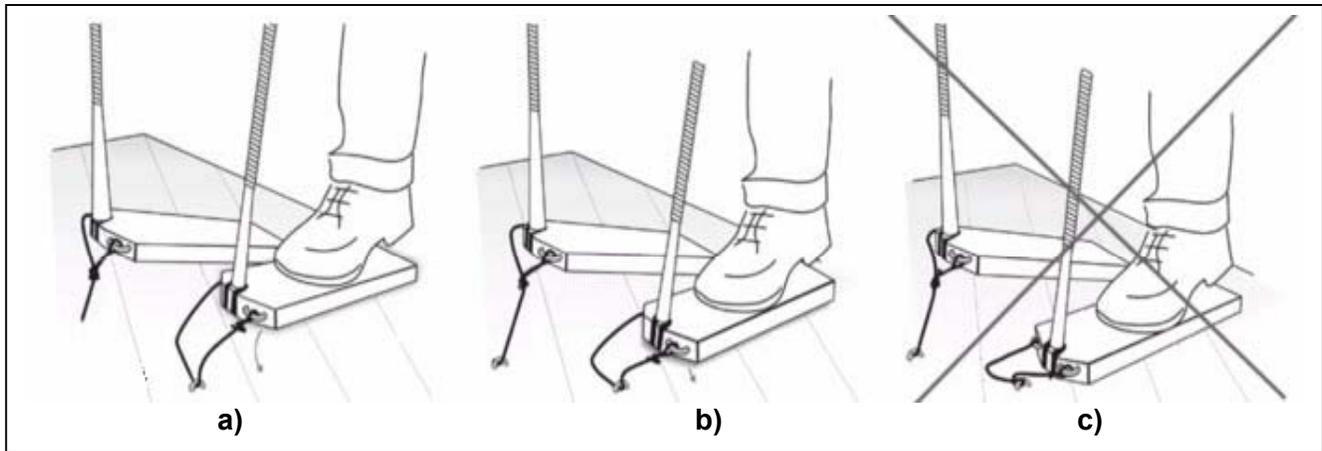


Fig. 4. Ringing great bells (blagovestniki) with pedals.

The methods of bellringing presented here are almost always applied together. That is why features of this or that group of bells sometimes become apparent only in combination with the features of the other bell groups, whereas they will not evince the necessary result when used separately. For instance, such methods of ringing small bells as grace notes or breaks will sound well only in combination with great and medium bells.

Reference:

Andrei A. Dyachkov's *Bell-Ringing School, Arkhangelsk, Russia*: "Russian Chimes 1.0" IBM-PC Based Computer Program for Windows, Reference Section, Lessons 1, 2 and 3, *The International Center of Bell Art, 2005*.

The program is described at <http://www.kolokola.ru> and its English version may be freely downloaded from this site.

Edited by Mark D. Galperin, English revision by Br. Christopher, of Blagovest Bells.

Small Glossary of Terms:

clapper: the long metal piece descending inside the bell from the top which strikes the bell strike and evinces the sound. Also called in English tongue (cf. Russian *yazyk* of the same meaning).

break: a cadence, or series of notes or bell strikes, signaling the end of a section of a peal, which is highlighted by means of suddenly introducing a new rhythm or melody with the treble bells.