



Madison Area Concert Handbells

Messenger

Fall 2009

Welcome to another season of entertaining handbell concerts!

The holidays represent a time of many wonderful gifts: the Babe in the manger, family gatherings, and the fulfillment of wishes. This year's concert will feature delightful music to fit every resulting mood, from ethereal to exuberant — and we have some surprises for you as we play old and new holiday favorites in our **Gifts of the Season** concert.

A mysterious “hum” sound will precede our opening piece; it's called the singing bell technique and is fashioned after the singing bowls used by the priests of Tibet and Nepal for centuries. Our hum will represent the increasing bustle of activities as light appears in the morning sky. Accordingly, our first piece is *Wake, Awake!*, a vigorous wake-up call that Jerusalem should prepare itself for a momentous event. As we follow the events of the gift of the Nativity, the melody *Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming* flows gently under malletted treble bells before, in the next piece, angels triumphantly announce *The First Noel* and then lightly dance to plucked tones and cavort to mated notes in joyful celebration of Christ's birth. *O Holy Night* follows, with that beloved tune played by chimes and then bells over a beautiful harp accompaniment. When we performed this piece in 1999, one of our audience members commented: “It was as close to heaven as I've ever been.”

An exciting version of *Joy to the World* is next, with many unusual harmonies and changes of meter: 2/4, 5/8, 4/4, and 6/8. This is followed by *A Christmas Carol Fest* that allows you, the audience, to participate in singing your favorite carols. Descants played on a bell tree, a recent addition to our equipment, will add new frills to some of the verses. The first half of the concert then closes with *O Tannenbaum*, a wonderful collaboration of our bells and the virtuoso organ playing of Mark Brampton Smith.

We open the second half of the program with *Christmas Tree-O* which features a solo on the bell tree accompanied by the choir. Then the rollicking fun of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* provides a mind-boggling array of different keys and quirky repetitions of all those wonderful gifts. Real gifts for children are exemplified by *A German Music Box* and then *Bugler's Holiday* by Leroy Anderson. (Whoever thought you'd hear that on handbells? It's a wonderful piece!)

Gifts are also important for the Jewish holiday that occurs at this time of year, and the dreidel (toy top) is portrayed in one of the songs of *O Hanukkah*, a medley that describes the lighting of candles and dancing of the hora, concluding with the majestic *Maoz Tzur* that speaks of the weak overcoming the strong. We are dedicating this piece to the memory of Irwin Goodman, who, with his brother, Bob, has been a loyal and generous supporter of MACH ever since the choir began in 1997. Tchaikovsky's wonderfully lilting *Waltz* from *Serenade for Strings* follows, as we imagine gliding couples celebrating in holiday finery at fancy balls. We are brought back to the source of Christmas festivities with the awesome sounds of *God With Us for All Time*, which includes orchestral chimes. We encourage all who wish to sing as we play the concluding piece of the concert, *The Hallelujah Chorus*, along with the organ.

Gifts of the Season will be performed December 11th through the 13th. Please turn to the back page of this newsletter for more detailed information. Tickets are available at the door or, in advance, at Borders Book Shops, Orange Tree Imports, and online at www.madisonhandbells.org. Join us and enjoy the sights and sounds of gleaming bronze bells celebrating the **Gifts of the Season!**

Susan Udell

Experience the uniquely beautiful music of one of America's finest handbell choirs!

Farewell, Susan!

The founder and Music Director of the Madison Area Concert Handbells, Dr. Susan Udell, will retire after conducting this year's Christmas holiday concerts. Perceiving the need for a professional quality handbell choir in the Madison area, Dr. Udell founded MACH in 1997 as a non-profit organization dedicated to community service through performances, educational programs, and advancement of the arts through handbell music. Under her leadership, the choir's service expanded significantly to elderly and youthful populations in the community. Last year eighteen concerts were given, with ten being performed without charge to these deserving audiences.

MACH now has the largest accumulation of bells and chimes in the state of Wisconsin, has produced CDs that are distributed nationally, and has impacted the lives of thousands of students through its hands-on school project. Workshops and massed ringing festivals for ringers and directors from Wisconsin and Illinois have been conducted through Dr. Udell's initiatives. Concerts have been presented throughout Wisconsin and in collaboration with many community organizations, including several with the Madison Symphony Orchestra.

Dr. Udell has been recognized for her work with the choir by receiving the Leadership Award from Madison's alumnae chapter of Sigma Alpha Iota, a national music fraternity for women. In 2003, she received the State University of New York--Potsdam's most prestigious alumni honor, the Minerva Award, for her professional achievements. (Other recipients include Renee Fleming and Lisa Vroman, although most recipients have not been musicians.)



MACH's tradition of presenting entertaining and educational handbell performances will continue as Dr. Udell passes the baton on to Associate Director Mark Bloedow. Mark has been on staff for the past two Spring semesters and will assume full responsibility for the musical aspects of the choir beginning in January 2010. Helping him with administrative and development duties will be Shawn Ray, MACH's Executive Director for the past year.

We all look forward to a bright future for the choir!

Christmas in OCTOBER

The stores were already decked out in red and green when 60 handbell ringers joined in the spirit of the holidays with their music on October 24th. That Saturday, a massed handbell festival was held at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church's west campus in Verona. Sponsored by MACH and directed by MACH's Music Director, Dr. Susan Udell, the Fall Festival included ringers from choirs in Madison, Stoughton, Baraboo, Wauwatosa, Menomonee Falls, and Rockford, IL.

All of the participants had prepared the music prior to coming. A three hour rehearsal in the morning and a one and one-half hour rehearsal in the afternoon helped bring musicality and finesse to pieces suitable for the fall and Christmas seasons. Mark Bloedow, MACH's Associate Director, accompanied two of the pieces on the keyboard. The finishing touch was a public concert later that afternoon for an appreciative audience. The concert not only included the massed ringing pieces, but also solo pieces by the Gospbells choir of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, conducted by Diane Madsen, and our MACH choir.

A big part of these festivals is the opportunity for ringers to become acquainted and share both music and sociability in rehearsals and over lunch—MACH's Sally Meredith deserves applause for all of her work in cooking for that many people. A great day was enjoyed by everyone present!

Many Thanks to the Underwriters of Our Christmas Concerts

MACH greatly appreciates support for our holiday concerts from the following underwriters: The Bassett Foundation, The Christensen-Cummings Foundation, The Goodman Foundation, Thompson Investment Management, and the Wahlin Foundation on behalf of Stoughton Trailers. We are grateful for their generous contributions and their trust in the quality of our performances.



Expanding the Handbell Audience

Taking a brief look at MACH's audience one thing seems to be lacking — younger people. Last spring, MACH performed concerts at Madison East High School and Middleton Performing Arts Center for a total of nearly 1,500 students. The students may not have known what to expect before the first piece was played, but after introductions from our Associate Music Director, Mark Bloedow, they were soon enthralled by the types of music that could result from handbells. By the end of the concert, audiences were clapping along to the Beach Boys and enjoying the music of Enya. We were very happy to have the opportunity to perform these concerts and be able to expose so many students to handbell music. It is our hope to continue reaching out to our youth in the Madison community and expanding the audience that MACH attracts.

An “Ephemeral” School Project??

While I was speaking with our church secretary, her 13 year old daughter appeared, wanting her mother to drive her to a tennis lesson. Like any new teen, she didn't pay any attention to others nearby and shyly stood there, expressionless, just waiting. I spoke up and said “Hi, it's been a LONG time since I've seen you; my, you've grown up! When you were in the 4th grade, I'm the one who taught you how to play the handchimes.” A surprised look came over her face, her eyes lit up and she broke into a great grin, saying with enthusiasm and a kicky jump of her feet: “I remember, yes, I remember!”


I smiled and she repeated both the words and her little jump. I replied: “Wow, I wish you could write a letter to the panel members who just denied us a grant for this year's school project. Their reasoning was that it was just a one day exposure; they questioned its long-term impact.”


Obviously, one class of instruction and the culminating concert by our full MACH choir a few weeks later made such an impact on this young lady that it lasted for three years. She made my day! --Susan Udell

Life in the 1500s (an Internet tale of bells)

England was old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins, take the bones to a bone-house, and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins was found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying some people alive. After learning that, they began to tie a string to the wrist of the corpse, leading the string through the coffin and up through the ground, tying it to a bell. Someone would then sit out in the graveyard all night (the graveyard shift) to listen for the bell. Thus, someone could be either *saved by the bell* or was considered a *dead ringer*.....

 **Madison Area Concert Handbells**
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See and hear us on the Web!
www.madisonhandbells.org

Address Service Requested

Gifts of the Season

Music Director: Dr. Susan Udell

Friday, December 11th, at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, December 12th, at 7:30 p.m.
Asbury United Methodist Church
6101 University Avenue, Madison

Sunday, December 13th, at 3:00 p.m.
First Congregational UCC
1609 University Avenue, Madison

SCRIP Fundraising Program Gets a Facelift

Help support MACH through one of our fundraising programs – the Simplified SCRIP Program. SCRIP is a term used to describe gift cards or gift certificates that contribute a designated percentage to an organization.

Here's how it works: You can purchase Simplified SCRIP Cards to spend just like cash for yourself or use them as gifts. When these gift cards are purchased, a percentage of the amount spent is donated to MACH. You receive the full amount while also supporting MACH! There are over 100 merchants included in the SCRIP program. There is a nominal cost for shipping of the gift cards – less than \$1 for up to 6 cards ordered. **You can now pay with credit card!** MasterCard, Visa, and Discover are accepted — you may even be able to double dip and give MACH a donation and give yourself a reward with your credit card!

Visit the Simplified SCRIP website and order online: www.schooltimesnet.com

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Come enjoy a dinner before the concert!

The printing of this newsletter is paid for by Imperial Garden. Please thank them for their support if you visit them before the concert.

If you would like to have your business advertise with MACH, please call Shawn Ray at (608) 260-2456 for more information.

Mark Your Calendars for the 2010 Spring Concerts:

Ringling with the Stars!

*to be presented Sunday, May 2nd at 3:00 p.m.
and Saturday, May 8th at 7:00 p.m. Conducted by Mark Bloedow.*