



Listen to the music

In October 2002 (Volume 2, Chapter 10) *The Learning Curve* talked about music in ringing. It described roll ups (rows with many of the bells in a familiar or musical order). This month we return to that theme in a bit more depth, with some practical examples.

One of the most musical effects, and the easiest to recognise, is a descending or ascending scale. We all know Rounds, which is the most complete run down the scale. In conventional music such a powerful theme would keep appearing, as it does for example when singing the hymn 'Unchanging God ...' to the tune Belfry Praise, but such repetition is not permitted in change ringing, so we must be content with incomplete repetitions.

Plain Bob

Figure 1 shows a course of Plain Bob Major, highlighting all the fragments of either Rounds or Reverse Rounds with four or more bells in sequence. There are 16 of them (counting Rounds at one end only) which is an average of one for every seven rows.

Figure 1 shows that Plain Bob Minor has 8 runs with four or more bells (counting Rounds once) or 12 if you also include three bell runs (which is half a row).

Awareness of roll ups

Why are so few ringers aware of roll ups? One sad fact is that some ringers don't listen at all, which might puzzle other musicians. The way ringing is normally taught does not help. The early stages tend to emphasise physical handling, and when it comes to change ringing, we focus on lines, logic and numbers. Listening can get forgotten, which also leads to poorer striking than would otherwise be possible. After all, the only way to know that you are striking your bell in the right place is to listen to how it fits in with the sound of the others.

Even if you do listen to your striking, and ring your bell with a metronomic beat, it is still possible to miss the music. Those with a musical ear might think it impossible to listen to a row and not know in what order the bells strike, but most of us, including many very good strikers, do not have this degree of musicality. We can appreciate the texture of alternating high and low notes, which is so characteristic of change ringing, but we can't decode the precise order the bells strike in. Uneven striking also makes it harder to pick out the tune, because the jerky rhythm breaks up sequences that you might otherwise be able to recognise.

Handbells and tower bells

It is instructive to compare ringing in the tower with ringing in hand. If you ring handbells, you probably find that you become much more aware of roll ups, and several factors might be responsible for this.

The sound of handbells is clearer – there is

much less reverberation, so it is easier to pick the bells out. Also, they are immediately in front of you rather than being remote and hidden, which makes you more aware of them. And of course, you can see the visual sequence, with adjacent bells going down (or up) like a row of dominoes. Maybe ringing two bells makes you more aware of relationships.

Ringling a pair of handbells is mentally more demanding than ringing the same method on a single bell (see *The Learning Curve* Feb - Apr 2001, Volume 1 Chapters 20 - 22). There is twice as much to go wrong, and without the steadying influence of the bell's momentum to help you keep in roughly the right place, things can go wrong more rapidly. So a roll up can be very reassuring, especially if you were a little uncertain at the time. Your hands slot into the sequence, your ears latch onto the familiar sound, and your confidence rises a couple of notches. It's like finding a landmark after travelling a long way with no familiar signs.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	1 3 5 2 7 4 8 6
2 1 4 3 6 5 8 7	3 1 2 5 4 7 6 8
2 4 1 6 3 8 5 7	3 2 1 4 5 6 7 8
4 2 6 1 8 3 7 5	2 3 4 1 6 5 8 7
4 6 2 8 1 7 3 5	2 4 3 6 1 8 5 7
6 4 8 2 7 1 5 3	4 2 6 3 8 1 7 5
6 8 4 7 2 5 1 3	4 6 2 8 3 7 1 5
8 6 7 4 5 2 3 1	6 4 8 2 7 3 5 1
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	6 8 4 7 2 5 3 1
7 8 5 6 3 4 1 2	8 6 7 4 5 2 1 3
7 5 8 3 6 1 4 2	8 7 6 5 4 1 2 3
5 7 3 8 1 6 2 4	7 8 5 6 1 4 3 2
5 3 7 1 8 2 6 4	7 5 8 1 6 3 4 2
3 5 1 7 2 8 4 6	5 7 1 8 3 6 2 4
3 1 5 2 7 4 8 6	5 1 7 3 8 2 6 4
1 3 2 5 4 7 6 8	1 5 3 7 2 8 4 6
1 3 5 2 7 4 8 6	1 5 7 3 8 2 6 4
1 5 7 3 8 2 6 4	1 7 8 5 6 3 4 2
5 1 3 7 2 8 4 6	7 1 5 8 3 6 2 4
5 3 1 2 7 4 8 6	7 5 1 3 8 2 6 4
3 5 2 1 4 7 6 8	5 7 3 1 2 8 4 6
3 2 5 4 1 6 7 8	5 3 7 2 1 4 8 6
2 3 4 5 6 1 8 7	3 5 2 7 4 1 6 8
2 4 3 6 5 8 1 7	3 2 5 4 7 6 1 8
4 2 6 3 8 5 7 1	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1
4 6 2 8 3 7 5 1	2 4 3 6 5 8 7 1
6 4 8 2 7 3 1 5	4 2 6 3 8 5 1 7
6 8 4 7 2 1 3 5	4 6 2 8 3 1 5 7
8 6 7 4 1 2 5 3	6 4 8 2 1 3 7 5
8 7 6 1 4 5 2 3	6 8 4 1 2 7 3 5
7 8 1 6 5 4 3 2	8 6 1 4 7 2 5 3
7 1 8 5 6 3 4 2	8 1 6 7 4 5 2 3
1 7 5 8 3 6 2 4	1 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
1 7 8 5 6 3 4 2	1 8 6 7 4 5 2 3
1 8 6 7 4 5 2 3	1 6 4 8 2 7 3 5
8 1 7 6 5 4 3 2	6 1 8 4 7 2 5 3
8 7 1 5 6 3 4 2	6 8 1 7 4 5 2 3
7 8 5 1 3 6 2 4	8 6 7 1 5 4 3 2
7 5 8 3 1 2 6 4	8 7 6 5 1 3 4 2
5 7 3 8 2 1 4 6	7 8 5 6 3 1 2 4
5 3 7 2 8 4 1 6	7 5 8 3 6 2 1 4
3 5 2 7 4 8 6 1	5 7 3 8 2 6 4 1
3 2 5 4 7 6 8 1	5 3 7 2 8 4 6 1
2 3 4 5 6 7 1 8	3 5 2 7 4 8 1 6
2 4 3 6 5 1 7 8	3 2 5 4 7 1 8 6
4 2 6 3 1 5 8 7	2 3 4 5 1 7 6 8
4 6 2 1 3 8 5 7	2 4 3 1 5 6 7 8
6 4 1 2 8 3 7 5	4 2 1 3 6 5 8 7
6 1 4 8 2 7 3 5	4 1 2 6 3 8 5 7
1 6 8 4 7 2 5 3	1 4 6 2 8 3 7 5
1 6 4 8 2 7 3 5	1 4 2 6 3 8 5 7
1 4 2 6 3 8 5 7	
4 1 6 2 8 3 7 5	
4 6 1 8 2 7 3 5	
6 4 8 1 7 2 5 3	
6 8 4 7 1 5 2 3	
8 6 7 4 5 1 3 2	
8 7 6 5 4 3 1 2	
7 8 5 6 3 4 2 1	
7 5 8 3 6 2 4 1	
5 7 3 8 2 6 1 4	
5 3 7 2 8 1 6 4	
3 5 2 7 1 8 4 6	
3 2 5 1 7 4 8 6	
2 3 1 5 4 7 6 8	
2 1 3 4 5 6 7 8	
1 2 4 3 6 5 8 7	
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	

Figure 1: Runs in Plain Bob Major

1 2 3 4 5 6	1 3 5 2 6 4	1 5 6 3 4 2
2 1 4 3 6 5	3 1 2 5 4 6	5 1 3 6 2 4
2 4 1 6 3 5	3 2 1 4 5 6	5 3 1 2 6 4
4 2 6 1 5 3	2 3 4 1 6 5	3 5 2 1 4 6
4 6 2 5 1 3	2 4 3 6 1 5	3 2 5 4 1 6
6 4 5 2 3 1	4 2 6 3 5 1	2 3 4 5 6 1
6 5 4 3 2 1	4 6 2 5 3 1	2 4 3 6 5 1
5 6 3 4 1 2	6 4 5 2 1 3	4 2 6 3 1 5
5 3 6 1 4 2	6 5 4 1 2 3	4 6 2 1 3 5
3 5 1 6 2 4	5 6 1 4 3 2	6 4 1 2 5 3
3 1 5 2 6 4	5 1 6 3 4 2	6 1 4 5 2 3
1 3 2 5 4 6	1 5 3 6 2 4	1 6 5 4 3 2
1 3 5 2 6 4	1 5 6 3 4 2	1 6 4 5 2 3
1 6 4 5 2 3	1 4 2 6 3 5	
6 1 5 4 3 2	4 1 6 2 5 3	
6 5 1 3 4 2	4 6 1 5 2 3	
5 6 3 1 2 4	6 4 5 1 3 2	
5 3 6 2 1 4	6 5 4 3 1 2	
3 5 2 6 4 1	5 6 3 4 2 1	
3 2 5 4 6 1	5 3 6 2 4 1	
2 3 4 5 1 6	3 5 2 6 1 4	
2 4 3 1 5 6	3 2 5 1 6 4	
4 2 1 3 6 5	2 3 1 5 4 6	
4 1 2 6 3 5	2 1 3 4 5 6	
1 4 6 2 5 3	1 2 4 3 6 5	
1 4 2 6 3 5	1 2 3 4 5 6	

Figure 2: Runs in Plain Bob Minor

Making more of roll ups

When you know that they are there, how does it help? Most of us gain some satisfaction when we meet familiar landmarks.

The first practical question is how to spot the roll ups. If you know where to expect them, then it is much easier to hear them. Find out where they come in methods you normally ring. Figure 1 shows roll ups at the front and back (ie not in the middle) in all leads. The pattern is different for other methods, but the almost complete lead-end roll up (4th lead in Figure 1 and 3rd lead in Figure 2) appears in nearly all common methods, Things change in a touch of course. Some touches, especially of Triples, often produce rows like Queens as well as runs.

Try to spot roll ups while sitting out. Listen for them while you are ringing too. At first you might find it easier to spot the roll ups that involve you, ie back bell roll ups if you are ringing round the back, and little bell roll ups when you ring round the front.

Once you learn to spot the roll ups, you will become more conscious of how well they are rung. Struck well they sound very satisfying, but struck badly they can stick out like sore thumbs, so it's worth extra effort on them.

Working together

Good striking is a team effort, so why not encourage the rest of your band to become interested in roll ups too?

There are plenty of things you could do together, and have a bit of fun as well. For example, those of you sitting out could try to see who can spot the most roll ups, or you could discuss how well each roll up is rung.

Alternatively, you could ring the same touch with different people on the roll-up bells and then see who rings the most roll-ups well.

This might lead to more general discussions after a piece of ringing, about what it sounded like. Many musicians and choristers do that, but it seems to be less common among ringers. Perhaps we should try to make it more common.

Tail End

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