

The Learning Curve

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Calling quarter peals

In May, *The Learning Curve* described the benefits of ringing quarter peals, and gave a few hints about the conductor's task. This month we look a little more deeply into calling quarter peals. It is of course potentially a huge area, so we can only dip a toe in the water. First we will look at some general aspects, and then at some specific examples.

Calling

To call a quarter peal successfully, you must learn a composition, then remember it, and finally call it accurately. While doing so, you must also ring your own bell correctly. You should also be able to check whether the ringing is still correct, and ideally you should be able to correct some errors if they occur.

Don't get hung up about correcting errors. Nobody can correct them all, especially if two people conspire to fall asleep at the same time. But correcting some slips will greatly increase the band's chance of success. In some ways, it's unfair to expect one person to put everyone else right, unless the others are inexperienced. Everyone should try to make sure that errors don't occur, and to make sure that when they do, they are self corrected if possible.

On the other hand, the conductor normally has a better overview of how the composition works, and therefore knows what to expect, whereas the ordinary ringer doesn't know what is coming next until each call arrives. The conductor can work out the new coursing order just before making the call, whereas the rest didn't know there was about to be a call.

Two examples – Plain Bob Major

Let us look at some real examples. They are both Plain Bob Major, but we can look at other methods in a future article.

Figure 1 shows two simple touches of Plain Bob Major from *The Ringing World Diary*. The notation was explained in *The Learning Curve* in June 2003 (Volume 2, Chapter 18). The columns (WBMH) represent the calling positions, and the numbers on the left are the resulting course ends. Actually they are not all of the course ends, because they use the shorthand of showing multiple calls in the same position, with a single number, and occur in separate courses.

1280					1264				
23456	W	B	M	H	23456	W	B	M	H
62345	-	2		2	52364	-			2
Repeat 4 times					32465	-			4
					63254	-			-
					23456	-			4

4 means S-S-

Figure 1: Quarters of Plain Bob Major

At first glance, the one on the left looks easier. It is a 5-part calling ('repeat 4 times' assumes that you have already rung it once) so there is less to learn. The one on the right is a 1-part calling, though there is some partial repetition within it.

But looks can be deceptive, so let's look at them in more detail.

While you are calling, it is much easier to check the ringing (and to correct any trips) if you keep track of the coursing order, as explained in *The Learning Curve*, in January 2004 (Volume 3 Chapters 1 & 2).

The 1280 in detail

Figure 2 shows all parts expanded, and all the coursing orders in columns corresponding to the calls that generate them. (The initial coursing order is top right) Calls Before make the Tenor repeat a lead, so there can be more than one of them in a course, as there are in this composition. For tidiness, we could just have shown the coursing order generated by the combined string of Bofores (in this case two) but Figure 2 shows the effect of each call separately. This means that the first two rows of each part (as drawn here) relate to one long course, rather than two separate courses. The pairs of Homes are different – they do come in successive courses, as shown.

It always helps to look for any patterns in the coursing order throughout the composition, as an extra check, as well as transposing them as you go along. In a 5-part composition like this, bells 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 cycle round each position in each part. So if you look at the corresponding spot in all five parts, you will see each bell once. For example, look at the left hand figures in the Wrong column (shaded grey). The numbers in the right hand position in the Home column (also shaded) are more memorable, because the bells appear in descending order (5432) before 6 returns to its natural place for the final part.

W	B	M	H	W	B	M	H	53246
-	(-)	-	-	32546	63254			43265
-	(-)	-	-		46325			42635
-	(-)	-	-	26435	52643			32654
-	(-)	-	-		35264			36524
-	(-)	-	-	65324	46532			26543
-	(-)	-	-		24653			25463
-	(-)	-	-	54263	35426			65432
-	(-)	-	-		63542			64352
-	(-)	-	-	43652	24365			54326
-	(-)	-	-		52436			53246

Figure 2: 1280 Plain Bob Major

The 1264 in detail

Figure 3 shows the 1264 in full. It looks smaller as there are no repeated calls Before, so all courses are drawn on a single row. Count the number of calls. There are only 16 – nine fewer than the apparently simpler 1280, which has 25.

The composition is broken into four blocks, two of which are four courses each, with identical (and simple) calls. These are separated by very short blocks (sometimes called turning courses, though the first is actually two courses).

To see the effect this has, look down the left hand figures in the Home column (shaded). The first course puts the 6 there, where it remains until the other turning course returns the 5 to that slot, where it remains until the end. Notice also that the 5 occupies the right hand slot of the Home column throughout the first long block, as does the 6 in the second long block. So there are long stretches where you know what these two should be doing, and only need to worry about 2, 3 and 4.

The little bells do all the work in the strings of

four Homes (shown shaded in the calls column). Look for a pattern in who does what. For example, which bells make the singles? The bell that makes the single jumps forward two places in the coursing order (the opposite effect to making the bob, where it jumps back two places). The bell that makes the single appears in the second position of the Home column (of the courses that end in a single). These are ringed in Figure 3, and you can see that the 4 makes all the singles, in both blocks. Notice also that 4 also makes the bob at all the bobs that alternate with the singles (also ringed). So during these long blocks, the 4 jumps back and forth in the coursing order.

Apart from being useful to know what the 4 is doing, this is also a valuable signpost for you as conductor. Suppose when you arrive at the block of four Homes, you can't remember whether it should be S-S- or -S-S-. Check where the 4 is in the coursing order (see the column for the Middle that you called the previous lead) and you see that it is ready to jump forward by making a single at the Home. In the same way, in the rest of the block, if you forget whether the last call was a bob or a single, just check the position of the 4 in the coursing order, to see what comes next.

If you manage to go to sleep, and are not sure when you have got to the end of the four Homes, you don't have long to think about it because if you have finished, the Wrong in the turning course is at the next lead. There is one further clue to help you – the coursing order at the end of the first long block has 2345 in sequence (preceded by 6 of course).

W	B	M	H	W	B	M	H	53246
1	-			65324				63254
	-							62534
	-	S				62345		64325
	-	S						63245
	-	S						64235
	-	S						62345
-	1	-		23645	52364			53624
	-	S				53246		54236
	-	S						52346
	-	S						54326
	-	S						53246

Figure 3: 1264 Plain Bob Major

Having analysed both of these compositions, you might decide that the second one is actually easier (and safer) to call, even though at first sight it didn't look the simplest. The real message though, is that you should try to find out how a composition works before calling it. Don't just learn where the calls are and hope for the best. Try to extract as many clues as you can from the composition. Not only will they help you to check whether it is right, but they might also save you from mis-calling it.

It might seem that for an inexperienced conductor, this is all too complicated, but it is the inexperienced conductor who is most likely to need extra clues to help keep the ringing (and the calling) right.

Tail End

The Learning Curve, Volume 2: 2002-2003, and Volume 3: 2004-2005, are available from CC Publications,