

*Handbell ringing is collaborative.
What follows are agreements we make with one another
to maintain high standards of excellence for our product and our experience.*

Houston Bronze Ensemble

Ringer Agreements 2025-2026

INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE:

- Members agree to prepare their individual parts outside of rehearsal. Figure out strategies for handling tricky passages, then repeat patterns to work them into your hands and your memory.
- Whenever possible, work out ringing challenges, alternate bell assignments, and choreography with other ringers outside of regularly scheduled rehearsal time. Ask for help when you need it with playing your part and/or with an extra hand here or there.
- A weekly report will be provided with instruction for what should be priority in the next rehearsal. Use this to focus your work. Mark your scores. Decoding handbell music is a process. Keep notes to avoid repeating errors, to help your eye scan the music quickly and accurately, and to remember assignments that have been made.
- Support others in being prepared and be willing to be supported. When instruction is provided (by the Artistic Director or a ringing colleague), notice your reaction; choose your response.

ENSEMBLE REHEARSALS:

- When: Weekly; Tuesday, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., and occasional Saturday sessions (see season calendar).
- Where: Trinity Lutheran Church Downtown; 800 Houston Ave., Houston, 77007
- Setup & Breakdown: All ringers assist with set up and break down for every rehearsal.
- Arrive Early: Generally speaking, ringers should be on site by 6:30 to coordinate shared bells and to rehearse tricky passages with your section.
- Regular attendance is assumed.
 - Two absences per semester are permitted.
 - Communicate in advance about known absences.
 - ❖ Mark the attendance sheet which is found in BAND.
 - ❖ In an emergency, send a text message to David (please do not call): 503-341-6461.
- Additional rehearsals may be scheduled as necessary for the full group or for sectionals at a mutually convenient time for the personnel involved.
- Phones: Unless you're 'on call' for something that's time sensitive, silence your phone and put it away during rehearsal. If an emergency requires your attention leave the room to take the call.
- High Standards: Don't practice mistakes. Prepare independently whenever possible, but if you or others near you are struggling in rehearsal, bring it to the attention of the Artistic Director.

We'll work it out together.

- Share: Handbell ringing is a team sport. Sharing bells is inherent in the art form. HBE has the luxury of many duplicate sets, and we use them to good effect when necessary, but this doesn't replace the expectation that sharing bells is our default performance practice. Start there, THEN in consultation with your adjacent colleagues, turn to dups as an alternative.

UNIFORM RINGING STYLE

- We come to HBE with a wide breadth of experience and we value the wisdom each of us brings. Most importantly, we aspire to develop a uniform ringing style throughout the ensemble. Listen, make suggestions as appropriate, and seek the 'just right' balance in being flexible and courageous as we grow into our collective expression.
- Be Strong: Take care of your body and bring your best self to the precious time we give to each other, with all the stamina, energy, and focus our activity requires.
- Facial Expressions/Demeanor: the art of handbell ringing is both aural and visual. We're more like orchestral instrumentalists than we are actors, so our aim is less about emoting with our faces for dramatic effect and more about being visibly engaged in the joy of ringing. Human beings are compulsive communicators. If we're unaware, we might inadvertently be communicating boredom or intense concentration, but not necessarily joy or even pathos. Having a pleasant countenance while making music can and should be practiced. Don't expect to 'turn on' when there's an audience. Just as we practice bell changes, page turns, dynamics, etc., build into each repetition an awareness of 'what you're saying.' A little intention will go a long way to a more vibrant visual performance and a more satisfying music-making experience for you.

REHEARSAL GUIDELINES:

- Questions: When the Artistic Director stops, make a mental note of issues to work out or questions to ask, but allow the AD to speak first. Sometimes to stay in the flow, we'll resume playing without further interruption, but often an opportunity will be provided for folks to ask questions (of the Director or other ringers). If not, please raise your hand to be acknowledged by the Director before speaking. Refrain from side talk - even if it's related to the music.
- Momentum: Avoid talking 'at' the Director (speaking out before being acknowledged). Once rehearsal is underway, think of the group energy as a force with its own inertia. The Director's job is to keep that energy flowing. While we're ringing, the music carries us along. When we stop, it's for a reason, so we'll resolve it and move on. If discussion is warranted, raise your hand and wait for instructions. Once you have the group's attention, we'll welcome your comments.

PERFORMANCE:

- Arrive early to set up and prepare. Allow extra time for traveling to a less familiar venue, to

navigate unexpected traffic, and to casually find your way in the building. Be ready to ring at the established start time.

- On your way, prepare mentally in order to be focused, energized, and relaxed. Set the intention to stay present throughout - moving gracefully from one moment to the next, before and while making music together. Trust that you've done the advance work necessary to perform with ease and confidence.

ATTIRE:

- Formal for Women: Red, black or blue sparkle top as directed (provided by HBE), black pants or skirt, black shoes and hose. Earrings and hair accessories should be small, simple, and not distracting.
- Formal for Men: Men are currently wearing a black Tunic (provided by HBE) and black pants, black socks and shoes. In the past, men have also worn black tuxedo jacket and pants, white shirt with wingtip collar, pleats, studs, and black vest (provided by ringer), and bowtie (provided by HBE) or simply a black dress shirt.
- Casual: HBE polo and pants/skirt as directed.

VOLUNTEERING:

- In addition to our regular December and Spring concert series, Houston Bronze Ensemble performs as guest artists at workshops, festivals, church events, and various other functions throughout the region.
- Ringers are expected to participate in at least three small group gigs or educational events per year.
- All ringers support HBE through various non-ringing tasks, such as costuming; props and set decorations; music library; equipment maintenance; rehearsal set up and break down; publicity; etc. Some tasks are prescribed and will be filled at the beginning of the season, and some pop up in the course of the season. Contribute your ideas, your care, and your sweat equity toward our great adventure together.

COMMUNICATIONS:

- HBE uses an online resource called BAND as our central communications hub.
- New members are given an invitation to join the HBE group on BAND. With the link, you can access the web-based version. Set up your profile to access the Ensemble's communications thread. You can also download a desktop app, or you can download the app to your phone.
- Members are accountable for staying informed through BAND and email messages and agree to respond in a timely manner.
- Communicate in advance if you know you will be absent (see above). Annual evaluations and other documents are occasionally requested by the Board. Ringers agree to reply in a timely

fashion. Communicate responsibly: If you have a grievance, communicate directly with the person involved at an appropriate time and in way resolution is possible. Do not complain to others who have no influence. If you need mediation, contact David to help sort out your concern. If you have a grievance with David, contact Board President, Kathy Beard.

- Promote: All ringers are expected to assist in audience development by publicizing HBE activities throughout your spheres of influence. Recruit other experienced ringers you know who would enjoy participating with Houston Bronze Ensemble. Have prospective Associate Ringers contact David.

FINANCIAL:

- Annual dues for active members are \$300, payable in full at the beginning of the season, or in 12, \$25 installments - August through July.
- Ringers provide their own gloves and music folder.
- Expenses for off-site retreats and tours are the ringer's responsibility (registration, lodging, food, and transportation). Occasionally Houston Bronze Ensemble funds may be allocated to help offset ringer expenses.

SHEET MUSIC:

- Music will be provided by Houston Bronze Ensemble. Ringers are responsible for maintaining their music, bringing it to each rehearsal, and returning it immediately after our final performance. Markings should not be permanent since the music may be reissued from time to time.
- Digital copies of the sheet music will be made available for study purposes. Do not distribute the sheet music outside of Houston Bronze Ensemble.

Updated 4/2025