

Bells

There are many types of bells of different sizes, shapes and sound qualities. It is good to be selective and offer sounds that reflect the 'moment' you are trying to capture within the theme of the workshop. Some bells create sustained ambient sounds, e.g. Temple bells, others shiver and shake and can be used to enhance rhythm and dance.

Sleigh bells - these can be shaken rhythmically (as in Morris dancing) to enhance the music, or like a prolonged 'shiver' to create atmosphere. They come in different useful forms:

- light hand-held models with wood or leather grips
- sleigh bell trees, which can be quite heavy but make a good sound
- wrist and ankle bracelets for those who find it hard to hold objects
- attached to lengths of rope that can be draped over or tied onto wheelchairs, twizzled in the air or snaked across the floor. They can also be played by two participants holding the ends.

Sleigh bells can also be bought individually, so are great for accessorising props (such as broomhandles) and puppets, or for sewing onto costumes to add sounds.

Temple bells - sometimes called cymbal bells, these consist of two brass discs, usually attached to lengths of leather thong or cord. Often highly ornate, they give an ambient sound when they strike each other, as the note produced sustains over many seconds. The two bells are often tuned slightly differently, so you can also hear a slight beat as the note decays. When several are played together, they form a serene and magical soundscape, particularly supportive of ritualistic activities. They also come in a finger bell form, but these are quite difficult to manipulate.

Handbells - a set of tuned handbells (usually set in C major), when played gently in turn, or in pairs, or in repeated patterns, sound amazing. They are also good for encouraging turn-taking and listening skills and can link to and reinforce certain themes, such as colours, rainbows, going up/down.

Small Indian bells - also tuned, these can be played individually, giving light individual notes which can be worked together to create musical pieces. These and cowbells also come on strings, incorporating a variety of sizes and sounds, for a more dynamic effect.

Agogo bells - these are held horizontally and played with a beater, which may be easier for some participants. They can be very loud, but are useful for sustaining rhythm, with their two-tone sound being easy to pick out in a percussive sound world.

Altar bell - generally used to assist meditation, this is played by running a wooden beater around the rim of the bell, creating a resonating note that lingers on and on like a singing bowl. When hit with a beater it can also sound like a ship's bell.

Bell trees - for some participants bell trees and garden chimes may be easier to play and access than other forms of bell, as they can be placed on trays and are upright so can be played at different angles.

Bell ring - a hollow brass finger ring full of little metal balls which make the whole ring act as a kind of jingly bell. The ring produces a fine, resounding tone which can be modified with the palm and the remaining fingers.

Links

Workshops - Buddhist Monk, Bob, Starry Night

Videos

Temple bells and gongs

Bob bells

Bob Ding Dong

Bell fishing