Ready to Ring!

FAMILIAR MUSIC FOR THE BEGINNING HANDBELL CHOIR

TWO TO FIVE OCTAVES

COMPILED AND ARRANGED BY
Martha Lynn Thompson
and
Frances L. Callahan

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Published by

agape

Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

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Foreword

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Good bell choirs don't just happen! They are the result of many months, even years, of hard work and dedication. Beginning ringers must be taught basic ringing skills upon which they can build advanced techniques. The question we as directors face is, "How do we teach these basic skills without boring the ringers with repetitious drills and exercises?" Can these basic techniques not be taught by the ringing of simple, recognizable compositions rather than through contrived exercises? We believe that they *can* be, and it is this belief that motivated us to write this collection.

In a first rehearsal with a group of would-be-ringers, after showing them how to hold a bell, how to ring it correctly, and how to damp it, we take them through a few short exercises, giving the ringers verbal instructions. These exercises or drills consist of ringing simple chords, striving to ring the chord tones together, learning to ring repeated notes and chords, and learning to damp the bells correctly. We may also ring single-line scale passages, emphasizing learning to ring individually at the proper time, learning to damp at the proper time, and learning to make the sound of one's bell match that of the neighboring ones. Perhaps you do these types of drills, too, but where do you go from there? You might not choose to move as quickly as we do, but at this point, we like to introduce our ringers to the written music, and before the first rehearsal is over, have them ring at least one recognizable piece of music. You may then wonder, "How do you get your ringers, especially children, to accomplish so much so quickly, and where do you find music employing enough bells to keep the ringers busy yet simple enough for them to ring?"

We *did* have difficulty finding music that was rhythmically simple, that didn't need to be rung "molto vivace" to sound good, and that used enough bells frequently to keep ten to twelve ringers busy. Nothing is more discouraging to a ringer than to have only five or six notes to ring in a piece of music, but many so-called beginning pieces are thinly scored and don't give ringers enough to do. The most dangerous thing we can ask a beginning bell choir to ring is a single line melody! It looks so simple, but if a ringer makes a mistake, (and that's inevitable!) most of the time everything falls apart and there's usually no choice but to stop and begin again! For this collection, we have chosen well-known melodies and arranged them in ways that will provide notes for all the ringers, using full chords and keeping all ringers busy. We are not suggesting that this is the most artistic way of arranging music for bells, but the music is written in such a way that the ringers can be constantly involved while learning basic techniques. We have simply substituted musical compositions for exercises.

As a director, you must decide what kind of musical background, if any, you will require of your ringers. Most of our ringers do not read music, and we do not require them to do so. Our only stipulation is that they want to ring bells and that they make a commitment to the handbell program. Therefore, we write-in the counting and we mark our ringers' notes. You may not choose to do this, but it does produce quick results and it gives the ringers an immediate sense of accomplishment.

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This collection is not intended to provide all the music one would want to use with a beginning bell choir, but it is intended to give the director a choice of music in varying degrees of difficulty. Perhaps you will want to choose specific arrangements, especially among the easier ones, rather than have your ringers learn them all, or you may want to ring them all, offering a variety of pieces to sight-read or to learn. The arrangements were written primarily as teaching pieces, not as performance pieces, although many of them could very well be used for performance purposes. With the exception of the pieces for two octave choirs, all the music can be rung with *three octaves of bells.* We would encourage you to try doubling melody lines an octave higher and perhaps doubling additional bass notes at appropriate places if your choir has the bells available to do so and if it suits your needs. For variety in a rehearsal, you might want to have your ringers pluck rather than ring some of the arrangements. There are many published collections and single pieces of handbell music beautifully and skillfully written in the handbell idiom, and we would encourage you to purchase these and use them to supplement the music in this collection. You will want to build a library of good bell music as you work to develop a well-rounded handbell program.

This book is for you! Be innovative and creative! Use it as you choose, taking from it materials and ideas that will help your bell choirs grow and develop into more advanced ringers.

Martha Lynn Thompson
and
Frances L. Callahan

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YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT . . . .

Martha Lynn Thompson is the organist for St. James United Methodist Church, Little Rock, Arkansas, where she and her husband, G. Felix Thompson, Jr. jointly direct the handbell program. Martha Lynn is a certified director of music and a Diaconal Minister in the United Methodist Church. She holds a Bachelor of Music Education degree and has taught junior high choral music prior to her position at St. James. Frances Legge Callahan holds a Bachelor of Music degree and is also involved in the music ministry at St. James United Methodist Church. Both Frances and Martha Lynn are talented handbell directors as well as superb arrangers of handbell music with the combined total of more than 65 arrangements to their credit.

From the beginning of their work at St. James, the Thompsons have used the bells as a tool to encourage team work and to develop self-control, dependability, and self-confidence. Today, more than ever, they regard the handbells as a means of getting the young person and the whole family back into participating church membership. Since October, 1970, the St. James Music Ministry has grown from 2 to 14 choirs. Today, the 300 member music program of the church includes 5 singing choirs, and 9 handbell choirs - a ringing group for every age from the fourth grade through adult.

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Notes for Ringing

This collection has been written with the following goals in mind. We believe that:

1 - Beginning ringers should have bell assignments that will keep them busy and allow them to ring often.

2 - Beginning ringers should master ringing notes ON THE COUNTS before they attempt to ring on the off-beats or between the counts.

3 - Ringers must learn to ring with precision, both on the beats and between the beats. Chord tones must be rung precisely together, a skill requiring the coordination of several ringers.

4 - Ringers must learn to damp their bells as precisely as they ring them.

5 - Ringers should be taught the basic elements of music reading and should become familiar with commonly used musical terms.

6 - Ringers should be taught various ringing techniques and should be given the opportunity to use them, even if in only the most elementary way.

The book contains a group of two-octave pieces and a larger group of pieces for choirs with 3 - 5 octaves of bells. The material is organized in such a way that the ringers start with the simplest whole-note chords and progress through quarter-note, eighth-note, and eventually to sixteenth-note rhythmic patterns.

When you discover that there are three two-octave settings, (p. 6, 7) and three three-to-five octave settings (p. 18, 19)) of "Jacob's Ladder," you may well ask, "Why?" Each setting is slightly more difficult than the preceding one. The first setting contains only the chord patterns used to harmonize this familiar melody. The chords are written as whole notes so the ringers have time to think and are not rushed from chord to chord. The director and the ringers need to work for precision in ringing each chord. In setting II, we've placed the "Jacob's Ladder" melody on top and have written the chords so that *all* bells ring the same rhythm as the melody. Each ringer must make a quicker response, now ringing on both counts one and two. Everyone is ringing the same rhythm, so precision- or lack of it - will be very obvious! In setting III, two things are now happening rhythmically - the accompaniment moves in whole notes while only the melody line has the rhythm that matches the words. The director must take care to see that each ringer is "doing his thing" since all bells are not ringing the same rhythm.

The two settings of "Jesus Loves Me" (p. 8, 20) follow this same plan. Setting I is comprised of what we call "practice chords" - a kind of warm-up drill derived from the harmonic structure of the hymn. In setting II, the melody has the correct rhythm of the hymn while the accompaniment moves in half-notes and whole-notes.

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"Kum Ba Ya" (p. 10-11, 24-25) and "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" (p. 12-13, 26-27) are treated in the same manner, but for the first time, an occasional eighth-note is introduced in setting III. However, since the ringers have already learned the correct rhythmic patterns from settings I and II, the introduction of the eighth-note should not cause difficulty.

Eighth-notes are used sparingly in the first pieces, giving the ringers a chance to master them under the simplest conditions. From the middle of the book on, eighth-notes are used more frequently and in more complex situations.

In the 3 - 5 octave section, you will find two settings of "The Angelus". The first setting (p. 22) is written so that all ringing is done on counts 1, 2, 3, or 4. By the time the choir progresses to setting II (p. 38) the ringers are accustomed to ringing eighth-notes. "Angelus II" is identical to "Angelus I" except the note values have been changed from half-notes to quarter-notes and from quarter-notes to eighth-notes, requiring ringing both on the beats and between the beats. We have also added the instructions to "swing" the bass chords to create the effect of bells swinging in a tower.

In "O Tannenbaum" (p. 42) the sixteenth-note is introduced, but in this first piece it is always combined with the dotted-eighth-note. This new rhythmic pattern is more easily mastered since all chord tones ring the same dotted-eighth and sixteenth-note pattern. Sixteenth-notes, in a variety of rhythmic patterns that will challenge the ringers, are used throughout the concluding composition, "Fanfare" (p. 47) but the moderate tempo should allow the ringers to master the tricky rhythmic patterns without frustration.

Commonly used musical terms and symbols are introduced early in the collection, and new terms are used throughout the book. The first use of a simple, one-line repeat occurs in "Au Clair de la Lune" (p. 9) and the final piece, "Fanfare" (p. 47) teaches the ringer how to negotiate the way through a repeat with a first and second ending. In "O Dear, What Can the Matter Be?" (p. 16, 21) we are given the opportunity to teach the ringers the meaning of *da capo (D. C.)* and *Fine.* We have purposely used very few dynamic markings in the music in this collection. We encourage you to experiment with different dynamic levels and choose what best suits your needs.

Special ringing techniques are introduced throughout the book, too. "O Dear, What Can the Matter Be?" (p. 16, 21) and "O Come, All Ye Faithful" (p. 30) give the ringers their first opportunity to try a "shake". A footnote on "She'll Be Comin' 'Round the Mountain" (p. 31) suggests that, for variety, the piece may be plucked as well as rung. "Long, Long Ago" (p. 34) "All Through the Night" (p. 36) and "Cradle Song" (p. 46) introduce the term "L. V." (Let Vibrate), and "What Child Is This?" (p. 44) allows the ringers to use mallets on suspended bells.

In the three-five octave section of this collection all three octave choirs should omit the bells that are in parentheses.

Good ringing - musical ringing - demands skill and coordination from each individual ringer as well as teamwork and cooperation from all the ringers. Beyond this, it requires ringers to become keen listeners, listening carefully and working to make each bell fit into its proper place. Precise, musical ringing, requiring time, patience, and discipline, *is* an attainable goal. Begin work now to achieve it!

HAPPY RINGING!

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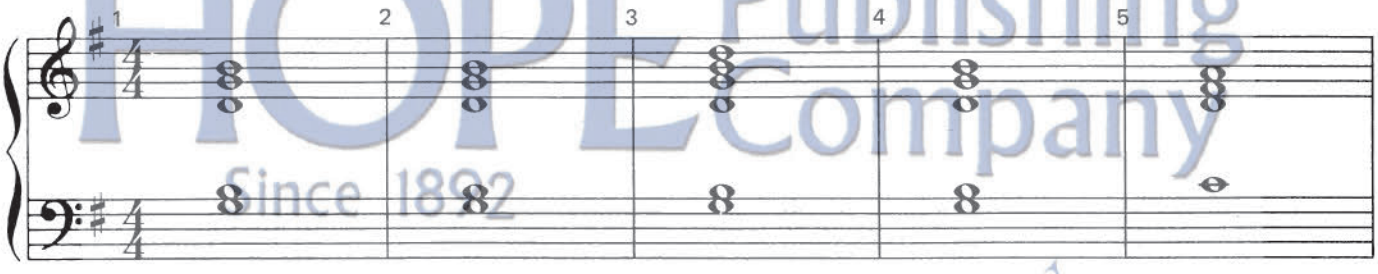
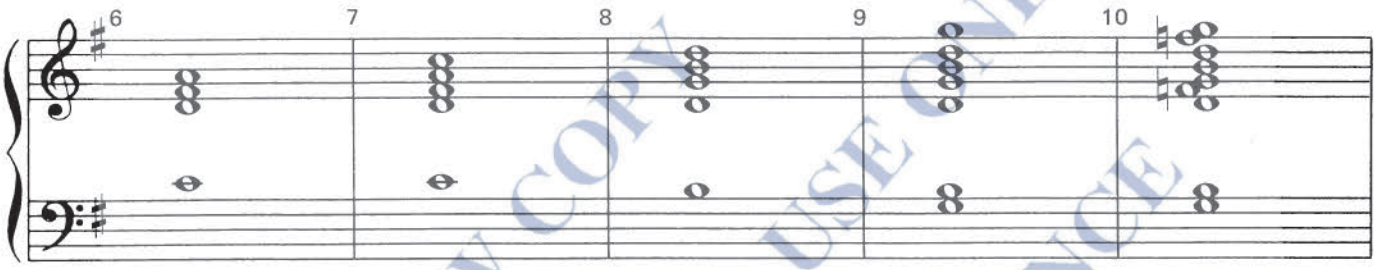
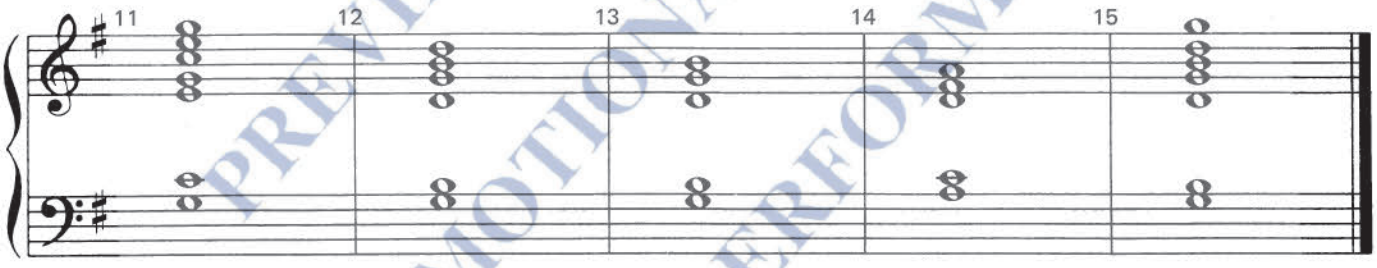
Jacob's Ladder - I

Handbells used: 2 octaves, 16 bells

American Folk Hymn
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON







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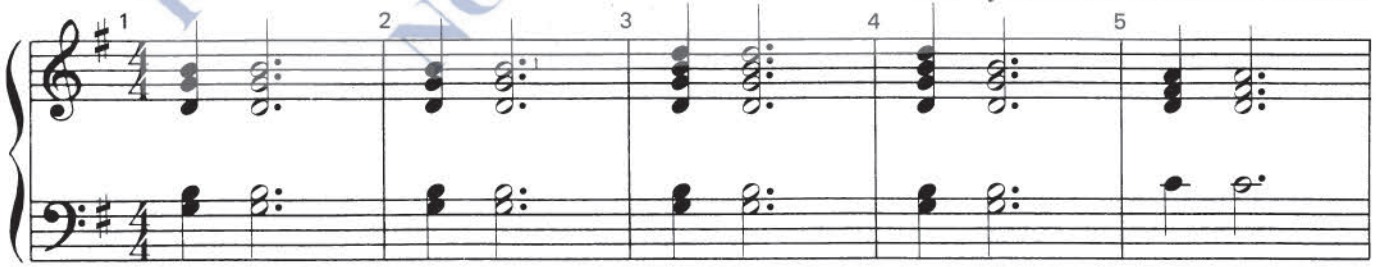
Jacob's Ladder - II

American Folk Hymn
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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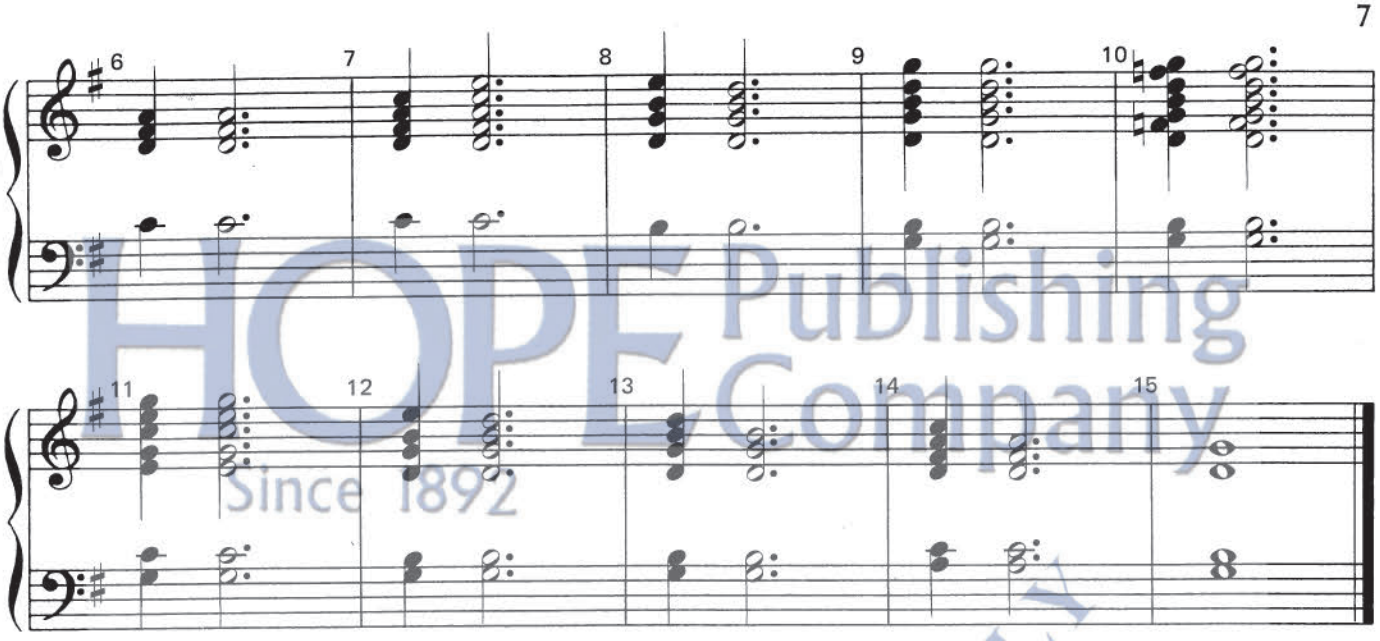

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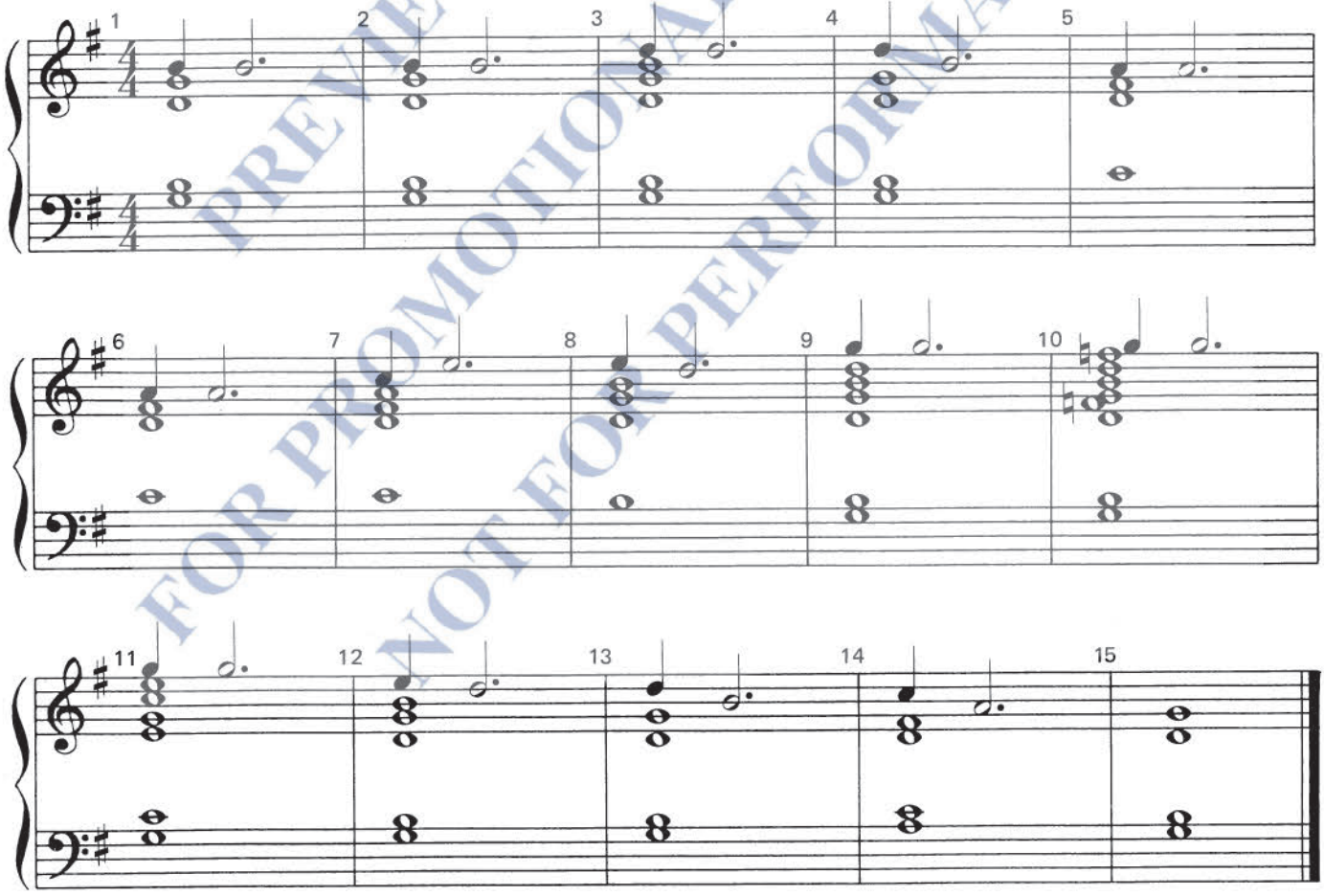
Jacob's Ladder - III

American Folk **Hymn**
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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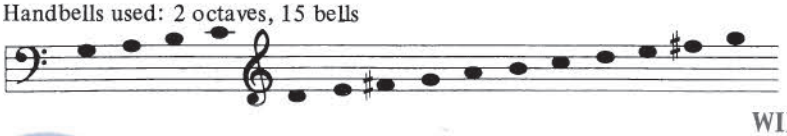
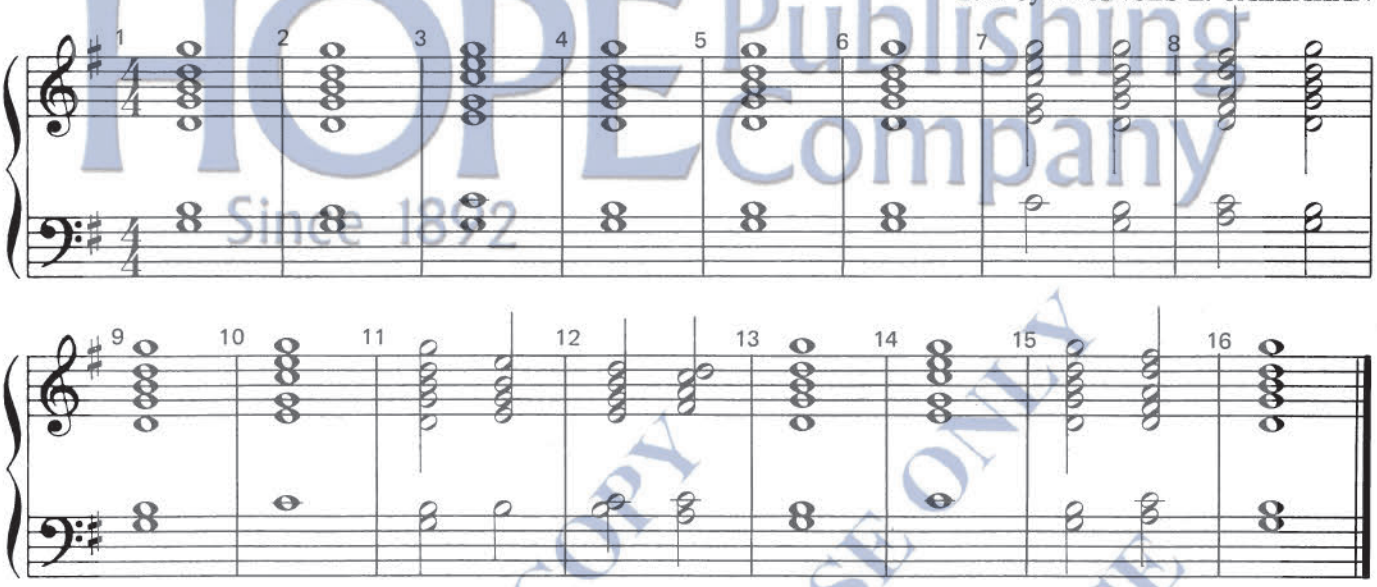
Jesus Loves Me, This I Know - I

Handbells used: 2 octaves, 15 bells



WILLIAM B. BRADBURY
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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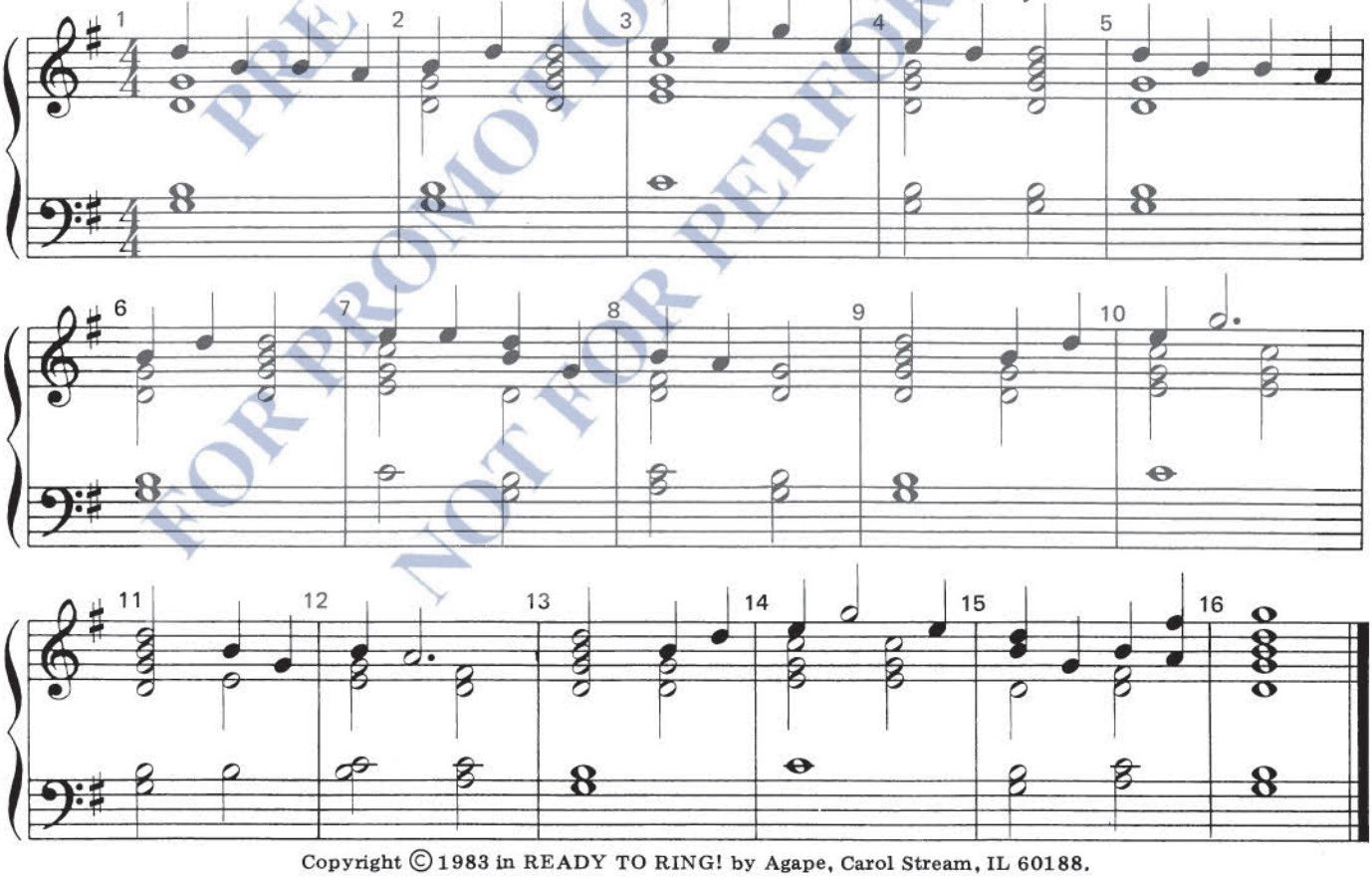
Jesus Loves Me, This I Know - II

WILLIAM B. BRADBURY
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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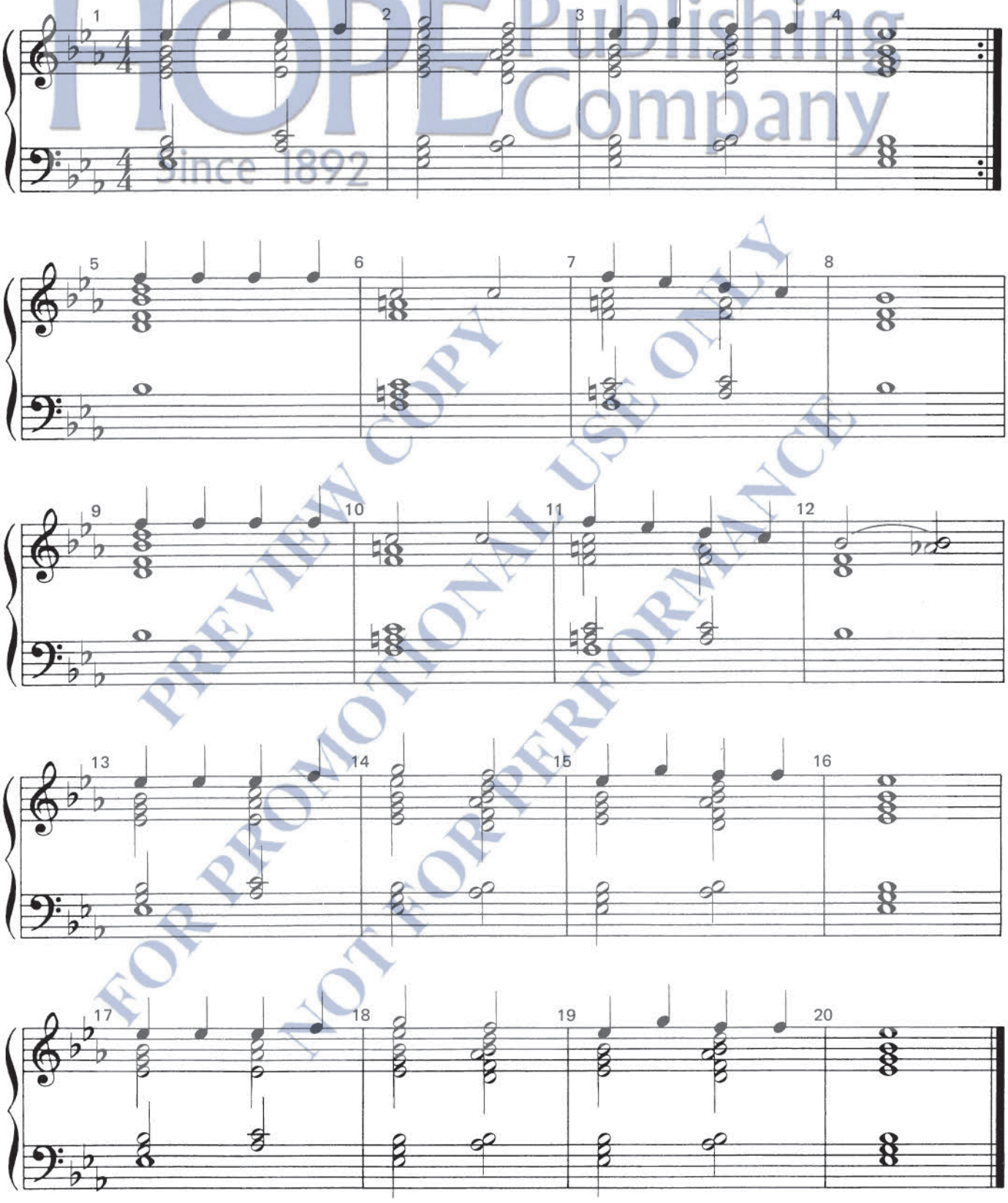
Au Clair de la Lune

Handbells used: 2 octaves, 17-19 bells

French Folk Song
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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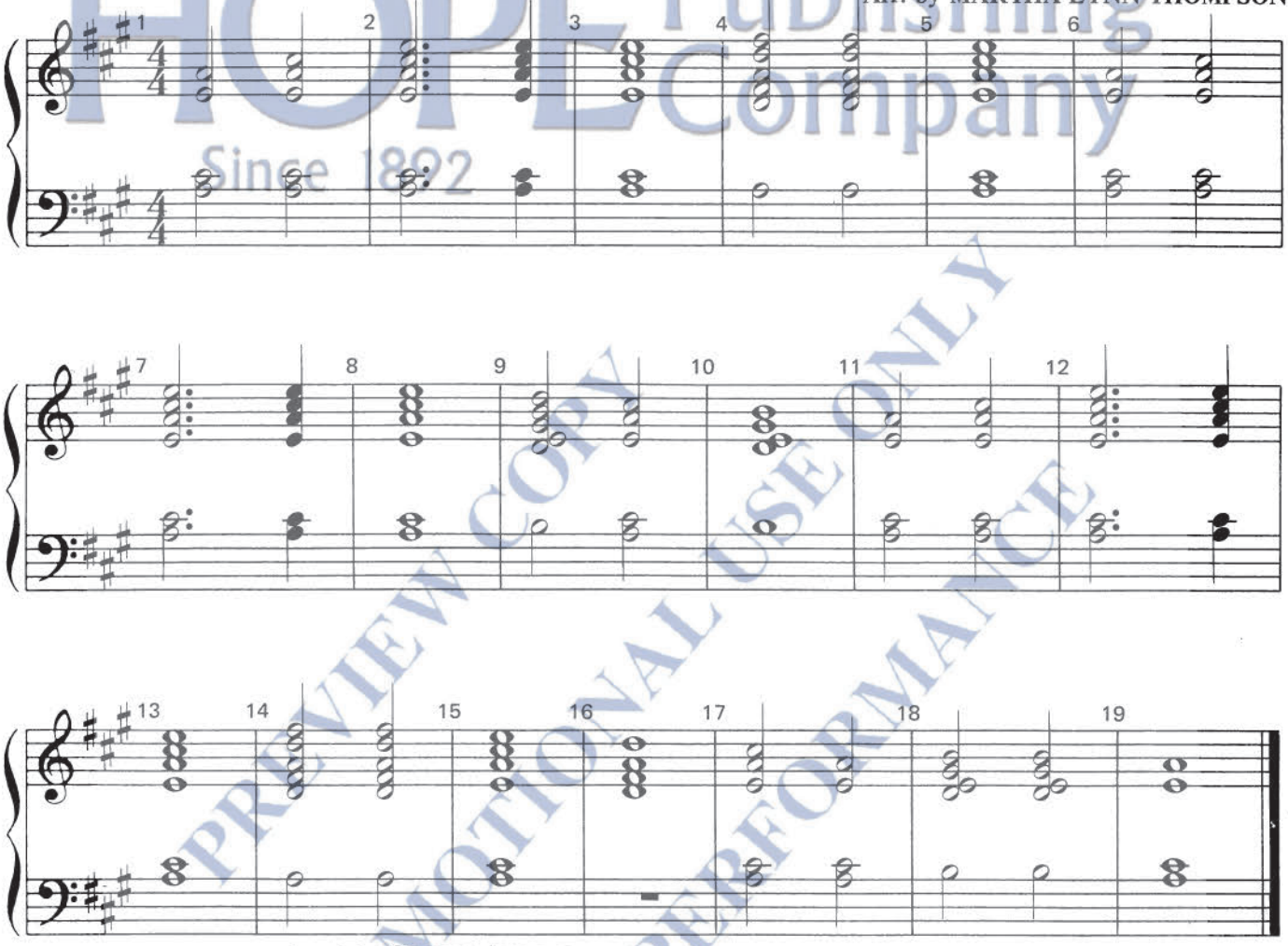
Kum Ba Ya - I

Handbells used: 2 octaves, 13 bells

African
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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Kum Ba Ya - II

African
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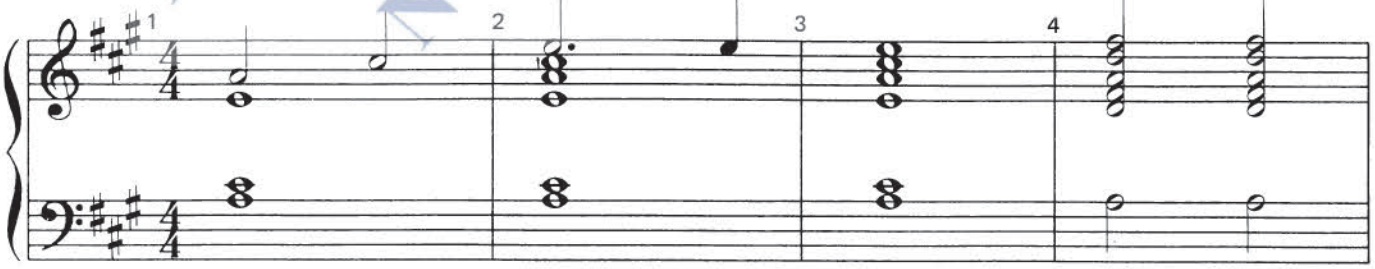

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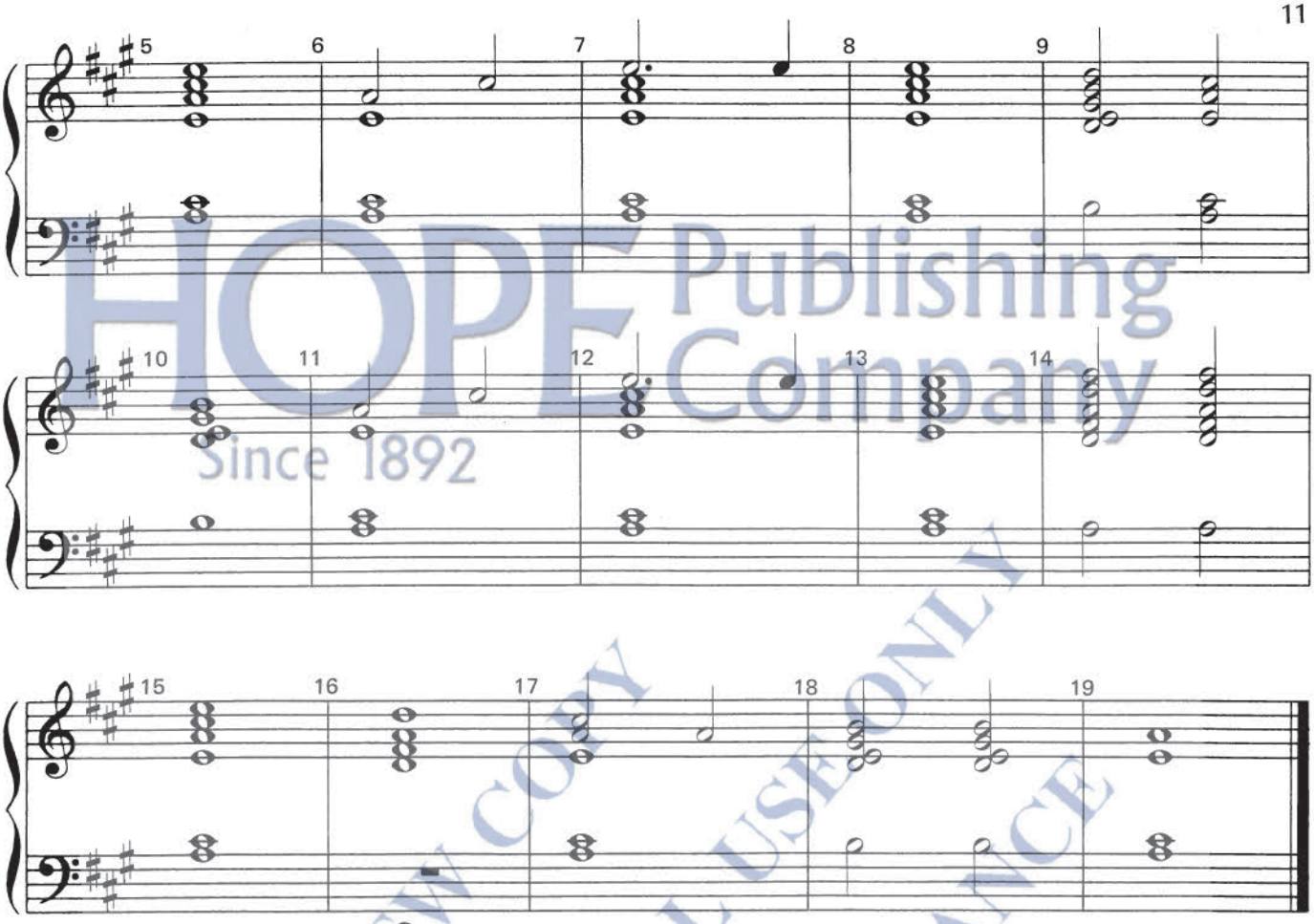

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Kum Ba Ya - III

African
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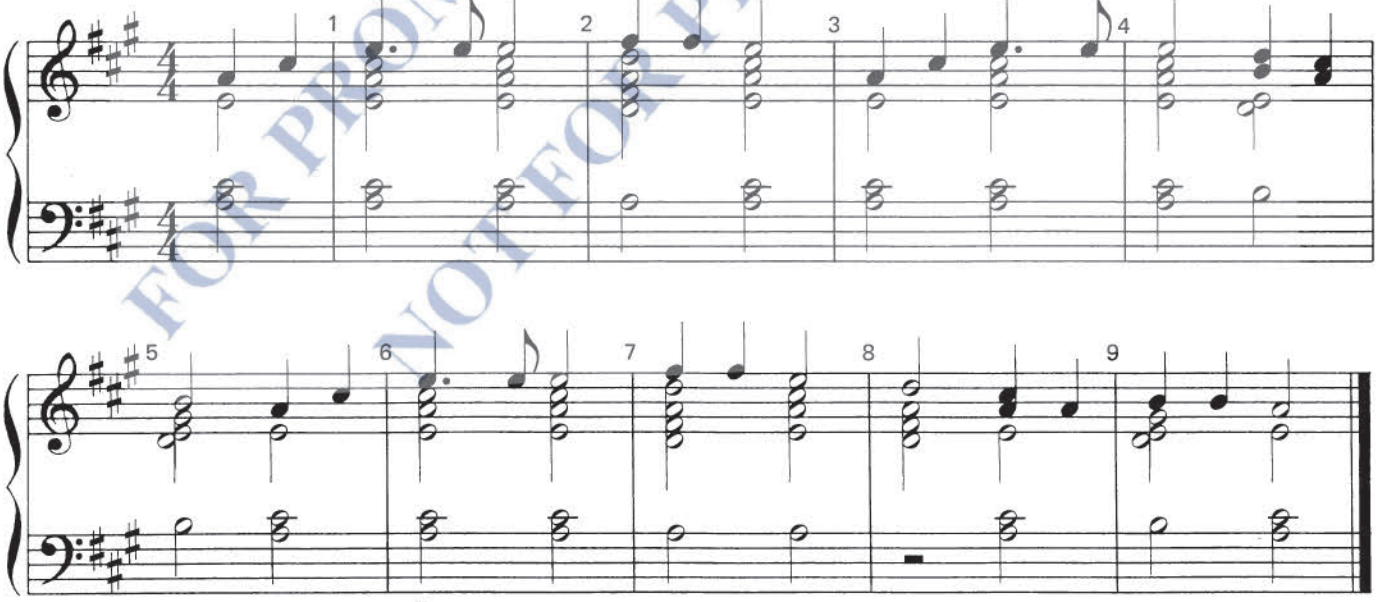

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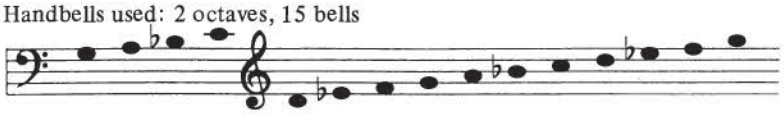
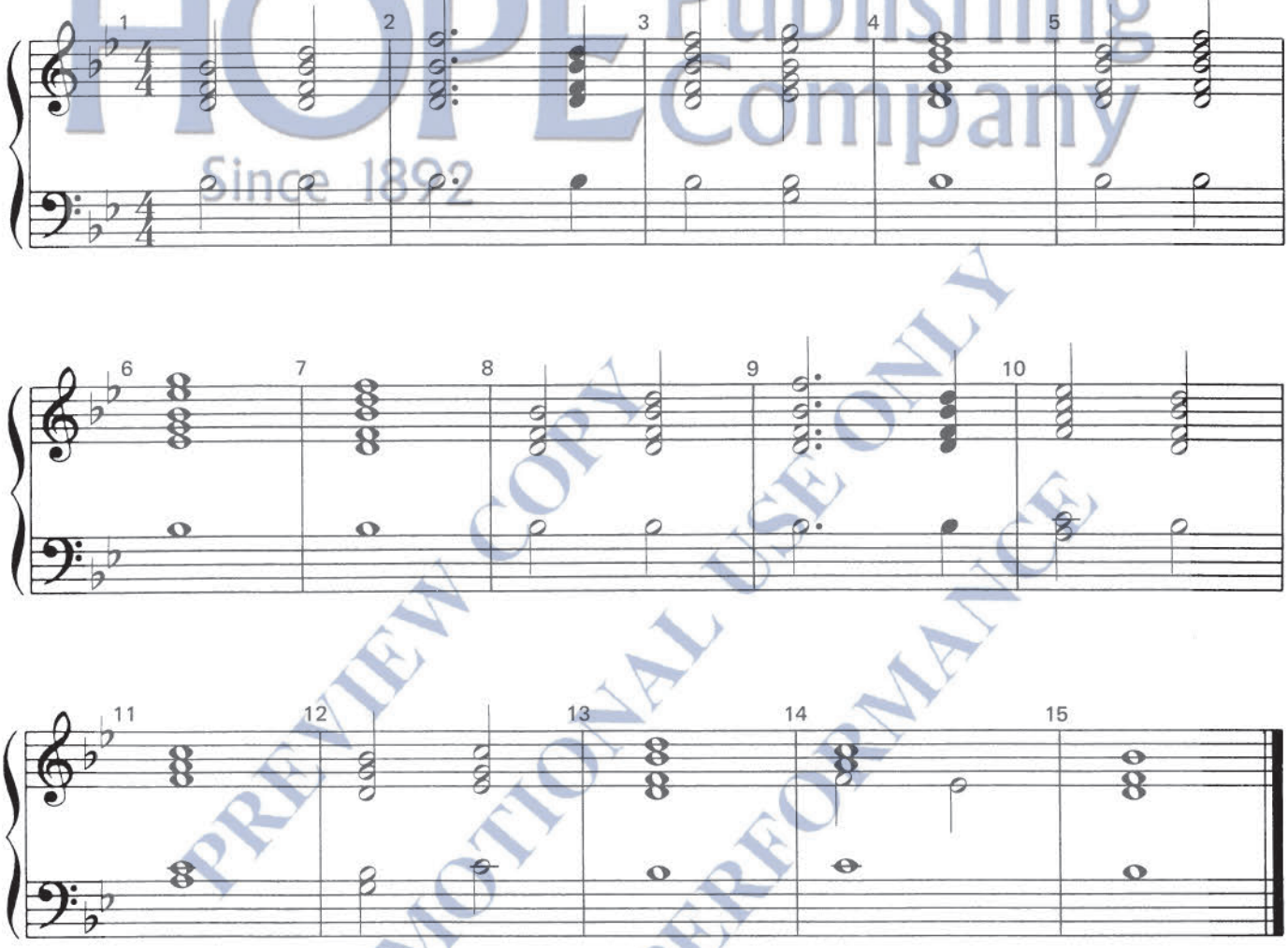
Michael Row the Boat Ashore - I

Handbells used: 2 octaves, 15 bells



Slave Song
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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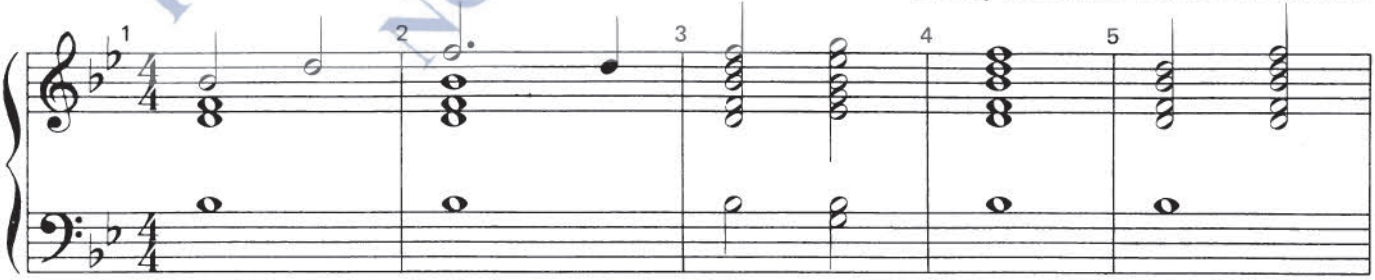
Michael Row the Boat Ashore - II

Slave Song
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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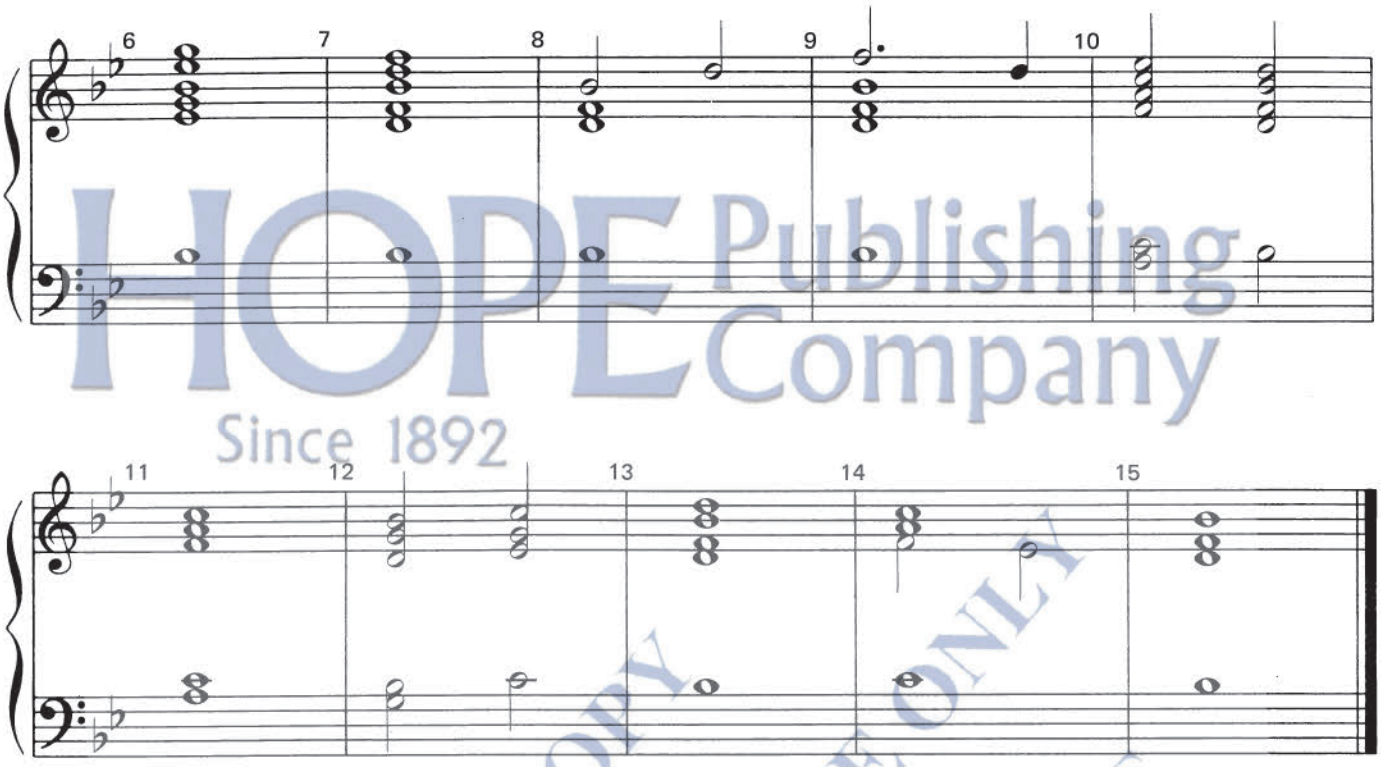

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Michael Row the Boat Ashore - III

Slave Song
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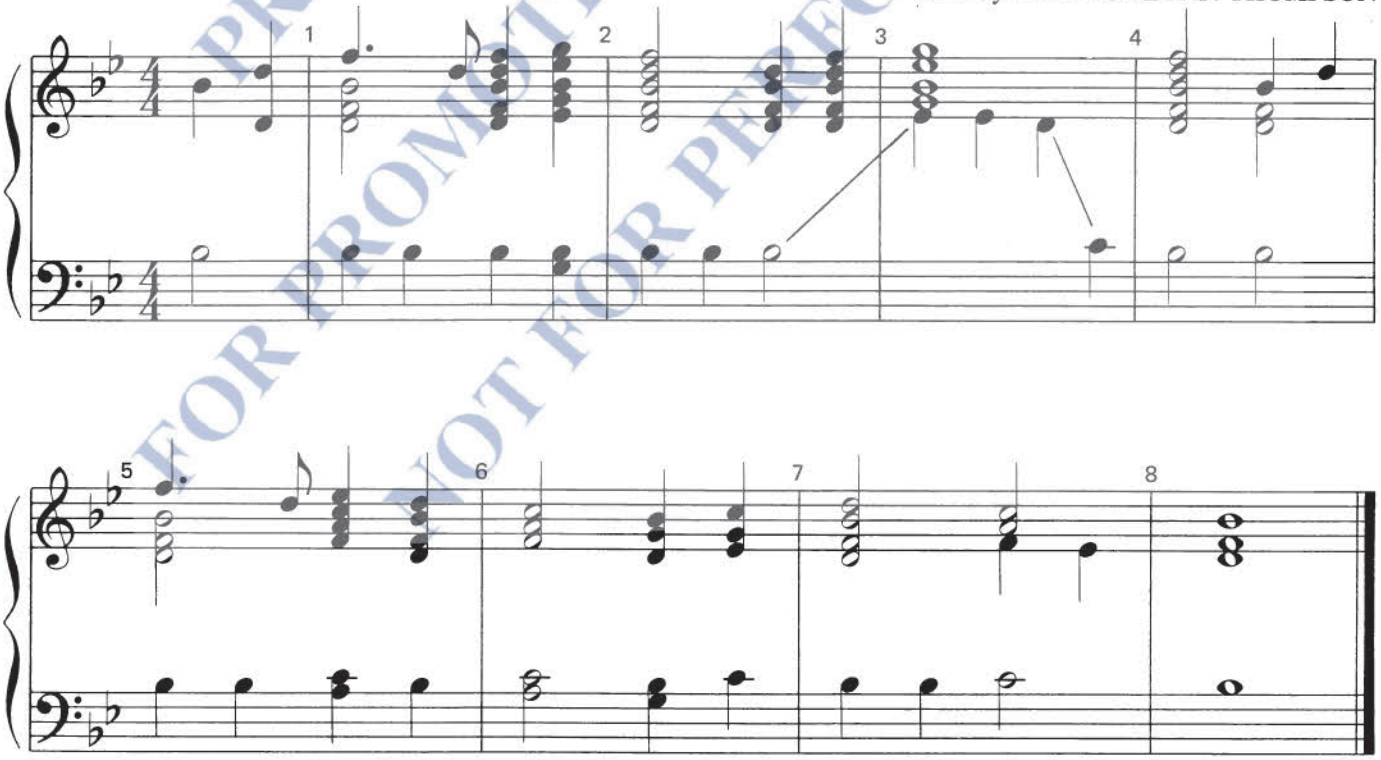

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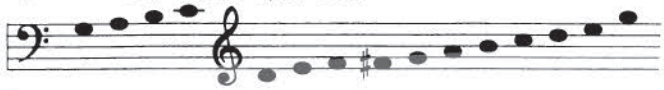
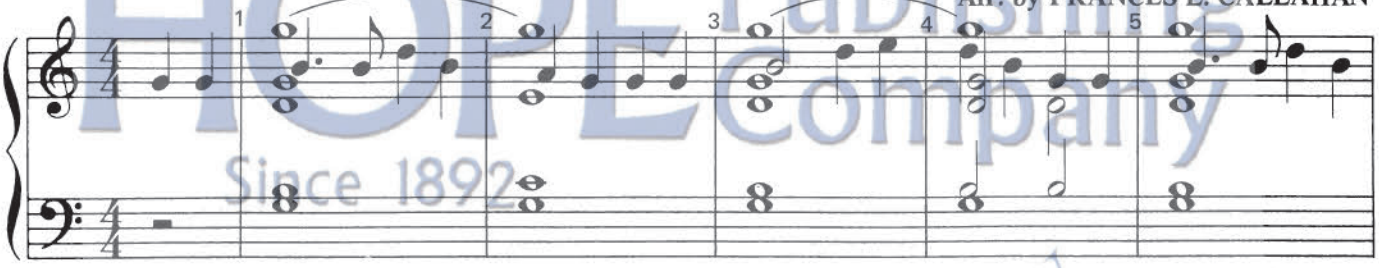
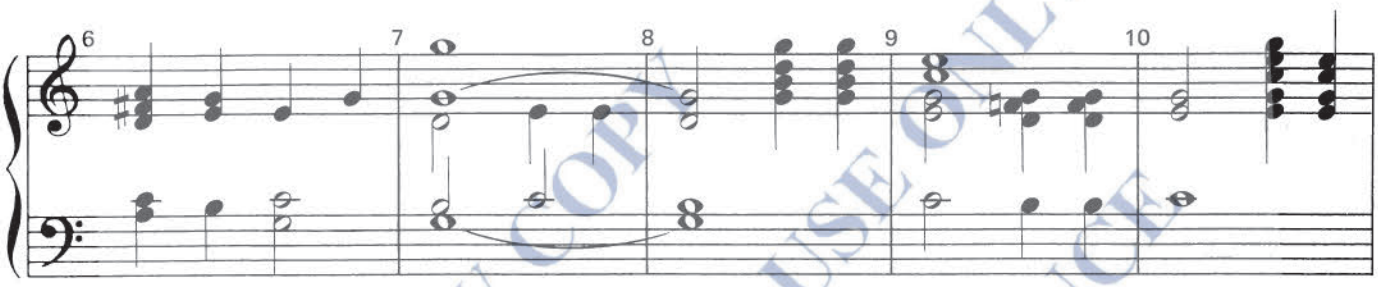
Lord, I Want to Be a Christian

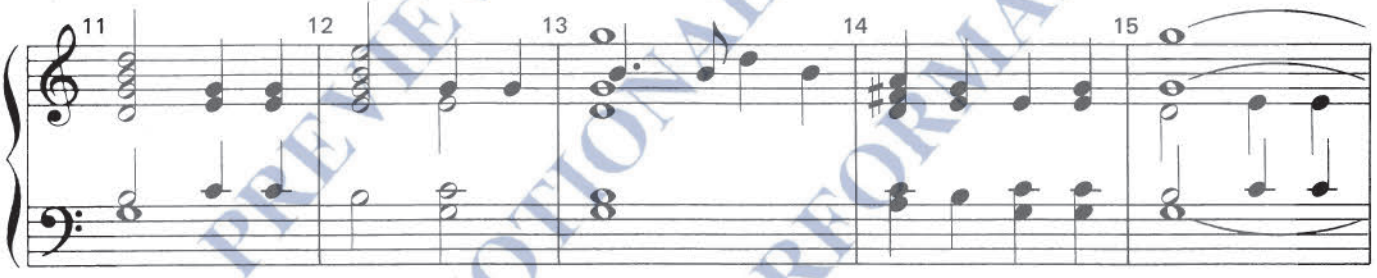
Handbells used: 2 octaves, 15 bells

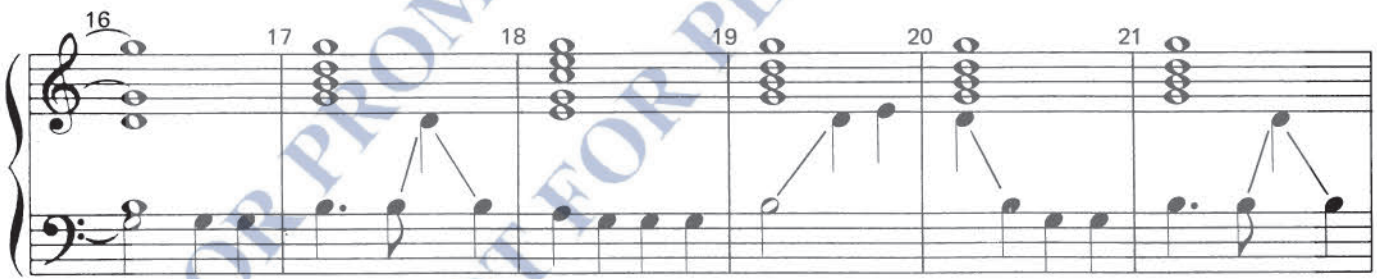


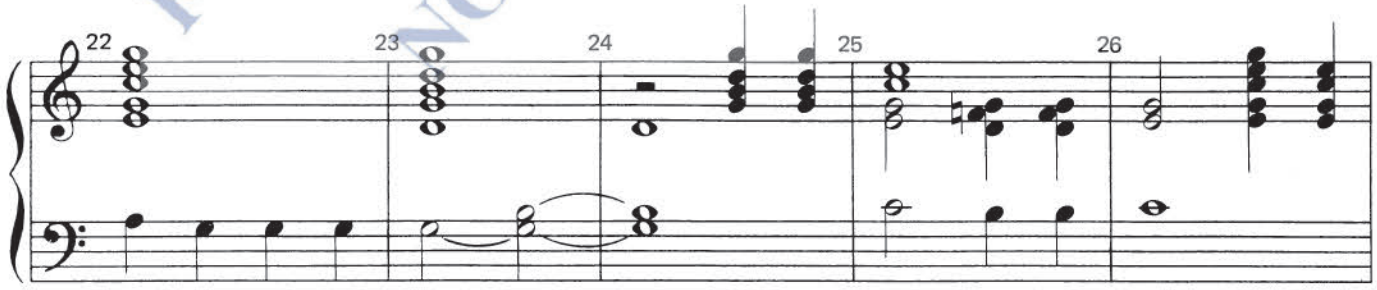
Negro Spiritual
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN











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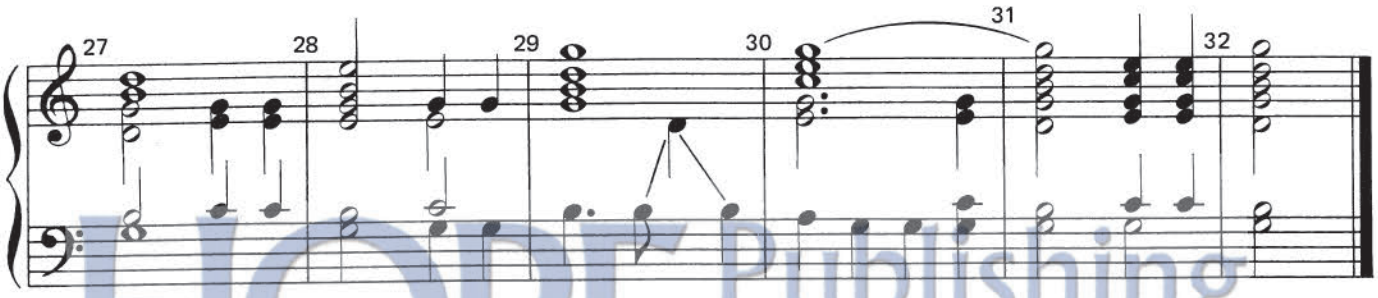

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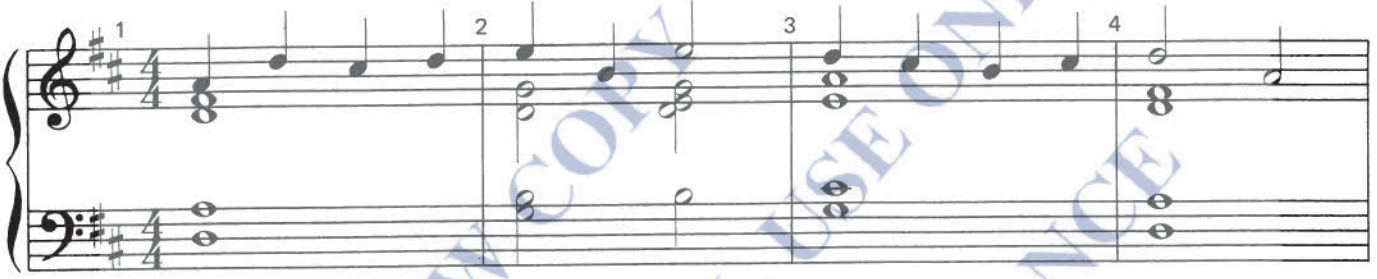
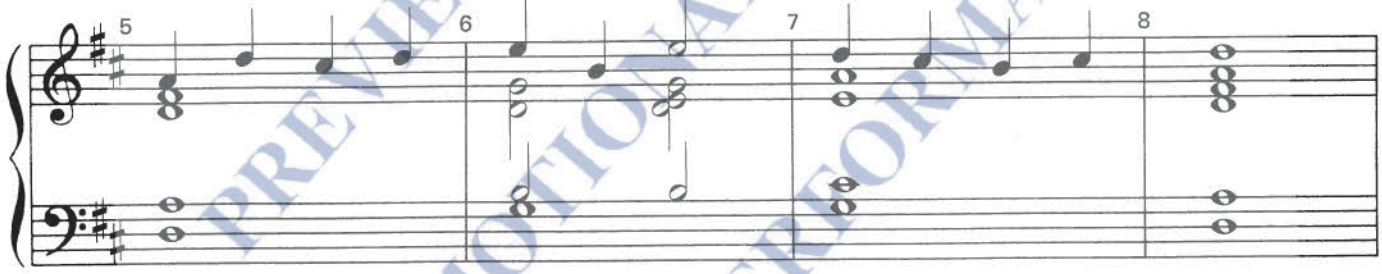
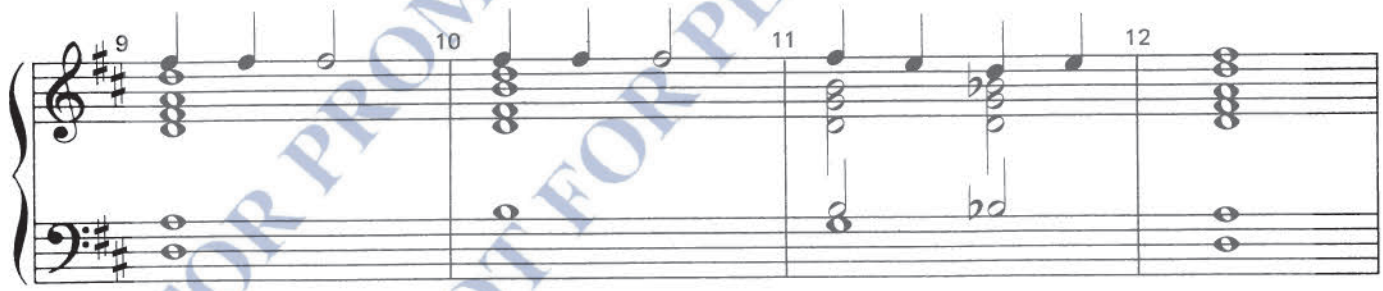
Aura Lee

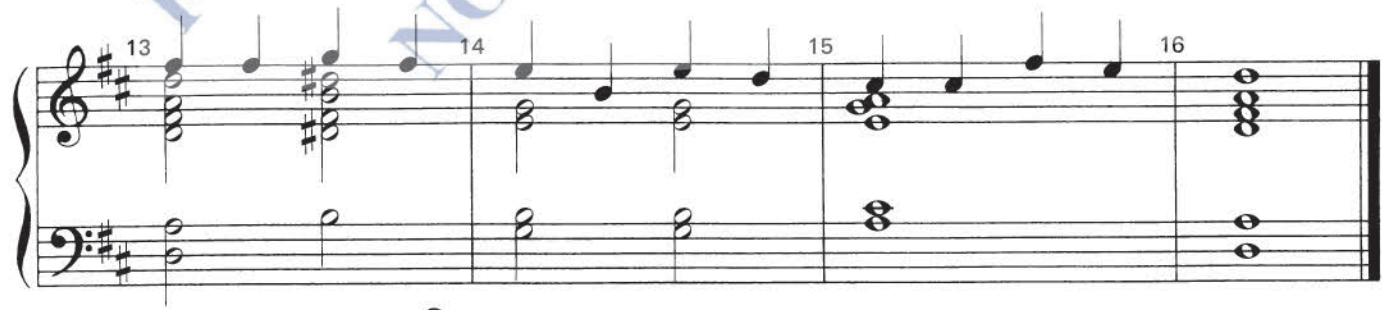
Handbells used: 2 octaves, 19-20 bells

Traditional
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN









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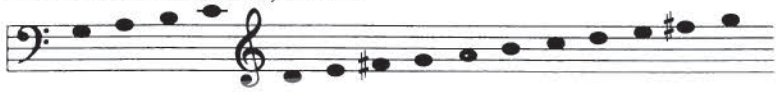
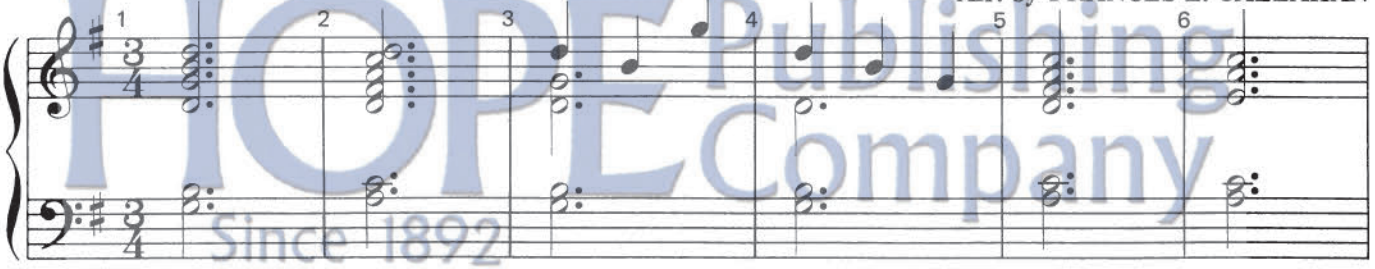
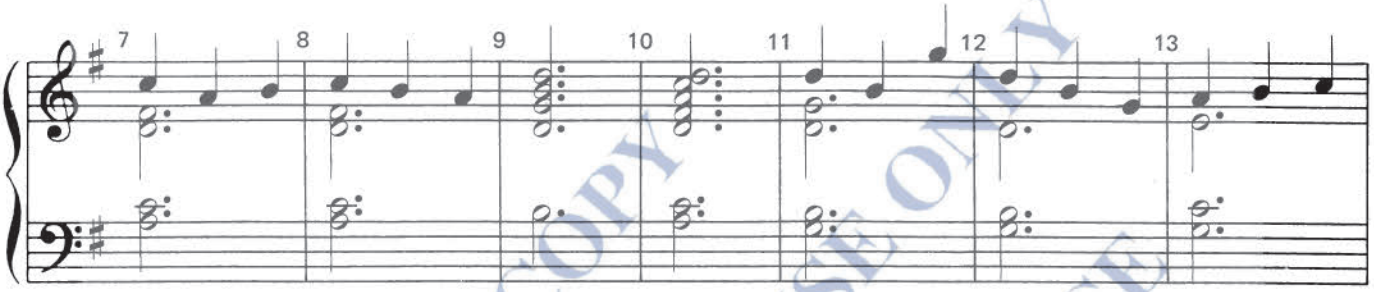
Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be? - I

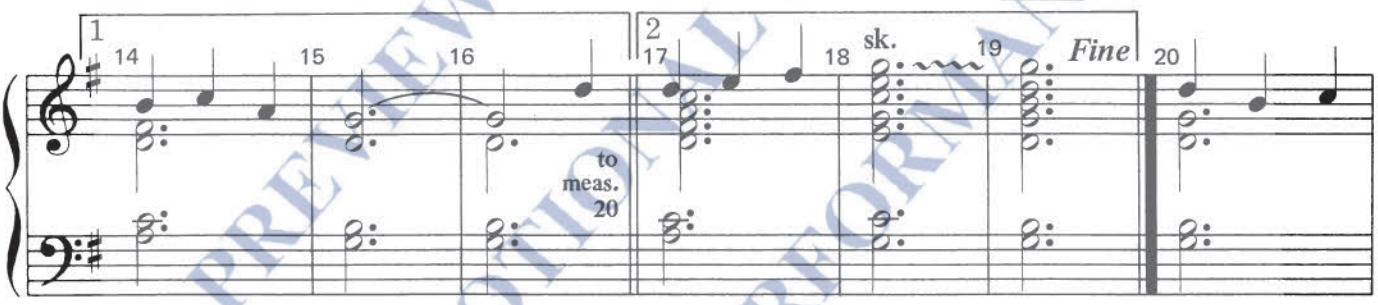
Handbells used: 2 octaves, 15 bells

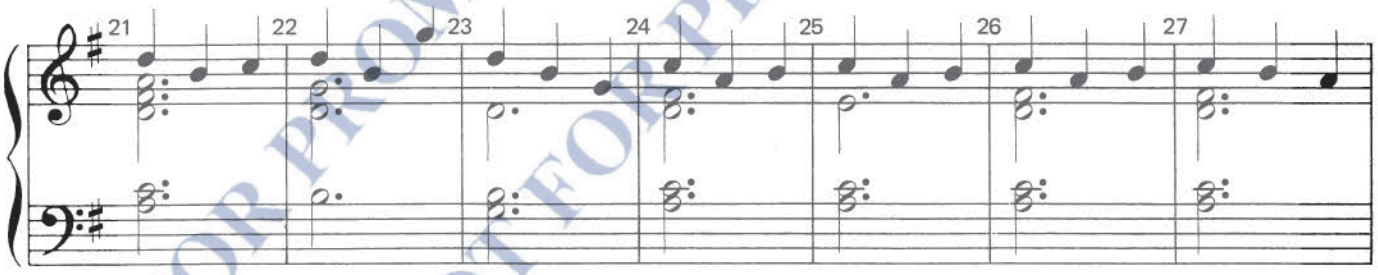


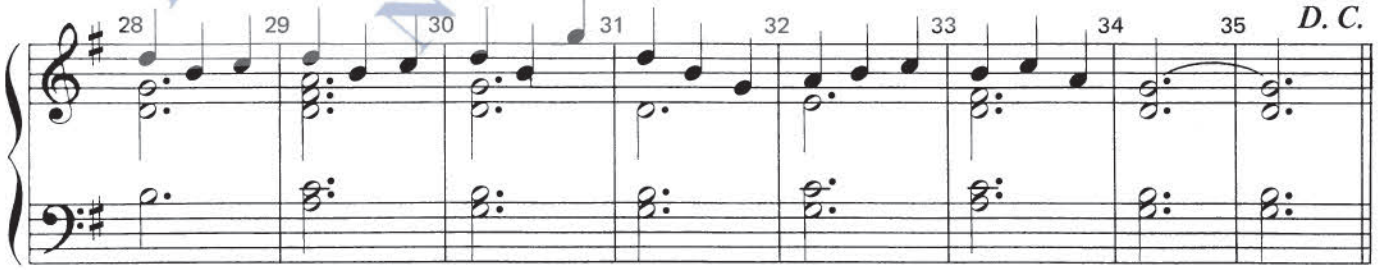
English Folk Song
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN











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There's a Song in the Air - I

Handbells used: 2 octaves, 19 bells

KARL P. HARRINGTON
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN

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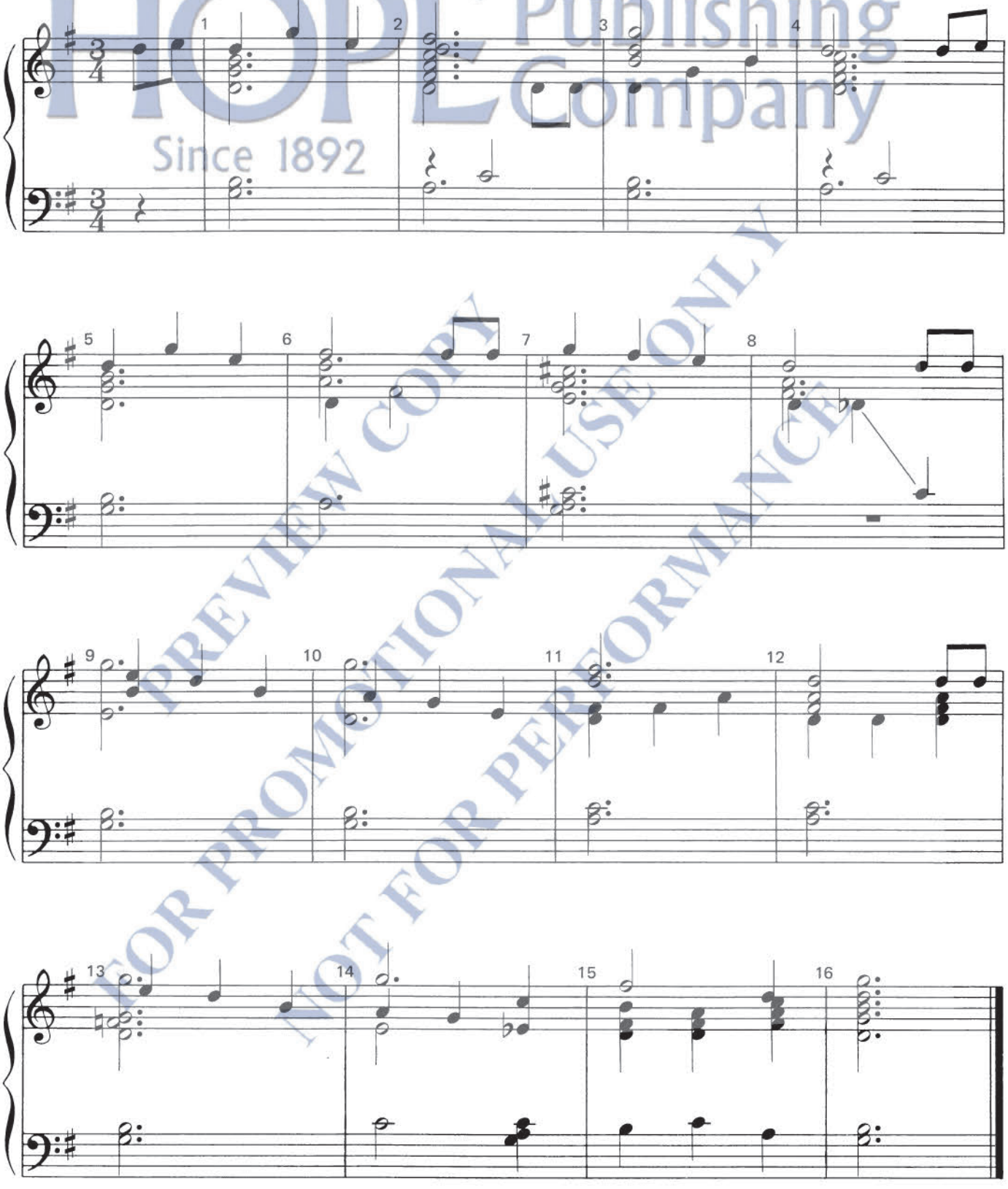

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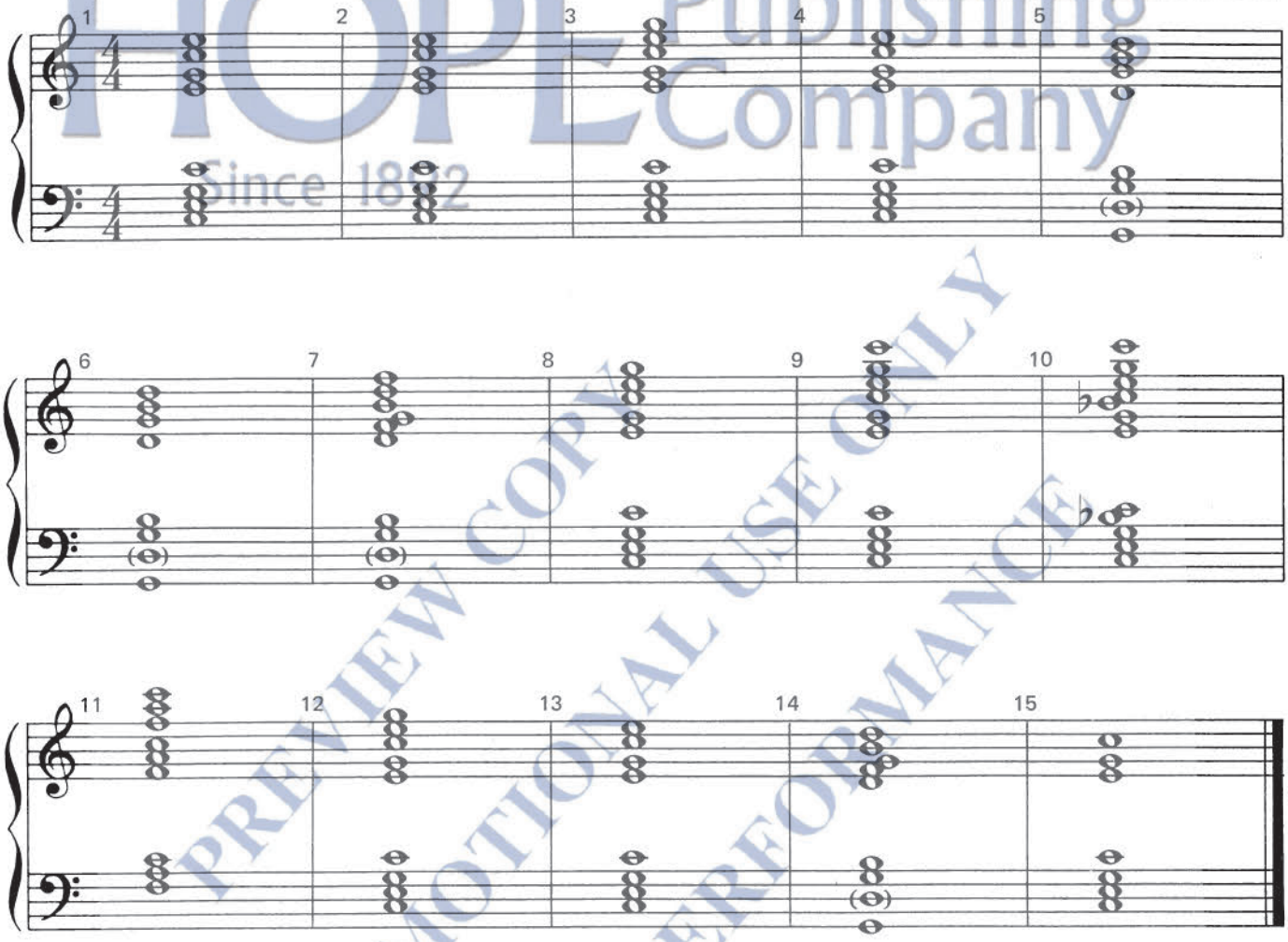
Jacob's Ladder - I

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 22-24 bells

American **Folk Hymn**
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN **THOMPSON**



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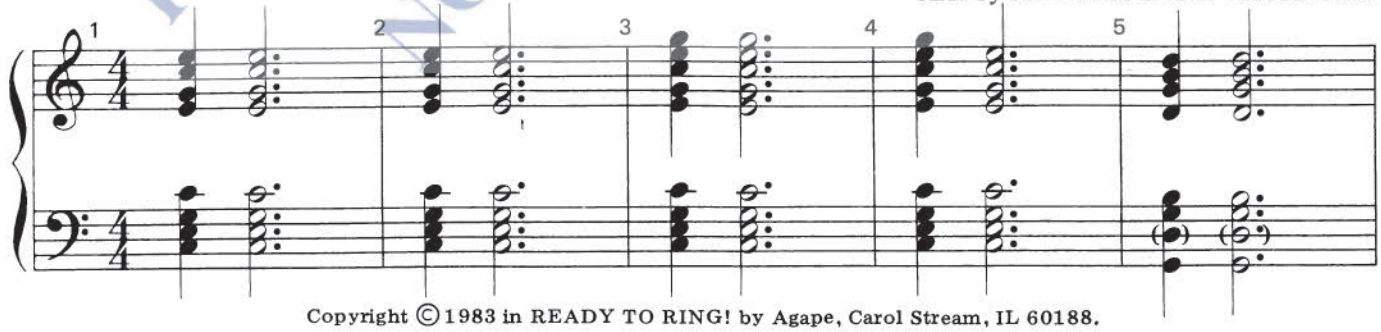
Jacob's Ladder - II

American Folk **Hymn**
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN **THOMPSON**



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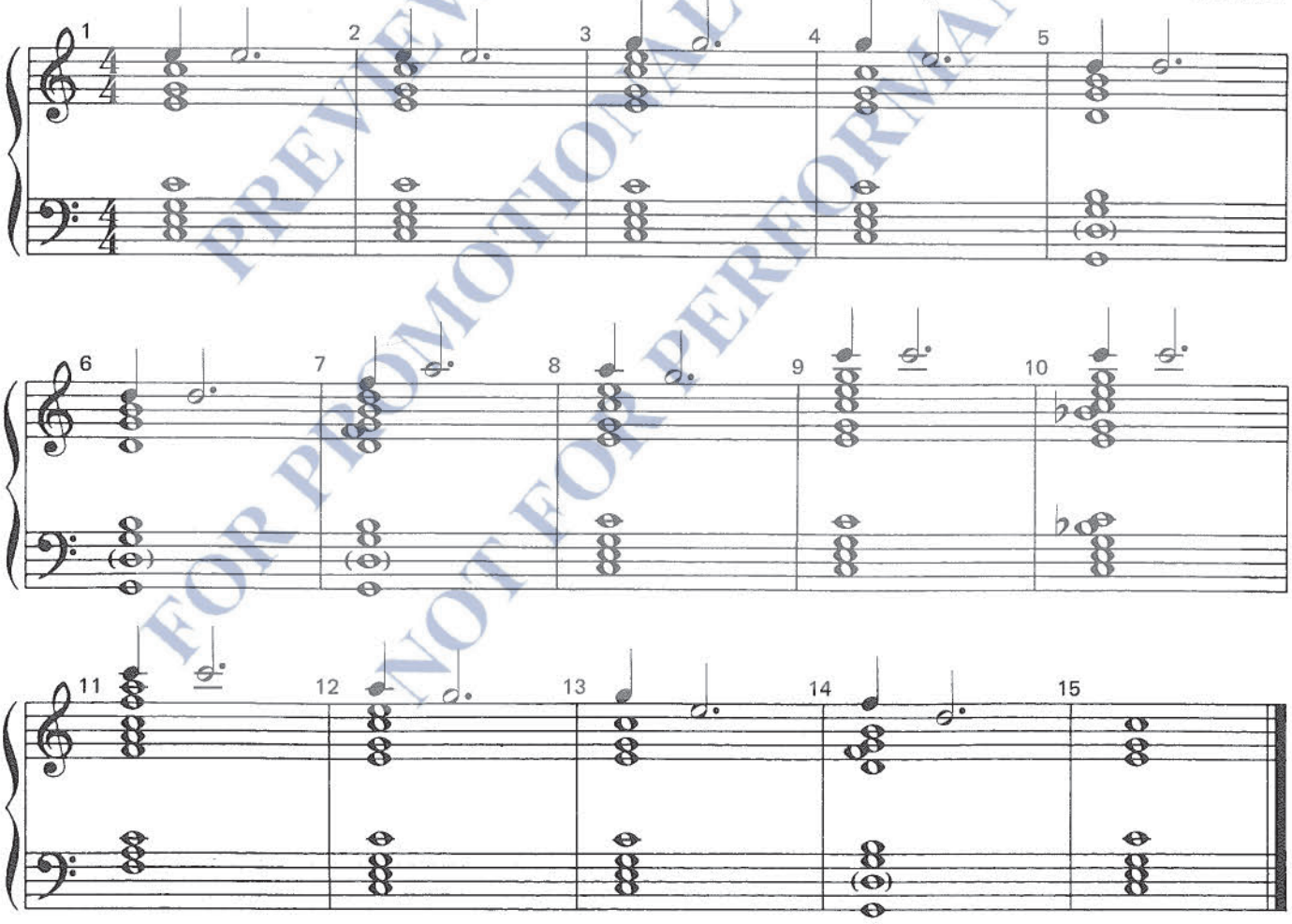
Jacob's Ladder - III

American Folk **Hymn**
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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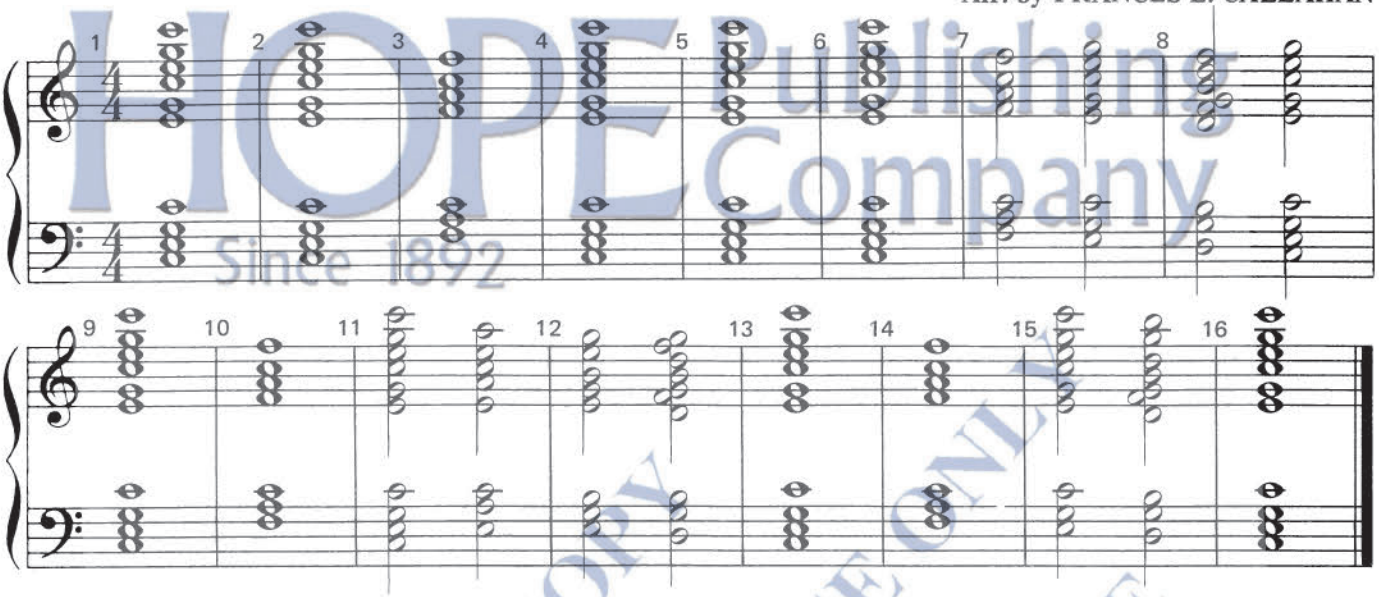
Jesus Loves Me, This I Know - I

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 22 bells

WILLIAM B. BRADBURY
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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Jesus Loves Me, This I Know - II

WILLIAM B. BRADBURY
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN

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Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be? - II

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 22 bells

English Folk Song
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN

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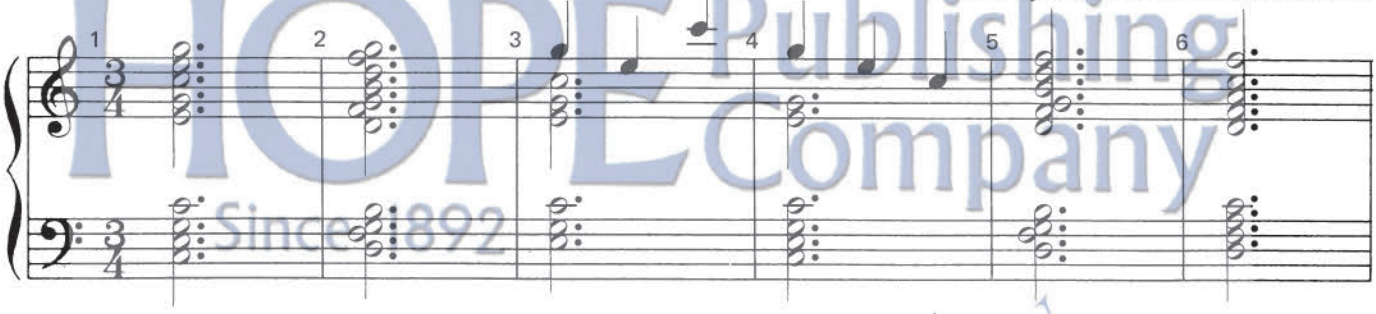

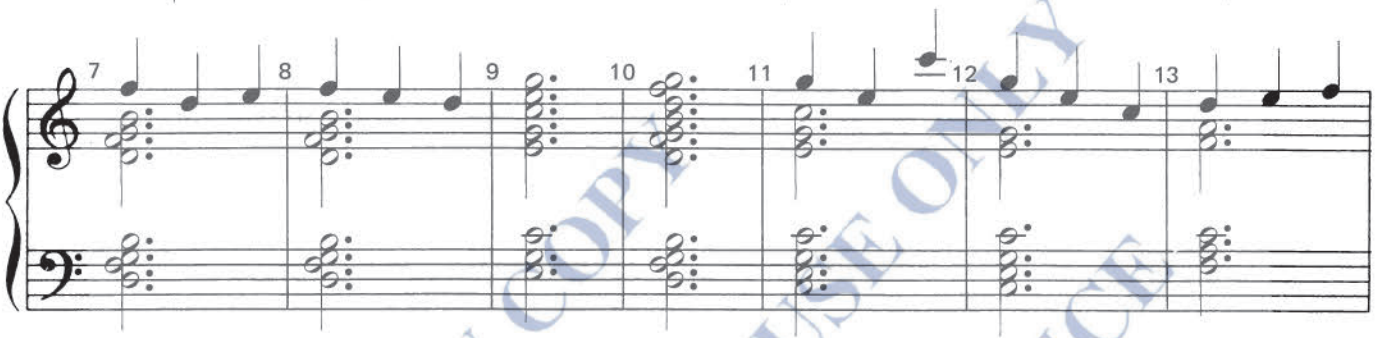

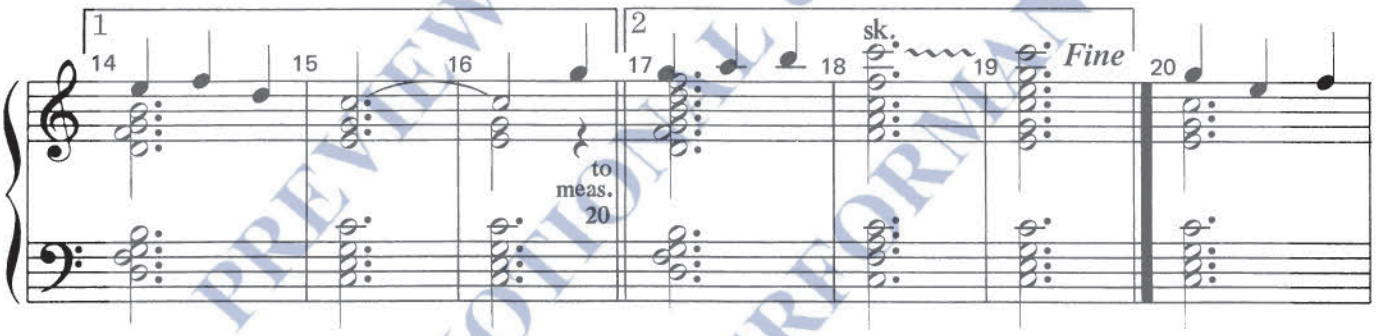

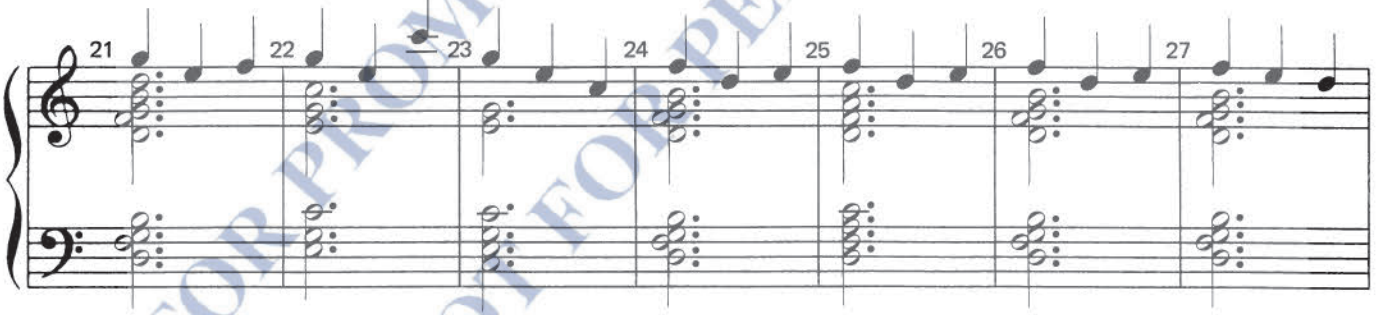

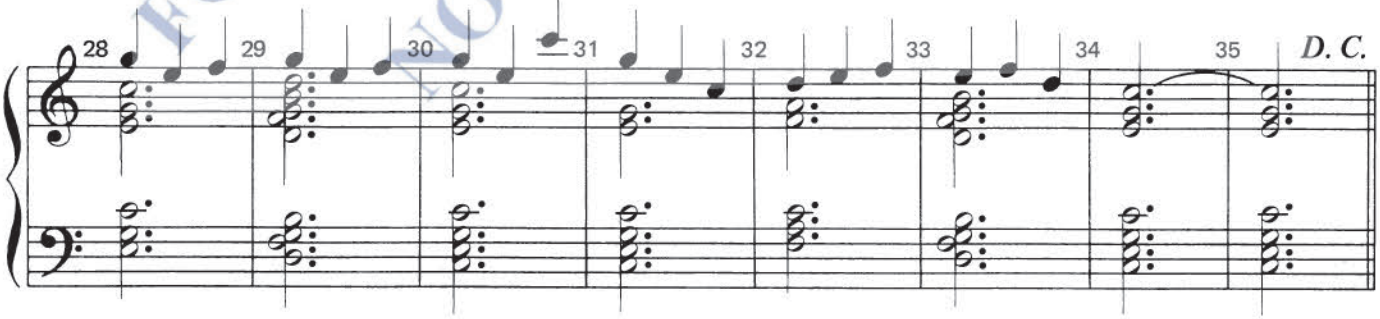

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The Angelus - I

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 19 - 22 bells

CHARLES GOUNOD
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON

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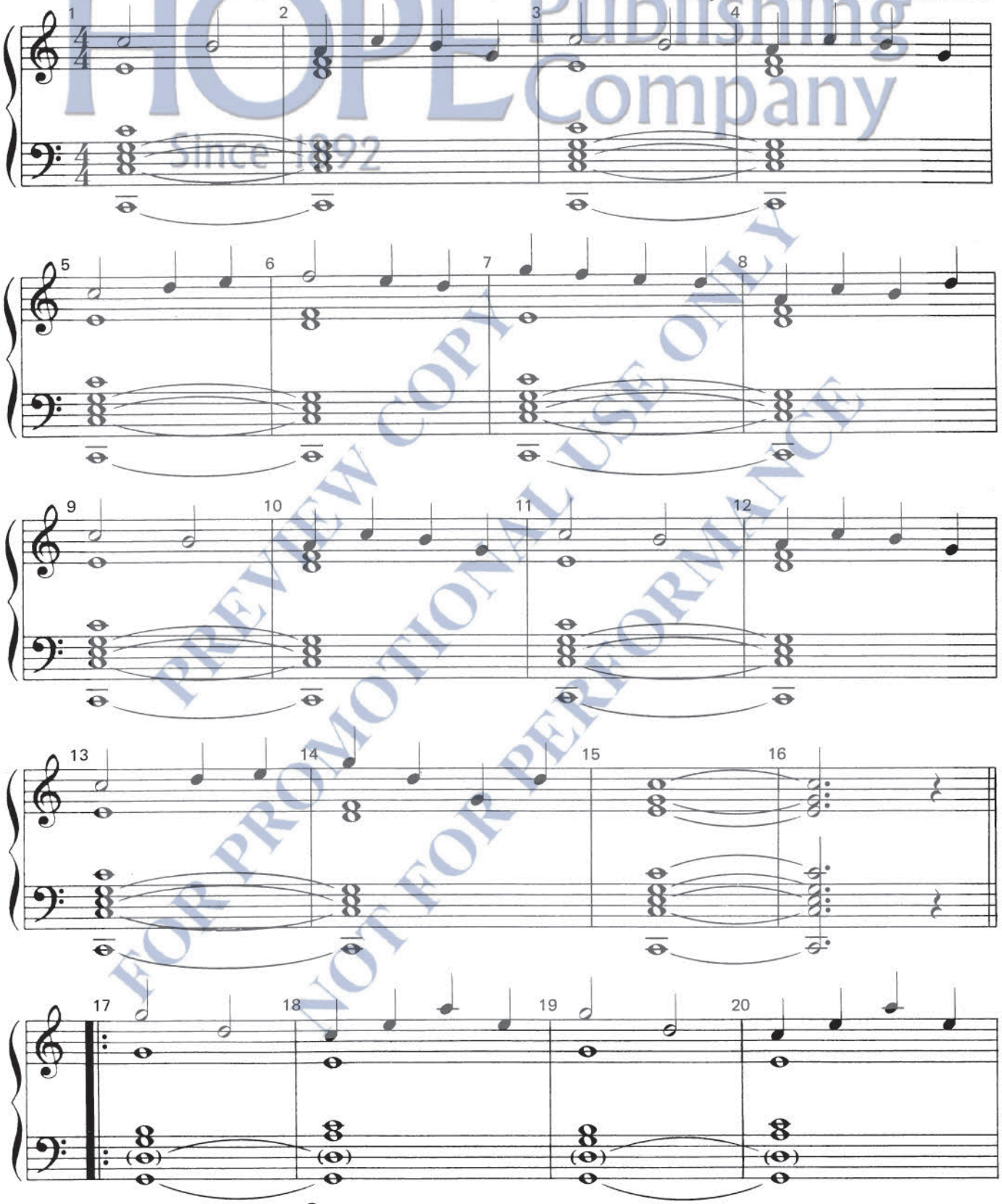

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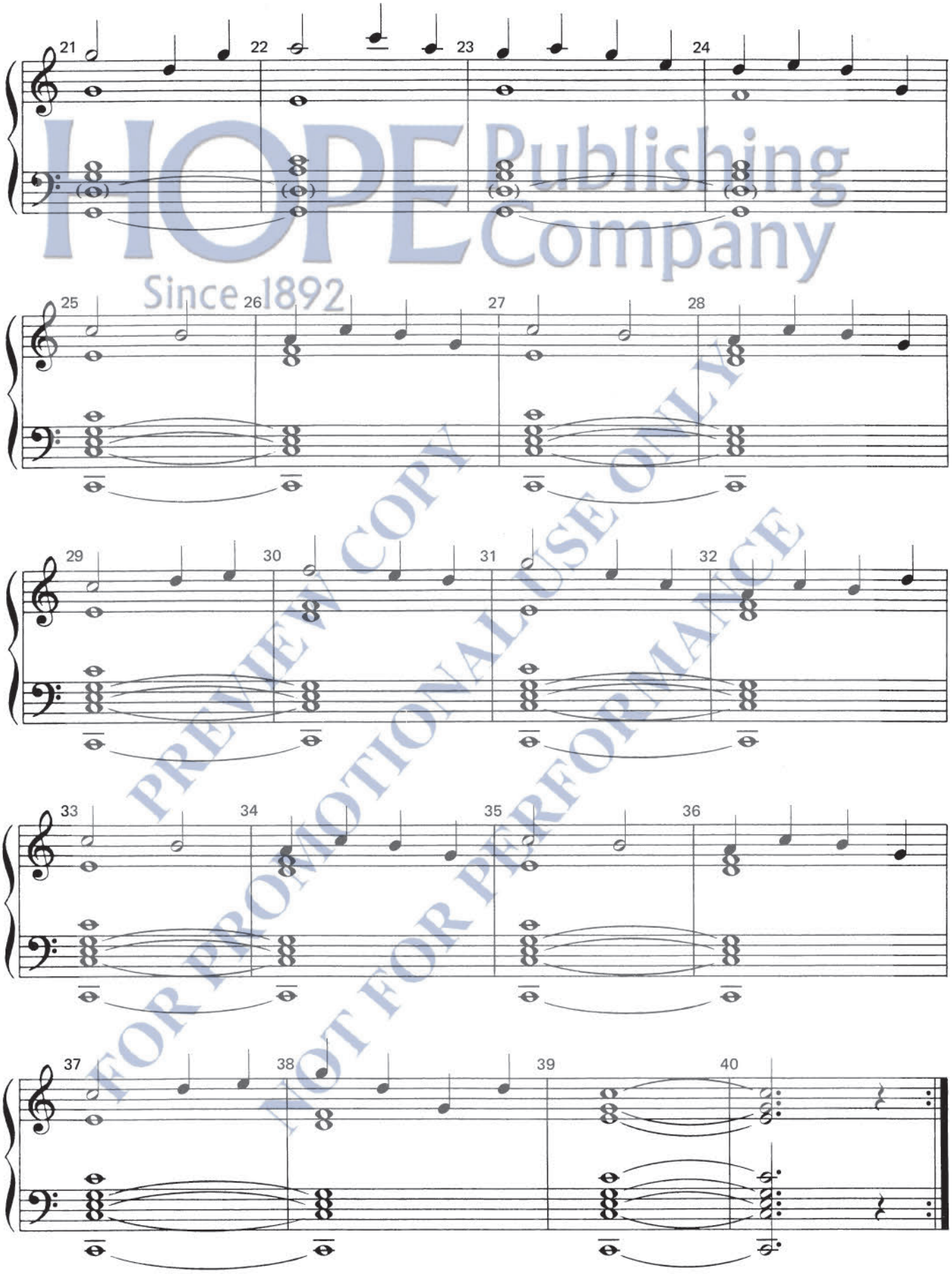

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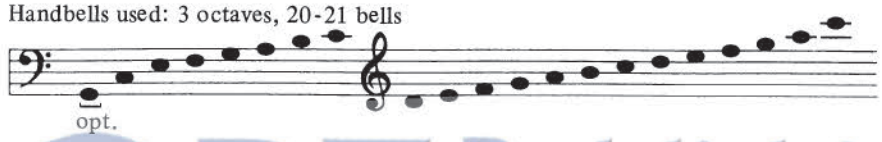
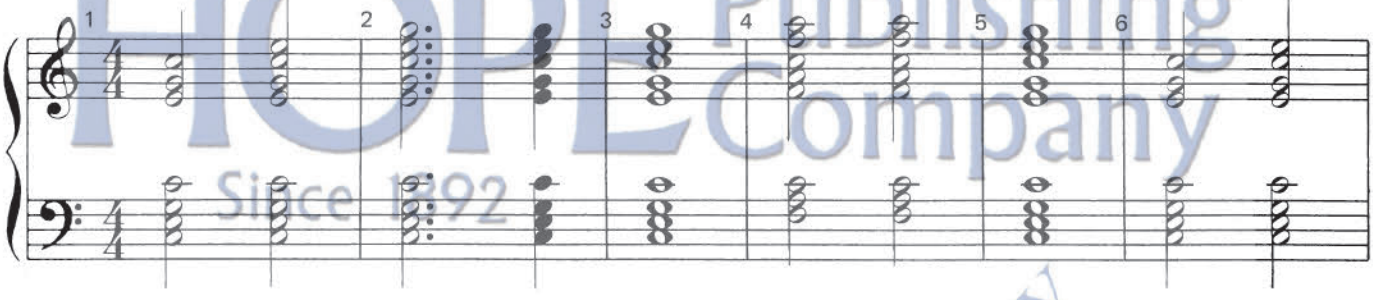
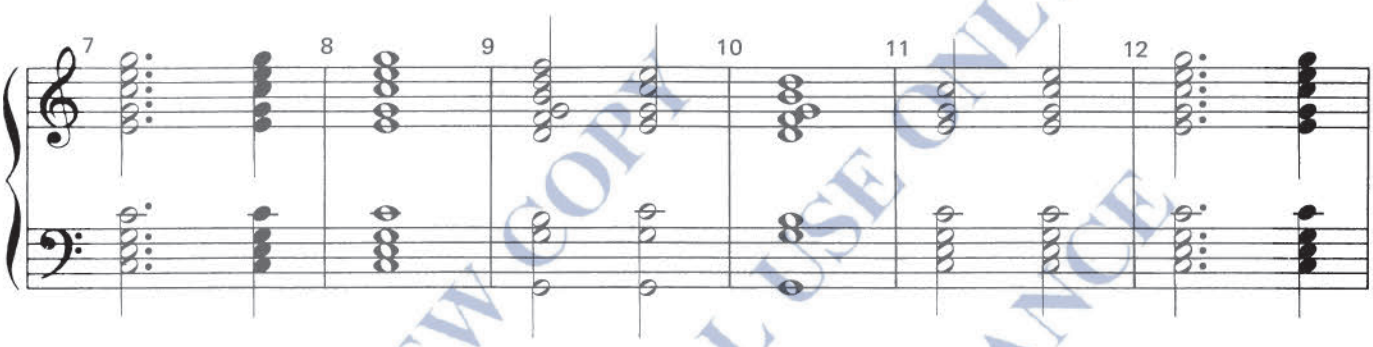
Kum Ba Ya - I

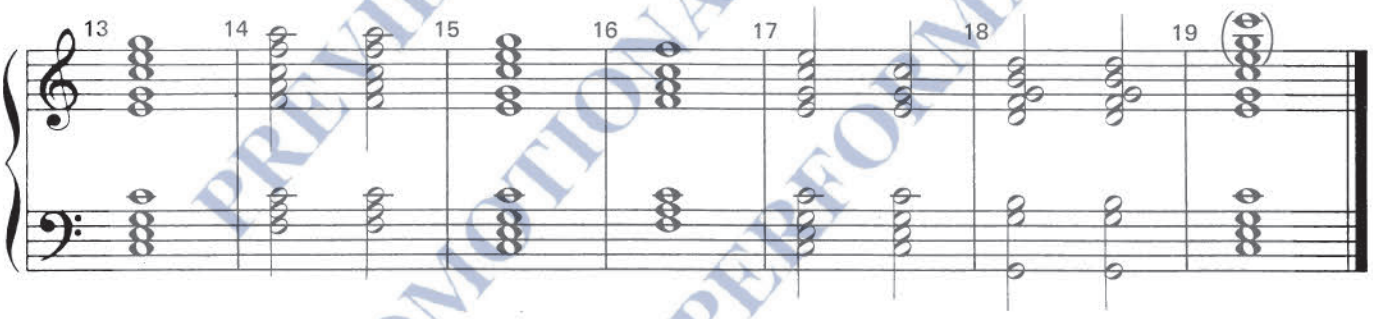
Handbells used: 3 octaves, 20-21 bells



African
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON







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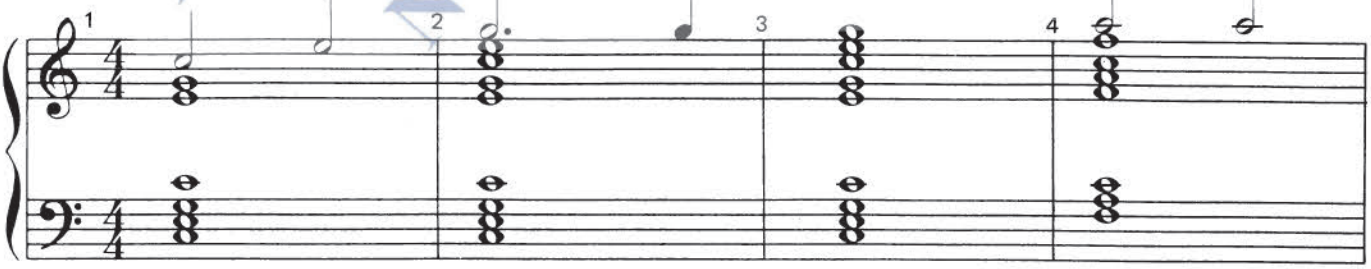
Kum Ba Ya - II

African
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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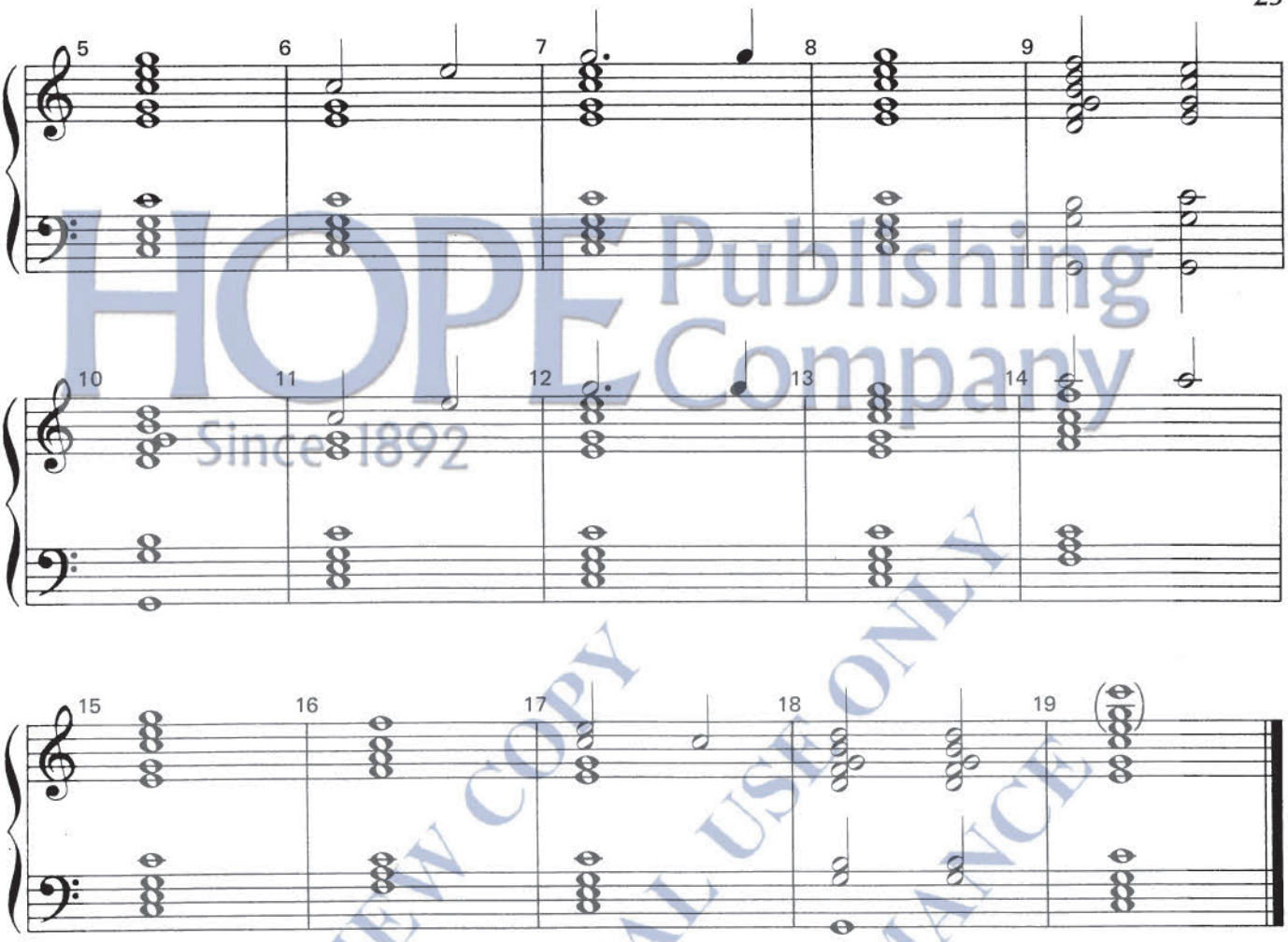

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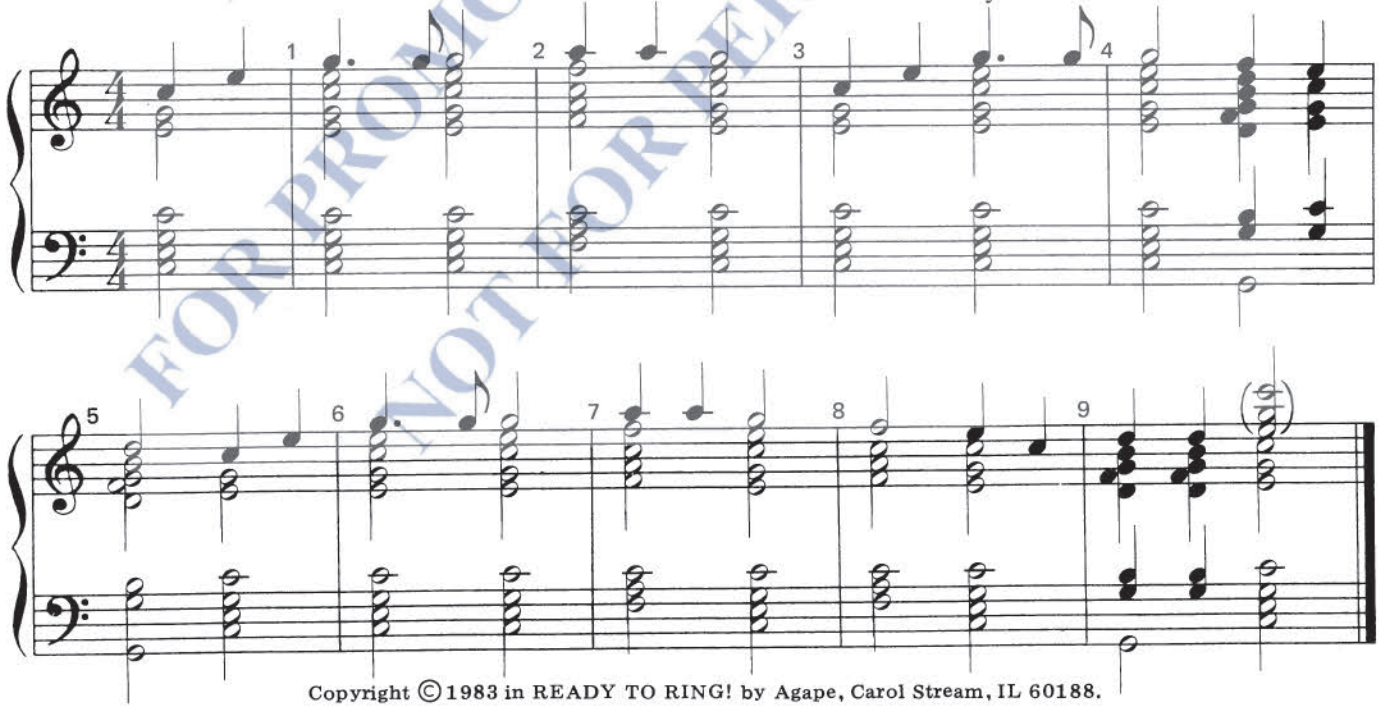
Kum Ba Ya - III

African
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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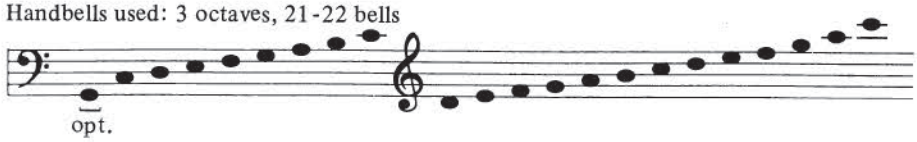
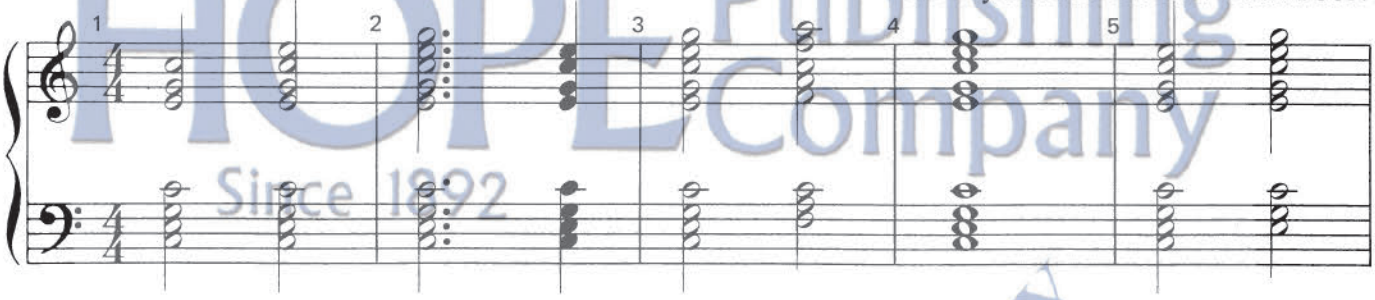
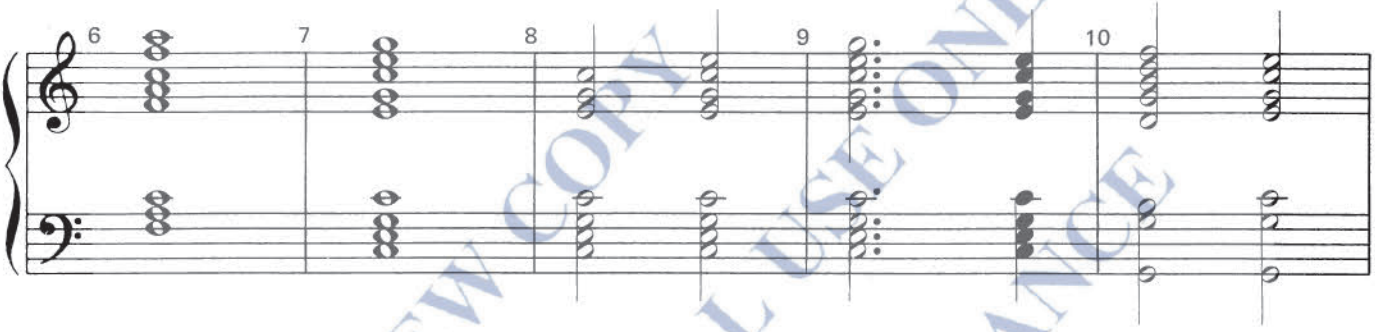
Michael Row the Boat Ashore - I

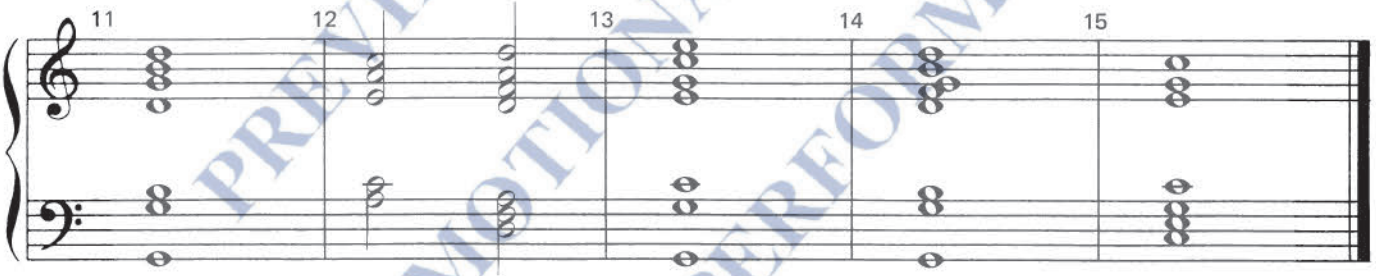
Handbells used: 3 octaves, 21-22 bells



Slave Song
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON







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Michael Row the Boat Ashore - II

Slave Song
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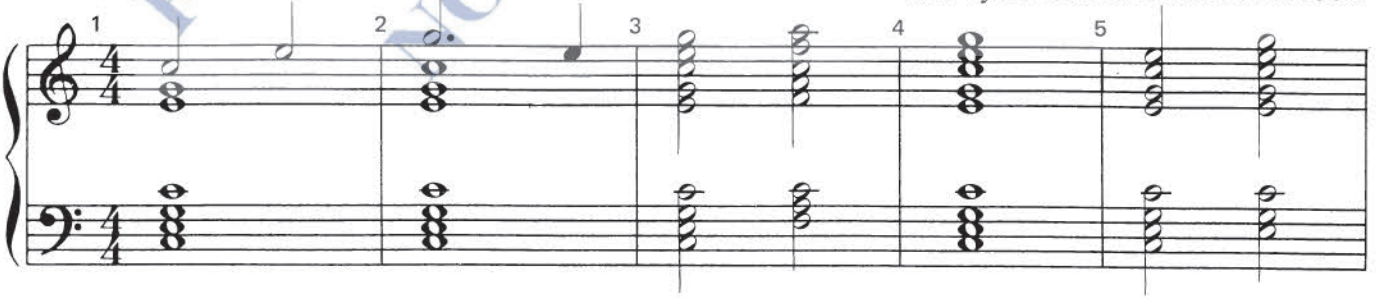

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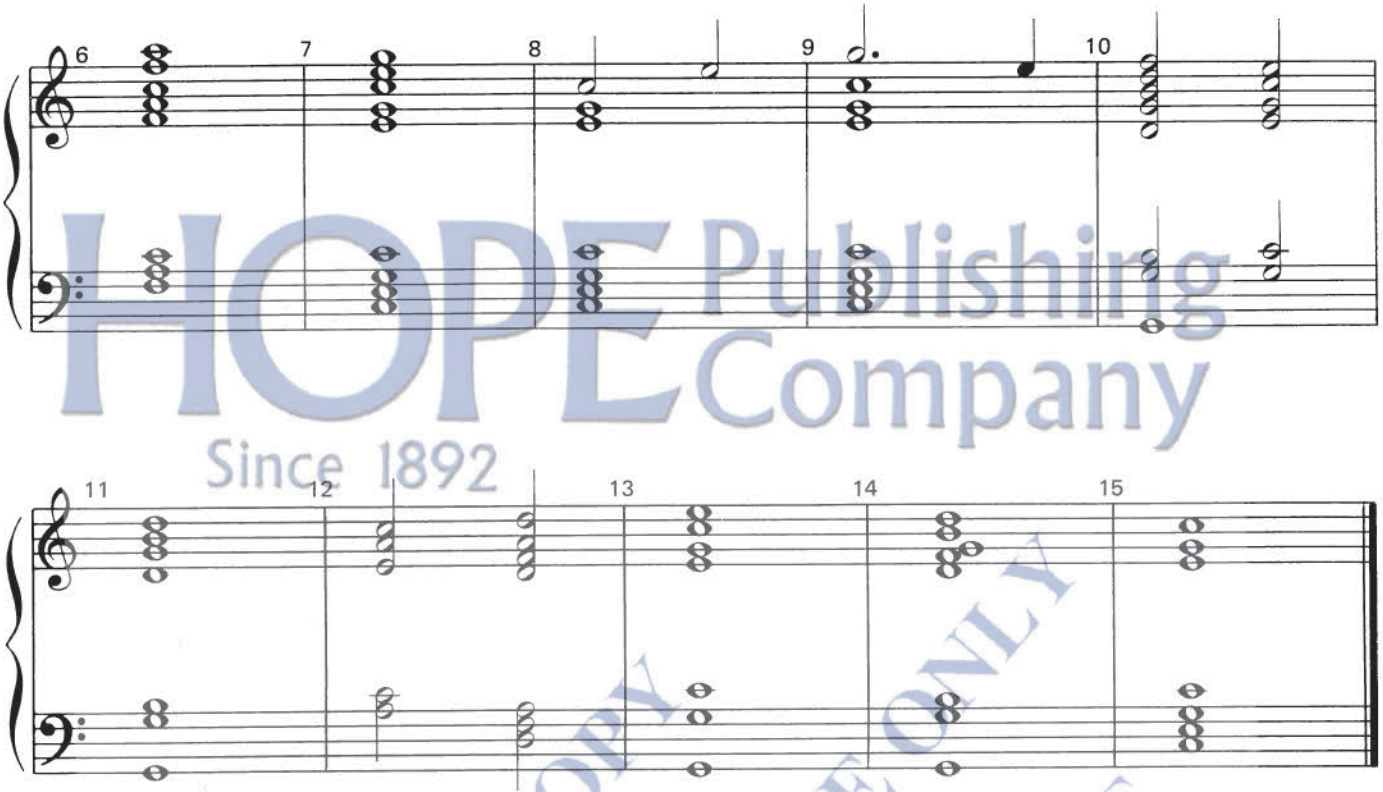

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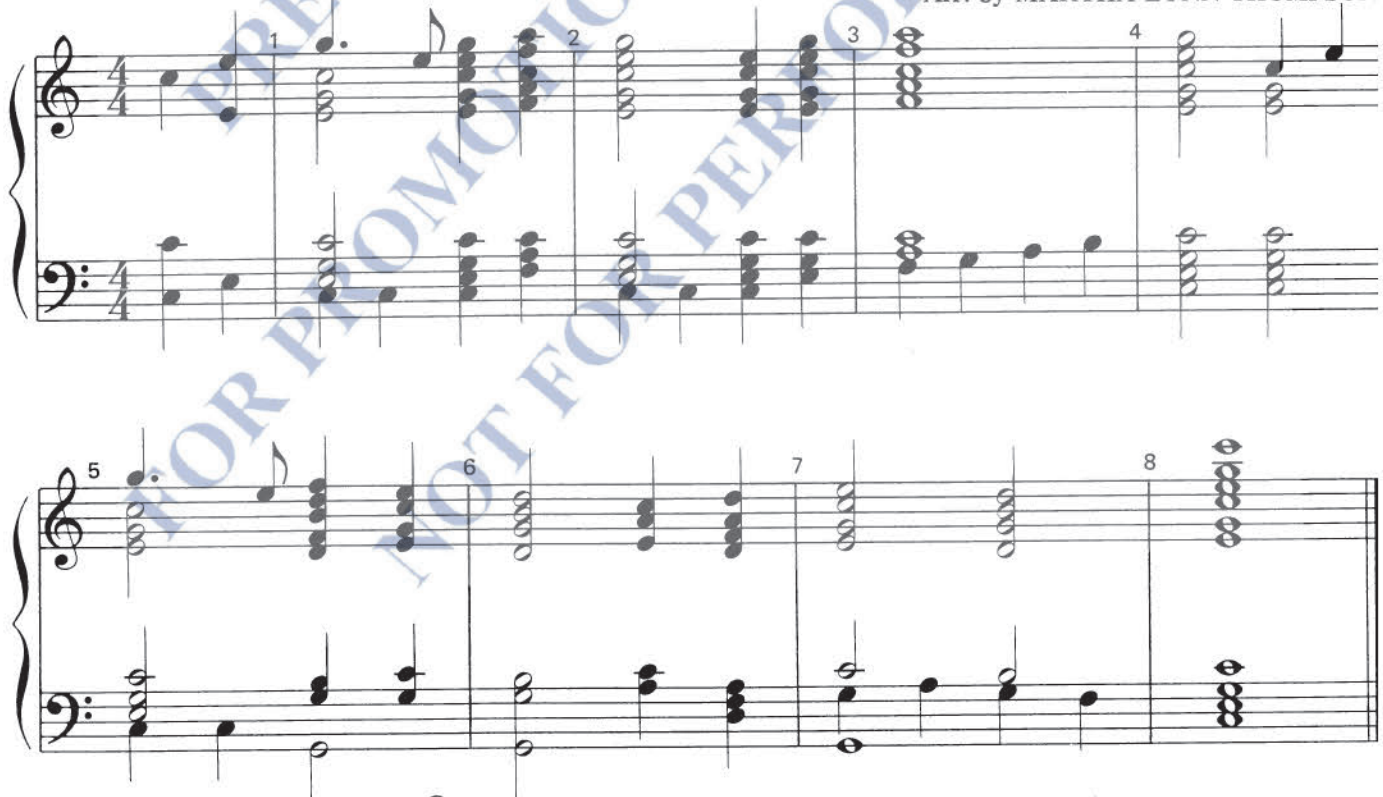
Michael Row the Boat Ashore - III

Slave Song
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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Faith of Our Fathers

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 24-26 bells

HENRI F. HEMY
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN

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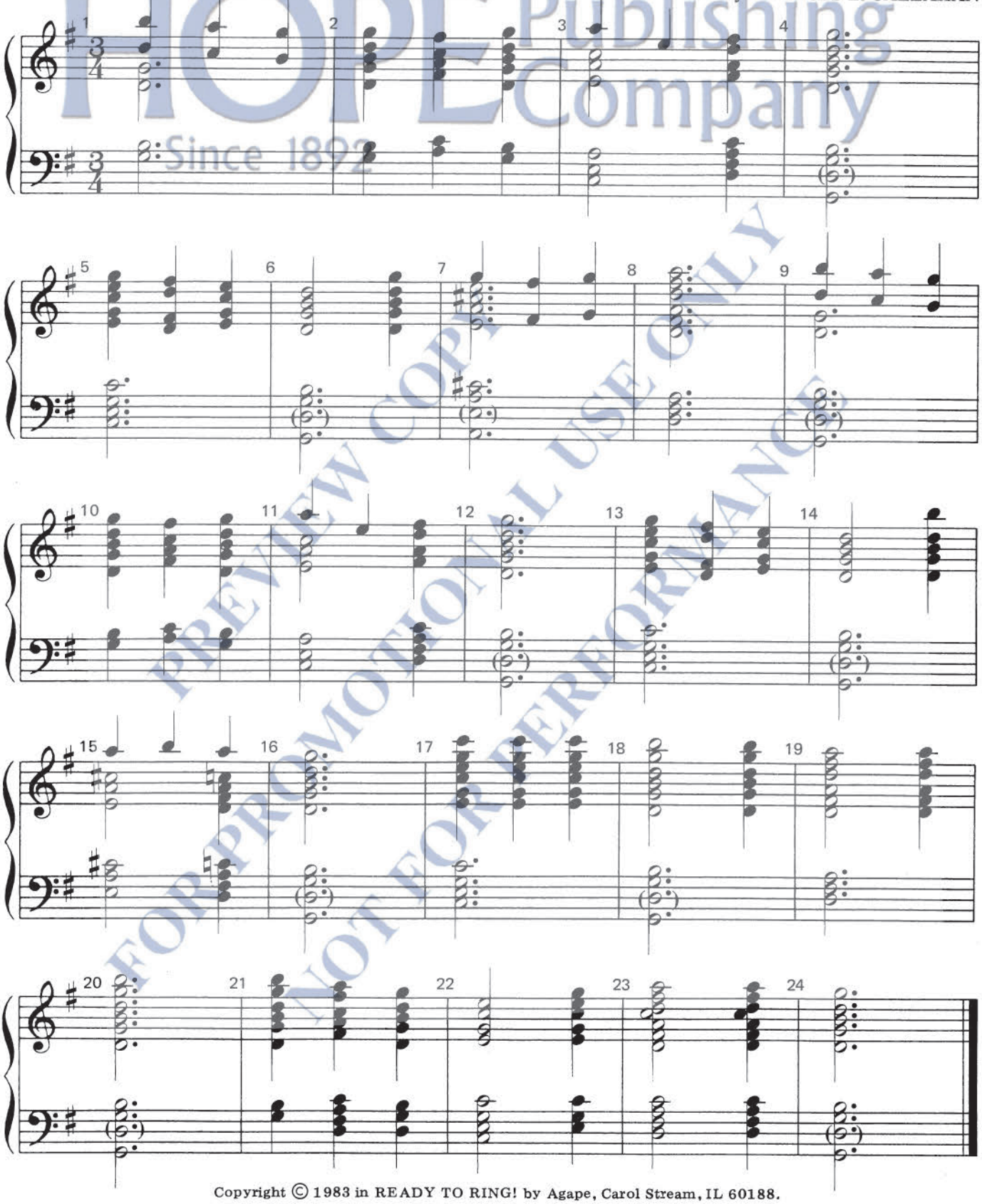

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There's a Song in the Air - II

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 29 bells

KARL P. HARRINGTON
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN

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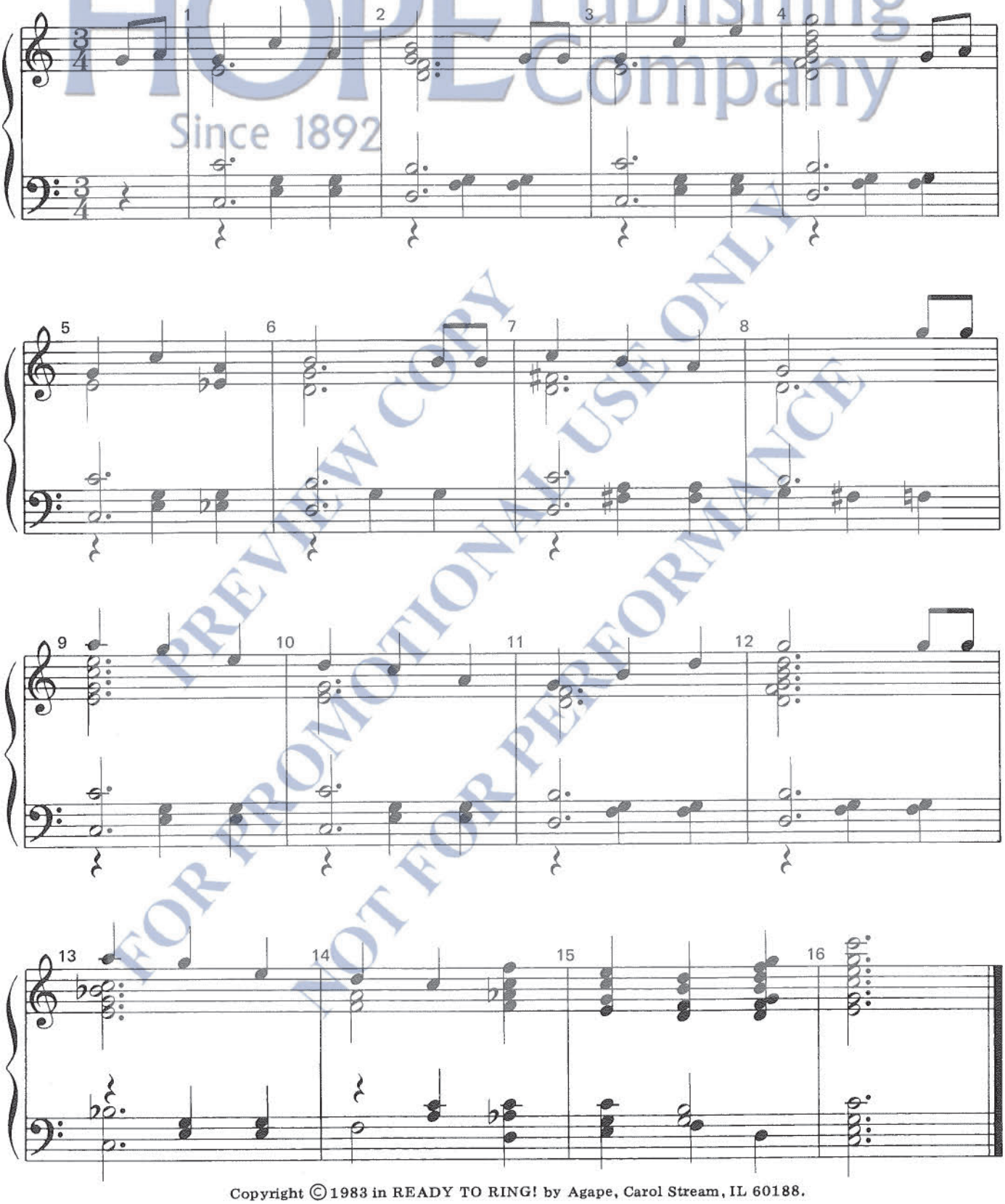

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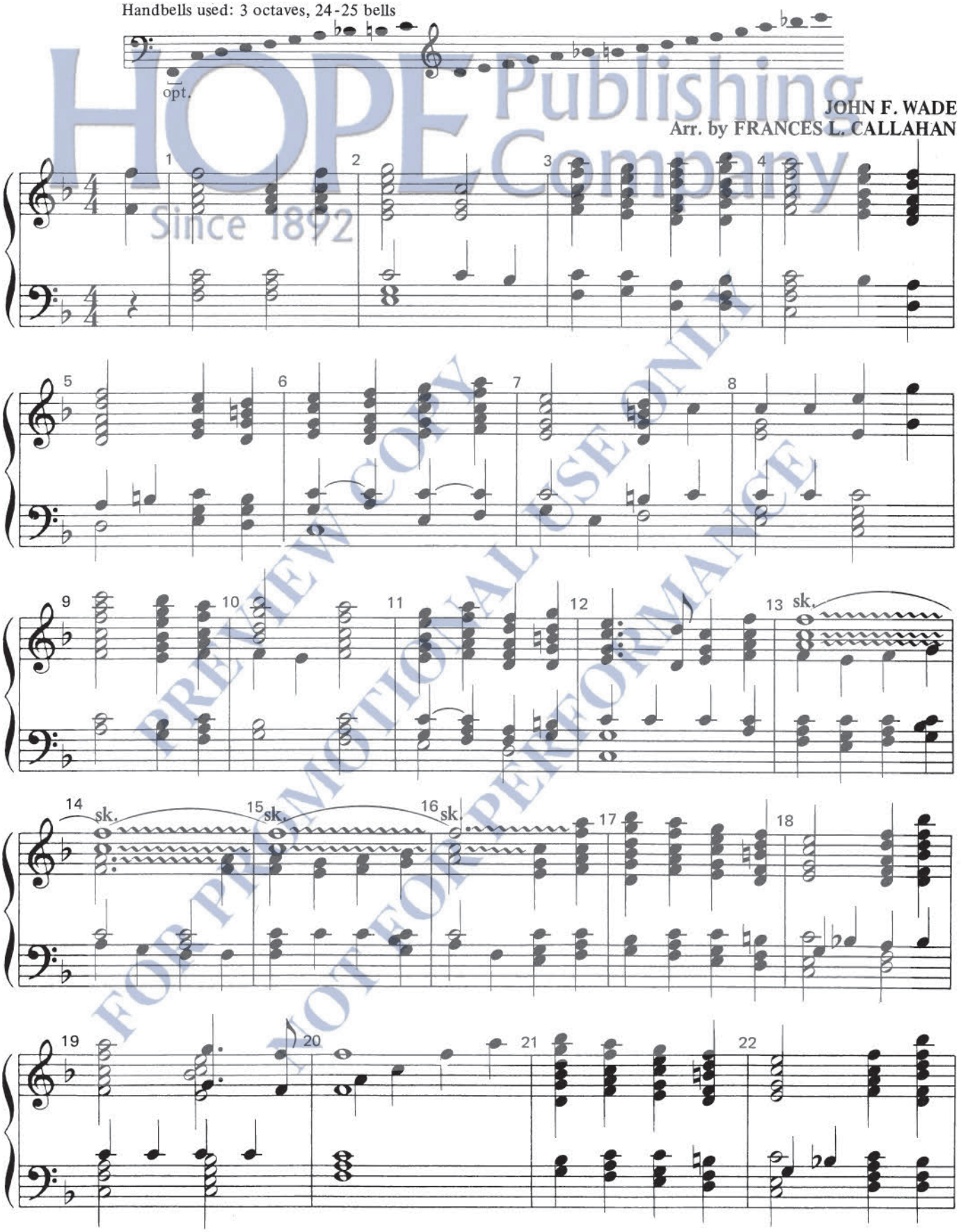
O Come, All Ye Faithful

(Adeste Fideles)

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 24-25 bells



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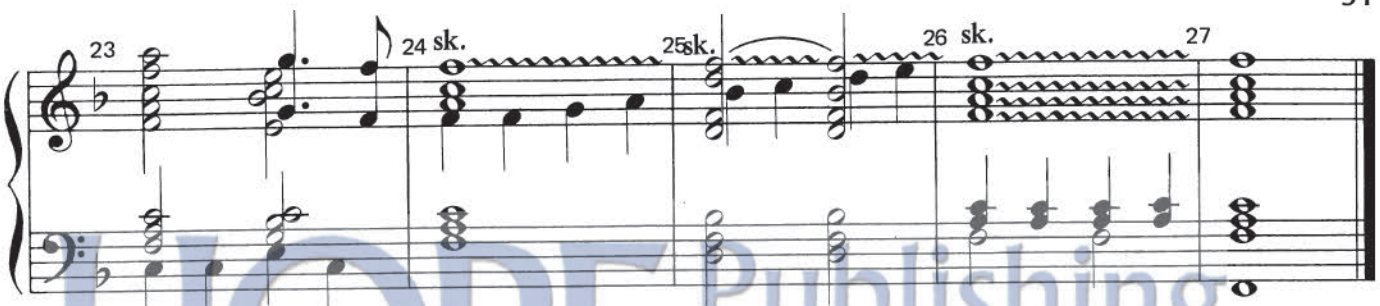

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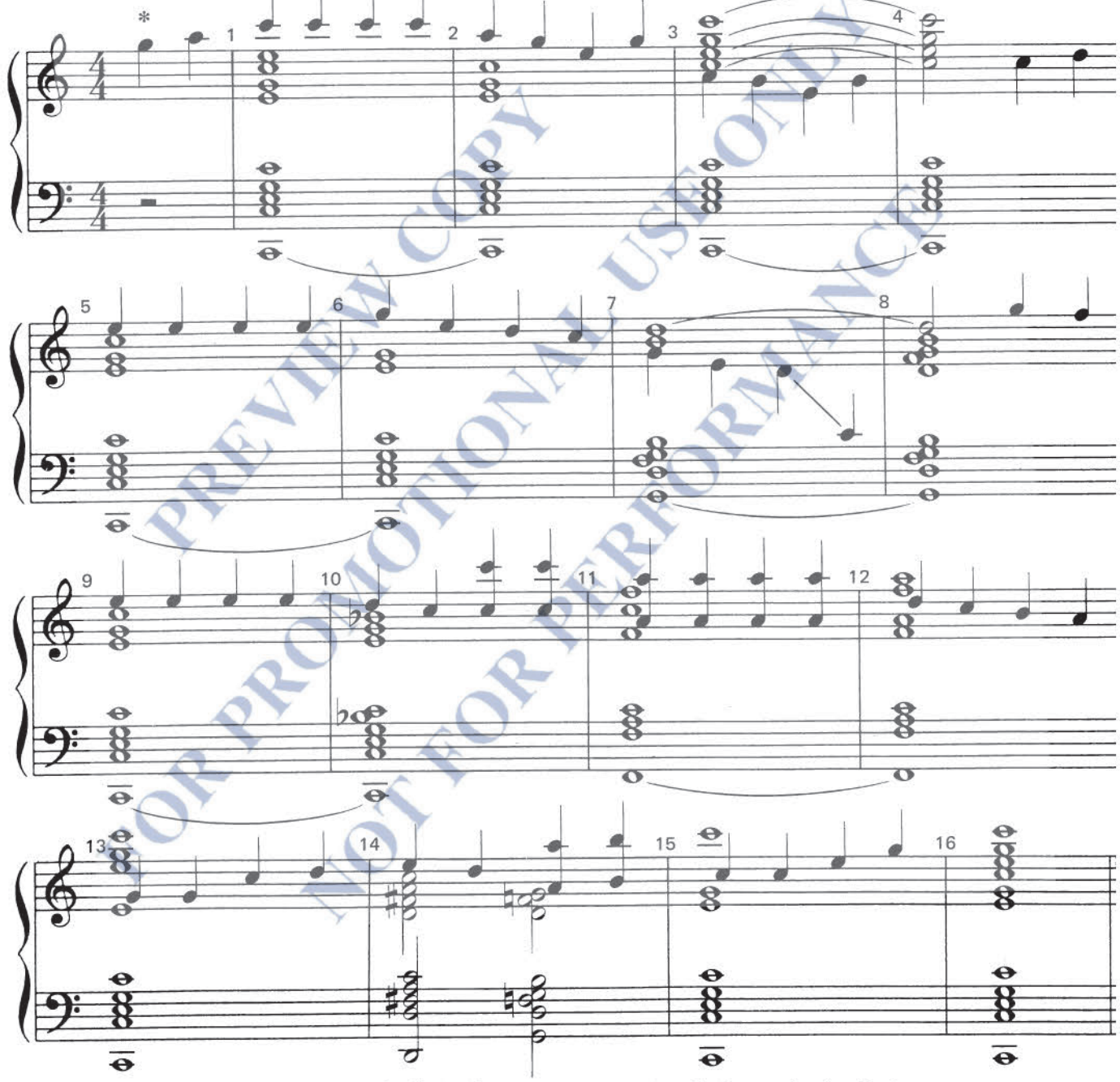
She'll Be Comin' 'Round the Mountain

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 25-29 bells

American Folk Song
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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*In this piece, bells may be rung or plucked. If 5 octaves are used, melody may be doubled.

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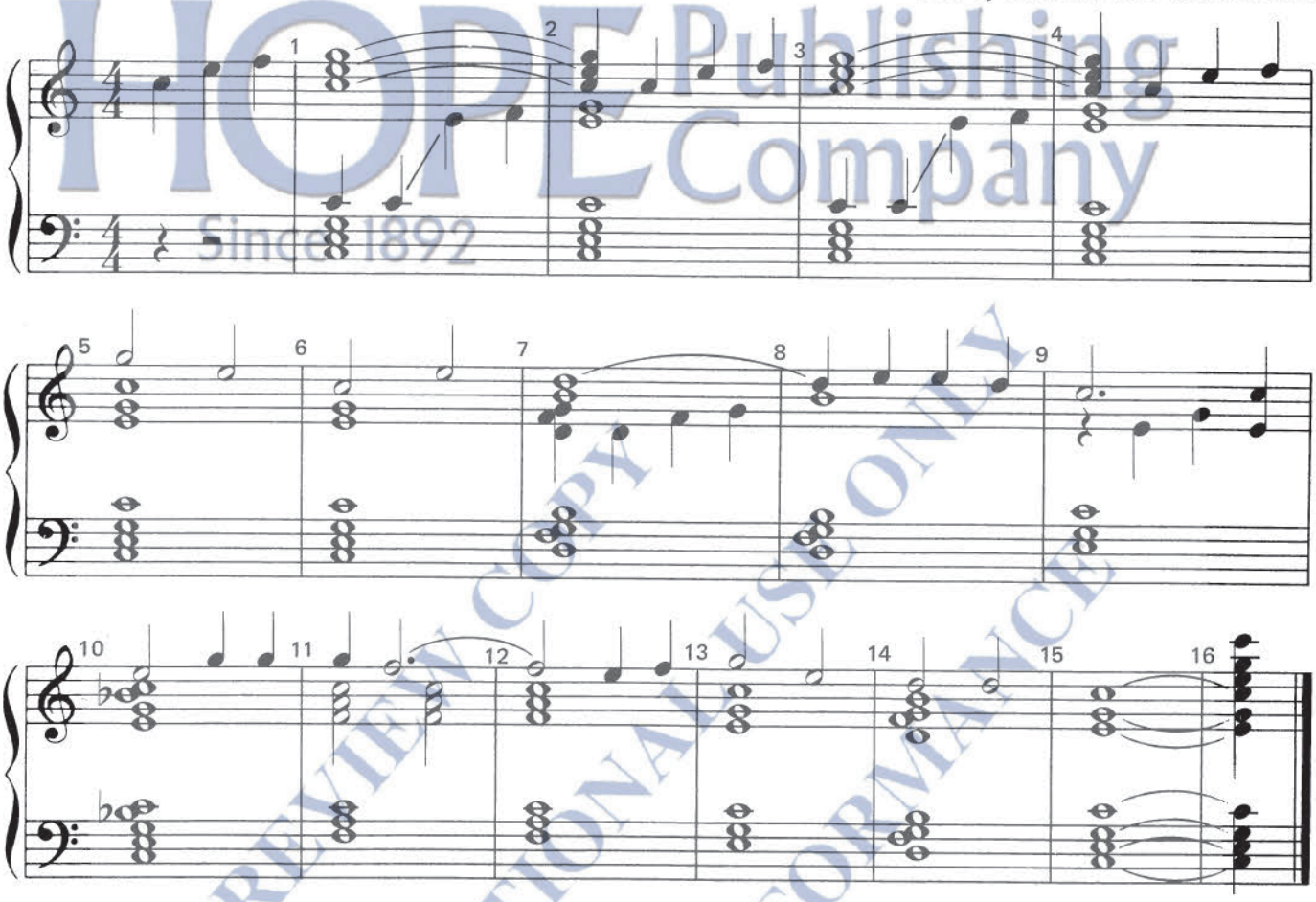
When the Saints Go Marching In

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 22 bells

Negro Spiritual
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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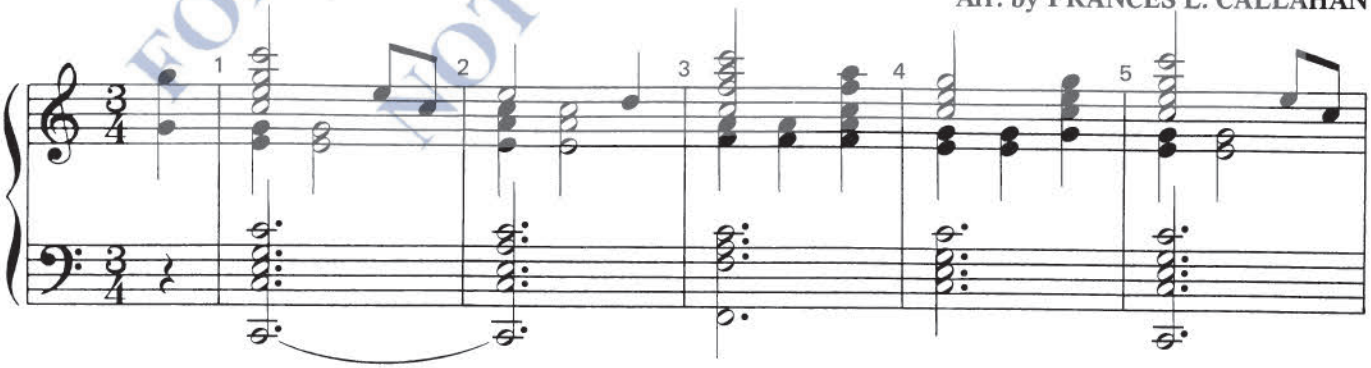
Amazing Grace

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 21-24 bells

Early American Melody
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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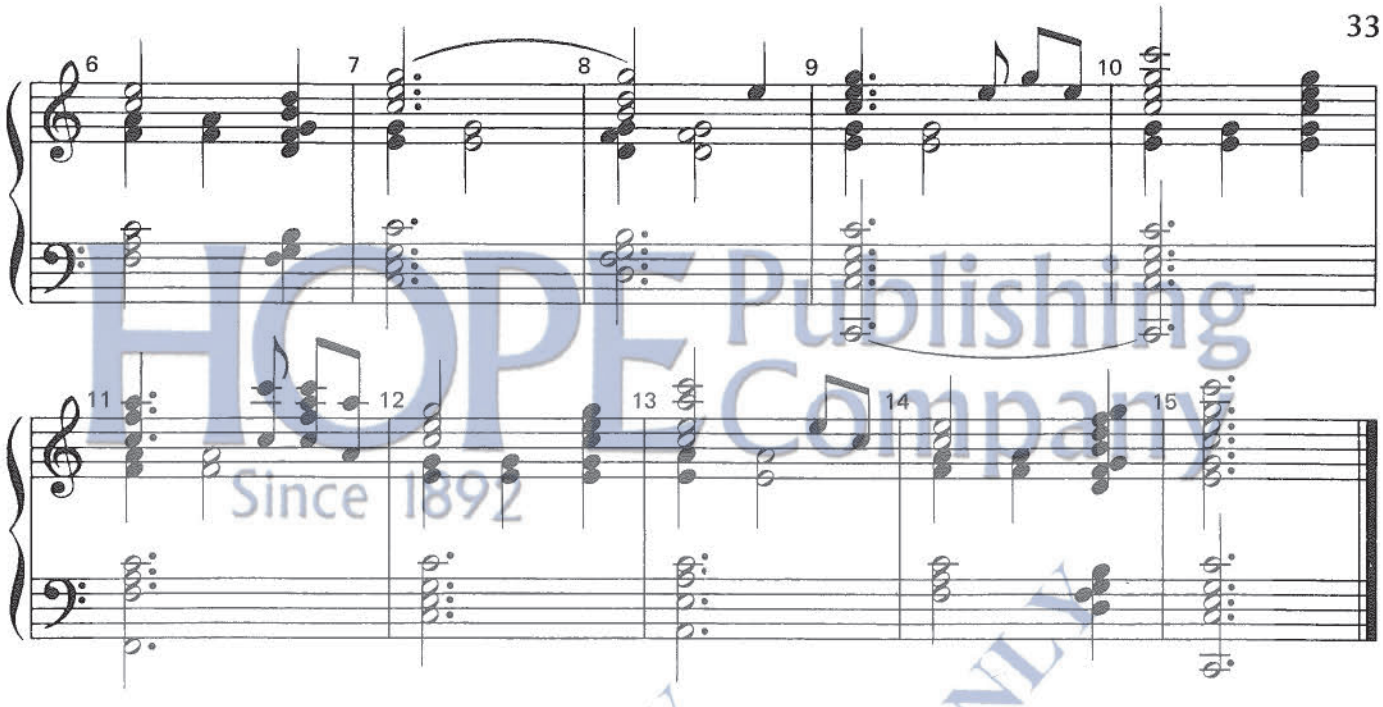

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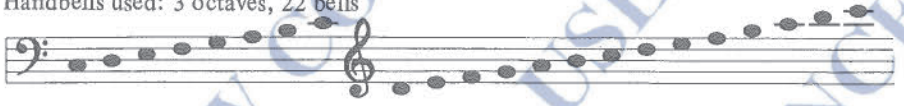
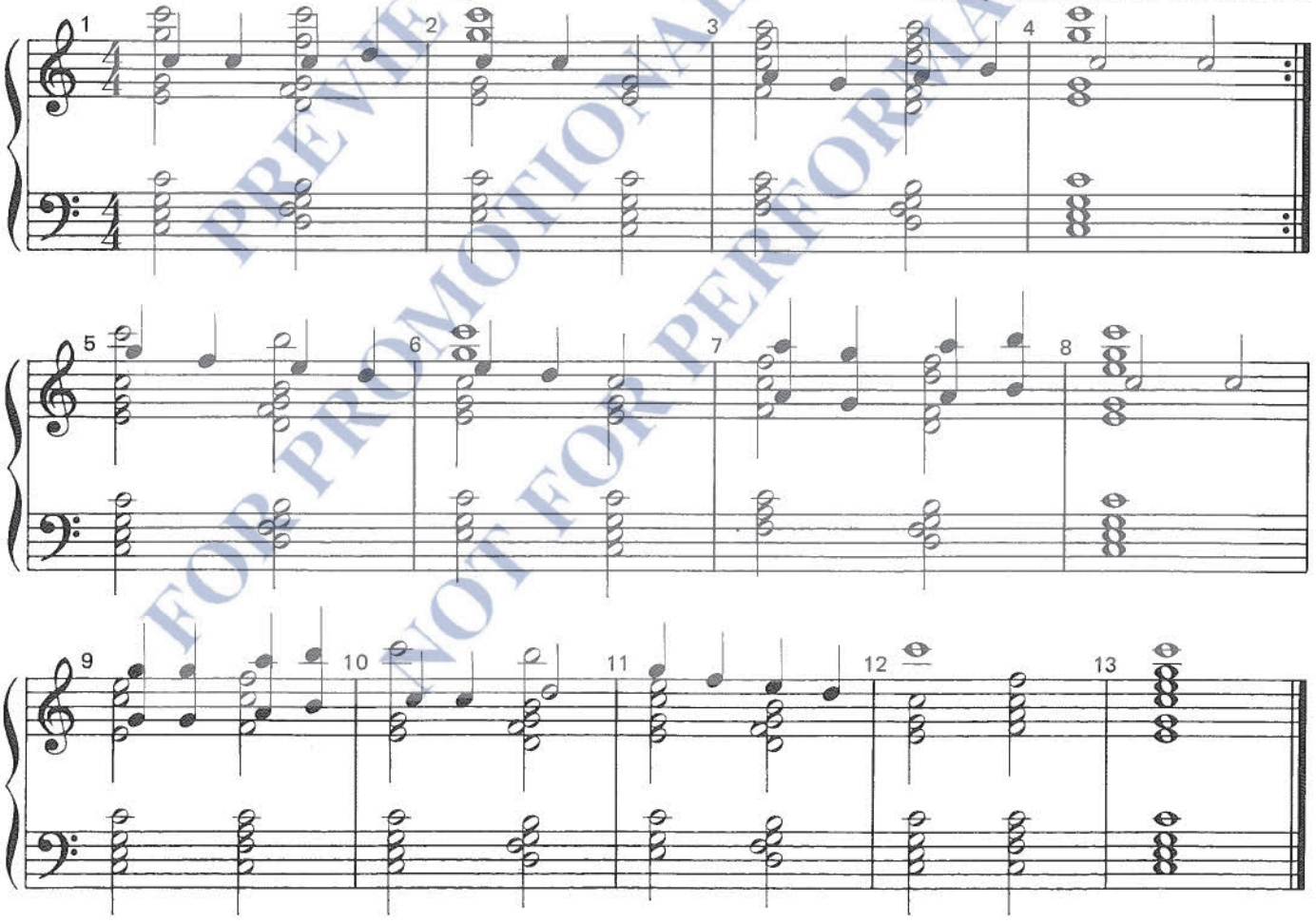
Good King Wenceslas

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 22 bells



Piae Cantiones
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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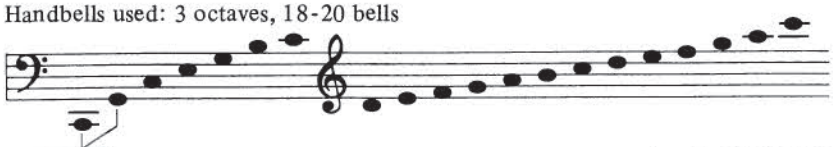
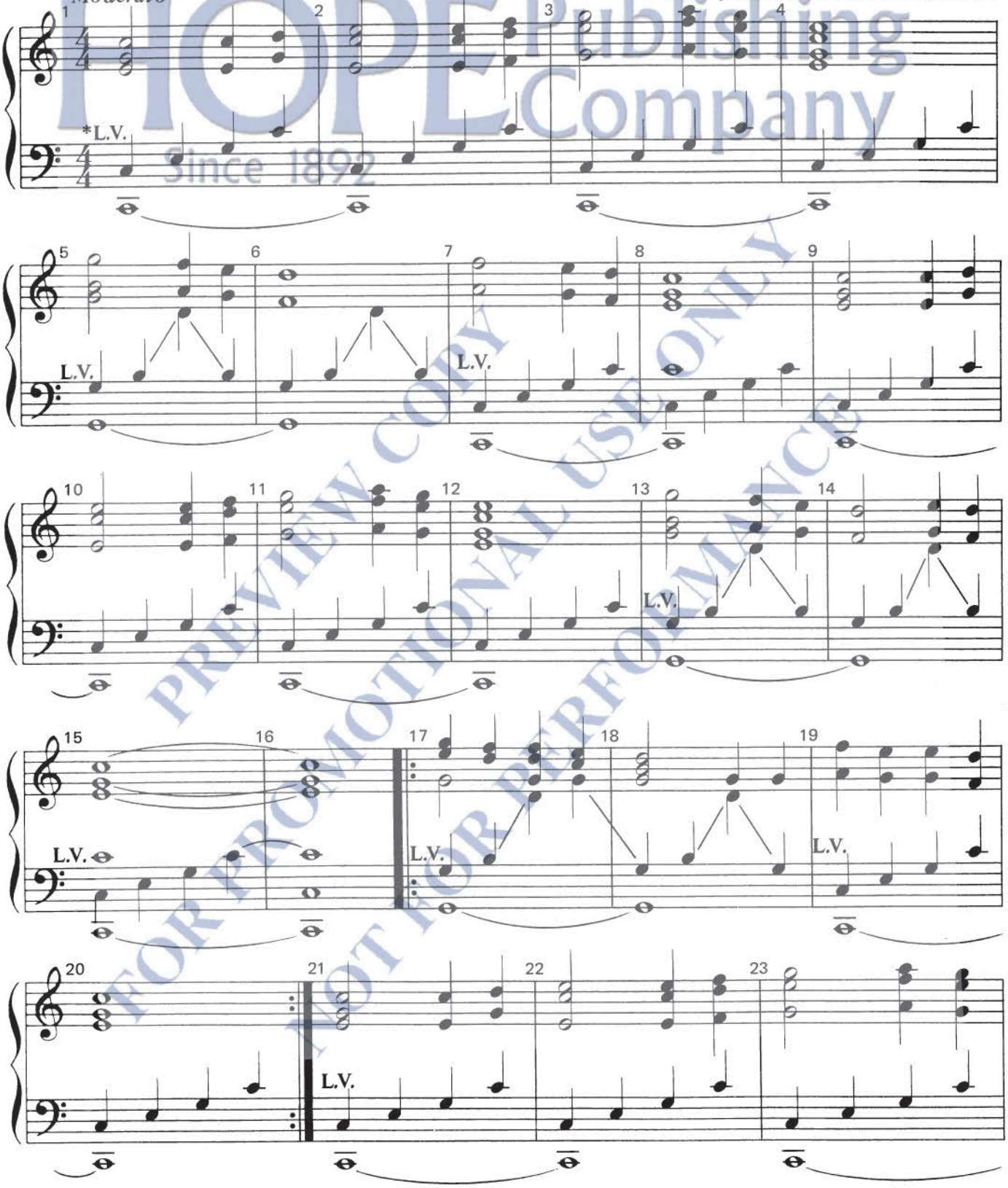
Long, Long Ago

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 18-20 bells



T. H. BAYLY
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON

Moderato



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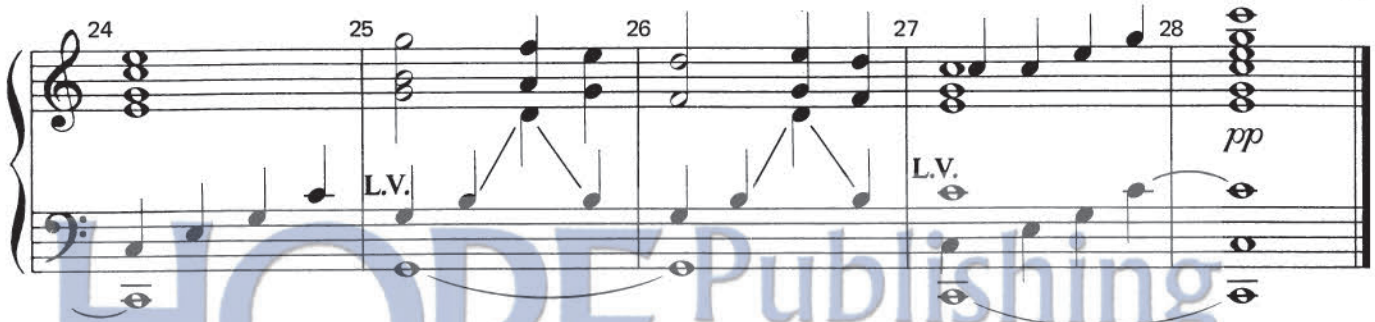

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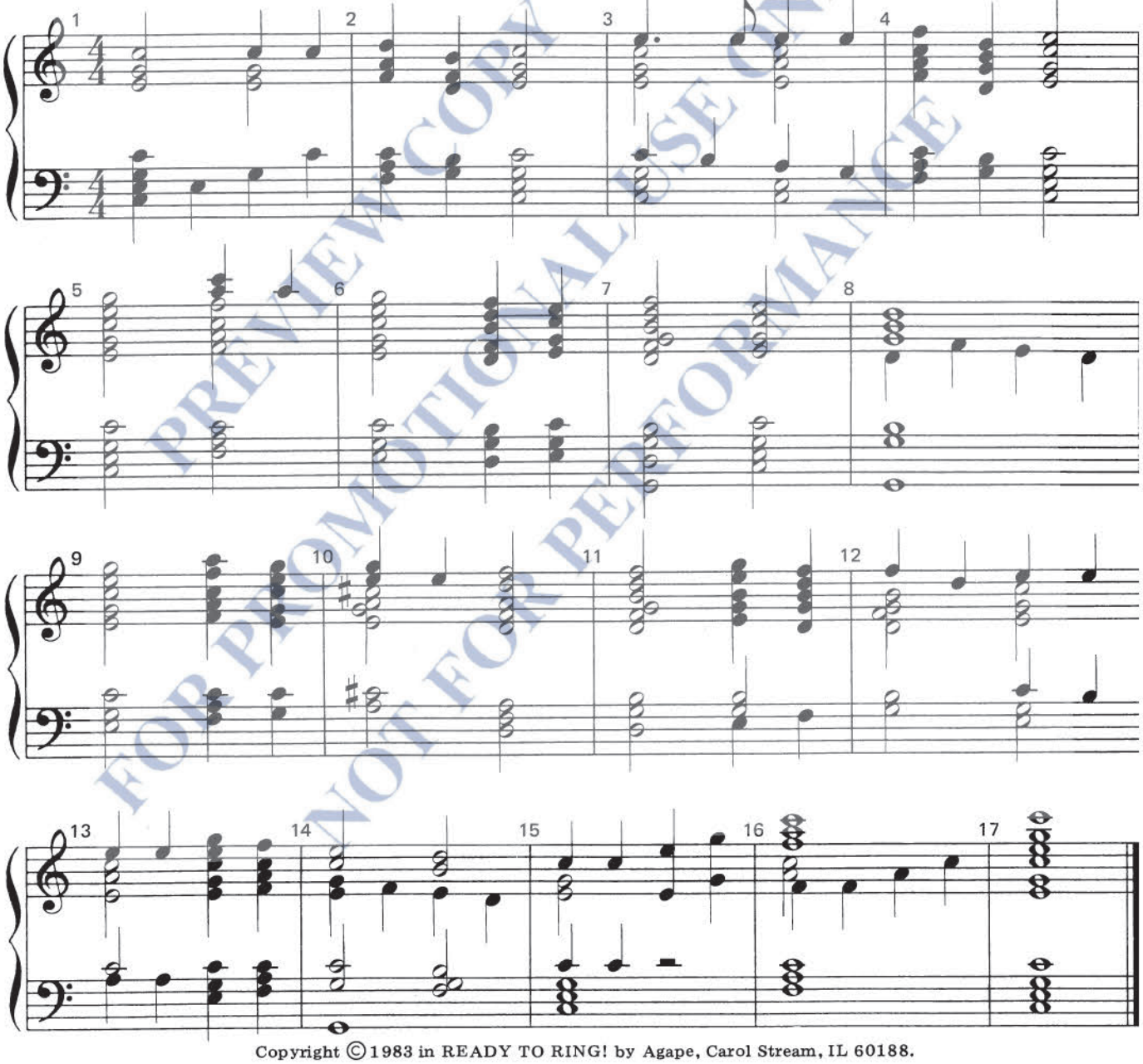
Fairest Lord Jesus

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 23-24 bells

Silesian **Folk Tune**
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN



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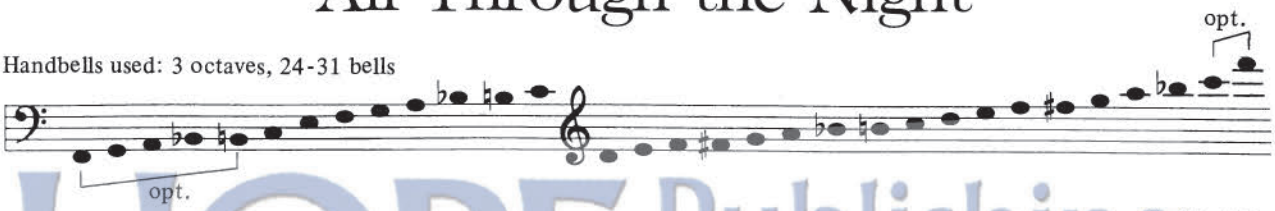
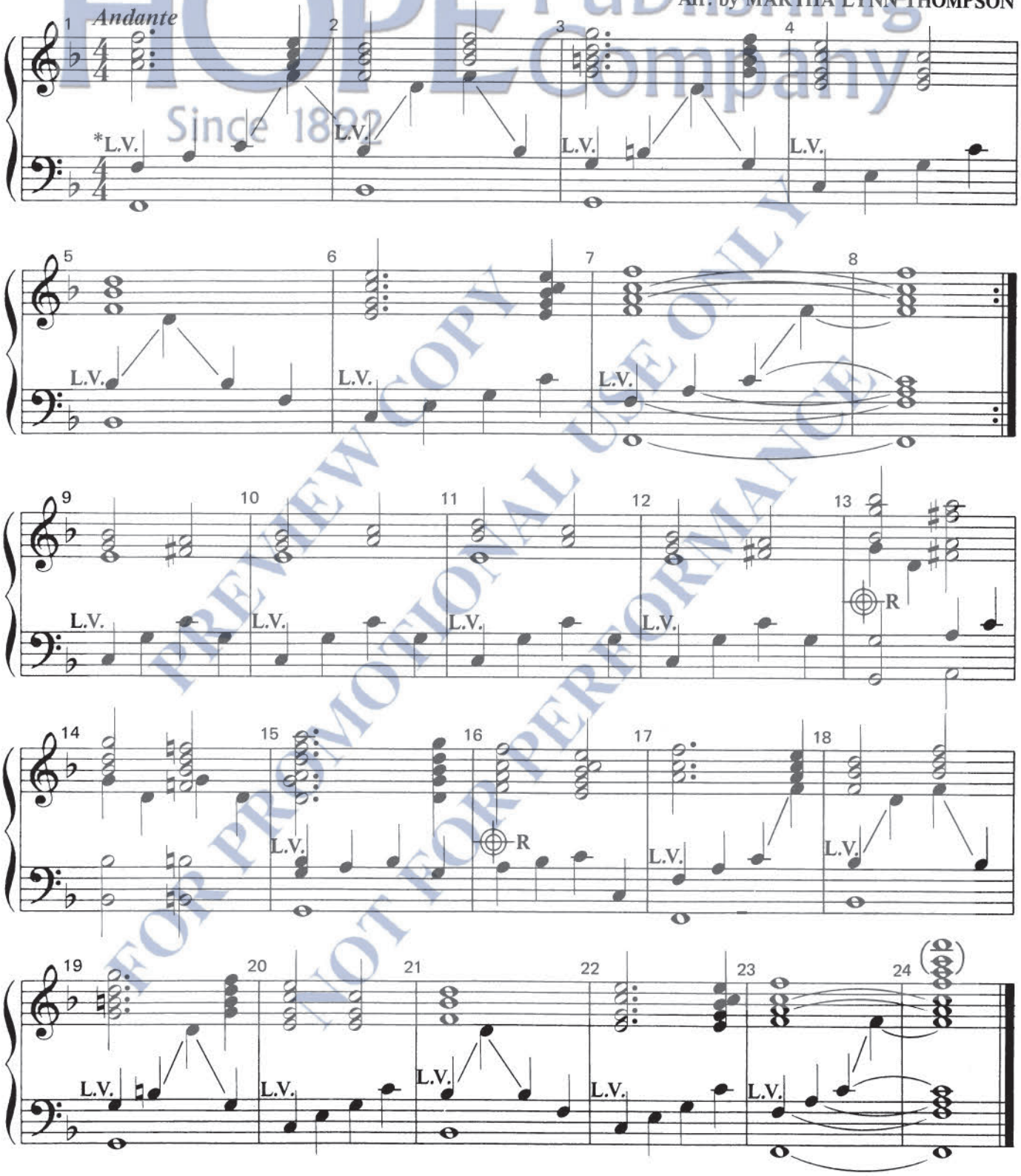
All Through the Night

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 24-31 bells



Welsh Melody
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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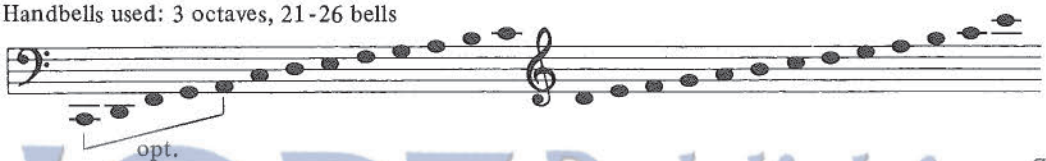
Simple Gifts

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 21-26 bells



Shaker Hymn
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON

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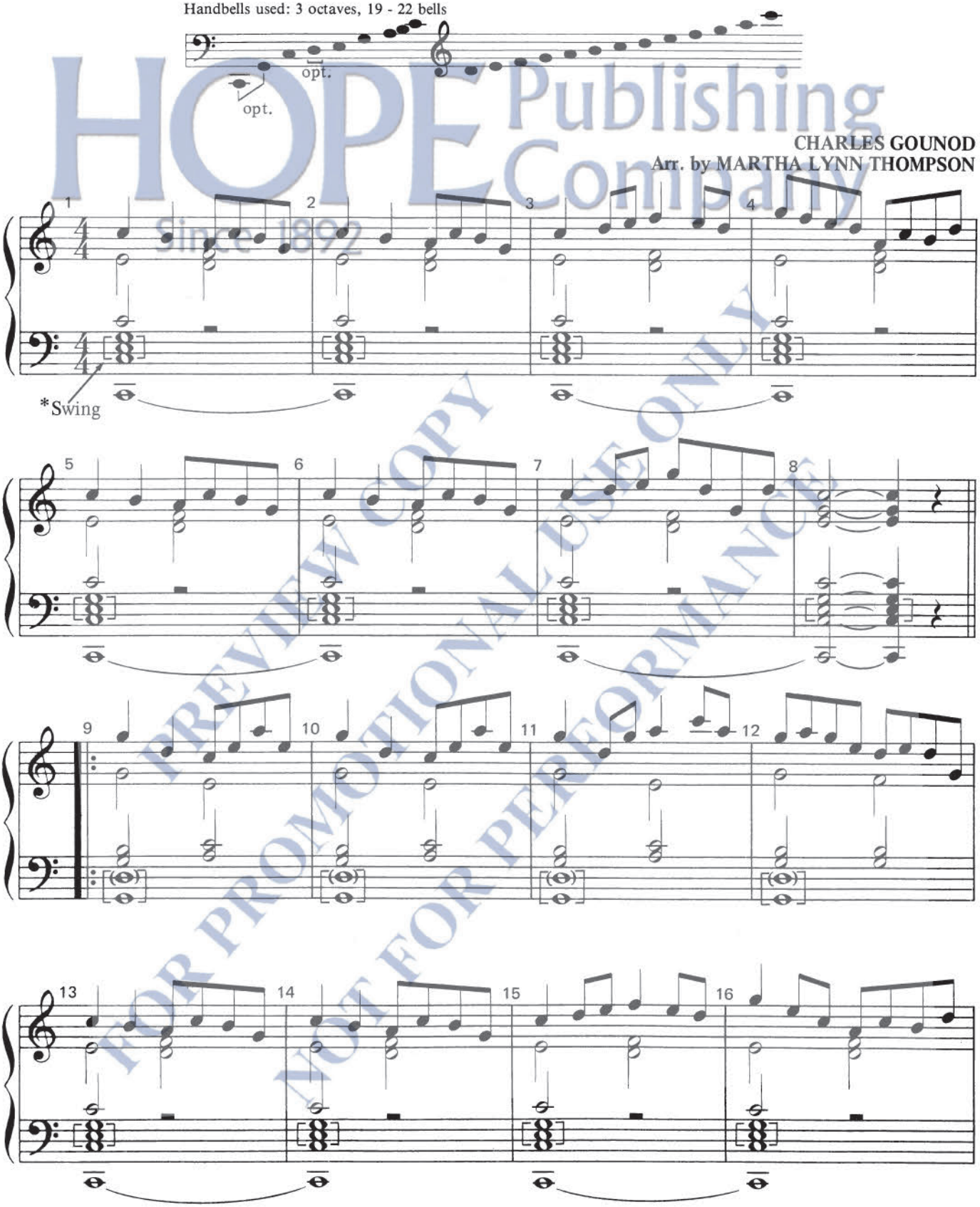
The Angelus - II

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 19 - 22 bells



CHARLES GOUNOD
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON

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*Swing bells in brackets throughout this selection.

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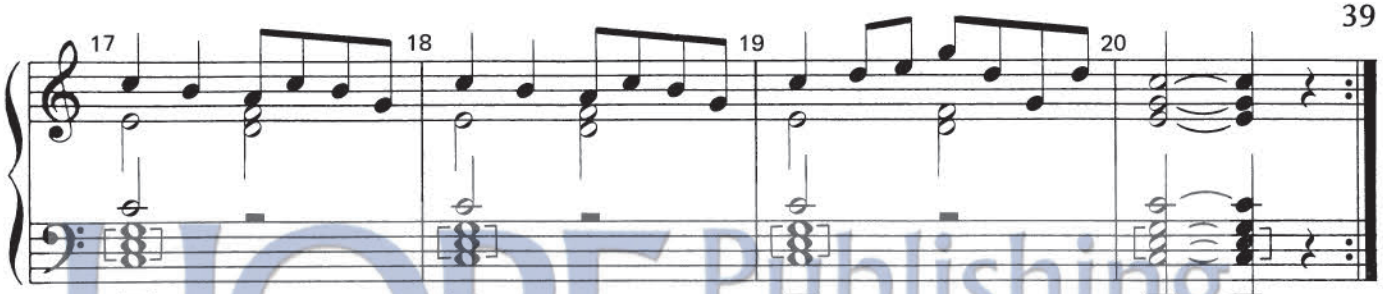

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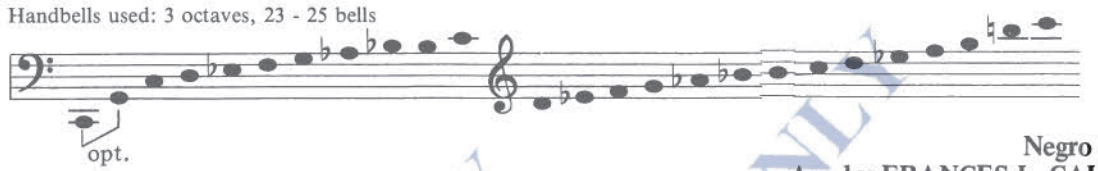
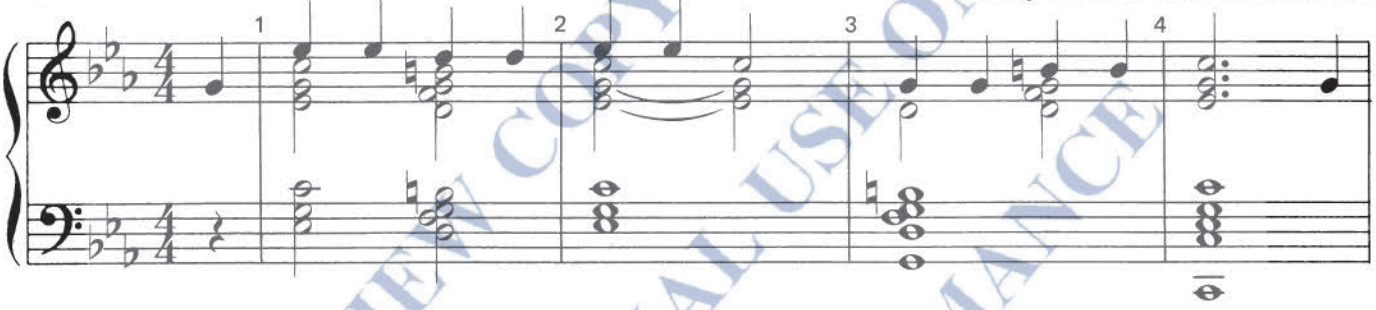
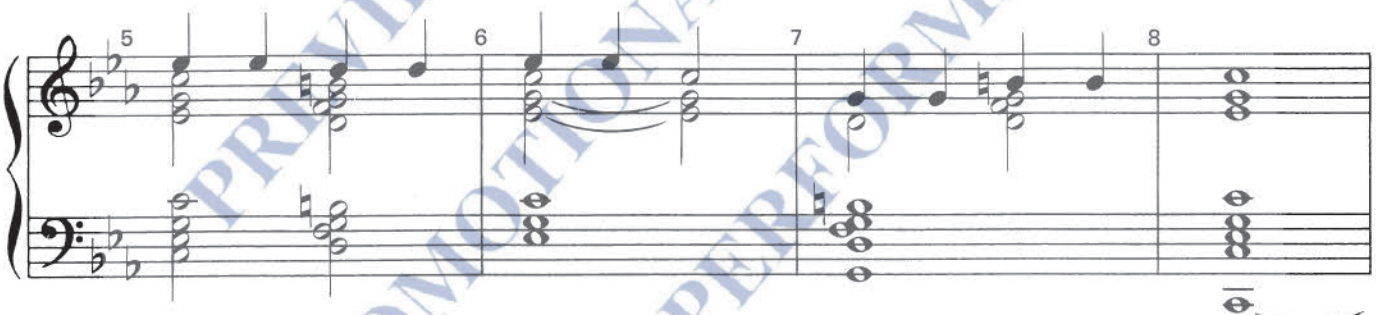
Go Down, Moses

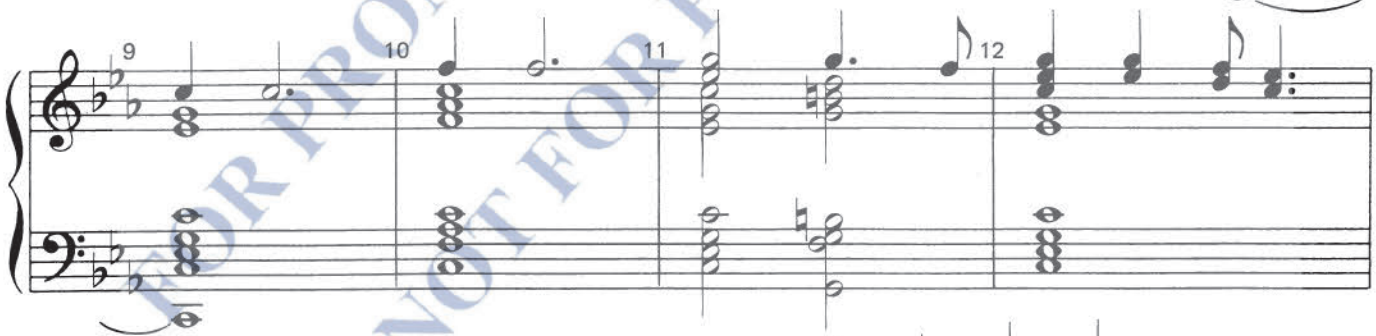
Handbells used: 3 octaves, 23 - 25 bells

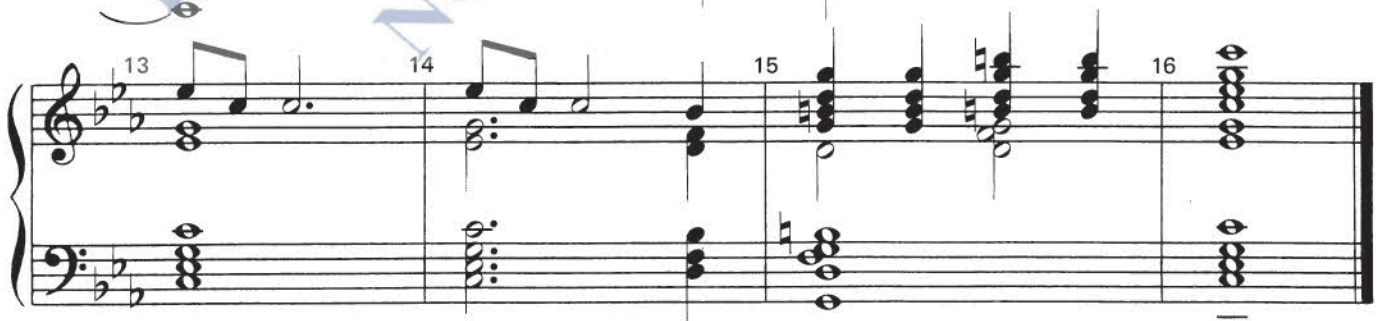


Negro Spiritual
Arr. by FRANCES L. CALLAHAN









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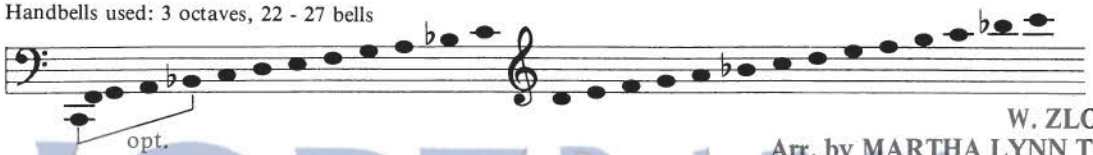
Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 22 - 27 bells



W. ZLOBIE LEZY
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON

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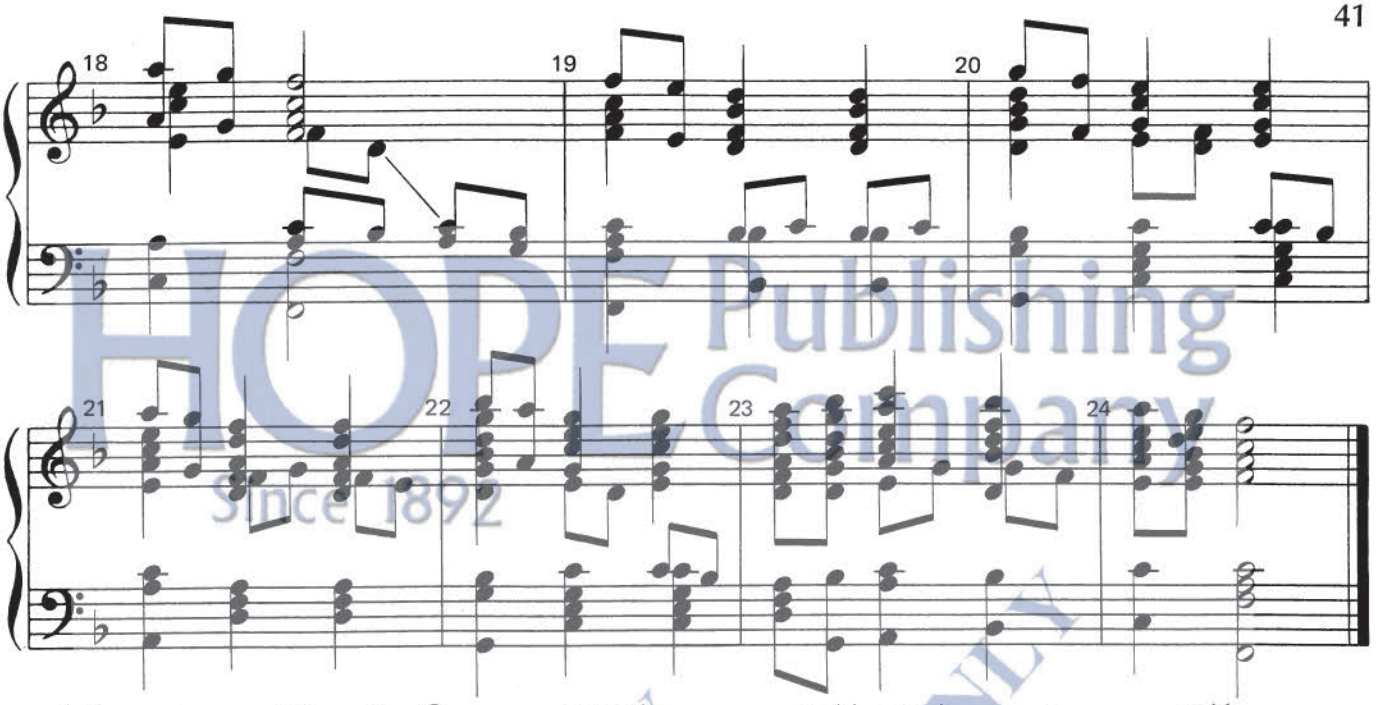
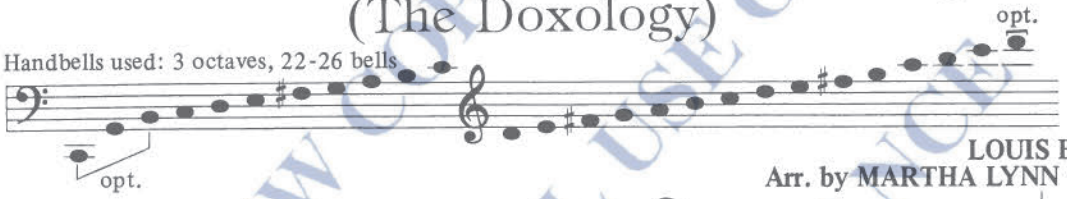


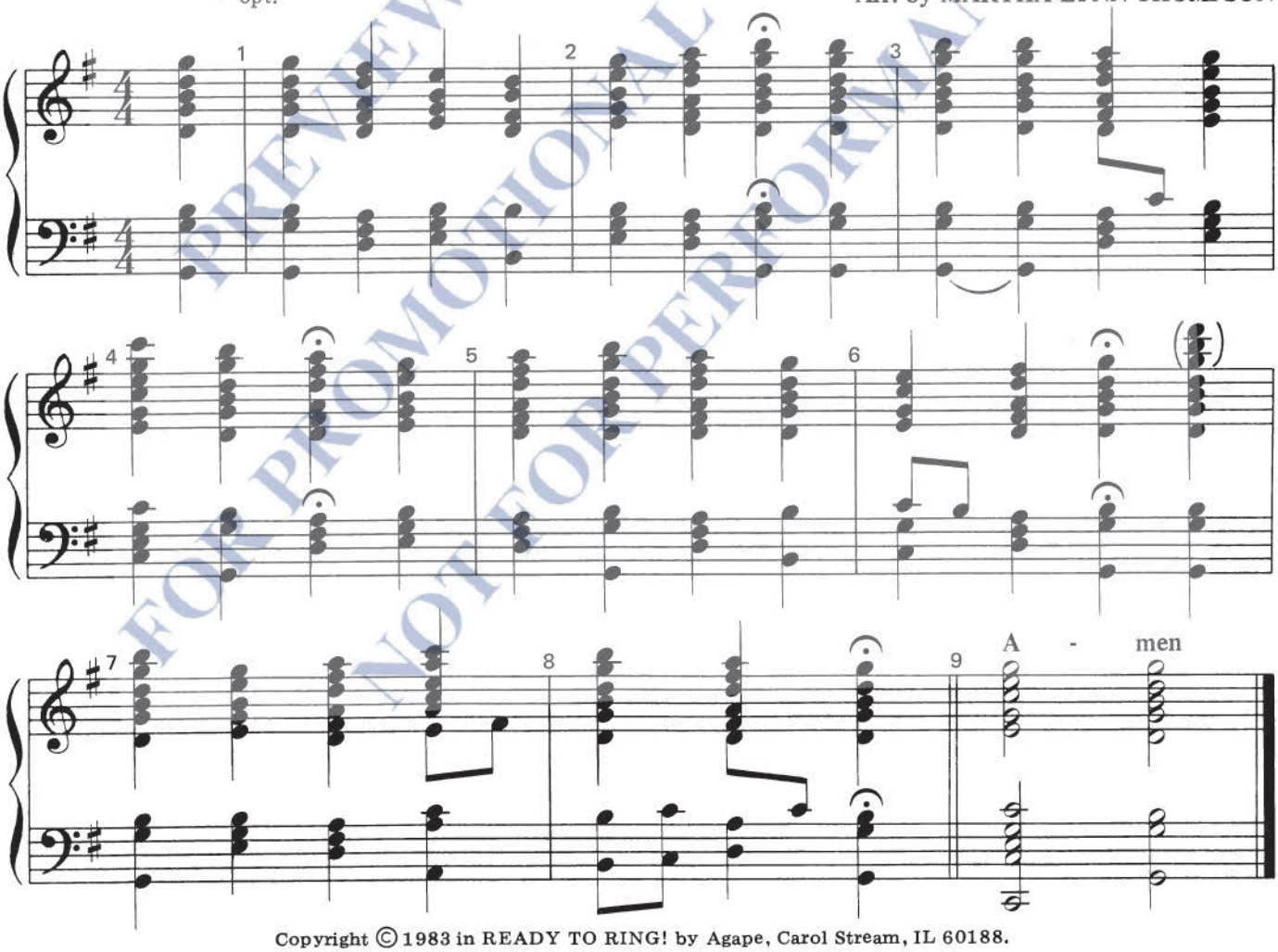
Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

(The Doxology)

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 22-26 bells



LOUIS BOURGEOIS
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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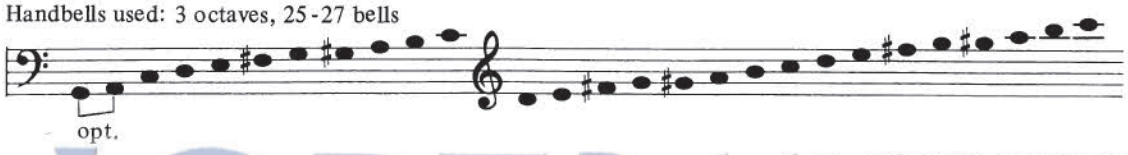
O Tannenbaum

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 25-27 bells



German
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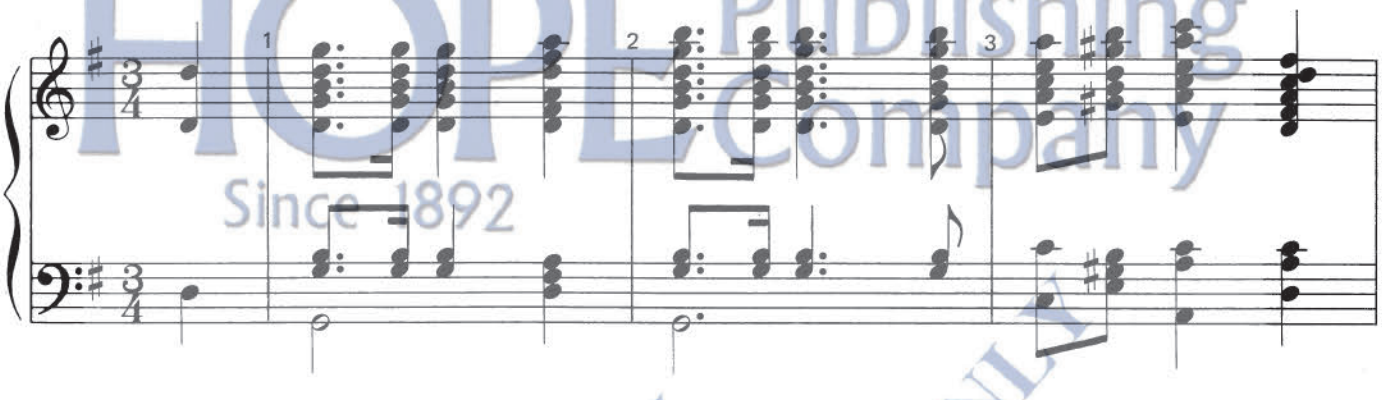

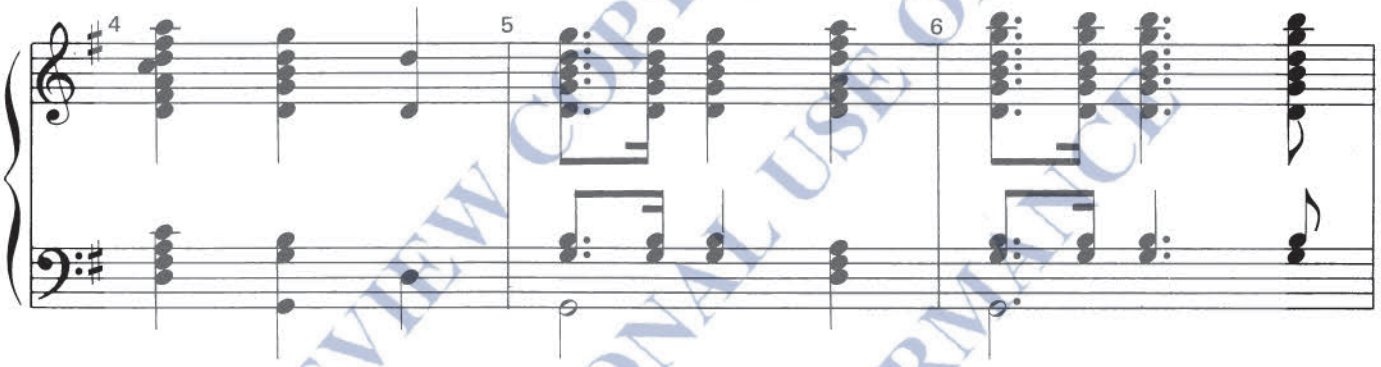

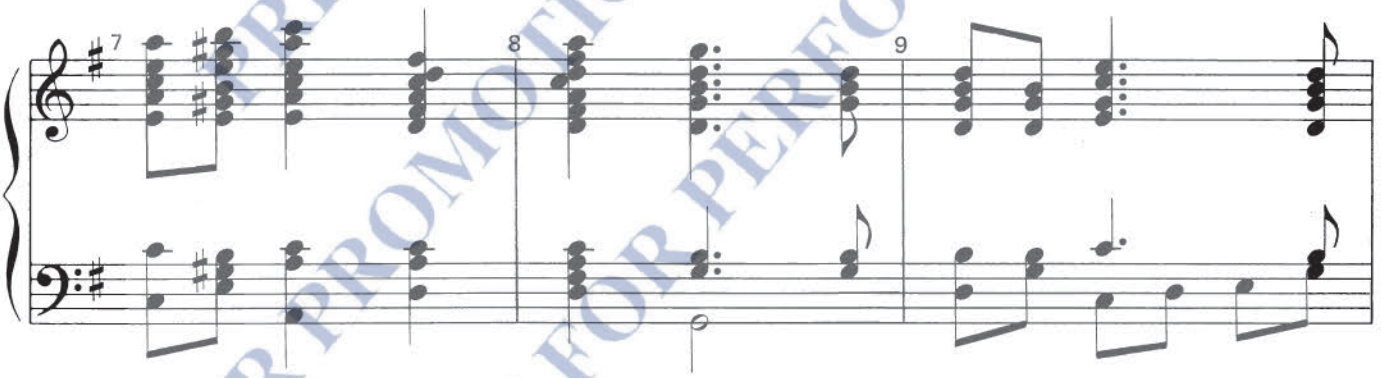

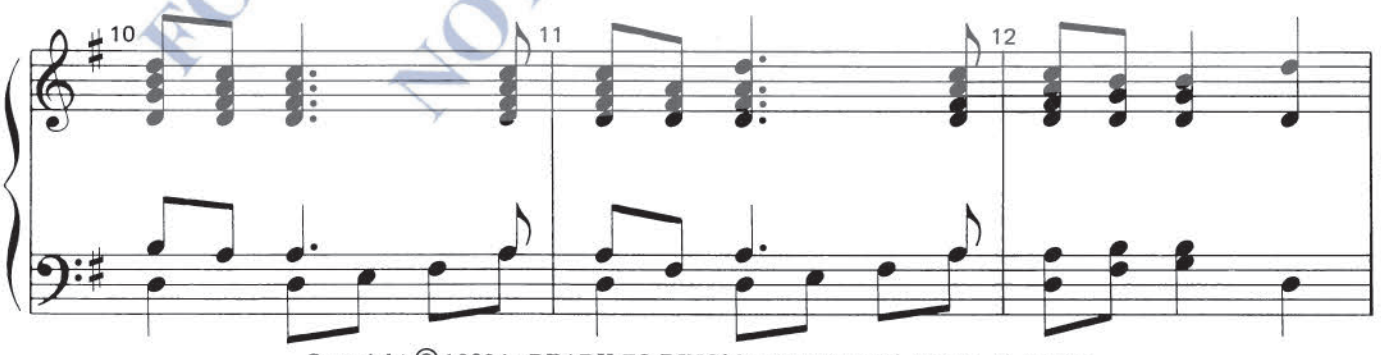

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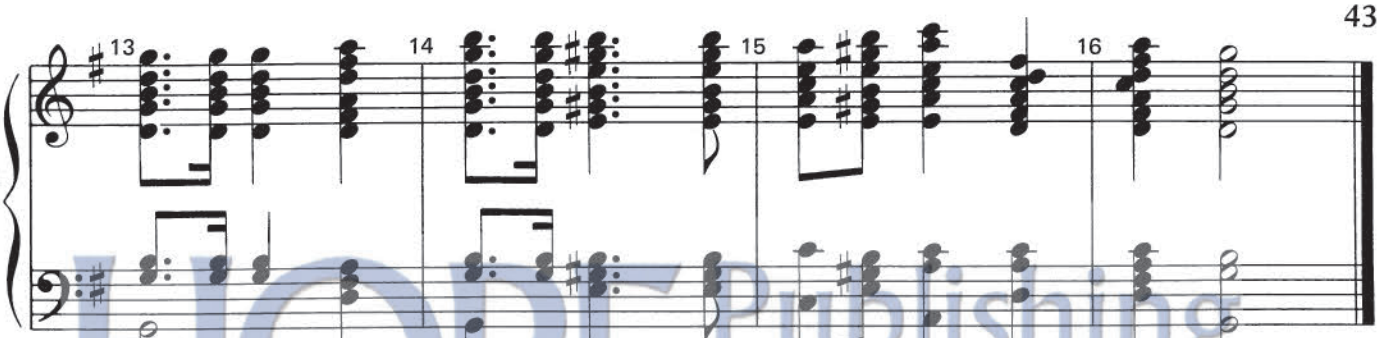

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My Country, 'Tis of Thee

(America)

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 22-26 bells

Anonymous
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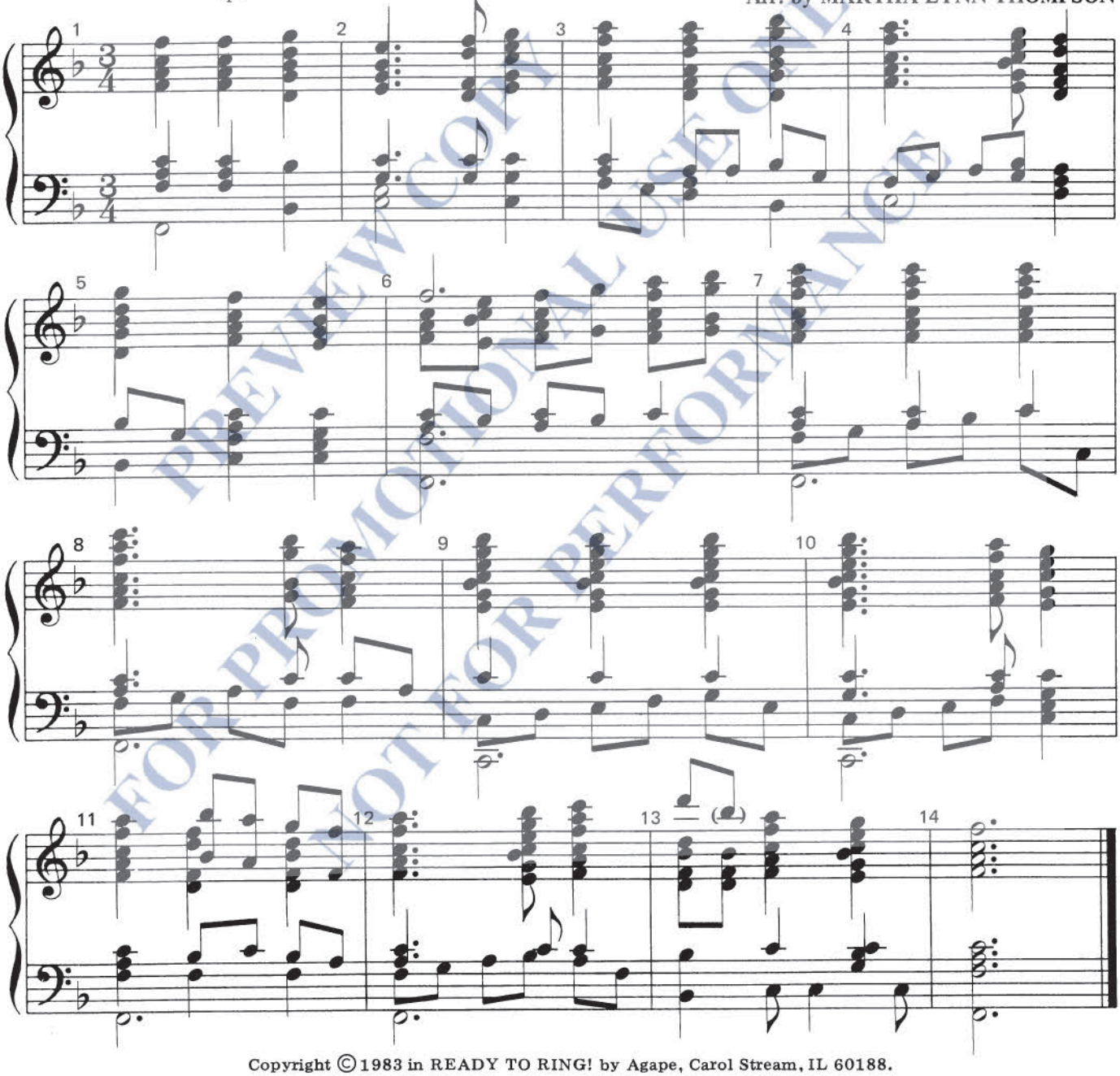

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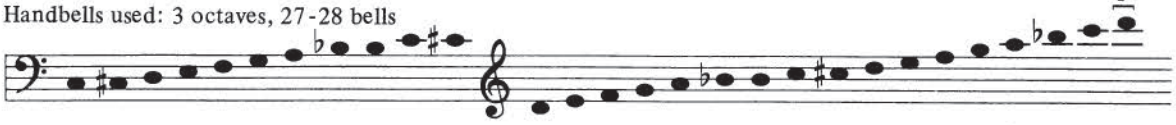
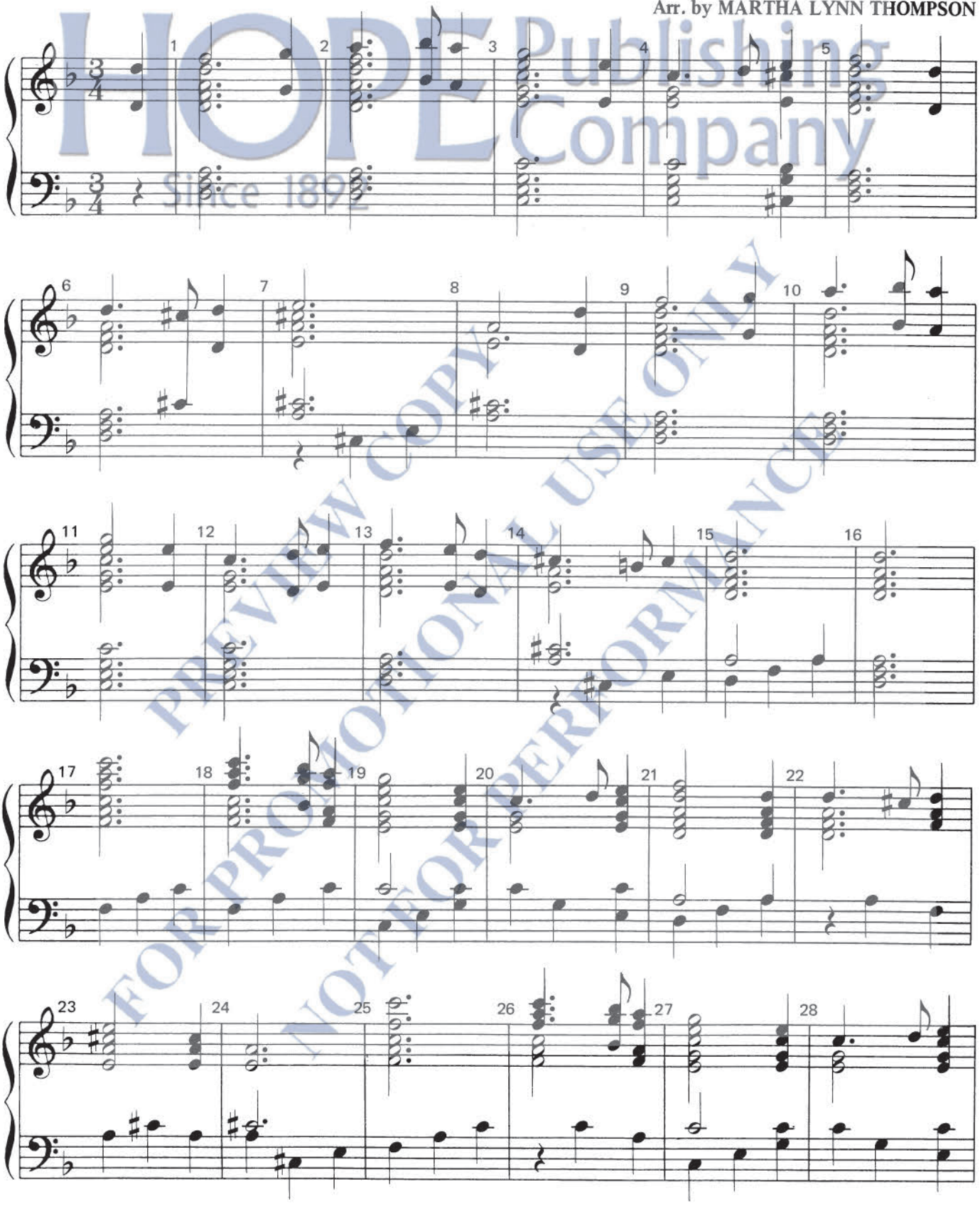
What Child Is This?

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 27-28 bells

opt.



16th Century English
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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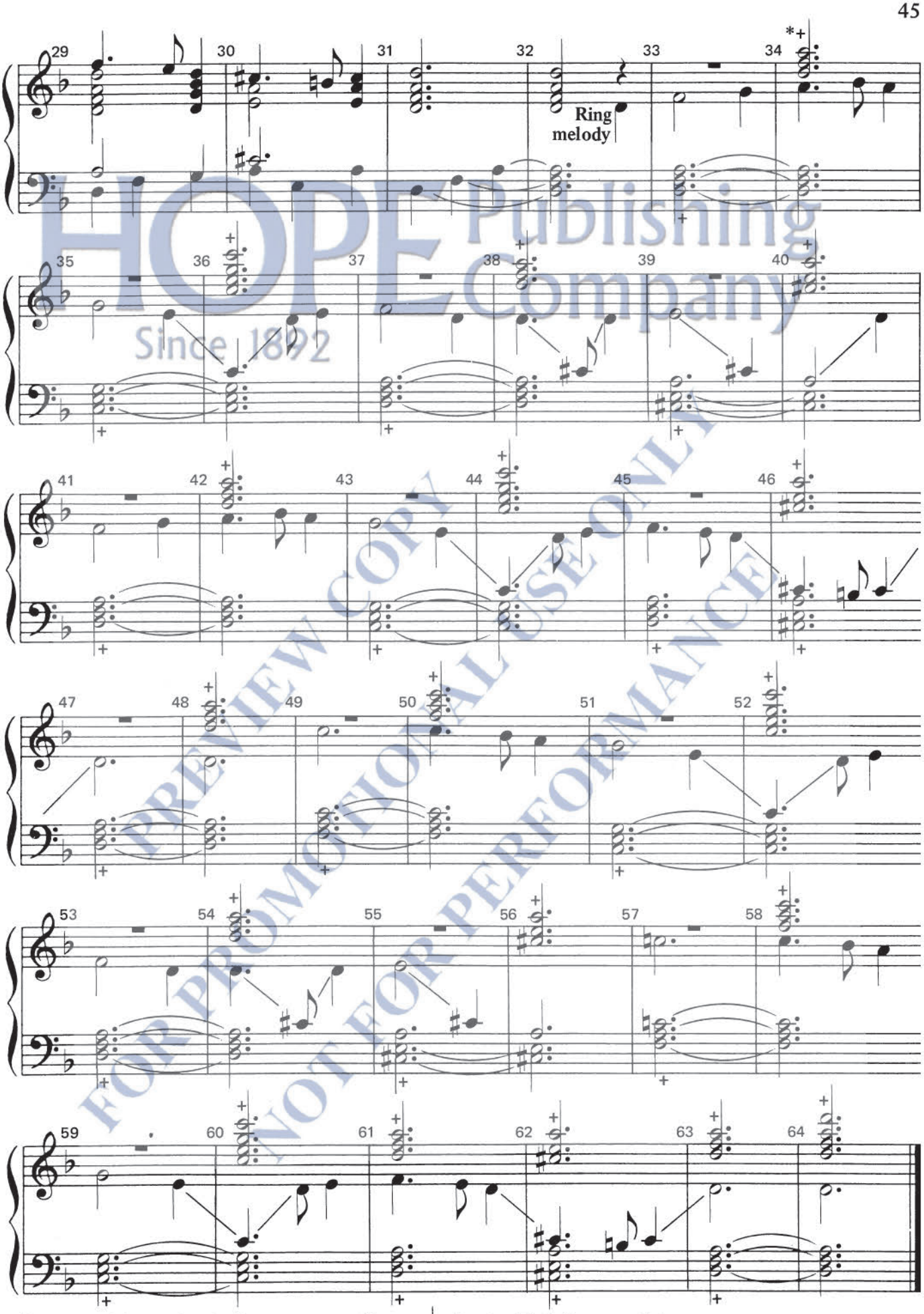

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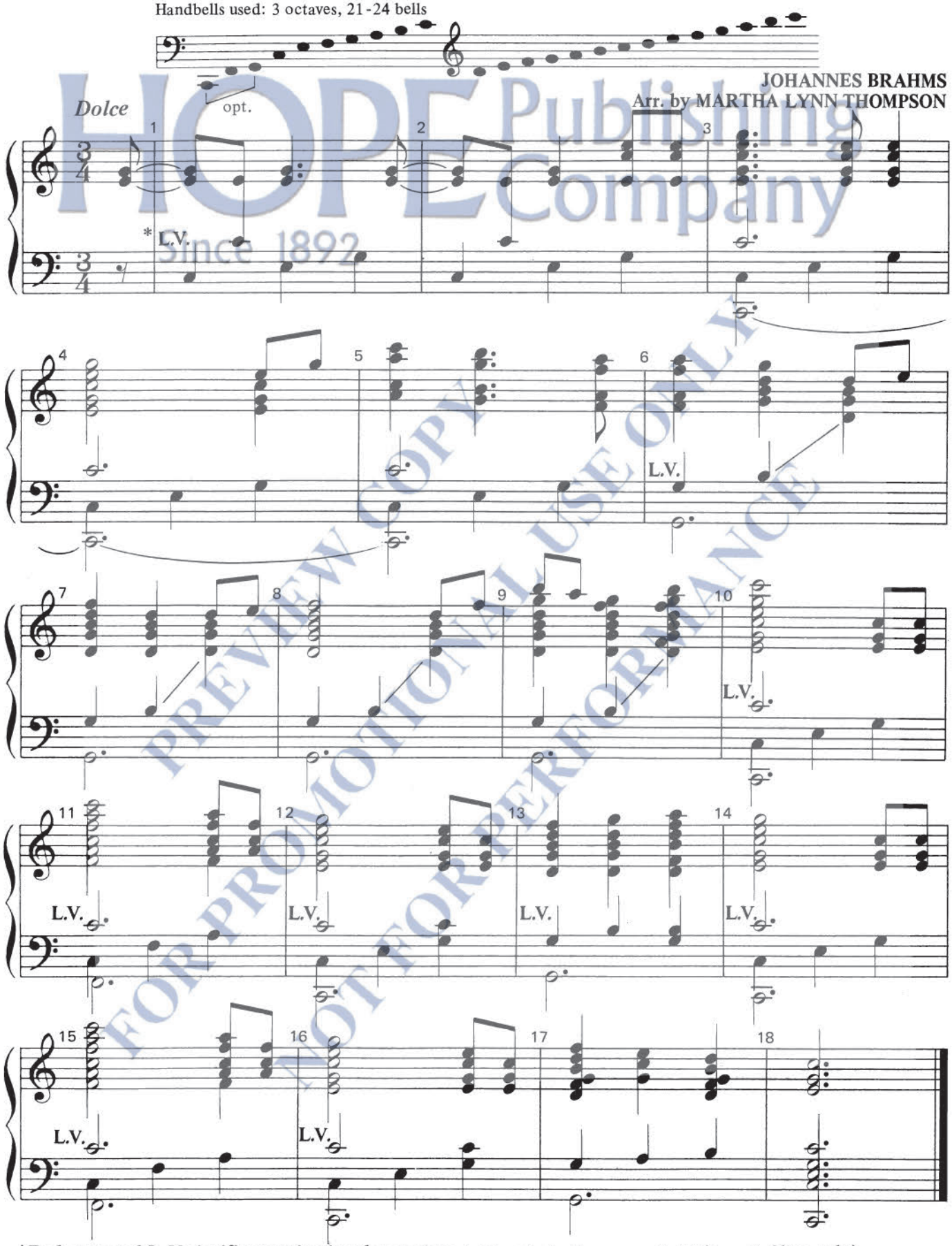
*Measures 34 to end, + indicates to use mallets on 𝅗𝅥. chords with bells suspended.

Cradle Song
(Lullaby)

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 21-24 bells

JOHANNES **BRAHMS**
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON



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Fanfare

Handbells used: 3 octaves, 21-25 bells

HENRY PURCELL
Arr. by MARTHA LYNN THOMPSON

Moderato

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How to Ring a Handbell

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There are several good methods books and handbooks that explain in detail many things you will want to know about ringing and about organizing a handbell choir, but it has not been our intent to make this a methods book. However, should you not have access to any of these other books, let us briefly explain the correct way to hold and ring a handbell.

1 – Grasp the handle of the bell firmly with your hand against the handguard of the bell. Your fingers should be around the bell handle in much the same way as they would be around the handle of a tennis racquet.

2 – Hold the bell upright, but tilt it slightly toward your shoulder so the clapper falls back toward the side of the bell nearest your shoulder.

3 – The bell, when rung, moves in an area above your waist but lower than your shoulder.

4 – Begin the ringing stroke with the bell upright. Move your arm down and out in a football-shaped motion.

5 – Snap your wrist as the bell reaches the forward-most part of this motion. It is this snap of the wrist that causes the bell to ring. Never ring the bell with a "hammering" stroke.

6 – After snapping your wrist to ring the bell, bring the bell into an upright position and continue the circular motion to bring the bell back to your shoulder.

7 – Allow the bell to continue to ring its full value, then damp it against your shoulder to stop the sound.

8 – After the bell is damped, move it slightly away from your shoulder and have it ready to ring again.

9 – In rapid passages, keep the bell close to your shoulder and *ring* it close to your shoulder so it can be damped quickly.

10 – A bell may also be damped by touching it with a thumb or finger or by touching it to the foam padding on the table.

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