

Morna-June Morrow Receives the Handbell Musicians of Canada Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award

Morna-June (M-J) Morrow of Winnipeg, Manitoba received the Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award at the HMC Annual General Meeting on September 17, 2022.



“Feeling the vibration of each bell absolutely reverberates my soul” – M-J Morrow

From her introduction in 1969 to handbells and the art of ringing them, given as a 40- minute crash course by Fred Merrett, M-J’s passion for this ‘instrument’ has never wavered. Since then, M-J has served handbell organizations at both the national and provincial levels as well as working tirelessly with local handbell choirs and directors in Winnipeg.

Photo: Patsy Andrews Vert presents Morna-June (M-J) Morrow (right) the Handbell Musicians of Canada Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award

After graduating from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Music (1967), M-J worked in the field of elementary school music for 55 years prior to retiring. In 1969 the Fort Garry School Division provided her with a 2-octave set of Schulmerich bells and the challenge to include them in the music curriculum. An additional octave was soon forthcoming based on her success in the classroom. From then on, there was always at least one handbell choir in whatever school she was teaching. Oakenwald, Crane, Chancellor and Bonnycastle students all benefitted from her growing expertise to the point that a number of students upon graduating to Junior High petitioned her to continue working with them and the Fort Garry Carillons, a community bell choir of junior high aged ringers, was formed in the early 1970’s. In addition to performing for school related concerts, many of these choirs performed in music festivals. Both pre- and post-retirement, M-J has also encouraged music educators throughout the province to use handbells with their students. She has held, and continues to hold, one-on-one sessions with teachers to educate and encourage them in this art, as well as conducting workshops for educators and students alike.

In 1973, M-J purchased her own 4 octave set of Schulmerich bells and these bells, plus 5 octaves of Schulmerich hand chimes purchased at a later date, have been used by many choirs over the years. In addition to the school choirs, M-J directed the Westworth Chapel bells (1988-2013), University Women’s Club (1999-2008) bells which subsequently became known as A’Pealing Bells (2009-2010), All Chim’n Quartet (2008-2011), MBGEHR Christmas Choirs (1999-2002 and 2004) and the Fort Garry Harmony Bells. These choirs constitute both, church based as well as community choirs. In 2013, a handbell composition was commissioned by Dr. Stuart Sladden, in M-J’s honour on the occasion of her retirement after 25 years of directing bells at Westworth United. The piece titled ‘Rejoice in the Dance’, was composed by Timothy H. Waugh.

In recent years M-J’s bells have seen use by Ring Out! Quartet, of which she is the founder and a member, and Rochester Ringers, a community choir originally established in 2013-2014 as a demonstration choir for Ringing Link (RL) 2014 and then resurrected as a community choir of experienced ringers under the direction of Dr. Stuart Sladden, in 2018. This choir used M-J’s basement as its practice venue and performed in various locations until

suspended due to COVID in 2020. M-J has also made good use of her handbells to perform as a solo ringer for numerous handbell events, church worship services and festivals and has also coached a number of aspiring bell soloists. Her bells have also been used by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra as well as making an appearance, along with M-J and two other local ringers, in a Hallmark movie 'The Christmas Club', filmed in Winnipeg in 2019.

M-J is very passionate about the art of handbell ringing and sharing that knowledge with others. She has conducted numerous workshops for the MBGEHR since it first came into existence in 1996. In addition to these she has conducted workshops in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia as well as in Fargo, ND and Duluth, MN. She has also reached out to other instrumental groups and conducted workshops on handbells at the Carl Orff Canadian National Conference and the RCCO (Royal Canadian College of Organists) Winnipeg Organ Festival.

M-J has served as a guest conductor for massed rings for at least 5 Spring Ring concerts held by MBGEHR. In addition, she has served in this role at concerts of a similar nature in provinces across Canada including, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. She has also directed massed ringing choirs at HGC RL in Winnipeg (2002) and Penticton (2005). In 2000 she served as the Canadian massed choir director for 800 ringers at the International Handbell Symposium (IHS) in the UK.

M-J has served as a judge for a number of Handbell Guilds of Canada Canadian composition competitions and as an adjudicator at various provincial and local music festivals including the Winnipeg Music Festival (WMF). She feels so passionately about the importance of the continuation of handbell ringing that in 2008 she established and funded the Morna-June Morrow scholarship which is presented to the winner of the MBGEHR plaque at the WMF.

M-J has written numerous articles and workshop notes as well as a history of the first 25 years of the MBGEHR. These articles appear in many of the provincial guild newsletters as well as in *Overtones*, the *Handbell Musicians of America* (HMA) magazine.

M-J has been honoured for her contribution to handbells and music education in general, with the following awards:

- Hon. Life Member of Carl Orff Canada's Music for Children, *Musique pour enfants* (1994)
- Hon. Life Member of Area VII Handbell Musicians of America (2013)
- Hon. Life Member of the Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers (2016)
- Canadian Music Educators' Association National Builders Award (2018)

Highlights of national/provincial service as elected officer:

- o served Handbell Guilds of Canada (HGC) as National Chair in 2000
- o worked on numerous organizing committees for Ringing Link (RL) 2002,
- o co-chaired, with Patsy Andrews-Vert, RL 2014 - both events were held in Winnipeg
- o served Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers (MBGEHR)
 - as Vice President 1996-1998
 - President 1998-2000
 - Past President 2000-2002
 - 2002 to present Archivist
 - 2005 to present Past President
 - 2009 to present – newsletter editor
 - 2009 to present membership secretary and treasurer
- o Runs the MBGEHR lending library, guild supply store and serves as local bells repairer



Photo: M-J Morrow with her commemorative bell. Presented by the Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers as a memento of this special occasion.