Mexican Wave

First of all, for those who have not met it before, what is this exercise? After the call '*Go Mexican Wave*' there is the usual handstroke and backstroke in rounds, then 1 and 2 swap for a handstroke and backstroke before swapping back to rounds for a hand-back. Then 2 and 3 swap and return, then the 3 and 4, and so on, as shown in Diagram 7.2, until the 'wave' reaches the tenor. Every change from rounds lasts for two strokes, and then we always return to rounds for two strokes. Every bell other than the treble and tenor move down one place, back to rounds, then up one place, and then back to rounds. This wave moves steadily through the bells, just as it moves round a sports stadium.

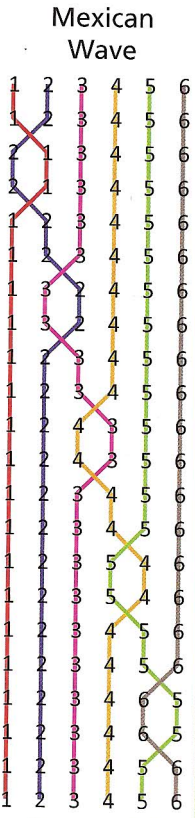

Diagram 7.2

Benefits? As with Kaleidoscope exercises, the student gets practice at moving their bell, but each bell's movement is restricted and the pattern regularly returns to rounds. It is easy for the student to work out who they are swapping with – the bells on either side. Even so, many bands find this a bit challenging the first few times, so it may help for the teacher to stand in front of each pair of ringers as they swap, and indicate with gestures when they swap and when they return to rounds.

Another benefit of Mexican Wave is that it introduces the idea of a '*Go!*' call starting a pattern of changes that will, in time, reach a natural stopping point. What's more, the later bells in particular have to keep an eye on what the other bells are doing; 5 has to wait quite a while for the 4 to swap with the 3 and return to rounds, and then be ready to start its work, and this work will involve being aware of what bells on each side are doing.

There are lots of ways to vary this exercise. You could make the wave bounce off the back and move back through the bells the other way, ending up with the treble and 2. You may, particularly on a larger number of bells, start a second wave before the first one has ended. This is a good exercise for keeping everyone alert – can the ringer get their bell in the right place as the first wave goes through while still being aware of a second wave that is approaching? Or at the very least, can they switch attention as one wave passes them and quickly detect if another one is coming along?

Another variation is to make the work each pair of bells does more complex — perhaps dodge, places, dodge and then places back in rounds each time instead of just places. Or, as with many exercises, you can call the bells into a different order before starting, so that, while still interacting just with the bell immediately before and after you, these won't necessarily be the bell immediately to your left and your right.

As in just about every teaching situation, vary the exercise to suit the individuals you are teaching.

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Jargon Box

1. Placing your bell accurately

Good ringing is rhythmical and regular, with the same time interval between the sound of each bell (except for the longer handstroke gap at the lead, discussed in Article 1). Inaccuracies make the ringing sound lumpy. 'Placing your bell accurately' means ringing not just in roughly the correct position, but getting the timing exactly right so as to keep the rhythm exactly even.

Experienced ringers place their bell using a combination of rope-sight (seeing the order in which the ropes come down and knowing who to ring after), rhythm (ringing at the appropriate speed so your bell will be where it should be even if others have gone wrong), and listening (to check whether your bell sounded at exactly the right moment).

All these are important, but listening to your own bell is crucial; bells can be odd-struck, and no amount of looking at other ropes will by itself guarantee that your bell sounds at precisely the right moment.

2. Odd-struck bells

The time interval between when the rope starts to descend and the eventual sounding of the bell varies considerably. It tends to be longer with heavier bells, but some bells have further individual variations, perhaps just at handstroke or just at backstroke, requiring the ringer to pull a bit earlier or a bit later. Such bells are described as odd-struck. The ringer must listen for odd-struckness; rope-sight alone cannot enable the ringer to make the necessary adjustment.