

# Handbells and Horns We Have Heard On High

**Village Ringers and Horns Aplenty will give a joint Christmas concert Dec. 13 at New Covenant UMC.**

By **MICHAEL FORTUNA**  
*Daily Sun Staff Writer*

Handbells and French horns don't normally cross paths on the concert stage. Until now.

The handbell choir Village Ringers, directed by Bonnie Fisher, and the French horn ensemble Horns Aplenty, directed by Don Brannon, will join forces for "A Golden Christmas" at 7 p.m. Dec. 13 at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

"It's something nobody has experienced here before," said Lesan Van Syckle, the founder of Horns Aplenty. "It's something different."

**T**he Ringers have been working on the concert material since September.

"I love Christmas carols," group member Donna Kagan said. "You only do it one time a year. You can bring out the old favorites. This concert is going to be very special. It's a different sound."

The 14-member Village Ringers will go first with a set of songs, followed by the 10-member Horns Aplenty playing four selections. The Ringers will return for another set, then appear with Horns Aplenty for the final two numbers: "Twas the Night Before Christmas" and "A Festival of Carols."

"Twas the Night Before Christmas," will feature the famous poem, along with some silly musical breaks from the two ensembles. "A Festival of Carols" will feature snippets from "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "While By My Sheep," "God Rest You Merry, Christians All," "Still, Still, Still" and "Angels We Have Heard on High."

**V**an Syckle arranged the final two selections, taking part of a band arrangement and converting it to the bells and French horns.

"The bells, I could take from the flute and oboe parts," said Van Syckle, of the Village of Polo Ridge. "Anything besides that, I transposed to whatever keys the horns are in or the keys the bells need to be in."

Van Syckle said the process took a while.

"I need to get a computer program to help with that," she said. "It's an interesting new challenge. I've never done anything like this before. It's been fun. It's been interesting to think from the bell perspective and the horn perspective. It's a nice collaboration."

Some of the Ringers' songs include the opening number, "A Christmas Carillon," with the members proceeding to the stage, and "Rise Up! Go Tell It," which features more percussive sounds. To achieve this, the players will tap the bells with mallets.

The audience will get involved with a sing-along portion featuring "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Santa Claus Is Coming

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Donna Kagan, center, of the Village of Pinellas, sings as she plays the bells during The Village Ringers practice for their upcoming Christmas concert at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

Photos by Sophia Lucente, Daily Sun



Bonnie Fisher, of the Village of Piedmont, leads The Village Ringers during their practice for their upcoming Christmas concert at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

to Town,” and “Winter Wonderland.”

“Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Thy Peace” makes it into every Village Ringers concert.

“We’re striving for peace on Earth,” said Fisher, of the Village of Piedmont.

Van Syckle and Fisher were talking one day when the idea of combining the groups for a Christmas concert spontaneously came up. They both latched on to the idea.

“It’s one less concert instead of doing separate ones,” Fisher said. “They’re all pretty carols. It’s the joy of Christmas, the spirit of Christmas.”

Kagan, who has played handbells throughout her life, joined the Village Ringers at its inception in 2018.

“It’s like a dream come true,” said Kagan, of the Village of

Pinellas. “I like being with people who are all of the same mind. Bonnie’s a really good teacher.

“When you play handbells, it’s touching your soul,” Kagan said. “They’re really special.”

Tickets for “A Golden Christmas” are \$15 and are available online at [ncumcf.com/tickets](http://ncumcf.com/tickets) or at the door.

If you think you have what it takes to join the Village Ringers, the group will host auditions Jan. 6 at New Covenant United Methodist Church. For information about the Village Ringers, visit [villageringers.com](http://villageringers.com).

For information about Horns Aplenty, visit [bandsofthevillages.com](http://bandsofthevillages.com).

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