

Reviewed by Carol J. McDowell

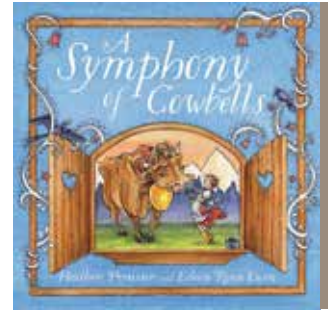
A Symphony of Cowbells

Written by Heather Preusser

Illustrated by Eileen Ryan Ewen

Ann Arbor, Michigan: Sleeping Bear Press, 2017

mountain. While in the meadow, Petra saw a bird carrying something shiny. Could it be Elfi's bell? She followed the bird back to its nest on the rock cliff, reached into the nest, and to her astonishment, there it was!



Petra ran back to the meadow to meet Elfi, who immediately recognized the “Brrring-BONG, brrring-BONG.” “MOO!” Upon hearing Elfi’s bell, the other cows moved into formation, swished their tails, and with heads held high resumed their journey up the mountainside. The symphony of cowbells was in harmony once again, and Petra’s family won first prize in the spring cheese festival—thanks to Elfi and her bell.

This story is especially amusing to me, having grown up on a farm and helping to move cattle from pasture to pasture. It provides an introduction to a symphony orchestra and the instruments it includes. Symphonies have a leader (conductor) and a seating chart, with instruments placed according to their sound. This may be compared to Elfi as the leader of a herd, whose members march in place according to the sound of their bells. What happens if the orchestra does not follow the leader? What happens if one instrument is out of place or out of tune?

Other questions your class might have fun addressing: What symphony instruments make the highest sound? The lowest sound? How do the instruments produce a sound? How does the shape of the instrument affect the sound? As a creative activity, students may add bells to the story to match the size and sound of the cowbells. I might suggest the following: (a) da-ding = resonator bell; (b) jingle-jangle = jingle bells; (c) clang-clong-clank = hand bell; (d) brrring-bong = cowbell; and (e) tiny tin bell = very small hand bell.

This story can also inspire a lesson in character education. It was Elfi’s responsibility

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“Da-ding, da-ding, Jingle-jangle, jingle-jangle, Clang-clong-clank, Brrring-BONG”

What is causing all this noise? Oh, it’s just the dairy cows, moving to higher, greener pastures. Their bell necklaces ring melodiously in sequence as they mosey up the mountainside. One morning during this upward journey, however, Elfi’s cowbell did not make its usual sound; her bell had disappeared! Without this bell, the cows would be out of tune and out of step, the herd’s harmony out of sync. Now what? Elfi, along with all the other cows, had a solution—they stubbornly lay down, refusing to move another hoof.

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What to do? A missing bell meant no cows would meander, no milk would be produced, no cheese would be made to sell, and there would be no money to support Petra’s family farm. Elfi’s bell must be found, but where to look?

The next morning, Petra decided to pick some flowers in the meadow to try to entice Elfi and the other cows to continue their trip up the

to lead the herd, and the other cows trusted her to do that job. She insisted only she could wear *her* cowbell, and she could not lead unless she had her bell—the best bell—around her neck. Elfi refused to settle for anything less. Her sense of obligation and refusal to compromise her high standards demonstrate an impressive example that serves to stimulate a discussion about trust, respect, responsibility, and caring.

These lessons and the many other possibilities in Heather Preusser and Eileen Ryan Ewen's *A Symphony of Cowbells* make it a worthwhile addition to your farm book collection. ■

CAROL J. McDOWELL teaches elementary music for the City of St. Charles (Missouri) School District. She holds bachelor's degrees in music and music education from Southeast Missouri State University and a master's degree in music education and PhD from Florida State University. Carol was appointed to the editorial boards of *The Orff Echo* (2008-2016) and *The Missouri Journal of Research in Music Education* (2000-2024), where she also served as editor from 2004 to 2008. She has completed three levels of Orff Schulwerk Teacher Education and Kodály teaching methods and has presented workshops and research poster sessions for national and state conventions. Her research articles have been published in various music education journals.