

## **ARSIS**

### **Ensemble of English Handbells**

Artistic Director Aivar Mäe

Bells and chimes are probably the oldest instruments that many Asian and European nations knew already in ancient ages. The music of handbells is not the invention of last centuries, either. The roots of these musical instruments date back to 13th – 14th centuries when it was not rare that differently tuned church bells called people to the service playing beautiful melodies. Sometimes there was used carillon – bell-ringing mechanism in which a manual keyboard (and often pedals) is connected by wires to the beaters of up to 70 static bells. The bells are usually hung in church tower. Carillons are found throughout Europe and the USA, mechanized carillons were the forerunners of musical clocks and boxes, also forerunners of handbells and handchimes.

Arsis Handbell Ensemble was grown up from Arsis Chamber Choir – when Aivar Mäe, the conductor of chamber choir heard handbell music in the USA for the first time, it became his fixed idea to bring this wonderful music also to Estonia, thus founding his own ensemble. It was the year 1991. It took two years explanatory work and preparations in both sides of the world and the idea became reality. In 1993 the representatives of the American Guild of Handbell Ringers visited Estonia, and brought the first three octaves of bells as a present to Aivar Mäe and his choir. By now Arsis Handbell Ensemble has one of the most perfect sets in the world that includes bells of seven octaves. All the handbells in the set have been made in the USA, Malmark Incorporation bell factory with whom Arsis has been co-operating already since 1993. The ensemble, having eight members, has toured in different places of the world. Already for five times Arsis has toured in the USA where the handbell music is most widely spread. One of the most exotic places was the Republic of South Africa where Arsis participated in Eisteddfod festival and was awarded the Grand Prix. In 2001, Arsis nominated as the best handbell ensemble in the world.

Aivar Mäe (b 1960) – the artistic director of Arsis Handbell Ensemble. He acquired his musical education at Tallinn Music High School and Estonian Academy of Music where he studied choral conducting with Prof Ants Sööt. Aivar Mäe has been working with several choirs in Estonia as well as abroad. He has been the leader of international choir festivals, also running seminars for choral music. In 1992, Aivar Mäe studied in the USA for a year and a half improving his knowledge at the music department of Portland University with Prof Bruce Brown. Since 1999, he has been working as the general manager of Eesti Kontsert, the National Concert Institute of Estonia.

### **Booking**

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