

News Notes

from the Cornell Chimesmasters

Chimesmaster's Corner

Elisabeth Wang '23, Head Chimesmaster

The Cornell Chimes have had an eventful and transformative year. Most notably, the tower is undergoing a construction project, mainly to renovate the roof, on a scale it hasn't seen in over 20 years. Despite all the scaffolding, we are still able to ring the bells for campus on a modified schedule. The renovations have encouraged us to find alternative ways to maintain connections with the Cornell community—since the tower is closed to visitors—such as by using an online song request form. We've also been using this time to reorganize our storage spaces inside the tower.

The chimesmasters have been keeping busy even before the renovations began. In February, fortunately with the weather cooperating, several chimesmasters embarked on a road trip to visit bell towers in the Northeast. We toured carillons in Philadelphia and Princeton and tried our hand at playing the instruments. On our way back, we were honored to play a spontaneous farewell concert for the chimes at a church in Endicott, New York, that was closing down. The road trip was a fantastic experience to try out other bell instruments, learn about

the roles they play in their communities, and meet bell experts and enthusiasts.

In the spring, we held our annual audition process. We continued using our method book that we developed last year to better guide competes and to make the competition a more accessible experience. We were excited to accept four new chimesmasters: Tony Chen '26, Elaine Tan '25 (Law), Kevin Wang '26, and Gianna Weidman '25.

This fall, we welcomed Ellen Dickinson, college carillonneur at Trinity College in Hartford and director of bell programs at Yale University, to host a masterclass for our chimesmasters. Each chimesmaster was able to play and receive individual feedback on a couple of pieces. Ellen's responses were very insightful and encouraged us to think about new ways to express musicality and use techniques specific to bell tower instruments.

Throughout the year, we've continued many of our traditional concerts and events, from playing special Summer Sunday Sunset Series concerts, to ringing the Great Chord and playing in clocktower costumes on Halloween weekend at midnight, to welcoming back many of our alumni for the annual Chimes Advisory Council (CAC) meeting. We were

particularly excited to feature a special concert during CAC to celebrate our advisor Jen's 30th anniversary of playing the chimes.

Looking back as a senior at Cornell, the chimes have been the highlight of my college experience. I'm grateful to have been a part of the chimes family and am honored to have been this year's head chimesmaster. Bingaling, ding dong, and ring on!



Elisabeth Wang '23 at the playing stand.

PHOTO BY ALINE WANG

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 Join the chimesmasters' private Facebook group or alumni email list. Email chimes@cornell.edu to learn more.

 chimes.cornell.edu

The Uris Library and McGraw Tower Renewal project is under way and scheduled to wrap up in early Spring 2025. So far, the tower has seen amazing tender loving care in the form of roof replacement inside the tower attic and at the belfry. Next semester, once the weather eases up (tentatively April 1, 2024), the plan is to focus on replacing the metal chevron roof and restoring masonry at the top portion of the tower. The chimes leadership understands the chimes spring competition will be affected due to fewer concerts and has plans in place to ensure there is an adequate compet process.

Notes from the Chimes Advisor

Jen Lory-Moran '96, '97

Can you read music? Climb 161 steps? Stand on one foot?

How many of us responded to an advertisement for the chimes competition that listed those three skills as the ones necessary to become a chimesmaster? (I certainly did!) For decades, those are the skills our ads have claimed one needs to become a chimesmaster—but we all know that isn't all it takes. What *isn't* listed on the ad?

This was a topic the Chimes Advisory Council members explored during this fall's CAC meeting. Over the last few years, the council has had many discussions about how to improve diversity within the chimes program and competition. This year, we began to tackle the question of how to make our program more inclusive. We raised many questions. "What if someone physically *can't* stand on one foot—can they not be a chimesmaster? What do we *really* require? What can we be flexible

about? What can we let go of?"

We look for so many qualities and competencies in our new chimesmasters—musicality, sight reading, programming, visitor interaction skills, willingness to learn and accept feedback, and so much more. The more transparent we can be from the start about the actual requirements necessary to be a chimesmaster, the better we can prepare ourselves for the competition process. Those students who may need accommodation can have a better idea of what supports they will need to be successful, and we can make sure they are provided those supports throughout the competition process.

We asked a lot of questions during this discussion. We are still looking for answers to most of them. A lot of work still needs to be done in creating a more inclusive environment for our competes and chimesmasters. But in a university that has always claimed that "any person can find instruction in any study," it should definitely be one of our top priorities.



An annual newsletter of the Cornell Chimes

Campus Activities

This newsletter is brought to you by Campus Activities.

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Be a part of Cornell's oldest musical tradition...
Become a Cornell Chimesmaster.
Can you...
read music?
climb 161 steps?
balance on one foot?
Attend one of our info sessions to learn more.
Spring 2017
Tuesday, January 31 & Thursday, February 2
5:00 - 6:15 PM
Top of McGraw Tower
chimes@cornell.edu

As a special feature in this year's newsletter, we asked some of our alumni chimesmasters from the 1950s to share memories from playing the chimes and to reflect on the changes they've seen in the program over the last 65 years. Thank you so much to Dick Haggard and George Ubogy for their wonderful contributions.

George Ubogy '58

My fondest memory from playing the chimes came some 50 years after graduation. One of my Midwest classmates wrote to our *Class Notes* that she was very taken by a chimes concert I gave just after an international political incident. I ditched the concert I had planned and instead played several topically relevant pieces of music. *Fifty years later* (!), this woman was still telling her church colleagues how topical and relevant music can be ("and here is an example"). It felt really good to know I had an impact, and one that persisted so long.

Some of the biggest differences between playing in the 1950s versus today?

- Creature comfort: we didn't have air conditioning or much heat—we did have an electric heater we could turn on near the playing stand. The lighting wasn't great.
- *Far* more important, the bells were in much worse shape. They hadn't been worked on in a long, long time, if they ever were. The resistance varied markedly from one bell to another so that one sounded easily and another required much more effort. The result was, unless one was playing fortissimo, the volume varied markedly between bells with the same amount of effort—all my Juilliard training down the tubes. Furthermore, with no practice stand, you had to practice silently on the bells themselves. But with variable resistance, some of the bells sounded when you were trying to play silently. God knows what passersby were thinking. The instrument is much more responsive and controllable now.
- We were all guys. There was no socialization, there was no mentoring, you were on your own. Duets were almost nonexistent. Women chimesmasters and Monica Novakovic changed everything for the better. Mentoring has made the chimesmasters much better than we used to be, and a great deal of thought goes into the competition and training of new chimesmasters.

On professional interaction: When I joined the Chimes Advisory Council, I was taken with Bob Feldman's extraordinary networking with other chimers. Nonetheless, I remember arguing strongly that we needed to turn toward the carillonneurs and go to the GCNA annual meetings, even though we were not carillonneurs technically. I was happy to see that goal embraced, and I believe we're quite respected among the GCNA members, largely thanks to Jennifer, and that we profit from the interactions. I hope to see chimesmasters go there earlier in their Cornell years, if the funds will permit it.

Dick Haggard '58, PhD '65

Ah, the chimes and good times in the 1950s. In years, they may seem long ago, but in our lives, not so. I sometimes think we must seem ancient to current chimesmasters, like we, then, would have thought of CMs from the 1890s (!) of whom we knew none, even from the 1930s. Indeed, our playing stand, the handles and linkages to the bells, the noises and weather in the bare playing chamber and belfry, and the “bells-as-cast” harmonics—all existed as in those earlier times. Learning to become a CM for us was pretty much an independent undertaking: we simply observed those playing, Pete Burkmeyer, John Hoare, and others, and then practiced and practiced, at first carefully silently playing right on the playing stand; tossing in our sleep as we, like all CMs, committed the Rag to memory; rarely seeing our competitors or, after our competitive success, our few (perhaps six total) fellow CMs. Little instruction was given, and we sure did not have the excellent “Method” books now available from Elisabeth Wang and her working group. Trial and error; no tension adjustment (are you serious?—hey, the wires held, that’s what mattered); no concern over copyright in those less litigious

years when we compete finally got to play out loud; emphasis on clean melody, chords preferred over eighth-note embellishments; many tunes from the Broadway shows of the time (arranging them quickly, some still may be in the files) and lots of Cornell songs—these were our usual playing conditions. Our only connection to the university was via an occasional check that appeared for our \$1 per program payments. The few occasions when we CMs did meet were to arrange for the competition period and then to select the one or two winners, which we did after listening to the anonymous final competition pieces through a window of a room in the Straight, reaching unanimous conclusions, and then welcoming the new one (or two) to play on with us. Because the numbers were down, three of us were selected in 1955, so Frank, George, and I became the new ones for playing the next three years. Those were good times, even though not nearly as collaborative or social or masterclass-connected as all our active CMs are now. I think current times are better for those good features, as well as for our close connection to the univer-

sity through the Chimes Council and the wonderful leadership of Jen L-M and Marisa, and now, Karli. The chimes sound better than ever with their new, tuned harmonics and the skills of our excellent chimesmasters.



1956 CORNELL YEARBOOK

Richard Haggard, Franklin Russell, Jr., John Hoare, Jr., George Ubogy, Peter Burckmyer



March 14, 2024



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Consider making your gift today to the Cornell Chimes General Fund (#362303) or the Unrestricted Chimes Program Endowment (#0007341).

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