
Bell of Silence

~ for SATB Choir and Handbells ~

music by Nathan Davis

words by Jennifer Davis Michael

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Dedicated to the Sanctuary Choir of The Park Avenue Christian Church for the 2015 Christmas Gala

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text © 2013 Jennifer Davis Michael*

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Bell of Silence

To enter silence
Is to go inside a bell
That has poured forth its sound.

With a clang, a chime,
A ping, a gong,
Or a deep, slow, rolling knell,
The air thickens, its ripples
Palpable as water.
They push, push, push
To the edge of the bell,
Shaping the air beyond it
Into a bell that rings on, and on.

For each wave of sound,
A counter-wave of silence
Washes back into the sea.

As the bell empties,
Silence fills it, ringing
In the pulse of each vibration,

Washing the cupped space,
Caressing the smooth metal,
Resting in the spoken word.

Inside the bell,
The holy silence breathes,
And waits.

- Jennifer Davis Michael

Performance Instructions

Voice notation:

In section A, non-boxed entrances should be placed freely, but in reference to the proportions of other entrances in the score. These non-boxed entrances are marked "solo" or "tutti", and tutti entrances will generally be made on conductor's cue.

The boxed materials are sung as phrases by all members of a section, but not in unison. Like the quiet chanting of many private meditations, neither the entrances nor the speed of the gestures need to be the same.

20 handbells are used:



n.b. the F natural bells are always playing E#'s in the score

The handbells may be played by members of the choir, or by additional bell ringers. If non-singing bell ringers are used, it is suggested that the 12 pitches shown above with filled noteheads be played from the same area as the singers, while the remaining 8 bells shown with open noteheads (used only for free-ringing and/or Singing Bell technique in sections A, D, and/or G) be played from other points spread around the performance space.

The players of the 10 pitches indicated above with tenutos (-) will need a thick dowel to produce the "Singing Bell" technique, which is made by rubbing a the dowel around the rim of the bell, as is done with a Tibetan singing bowl. Similar to making a wine glass sing by rubbing a finger around its rim, some experimentation may be necessary to find the right speed and pressure. This technique requires two hands, so one player can only play one pitch.

Parentheses at the beginning of each system in section A summarize the bells that are currently active as "singing bells".

Boxed bell pitches at Rehearsal D give available pitches for very sparse free ringing - like windchimes in a gentle breeze.

Circled Cues:

In Section A, the conductor paces the events by giving numbered cues. This is most easily accomplished by showing the upcoming cue number with fingers, then giving an upbeat prep that begins that numbered cue on the "downbeat".

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Still, ♩ = 72

mf

SOPRANO

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

oo_ en - ter_ si - lence_

To_

Handbells

4

mp

S.

A.

T.

B.

To en - ter

mf

Bells

* mute quietly but abruptly

2

A Freely, ♩ = 80-120

7

S. *Non vib.: simply, inward*

A. *solo: p*
To en - ter si - lence to en - ter si - lence

T. *Non vib.: simply, inward* *solo: p*
To en - ter si - lence

B.

A Freely,
Singing Bell technique *

Bells

n ————— *p* *n* ————— *p*

* once note sounds, play continuously until m.17, varying volume within a quiet dynamic

8

S.

A. *tutti: independent entrance and tempo*
pp
to en - ter si - lence si - lence to en - ter si - lence

T. to en - ter si - lence to en - ter si - lence

B.

Bells

n ————— *p* *n* —————

[bracketed notes indicate all pitches already sounding]

9 *Non vib.: simply, inward*
solo: p

S. to en - ter si - lence

A.

T. to en - ter si - lence

B.

Bells

⑤

10 **tutti:**
 independent entrance and tempo

S. to en - ter si - lence is

A. to en - ter si - lence

T. to en - ter si - lence

B.

Bells

tutti, unis.:

⑥

11

S. *to en - ter si - lence is*

A.

T. *Non vib.: simply, inward*
solo: mp
to en - ter si - lence *to en - ter si - lence*

B. *to en - ter si - lence*

Bells *n* *p* *n* *p*

⑦ ⑧

12

S.

A. *tutti, unis.:* *is* *tutti, independent:* *mp* *to en - ter si - lence is*

T. *mp* *to en - ter si - lence* *is*

B. *tutti:* *independent entrance and tempo* *mp* *to en - ter si - lence*

Bells *n* *p*

⑨

13

S. *mp*
to en - ter si - lence is

A. *mf*
to go in - side a bell

T. *mf*
to go in - side a bell

B. *tutti, unis.:*
is *tutti, independent:*
to en - ter si - lence is

Bells *n* *p*

14

S.

A. *mp* *mf*
to en - ter si - lence is to go in - side a bell

T. *mp* *mf*
to go in - side a bell *mp*
to en - ter si - lence

B.

Bells

15

S. *mf* to go in-side a bell *mp* to en-ter si-lence is *mf* to go in-side a bell

A.

T. *mf* is to go in-side a bell

B. *mf* to go in-side a bell *f* to go in-side a bell

Bells

16

S. *mf* to go in-side a bell *f* [Conducted, ♩ = 80]

A. *mf* to go in-side a bell *f*

T. *mf* to go in-side a bell *f*

B. *mf* to go in-side a bell *f* to go in-side a bell *mf* to go in-side a release and l.v.

Bells

B Full, ♩ = 80

18

S. *f* To en - ter si - lence is to go in - side a bell *p*

A. *f* To en - ter si - lence is to go in - side a bell *p*

T. *f* To en - ter si - lence is to go in - side a bell *p*

B. *f* bell is to go in - side a bell *p* *mp* That has

B Full, ♩ = 80

Bells

strike ord.

f *lv.*

21

S. *dolce mp* That has poured forth its sound that has poured forth its

A. *dolce mp* That has poured forth its sound that has poured forth its

T. *dolce mp* That has poured forth its sound that has poured forth its

B. poured forth its sound *dolce p* That has poured forth its

Bells

C Bright, ♩ = 92

25

S. *mf* *f*
 sound to go in-side a bell With a clang, with a ping with a

A. *mf* *f*
 sound to go in-side a bell With a chime with a gong

T. *mf* *f*
 sound to go in-side a bell

B. *mf* *f*
 sound to go in-side a bell

Bells **C** Bright, ♩ = 92 *l.v. sempre*
f

28

S. clang with a ping with a clang a ping a chime a ping

A. with a chime with a gong a chime a gong a clang a gong

T. chime gong chime gong clang ping gong

B. ping clang ping chime Or a

Bells

31

S. knell, The air thi - ckens, its ri - pples

A. knell thi - ckens, its ri - pples

T. slow, ro - lling knell with a clang with a chime

B. deep, slow, ro - lling knell (knell) with a clang with a chime

Crisply, rhythmic

34

S. pa - lpa - ble as wa - ter. They push, push push

A. pa - lpa - ble as wa - ter. They push, push, push

T. with a clang with a chime with a gong its ri - pples

B. with a clang with a chime with a gong

ff

36

S. push, push, push push, push, push To the edge

A. push, push, push push, push, push To the edge

T. pa - lpa - ble as wa - ter. They push, push, push To the

B. ri - pples as wa - ter. They push, push, push To the

div.

ff

39

S. of the bell With a clang a ping a chime

A. of the bell With a chime a gong a ping

T. edge of the bell *mf*

B. edge of the bell *mf*

Bells *f* *mf*

Relaxing, ♩ = 80

42 *mf* *molto rit.*

S. Sha-ping the air be -yond it

A. *mf* *mp* Sha-ping the air be -yond it In - to a bell that rings on

T. *mp* In - to a bell that rings on

B. *mp* *div.* to a bell that rings on and

Relaxing, ♩ = 80 *molto rit.*

Bells

D Stately, ♩ = 63

46

S. *p* oo_ en- ter_ si - lence oo_

A. *p* oo_ en- ter_ si - lence oo_

T. *p* oo_ en- ter_ si - lence oo_

B. on. To to

Bells

D Stately, ♩ = 63

(mute)

free rings: very gentle, and very sparse

pp

51

S. *mf* *espressivo* for each wave_ of sound oo_ a coun- ter wave_ of

A. en- ter_ oo_ en- ter_ *poco*

T. en- ter_ oo_ en- ter_ *poco*

B. en- ter_ To en ter_ *poco*

Bells

div. *mf* *espressivo* *p* *mf* *f*

55

S. *mp* *p*
to the sea

A. *mp* *p*
si - lence to the sea

T. *mp* *p*
si - lence to the sea

B. *mp* *p* *mp* *p*
si - lence wa - shes back to the sea wa - shes back

Bells

58

S. *mp* *p* *f*
to the sea

A. *mp* *p*
to the sea

T. *mp* *p*
to the sea

B. *mp* *p* *div.*
wa - shes back wa - shes back to the sea.
(to the sea)

Bells

Bright, ♩ = 92

(Only if needed for pitch)

E

61

S. clang, with a ping with a clang with a ping with a

A. *f* With a chime with a gong with a chime with a gong

T. chime ping gong

B. ping gong

Bells *f*

E

63

S. clang a ping a chime *mf* As the bell emp-ties Si-lence

A. a chime a gong *mf* a clang As the bell emp-ties

T. clang chime ping gong *div.* chime *mp* a ping *mf* As the bell as the bell emp-ties

B. clang chime ping gong chime clang *mf* the bell fills

Bells

66 *ff*

S. fills it, rin - ging In the pulse of each vi -

A. As the si - lence fills it rin - ging In the pulse of each vi -

T. si - lence si - lence fills it rin - ging In the pulse of each vi -

B. si - - - lence rin - ging In the pulse of each vi -

div.

68 *rit.* **F** Graceful, ♩ = 72 *mf*

S. bra - tion Wa - shing the cupped space Ca -

A. bra - tion Wa - shing Ca -

T. bra - tion , Wa - shing the cupped space Ca -

B. bra - tion Wa - shing Ca -

71 *mp* *molto rit.*

S. re - ssing the smooth me - tal Re - sting in the spo - ken

A. re - ssing me - tal Re - sting in the spo - ken

T. re - ssing the smooth me - tal Re - sting in the spo - ken

B. re - ssing me - tal Re - sting in the spo - ken

74 15-20" **G** Still, ♩ = 56

S. word. bell The

A. word. the The

T. word. side The

B. word. In

Bells 15-20" **G** Still, ♩ = 56

Singing Bell technique

sim. *pp*

n *pp*

78

S. ho - ly si - lence breathes(s) *

A. ho - ly si - lence breathes(s) *

T. ho - ly si - lence breathes(s) *

B. ho - ly si - lence breathes and wai - - ts.

Bells *l.v.*

* no attack on "s", just a clear transition from the vowel