



Bay View Week of Handbells Concert, August 17, 2023

Come to the annual Week of Handbells concert! This annual Bay View event draws about 100 handbell musicians from all over the world to make incredible music on a magnificent instrument. They prepare for months, travel for hours, rehearse together for several days, and then present a program of their music. This year, the concert will be held in the John M. Hall Auditorium on Thursday, August 17th at 7:30 p.m.

Don Allured started the Bay View Week of Handbells in 1978 as an event for handbell directors to get together to learn more about their instrument. As the commonly acknowledged Dean of Handbells in this country, Don not only provided classes but also a performance opportunity to demonstrate the wonder of handbells. Over the years, BVWOH has evolved into a high-level performance event presenting some of the best repertoire written for handbells. Don led the event until 2009, and then passed the reins to Carl Wiltse. In 2017, after fifteen years at the helm, Carl put the Week of Handbells under Fred Gramann's baton. This year will mark Fred's sixth year at the podium.



If you're in the audience, you'll be amazed at the depth of expression and level of precision that's possible with handbells. If you're one of the ringers on the stage, you'll be celebrating the success that comes from inspiring those who appreciate what you present. It's no mean feat to unite the skills of people who generally see each other for only four or five days each year, and the synergy that becomes "The Concert" is not to be missed. Here's a preview of what's happening in August:

Toccata Festivo



Our opening piece is Caleb Onstead's "Toccata Festivo". Caleb hails from Pennsylvania, and rings with the Stow Heritage Ringers. He's a published composer known for his fast-paced, exciting works. "Toccata Festivo" is the first in a series of three concert etudes for bronze level ensembles. A special note is that it was premiered at his high school graduation recital, and is a representation of all the mentoring and training he's received in handbells. "Toccata Festivo" is a keep-up-with-me piece with the subtitle "Etude No. 1 - A Study in Rhythm and Endurance". From downbeat to cutoff, it moves rapidly always daring the listener to anticipate what's coming next (Caleb wishes he'd included a

disclaimer against the possibly of [musical] whiplash).

Searching for Caleb: He'll be in the fourth row onstage, fourth from the right, Look for the tall young guy!

Lo, How a Rose

From director Fred Gramann: *"It has been a tradition each year to include a piece by Carl Wiltse as he was associated with the Bay View Week of Handbells for forty years, serving as director for fourteen. In 1999 he composed a beautiful setting of the 16th century melody "Lo, How a Rose" for handbells. I asked him if he would allow me to add two flutes and expand the range to accommodate the resources available at the Bay View Week of Handbells. He kindly gave his approval and the resulting work will be shared on this year's concert."*



Searching for Fred: Not a problem - he's on the podium, directing!

After Silence

The Week of Handbells has a special set of compositions commissioned in honor of founder Don Allured. They're some of the most imaginative and expressive literature in the history of the BVWOH, and often stretch the envelope that identifies what we think is possible with handbells. Jason Krug, from

Indianapolis, has composed “After Silence” in response to the commission call. Jason writes:



My piece is entitled “After Silence,” based on the Aldous Huxley quote, “After silence, that which comes closest to expressing the inexpressible is music.” I’ve always been fascinated by the role silence plays in music, and how musicians tend to shy away from silence as somehow anti-music, or not a true part of the music. I feel like this is just a reflection of modern life, where many people feel the need to fill every waking moment with some sort of noise, sound, activity, or distraction.

There is something powerful in silence, in existing, even for a mere moment, alongside a vacuous nothing. It can be reflective, emotional, and even a bit scary. I decided to punctuate this piece with several moments of silence, many more than one would come to expect in a normal piece. So much music in the modern world is a solid wall of sound that even a single bit of silence has impact, so my hope was to set silence on equal footing with sound in this piece, to give those moments of silence just as much chance to change the story and the meaning of the piece as the notes themselves.

This piece crosses two worlds, two different eras. Just as the music itself deals with the dichotomy of Sound and Silence, the creation of the piece crosses the boundary line of Before COVID and After COVID. My original deadline to complete this piece was June of 2020, so most of the bones of the piece were in place in early 2020, before the world shut down. The final edits, tweaking, fixing, and shaping of the piece happened in early 2022, after the piece lay dormant for nearly two years, and as the world was just beginning to attempt to resume some sort of normalcy. Framed through that lens, the moments of musical motion punctuated by the moments of stark silence take on an even weightier feeling.

When I asked the composers to share about their pieces, one of the questions was: “Are there any fun touches that you hope the audience will catch (yes, including ‘Easter Eggs’, if you want to share them)?” To which Jason replied:

All I will say is that the piece isn’t truly over until it’s over and the conductor says that it is. This is the only piece I have ever written where the last measure is actually a held whole rest – where that final silence isn’t just part of the sound dying away, but an actual integral part of the piece itself.

Si Tuvieras Fe



Brian Seemann lives in Washington D.C., where he's the director of the handbell program at the Landon School in Bethesda, Maryland. In addition to his teaching handbells professionally, he is a cohost of "Two Tacos High", a new podcast about the world of handbells. During COVID, he was also one of the first people to create videos of pieces written for handbell choirs by compositing videos of himself playing each part (including some really nice green-screen work in a gorgeous church!). Brian writes:

"I originally wrote [Si Tuvieras Fe] back during the pandemic. The tune itself was one of the 'standards' at the church where I was working at at the time, and was often played and sung at the end of service. Between hearing it frequently, and just the catchy nature of the tune, it was in my head frequently and I decided it was time to arrange it for bells. It was one of the first pieces that I recorded as a 'self virtual ensemble' and in general had a lot of fun arranging and then playing the piece. I am really looking forward to hearing it performed this August. There are actually no Easter Eggs in this piece, which is rare for me. Most of my other arrangements have snippets of other tunes hidden in them, but this one is all Si Tuvieras Fe!"

Searching for Brian: He'll be in the fourth row onstage, seventh from the right.

Transitions of the Heart

Handbell composers receive commissions from a variety of sources. Sometimes the composition desired is for a commemorative event; other times it's to written to remember a family member. Matt Compton, who is a popular composer in the handbell world, as well as the artistic director of the Bells of the Cascades (Washington state), is no stranger to such requests. Matt says of "Transitions of the Heart":

"I was approached to compose a piece in honor of two transgender siblings by their parents in early 2021. I am so honored to have been given this opportunity to write what I believe is the first piece of this kind for handbells.

"This piece is meant to be an anthem of strength and hope for those who have found themselves to be learning about who they truly are in the transgender



community - those who have found acceptance and love through their transition, or those who might still be unsure and scared.

“The piece tells the story of innocence in childhood, a noticeable change, frustration and challenge, and then an eventual love and acceptance, not only from friends and family, but also for oneself.

“It is my hope that as you play [and hear] this piece, you feel the story of those in the transgender community and find a love and acceptance for those who need it and share their story with others. And for those who are part of the trans community, it is my hope that you continue to find the love and support you need and that your voice is heard loudly! We stand with you.”

Silverthorne



It is a tradition to select one of Don Allured’s many compositions for the BVWOH repertoire. Some of you will remember Don as a fellow Bay View cottager, and how he kept his boat, Silverthorne, at the marina. Because even boats have a finite lifetime, Don later replaced that boat with - you guessed it - the Silverthorne II. It was one of his personal traditions to take BVWOH participants on sunset cruises; many of the current participants still remember those times fondly.

I understand that both boats were named after Silverthorne Mountain, which is near the city of Silverthorne, Colorado. Wikipedia says that Silverthorne Mountain is the 351st highest mountain in the state, with a peak elevation of 13,357 feet/4071 meters. The air is thin, and the terrain is majestic. Don’s piece is a meditation on a glorious alpine experience.

A fun BVWOH fact: If you drop in on our rehearsals at John M. Hall Auditorium, you’ll see the ship’s bell from the Silverthorne II fastened to Fred’s podium. We use it to call everyone back to rehearsal!

Also: Watch the left side of the orchestra pit (where the aluminum bells live) at the end of the piece!

Huron Carol

Catherine McMichael is a Saginaw composer who excels in many areas of her field, ranging from instrumental solos to full orchestral works. We’ve been privileged to perform her handbell works at BVWOH from time to time, including her Allured Composition Award work “Odyssey”. For the 2023 concert, we have

her arrangement of "Huron Carol", one of the oldest Great Lakes Christmas songs. Catherine says of her piece:

"I was inspired to write ['Huron Carol'] because my bell choir in Saginaw, MI, Bells on High, was going to be on a televised Saginaw Choral Society concert last December. We had played Kevin McChesney's 'Now the Green Blade Riseth' many times, and we love it, but I wanted something new and different and with a lot of high energy.



"I happened to be in the Catskills after the Area 1 Festival last June and while hiking for three days, I turned over in my mind what would be appropriate for my bell choir. Being from Michigan, Huron Carol was very fitting as it's of French Canadian origin mixed with Native American lyrics. I thought it would suit us very well. I wrote it in my head while hiking, trying out different gestures, fun things that we could do to make it showy and dazzling. It helped to be surrounded by all that green forest. I felt at one with the natural world of those early days while working out the piece.

"We did actually play on TV and had a wonderful time. I handed it to Fred last summer because I had it done by then. He was very gracious to include it on the program and I am really looking forward to hearing 100 fine ringers have a blast with it!"

Searching for Catherine: She'll be in the third row onstage, eighth from the left.

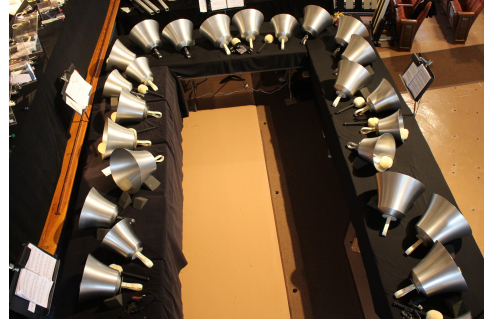
Dance of the Sugar Plum Sumo Fairy



You'll notice that the setup for BVWOH takes up not only the entire stage, but the orchestra pit as well. Our largest bells are in the pit, and the musicians there are called the Pit Ringers. This, of course lends itself to a whole bunch of other terminology; Paul Kingsbury, our bass leader, is the "Pit Boss", we have an annual Pit Lunch at the Side Door down highway 31, and the two main sections at floor level are called "Pit Left" and "Pit Right" (formerly called "Deep Pit", the aluminum bells; and "Baby Pit", bronze bass bells - but this terminology has been updated since the Pit Right bells still weigh six to nine pounds apiece).

Last year, Paul Kingsbury arranged Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer" for the BVWOH bass bells. The brand of humor found in bass ringers resulted in the

addition of the subtitle “Six Feet Under” (which I don’t recall that you saw on your programs... but that may be just as well).



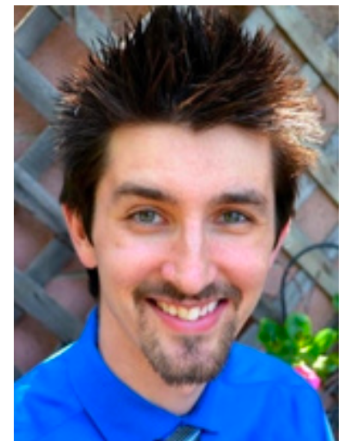
For the 2023 concert, I’ve been given the privilege of arranging a bass-only piece. If you’ve been to see Tchaikovsky’s “Nutcracker Suite”, you’ll recall that the second act has a solo ballet number sometimes referred to as the “Candy Fairy”.

In the truest of bass handbell ringing, the title of this pretty work has been altered to “Dance of the Sugar Plum Sumo Fairy”. And because audience members can’t really see the score from where they are, I’d like to share that the score indicates that this piece should be played “Heavily”.

Searching for me (Larry Sue): If you want to help me find myself, I’m playing aluminum bells in Pit Left. You’ll recognize me as the short guy.

Determination

This year we have not just one, but two Allured Composition Award pieces in the BVWOH concert. Alex Guebert hails from Southern California, where he serves on staff at St. John’s Lutheran Church of Orange, CA, teaches music, composes, and directs three advanced handbell ensembles. He’s a remarkably skilled percussionist, and has often contributed his talents to the BVWOH concerts.



Alex is rather famous/notorious for using many, many time signatures in his composing. He’s also skilled at writing large-scale works; there’s a report that he wrote a twenty-five minute work, “Ransom” for his graduate recital. In his Allured Composition Award commission work, “Determination”, we have both! In his score notes, Alex says:

“Determination’ is a musical depiction of a determined soul. Various themes through the work paint the picture of courage and willpower in the face of adversity.”

The inspiration for “Determination” was quite modern:

“Determination” is my own homage to video game score, particularly Toby Fox’s score to the 2015 video game “Undertale”. I only discovered “Undertale” [in

2022], but it has already won me over with its story, characters, world, and musical score which are all brimming with personality, heart, and charm. The term “determination” is used frequently in “Undertale”. Though this piece is an original work, not an arrangement of themes from any video game, my goal here is to bring the feel of game music, with its stylistic quirks, propulsive rhythms and catchy melodies, to the medium of handbells.

Searching for Alex: He’ll be in the fourth row onstage, sixth from the right (right next to Brian), and later on, you can watch him do his thing on the drum kit!

La Vie en Rose



Sandra Eithun lives in Wisconsin, where she is the music director at one church and the handbell director at another. She conducts at handbell events, and does lots of composing and arranging as well. We’ll be presenting her arrangement of “La Vie en Rose”; here are her thoughts:

“I have always loved the tune. When you have a great melody to work with, the rest just flows. When I hear the sultry, lazy versions done by artists like Edith Piaf, Louis Armstrong and Andre Bocelli I’m just transported. I want to make sure that we offer our audiences the ‘softer side’ of handbells from time to time. We’re very accomplished ‘big’ ringers, but to really work on the fussiness of a piece like this and finesse the bits and pieces, we create a sort of poem for the listener.

“My daughter is 36 now, but when she was a young girl, we’d snuggle up and watch the 1950’s Audrey Hepburn movie Sabrina. I loved hearing La Vie en Rose in the background of that story. Part of the storyline includes Sabrina traveling to Paris and returning with all of her memories. I always kept that tune tucked in the back of my brain as a ‘someday I’d like to score this for handbells’ song. When Twin Cities Bronze offered me this commission, they said, ‘you can score anything you’d like!’ Yay! Music to my ears. It took me two seconds to respond and ask them if I could do this piece.

“I especially love hearing the dialog between the voices in the suspended mallet section as well as after the [key change]. I also love the dramatic sweep into the new key. I want there to be goosebumps in the audience! (that’s why we teach music, right? To inspire and transport).”

Smiles

If you've been around the Bay View Association for a while, you know that there's a bit of land at the east end of Buffett Lane (where it intersects with Forest Avenue) called "Smiles Park". It's a very, very short walk up the hill from Crist Hall (aka "the dorms"). There's a sign there stating that J. Will Callahan wrote the lyrics in a cottage there during World War I. According to Mary Jane Doerr's wonderful book about Callahan, "Smiles" was a tremendously popular song in its time, selling between three and five million copies (an incredible level of success, since there was little radio, no TV, and no Internet in Callahan's time - everything was print copies!



When Carla, my wife, and I saw the sign at Smiles Park, we googled the song on the Internet, and once the (first) arrangement was done, we sent it to Fred. He responded with "it would make a great concert closer, but can you add some excitement to the last half?" Enter my wife, the musical genius, who said, "Charleston". And that's how the second half changed, and how she became co-arranger.

We've met a fair number of folks who sang "Smiles" in their school days. We hope, when you hear it, there'll be a bit of nostalgia, but also a lot of happiness and fun.

We won't mind if you sing along, or even jump into the aisle to see how well you remember the Charleston. We'll be smiling with you, and will be looking forward to seeing you again.

Searching for Carla: She'll be in the front row onstage, fifth from the left, watching over me as I ring!

*There are smiles that make us happy,
There are smiles that make us blue,
There are smiles that steal away the teardrops
As the sunbeams steal away the dew,
There are smiles that have a tender meaning
That the eyes of love alone may see,
And the smiles that fill my life with sunshine
Are the smiles that you give to me.*

We're looking forward to seeing you at the concert, Thursday, August 17th, at 7:30 p.m. in John M. Hall Auditorium!