

The Bells of Saint Michael

Royal Eijsbouts, Astén, The Netherlands, 2009

by Kevin Vogt, DMA

Four bronze swinging bells hang in the bell tower, cast by the Royal Eijsbouts bell foundry in The Netherlands especially for St. Michael the Archangel Church.

The bells ring the musical pitches of C, D, F and G, and are inscribed with the names of the archangels **Michael** ("Who is like God"), **Gabriel** ("God is my strength"), **Raphael** ("God is my health"), and **Uriel** ("God is my light").

Bells have traditionally been rung from churches as alarms in times of war, to proclaim peace at the armistice, and to ward off and warn of approaching storms. The daily round of ringing belongs to the keeping and sanctification of time, to calling the faithful to worship, and to heralding the Good News of Christ and his kingdom.



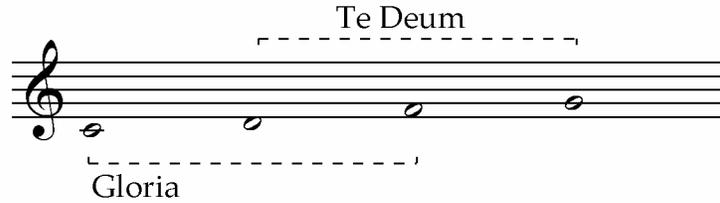
Call to Prayer

The pealing of bells calls the community to prayer and proclaims the joy of the Church to the world on Sundays and Feast Days, at weddings, and on the

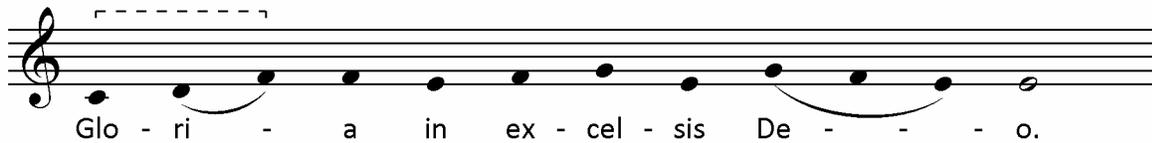
most solemn high Holy Days. The principle of progressive solemnity is expressed by the ringing of one bell before weekday or ferial Masses, two bells before Sundays and Feasts, and four bells before Masses of the great Solemnities of the year. A paean of praise is customary after Masses on Sunday, Feast Days, Solemnity and Weddings and Weddings. The four-bell

peal in the tower of St. Michael the Archangel Church allows for three different festive rings:

The "Gloria" peal, comprised of the notes C-D-F, the "Te Deum" peal, consisting of the notes D-F-G, and the solemn "Gloria-Te Deum" peal combining all four bells together.



The "Gloria" peal is derived from a Gregorian Gloria incipit:



The "Te Deum" peal is derived from the incipit of the canticle, "Te Deum laudamus" (We praise you, O God):



For Whom the Bell Tolls...

The tolling of the lowest bell accompanies funeral processions to Church and burial processions to the Place of Repose. It is both a prayer for the repose of the departed soul and a reminder of our own mortality.

The Angelus

A special call to prayer rings at 12:00 noon and at 6:00 p.m., traditional times for praying "The Angelus," commemorating the Annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary, Mary's "fiat," and the Incarnation itself. The Angelus bells consist of three sets of three strikes (rung here at St.

Michael the Archangel parish on the bell pitched at “D” and named for Gabriel the Archangel), followed by the swinging of the highest-pitched bell for one minute.

Hour Strikes and Quarters

The striking of bells throughout the day marks the passage, goal and sanctity of time.

The “Saint Michael Quarters” is a newly-composed melody for the four-bell peal at St. Michael the Archangel Church, and is a four-phrase melody which emerges over the course of the hour in 15-minute intervals. Each phrase uses all four bells. The “First Quarter” is made up of two step-wise motives, the first descending [A]. The second motive [B] defies the melodic laws of closure following a leap, ascending stepwise and producing a sense of openness and embarking.

Motive **A** **B**

First Quarter

The “Second Quarter” on the half-hour reprises the two First-Quarter motives, and then repeats them in reverse order, creating a motivic pattern of A-B-B-A, a “palindrome,” which reads the same forward and back, suggesting a low-level sense of closure of the half-hour period. However, because the motives retain their original form and pitches, the Second Quarter melody remains unfinished and the tonal center unresolved.

Second Quarter

Four-Motive Palindrome

To the phrases of the Second Quarter, the Third Quarter adds a retrograde (backwards) version (“R-Y”) of the Second Quarter phrase “Y,” which also has the characteristics for reversing the pitch order within the “A” and “B” motives of phrase “X.” The development of ideas in “R-Y” of “X” and “Y,” coupled with the new energy of the ascending third phrase heightens the sense of expectation as time moves on toward its fulfillment. This “teleology” is interpreted in the ecclesial context in eschatological terms, evoking watchfulness for the End Times.

Third Quarter

X **Y** **R-Y**

“In the fullness of time...” Following suit, the Fourth Quarter adds a phrase that is a retrograde (backwards) version the original phrase “X.” It is a “motivic” palindrome with “R-Y,” but completes a four-phrase sequence which is a grand 16-note palindrome. In other words, the entire melody reads the same forward and backward, bringing its end full circle to its beginning, symbolizing the Christ who is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the source and goal of all Time. Moreover, the structure of motivic permutations creates a host of “chiastic,” or cruciform patterns, symbolic of the Cross through which Christ redeems all time.

Fourth Quarter

Sixteen-Note Palindrome