

Program Notes

The title of the original Longfellow poem is *Christmas Bells*. There is an interesting story behind the writing of the poem. Charles Appleton Longfellow was the eldest son of the famous poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Fannie Elizabeth Appleton, who lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In March of 1863, with the Civil War then in its third year, nineteen year old Charley ran away to Washington to join the Union Army. He presented himself for enlistment to the commander of Battery A of the 1st Massachusetts Artillery, who knew the boy. The officer contacted Henry who reluctantly gave his permission for the boy to enlist.

Charley proved himself such an exceptional soldier that he was soon offered a commission as a Second Lieutenant of Artillery. He first saw action at the Battle of Chancellorsville. In June he was briefly invalided home following a bout of typhoid fever and malaria, rejoining his unit in August. Then in November, during the Battle of New Hope Church, Charley was shot through the left shoulder, the bullet just grazing his spine. He narrowly avoided being paralyzed. Henry received word of Charley's wounding on December 1, and he and a younger son went immediately to Washington, where Charley was in hospital, and brought him home to Cambridge. It was while nursing his son in his slow recovery that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow composed this poem during Christmas, 1863.

—Ronald Perera

Christmas Bells

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said:
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead; nor doth He sleep!
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807–1882)

Commissioned by The Memorial Church,
Harvard University, for the 2014 Carol Service

A Soldier's Carol

for SATB Chorus unaccompanied

Christmas Bells (1863)

Ronald Perera

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)

Andante espressivo e flessibile (♩ = 88)

Soprano



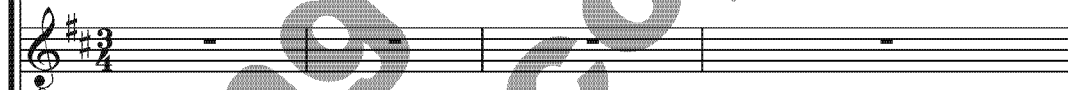
I heard the bells on Christ-mas

Alto

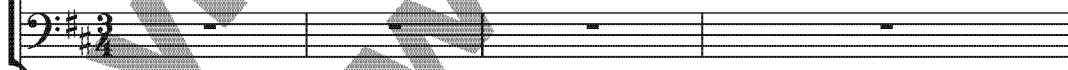


I heard the bells on Christ - mas

Tenor

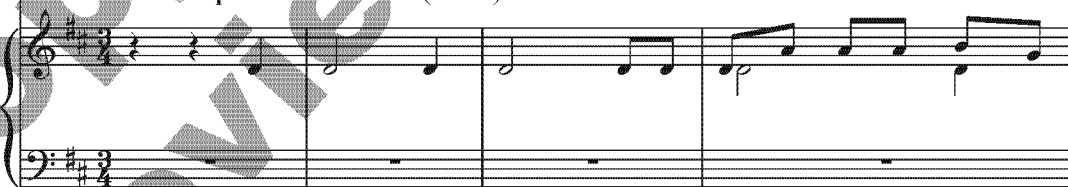


Bass



Andante espressivo e flessibile (♩ = 88)

Keyboard
(for
rehearsal
only)



5

(mp)

Day Their old, fa-mil-iar car-ols play, And wild _____ and

Day, on Christ - mas Day, And wild _____ and

p

And wild _____ and

p

and

9

poco trattenuto

sweet The words re-peat Of peace on earth, good - will to

sweet The words re - peat Of peace on earth, good-will to

sweet The words re - peat Of peace on earth, good - will to

sweet The words re - peat Of peace on earth, good-will to

poco trattenuto

13 **Tempo I**

men! men! men! And thought how, as the day had come, The

pp *mp* *pp dolcissimo*

Tempo I

17

The bel-fries of all Chris-ten-dom* Had come. The bel-fries of all Chris-ten-dom* Had

pp *mp* *pp* *p* *mp*

* The "t" is silent.

21

cresc. *mf*

rolled a - long - The un - bro - ken song Of peace on earth, good -

cresc. *mf*

rolled a - long - The un - bro - ken song Of peace on earth, good -

cresc. *mf*

rolled a - long The un - bro - ken song Of peace on earth, good -

cresc. *mf*

rolled a - long The un - bro - ken song Of peace on earth, good -

25

poco trattenuto *p* *pp* **Tempo I** *mf*

will to men! Till, ring - ing, sing - ing on —

p *pp* *mf*

will to men! Till, ring - ing, sing - ing on —

p *pp, mf*

will to men! Till, ring - ing, sing - ing

p *pp, mf*

will to men! Till, ring - ing, sing - ing

poco trattenuto **Tempo I**

poco trattenuto

Tempo I

37

will to men! Then from each black, ac-curs-ed

will to men! Then from each black, ac-curs-ed

will to men! Then from each black, ac-curs-ed

will to men! Then from each black, ac-curs-ed

poco trattenuto

Tempo I

41

mouth The can-non thun - dered in the South, And

mouth The can-non thun - dered in the South, And

mouth The can-non thun - dered in the South, And with

mouth The can-non thun - dered in the South, And with

44

dim. *p*

with the sound The car - ols drowned Of peace on

dim. *p*

with the sound The car - ols drowned Of peace on

dim. *p*

the sound The car - ols drowned Of peace on

dim. *p*

with the sound The car - ols drowned Of peace on

47

ff

earth, good - will to men! It was as if an earth - quake

ff

earth, good - will to men! It was as if an earth - quake

ff

earth, good - will to men! It was as if an earth - quake

ff

earth, good - will to men! It was as if an earth - quake

51

, sub. p

rent The hearth-stones of a con - tin - ent, And made for -

, sub. p

rent The hearth-stones of a con - tin - ent, And made for -

, sub. p

rent The hearth-stones of a con - tin - ent, And made for -

, sub. p

rent The hearth-stones of a con - tin - ent, And made for -

55

mp

lorn The house-holds born Of peace — on earth, —

mp

lorn The house-holds born — Of peace — on earth, —

lorn — The house-holds born — Of peace, — of peace — on

lorn — The house-holds born Of peace, — of peace — on

poco trattenuto

Tempo I

59 *p* , *pp* , *mp*
 — good-will to men! And in de-spair I bowed my head; —

p , *pp* , *p*
 — good-will to men! And in de - spair I

mp , *pp* , *mp*
 8 earth, good-will to men! And in-de-spair I bowed my

mp , *pp* , *p*
 earth, good-will to men! And in de - spair I

poco trattenuto

Tempo I

63 *p* *p*
 — "There is no peace on

p *p*
 bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I

p *p*
 head. "There is no peace on

mp
 bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I

63 *p* *p*
 bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I

67 *mf*

earth, "For hate _____ is strong _____ And mocks the song Of

mf

said: "For hate _____ is strong _____ And mocks the song Of

mf

8 earth, "For hate _____ is strong _____ And mocks the song Of

mf

said: "For hate is strong _____ And mocks the song _____ Of

71 *p* *poco trattenuto* *pp*

peace _____ on earth, good - will _____ to men!"

p *pp*

peace _____ on earth, good - will _____ to men!"

p *pp*

peace _____ on earth, good - will _____ to men!"

p *pp*

peace _____ on earth, good - will _____ to

poco trattenuto

75 *ppp* **Tempo I** *f*

Then pealed — the bells more loud — and deep:

ppp *f*

Then pealed — the bells more loud — and deep:

ppp , *f*

Then pealed the bells — more loud and deep: "God

ppp , *f*

men!" Then pealed the bells — more loud and deep: "God

Tempo I

79

"God is not dead; — nor doth he sleep! The

"God is not dead; — nor doth he sleep! The

is not dead: — nor doth he sleep! — The

is not dead; — nor doth he sleep! — The

83 *cresc. poco a poco* *poco trattenuto* **ff** **Meno mosso**

wrong — shall fail, — The Right — pre-vail, With peace — on —

cresc. poco a poco **ff**

wrong — shall fail, — The Right — pre-vail, With peace — on —

cresc. poco a poco **ff**

8 wrong — shall fail, The Right pre - vail, With peace — on

cresc. poco a poco **ff**

wrong — shall fail, The Right pre - vail, With peace — on —

poco trattenuto **Meno mosso**

87 **Ancora meno mosso**

earth, good-will — to — men! — Peace on earth.

mf *ff* *pp* *p*

earth, good-will — to — men! — Peace on earth.

mf *ff* *pp* *p*

8 earth, good-will — to — men! — Peace on earth.

mf *ff* *pp* *p*

earth, good-will — to — men! — Peace on earth.

Ancora meno mosso