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

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**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)
A Soldier’s Carol

*for SATB Chorus unaccompanied*

*Christmas Bells* (1863)
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)

**Andante espressivo e flessibile** (\( \dot{\jmath} = 88 \))

*Soprano*

*Soprano*

*Alto*

*Tenor*

*Bass*

**Keyboard**

(for rehearsal only)

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Day Their old, familiar carols play, And wild and

Day, on Christmas Day, And wild and

And wild and

sweet The words repeat Of peace on earth, goodwill to

sweet The words repeat Of peace on earth, goodwill to

sweet The words repeat Of peace on earth, goodwill to

sweet The words repeat Of peace on earth, goodwill to

poco trattenuto

poco trattenuto
men!

The men!

And thought how, as the day had come,

* The “t” is silent.
rolled a-long The un-bro-ken song Of peace on earth, good-
cresc.
rolled a-long The un-bro-ken song Of peace on earth, good-
cresc.
rolled a-long The un-bro-ken song Of peace on earth, good-
cresc.
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cresc.
rolled a-long The un-bro-ken song Of peace on earth, good-
cresc.
its way,

The world revolved from night to day,

its way,

The world revolved from night to day,

on its way,

The world revolved from night to day,

on its way,

The world revolved from night to day,

A voice, a chime,

Of peace on earth, good-

A voice, a chime,

Of peace on earth, good-

A chant sublime Of peace on earth, good-

A chant sublime Of peace on earth, good-

A chant sublime Of peace on earth, good-

A chant sublime Of peace on earth, good-
poco trattenuto

Tempo I

will to men! Then from each black, accursed

will to men! Then from each black, accursed

will to men! Then from each black, accursed

poco trattenuto

Tempo I

mouth The cannon thundered in the South, And

mouth The cannon thundered in the South, And

mouth The cannon thundered in the South, And with

mouth The cannon thundered in the South, And with
with the sound The carols drowned Of peace on

with the sound The carols drowned Of peace on

the sound The carols drowned Of peace on

with the sound The carols drowned Of peace on

earth, goodwill to men! It was as if an earthquake

earth, goodwill to men! It was as if an earthquake

earth, goodwill to men! It was as if an earthquake

earth, goodwill to men! It was as if an earthquake
The hearth-stones of a continent, And made for-

The hearth-stones of a continent, And made for-

The hearth-stones of a continent, And made for-

The hearth-stones of a continent, And made for-

The hearth-stones of a continent, And made for-

The hearth-stones of a continent, And made for-

The house-holds born Of peace on earth.
poco trattenuto

Tempo I

good-will to men! And in despair I bowed my head;

earth, good-will to men! And in despair I bowed my head;

“There is no peace on earth,” I bowed my head;

“There is no peace on earth,” I bowed my head;
earth, "For hate is strong And mocks the song Of
sait: "For hate is strong And mocks the song Of
earth, "For hate is strong And mocks the song Of

peace on earth, good will to men!"
peace on earth, good will to men!"
peace on earth, good will to men!"
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

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

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God

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,

is not dead; nor doth he sleep! The,