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)

Christmas Bells was written in response to a request from the Financial Times for a carol as part of their annual Christmas fundraising. In searching for a suitable text, I found that Longfellow's American Civil War poem resonated for me with the commemoration of the outbreak of the First World War, a subject which was already occupying much of my vocal programming and composition at the time. It felt important to be reminded of the seasonal message of peace even when war felt an ever-present topic. *Christmas Bells* was first performed by the Godwin Choir at St George the Martyr, Southwark, directed by Alex Davan Whetton with Steven Neugarten at the piano in December 2014 on YouTube for the Financial Times.

Duration: c. 4 minutes

The FT Christmas Carol 2014

Christmas Bells

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807–1882)

Roderick Williams
(b.1965)

Bright, not too fast ♩ = 86

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Bright, not too fast ♩ = 86

Piano

(use the sustaining pedal freely to blur the chiming)

heard the bells on Christ-mas Day_Their old fa-mil-liar ca-rols play, and wild and sweet the words re-peat_ Of

heard the be... (lls)___ Day_ o... (ld) Ca... swee..._____ ... pea...

heard the bells on Christ-mas Day_Their old fa-mil-liar ca-rols play, and wild and sweet the words re-peat_ Of

___ Chri... o... (ld) ca - rols_____ wi... (ld) wor...

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mp peace on earth, good-will to men!_____ [3+2+2+2] **mf** And

p ear... (th) wi... (ll) men!_____ **mf** And

mp peace on earth, good-will to men!_____ **mf** And

p pea... wi... (ll) men!_____ **mf** And

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cresc. thought how, as___ the day had come The bel-fries of all Christ-en-dom_ Had rolled a-long The un-bro-ken song Of **dim.**

cresc. thought how, as___ the day had come The bel-fries of all Christ-en-dom_ Had rolled a-long The un-bro-ken song Of **dim.**

cresc. thought how, as___ the day had come The bel-fries of all Christ-en-dom_ Had rolled a-long The un-bro-ken song Of **dim.**

cresc. thought how, as___ the day had come The bel-fries of all Christ-en-dom_ Had rolled a-long The un-bro-ken song Of **dim.**

poco **p**