

THE CORNELL
CHIMES



News Notes
from the
CORNELL Chimesmasters



Chimesmaster's Corner: A Year of Renewal

Kevin Wang '26 (KW)

Greetings from McGraw Tower! 2025 has been an amazing year for the Cornell Chimes. After an extended period shaped by construction and limited access, the project concluded at the end of August, marking a long-awaited return to normalcy. We were thrilled to resume our regular concert schedule and reopen our doors to the public. Since then, hundreds of guests have experienced the chimes up close, bringing renewed energy back to the tower. That sense of renewal was further reflected this year with the welcoming of four new chimesmasters: Wenlong Fang '27, Alex Gardocki '27, Andrew Arena '28, and Serena Wu '28.

We continued our traditional specialty concerts, including Homecoming, Family Weekend, and Veterans Day. A highlight was the midnight Halloween concert, which featured the much-anticipated return of the tubas. Special thanks go to alumni chimesmasters Linda Li '22 and Chenchen Lu '23 for helping us set up the Halloween decorations! We also hosted several additional themed concerts to reengage students from across campus, including programs featuring Taylor Swift, animated films, and musical theater.

Alongside our performance schedule, we made several long-overdue improvements to our spaces and equipment. We moved in new music cabinets and desks, upgraded our computer, and refreshed the practice room and playing stand level through a series of cleanups.

The tower was active over the summer as well. In July, we reached a wider audience than ever before when we played a proposal concert for an alumnus. What began as a deeply personal moment quickly captured attention far beyond the Arts Quad, going viral across social media. We had the privilege of performing another proposal concert in early December.

It is hard for me to believe how quickly the years have passed since I first climbed the tower during the Fall of '22. From coaching compets, playing duets with fellow chimesmasters, and meeting alumni during the Chimes Advisory Council (CAC), these experiences have shaped some of my most vivid Cornell memories. I'm thankful for everyone who has made this journey possible, and I look forward to making this year another memorable one.



Connect to the Cornell Chimes All Year Long!

 [@CornellChimes](https://www.instagram.com/CornellChimes)

 [facebook.com/chimes.cornell](https://www.facebook.com/chimes.cornell)

 [chimes.cornell.edu](https://www.chimes.cornell.edu)

 Join the chimesmasters' private Facebook group or alumni email list. Email chimes@cornell.edu to learn more.



Behind The Bells: *Everyone's Feet Are Moving*

Karli Buday, Director of Campus Activities

It has been a big year for the Chimes program - full of progress, patience, and exciting momentum! Bing Bong! Here's a look at the work that keeps the bells ringing across campus.

As you know, the tower was offline for about 18 months during a major roof restoration. This multi-million dollar project reinforced and repaired critical infrastructure to protect the long-term future of the Chimes. While the timeline stretched longer than expected, the investment ensures the program's longevity for generations to come.

The Chimes Museum renovation is also moving forward. Thank you, Jessica Cavin (Office Manager for Campus Activities), for supporting this project and working to get it across the finish line! Work actually began before the tower closure, but was delayed after a small construction-related flood impacted the ceiling and electrical systems. We've also received a significant collection of Cornell and Chimes history from Erwin Chan's family to incorporate into the space. Many of you know that Erwin Chen '00 was a past chimesmaster and was a prolific music arranger. Enoch Chan, Erwin's brother, was an amazing collaborator, ensuring the collection was shipped to Cornell. We have been able to transfer most of the pieces to the Rare & Manuscripts Collections. Our goal is to reopen the museum at the start of the 2026-2027 academic year.

As you have already read, the Chimes book project is officially underway and is currently fully funded! This is a special moment to document the continued history, stories, traditions, and rare memories that make the program so distinctive. More details on the timeline will be shared in the coming months.

Behind the scenes, technology upgrades are in motion. Installation of a new hour bell control panel is expected to begin over Spring Break and be completely functional by the end of the semester. The updated system will enable Wi-Fi programming and replace the existing software that is no longer supported, ensuring the hour bells remain reliable and adaptable.

Work also continues on the clock face lighting project initially started by Aidan McNay '24, M.ENG '25 (ACM), last year's head chimesmaster. The Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, alongside current students, is advancing the system to allow ongoing color changes and potentially expanded features, including rhythmic light pulsing. More updates soon!

You may also notice that the Chimes newsletter has grown. With so much happening, we want to keep you informed and connected. Thank you to Vasile (Alex) Trusca, Program Coordinator within Campus Activities, for helping expand this effort!

Chimes family and friends, your support keeps the Chimes program strong. The bells continue to mark time, celebrate milestones, and remain a steady presence at the heart of campus.





Bells That Bind Us: A New Chapter in Cornell Chimes History

Corey Ryan Earl '07 and Robert Feldman '66

The Cornell Chimes are the university's oldest musical tradition, ringing out over campus since 1868. Perhaps more than anything else, the bells unite generations of Cornellians – students, faculty, staff, and alumni, as the campus has evolved and grown. With the 160th anniversary of the Chimes approaching in 2028, we need your help telling your stories and preserving our history.

The Chimes Advisory Council has commissioned well-known university historian Corey Ryan Earle '07 to compile a new book on the history of the bells, building on the history documented in *The Cornell Chimes* by Ed McKeown, published in 1991 for the centennial of McGraw Tower. In addition, the Council has formed a small advisory committee of alumni and current chimesmasters to work with Corey on the book. The new book is not intended as a sequel but rather as an updated edition. This will span the entire history of the bells with a focus on events since 1991 and on stories not included in the previous book.

A lot has happened in the 35 years since the last book: addition of bells and tuning, several tower renovations, digitization and social media, a mysterious pumpkin, a pandemic, and more. As the people who experienced and shaped these moments in Cornell history, your voices as Chimes alumni are critical in ensuring these stories are documented. We are seeking:

- Your memories or short essays about your experiences as Chimes alumni
- Details about your time as chimesmaster
- Anecdotes, incidents, and traditions in the history of the Chimes that should be documented
- Chimes photographs, archives, or other memorabilia that should be preserved for posterity or included in the book
- Corrections, clarifications, or omissions from the 1991 *The Cornell Chimes* book

Please share your memories and photographs at our survey online:
<https://tinyurl.com/CornellChimesHistory>

We would love to hear from each of you, ideally in the next few weeks. Even if you don't have stories to share, the other information you provide in the survey will help ensure our records of Chimes alumni are accurate.

Visit the link above or scan this QR code with your phone to access the survey. Or email your stories, suggestions, ideas, and archival material directly to Corey Ryan Earle at cre8@cornell.edu.

This book project is made possible by the generous financial support of several Chimes alumni. Want to help support the project or get involved in other ways? Contact Bob Feldman '66, the book's Project Manager, at robert_feldman@hotmail.com or 508-740-5390.





We're Not in Kansas Anymore... but GCNA Congress Was

Ben Isaacson '27 (BMI)

From June 10-13, 2025, several of us found ourselves far away from Cayuga's waters in Lawrence, Kansas. Shirley Yuan '25, Kimon Vontas '27, Ben Isaacson '27, and Jen Lory-Moran '96, MAT '97 headed to the University of Kansas for the 82nd annual Congress of the Guild of Carillonneurs in North America (GCNA). We had the wonderful opportunity to meet up with Amrhen Ortega '15, Keiran Cantilina '15, and Judy Ogden '71, MPS '75, JD '77 as well.

It wasn't all that different from Cornell there: both universities were founded in 1865, both call themselves The Hill, and both use the same alma mater melody, with Cornell's as the original inspiration. And just like McGraw Tower, you can see and hear KU's Memorial Campanile and Carillon from quite a distance! The 120-foot campanile was built in 1950 to commemorate the 277 KU students who passed away during World War II. Since then, the 53 bells of the carillon have rung out over the campus from atop Mount Oread.

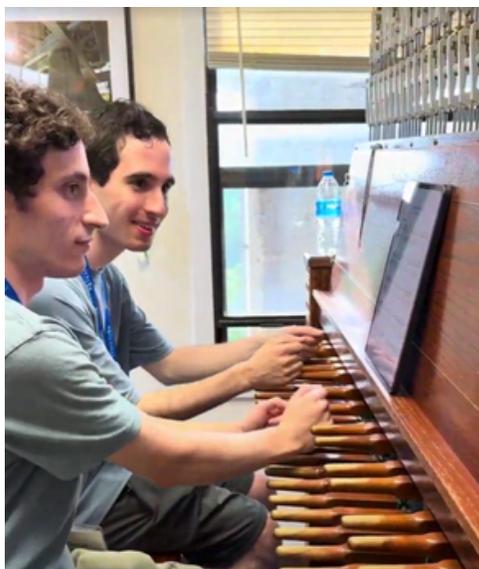
Kimon, Shirley, and I had a chance to play the carillon ourselves, and it was quite a blast. We tested out some of our own chimes arrangements and tackled some of the carillon arrangements as duets. I bravely tried playing the Alma Mater from memory despite the different keyboard layout, which was extra funny, knowing it was also the KU alma mater. As for Jen, our resident official Carillonneur Member, she even had one of her very own arrangements performed.

Listening to breathtaking carillon performances early in the morning was deeply refreshing, and I hadn't realized the tight-knit nature of the carillon community. We repeatedly found ourselves immersed in detailed conversations about bells, music, and history, and we heard some truly remarkable stories from Congress members. We met students from Yale, UChicago, and UMiami and learned a lot about the role of the carillon at other institutions across the country. Also, I have to admit that it was very entertaining to share our Cornell Chimes traditions and legends over lunch. The pumpkin of '97 was an excellent conversation topic.

Overall, we learned so much about the histories and cultures of bells, and we expanded our musical understanding of the chimes we ring 3 times a day, 7 days a week. I'm thankful we got to attend this year's Congress, and I have no doubt that the lessons we learned will continue to enrich our time at Cornell.



Cornell Chimesmasters at the GCNA Congress 2025, from left to right: Keiran Cantilina '15; Amrhen Ortega '15; Jennifer Lory-Moran '96, MAT '97; Benjamin Isaacson '27; Kimon Vontas '27; Shirley Yuan '25; and Judy Ogden '71, MPS '75, JD '77.



Kimon Vontas '27 and Benjamin Isaacson '27 playing the KU Memorial Carillon.



From Ithaca to Mechelen: *A Carillon Adventure*

Jennifer Courtley Lory-Moran '96, MAT '97 (JLCLM)

This year, I am doing something absolutely incredible and having the biggest adventure of my life. I have taken a year's leave from my teaching job and am spending a year in Belgium, studying carillon at the Koninklijke Beiaardschool, "Jef Denyn" (or the Royal Carillon School, "Jef Denyn") in Mechelen!

Some have asked, "Why go now?" After all, I am only a few years away from being able to retire. Why not wait?

Well, I am "seizing the day" and following this dream while I can. As I'm getting older, physical activities aren't getting any easier. If I was going to pursue this, I wanted to go while I could still climb towers and walk on cobblestone streets. And who knows - maybe going now will give me the break I need, and I may end up teaching even longer than I might have without a break. (Don't hold me to that!).

When I arrived in Mechelen, I was undecided about how intense I wanted my year at the Carillon School to be. I needed to decide whether I was there to cavort around Europe and play some bells, or to study bells and have occasional side trips into other parts of Europe. I ended up choosing option "b," and have been working toward completing the carillon school's diploma in a year, which is a LOT more work than I originally envisioned. I have basically become a music major for a year - whee!

Each week I have lessons in playing carillon, campanology (the history and science of bells), harmony, arranging, and improvisation. I also receive instruction in playing from lead sheets and playing duets. In addition, I need to write a thesis this year on a campanological topic. (I was distressed at trying to find academic resources related to my topic with only the carillon school library and the public library in Mechelen to turn to, but thanks to the Cornell University Library system, I have recently realized I can access a massive treasure trove of resources remotely! (Thank you, Cornell librarians!!!)



In addition to lessons at the school in Mechelen, I take the train to Lier once each week for carillon lessons through a music academy there.

For fun, I play in a handbell choir at the carillon school each week. Such tiny bells compared to the ones I play during the rest of the week!!!

It is unbelievable to find myself living in a place where I can literally walk to 4 different carillons within 15 minutes of my apartment, compared to Ithaca where I have to drive 2 hours to get to a carillon. Most weeks I am playing on at least 3 different carillons and climbing hundreds of stairs.

The historic belfry of Tongeren's Basilica of Our Lady, part of Belgium's rich carillon tradition and a UNESCO World Heritage site.

During the first 3 months in Belgium, I played 15 different carillons - the instruments that I play regularly in Mechelen and Lier; instruments in Belgium and the Netherlands that I visited on monthly school-sponsored group trips with my teacher from Lier; and visits as part of the Mechelen school's "kangaroo project," where the school has created a list of over 30 towers whose carillonners have agreed to host carillon student "joeys" to "hop along" with them and see what their experience as carillonners is like. I have played on light instruments and heavy instruments, bells cast in this century and bells that are 500 years old, carillons tuned in equal temperament and carillons with mean tone tuning, chamber carillons located at ground level and a carillon that I had to climb over 500 steps to reach. I have also seen a number of historic automatic drums - these are like massive music boxes that can be programmed to play melodies on the bells throughout the hour by adding and removing metal pins that stick out around the drums - and I even climbed inside one and helped change its melody!

It hasn't been easy being away from my family and friends for so long. Fortunately, my husband and daughter were able to visit me at Thanksgiving time, and I came home for a few weeks at Christmas. And I am so grateful to live in an age of phones and email and texts and video calls. I can't imagine being away like this and having to wait weeks for letters to make it back and forth across the Atlantic! I've also been very lucky to make some amazingly supportive new friends at school, which makes being away from home more bearable.

So I came to Belgium with the purpose of exploring cool European cities and playing lots of bells. I am *definitely* playing lots of bells! Since arriving here, I have spent long weekends in Amsterdam and Bruges and Paris exploring. But most of my visits to cool European cities have been primarily centered around climbing staircases and ladders of questionable levels of safety (no OSHA here!) to explore dusty belfries in churches built centuries ago. And every day I think about how incredibly lucky I am to be able to access those belfries and play those instruments. My life this year is very different from anything I've ever experienced - I am able to walk or take public transportation ANYWHERE I need to go. There is immediate access to Belgian chocolate whenever it is needed. And there are gorgeous bells everywhere I turn. Basically, heaven.



At St. Rumbold's Cathedral in Mechelen, Belgium.



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Campus Activities

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CORNELL
Giving Day

On March 12 of 2026, alumni, parents, friends, and Big Red fans around the world will come together to support all the things that make Cornell special. Every gift made between 12:00 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. EDT counts toward Cornell Giving Day.

The Cornell Chimes is sustained entirely by the generosity of alumni and friends. Your support helps keep the bells ringing across campus and carrying tradition forward. Scan the QR code to make your gift and be part of the music.



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