ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: THE COWBELL IN MUSIC AND CULTURE

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Cowbells are used as percussion instruments in a variety of musical settings today. Such uses represent a number of distinct musical practices. In this dissertation I attempt to chronicle cowbells in music from the first such use (the mid-19th century) to the present day, with a focus on historically linking and differentiating cowbell practices in orchestral music, in early musical theater and popular music, and in Cuban and Cuban-derived music. I argue furthermore that perceptions of the cowbell and its connotations, in the cultures that produce these musical practices, affect the way that the instrument is used and perceived. The word “cowbell” makes no differentiation between cowbells used historically for farming and the modern instruments descended from them. This, coupled with historical associations between cowbells and the carnivalesque exemplified by charivari practices, has led to perceptions of the cowbell, throughout its musical history, as an object of othering, humor, and/or derision.

# THE COWBELL IN MUSIC AND CULTURE

By

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**Terms for “Cowbell”**

**In German**

*Kuhglocke*

*Herdenglocke* (“herd bell”)

*Herdengelauten* (“herd ringing”)

*Kuhschellen* (“cow ringer”)

*Viehschellen* (“livestock ringer”)

**In Basque**

*Zintzerrat*

**In French**

*Cloche à vache*

**In Spanish**

*Cencerro*

*Gangarria*

**In Italian**

*Campanaccio*

Introduction

## "I Got a Fever"

"So clear and unprejudiced ears hear the sweetest and most soul-stirring melody in tinkling cowbells and the like (dogs baying the moon), not to be referred to association, but intrinsic to the sound itself…"

- Henry David Thoreau, journal entry dated June 9, 1852

On April 8, 2000, the long-running sketch comedy television program *Saturday Night Live* (then in its 25th season) aired a sketch which is variously referred to as "*Behind the Music*: Blue Öyster Cult" or, more commonly, "More Cowbell." Written by Will Ferrell and Donnell Campbell, the sketch opens with narration implying it to be a segment of the VH1 series *Behind the Music*, and the footage is appropriately treated with faux-grain in order to suggest a provenance from the year 1976. Rock band Blue Öyster Cult, portrayed by *SNL* cast members Chris Parnell, Chris Kattan, Horatio Sanz, Jimmy Fallon, and Ferrell, are shown in the studio recording "(Don't Fear) The Reaper," with production handled by the fictitious Bruce Dickinson (portrayed by the episode's host, Christopher Walken).

In the sketch, the band's attempts to run the tune are repeatedly stymied by fictitious cowbell player Gene Frenkle. Portrayed by Ferrell, Frenkle plays the song's cowbell part in various comedic ways - overly loudly, accompanied by intrusive dancing, and, in one case, badly out of time and directly in the face of lead singer Eric Bloom (played by Parnell). Each time, after the band members inevitably object to Frenkle's cowbell playing, Dickinson emerges from the producer's booth, insisting that not only was the cowbell not too loud, it was in fact too quiet. Christopher Walken's deadpan delivery of lines like "I gotta have more cowbell!" gets riotous laughs from the studio audience and pushes the rest of the cast to the point of breaking - Fallon (portraying drummer Albert Bouchard) can be seen biting down onto his drumsticks to keep himself from laughing. Over the final track, after the band has evidently been convinced by Dickinson's endorsement, the video freeze-frames on Ferrell. Text fades in, reading "Gene Frenkle 1950-2000," and the sketch concludes. It is five minutes and forty-two seconds of truly inspired comedy.

Will Ferrell and Christopher Walken are both closely associated with the sketch to this day. Ferrell in particular has made a large number of appearances alluding to his role as Frenkel - for example, he played cowbell on the song “Little Sister” with Queens of the Stone Age during the May 14, 2005 episode of *Saturday Night Live*, while in costume and character as Gene Frenkel. In December 2022, Ferrell made headlines for appearing - playing the cowbell - onstage during a musical performance by his teenage son Magnus Ferrell, as reported by *Rolling Stone*[1] for example.

Christopher Walken, on the other hand, does not share Ferrell’s evident enthusiasm for the notoriety of the sketch. In 2004, in an interview with the Orlando Sentinel, Walken complained, “I hear about it everywhere I go. It's been YEARS, and all anybody brings up is 'COW-bell.'”[2] On November 21, 2019, Ferrell, appearing on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, claimed Walken had told him the sketch “ruined [his] life.” This piece of phrasing was a widely reproduced headline soon after the episode aired. “During the curtain call, people bring cowbells and ring them,” Ferrell recalls Walken saying. At an Italian restaurant where Walken lunched, “the waiter asked if I wanted more cowbell with my pasta bolognese.”

Will Ferrell’s recollections here – an anecdote on a late night television show – need not be taken as gospel. And indeed, the personal feelings of the celebrities involved in this sketch are not crucial to a study of the cowbell. But “More Cowbell,” the sketch, *is* crucial to a study of the cowbell, because like Christopher Walken and Will Ferrell, the cowbell *itself* has become closely associated with it in the popular consciousness. “More Cowbell” is beloved now - *Rolling Stone* called it the ninth best sketch in SNL’s history in 2014,[3] and some online “listicles” call it the best. When I began to research this dissertation, references to Will Ferrell or to “More Cowbell” more broadly were a nearly universal response when I mentioned my topic. This, and the preponderance of “More Cowbell”-related content that appears when one types “cowbell” into a search engine, suggest that the sketch, or at least the slogan, is

[1] John Blistein, “Will Ferrell Brought His Signature Cowbell to His Son’s First Live Show,” *Rolling Stone*, December 5, 2022, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/will-ferrell-played-cowbell-son-magnus-first-concert-1234641626/
[2] Roger Moore, “Nobody Does It like Walken,” *Orlando Sentinel,* October 25, 2004, https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2004-10-25-0410240130-story.html
[3] “50 Greatest *Saturday Night Live* Sketches of All Time,” *Rolling Stone*, accessed 4/27/2023, https://www.rollingstone.com/tv-movies/tv-movie-lists/50-greatest-saturday-night-live-sketches-of-all-time-12735/

the go-to point of reference for at least the modern American mind. For this reason, it is worthwhile to examine the cowbell's portrayal therein.

The sketch is funny. In fact, it is hilarious. It is likely beyond the scope of any dissertation outside of the disciplines of psychology or media studies to attempt to argue for the objective humorousness of anything, but if the stifled laughter of the sketch's cast, and the roars of delight from the studio audience, are anything to go by, it is safe to conclude that "More Cowbell," comedically, works. But it is of use to at least make an attempt at answering the question of why. Where is the humor here?

There is physical humor - Will Ferrell's gyrations, his comically undersized shirt that rides up and exposes his stomach. There is a kind of tonal dissonance in the contrast between the song's dark sound and morbid lyrics and the whole premise of comedy being drawn from it. Christopher Walken's continued request for more cowbell may be humorous in part because of the contradiction - it is plainly obvious to the audience as well as to the band that the cowbell is too loud, and yet *the* Bruce Dickinson wants more of it!

Let me now ask a rhetorical question of the reader - a question that will hang over this entire dissertation. Could this joke have been made about any of the other instruments present in the song? Could this have been a "More Guitar" sketch? A "More Vocals" sketch? The premise of this joke *could* be applied to other instruments. But I suspect that the sketch would not have reached an iconic status if it had not focused on the cowbell. I will in this dissertation argue that there is in Western culture a long history of the cowbell being associated with humor. This history predates the cowbell's introduction into music. Its influence near-inevitably colors the ways in which it has been used musically, as well as how it has been both *heard* and *understood* musically by audiences. And the fact that perhaps the cowbell's most visible presence in modern popular culture is this extended joke at the expense of the cowbell itself - this "More Cowbell" sketch - is surprisingly appropriate in light of this history.

"More Cowbell" singles out the cowbell for ridicule. It sets the cowbell apart from the other instrumental forces that make up the song, and in doing so implies that the cowbell *does not belong* - that its presence here is inappropriate somehow. "More Cowbell" portrays the cowbell as an interloper among "proper" rock instruments, the cowbell as a goofy sound amidst a serious and dour soundscape, the cowbell played in a comical (but realistic) manner live on set by Will Ferrell while the rest of the cast

members mime their instruments soberly (and inaccurately). There is even an additional humorous contradiction that might be perceived by a viewer familiar with the actual Blue Öyster Cult song in question - that contradiction between the obnoxiously loud cowbell present throughout the sketch, and the actual cowbell present in “(Don’t Fear) The Reaper,” which is so low in the mix as to be nearly inaudible.

There is something inherently funny about the cowbell being the center of the sketch, independent of the funny things that people say about it and the funny way that Will Ferrell plays it. This is why “More Cowbell” seems to exist today as a slogan, as something that coffee mugs and t-shirts and indeed cowbells have printed on them, as least as prominent as the actual sketch if not more so. The cowbell itself is a punchline.

**The task at hand**

So the cowbell is a punchline. For now, what else is it?

Let us first define the cowbell, as objectively as possible, in the context hitherto described: the context of “More Cowbell,” and of the song “(Don’t Fear) The Reaper.” In both of these contexts, the cowbell is a struck metal percussion instrument. It is shaped like a kind of trapezoidal, square-mouthed bell, and has no clapper inside it. It can be held (as we see Ferrell doing in the sketch) and struck, or it can be mounted (using a bolt connected to an O-ring) onto any metal rod between ⅜” and ½” in diameter. In order to produce sound, the instrument is struck with an implement, such as a drumstick or a mallet. This instrument - this cowbell - is a universal feature of the modern drumset and a common feature of the Western concert percussion battery, not to mention a ubiquitous sound in many styles of African diasporic music: Washington D.C.’s own Go-Go, the music of Cuba, and the various Cuban-derived musical styles that are sometimes referred to as “Latin” or “salsa,” but which I follow Fernando Rios in calling instead *tropical* music.

When “cowbell” is written on a wind ensemble or orchestra part, percussionists know to reach for this instrument. But this is not the only way to interpret the word “cowbell.” There are also the bells that cows wear.

By way of a representative example, let us consider a modern example manufactured by Bevin Bells - to be specific, it is their Kentucky model in size 2k. It has a trapezoidal shape, a rectangular mouth,

and a rectangular metal loop at its upper extremity, shaped so that a leather strap (such as on a collar or harness) can be threaded through it. It also has a clapper hanging inside it. When this bell is hung from the neck of a cow, the motion of the animal's head as it grazes and mills about will cause the clapper to swing and maintain a reasonably constant noise to broadcast the animal's location. Its physical attributes, therefore, suggest that it was manufactured for the purpose of being hung from the neck of a cow.

*Figure 1: Bevin Kentucky bell and Latin Percussion Black Beauty, exterior.*

*Figure 2: Same bells, interior.*

Figures 1 and 2 show these bells. In both images, the Bevin Bell described above is on the left, and on the right is another cowbell from my personal collection, a Latin Percussion Black Beauty.[4] Figure 2 shows details of the bells' interior - clearly visible is the clapper of the Bevin bell, as well as the smooth, featureless interior of the Black Beauty.

Both of these objects are **cowbells.** I mean by this statement that there is not a more clear or specific term in common parlance, whether among musicians or the general public, which will differentiate these objects. The word "cowbell" is the most intelligible and widely used means to denote both of them. But they are not so interchangeable as their identical names might imply. They are *similar* - these two bells have a nearly identical shape, and indeed if I were to remove the clapper of the Bevin example and strike it with a stick it would have a similar tone to the LP example and would be able to perform in many of the same musical roles. But in their current states - clappered and unclappered - they are different in construction, purpose, and method of sound production. And yet they are both cowbells.

Why are they similar? The reason that they share the same name and so many features of construction is simple: they share a common origin. The hanging of bells from domesticated animals dates back thousands of years. Percival Price, in his 1997 volume *Bells and Man*, remarked that "the small amount of Greek and Roman evidence of animal bells cannot mean that these people rarely put bells on their animals. The ancient universality of the custom and its mention in fable belie this."[5] Similarly, Panayotis Panopoulos - one of the rare writers to chronicle the social aspects of animal bells in their agricultural use (though unfortunately for our purposes he writes primarily about goat bells) complained in 2003 that "although animal bells are highly important artefacts in the material culture of stock-keeping societies, they have received little attention from ethnographers."[6]

And cowbells - meaning for us specifically elongated, non-spherical bells of the type typically hung on cattle in Europe and in the post-Columbian Americas - have been reappropriated for musical purposes on several occasions over the course of the last two hundred years.

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[4] To be clear, "Latin Percussion" thusly capitalized in this document refers to the American musical instrument manufacturer of that name, founded in 1964 by engineer and entrepreneur Martin Cohen.
[5] Percival Price, *Bells and Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 74.
[6] Panayotis Panopoulos, "Animal Bells as Symbols: Sound and Hearing in a Greek Island Village," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 4 (2003): 640, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3134704.

To put it another way: the reason that my LP Black Beauty and my Bevin Kentucky bells look so similar is that the musical practice which the LP cowbell was manufactured to meet the needs of *originated*, historically, in the use by musicians of cowbells *as instruments*. The specifics of this process will be the focus of much of this dissertation. But an unavoidable parallel focus of this dissertation will be this way in which the definition of the term "cowbell" is split. The musical cowbell and the nonmusical cowbell are hopelessly intertwined. They are alike and yet distinct. They are not interchangeable, and yet the process by which one can become the other – the removal of the clapper – is simple and easy to do, and is what has *allowed* the cowbell to have such varied musical uses.

I hypothesize that this aspect of the cowbell is what makes it particularly susceptible to being assigned the role of punchline. It is what makes the cowbell's otherness, as portrayed in "More Cowbell," seem so natural to the viewer. We are aware that the cowbell is an instrument, and we are familiar with its use in musical contexts and can recognize its sound. But we intuit that it is also somehow *different* from other instruments. It is *less* an instrument, because it can easily be *not* one. It has the word "cow" in its name, after all, and this is a reminder of a utilitarian, agricultural function - a status not as an instrument but as a tool - that no other musical instrument is saddled with the memory of.

I will argue, in this dissertation, that this intrinsic otherness has been a feature of the cowbell in all its musical contexts. Some of these contexts - such as "More Cowbell" - have purposefully exploited this feature of the cowbell for comedic effect. But the cowbell stands to be potentially heard as a punchline, or at least to carry an association with cows, a sense of coming from *outside music*, even when used with no humorous intent at all. Certainly it is this "otherness" which has prompted quite a large number of people - both musicians and non-musicians - to assume that I am joking when I tell them I am writing a dissertation about cowbells.

This is the cowbell's cultural heritage. In different contexts, cowbells can suggest public festivity, idyllic pastoralism, or just sheer comedy, but thanks to this unique origin and the otherness that it grants, in music the cowbell is (so to speak) always good at suggesting *something*. Some composers and performers have successfully exploited this suggestiveness for artistic effect; at other times, however, the cowbell's seeming readiness to be funny in and of itself - a readiness that may be completely unavoidable

by simple virtue of the fact that the word “cow” is in its name - threatens to stand in the way of serious questions about it how it got to be where it is, so to speak, in music.

And so the intention of the present document is outlined. My goal from the genesis of this dissertation project was to write a history of the cowbell in music, with a focus on understanding the relationship between the distinct objects both musical and nonmusical which fall under that name. But as I began to research this topic I quickly discovered that the history of the cowbell is not just one history - it is multiple histories that stretch over multiple continents and are privileged to influence one another at times, seemingly, by simple virtue of the fact that the same word (be it cowbell, cencerro, *kuhglocke* or any other synonymous term) has the power to denote them all. Under the umbrella of “cowbell” are many rich instrumental traditions, from many different styles of music. This document will attempt both to explore these usages and, more importantly, to relate them to one another in history and to when possible document discourses surrounding them.

Nevertheless, the sheer breadth of the topic means that the depth of musical analysis which all of these uses merit was, at times, beyond the scope of my time and resources to cover. In making an effort to prioritize breadth and context, I hope to improve upon prior organological writings which have described the cowbell’s musical usage only in incomplete ahistorical ways. My own musical interests, experience, and training, however, have all left me best equipped to discuss music of the European concert hall tradition (including both the orchestral canon and the 20th century avant-garde). Though I have made an effort to, through scholarship, ensure that my accounts of music beyond this tradition (including West African and Afro-Cuban music) is clear, accurate, and thorough at least as far as it relates to the topic, I must acknowledge that my particular perspective, as a performer, is reflected in the more historical approach of chapters dealing with musical practices beyond my wheelhouse.

Chapter 1

## The Cowbell as Category
## Denoting, describing, and using

In order to set the parameters of a study of the cowbell, it is necessary to establish exactly what is meant by "cowbell." This may seem inane and obvious, but I contend that it is a question with hitherto-unexamined subtleties in its answering.

The word "cowbell" is used, by different speakers over the course of history and today, to refer to a variety of objects - some similar, related, or closely comparable with one another, and others less so. The phrase "musical usage of the cowbell" likewise encompasses a variety not only of musical contexts but of actual musical instruments - ranging from cowbells used as sound effects in 19th century American musical theater, to cowbells used as soundscape in the orchestral works of Mahler and Webern, all the way to the modern cowbell whose role in "(Don't Fear) The Reaper" has already been examined in the introduction. A study of the history of the cowbell, in music and culture, becomes therefore in part *a history of what, in music and culture, people have called "cowbells."*

As far as I am aware this dissertation represents the first comprehensive study of cowbells in music. But this is of course not to suggest that this is the first time that any writers on music have examined the cowbell. In this chapter, however, we will examine ways in which prior writers have attempted to document the cowbell, including both simple descriptions and proposals of classification.

The concept of "classifying" the cowbell will appear frequently in this text, and I will specify here that I use this term to indicate the use of terminology which suggests that cowbells come in clearly-defined "types," which can be donated by terms other than "cowbell." Though such a practice has obvious benefits for clarity when discussing the disparate objects and musical practices that can be called "cowbell," I aim to show here that such classification systems - as outlined in reference works on percussion instruments - are typically non-comprehensive or contradictory due to their lack of a broader cultural and historical perspective.

**Prior Descriptions and Classifications of Cowbells**

It is readily observable that not all cowbells used in music are the same "kind" of cowbell. The best, most interesting, and most demonstrative example of this fact is the distinction understood by modern percussionists between "cowbell" and "almglocken." *Almglocken* are a *kind* of cowbell - they are specifically central European cowbells, their name being German for "Alpine bells" - but they functionally are a distinct instrumental practice from other cowbells in music. *Almglocken* are often (but not always) tuned, and often (but not always) understood by composers as resonant metal instruments. They are more delicate than other cowbells, ring for longer, and belong much more firmly to the European concert tradition, having originated in the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen in the 1950s. They are distinct both in their physical characteristics and in way that they are used in music. But they are still *cow*bells – as will be covered in the relevant chapter, the first *almglocken* were selected from the stock of a West German cowbell factory.[7]


*Figure 3: Two almglocken (pitched C4 and D4) from the University of Maryland's collection.*

[7] Jonathan Hepfer, "Christoph Caskel and the Birth of 'Zyklus,'" *Percussive Notes* 60, no. 2 (April 2022), 56.

Some scores - such as, for example, Betsy Jolas' 1991 solo percussion work *Etudes Aperçues* - are written for instruments which the composer identifies as "cowbells" but which a modern percussionist would identify as "almglocken." Jolas' cowbells have definite pitches and are described by her in the performer's note as "resonant sounds." Resonant, pitched cowbells - this is a reasonable definition of *almglocken*, though as we shall see it is not a comprehensive one.[8]

The most standard reference on percussion instruments - James Blades' *Percussion Instruments and Their History* (1970) - includes the following as the full extent of its coverage of the cowbell.

"Cowbells have been used descriptively and otherwise, as in Mahler's Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, and in Strauss' *An Alpine Symphony*, in each case shaken intermittently and in rhythmic structures as in the percussion ensemble accompaniments to the pianoforte cadenza in *Rio Grande*. Here Lambert specifies a small cowbell without clapper. Varese in *Ionisation* (1931) specifies cowbell (cencerro) without clapper, to be struck with a drumstick, and muffled by inserting a handkerchief or a similar piece of material into the bell. Copland in *Music for a Great City* scores for two cowbells of different pitch to be struck simultaneously. Peter Schat in *Signalement* scores for cowbells, 3 ½ octaves (chromatic) F to C, and Messiaen for an even larger number in *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum.*"[9]

Blades notes that cowbells are used both with and without clapper, and with or without pitch, but makes no attempt to differentiate these fundamentally different uses as distinct instruments - they are all simply *cowbells* to him.

However, those reference works which *do* try to parse out the distinction between different kinds of cowbell, in music, are often non-comprehensive and/or contradictory. *The Handbook of Percussion* by Karl Peinkofer and Fritz Tannigel in their entry for "animal bells" identify three types of cowbell. They identify *almglocken* as the type of cowbell most commonly found in the Alps, without reference to pitch or to the presence or absence of a clapper. They then list two types of cowbell which are definitely clapperless.

[8] The history and usage of *almglocken* will be explored in detail in Chapter 6.
[9] James Blades, *Percussion Instruments and Their History*, London: Faber and Faber, 1971, 392.

"The straight walled bells, high, narrow, and clapperless, belong to the instruments characteristic of Latin American folk and dance music… Called *cencerro*, they are beaten singly or in pairs with sticks… In Western jazz and dance music such bells have become widespread under the name cowbell (also jazz cowbell)."[10]

Furthermore:

"Recently [this book was published in 1969] manufacturers have developed a very short and dry-sounding instrument of strong tin, shaped like an angular trapezoid… this instrument often called metal block because its sound is so far removed from that of the original cowbell."[11]

I find this classification - a distinction between *cencerro*/cowbell or jazz cowbell on one hand and "metal block" on the other hand, with both being clapperless and distinct from the possibly clappered *almglocken* - to be unsatisfactory. For starters, "metal block" as a category of instruments is untenable. The term "metal block" was used by Darius Milhaud to describe an instrument used in his pioneering multipercussion setups, in *Creation du Monde* (1923) and his *Percussion Concerto* (1930). These works draw their sound palette from the American jazz drummers Milhaud heard in London and New York, and accordingly the metal block is conventionally understood to be a high-pitched clapperless mounted cowbell of the type common in the early jazz drum kit.[12] In this sense, the term "metal block" (or "*bloc de métal*") serves, for Milhaud, as a kind of descriptive phrase. I have not been able to find documentation of Milhaud's familiarity with the cowbell or where he got this terminology from, but it is suggestive of Milhaud's desire for a sound which is similar in timbre to that of the wood block ("*bloc de bois*"), but metallic rather than wooden in character.

Peinkofer and Tannigel's usage of the term implies that it is used beyond Milhaud's work, something that my research has not been able to corroborate. They moreover imply that the "category" of

[10] Karl Peinkofer and Fritz Tannigel, *Handbook of Percussion Instruments: Their Characteristics and Playing Techniques, with Illustrations and Musical Examples from the Literature*, trans. Kurt Stone and Else Stone (London: Schott, 1976), 130-131.
[11] ibid.
[12] Stephen W. Dodge, "The 'Concerto Pour Batterie et Orchestre' by Darius Milhaud With a Look at Percussion in His Music Life," *Percussive Notes* 17 no. 3 (Spring/Summer 1979), 58.

metal block has been created by unnamed manufacturers. The distinction between "*cencerro*" and "metal block" is likewise muddled, generalized, and non-specific. As far as the physical qualities of these two instruments go, it appears that the "metal block" is shaped like a trapezoid, and the "*cencerro*" is "straight-walled, high and narrow." Without images being provided of the two, I am inclined suggest that the physical distinctions between the "metal block" and "cencerro" are envisioned by Peinkofer and Tannigel are within the conventional variance of size and shape that we see in the cowbells of the Western world. The relationship between the cowbells of tropical music (which they may denote with the Spanish *cencerro* simply because they associate the music in question with Spanish speakers) and the so-called "jazz cowbell" goes unelaborated upon.

In fact, I will argue in this volume that the Cuban cowbell practice and the American one (which does figure prominently in the percussion palette of early jazz) are distinct practices historically, but that these practices have coalesced into a single modern practice, and that accordingly differentiating *cencerros* and "jazz cowbell" as though they are entirely separate instruments is not particularly useful.

This is also not the only time that a writer on the subject of cowbells has tried to treat *cencerro* as a specific kind of cowbell, rather than a word for cowbell which is applied by speakers of Spanish, either. James Blades' *Oxford Music Online* entry for "cencerro," for example, describes it as a "clapperless animal bell of Spain and the New World."[13] This framing suggests that the *cencerro* is an animal bell distinguished from other animal bells either by its clapper or its provenance in the Hispanosphere. This is a strange assertion to make, given that a "clapperless animal bell" - which I interpret to mean an animal bell which *typically* lacks a clapper, and therefore would be clapperless even when hanging from an animal's neck - would make no sound from the animal's motions. While this "cencerro" entry makes more of an effort to parse out distinctive uses of cowbells than Blades' *Percussion Instruments and Their History*, it becomes ahistorical (insofar as it tries to engage with the peculiar Cuban or tropical usage of the cowbell without seemingly engaging with the history *of* that usage) and internally contradictory (when Blades refers to *cencerros* tied to the backs of the celebrants of Ecuadorian festivals and "shaken while dancing" - will a clapperless cowbell make noise when shaken?).

[13] James Blades (rev. James Holland), "Cencerro," Oxford Music Online, accessed 4/25/2023, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000005273?rskey=9PgqdZ&result=1.

Both the Blades book and Peinkofer and Tannigel's book date back several decades. What might a more up-to-date reference work have to say about the different kinds of cowbells? As an example of such a work, we need look no further than John Beck's 2007 *Encyclopedia of Percussion*, 2nd edition. Though this book is both remarkably broad and remarkably thorough - touching upon percussion instruments from virtually all of humanity's musical practices, and featuring longer sections on such a wide range of topics as the history of multipercussion, calfskin head manufacture and maintenance, and the percussion instruments of the Turkish Janissary (not to mention long articles on most of the instruments of the Western concert battery) - its treatment of the cowbell is brief, non-comprehensive, and self-contradictory.

Beck's definition of "cowbell" reads as follows:

"Originally a bell hung around the necks of cattle in order to identify their location, now referring to a conical or rectangular bell without a clapper that is struck with a wooden stick."[14]

Note how Beck avoids the fundamental linguistic trap of the word "cowbell" - the fact that the term can refer to both of the distinct objects he describes here - by implying, through his wording, that one definition *has supplanted* the other. Beck's wording sidesteps the cowbell's history completely. In reading this definition, one might get the impression that the struck musical cowbell is unrelated to the agricultural cowbell, that perhaps it is an instrument that resembles the agricultural cowbell only through a kind of convergent organological evolution.

We will in this dissertation attempt to trace the history that Beck here sidesteps. This is the "music" portion of the titular "music and culture." But in order to do so - to describe the relationship between the cowbells used in music and the cowbells worn by cows - we must first examine the factors that allow us to pronounce a given bell as belonging to either category.

**Manufacture and Use**

[14] John Beck, *Encyclopedia of Percussion, 2nd ed*.( New York: Routledge, 2007), 21.

Classifying cowbells - even to simply describe them as “musical” and “non-musical” - involves choosing which of two criteria are used to classify them. I identify these criteria as ***manufacture*** and ***use****.*

It is an accurate, general statement that most musical instruments are intended to be used as musical instruments when they are manufactured. Clarinets are manufactured to be played by clarinetists in musical settings where clarinets are appropriate and/or called for. A guitar is constructed so that it can be used as a guitar, even if many guitars end up instead functioning as dust-gathering knicknacks on the walls of middle-aged men (or percussion doctoral students). But this does not apply to all percussion instruments. Indeed, since the early 20th century the use of “found sounds” - instruments which were not manufactured for musical use - has become a common feature of the percussion repertoire. We could, by way of example, mention the coffee cans in John Cage’s works for percussion quartet, such as *Third Construction* (1941), or the nonspecific metal sounds found in such works as Iannis Xenakis’ *Psappha* (1975) or David Lang’s *The Anvil Chorus* (1991), both for solo percussionist.

Today, cowbells like the LP Black Beauty I have referred to already, or any other cowbells made by musical instrument manufacturers for drummers and percussionists to play on, are both *instruments by manufacture* and *instruments by use*. They are made to be used for a musical purpose and then used for a musical purpose. But this does not describe all cowbells throughout history. The manufacture of cowbells for musical use came into existence in order to meet an extant demand for musical cowbells - a demand that existed because musicians had already begun playing music with cowbells *not* manufactured for musical use. Such uses involve a contradiction between use and manufacture.

Consider also the example provided in the introduction - were I to remove the clapper of a Bevin bell, made for express agricultural purpose, and find a way to mount it on a drumset or a set of timbales, it could fulfill all the same musical roles that the LP Black Beauty could. Its pitch is lower and its tone is a bit washier and a bit clangier, but it would be instantly recognizable as a cowbell and have the cowbell’s biting, piercing tone quality.

Indeed, the distinction between manufacture and use could apply not only to the cowbell’s status or non-status as a musical instrument but also to the distinction between different “kinds” of musical cowbell which are suggested by modern parlance, and by the extent to which the terminology of manufacturers must be fallen back on in order to avoid overgeneralization of the traits of cowbells. Latin

Percussion today manufactures cowbells under names which seem to orient them towards certain styles of music - Mambo, Cha-Cha, and the "Classic Rock Ridge Rider," just to name a few examples. If, however, a percussionist were to play a mambo's cowbell part with a Classic Rock Ridge Rider, is it now a Mambo cowbell?

In terms of manufacture, no. The LP Mambo Cowbell is a specific model of cowbell with a specific size and a specific character of tone. So is the Classic Rock Ridge Rider. They are different instruments, insofar as they are distinct objects from one another and produce sounds which are not identical. But they sound alike enough to where it is possible to use either cowbell for either purpose - though experienced players of either genre may find one cowbell or the other to be preferable for their purposes, due to its particular sonic characteristics.

We could even extrapolate an unlikely if amusing hypothetical from this thought process by envisioning a somewhat clueless drummer who, when asked by a contractor to bring a cowbell to a big band gig, goes to his university's instrument collection and borrows a C4 *almglocke*. He brings this enormous, mellow-toned, resonant bell to the gig and mounts it on his drum kit. It is recognizable to musicians as a cowbell by its shape and its method of sound production (being hit externally with a stick), but its low, sonorous clang sounds nothing like the cowbell the contractor expected. The drummer is not likely to be hired again, and worse still, the kind of cowbell playing that goes on at a big band gig will almost certainly lead to him cracking the *almglocke* and shelling out hundreds of dollars to replace it for the university. Nevertheless, in this case, the instrument in question was an *almglocke* by manufacture but a cowbell by use.

This whimsical misunderstanding has likely never happened, however. The practical fact is that for drummers and percussionists, the *almglocken*/cowbell dichotomy rarely if ever poses an actual obstacle to comprehension. Nor, aside from the direct usage of cowbells to simulate the sound of a grazing herd of cattle in certain orchestral works,[15] is the distinction between clappered cowbells and non-clappered cowbells of relevance to percussionists. But if we are to explore the *history* of the cowbell in music, these distinctions *will* be relevant. In order to chronicle the process of how cowbells became musical instruments (again, while simultaneously retaining an understanding as non-musical objects), we

[15] This will be explored in Chapter 3.

will need to explore terminology that can differentiate between different roles that cowbells can play, as well as differentiate between clappered and non-clappered cowbells.

Therefore, in addition to the term *almglocken* already introduced and summarized, I will also introduce the term ***agricultural cowbell***. This term could be defined a number of ways based on the context. It could mean a cowbell that is *made to be worn* by a cow (agricultural by manufacture) or a bell that *is worn* by a cow (agricultural by use). Further subtleties of this particular concept will be explored as they arise in future chapters. The appropriateness of this terminology, as far as describing purpose of manufacture, is further rendered questionable by the fact that some portion of the cowbells advertised and sold online, despite being physically equivalent to "true" agricultural cowbells, are in fact produced either as souvenirs or as noisemakers for sporting events. To fully document and parse out this distinction, however, is a future project. For simplicity's sake I will use "agricultural cowbell" to refer to all cowbells made, with clappers, for non-musical use.

However, because of the cowbell's peculiar history - its pattern of adoption followed by manufacturer's codification - much of this document will concern points in history when the specific cowbells being used by the musicians being discussed will be cowbells of non-musical manufacture and musical use. Accordingly, the terms outlined above will often only be partially applicable to a given cowbell example.

*This* is why I argue that the cowbell resists classification. Accordingly, though I maintain that James Blades' coverage of the cowbell in *Percussion Instruments and their History* is insufficient given the prominence in music the cowbell had even by 1970, I am simultaneously struck by the sense that by making no attempt to distinguish terminologically between the wildly different uses of cowbells in jazz, Mahler, and Messiaen, Blades sacrificed specificity for *clarity*. After all, what those three uses of cowbell have in common - the only thing they have in common besides the fact that they are all *musical* uses - is that in one way or another, *they are played on cowbells.*

Chapter 2

## The Humorous Cowbell
## The Carnivalesque and the Charivari

The preceding chapter has established terminology which can be used to try and differentiate between different uses of cowbell without attempting to comprehensively (and inaccurately) classify all cowbells. This is a necessary step in order to describe the history of the cowbell's use in music. But the second half of this dissertation's title describes the secondary purpose which runs alongside this musical history – the cowbell's cultural history.

As we saw in the introduction, the cowbell has, in modern culture, some kind of intrinsic humor. It is possible that this humor results from the extramusical associations the cowbell carries into music from its past and present usage *outside* music. The most obvious such association is right there in the name: "cow." For so long as the objects which we call cowbells continue to go by a name that contains the word "cow," there will be an association with the idea of cattle tied to every denoting of those objects - even when, as is usually the case in music, the moniker is an orphaned etymology.

But this is not the whole picture. The link to agricultural practice is *part* of the humor, as we will see. But the cowbell's cultural baggage goes far beyond this simple fact of its use. Indeed, for centuries the cowbell has been established in European and postcolonial American culture as a symbol and component of the kind of mocking and transgressive public spectacles that fall under the umbrella of Mikhail Bakhtin's *carnivalesque*. In order to demonstrate this, we will examine the spectacular practice which most firmly and intriguingly links cowbells with both music and humor: the medieval spectacle of social judgment known as the *charivari*.

### Bakhtin and the carnivalesque

In his 1965 work *Rabelais and his World*, the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), exploring how Francois Rabelais' 16th century pentology *Gargantua and Patagruel* reflects the aesthetics and social dynamics of the pre-modern carnival, utilizes the term and the concept of the *carnivalesque*. This term is difficult to succinctly define, but is used both by Bakhtin in this work and by

those writers who have followed him to refer to the specific brand of parodic humor and the peculiar suspension of ordinary societal relations within carnivals and other comparable festive occasions. Bakhtin mentions the pre-modern celebration of Easter and the Feast of Fools, historically celebrated on the first day of the new year, as examples when introducing the concept.[16] The carnival and its relatives, according to Bakhtin, operate within a social framework entirely separate from that from everyday, non-carnivalesque life. “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom.”[17]

The social hierarchies of non-carnival life are suspended or inverted in the carnivalesque - jesters are crowned kings and clowns elected abbots and bishops. Bakhtin stresses, however, that while the humorous elements of the carnivalesque, in parodying the conventions and power structures of everyday life, seek to tear them down, this is not a purely destructive force. It is a transformational force which destroys so that it can create. The laughter of the carnival, says Bakhtin metonymically, “is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies; it buries and revives.”[18]

Of pertinence to the present study is the fact that Bakhtin does see significance in, and explore, the otherness of cowbells as it relates to the carnival and the carnivalesque. The passage in question concerns an episode in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* wherein the titular giant Gargantua steals the bells directly from the steeple of Notre Dame, intending to hang them from the harness of his enormous horse. A horse-bell, of course, is not the same as a cowbell, but what a horse-bell and a cowbell share, functionally, is the act of taking a metallic noisemaker and adorning an animal with it - something that, when the metallic noisemaker in question is so lofty and pious as the bells of Notre Dame themselves, becomes what Bakhtin terms “a typical carnivalesque gesture of debasement. It combines a destructive theme with that of renewal on another material, bodily level.”[19] Bakhtin goes on to describe bells (“usually” cowbells in his words) as appearing “even in the most ancient carnivals as an indispensable accessory,”

[16] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5.
[17] Ibid., 7.
[18] Ibid., 11.
[19] Ibid., 214.

and notes that “we still hear the jingling of carnival bells on bridal vehicles.”[20] The translator notes that by this Bakhtin means the single bell hung over the horses in the traditional Russian sled known as the *“troika.”* This association with “carnival bells” and weddings will be returned to later in this chapter.

Nicola Scaldaferri has written that the Italian *campanaccio*, meaning “cowbell,” is in fact a *pejorative* form of *campane*, meaning “bell,” and that this reflects how the cowbell and the church bell “create an oppositional couplet that draws on their materiality, their positioning and their context of use.”[21] Scaldaferri does *not* connect this with Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque, but it does evoke the “debasement” portrayed in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* - a debasement which in that work is an actual physical action rather than a state of symbolic, rhetorical opposition.

Accordingly, though Bakhtin’s discussion of the cowbell has an entirely non-musical focus, the act of “debasement” which is inherent to the cowbell - to the constant linguistic attachment of the cow to the bell - also applies to the cowbell in music. When we identify a cowbell - or a *cencerro*, or a *kuhglocke* - we are keeping that “uncrowning” of the concept of the bell, by association with the cow, alive. This is an aspect of the inherent humor that the cowbell has, the humor that has associated it with laughter and with mockery for centuries.

Now, to demonstrate this in detail, we will examine a historical spectacle of popular comedy with a close association to the cowbell. It is a social phenomenon which Bakhtin associates with the carnivalesque: the charivari.

**Charivari and its cousins**

*Charivari* is the most commonly used name for a set of related folk customs of historical Western Europe and postcolonial North America. The most thorough charivari documentation (including all examples cited in this chapter) dates from the 15th century and later. Regional variations and alternative names include *shivaree* (often used in North America), the English *rough music*, the German *Katzenmusik*, the Italian *campanate*, the Spanish *cencerrada,* and the Basque *zinzarrotse*.[22] Note that

[20] Ibid.
[21] Nicola Scaldaferri, "Soundmasks in resounding places," in *Sonic Ethnography* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2020), 56.
[22] Violet Alford, “Rough Music or Charivari,” *Folklore* 70, no. 4 (1959),http://www.jstor.org/stable/1258223, 508.

these last three names all specifically invoke the ringing of bells, with the last two specifically referring to cowbells. Indeed, Mark McKningt has documented a specifically New Orleans-based 19th century American charivari tradition known by its practitioners as "cowbellion."[23]

These are all "mock serenades." They are transgressive, social events where a community gathers together to make loud noises aimed at a particular individual. In some instances, the dedicatee might be mock-kidnapped and paraded around the community on a donkey. The dedicatee might alternatively be represented by an impersonator, who bodily parodies them much as the charivari itself parodies a serenade or a parade. The charivari participants would often request a retribution of some sort, in the form of money or food and drink.

In spite of what the name "rough music" might suggest, however, charivaris are generally described as a kind of sonic social practice rather than as actual music. Certainly, historical commentators on the subject did not seem to consider it music. Violet Alford quotes medieval writers calling the charivari an "obnoxious sport" and an "iniquitous game."[24] And the instruments with which they were accompanied were broadly not seen as actual instruments; functionally, the charivari was noise and its "instruments" noisemakers. Some charivaris included chants or rude songs written for the occasion, and it is an intriguing possibility that a modern, open-minded listener, hearing an actual 15th century French of English charivari, would in fact process it as a particularly noisy kind of music - songs or chants accompanied by pots, pans, cowbells, and any other piece of houseware or farming equipment that could be enlisted to bang and crash. However, songs are not a requisite of a charivari (the practice has little to no actual "requisite" elements save the overall social dynamic of community vs. individual or married couple), and many charivaris recorded by Alford, Davis, Johnson, Ingram, and others are more so simple community justice (or antagonism). It is possible, however, that this is because the study of charivari has taken place almost entirely within the field of sociology.

Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque also describes the charivari. The charivari and carnival are both boisterous, grotesque, public festivities. The carnivalesque's paradoxical laughter - simultaneously creative and destructive - can be compared with the charivari's blend of violence and tomfoolery. So, too,

[23] Mark McKningt, "Charivaris, Cowbellions, and Sheet Iron Bands: Nineteenth-Century Rough Music in New Orleans," *American Music* 23, no. 4 (2005), https://doi.org/10.2307/4153068, 409..
[24] Alford, "Rough Music," 505.

does the carnivalesque's rejection of conventional social structures and power relations evoke the charivari's peculiar dynamic - that of the individual placed, regardless of social position, at the mercy of the community. Natalie Zemon Davis has shown that besides their aesthetic common ground, charivaris and carnivals shared a more concrete, institutional origin in that both were - in late Middle Ages France, the purvey of Davis' study - organized and carried out by transgressive organizations of the laity which called themselves Abbeys of Misrule.[25] Charivaris of all nationalities are often malicious or humiliating in intention, and always have, according to Natalie Zemon Davis, a "boisterous mixture of playfulness and cruelty."[26] From culture to culture, as well as over history, the precise mix thereof varies. English and French charivaris, for example, seem to have historically tended towards the malicious end, and functioned almost entirely as public humiliation for the sake of moral judgment by the community. Alford speaks of French peasants as late as the early 20th century living in *fear* of these bands of young men who would roam their communities, raising rackets and demanding wine.[27] The so-called *Bal des Ardents* or "Ballad of Burning Men" in which Charles VI of France nearly burned to death along with four other nobleman while engaged in a dance covered in flax and resin to affect the appearance of wild men was, according to Alford, a charivari - given in honor of a remarrying lady-in-waiting whose new husband was much younger than her.[28]

American charivaris (also called "shivarees" or "bellings"), on the other hand, seem to tend toward the less malicious (albeit still playful) end of the spectrum. Loretta T. Johnson, the first writer to integrate studies of American charivaris with their European roots, describes the Midwestern shivaree of the 19th century as "a raucous, high spirited, occasionally even violent celebration after a wedding."[29] Contrast this - an "inevitable adjunct" to *any* wedding - to the 15th century French charivari documented by Davis, an instrument of mockery which, when given during a wedding, served to mark that wedding as a recipient of social ill will. The donkey of French charivari and English rough music was often replaced with a

[25] Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past & Present* no. 50 (1971), http://www.jstor.org/stable/650243, 43.
[26] Natalie Zemon Davis, "Charivari, Honor, and Community," in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 42.
[27] Alford, "Rough Music," 512.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Loretta T. Johnson, "Charivari/Shivaree: A European Folk Ritual on the American Plains," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20, no. 3 (1990), https://doi.org/10.2307/204083, 372.

wheelbarrow. In America and Canada it became instead a traditional festivity, albeit one with teeth, so to speak.

The “instrumental forces” of a charivari were often themselves mockeries of what might be ordinarily thought of as instruments. The iconic example is struck kitchenware - seen, for example, in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma* when Curly’s cowboy friends raise a ruckus below his window on his wedding night with pots, pans, and ladles. Any object that can make noise is fair game, however; and in stock-keeping societies where animal bells are to be found, cowbells are readily available and particularly efficacious noisemakers. Martin Ingram lists the components of English and Scottish rough music as the “ringing of bells, the raucous playing of musical instruments, the beating of pots and pans and other household utensils, and the discharge of guns and fireworks.”[30] Indeed, most scholarly accounts of charivaris will, when listing the objects used for the noisemaking, at least mention “bells” when not singling out some kind of animal bell (for example, “mule bells” in Davis’ Renaissance French example).[31] And in the case of the American examples, cowbells in particular are common elements in the practice.

One common historical American shivaree feature, for example, is the covert attaching of cowbells to the marriage bed.[32] The effect of this is that when the married couple go to consummate their marriage, any shaking or moving of the bed that might occur will additionally shake and clatter the cowbell. This practice clearly evokes Alford’s description of the charivari as potentially a “prophylactic” to goad a couple into consummation; however, in the events described by Alford, the charivari’s participants would be present, below the couple’s window, not unlike the pot-and-pan wielding cowboys from Oklahoma.[33] When the cowbell is attached to the bed itself, however, the act of noisemaking is shifted, by the crowd, from the crowd to the couple themselves. This parallels the shift in sonic control when a human being takes a cowbell from a cow - taking control of the sound from an animal to human - but in the opposite direction. It furthermore means that instead of making noise to mock consummation which is understood, but not known, to be occurring, the shivaree’s crowd will have in the cowbell’s noises direct,

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[30] Martin Ingram, “Ridings, Rough Music and the ‘Reform of Popular Culture’ in Early Modern England,” *Past & Present*, no. 105 (1984), http://www.jstor.org/stable/650546, 86.
[31] Davis, “Charivari, Honor, and Community,” 48.
[32] Norma Hancock, “Shivarees.” *Western Folklore* 14, no. 2 (1955), https://doi.org/10.2307/1497005, 146.
[33] Alford, “Rough Music,” 506

audible indication *of* the consummation. This is a more direct, incisive embarrassment of the couple than the simple mock serenading from outside. It also evokes Bakhtin's account of the poetic image in Rabelais of the church bells of France being removed from their belfries and transformatively debased - "uncrowned, destroyed, and regenerated"[34] - by being hung from the beard of the feasting giant Pantagruel so that he will by the action of chewing ring them.

# Cowbell Padlocked To His Neck By Jokers at Wedding

Mitchell, S. Dak., Sept. 29.—With a cowbell padlocked to his neck by wedding jokers, Salie Nolt and his bride arrived here by train from Mount Vernon.

While the bridal couple were walking the short distance to the train after the marriage ceremony, the bridegroom was captured, a chain was placed around his neck, to which was attached a cowbell, and the chain was linked with a padlock. When the bridegroom arrived here he hurried off the train and went over to the roundhouse and implored the blacksmith at work at the forge to release him of his chains and bell.

The employees in the roundhouse gathered around the unfortunate bride groom and enjoyed the situation as he was being released from his bondage. The cowbell was consigned to the creek running near by and the released man went back to the train and resumed his wedding tour. Mr. and Mrs. Nolt will live at Ethan, where he is engaged in the lumber business.

*Figure 4: From the September 29, 1908* San Jose Evening News.

Cowbells have also seem to have retained, from this historical usage in the shivaree, an evident cultural association with weddings. I cite here a couple of examples that were considered newsworthy in the early 20th century. I reproduce in Figure 4, for example, a *San Jose Evening News* article from September 29, 1908, describes a groom who has been pranked by his male friends with a cowbell padlocked around his neck. A July 21, 1909 article in the *Morning Olympian* of Olympia, Washington, tells of wedding guests filling the luggage of the newlyweds with cowbells and rice, for the purpose of making both a racket and a mess when the luggage is opened. Innocuous pranks like these, tempering the jubilation of the newlyweds with the unexpected sound of the cowbell, *recall* the shivaree, but deprived of

[34] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* 214.

the charivari's transgression and its retributive nature, they are simply traces. And this association did not die out in the early 20th century; agricultural cowbells are widely sold online as wedding accouterments, with advertising copy (to cite one example) asserting:

"Plain or custom imprinted cowbells make great wedding favors! Guests ring them as the couple leaves the church and/or at the reception for the couple to kiss. Sure beats birdseed or bubbles!"[35]

Indeed, my own wedding in December 2022 was accompanied by my family and friends ringing cowbells - though I will readily admit that this was due *in part* to their familiarity with my dissertation project.

The last and most intriguing example of cowbells within the charivari tradition which we will now examine brings us back to Bakhtin. It is the charivari described in the 14th century French verse satire, the *Roman de Fauvel* (1310-1314), and the charivari that Bakhtin most frequently evokes with his deep study of Renaissance accounts of the carnivalesque. *Fauvel* most famously exists as a manuscript, compiled by Chaillou de Pesstain in 1314, filled with illuminations as well as monophonic songs in both Latin and French which accompany the narrative. There is a good deal of music scholarship dealing with this work, but focus tends to be on the musical compositions by Philippe de Vitry rather than the text. The actual poetic text of the *Roman de Fauvel*, by Gervais du Bus, is written in archaic French; no English translation exists. In fact, in 2022 (last year as of the time of writing), a dissertation was submitted by violist Rebecca Flank drawing attention to this fact. Flank did translate a large portion of the text into modern English as part of her project, but not the portion which includes the charivari.[36] Accordingly, the excerpt below is my own translation (into English) of Armand Strubel's 2012 translation (into modern French).

The charivari in *Fauvel* is given on the occasion of the wedding of Fauvel, a horse, to the allegorical figure of Lady Vainglory. It is possible that the social transgression committed by this couple, which earns the community's carnivalesque ire, is the fact that the wedding is between a horse and an

[35] "Wedding Bells, Plain & Printed," Cowbells.com, accessed 4/26/2023, https://cowbells.com/collections/wedding-bells-plain-imprinted.
[36] Rebecca Flank, *Accessing Music: The Modern Interpolation of the "Roman de Fauvel"* (DMA Dissertation, University of Cincinnatti, 2022), 61-89.

allegory. At any rate, as Fauvel takes his bride to the wedding bed, people gather outside and begin to make noise with a variety of implements.

"They are extravagantly disguised.
Some have reversed the front and back
Of their clothes and put their clothes inside out
The others made themselves adornments
With coarse sacks and monks' frocks.
It's just if we could recognize a single one,
They were so painted and transformed;
They only meditated evil deeds.
One brandished a large frying pan,
The other a kitchen hook, grill and
A pestle, and the third a copper pot,
And all counterfeited the drunkard;
Another held a basin, and they knocked on it,
So loud that they stunned everything, like thunder.
One had cowbells
Sewn on the thighs and buttocks,
And above great bells that made
When shaken and ringed, a clear sound;
The others had drums and cymbals,
And great ignoble and dirty instruments,
Castanets and 'macequotes'[37]
From which they drew sounds and notes
So acute that no one can describe them."[38]

[37] Strubel identifies this word as a *hapax* (a word which appears only once in a text or group of texts) and is unsure what it refers to.
[38] Armand Strubel, *Le Roman De Fauvel*, Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Librarie Général Française, 2012), 583.

I will note that the term I have translated as “cowbells” appears in the original text as *tantins à vaches*, which Strubel translates as *clochettes à vaches.* In both cases the cattle connection is clear and present (the word *vache*), and the grotesquery of the event is emphasized by the fact that a cowbell-wielding participant has fastened the bells to his body, just as they would be attached to the cow, to make noise when he moves.

The charivari in question is also in one of the work’s most vivid and widely reproduced illuminations, shown in Figure 5. Pots and pans beaten with spoons can clearly be seen in the hands of the charivari’s participants. It is possible that the shovel-like shape visible in the left side of the charivari is intended to be a cowbell, but it may also be a frying pan as described in the text.

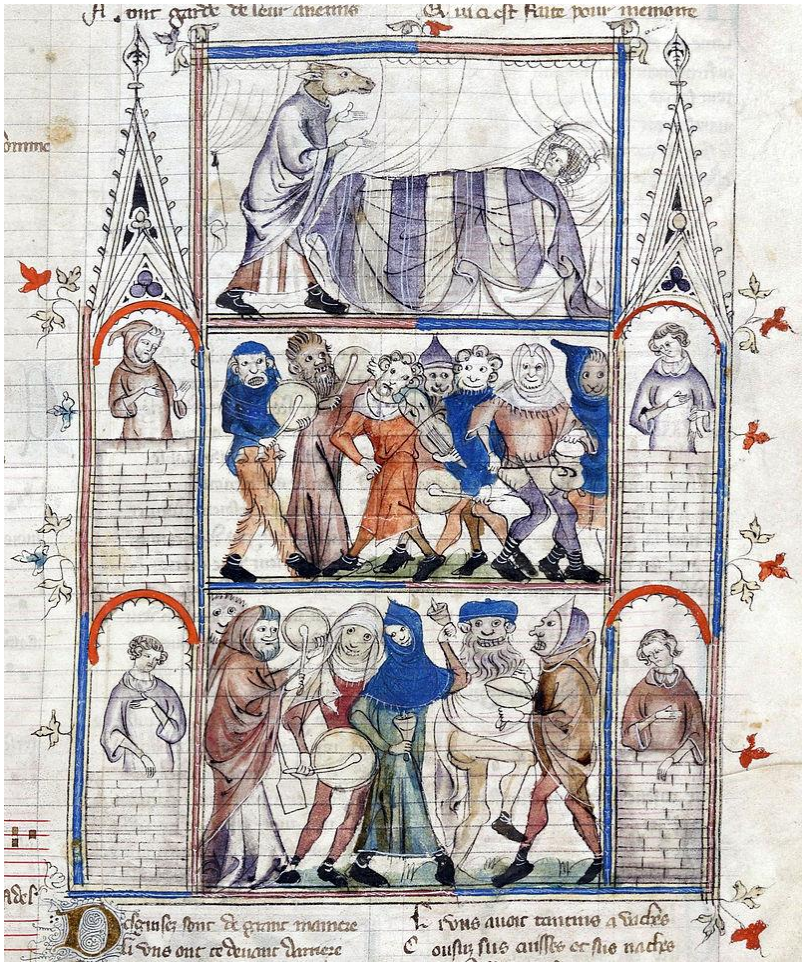


*Figure 5: Charivari from the* Roman de Fauvel *(folio 34r of the Chaillou de Pesstain manuscript).*

*Fauvel* is pervaded with the spirit of the carnivalesque. It is a biting satire, with Fauvel - a socially mobile horse, his name an acronym for six of the seven canonical vices, who comes to amass a huge religious and political following before his aforementioned marriage - being, as argued by Flank, a stand-in for the unpopular figure of France's King Phillip IV.[39] The social order it presents - a horse ruling over people - is just the kind of debasement that Bakhtin identifies with the carnivalesque. Embodying the flipside of this debasement - the notion of the carnivalesque as comedic renewal as well as comedic destruction - is the yearning for a more just social order that lies implicit in its rhetorical tearing-down of the social order *as is*.

**The cowbell's cultural baggage**

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin is careful to distinguish between the ambivalent parody of the Renaissance which he calls carnivalesque - laughter that destroys so it can create - and the altered form that he claims parody has tended to exist in since the Renaissance's end. "In the new official culture," writes Bakhtin, "there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness."[40] For Bakhtin, writers and audiences of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries lost the ability (or desire) to appreciate the transformational, rejuvenating power of the ribaldry and obscenity in Rabelais' (and others') work.

I seek to add to this concept a changing position of the cowbell. As I have already noted, the notion of the cowbell as a debasement of a "true" bell is a poetic image rather than an actual physical transformation that occurred in any kind of real time. No Gargantua ever could have actually taken church bells down from the steeples and hung them from domestic animals. However, if we understand the charivari as we have already sought to understand it - as a mock serenade - it follows that the sonic element of the charivari is a mockery *of* music, and that its instruments are themselves mockeries *of* "actual" instruments. Rabelais presents the cowbell as a near-universal feature of the carnivalesque, and so we can surmise, within his historical narrative, that it too was a victim of the changing understanding of parody after the Renaissance. Since well before Rabelais' time, the cowbell has been a fixture of parody and comedy - in the charivari and in the carnivalesque. But within Bakhtin's framework, *since* Rabelais'

[39] Flank, *Accessing Music*, xv-xvii.
[40] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* 101.

time, that status has since ceased to be transformational. To put this suggestion into modern terminology – cowbell jokes have a tendency to punch down. Sometimes this is only because they are jokes at the expense of inanimate objects with “cow” in the name. But sometimes, this is borne out by an association of the cowbell, in humor, with cruel racial caricaturing. Examples of this will be examined closely in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3

## "A Simple Piece of Iron"
## The Orchestral Cowbell Before 1920

The cowbell's introduction into the musical world was not seamless or continuous. The musical practices which have featured the cowbell - American theater music, Afro-Cuban music, European classical music, the globalized popular music world today - have all done so with varying degrees of independence. In this chapter we will examine the small but prominent place that the cowbell has held in the European orchestral repertoire during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

### Gioacchino Rossini: *Guillaume Tell* (1829)

There is not a cowbell in *Guillaume Tell* - at least, there is not a *literal* cowbell. But it has been argued by one writer - none other than the great composer Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) - that Rossini's percussion writing contains an allusion to, or representation of, the sound of a cowbell. The opera's percussion section features timpani, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, and an instrument simply called *campana* or "bell." This is no cowbell but rather a church bell - it rings at the beginning of the second act to signal the end of the shepherds' work day, and is thusly identified within the libretto.

The role of the cowbell is instead played, according to Berlioz, by the triangle. This occurs during the third section of the overture, which the musical literature has come to describe as "Call to the Dairy Cows" or *ranz des vaches*. The *ranz des vaches*, also widely known as *kuhreihen*, is a distinctly Swiss genre of worksong - the melody of this particular section of the *Guillaume Tell* overture is an example called "Appenzell." *Kuhreihen* were historically sung, or played on alphorns, by cowherds to their cattle as a sort of "come-hither" command.[41] Given the ubiquity, and usefulness, of cowbells in the exact kind of mountainous terrain where *kuhreihen* would be sung, it is not off-base of Berlioz to associate the sounds.

*Kuhreihen* were something of a melodic trope in early romantic classical music, being utilized for pastoral color in Beethoven's 6th symphony and Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* among many others.

[41] "Ranz des vaches," Oxford Music Online, accessed 4/26/2023, https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000022893?rskey=yBQraq&result=1.

But the “Call to the Dairy Cows” in *Guillaume Tell* is distinctly programmatic, insofar as its presence in the overture serves to establish the opera’s Swiss identity and rural, mountainous setting.

The section, the third of the opera’s widely-heard overture, is an andate ⅜ in a ternary ABA form. The distinctive *kuhreihen* melody, familiar to generations of Americans as a common musical quotation in cartoons ranging from *Looney Tunes* to *Spongebob Squarepants*, appears first traded back and forth between *cor anglais* and flute. The B section shifts into a more distinctly contrapuntal texture with the cattle call in the *cor anglais* and a nimble 16th counterpoint above in the flute, all accompanied by a new voice - the triangle. The triangle remains a part of the texture through the second A section, which retains the B section’s woodwind texture.

Hector Berlioz, in his 1844 *Grand traité d’instrumentation et d’orchestration modernes*, argues that the triangle be understood as a programmatic representation of an animal bell, and how intriguing words on the topic are worth quoting in full.

“The triangle is here extremely appropriate, with its little pianissimo ting sounding at intervals. It is the little bell attached to the sheep grazing quietly while their shepherds exchange their merry songs. ‘Ah!’ someone will say, ‘so you see some dramatic purpose in this use of the triangle? In that case, kindly tell us, what do the violins or the violas or the cellos or the clarinets etc. represent?’ To which I reply that the latter musical instruments are the fundamentals of the art, while the triangle, being merely a simple piece of iron whose sound does not belong with the recognisable sounds of the orchestra, should not be heard in the middle of a soft, gentle piece without very good reason, otherwise it will seem absurdly out of place.”[42]

Berlioz identifies the triangle in the *Guillaume Tell* overture as a sheep bell, rather than a cowbell. This is a curious choice, in light of the fact that a *ranz des vaches* is a *cattle* call. It may be explained by the fact that Rossini appears to not have personally used the phrase *ranz des vaches*, or it may be linguistic quirk or bias of Berlioz’s own. Indeed, sheep and shepherds being Berlioz’s “default” image of pastoralism is perhaps illustrated by the fact that when in *Symphonie Fantastique* he sought to express it

[42] Hector Berlioz and Hugh Macdonald, *Berlioz's Orchestration Treatise: A Translation and Commentary,* Cambridge Musical Texts and Monographs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 292.

in music himself, he wrote a musical figure - a dialogue between English horn and offstage oboe - which he termed “two shepherds piping a *ranz des vaches* in dialogue.”[43]

At any rate, Berlioz’s comments about the triangle above merit a deeper consideration. His antipathy towards an array of percussion instruments is clear in this treatise, but in the case of the triangle he goes so far as to question whether it could be an instrument at all. Rossini does not appear to have ever identified the triangle as standing in for a cowbell, or animal bell of any kind. Berlioz’s argument is not concerned with the composer’s intentions. He is simply concerned with the sonic characteristics of metal. If the triangle here is to be an instrument, Berlioz says, it must be an instrument that portrays a real-world noise, because it is an instrument of noise - a “simple piece of iron” – not one of music.

Berlioz, of course, was not *entirely* opposed to the triangle on the basis of its noisiness. In his commentary on the Berlioz orchestration treatise, Hugh MacDonald notes Berlios “casts” the triangle as an “Italian peasant instrument” in *Harold en Italie* and as the metallic color of sword-thrusts in the opera *Benvenuto Cellini*.[44] But these uses, we can surmise, are appropriate in Berlioz’ eyes because they stand in for either ethnic color or the presence of metallic sounds in the drama the music conveys.

Accordingly, Berlioz chooses to leave out percussion entirely from the “Scène au champs” – the pastoral third movement of *Symphonie fantastique* - until the rolling thunder portrayed by the timpani at the movement’s conclusion. This is a chilling moment - a bleak shattering of the countryside’s peace - and such a moment, we can surmise, is a “very good reason” of the sort Berlioz deemed necessary for the usage of a percussion sound in a “soft, gentle piece,” to use his words.

The phrase “a simple piece of iron,” interpreted as a *sonic* description, is at odds with the sound of the triangle as modern percussionists are familiar with it. But this creates an interesting possibility. Berlioz’ words are suggestive of a triangle sound different from the modern one - one affected by 19th-century manufacturing processes, and indeed by the standards of sound production among early 19th century percussionists. In a modern recording of the *Guillaume Tell* overture, the triangle is a shimmer, a dainty and delicate sound that, if it has a real programmatic effect, is suggestive of dewdrops or butterflies. But perhaps the triangles Berlioz heard used in this repertoire were duller, and lower in pitch, and therefore closer to the sound of an animal bell. This is difficult to say for certain, as scholarly

[43] D. Kern Holoman, *Berlioz* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 101.
[44] Berlioz and MacDonald, *Orchestration Treatise,* 291.

documentation of historical triangle sound quality is not readily available. But if true, it does provide evidence that Rossini's *ranz des vaches* is, in an indirect sense, the first cowbell in the classical canon… not to mention an intriguing opportunity for historically informed performance.

**The Sound of Mahler's Cowbells**

The first unmistakable use of cowbells in a symphonic setting - not a programmatic allusion to their sound, but the physical presence of cowbells making noise onstage - came in 1906, in Gustav Mahler's 6th symphony. Mahler's cowbells (he calls them *Herdenglocken* or "herd bells") have clappers in them; they are agricultural cowbells, presumably straight from the factory or from the dairy farm, though the exact provenance of the bells used in the premiers of Mahler's 6th and 7th symphonies does not appear to have been recorded. By way of technical direction for the player, the following German direction appears in the 1906 published score when the *herdenglocken* first enter.

"Die Herdenglocken müssen sehr diskret behandelt werden in realistischer Nachahmung von bald vereinigt, bald vereinzelnt aus der Fern herüberklingrenden (höheren und tiefen) Glöckchen einer weidenden Herde. Es wird jedoch ausdrücklich bemerkt, dass diese technische Bemerkung keine programmatische Ausdeutung zulässt."

In English:

"The *herdenglocken* must be treated very discreetly in realistic imitation of the (higher and lower) bells of a grazing flock ringing out from afar, now united, now isolated. However, it is expressly noted that this technical note does not allow for any programmatic interpretation."

The notation of these instruments (shown in Figure 6) in all of Mahler's uses, is large note values accompanied by trill markings. The smallest note value marked in any of Mahler's cowbell parts is a quarter note in the second movement of the Seventh; most of the figures come in half notes or larger.

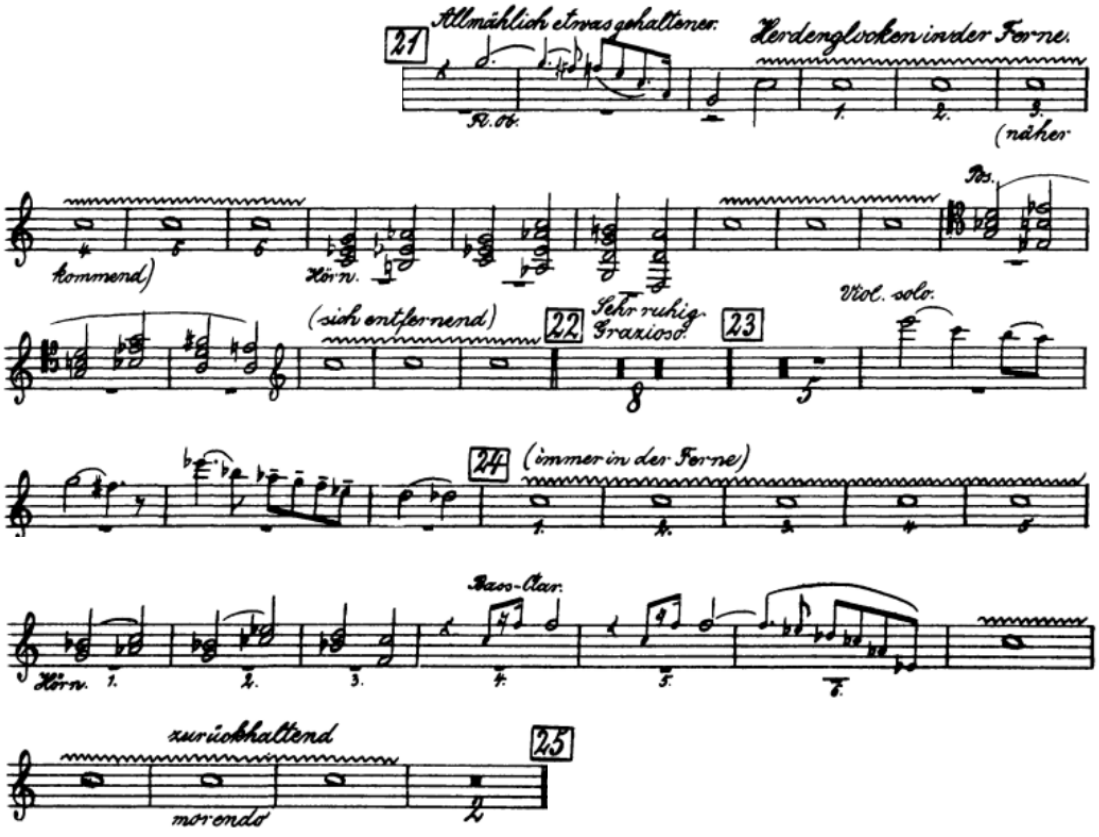



*Figure 6: Herdenglocken as notated in the first movement of Mahler's Symphony no. 6.*

Though no photographs of the "original *Herdenglocken*" have survived so far as I can determine, it does appear that Mahler selected them himself. In a letter to Oskar Fried, who conducted the work's second performance in Berlin in October 1906 (the work had been premiered in Essen in May of that year), Mahler promised to bring the cowbells along with him. This seemingly meant that the hapless percussionist who had to play them on this performance seemingly saw them for the first time the morning of the performance - a situation tragically familiar to modern percussionists as well.[45]

The *herdenglocken* appear in the first movement, the Andante (variously the second or third movement in different editions), and the fourth movement. In the first movement, they are placed offstage, and form part of a foggy, mysterious texture that crops up in the movement's development - a marked contrast to the driving, earthy march that opens the movement and recurs throughout it. Lasting from

[45] Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 503.

figure 21 to figure 25 in the first movement, the passage features the cowbells and near-inaudible high string tremolos accompanying such material as a quotation of the movement's second them, horn call-esque perfect fourth motives traded between solo winds and timpani, and a half-note celesta figure that "emerges" from the bells - a ghostly and mysterious effect.

In the Andante, the cowbells come out onto the stage and are given a more prominent (albeit brief) role in a lush passage, accompanying a choral horn figure as well as a pentatonic-adjacent melodic motif carried through the woodwinds and the trumpets. The cowbells retreat back offstage in the last movement, and are once again dictated to be heard at a distance. In their first appearance, they join with celesta (again) as well as harp to provide a ghostly yet mechanical backing for a solo horn. In this movement they are also alternated with "deep ringing of bells" (*tiefes glockengeläute*) - a marking indicating cast bells, larger and completely different in tone from the cowbells. At figure 145, the *glocken* first form a backdrop alongside quarter notes in low clarinets, tremolo violins, and the harp; in the fifth bar, the *herdenglocken* enter over top of them along with a higher octave of harps and the bassoons, English horn, and flute. The *glocken* then stop, and the cowbells continue under fragmented wind solos. The effect it creates - the ringing of one type of bell seeming to transition into another type - it is almost a crossfade, created using simple orchestration. It is another eerie, plaintive little moment, less comforting than either of the cowbell's earlier appearances.

The *Herdenglocken* in the Seventh are written for in much the same way as those in the Sixth. Once again they begin offstage. They first appear in the *nachtmusik* second movement at rehearsal 84, alongside a solo horn accompanied by thumping, haunting low strings. Texturally, this is somewhat unlike the sound worlds the cowbells inhabited in the Sixth - there is no celesta or harp to provide a glassy compliment to the bells' tinkling. They are alone in their register and timbral space, though are still associated with a horn as the melodic voice, as was often the case in the previous work, and the somber, mysterious character is similar to that which accompanied the cowbells in their first appearance in the Sixth. The cowbells are then, near the end of the movement, played onstage. Here they once again accompany a mechanical 8th-note figure on the celesta, though this one is unmistakably light and jovial. Alongside them is a sweeping melody in the horns and long tones in the strings. This is another "pastoral" soundscape, but it is a brief moment of warmth and color in what is often a dark and brooding movement.

The cowbells appear only once more, at the conclusion of the fifth and final movement - onstage, a tinkling metallic color underscoring the wildly exuberant conclusion. Like in the finale of the Sixth, they appear in conjunction with the *glockengelaute* - the "ringing of deep bells." This time, instead of a transition, the two sounds occur in prolonged conjunction. The effect is simply a denser, more clangorous metallic backdrop that would have been created by either set of bells alone.

**The Intent of Mahler's Cowbells**

It is possible, then, to hear all the cowbells in these two Mahler symphonies as simply sounds among sounds - found sounds taken out of the world, and placed into orchestrated musical contexts. Insofar as Mahler in his scores specifically disallows a "programmatic interpretation," this *appears* at first to be his intent.

Contemporary audiences, however, were at times unwilling to hear them thusly - to, in a sense, separate the cow from the cowbell. Listeners were at times surprised and confused by the presence of cowbells - a sound so clearly indicative of a specific, real-world environment and all its implications that one critic, Hugo Daffner, accuse Mahler of "the crassest and most superficial naturalism."[46] An unnamed critic in the *Berliner Zeitung*, commenting on the work's Berlin premiere, described the cowbells as leaving a "taste of milk - but pasteurized milk."[47] Writing in the March 9th, 1923, *New York Times*, music critic Richard Aldrich complained that in the Seventh, "there are cowbells for no reason stated - can it be for a musical reason?"

Even when elevated by being associated with such an established composer as Mahler, cowbells are still marked for laughter. Such laughter is expressed in Figure 7 below, a widely reproduced cartoon that initially appeared in the cover of German men's magazine *Die Muskete* in January 1907. In it, a distraught caricatured Mahler declares that he will write a new symphony to feature a percussion sound he has only just conceived of: the car horn. Behind him on a rack (of a sort the cowbells in his then-recent Sixth symphony might have been hung from) are other visual reminders of the noise to which Mahler has subjected his listeners - a ratchet, a *ruta*, sleigh bells from the Fourth symphony, extra timpani, a hammer, and of course, a cowbell.

[46] Quoted in Thomas Peattie, "Mahler's Alpine Journey," *Acta Musicologica* 83, no. 1 (2011), 85.
[47] de La Grange, *Mahler*, vol. 3, 505.


*Figure 7: A caricature of Mahler and his percussion sounds, from January 1907* Die Muskete.

Theodor Adorno in his *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, describes the cowbells (specifically in the first movement of the Sixth symphony) as being involved in an allusion to the "elemental [and] mythic" and to "primal nature,"[48] albeit a melancholic one. This musical moment "pauses to draw breath," says Adorno, "knowing the way back to be blocked, rather than feigning to follow the way."[49] For Adorno, the cowbells carry an implication of a regression to a pre-modern state, which, insofar as time travel is not possible, is an ephemeral dream for Mahler. Thomas Peattie, speaking of this same episode, calls it a "pastoral that is at its core fractured and broken,"[50] symbolic of Mahler's inability to find his hoped-for spiritual fulfillment and peace in a late 19th century Switzerland which had been wholly commercialized and was filled with tourists on similar would-be journeys of self discovery.

This particular reading is supported by Mahler's remarks recorded by Edgar Istel in 1908. While again denying a programmatic association for the Sixth's cowbells, Mahler conceded that the sound of

[48] Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. E. F. N Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 37-38.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Peattie, "Mahler's Alpine Journey," 83.

cowbells *did* carry a specific implication for him: it was a representation of the "changing or fading of nature sounds."[51] Mahler envisioned himself, he told Istel, "on the highest peak, facing infinity," and the cowbells symbolize "loneliness and disengagement with the world, just as the sounds of grazing herd float upwards, symbolizing the last farewell to existence for the one who walks alone on the mountaintop."[52] This is a scene that Mahler, a frequent traveler in the Alps, may well have experienced quite literally.

Mahler, it seems, is contradicting himself. He intended these marks to dispel accusations of programmaticism, but in practice they simply correct the programmatic intent. The cowbells still represent a particular scene with specific emotional implications. They are programmatic in this sense. Rather than a portrayal of cows, Mahler's cowbells portray the absence of cows - they can be heard, but they are simply out of view down the mountain. Note that some - but not all - of the musical moments where Mahler writes for the cowbells mirror this by placing the cowbells offstage, where their sound can be heard but its mechanism cannot be seen.

Furthermore, recall that Mahler characterizes the cowbell, in this statement, as "nature sounds." Adorno, as noted, heard a pastoral implication in them; Julian Johnson identifies them as evoking "a pastoral space where the lines between man and nature are blurred."[53] This lines up with Mahler's particular association outlined above; the lonely, distant mountaintop *is* a kind of pastoral, if a lonely and bleak one, far from the warmth and cheer of Rossini's *ranz des vaches*. I, however, would suggest a slightly different interpretation of "nature sound." They *are* nature sounds - the scene that Mahler describes them as implying is one *of* nature - but they are not *natural* sounds. They are manmade. The sound of a cowbell implies the presence of a cow, but more to the point it implies the domestication of a cow - someone put the bell around its neck, after all. When Mahler envisions himself alone on a cliff facing infinity, with the sounds of distant cowbells wafting up from below, he describes a situation where the furthest he could get from the modern world was a sonic space that remained filled with metallic noise. If the sound of cowbells really implies a pastoral space - an escape from modernity - it does so through a sound that implies modernity's, and humanity's, inescapability. In this reading, the sounds of

[51] Quoted in ibid., 86
[52] Ibid.
[53] Julian Johnson, *Mahler's Voices: Expression and Irony in the Songs and Symphonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 54.

cowbells tinge the pastoral scene with a chilling irony, and support Mahler's assessment of the whole scene as lonely and apocalyptic.

**The Meaning of Mahler's Cowbells**

Let us postulate that Mahler's usage of the cowbells in these two symphonies exist, for the sake of argument, on a gradient of possible interpretation. At one end is pure programmaticism: the cowbells are there to indicate that the piece is presently portraying a landscape where one might hear cowbells. At the other end is pure sound: the cowbells are simply a sound which Mahler can orchestrate with, just as he can any other sound which an instrument in the orchestra can produce. Though Mahler's disavowal of a programmatic reading might seem to suggest he utilized the cowbells as pure sound - as absolute music without connotations - his comments to Istel suggest otherwise. The cowbells are, for Mahler, a non-programmatic sound with specific emotional implications - derived in a programmatic manner, by portraying a specific scene - which he utilizes in the development of the first movement of the Sixth Symphony, to name the most-written-about example. At other times in the symphonies, however, Mahler uses the cowbells in music *at odds* with these emotional implications. The dividing line is the physical location - and accordingly the visibility - of the bells.

Whenever Mahler uses the cowbells offstage - in the first and last movements of the Sixth and the first appearance in the second movement of the Seventh - they accompany dark, introspective music. Their onstage appearances, conversely, consistently accompany music in a major mode, of either a lighter character and sprightly tempo (as in the Andante from the Sixth and their onstage appearance in the second movement of the Seventh) or, in the unique case of the Seventh's finale, bright and muscular bombast. From this, I venture to suggest that Mahler placed the cowbells offstage specifically in order to invoke the solitary, disengaged emotional state he attached to the image of hearing unseen cows from a mountaintop - as those cows are not visible, so too he directs the cowbells to not be visible. When by contrast he uses the cowbells *without* intending this association, they are played onstage, and the sound is rejoined to its visual component. In doing so, a subtle mystery is dispelled. The audience can see a percussionist shaking and jangling the bells.

On the other hand, it is possible that these upbeat onstage uses are themselves an ironic tint on the music they accompany. If Mahler found the lonesomeness of that sound inescapable, his placement of the bells alongside the triumph of the Seventh's finale or the lovely pastoral in the Andante from the Sixth *could* be an effort by Mahler to place doubts within their triumph or serenity, respectively. This is, however, conjecture based on an excessively granular psychological reading. It is, I suspect, more likely that these cases are instances where Mahler intended only to utilize the sound of the cowbells. When the bells are onstage, and the mechanism of their sound production is visible, the eeriness of their sound is dispelled, and the little bit of stage magic that conjures up Mahler's mountaintop solitude ceases.

Before leaving this, we must consider that Mahler's intent is only one part of the interpretation of these sounds in his works. Even if he did not intend to conjure up images with them, Mahler could do nothing to eliminate the close associations that a lifetime of awareness of the cowbell as an environmental sound conditioned in his listeners. He himself let the sound of cowbells paint a picture for him, but his particular picture was a lonely one with unseen cattle instead of a pleasant one with visible cattle. Those listeners who hear the cowbells and imagine visible cattle will find such a pleasant scene being evoked by the *onstage* (and therefore visible) cowbells in the pastoral episodes where they appear. Perhaps these same listeners can compromise with Mahler, then, and understand the sound as implying solitude and bleakness when its source is *not* visible.

**The Orchestral Cowbell Beyond Mahler**

Of all the musical uses of cowbell that are covered in this dissertation, Mahler's *herdenglocken* may be the most written about. They are the only such usage with a recent, comprehensive study available in English that I was able to locate - the study in question being Thomas Peattie's "Mahler's Alpine Journey," which has been an invaluable resource to me. The scope of Peattie's study, however, is limited to the cowbell episode in the first movement of the Sixth, and to hermeneutic readings of that instance' particular implications (programmatic or otherwise). Such a scope is merited in light of the fact that other writers who comment on Mahler's cowbells similarly orient themselves towards that particular episode.

When addressing the development of cowbells in the orchestra after Mahler, Peattie has this to say, consigned to a single footnote:

"The subsequent use of cowbells in an orchestral context finds two strikingly different manifestations. Whereas in Richard Strauss's Alpensinfonie (1915) they are employed quite literally to symbolize a grazing herd, in the third of Anton Webern's Five Pieces for Orchestra, op. 10 (1913) they largely serve a coloristic function. In rather different ways both Webern and Strauss might be seen as paying homage to Mahler."[54]

Peattie is correct in that Anton Webern and Richard Strauss utilize cowbells, in orchestral settings, in methods that evoke Mahler both through the way the instruments are scored for and in the technical reality of the instruments - that is to say that, unlike virtually all "cowbell" parts in orchestral works since, the cowbells (*Herdengelaute*) in Richard Strauss' *Ein Alpensinfonie* (1915) and those in several works by Webern from that decade (beyond op. 10 as mentioned by Peattie) are agricultural cowbells, played with their clappers intact, used to generate continuous soundscapes rather than specific, rhythmic precise sounds.

Peattie's characterization of Webern's cowbells, however, is not the full picture. In fact, Webern uses *Herdenglocken* in the percussion sections of three related orchestral works, all of which were composed in the summer of 1913: the third movement of the *Fünf Stücke für Orchester*, op. 10 (1913), as mentioned by Peattie; "Kanfftag III," and "O sanftes Gluhn der Berge" ("Oh gentle mountain radiance"), with the latter two being orchestral songs with solo voice. *O sanftes Gluhn der Berge* ("Oh gentle mountain radiance") in particular, with its original poetic text written in honor of Webern's mother, is suggestive of a deeper meaning. Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer call it "an invocation of his mother, who appears to him as an apparition, now transfigured into the mother of grace."[55] This mystical imagery, combined with mountain imagery, may in fact allow for a deeper and simultaneously more representational, Alpine connotation for Webern's cowbells. A comprehensive analysis of the percussion

[54] Peattie, "Mahler's Alpine Journey," 79.
[55] Hans Moldenhauer and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton Von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 204.

colors of these movements would be of value to the literature as stands to both shed light on these lesser-known Webern works and to expand the *Herdenglocken* discourse beyond simply Mahler and the first movement of his Sixth, but is another study I must leave for the future.

At any rate, the fact remains that in works by these three composers, between the years 1906 and 1915, there existed a self-contained and continuous musical cowbell practice distinct from all that came before it or after it. In light of Mahler's position as the originator of it, I use his terminology and will refer to this usage, and the instruments used in it, as *herdenglocken*. Mahler, Webern, and Strauss' *herdenglocken*, in any performance of the piece, are (uniquely) agricultural cowbells by *musical use*. Even removed from the question of their programmaticism, the manner in which percussionists play these cowbells explicitly and intentionally resembles the motions, and accordingly the resulting sounds, of cowbells worn by actual cows. There exists no other cowbell tradition in music which is less transformational.

Furthermore, the sound of the instruments, as described in detail by Mahler, is arrhythmic and ametric. Accordingly, when *herdenglocken* are used in music, the practical reality is that they produce neither impacts nor prolonged tones, but soundscapes. The soundscape they produce is, when executed following Mahler's instructions, a reproduction of a real-world soundscape. The resulting musical effect is almost akin to sampling, or to the collection of recorded ambient noise, generated through manipulation of a sonic object: the cowbell.

But while the continuing popularity of Mahler's symphonies means that *herdenglocken* are available for purchase or rental from many current percussion instrument distributors, these modern examples are understood to be special instruments used only for certain particular pieces. No, "cowbell" has a wider meaning in the orchestra than *herdenglocken*. Other composers in the European concert tradition began to add cowbells to percussion parts soon after Strauss, but they did so with a different understanding of what the word meant and what instrument it would denote for the performer. In these uses, the cowbell had no clapper, was struck by a stick, and made a short, clear sound.

Uses in this mold include the already-discussed *bloc de metal* in Milhaud's *Creation du Monde* (1923) and Percussion Concerto (1930), and the various uses enumerated by James Blades: the *cencerro* in Edgard Varese's *Ionsiation* (1931) and the cowbells in Constant Lambert's *The Rio Grande*

(1927) or Aaron Copland's *Music for a Great City* (1964). To these we might add the *cencerros* used in Amadeo Roldan's *Ritmica no. 5* and *Ritmica no. 6* (both 1930) and his *Obertura sobre temas populares Cubanos* (1925) for orchestra. These uses do not draw on the *herdenglocken* tradition. These are examples of cowbell practices beyond those discussed in this chapter - predating them, in fact - diffusing into the orchestra from other performance idioms.

Chapter 4

## "The Finest Cowbell Known to Jazz"

## Cowbells in the theater and the drum kit

### Bellringers and Cowbellogians

I began the previous chapter with a discussion of the *Guillaume Tell* overture because Hector Berlioz' comments about the triangle in the overture's *ranz des vaches* seem to represent the beginning of discourse surrounding animal bells in music. But Rossini did not actually write for a cowbell or any other kind of animal bell in that work. The idea of the triangle standing in for one originated decades later with Berlioz. No, the actual beginning of the cowbell in music - the first usage of an object that can be unequivocally described as a "cowbell" in a musical performance or composition - occurred in 1840's America, in an entirely different performance idiom.

In the late 1840s American minstrel troupes began to incorporate numbers in their performances where they would play the part of "Cowbellogians." To quote one full title from a March 3, 1847 playbill by the Ethiopian Nightingale Singers: "an Original and highly amusing Burlesque on the Popular SWISS BELL RINGERS entitled the COWBELLOGIANS or VIRGINIA BELL RINGERS."[56] This particular reference, reproduced in Mahar's *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask*, is the earliest use of the word I have found. But it cannot be concluded from this that this was the first Cowbellogian performance or that the Ethiopian Nightingale Singers originated the act. Cowbellogian acts are widely referenced in the advertising materials of minstrel troops of the mid-19th century, but precious little information about what the act actually entailed or looked like. There may be useful information to glean, however, in an examination of the "Swiss Bell Ringers" that Cowbellogians here (and elsewhere) are said to be parodying.

The Swiss Bell Ringers, in fact, were not Swiss at all; they were seven young men from the village of Oldham, in the town of Lancashire, in the North of England. The whole "Swiss" charade was evidently the doing of renowned circus promoter P.T. Barnum. Barnum, according to his autobiography, engaged the group in 1844 for a tour of the U.S., Canada, and Cuba. The "Swiss" moniker was,

[56] William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 45.

seemingly, simply an angle to make the group seem more exact. Barnum also directed these men to grow long mustaches and wear Swiss peasant dress (or perhaps something Barnum felt American audiences would assume was Swiss peasant dress), and notes proudly that he assured the Oldham residents that their Northern English accents would sound alien enough to Americans to be an acceptable substitute for "Swiss" accents.[57] When they engaged with Barnum, the bellringers were being billed as "Campanologians," a name that they retained for at least some American performances; this may be the origin of the distinctly non-euphonious moniker "Cowbellogian."

As for the nature of *their* act, the Lancashire Bell Ringers - or Swiss Bell Ringers - were a seven-man handbell choir. This performance idiom is widespread in communities and especially churches in contemporary North America, but in the early 20th century it was distinctly English and unfamiliar elsewhere. Handbell choirs emerged as a companion practice to change ringing, a practice that lies at one possible intersection of music and math - performers, operating a set of church bells of different pitches, will ring them in what are known as "changes," or different permutations of bells. Much scholarship has been devoted to change ringing, and with good reason, as it is a fascinating and distinctive cultural practice, but the extent of its present relevance is that change ringing - being a ringing of many church bells simultaneously - is extremely loud, and handbell choirs developed in England as a way for bell-ringing groups to practice their changes much more quietly - and potentially, to practice them someplace warmer than a belfry.[58]

[57] P. T. Barnum, *The Life of P.t. Barnum* (Buffalo, NY: The Courier Company, 1888), 134.
[58] Christine Avedikian, "Handbells: Historic Beginnings," *American Music Teacher* 32, no. 6 (1983), http://www.jstor.org/stable/43541652, 34.

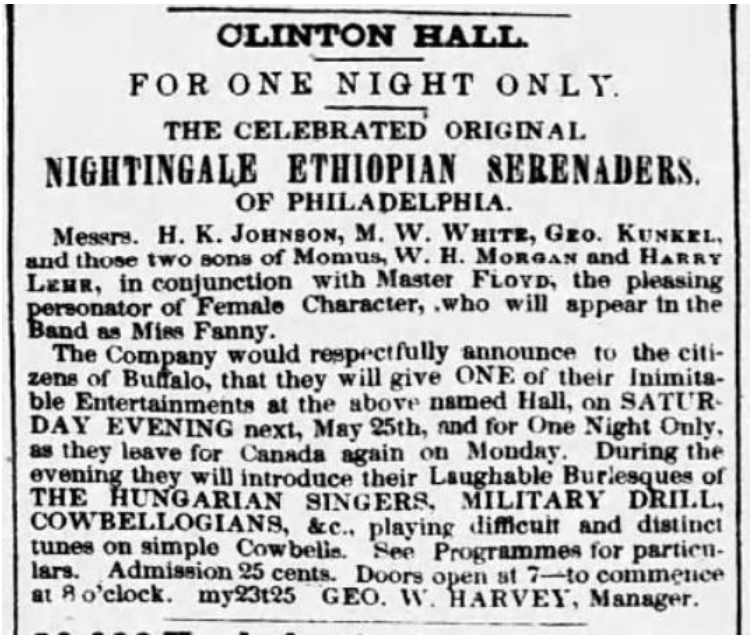
THE GREAT MUSICAL NOVELTY.
THE CAMPANOLOGIAN BAND OF MUSICIANS, known as the
SWISS BELL RINGERS,
Who have been producing a great sensation in New York by their
*NOVEL AND SUPERIOR MUSIC,*
which is made entirely by the
*RINGING OF BELLS,*
Will give a
GRAND CONCERT,
ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, SEPT. 25th,
AT CALVERT HALL,
In which they will introduce a great variety of pleasing and interesting Overtures, Quadrilles, National Airs, &c , including among others,
OVERTURE TO FRA DIAVOLO,
Jullien's Royal Irish Quadrilles,
Grand Movement from Haydn's Surprise Symphony, as performed before Queen Victoria and the Royal Family. "My beautiful Rhine!"
Hail Columbia, Yankee Doodle, &c. &c.
☞The doors will be opened a 7 o'clock, the Concert to commence at precisely 8 o'clock.
☞Tickets 50 cts.—to be had at the door.
s19 6t*

*Figure 8: From the September 21, 1847* Baltimore Sun.

As these bell-ringing groups became more skilled, some began to expand their bell arsenals beyond simply smaller versions of their local bells, and began to play tunes on them. The earliest advertisement I have found for the Swiss Bell Ringers in America - a *Baltimore Sun* clipping dated September 21, 1844, shown in Figure 8 - lists "interesting overtures, quadrilles, national airs, etc." among their repertoire as well as the "Grand Movement from Haydn's Surprise Symphony." A *New Hampshire Gazette* review entitled "The Swiss Bell Ringers" from August 24, 1847, reports (dryly noting that the supposed Swiss are all from Oldham) that the group had a battery of eighty tuned bells, and describes their repertoire as including "elaborate overtures, and pieces with intricate variations, containing rapid chromatic passages; sometimes involving extraordinary modulations…"

Might descriptions like this also apply to Cowbellogians, with the distinction that cowbells are used instead of handbells? Answering this question requires that we note that the term "Cowbellogian" was used by a variety of ensembles over the course of decades (from the 1840s to the 1880s). Accordingly, while the specificity of the terminology might be seen as suggesting that such performances

had *something* in common, we cannot treat Cowbellogians as a monolith. But documentation seems to suggest that at least *some* Cowbellogian acts - that of the Ethiopian Nightingale Singers, for one - did indeed involve the playing of handbell repertoire on tuned cowbells. I cite here an advertisement in the May 24, 1850 *Buffalo Commercial*, one of the only contemporary Cowbellogian advertisements to actually describe the act, declaring that the Cowbellogians would play "difficult and distinct tunes on simple Cowbells" (see Figure 9). This is the best evidence, and closest thing to confirmation, that Cowbellogian acts parodied handbell choirs by applying their performance practice to cowbells of specific pitch, rather than handbells.



CLINTON HALL.

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY.

THE CELEBRATED ORIGINAL

NIGHTINGALE ETHIOPIAN SERENADERS.

OF PHILADELPHIA.

Messrs. H. K. JOHNSON, M. W. WHITE, GEO. KUNKEL, and those two sons of Momus, W. H. MORGAN and HARRY LEHR, in conjunction with Master FLOYD, the pleasing personator of Female Character, who will appear in the Band as Miss Fanny.

The Company would respectfully announce to the citizens of Buffalo, that they will give ONE of their Inimitable Entertainments at the above named Hall, on SATURDAY EVENING next, May 25th, and for One Night Only, as they leave for Canada again on Monday. During the evening they will introduce their Laughable Burlesques of THE HUNGARIAN SINGERS, MILITARY DRILL, COWBELLOGIANS, &c., playing difficult and distinct tunes on simple Cowbells. See Programmes for particulars. Admission 25 cents. Doors open at 7—to commence at 8 o'clock. my23t25 GEO. W. HARVEY, Manager.

*Figure 9: From the May 24, 1850* Buffalo Commercial.

Beyond this, the newspaper clippings of the era by and large limit description of Cowbellogian acts *to* the assertion that they are a parody or burlesque of this handbell act. But the word itself - "Cowbellogian" - does haunt these clippings. And so we can find reference to Christy's Minstrels performing as Cowbellogians in a February 17, 1848 *New York Herald* clipping (Figure 10). An 1869 "Amusements" column in the *San Francisco Daily Examiner* (Figure 11) advertises some Cowbellogians appearing in conjunction with the California Minstrels.

CHRISTY'S MINSTRELS and harmonious voices have become synonymous terms. They still pursue their triumphant career, and will continue it for a great length of time, we dare say; as when the public have found a good place of amusement, they do not drop it in a hurry. The Cowbellogians form a prominent feature in tonight's bill. As for full houses, we need only say they always have them.

*Figure 10: From the February 17, 1848* New York Herald.

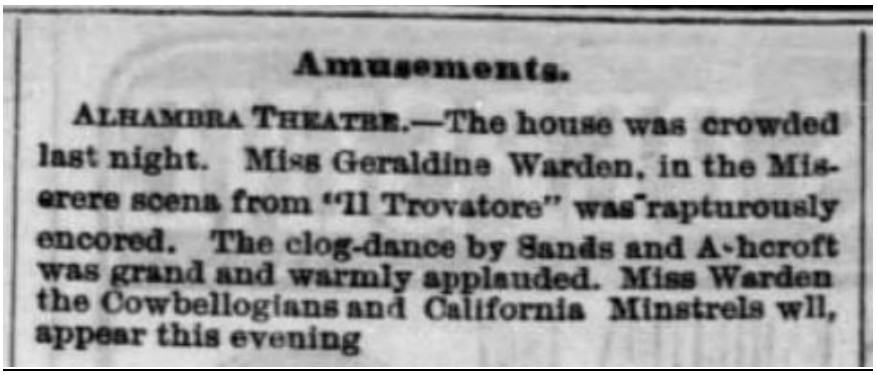



*Figure 11: From the April 3, 1869* San Francisco Daily Examiner.

Interestingly enough, it appears that the word "Cowbellogian" even entered the popular lexicon as term for the instrumental forces of shivarees and equivalently obnoxious wedding rituals, as the clipping shown in Figure 12 (from the extraordinarily named *Petroleum Centre Daily Record* of Cornplanter Township, Pennsylvania) uses it.

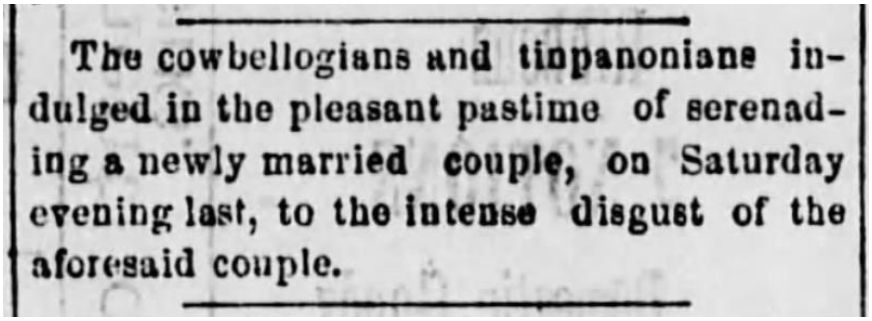
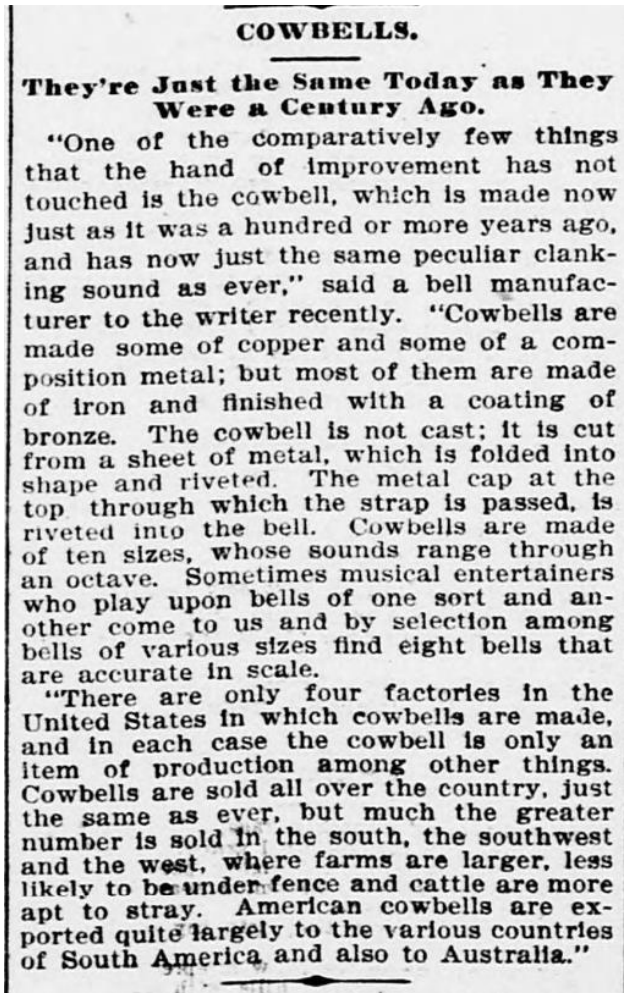

The cowbellogians and tinpanoniane indulged in the pleasant pastime of serenading a newly married couple, on Saturday evening last, to the intense disgust of the aforesaid couple.

*Figure 12: From the October 30, 1870* Petroleum Centre Daily Record.

The Cowbellogian act seems to have died out in the mid-late 19th century. The last performance under the name which I have found record of was given in Davenport, Iowa in July 1891, attested by articles in the July 28 and 29 *Quad-City Times*. But the musical practice of cowbells continued. A July 14th, 1900, *Washington Star* article (widely reproduced in regional papers around the country) quoted an unnamed manufacturer of cowbells as saying that "sometimes musical entertainers… come to us and by selection among bells of various sizes find eight bells that are accurate in scale." I consider this article (shown below in Figure 13) to be significant in the musical cowbell's American historiography. This is one of the only sources from the period between the advent of Cowbellogian acts and the trap sets of the early 20th century that hints at the continuance of a cowbell-playing musical idiom in America, and *the* only one I have found that specifies the cowbells as being being tuned.



**COWBELLS.**

**They're Just the Same Today as They Were a Century Ago.**

"One of the comparatively few things that the hand of improvement has not touched is the cowbell, which is made now just as it was a hundred or more years ago, and has now just the same peculiar clanking sound as ever," said a bell manufacturer to the writer recently. "Cowbells are made some of copper and some of a composition metal; but most of them are made of iron and finished with a coating of bronze. The cowbell is not cast; it is cut from a sheet of metal, which is folded into shape and riveted. The metal cap at the top through which the strap is passed, is riveted into the bell. Cowbells are made of ten sizes, whose sounds range through an octave. Sometimes musical entertainers who play upon bells of one sort and another come to us and by selection among bells of various sizes find eight bells that are accurate in scale.

"There are only four factories in the United States in which cowbells are made, and in each case the cowbell is only an item of production among other things. Cowbells are sold all over the country, just the same as ever, but much the greater number is sold in the south, the southwest and the west, where farms are larger, less likely to be under fence and cattle are more apt to stray. American cowbells are exported quite largely to the various countries of South America and also to Australia."

*Figure 13: From the July 14th, 1900* Washington Star.

Though we still have not reached the point in history (nor the chapter) where we will explore the *almglocken* tradition, evidence like this article is reason I take issue with the assertion sometimes made (e.g. by John Beck in his earlier-discussed *Encyclopedia of Percussion*) that *almglocken* can be simply defined as "pitched cowbells."[59] Tuned cowbells used by Cowbellogians, or by the "musicians who play upon bells of one sort or another" described here, or even (to name a more recent example) 1950's novelty bandleader Spike Jones, do not belong in the *almglocken* tradition. As we will see in Chapter 6, this American comedic tuned cowbell tradition predates the *almglocken* tradition by decades.

Would that there was more that we could say, with certainty, about the Cowbellogian performance idiom, and the tuned cowbell uses that seem to have followed it. It is this musical lineage that appears to be chronologically the very earliest adoption of the cowbell, as an object, into music. But ultimately, the available information is sparse. I have been forced by this fall back to conjecture as far as the practical realities of the playing of the bells are concerned.

But given the cowbell's already-much-discussed association with the carnivalesque and tendency towards humor, I consider it nothing short of astounding there exists, in these sparse references to Cowbellogians, such evidence that the very first cowbells brought onto the musical stage were brought there specifically to be laughed at, as caricatures played by (blackface) caricatures.

In this forgotten piece of minstrelsy history we can see that what drove the first performers to take this everyday object and make music from it was the idea that it would be a joke in and of itself: a burlesque of a cowless bell. We saw in Bakhtin the example of a bell debased by its hanging from - and thereby its association with - an animal. In the Cowbellogian act, performers exploit this preexisting debasement - made concrete and accessible to the audience by the existence of such a thing as a "common cow bell" - in order to ridicule the handbell practice. They replaced the "heightened" handbells with a "low" pejorative - a raucous and bucolic cowbell. The cowbell itself *is* the joke.

[59] Beck, *Encyclopedia of Percussion*, 4.

**Cowbells and the drum kit**

Cowbellogian acts, by adopting the cowbell into the performance idiom of minstrelsy, situated the cowbell both literally and symbolically *on the stage*. It is in these performances so far as I have been able to determine that the cowbell was used in what was unmistakably music, intended to be performed for a paying audience. The cowbell was a consistent feature of the percussion battery of American theater music at the turn of the 19th century and remained a core feature of the drum kit that developed in part *from* that theatrical percussion tradition. And it seems very possible that it is entirely from Cowbellogian acts that the cowbell ever found itself in the building, so to speak, so that it could come to have that place in theater music.

The most comprehensive documentation of the development of the early drum kit yet published is Matt Brennan's *Kick It: A Social History of the Drum Kit*. Pointedly to our present discussion, he introduces the theater percussion idiom by noting its development from the percussion sounds of blackface minstrel shows. By way of these sounds Brennan lists tambourines, bones, and tap dancing.[60] He does not list cowbells, but this omission may simply be due to the fact that (as already noted) the literature does not widely discuss the minstrel use of cowbells.

It remains the case, however, that whether or not there is any practical continuity between the use of cowbells by trap drummers and drum kit players in the early 20th century and use of cowbells in Cowbellogian acts decades earlier is not something that can be presently proven or disproven. I have already recounted the historical record of Cowbellogian acts as it seems to exist in its entirety. The *Washington Star* article describing the purchase of tuned cowbells by musicians as commonplace is suggestive that the practice continued after the Cowbellogian name had fallen into disuse, but "suggestive" is all it is.

At any rate, documentation of percussion instruments (and of the cowbell's place among instruments) became more concrete in the early 20th century. This is for several reasons - widespread photography, a growing industry of percussion instrument manufacturers, and the actual development of the drum kit idiom itself. And so as the drum kit both comes into practical use and becomes definitely visible to the historical record, the cowbell is already there.

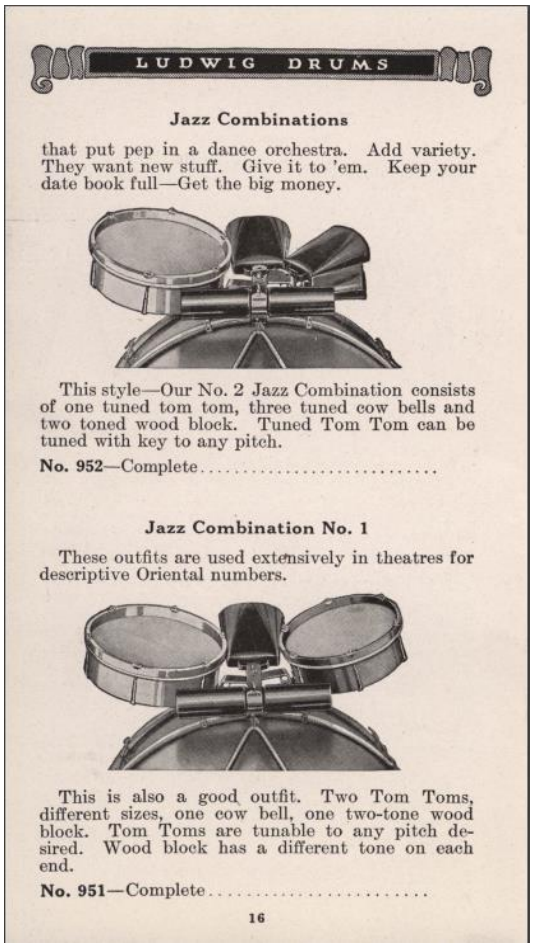
[60] Matt Brennan, *Kick It: A Social History of the Drum Kit* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 28.

For one prominent example, the cowbell formed a part of the percussive sound palette of Tony Sbarbaro, who has the distinction of being the drummer on the first commercial jazz recordings. Sbarbaro (1897-1969) was a New Orleans drummer, the child of Sicilian immigrants, and played traps with an all-white group called the Original Dixieland Jazz Band who, in 1917, cut the two very first jazz records in history: "Livery Stable Blues" and "Dixie Jass Band One-Step." According to Brennan:

"He [Sbarbaro] uses the full range of the drum kit on both recordings: 'Livery Stable Blues' features military rudimental snare drum playing (flams, rolls, and ruffs) throughout; an audible, booming syncopated bass drum which sounds like it was played using a combination of foot pedal and occasional double drumming technique; and punctuations on both **cowbell** and Chinese cymbal. Sbarbaro drives the livelier tempo of 'Dixie Jass One Step' with snare drum and cymbal accents, and then launches into a delightful syncopated rhythm played on alternating woodblock and **cowbell** with accents on bass drum, before returning to the snare to conclude the number."[61]

Emphases mine. The recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band were enormously influential in spite of the fact that, as observed by Lawrence Gushee, they were white musicians playing a highly rehearsed derivation of an improvisatory musical practice originated by and primarily played by persons of color. This influence, says Gushee, is owed to the "superb recording technique of the Victor Talking Machine Company."[62] But this also means that the drumset approach and instrumental palette of Tony Sbabaro were similarly privileged, made widely available via recording, and made able to be imitated by musicians who, as Gushee put it, "never had visited and never would visit New Orleans."[63]

[61] Brennan, *Kick It*, 85-86.
[62] Lawrence Gushee, "The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Jazz," *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002), https://doi.org/10.2307/1519947, 151.
[63] Ibid.



LUDWIG DRUMS

**Jazz Combinations**

that put pep in a dance orchestra. Add variety. They want new stuff. Give it to 'em. Keep your date book full—Get the big money.

This style—Our No. 2 Jazz Combination consists of one tuned tom tom, three tuned cow bells and two toned wood block. Tuned Tom Tom can be tuned with key to any pitch.

**No. 952**—Complete.....

**Jazz Combination No. 1**

These outfits are used extensively in theatres for descriptive Oriental numbers.

This is also a good outfit. Two Tom Toms, different sizes, one cow bell, one two-tone wood block. Tom Toms are tunable to any pitch desired. Wood block has a different tone on each end.

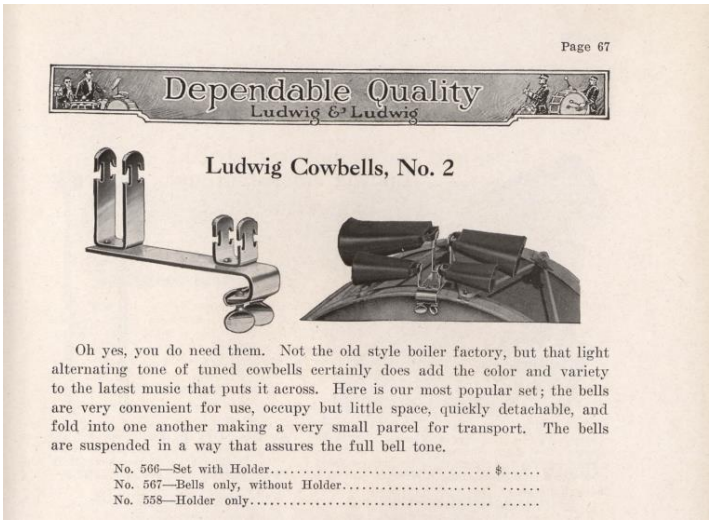
**No. 951**—Complete.....

16

Figure 14: From California Band Instrument Company 1922 Ludwig catalog.

And so - whether due to a common influence *with* Sbarbaro, or the influence *of* Sbarbaro - we have the cowbell affixed to the bass drum in the industry-codified early drum kit. This page (shown in Figure 14) from a 1922 Ludwig & Ludwig (printed for the California Band Instrument Company of Oakland) catalog shows a selection of small arrays of sound effects available for purchase. These so-called “jazz combinations” incorporate one or more of single-headed tom toms, wood blocks, and cowbells. From the fact that the cowbells (whose mouths are oriented away from the viewer) are mounted horizontally, we can surmise they are clapperless. A clappered cowbell (i.e. an agricultural cowbell) held horizontally and struck with a stick will buzz, as the clapper bounces and comes to rest against the lower interior of the bell. This sound has to my knowledge *never* been a feature of those cowbell practices which are either documented closely or preserved through audio recordings. The cowbells that can be

heard in early drum kit recordings have a clear, percussive tone which indicates their clappers have been removed.



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Dependable Quality

Ludwig & Ludwig

Ludwig Cowbells, No. 2

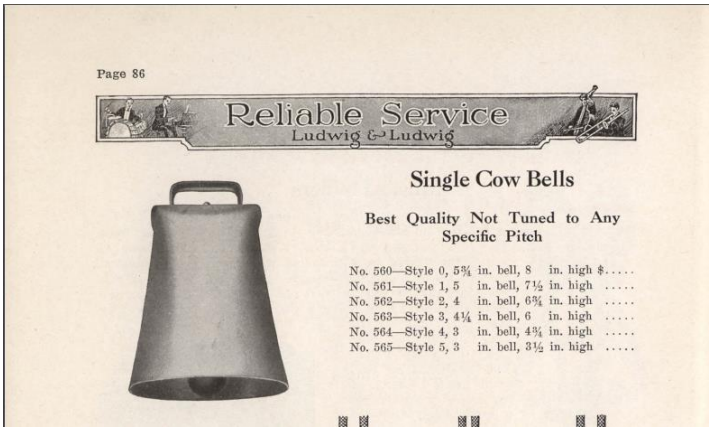
Oh yes, you do need them. Not the old style boiler factory, but that light alternating tone of tuned cowbells certainly does add the color and variety to the latest music that puts it across. Here is our most popular set; the bells are very convenient for use, occupy but little space, quickly detachable, and fold into one another making a very small parcel for transport. The bells are suspended in a way that assures the full bell tone.

No. 566—Set with Holder..... $.....
No. 567—Bells only, without Holder..... .....
No. 558—Holder only..... .....

Figure 15: From the 1922 Ludwig & Ludwig catalog.

Shown in Figure 15 are cowbells advertised in another 1922 Ludwig and Ludwig catalog, this one printed in Ludwig's home city of Chicago. As with the previous example, neither the illustrations nor the copy indicates clearly whether these cowbells - available in sets of up to four - have clappers or not. But we can surmise from practical considerations and performance practice that they do not. The copy does *support* this, if not confirm it, with the statement that the bells are "suspended in a way that assures the full bell tone."

However, it does also appear that cowbells with clappers were still being marketed to percussionists during the days of the early drum kit. Consider the "Single Cow Bells" advertised on page 86 of the same catalog, in Figure 16 below. This instrument *does* appear to be drawn with a clapper. The ad copy here is sparse and gives no suggestion of an intended or imagine musical use. Assuming it actually is a clapper pictured inside, then this instrument is quite distinct from the mounted ones already discussed. It is simply an ordinary cowbell - an agricultural cowbell. Without clear indication one way or another, though, we cannot be sure.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Reliable Service
Ludwig & Ludwig

Single Cow Bells

Best Quality Not Tuned to Any Specific Pitch

No. 560—Style 0, 5¾ in. bell, 8 in. high $.....
No. 561—Style 1, 5 in. bell, 7½ in. high .....
No. 562—Style 2, 4 in. bell, 6¾ in. high .....
No. 563—Style 3, 4¼ in. bell, 6 in. high .....
No. 564—Style 4, 3 in. bell, 4¾ in. high .....
No. 565—Style 5, 3 in. bell, 3½ in. high .....

Figure 16: From the 1922 Ludwig & Ludwig catalog.

At any rate, the presence of mounted clapperless cowbells in the early drum kit does beg the question of when, why, and by whom this cowbell practice came to lose its clapper. Did even the Cowbellogians actually use clapperless cowbells? I am inclined to believe that they didn't, so that their act might be a closer approximation of the handbell acts they were parodying. But why the change? I have not found an answer to this in my research. I consider this question - what the practical realities of cowbell usage in American theater percussion and trap drumming were prior to the standardization of the clapperless cowbell mounted on the bass drum - to be one of the intriguing ones remaining unanswered at the time of my writing this dissertation.

**Against the Cowbell**

By way of concluding this chapter, I wish to draw attention to an intriguing trend I noted while searching databases available through the University of Maryland library system, primarily the Readex *America's Historical Newspapers* database, as well as Newspapers.com. As has already been noted, the cowbell was featured in the percussion battery of the first jazz records ever cut, the 1917 recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. It follows that as jazz grew in popularity in America, the sound of the cowbell followed it. And as jazz faced early criticism and negative reaction from audiences, the cowbell was sometimes singled out for *particular* criticism.

For example, the March 2, 1920 issue of the *Wyoming Star* of Cheyenne ran an anonymous editorial by the plaintive title of "Where is the Music of Yesteryear?" In it, the author complains of "weird

sounds produced by a drummer hammering frantically on a Chinese block [i.e. a woodblock], shaking a cowbell, or clattering with drumsticks on the edge of a bass drum." A similarly anonymous and similarly toned editorial ran in the January 23, 1921 *Dallas Morning News*, lamenting that "the oldtime musical instruments have given way to the cowbell, the anvil, and the mournful saxophone."

This disdain can even bleed into the language of writers who are not simply complaining about jazz. Austrian composer Hugo Reisenfeld was quoted in the November 19, 1922 *Baltimore Sun* thusly: "I like jazz - good jazz. Not the noisy presentations in which cowbells ring continuously - which are always passe…"

Some of those were so moved to disgust by the cowbell's use in music that they expressed it in rhyme. To quote an item of unclear origin than ran widely in Aprill 1922 (in the *Duluth News Tribune* on April 7, in the San Jose *Evening News* on April 11, and Washington's *Bellingham Herald* on April 18):

"A tin dishpan and an auto horn,
A squeaky fiddle and a rat eating corn,
A baby's rattle and a puppy's whine,
A cowbell jangle and a rosined twine -
That's jazz."

The most artistically impressive such verse I have come across is a poem entitled "The Drummer Guy." It was written by Carlton Fitchett (1886-1946), published in the *Bellingham Herald* of Bellingham, Washington, September 7, 1918, and I quote the first several stanzas below so that its peculiar mix of wit and reactionary disdain can be appreciated by the reader.

"The orchestra in days gone by could stir our soul and spirit;
Its symphonies could make us sigh with happiness to hear it.
But now instead of tuneful sounds we hear a jangling clamor;
A jazzy drummer sits and pounds some hardware with a hammer.
The cello and violin are now no longer in it;

The drummer with his jazztime din is busy every minute.
In vain to hear the notes we try - they cannot reach our attics
And so we watch the drummer guy indulge in acrobatics.
He rings a cowbell with his knee, then taps on sheets of metal,
Then toots a horn with boyish glee and hammers on a kettle,
Then plays a solo with his feet upon his drum and cymbal,
And with each hand a gong he'll beat - the lad is surely nimble."

There even appeared during this time a small canon of widely circulated and reproduced cowbell jokes. These generally took the form of brief, humorous dialogues regarding the parallel absurdities of cowbells being instruments and jazz being music. The following, for example, was published in the Boston Globe of May 12, 1920 (and credited to the Louisville Courier-Journal):

"No; I know nothing about music."
"All you have to do is jangle this cowbell."
"But suppose I come in at the wrong time?"
"You can't do that in jazz."

This one ran (under the title "Among Musicians") in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch of November 22, 1919, and is credited to the Detroit Free Press.

"I have a genuine Cremona violin."
"What's that in these days? I have the finest cowbell known to jazz."

The rhetoric of all these examples is closely related. They are suggestive of a mindset that takes it as self-evident that the cowbell is not a musical instrument and uses this presupposition to imply, humorously, that by the same token jazz itself is not music, or is music of a uniquely offensive or

inappropriate kind. The cowbell as referenced by these anonymous writers is a metonym for the genre with which they associate it - that being jazz.

In this way do we return once again to the cowbell's place in culture, and the question of how it has affected the cowbell's use in music. I was not drawn to this question by the specter of *Saturday Night Live's* "More Cowbell" sketch, and the slogan "More cowbell!" more generally, which haunts the possibility of modern-day cowbell discourse. Indeed, I initially hoped to *avoid* the topics of Will Ferrell, Blue Öyster Cult, and the question of whether or not "cowbell" is something that anyone needs "more" of altogether. It seemed to me, making such decisions in Spring 2021 when I first began to piece together the notes that would one day become this present work, that to give such jokes a platform at all would be to delegitimize the actual historical research I planned to do.

But the reader will of course already be aware that "More Cowbell" is the topic of the opening words of this document's introduction. This is because of the contents of the present chapter. It is still my stance that the seeming inherent humor of the cowbell stands to obscure the ability to describe the instrument's history, but my research has now suggested that the history and the humor are intertwined. The cowbell's history is a one of humor. Its predilection for comedy dates back to the charivari and its carnivalesque relatives and antecedents, but is also the very cause for the cowbell's introduction into music.

Let me repeat: the first usage of a cowbell recorded on the concert stage was evidently comedic in nature. Minstrel troupes in the late 1840s parodying contemporary handbell choirs exploited the cowbell's existing connotations both as burlesque object and as a mundane one in order to parody contemporary handbell choirs. And it seems that they did this - beyond whatever other comedy was involved in the scripting or physicality of the act - by *substituting* cowbells for handbells.

Evidence then suggests that for the remainder of the 19th century, cowbells remained in the batteries of percussionists in the theatrical performance idioms that followed from minstrelsy in America. And when in the 1910s the development of the drum kit and early days of jazz coincided, cowbells were prominently featured in (and publicly derided by some as a part of) the percussive environment that resulted. Perhaps there is continuity in both these instrumental practices and the mockery they seem to have provoked. But whereas provoking laughter was the entire point of the cowbell's usage by

Cowbellogians, no such intent is evident from the cowbell's presence in early jazz and the early drumset. The mockery that nevertheless did result - the jokes, the *rhymes* - was perhaps unavoidable. And so too did I conclude that far from obscuring the ability to describe the cowbell, the ubiquity of "More Cowbell" *elucidated* something about the cowbell. It is the latest entry in this history of usages of cowbells in music being seen either as funny, inappropriate, or both - a history that is older even than the cowbell's musical use to begin with.

Chapter 5

## "The So-Called *Cencerro*"
## Iron Bells and the Cowbell in Cuba

Early in this dissertation I mentioned my decision to allow practical usage of the word "cowbell" by musicians and audiences to determine the scope of my study. That is to say, rather than engaging in linguistic prescriptivism and committing this study to a sorting-out of what is and is not a cowbell, I resolved to instead study *all* objects which are or can be referred to as cowbells, on the basis that it is this study which is of the most practical use to percussionists.

We have come now to the point where this position is at its least tenable – the point where this dictum would force me to describe, as a cowbell, a whole variety of struck metal instruments which are *not* cowbells. I am referring here to the wide variety of struck clapperless bells which are used in the music of Sub-Saharan Africa and in the African diaspora. To be clear, it would be erroneous for these bells to be referred to as "cowbells," something that at a glance seems entirely erroneous - these bells have no connection with domestic animals, after all.

However, to completely reject the cowbell connection would be to reject the actual historical link between these African bells and the cowbell practice. For it is to the historical presence of just such traditional bells as the *ekón*, *agogo*, and *ngongue* in Afro-Cuban drumming practices that the cowbell owes its presence in Cuban music, and its modern familiarity as a part of tropical music (recalling that the label *tropical music* describes the various interrelated genres of music from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America which have formerly been ascribed the label of *Latin music*). This chapter therefore serves not to frame African struck bells as a kind of cowbell, but rather to describe a process through which the instrumental practice which *used* those bells came to adopt cowbells as a replacement *for them* - and subsequently, how this Afro-Cuban cowbell usage came to influence and alter the way that cowbells were used in *other* musical practices.

**The timeline and its instruments**

Many genres of drum-based instrumental dance music originating in Sub-Saharan Africa feature recurring, syncopated rhythmic patterns which are commonly called *timelines* or *bell patterns*. Though they can be rendered quite legibly in Western notation - Figure 17 below shows what is sometimes called the "long bell" or "standard" bell pattern - these patterns, in their cultural contexts, are not felt as syncopations against an underlying "time." They *are* time.

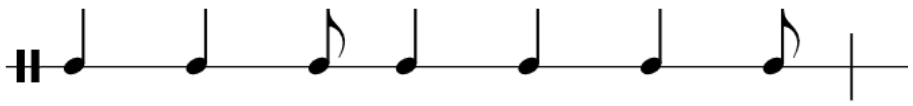

*Figure 17: 12-pulse (or 12/8) standard bell pattern, after Peñalosa and Greenwood.*

Describing the long bell in an Ewe context, Steven M. Friedson calls it

"something in between a meter and a rhythm, something that at once defines a rate of motion and gives that motion a life of its own… More than mere an acoustical phenomenon, the bell's timing is held in the body of every drummer, singer, and dancer, because it is part of the body, the source from which it came and the destination of its specific realizations. It is precisely as body that each refraction of the musical texture has the capacity to rehearse the bell in a different way. When asked where "one" is, Ewe drummers will tell you to listen to the bell because there is no "one."[64]

While it is common, then, to hear the 12/8 bell juxtaposed against musical events or emphases that line up with the stresses that Western musicians will associate with eighth-notes 1, 4, 7, and 9 of the 12/8 meter, this is not an expression of an underlying beat which takes precedence over the timeline, or from which the timeline proceeds - rather, the beats proceed from the timeline. Such beats are, according

[64] Steven M. Friedson, *Remains of Ritual: Northern Gods in a Southern Land* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 138.

to Gerhard Kubik (2011), generally conceptualized instead as "the steps" or in some cases "*pieds de danse*" - "dance feet."[65]

The terminology "bell pattern," though oriented towards the subject of the present study, might give the erroneous impression that these timeline patterns are exclusively or even primarily played on bells. This is not the case, as according to Kubik timeline patterns are produced "either by hand-clapping or by striking a musical instrument with a penetrating sound such as a bell, high-pitched drum, the rim or wooden body of a drum, a bottle, axe blade, calabash or percussion beam, concussion sticks (such as the Cuban "claves"), or a high pitched xylophone key."[66]

This passage is intriguing because of Kubik's framing. The construction "musical instrument such as" indicates that, for Kubik, all of the sound possibilities that follow should be considered musical instruments, in spite of the fact that those possibilities include such items as a bottle and an axe blade. At the risk of making too much of a minor semantic quirk, I interpret this framing as an inclusive stance on what exactly it is that qualifies an object as an instrument. That is to say: for Kubik, in the context of timeline patterns, whatever objects have the proper sonic characteristics to express the timeline pattern (a sound that can both be heard over other sounds and which can clearly express a precise rhythm) can be used to play the timeline pattern, and when thusly used, they constitute instrumental forces.

There is a great deal of scholarship concerning the ethical concerns that arise from musicological tendencies towards generalization of African music. In the interest of avoiding such generalizations - to not, as Kofi Agawu puts it, impose "universalizing discourses onto heterogeneous musical objects and processes"[67] - I will specify that timeline patterns as a concept are not universalities in African music by any means, and that the specific bell pattern I have to this point referred to is only one subset of possible timeline patterns. And as we can see from Kubik's list above, the bells - the real present topic of discussion - are only one subset of the instruments which might be used to *play* the patterns. However, this is not to say that the timeline pattern is an instrumental practice with a completely open instrumentation. Across sub-Saharan Africa, from present-day Ghana southeast into present-day

[65] Gerhard Kubik, *Theory of African Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 35.
[66] Ibid. 57
[67] V. Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 173.

Democratic Republic of the Congo, bells are constructed in order to play these patterns. And it is to the bells we now shift our focus.

When we discuss all of the struck, clapperless metal bells used to play timeline patterns in instrumental dance music across sub-Saharan Africa, it is a struggle to avoid making the kind of generalizations that Agawau warns against. This is because all these bells - the Ewe *gakókwé* (also spelled *gankogui* and *gangokui*) and the Yoruba *agogô* (and for that matter the Brazilian *agogo* derived from it), to name the examples which are best documented - *do* bear a strong resemblance to one another. They are typically flange welded from two triangular sheets of iron bent around the post of an anvil, which leaves them with a pair of raised "ridges" running the length of the instrument, opposite one another. Such bells commonly exist both as single bells, with a stem-like handle, and as pairs of differently-sized bells attached to a single handle, whether stem-like or U-shaped. Examples of all such configurations can be seen below, in Figure 18**.**

*Figure 18: Single and double iron bells (including at lower right a Brazilian agogo)*

Jan Vansina's study "The Bells of Kings," though approaching these bells from a purely archeological (that is to say, non-musical) perspective, provides the most comprehensive data regarding the distribution of single and double bells.[68] Gerhard Kubik's chapter on intra-cultural influences in historical Africa, in the 2001 edition of the *Garland* encyclopedia, states that bellmaking diffused, in tandem with ironworking more broadly, southwards from what is now Northern Nigeria.[69]

Within the musicological literature the concerns itself with features common to the music of many African cultures - that is to say, the musicological literature which chronicles timeline patterns as a widespread trope rather than their specific uses within a given culture - it is common to refer to these bells simply as *bells*. Some writers, especially older ones such as James Walton in his 1950s archeological writings, will refer to these instruments instead as *gongs*, seemingly on the principle that they cannot be bells since they do not have clappers. Jeremy Montagu, on the other hand, makes the case that, within the Sachs-Hornbostel system of instrumental classification, instruments like the Ewe *gankogui* are bells in that they are metal idiophones whose vibration is weakest at its vertex, whereas gongs are idiophones whose vibration is *strongest* at its vertex.[70]

My preferred terminology for these bells, following Kofi Agawu[71] and *Garland*, is simply **iron bells**. "Iron bell," like "cowbell," is an imperfect category; by "Iron bell," after all, I do not simply mean a bell that is made out of iron, just as "a bell that is associated somehow with a cow" is not and cannot be a satisfactory or useful definition of "cowbell." I consider it a useful and justified piece of terminology, however. As I note already I follow in this usage scholars whose knowledge of the individual cultures whose bells are contained by that term *far* exceeds my own.

Having now established what the term "iron bell" means in this context - both as a physical object and as a physical portion of the instrumental practice of timeline patterns - we can explain the process by which the iron bell came to Cuba, and how its use there gradually transformed into the modern use of the cowbell in tropical music.

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[68] Jan Vansina,"The Bells of Kings," *The Journal of African History* 10, no. 2 (1969), http://www.jstor.org/stable/179509, 192-193.
[69] Gerhard Kubik, "Intra-African Streams of Influence," in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1998), 294.
[70] Jeremy Montagu, "5. What Is a Gong?" *Man* 65 (1965), https://doi.org/10.2307/2796036, 18.
[71] V. Kofi Agawu, *The African Imagination in Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 97.

**Slavery in Cuba**

In 1762 English forces under the command of George Keppel, the 3rd Earl of Abermarle, captured Havana. Cuba was then a Spanish colony, and Spain and England were at the time belligerents as part of the large Seven Years' War (1756-1763). Though the island was returned to Spanish governance in only five months, the English occupation significantly altered the Cuban economy in two ways: one, the introduction of a sugar-growing plantation economy (which quickly outpaced Cuba's prior tobacco-based economy), and two, the importation of 10,700 enslaved Africans. Once back in Spanish hands, colonial authorities accepted this economic jolt and continued to import slaves so that it might grow further. Accordingly, by the 1780s the enslaved population had grown to 65,000 individuals, and by the mid-19th century there were nearly 400,000 enslaved black Cubans, as well as a free black population of over 200,000.[72]

Cuba is not the only slaveholding country with a history of African-diasporic musical development taking place within its borders. But it is in Cuba where many of the most significant developments that led to modern tropical music occurred - the *danzon*, the *son*, the *son montuno*, the *mambo* - and it is in these developments that the cowbell took on a new musical role, its most crucial, central, and exciting one yet. But why did this happen in Cuba specifically?

The answer lies in some unique attributes that Cuba's version of chattel slavery possessed. Herbert S. Klein, in his marvelously readable *African Slavery in Latin America*, reports that in the 1850s there were 50,000 slave-owning Cubans. But of these, almost half were residents of urban areas, primarily Havana. There were significant differences in the material reality of slavery between urban Cuba and rural Cuba in this time period - for example, the average rural slaveholder owned four times as many slaves (12) as the average urban slaveholder (3), but the former number is skewed significantly by a small number of sugar planters who typically owned a hundred or more. Furthermore, while the system of slavery in Cuba's plantations resembled the repressive circumstances found elsewhere in the Caribbean, 19th-century Cuba's urban slaves possessed an unusual degree of social autonomy - a system Klein

[72] Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 87.

describes as “a well-developed practice of slaveowners allowing their slaves to live and work away from home in return for a fixed rental.”[73]

That is to say: enslaved Cubans were often able to live in their own homes, seek employment on their own, and maintain fully autonomous social lives in return for a regular sum, paid to their owners, which functionally amounted to a monthly rent on their own bodies. Such individuals were termed “jornal slaves.”[74]

This autonomy enabled a much freer mixing of the cultures of the enslaved and the enslavers, especially with the free black population in Cuba swelling into the hundreds of thousands during the 19th century. But it also allowed for the development of communities, both pan-African and organized along ancestral cultural lines, and it is in these communities that African music was able to flourish in Cuba - and always present in the background of that practice was the bell, playing its timeline patterns.

In colonial Havana, both free blacks and the aforementioned jornal slaves were able to socially organize with one another in social organizations called *cabildos*. Ivor Miller, writing in his 2009 volume *Voice of the Leopard*, clarifies as an umbrella term denoting both *cofradías* - state- and Church-sanctioned fraternities intended to organize and pacify minority ethnic groups, a tradition dating back to late-14th century Seville - and *cabildos de nación*, groups organized, along ethnic or fictive familial lines, instead by black Cubans themselves.[75]

Closely related to the *cabildos* are three prominent Afro-Cuban religious/ritualistic organizations: the Kongo religion *palo monte*, the Yoruba religion *Santería*, and the Efik-derived fraternal organization *Abakuá.* All of these organizations were, in colonial Cuba, vectors for the continuation of African cultural practices.

This includes the *comparsas*, “bands” formed (in many cases by individual cabildos) to perform drum-based music (sometimes called *conga de comparsa*) in Cuba’s Carnaval, held (in colonial times) on the feast of Epiphany - that is to say, January 6th, or Three Kings’ Day.[76] *Abakuá* lodges made up some

[73] Ibid. 102
[74] Ivor Miller, *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 71.
[75] Ibid., 75
[76] Terry O’Mahoney, “Cuban Carnaval and Conga de Comparsa,” *Percussive Notes* 39, no. 2 (April 2001): 9.

of the *comparsas*, which would process through Old Havana to the palace of the governor general, whereupon they would proclaim their loyalty to him and receive money and gifts in return.[77]

A survey of the full extent of African-derived drumming practices in Cuba is a project far too large for the scope of the present study. I would note that beyond Carnaval's festivities, other prominent such practices include the Yoruba-derived *batá* drumming of the *santeros* and the various bodies of drum-based music that fall under the broad and nonspecific umbrella of *rumba*. But once again, our focus is on the bells, and with this background, we can now turn once more to the bells themselves.

**Fernando Ortiz and the *ekón***

To describe the usage of bells in Cuban music - both iron bells, and the cowbells that came to replace them - I must now introduce a crucial source already alluded to. Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) was a Cuban anthropologist and ethnomusicologist, a writer whose significance in the historiography of Cuba is enormous. His work *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940) is widely cited today for its coining of the term *transculturation*, meaning the process by which two cultures influence one another and in doing so create a third culture, not clearly derived more from one than from the other. Ortiz utilizes this term to describe how Cuban culture cannot be seen either as African culture with Spanish influences, nor as Spanish culture with African influences.[78] As we shall see, it is also a fair enough term for the cowbell's presence in Cuba as well.

I have not found another study of the instruments used in Afro-Cuban music anywhere near as thorough as Fernando Ortiz' *Los Instrumentos de la Musica Afrocubana* (1952). It is shocking to me therefore that this book has never been translated into English. In the research I undertook for this dissertation, I worked from the second edition of Ortiz' book, published in 1996, and translated the relevant chapters using a combination of machine translation and work with a Spanish English dictionary.

[77] Miller, *Voice of the Leopard*, 40.
[78] Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar,* trans. Harriet De Onís (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 97-98.

The relevant materials in Ortiz's study are contained within two chapters: "El *ekón*, el *Oggán*, el *Kangá*, y el *Ngongui*;" and "El cencerro y la gangarria." The former chapter deals with iron bells in Cuba; the names listed in the title being various names for single or double bells, namely the Abakuá single bell *ekón*, the Arará (or Dahomeyan) *oggan*, the Abakuá double bell *kanga*, and the Kongo *ngongui*. The latter chapter is concerned with cowbells.

From the simple fact that they are the subject of two different chapters, it is obvious that Ortiz wishes to distinguish between these instruments. For Ortiz - like most writers on the subject - an umbrella term (like "iron bell") for all these similar struck clapperless bells is a necessity, if only for the sake of clarity. Ortiz, rather than using a general term to strive for clarity and accuracy (again, like "iron bell") selects a specific one: *ekón,* the specific word used by Abakuá members for the flange-welded bell in their percussion battery. Ortiz uses the word to apply to all such bells used in Africa itself, and even for the familiar Brazilian *agogo*.

Such an umbrella term is also necessary for Ortiz so that he can clearly and categorically contrast the iron bell - his *ekón* - with the cowbell.

"Es un error decir que el *ekón* es un *cencerro*. El *Cencerro* es una forma de campana completa; es decir, con badajo colgante en su interior, que al percutirlo la hace sonar. El *ekón* no tiene lengua y se percute exteriormente."[79]

It is an error to say that the *ekón* is a cowbell, says Ortiz. The cowbell is a kind of complete bell; that is to say, with a clapper hanging inside, which makes it sound when struck. The *ekón* has no tongue and is struck on the outside. This is a clear distinction, but Ortiz needs to clearly differentiate the instruments because, in the decades leading to the time of his writing, a new instrumental practice had emerged in Cuba which confounded this distinction.

In the late 1930's, the *son* - a musical and dance genre fusing the various African musical traditions maintained by black Cubans with those that originated among the Spanish colonizers - began to transform in new, increasingly Africanizing ways. The percussive battery expanded from claves, bongos,

[79] Fernando Ortiz, *Los Instrumentos De La Música Afrocubana* (Madrid, Spain: Editorial Música Mundana Maqueda, 1996), 271.

and occasionally maracas to include congas and the cowbell. In this context, the cowbell had no clapper and was struck from the outside with a stick. Cuban composer Amadeo Roldan's uses of *cencerros* in his Afro-Cuban-inspired orchestral percussion sections, mentioned in the previous chapter, are also part of this practice.

The most representative and influential example, however, would be that of Arsenio Rodriguez (1911-1970), the famed blind bandleader. Rodriguez, evidently a popularizer if not an originator of the cowbell in Cuban music, began in the late 1930's to have the bongo player to pick up the cowbell and play regular rhythmic patterns (often simply half notes on 1 and 3) during *montuno*, the extended improvisatory section which became a standard feature of the *son* at this time.[80] The introduction of the cowbell may have had symbolic, Africanizing significance for Rodriguez, whose devotion to and appreciation of his African heritage and identity influenced his art throughout his career. An illustrative (and remarkably relevant) example from Rodriguez's own lyrical writing – a conga, dating likewise from the late 1930's, entitled "Todos seguimos la conga" ("We All Follow the Conga") – is collected by David Garcia in his volume *Arsenio Rodriguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music*.

"…cuando suena los tambores / con ese ritmo y como pasa / repiquetiando su sonido / nacido de Africa / cuando suena los cencerros todos van a 'rrollar."

("…when the drums sound / with that rhythm and how it passes by / playing its sound / born in Africa / when the bells sound everyone goes rolling.")[81]

The above translation is by Garcia – note that he has translated *cencerro* as "bell."

It is uses like these that Ortiz is referring to when, in the chapter "El cencerro y el gangarria," he writes the following:

"In Cuba, the so-called *cencerro* belongs to the category of metallic instruments with external percussion, such as a bell without a clapper, **and** bells with a clapper that strikes inside the instrument,

[80] Raul A. Fernandez, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 32.
[81] David Garcia, *Arsenio Rodriguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 21.

because it is used in both ways. In one and the other, [it is] trying to imitate or substitute, with advantages of economy and timbres, its imperfect African precedents. … It was the black who in Cuba sometimes took away the hammer [i.e. clapper] to use it [i.e. the cowbell] **as an ekón**, by means of external percussion."[82]

Emphases mine. And later:

"A Creole corruption or imitation of the *ñañigo* [i.e. Abakuá] *ekón* is the misnamed *cencerro*, which is usually played in some popular "son" orchestras. It is simply a *cencerro* that the hardware market sells for cattle, whose bell has had its clapper removed, and is struck from the outside with a metal or hardwood baton. Already in musical establishments they sell cencerros prepared in this way; imported from abroad as useful in livestock and authorized in Cuba for Afro-Cuban music…"[83]

I have left the word *cencerro* untranslated so that Ortiz' terminology is clear.

These passages are of extraordinary importance for the historiography of the cowbell. There is already scholarship that relates the rhythmic language of West African music to that of Cuban music. David Peñalosa and Peter Greenwood in their 2012 work *The Clave Matrix* have done the most significant work in this area, including a lengthy and compelling argument demonstrating that the *clave* rhythmic framework of tropical music is a derivation of timeline patterns and the long bell specifically.[84] But his work does not engage with the details of instrument use like Ortiz does here.

In this passage Ortiz describes the process by which the cowbell supplanted the traditional iron bell in Afro-Cuban music with a particular specificity no other author has matched. As Ortiz describes it, the process went like this: cowbells made outside Cuba for agricultural use were imported to Cuba, the clappers of the cowbell were removed, and then they were used as substitutes for iron bells As for why, Ortiz suggests their motivations might have been economic - readily available cowbells forms a store are easier to procure than a bell that requires being, or knowing, a blacksmith - or aesthetic, as suggested by

[82] Ortiz, *Los Instrumentos*, 288.
[83] Ibid.
[84] David Peñalosa and Peter Greenwood, *The Clave Matrix: Afro-Cuban Rhythm: Its Principles and African Origins*, 2nd ed. (Redway, CA: Bembe Books, 2012), 55-75.

Ortiz's reference to "inferior African precedents," though we should regard with suspicion this insinuation that black Cubans would have obviously preferred "superior" American-made hardware to traditionally made bells.

Ortiz's first reason, on the other hand, is believable. Even if we do not put in terms of "economics" - i.e., cost - we can still suggest, without being able to say much concrete about the ease of making or obtaining iron bells in early-1900s Cuba, that obtaining and lightly modifying a cowbell might have been easier.

There is another possible motivating factor for this replacement process which we can briefly speculate about. Abakuá, along with the *cabildos* more broadly, faced significant state repression in the latter part of the 19th century. As Miller puts it, "colonial authorities thought that destroying the *cabildos* would erase the historical memory of Africa" and, in doing so, encourage loyalty to Spain among Cuba's African-descended population.[85] This extended into a concentrated effort to quash Afro-centric thought through to confiscation of material culture - that is to say, beginning in the 1880s the colonial Cuban police force began to raid Abakuá lodges and confiscate their instruments, in many cases either destroying them or putting them on display in museums where, in some cases, they remain to the modern day.[86]

It is possible that such public stigmatization against overtly African cultural practices, then, was a motivating factor in Afro-Cubans replacing their traditionally constructed bells with modified cowbells. At a point in time where African instruments are the subject of police action, cowbells may have been safer to have in the home.

As I noted above, this is speculation. But it is speculation that stands to help answer a question begged by Ortiz' account of the cowbell: that of the timeframe for the adoption of the cowbell into music that he describes here. It must have taken place alongside if not prior to Arsenio Rodriguez's introduction of the cowbell to his *conjunto* in the late 1930s. We would do well here to recall the unnamed seller of cowbells quoted in Chapter 4 who, in 1900, described American cowbells being exported in large quantities to South America – might they perhaps have been exported to Cuba as well? This is speculation, but I suspect it may be found accurate by future research. As to the question of the timeline,

[85] Miller, *Voice of the Leopard*, 140.
[86] Ibid., 142-143.

then, we can say that it is *possible* that cowbells began to be used by Afro-Cuban musicians in the late 19th century, but unless future research turns up primary sources that more directly describe this process, all we can say for certain is that the substitution was well underway by 1940.

The way that Ortiz frames the precise distinction between the cowbell and the iron bell is intriguing. Regarding the cowbell, he writes that Afro-Cuban musicians remove the clappers of cowbells "para utilizarlo a manera de un *ekón*" - in order to *use them as iron bells*. If therefore we were to put Fernando Ortiz's classification into the terms I have already used to describe the difficulties of classifying cowbells, the use - for Ortiz - trumps the manufacture. For Ortiz, the Cuban musicians who prior to the 1940s used cowbells as substitutes for *ekónes* - who applied the instrumental practice of iron bells to a new, foreign object in the American-made agricultural cowbell - were *still playing ekónes* which had *once been* cowbells, but by virtue of this new use were no longer.

Ortiz' terminology has not caught on at all. The word *ekón* is, outside his writings, not used very widely. Writers on Abakuá, such as the aforementioned Ivor Miller or Lydia Cabrera, use it in what can be described as an accurate cultural context. The term turns up in Alejo Carpentier's seminal *Music in Cuba* framed as a synonym for "cowbell",[87] and turns up a total of three times in the entire 50-year archive of *Percussive Notes*, in all three cases also defined as simply "cowbell" or "a kind of cowbell:" a 1978 "Terms Used in Percussion" column by Michael Rosen, and two articles ("An Abbreviated History of Cuban Percussion" from February 1997 and "Cuban Carnaval and *Conga de Comparsa*" from April 2001) by Terry O'Mahoney, and these are instances where the word is applied to bells - "cowbells" - used in Abakuá drumming or (as in the case of the *conga de comparsa*) drumming practices influenced by Abakuá drumming.

This state of affairs is quite the opposite of what Ortiz might have hoped for. We can imagine a world where he got his wish, and even when cowbells are used as iron bells, musicians and audiences alike understand that there is a distinction between them. This is a world in which the struck metal idiophones used in Cuban and Cuban-influenced music, despite resembling cowbells and perhaps being widely understood to be derived from practical modification *of* cowbells, are not *called* "cowbells." Perhaps in this hypothetical world Ortiz's book was translated into English and caught on among

[87] Alejo Carpentier, *Music in Cuba* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 228.

percussionists both Anglophone and Hispanophone, and those instruments are all called *ekónes* - or, better yet, some original term not already in use for the specific iron bell used by the Abakuá.

But this is not the reality we live in. Musicians and audiences alike call those instruments cowbells. And this means that, despite the multicultural history of the practice outlined in this chapter, the usage of cowbells in tropical music is denoted by the same word as the cowbells in Mahler, and the cowbells rung at sporting events, and the cowbells that hang from the necks of cows. That same cultural baggage the cowbell carries with it, left over perhaps from such carnivalesque associations as its prominence in the charivari, therefore "infects" the instrument's presence - its use, its prominence, its very naming - in tropical music too.

**The Changing Cowbell in the Drum Kit**

This chapter has focused primarily on instruments and their physical qualities. But we should not neglect the *musical* dimension of this instrumental practice. Nor should we leave unsaid how the cowbell's hitherto outlined trajectory into Latin music affected the cowbell's usage more broadly.

The specific musical practices that feature in the narrative here presented are almost entirely limited to Cuba. But I have interpreted them as applying to m tropical musical more broadly, simply because my research suggests that cowbells, as an element of tropical music, do originate in Cuba; their presence the Colombian *cumbia* or in the music of Puerto Rico is primarily the result of Cuban influence on these musicians. The only sources I have hitherto found which document the transition from iron bells to cowbells - Ortiz' *Los Instrumentos de la Musica Afrocubana* and Christopher Washburne's *Latin Jazz: The Other Jazz* (2020) - describe it from a Cuban perspective. It is entirely possible that similar processes of substitution could have happened anywhere where African or African-descended populations had knowledge of a musical practice featuring bells, and access to cowbells which could be enlisted to take the place of those bells, and the social autonomy to do so - that is to say, the particular circumstances which were at play in the cultural environment of colonial Cuba.

We have already made the observation, in the previous chapter, that cowbells in the early drumset were just one option in an array of sound effects commonly mounted atop or alongside the bass drum. These were used in punctuative ways, to accent musical impacts and breaks, and to play figures

that in modern drumset terms would be called “fills.” This stands in direct contrast to the role of the cowbell in Arsenio Rodriguez’s *conjunto* of the late 1930s, or Damaso Perez Prado’s *mambo* arrangements of the 1950s, or Tito Puente’s Puerto Rican-American-Cuban work from the 1950s and 60s.

Matt Brennan argues in *Kick It: A Social History of the Drum Kit* that the codification of the drum kit’s contribution to mid-century rock and pop music - straight time on a cymbal or hi hat, snare on 2 and 4 - developed out of a the tradition of accenting 2 and 4 in such African-American genres as ragtime, gospel, and stride music,[88] but also from the Afro-Cuban practice of playing straight percussive time, with syncopated accents.[89] I hypothesize furthermore that the influence of tropical music on the development of the modern drum kit idiom can also be observed in the way that rock drummers of the 1960s began to use their cowbells.

Damaso Perez Prado (1916-1989), to name one prominent example, had a Billboard no. 1 hit in 1955 with his mambo arrangement of “Cherry Pink (and Apple Blossom White)” by the French songwriter Louiguy. In his recording, the cowbell (when used) keeps time with hard-driving quarter notes. We can then compare this usage – representative of the tropical cowbell style as it is - with the straight time eighth notes on cowbell that open Mountain’s “Mississippi Queen” (1970), or the eighths on cowbell that serve as the “ride” instrument in John Bonham’s drumset on Led Zeppellin’s “Good Times Bad Times” (1968), or yes, the straight cowbell quarter notes that underpin Blue Öyster Cult’s “(Don’t Fear) The Reaper” (1976). I suggest that uses such as these as indicators of a post-Cuban conception of the cowbell, insofar as they use the cowbell as an instrument to indicate time (as the cowbell is often used in Afro-Cuban music), rather than to punctuate musical structures or play fills.

I will further draw attention to the syncopated cowbell pattern in the *opening bars* of the aforementioned Led Zeppelin track, shown in Figure 19. This pattern is, in fact, a permutation of the long bell shown in Figure 17.

[88] Brennan, *Kick It*, 179-180.
[89] Ibid., 189.

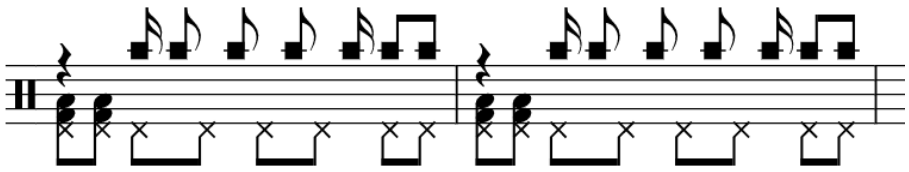


*Figure 19: mm. 3-5 of drums in Led Zepplin's "Good Times Bad Times" (1968). Cowbell represented by square note head. Transcription by the author.*

Consider also the overdubbed cowbell that opens and underlies The Rolling Stones' "Honky Tonk Women" (1969), shown in Figure 20. While not copied directly from any tropical cowbell usage so far as I can tell, this, too, I suggest that it shows the influence of such usages with its driving syncopation.

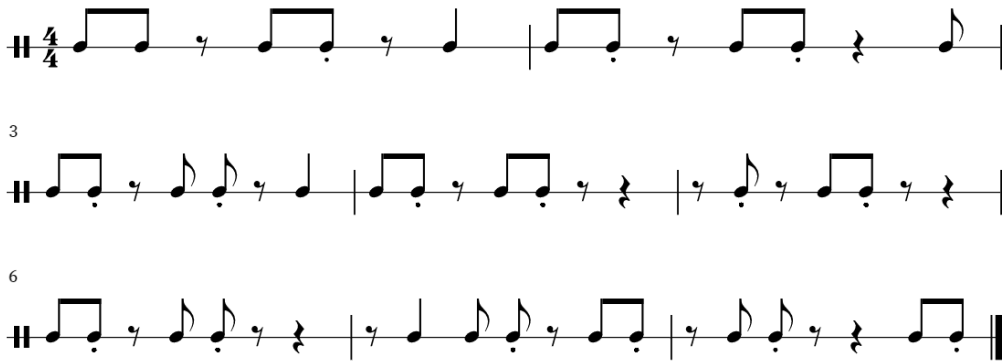



*Figure 20: mm. 1-8 of cowbell in "Honky Tonk Women" (1969) by The Rolling Stones. Transcription by the author.*

A systematic survey of mid-century popular music recordings (both in the Cuban sphere and beyond it) is one of the most compelling of the many future studies I feel that my research into the cowbell has outlined. Until then, I will leave this as a hypothesis, but one which I am quite excited about: the cowbell used as it is used in these 20th century rock examples owes its presence to an American heritage - the European origin of the "cowbell" as we mean it, and the American theater percussion idiom - but a rhythmic language, a *use*, from Africa by way of Cuba.

**The Cuban-American Cowbell**

The notion of a “Latin” or rather a “tropical-style” cowbell is implied by the usage, which crops up again and again in the history of the cowbell’s musical use, of the Spanish word *cencerro* to indicate or imply the “kind” of cowbell associated with tropical music – this was seen in both Oxford Music Online and in the Peinkofer and Tannigel in Chapter 1. But could the concept of a “tropical-style cowbell” be useful for describing the history of usage of cowbells and music?

I would suggest not. To describe the cowbells used in modern drumset practice, and those cowbells in orchestral practice which follow from that (e.g., those in the music of Darius Milhaud or Aaron Copland) as “Cuban-style” is to bely the cowbell’s history in the early drumset and before that in theater percussion of the 19th century. To create a distinction between Cuban-style cowbells and “American-style” cowbells would bely the fact that functionally, “cowbell” is in modern percussion practice a single instrument with numerous variations. Some variations are explicitly marketed towards Latin musicians. Some are not. There is nevertheless substantial overlap in their practical musical function, because ultimately they are all cowbells. If we accept, then, that the popular use of the word “cowbell” for all these uses will continue, then I offer the term **Cuban-American cowbell**. This term is meant to indicate a shared heritage, and cultural exchange *between*, the American cowbell practice discussed in the previous chapter and the Cuban one discussed in this chapter. I hope that the preceding material has demonstrated why I argue for the instrumental practice of the clapperless struck non-*almglocken* cowbell to be understood as a product of two instrumental practices coming together - Cuban cowbells and American cowbells, able to combine for the simple reason that the basics of their hardware are close enough to identical as to be functionally interchangeable.

I should not leave unsaid, as a postscript here, the possibility of these practices being more continuous than I have documented here. I noted in the previous chapter that it is unclear when or why American drummers began to play mounted, clapperless cowbells alongside or instead of unmounted clappered ones. It is not impossible that this switch was the result of Cuban influence, but to date I have found no documentation of this. In light of the pre-sound recording cultural exchanges between the music of Cuba and the burgeoning genre of jazz that affected both idioms, however, it is possible that such a connection will be uncovered.

**“Reverberations of Resilience”**

The cowbells mounted to the bass drums of the early 20th-century trap drummers and the cowbells used by Cuban musicians of the same time period were - insofar as they were either agricultural cowbells with their clappers removed or were built in such a way that they exactly resembled them - likely physically very similar. They had similar sonic characteristics - as metal idiophones struck with sticks, they were both bright, high-pitched instruments with a quick decay. But they were not part of the same instrumental practice. The cowbells used by jazz drummers in the early 20th century owed their presence to the history of drummers as collectors of small theatrical sounds, a history that (as far as the cowbell is concerned) dates back to the efforts of 19th-century minstrels to provoke laughter from audiences. By contrast, cowbells used by Cuban musicians in the early 20th century owed their presence to a longstanding instrumental practice - time patterns - into which the cowbell, thanks to its availability and suitability, could and did substitute. The first entry of the cowbell in Cuban music, then, was a substitution for another instrument, just like the cowbell’s entry into American music as a feature of the Cowbellogian act.

But while the latter substitution served a comedic, satirical end - the cowbell functioning as a burlesque of “heightened” handbells - there is no reason to believe that the former substitution did so too. I, at least, have come across no evidence to suggest it, in any scholarship surrounding Afro-Cuban or tropical percussion.

With the way that these usages have syncretized underneath the single, unqualified, name of “cowbell” in modern percussion parlance, however, the cowbells in tropical music are tarred with the same brush. They become subject to the same bovine associations that will always stick to an instrument that has the word “cow” in its name, and similarly inherit the legacy of mockery - the carnivalesque legacy - which the cowbell has earned in other times and places.

Am I trying to argue here that because Latin music so prominently features cowbells, and because cowbells are an instrument that have in many cultures (but especially modern American culture) become humorous in and of themselves, that Cuban music, or tropical music more broadly, is at a risk of being undermined? No, I am not. But I do worry that it can obfuscate the discourse. A systematic survey

of the cowbell's usage in mid-century tropical, rock, and pop recordings - one systematic enough to see truly large trends in usage and influence - is beyond the scope of my present study. I suspect that a fruitful dissertation on just this one topic could be written by a performer with practical experience and training in Afro-Cuban music - training that I, unfortunately, do not have.

I would, however, quote here from Christopher Washburne's *Latin Jazz: the Other Jazz*. Washburne writes in reference to a performance (for which he was present) where renowned jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis clumsily attempted to join a performance by Bobby Sanabria's Afro-jazz ensemble Ascensión by picking up a cowbell and playing it out of time, unable to hear where *one* was in a 6/8 *clave* pattern. Washburne, too, feels the pervading presence of Will Ferrell and "More Cowbell" in the cowbell's popular conception.

"As someone who has studied the organological history of percussion used in Latin jazz, I have always celebrated expressions of "More Cowbell" as they signify, albeit mostly unconsciously, an acknowledgment of our shared and troubled colonial past. When cowbells are played, reverberations of resilience of the enslaved Africans prevailing in the face of adversity resound. However, those celebratory reverberations are undermined when traditions are treated with disregard, especially by prominent figures in influential positions."[90]

At the 2022 Percussive Art Society International Convention, I attended a performance given by the critically acclaimed Cuban-American percussionist and singer, Pedrito Martinez. When performance had concluded and Martinez was answering questions from the audience (of mostly percussionists), I asked him to describe the role of the cowbell in his music. Martinez laughed and, pointing at me jovially, said "First of all, you've got to have more cowbell." There was laughter from many of the percussionists who crowded the conference room in attendance.

This is what I have in mind when I say "obfuscate the discourse." The cowbell's presence in Cuban music history, and in all the musical practices that today fall under the "tropical" umbrella, is not a joke. And this is an important distinction to make because as we have seen there *are* musical uses of the

[90] Christopher Washburne, *Latin Jazz: The Other Jazz* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 145.

cowbell which *are* jokes. And so long as the cowbell's first association in the popular consciousness is that joke, it will continue to be hard to talk seriously about.

But it does not appear that for Pedrito Martinez, the cowbell *is* a joke. Martinez was simply *making* a joke, and at that a joke about an instrument that has been a consistent subject of jokes for centuries. And this heritage of laughter need not necessarily be mutually exclusive with treating instrumental traditions with respect. And so after the momentary laughter from the audience, he thought for a moment and then, punching himself in the small of his back with a fist, he said "It spanks you. It makes the music move." Though this description is without historical context, it is a fine enough summation of how the cowbell's usage in *this* musical lineage differs from the uses described in previous and future chapters.

Chapter 6

## Stockhausen and the *Almglocken*
## The Possibility and Codification of a Cowless Cowbell

In the year 1950, cowbells were a prominent feature in the percussion batteries of many different musical idioms, and for the most part, each idiom's usage was distinctive if not unique. It was a consistent feature of the now-codified drum kit and thereby stood to potentially be used in any instrumental genres which featured the drum kit, but was likely heard most widely as a feature of dance-oriented jazz genres. As covered in the previous chapter, by 1950 the cowbell had become a common if not universal feature of Cuban popular music and geographically related genres - music that was on its way to significant visibility and influence in the English-speaking word. And in the orchestral world, the cowbell's presence had already taken the form of two wildly disparate strains of usage - one, a la Darius Milhaud, Aaron Copland, and Constant Lambert following in usage from the aforementioned jazz usage of the cowbell; and two, Mahler's *herdenglocken*, an entirely separate usage that actually simulated the soundscapes produced by cowbells in their "proper place" - that is to say, on the necks of cows - and allowed Mahler, and those who followed in his usage, to compose not with the sounds and implications of the bells themselves but with the sound*scapes* and implications produced by cows.

This was the state of the cowbell as a musical element when the *almglocken* emerged. In the first chapter I introduced this term as a means to show why classifying different kinds of cowbell can be useful for musicians, but also how a classification system for cowbells applied to the instruments as they presently exist will "fray" when applied to the *history* of the cowbell. It is only at this point, where the cowbell's presence in music and culture *prior* to the existence of the *almglocken* tradition has been examined in detail, that we can now deal with the genesis of that tradition in its historical context.

It is only then that we can fully understand the subtleties of the unusual relationship that the *almglocken* has with the cowbell. To summarize this relationship up front: *almglocken* are cowbells, but not all cowbells are *almglocken*. *Almglocken* as a term is used today to refer not only to a specific kind of cowbell but to a specific usage *of* that specific kind of cowbell. It is furthermore an instrumental practice

that developed quickly, and owes many of its specific traits and tropes of usage to creative decisions and practical concessions alike on the part of its early adopters and practitioners.

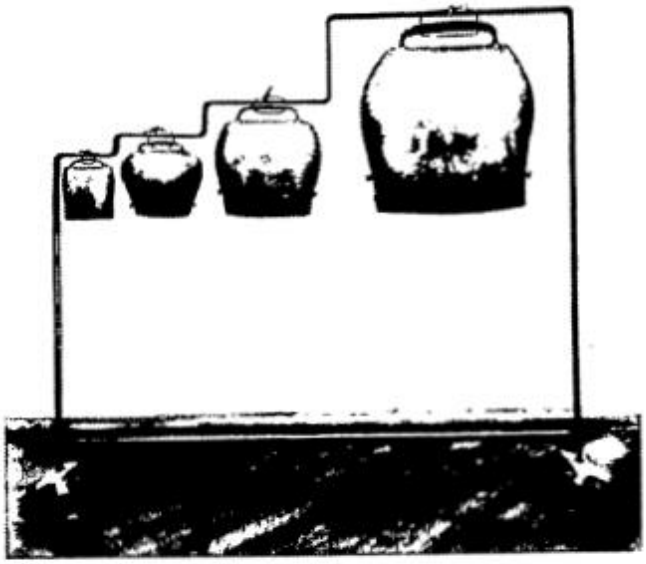
I will note here, before continuing, that in this chapter I will at times use the words “cowbell” and “almglocken” interchangeably. Though this terminology risks being misleading, it is in fact reflective of the inconsistent terminology used by most of the composers whose works will be covered here, who either used *almglocken* or *cowbell* alternately or used *cowbell* (or an equivalent word, e.g. *cencerro*) to refer to instruments that, as we will see, are part of the *almglocken* tradition.

**Karlheinz Stockhausen**

When Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007) was a child, he was fond of using a small wooden hammer to strike and listen to household objects. “Long before he learned to play the piano,” writes Robin Maconie in *Other Planets: The Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen*, “he was already tapping at it with his little wooden hammer like a doctor testing a patient for soundness of heart, wind, and limb.”[91] It is difficult to hear this biographical detail and not surmise that it is this same tendency that would one day lead to Stockhausen so dramatically innovating the way that cowbells could be used to musical ends.

The *almglocken* tradition begins with the cowbells - or “almglocken (cowbells)” - that Stockhausen included in the sizable battery of his 1955 work for three orchestras, *Gruppen*. The cowbells in this work form portions of the three large percussion batteries which join each of the orchestras, and Stockhausen’s setup (and the bells themselves) can be seen in the Gruppen score as shown in Figure 21 - compare to the modern *almglocken* shown in Figure 3. The bells - which in the German version of the instrumentation are called “*almglocken* (‘kuschellen’)” - are stipulated to be of thirteen precise pitches: F3, A3, C4, E4, G#4, B4, D#5, G5, A#5, D6, F#6, A6, and C#7.

[91] Robin Maconie, *Other Planets: The Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 14.



4 cowbells, suspended. This stand must be high enough, so that the lower edges of the bells can be hit while the player is standing.

*Figure 21: From the English instrumentation of* Gruppen*'s published score.*

In order to obtain these pitches in 1955, Stockhausen (according to his own words) had to go and find them himself.

"I had already traveled in 1955-56 to Lindau to the cowbell factory, and I selected for the West German radio station the right cow bells. As you know, there is a whole scale with precise pitches spread over about five octaves, and I had no money at that time. I bought these cowbells for something like, nowadays, $60. Later I couldn't get these cowbells back and some were stolen, so I needed to buy them again. I went again, and now I have three complete sets of the right cowbells."[92]

[92] Michael Udow, "An Interview with Karlheinz Stockhausen," P*ercussive Notes Research Edition* 23, no. 6 (September 1985): 6.

Stockhausen's directions in the score call for the cowbells to be hung from racks using leather thongs, to maximize their resonance. His interview with Udow contains several more logistical stipulations - namely that the cowbells should be hung high enough to force the player to stand in order to reach them, and that the metallic beaters called for in the score "must be the clapper that was originally in the cowbell."[93] This last note certainly complicates any description of Stockhausen's *almglocken* as "clapperless cowbells," but since clappers are to be *removed* - and the bells struck with other implements as well - I will continue to thusly describe them.

What made Stockhausen's *use* of the cowbells in *Gruppen* new and distinctive was the prioritization of both pitch and resonance. As we have already seen, the use of cowbells as pitched instruments is exactly as old as the introduction of cowbells into music, and the vestiges of that practice in the vaudeville practice and its derivatives - including the occasional use of multi-toned cowbells on the early jazz drumset - *could* have been familiar to Stockhausen, an enthusiast of jazz. And it would follow from this that Stockhausen was familiar with the concept of a cowbell's clapper being removed so that it could be sounded in a more rhythmically precise way. And the use of resonant alpine cowbells in the symphonies of Mahler to create a continuous backdrop of sound also *could* have been familiar to Stockhausen. I have uncovered no source that connects Stockhausen's cowbells with any of these prior musical uses, so the possibility of any of them being sources of inspiration for him must remain speculative.

When one thinks of the child Stockhausen tapping at mundane objects with his toy hammer, one is reminded that it is *possible* also that this usage of cowbells was a truly original stroke by Stockhausen himself. At any rate, however, Stockhausen's combination of both factors enabled him to revolutionarily use the cowbell not as a punctuative sound effect, nor a timekeeper, nor a reproduction of real world sound. Instead, Stockhausen's hands, the cowbells of *Gruppen* and in his percussion solo *Nr. 9 Zyklus* (1959) become like *gongs.*

[93] Ibid.

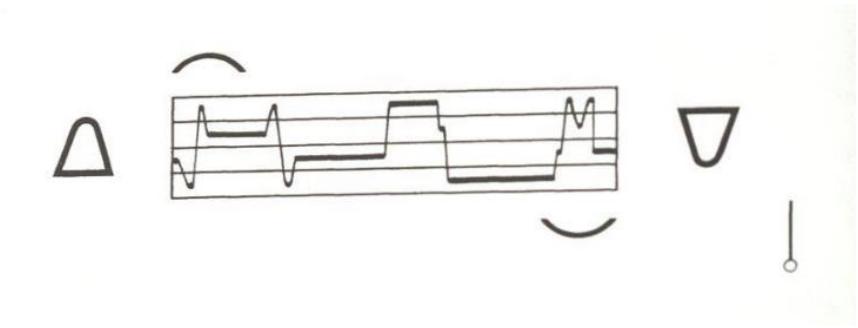


*Figure 22: Cell of cowbell music from period 8 of* Zyklus*.*

I provide some examples from *Zyklus* here, which I performed on the lecture recital given in conjunction with this dissertation project. Unlike the conventionally notated *Gruppen*, *Zyklus* exists in its written form as a graphic score. Figure 22, for example, shows one of the line-on-grid figures which Stockhausen's notes in the score direct us to understand as a combination of tremolos (for the lines which are parallel to the grid) and figures played "as fast as possible," for the lines which move between the spaces on the grid. This figure, from Period 8 of *Zyklus'* seventeen-period continuous form, occupies a mysterious sonic space accompanied by the resonance of gongs and vibraphone glissandi. The *almglocken* Stockhausen wrote this for - also resonant - are able to realize the linear nature of this figure provided the performer strikes the bells during the fast-as-possible squiggles at the same hand speed as the tremolos. I will follow Stockhausen himself in noting also that I consider this particular cell of the score to be visually quite beautiful, and in fact I have it tattooed on my left forearm as a commemoration of the significant undertaking that learning this work represented.

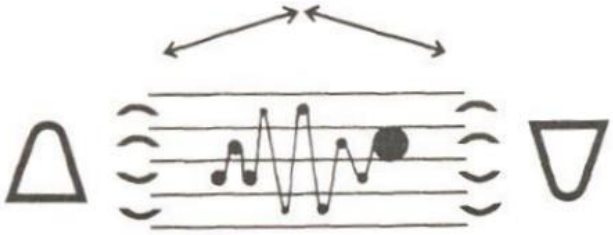


*Figure 23: Cell of cowbell music from period 7 of* Zyklus*.*

Figure 23 shows another such linear cell. Rather than connecting tremolos represented by horizontal lines, in this case the lines connect dots (representing strokes or impacts) whose size directly represents their dynamic. The slanted lines above the staff indicate that the tempo, rather than simply being "as fast as possible," should increase and decrease over the course of the cell. The notation here also emphasizes the *resonance* of the bells, with the open ties at either end indicating that the instruments are to be allowed to vibrate. Stockhausen uses this same open-tie notation for the triangle, cymbals, and gongs in the setup, which (in his conceptualization) share a sound profile with these cowbells.

It is perhaps because of this distinction, this non-continuity with previous cowbell practices in music, that Stockhausen used the term *almglocken* to denote the tuned cowbells he wrote for in his score. It appears that Stockhausen is the first writer to use this word. This is difficult for me to say for certain, but searches of all the databases and search engines available to me as a University of Maryland student have turned up no uses of the word "almglocken" in English or German sources that do not pertain directly postwar music, the word does not appear in any German dictionaries I have consulted, and no musician or composer appears to have used the word before Stockhausen did. On this basis I suggest that the term is in fact a Stockhausen neologism, something which stands to be confirmed (or denied) by my future research on this topic.

Since Stockhausen, so far as I have been able to determine, did not take credit for coining the term "almglocken," his motivations for having done so are likewise ultimately unknown. My above suggestion that the usage (and therefore the coining) of the term stems from the discontinuity between Stockhausen's vision for the cowbells and prior cowbell usages with which he might have been familiar is still only a suggestion. But I argue that Stockhausen's particular denotation of the cowbells in his scores, as well as statements made by Stockhausen about cowbells, back this up.

Consider, for example, the denotation of these instruments in the German-language instrumentation in the score of *Zyklus*: "*almglocken* ('viehschellen')." The framing here clearly indicates that "almglocken" is the proper name, as it were, for the instruments being denoted. But the second half - "viehschellen," translating roughly to "livestock ringers" and colloquially translating to "animal bell" - is necessary here, so that the reader will *know what Stockhausen is talking about*.

This construction reappears in the instrument list contained in the liner notes for Stockhausen's 1990 recording of *Zyklus*, *Refrain* (1959) and *Kontakte* (1960). It is accompanied there by the following statement, appearing in both German and English.

"13 Abgestimmte *Almglocken* führte ich zum ersten Male in *GRUPPEN für drei Orchester* in die Musik ein. …I introduced 13 tuned cowbells into art music for the first time in *GRUPPEN for three orchestras*."[94]

Though the wording of this statement does make it sound like Stockhausen could simply be claiming that he was specifically the first composer to write for *precisely thirteen* tuned cowbells, this is as close to a claim about "inventing" the *almglocken*, so to speak, that I have found in Stockhausen's writing.

Elsewhere in these same liner notes, Stockhausen explicitly engages in the kind of cowbell-classifying that his usage of the word "almglocken" implies. This comes as Stockhausen is complaining (politely) about percussionists replacing components of *Zyklus*' instrumentation with instruments with dissimilar resonances.

"…The composition of timbres [in *Zyklus*] is relative: I can imagine that the function of the sounds in the form described here could also be realized with other timbres, as long as the varying complexity, the different degrees of the resonating and non-resonating bodies of sound, the scale of the more or less memorable clarity and conspicuousness is taken into account and refined. However, it does not make sense to replace particular prescribed instruments by [sic] less refined ones, as has often happened. For instance, one interpreter replaced the *cow bells* which should resonate as long as possible with as many partials (overtones) as possible and one main pitch - which does not have to be the fundamental - by the very dull and unresonant *cencerros*."[95]

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[94] Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Zyklus - Refrain - Kontakt," liner notes for Stockhausen, Karlheinz, *Zyklus - Refrain - Kontakte*, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Christoph Caskel, and Aloys Kontarsky, recorded 1960-1968. Stockhausen no. 6, 1993, 79.
[95] Ibid. 125-126.

This intriguing passage suggests a number of things. For one thing, it shows Stockhausen differentiating between a kind of cowbell that is appropriate for his music - one which he calls *Almglocken* in the German version of this passage[96] but which the translator rendered as "*cow bells*" in English - and one which is, on the basis of its lesser resonance, *not* suitable for his music. These latter cowbells he calls *cencerros*. By using "*cencerro*" in this way, Stockhausen is falling in line with certain aspects of the questionable history of cowbell terminology, as covered in the first chapter of this work. In particular it recalls the fraught terminology of Peinkofer and Tannigel, whose work Stockhausen may have been familiar with. Stockhausen also references this same distinction in his interview with Udow, though in this case he calls the two types "frog mouth cowbells" and "rectangular mouth cowbells." This distinction probably aligns with the *almglocken* / *cencerro* dichotomy Stockhausen suggested elsewhere.

More to the point however, this passage outlines the *rationale* behind Stockhausen's choice to write for cowbells in the way that he did in *Gruppen*, in *Zyklus*, and in many works that followed them. Stockhausen wrote for cowbells because of the specific sonic attributes of specific cowbells with which he was familiar - rounded cowbells of thin sheet metal from Central Europe, the kind which he describes to Udow as "frog-mouth" (i.e. round-mouthed) and which in his scores he calls "almglocken" or "Alpine Bells." Like Mahler, he takes a sound with which he is familiar and manipulates it to musical ends. Unlike Mahler, who did so with an actual sound*scape* - the simulation, with cowbells, of the sonic features of a real or imagined location so as to evoke specific moods and implications - Stockhausen composes for the cowbell with no allusion or implication at all to the cowbell's familiar usage as an agricultural tool, *as well as* little to no continuity with extant cowbell practices in music.

All this is to say that it appears to have been a goal not only for Stockhausen to distinguish his cowbells from prior cowbells due to their sound, but to make it clear that *they had nothing to do with cows*.

At the same time, however, this effort - this rhetorical separation of the cow from the cowbell by Stockhausen - is undermined by Stockhausen himself. It is one thing to note that Stockhausen's translators often undermine this distinction by translating "*Almglocken*" or *"Almglocken* ('Viehschellen')" as simply "*cow bell*." It is another to note that even Stockhausen himself, when interviewed in English by

[96] Ibid. 34.

Michael Udow, *exclusively* uses the word "cowbell" to refer both to *his* cowbells - those which we come to understand as *almglocken* - and those cowbells which are *not* his cowbells.

To complicate things even further, it is not unheard of for musicians or retailers of musical instruments to conflate the *herdenglocken* described in Chapter 3 with the idea of the *almglocken*. This occurs, of course, when both instrumental practices are lumped together under the "cowbell" umbrella, and as we have seen, this is accurate in a purely descriptive sense. James Blades does so, for example, in *Percussion Instruments and their Histories*. But some reference works that differentiate between *almglocken* and non-*almglocken* cowbells, and John Beck's *Encyclopedia of Percussion*,[97] specifically include Mahler's cowbells in the *almglocken* category.

Here, too, the question of whether this terminology is appropriate is complicated by the two levels that the word "almglocken" can function on. On the one hand, if read simply as a *description*, "Alpine bells" is an entirely reasonable way to *describe* the cowbells that Mahler would have heard in the imagined mountaintop scene he related to Eugene Istel, as described in Chapter 3. On the other hand, I contend that the modern usage of *almglocken*, which follows from Stockhausen's use of the term, is best understood not as a description of the bells, but as an *instrumental practice* - one distinct from prior notions of "cowbells," especially Mahler's with their sonic masquerading as a grazing herd.

The *almglocken* practice, as founded Stockhausen, is ideologically defined - is rendered *distinct* from prior cowbell practices in the Western concert idiom - by its lack of a relationship with the sound of the cowbell in non-musical settings. But this distinction is undermined by both the material fact that is an instrumental practice *applied* to cowbells and by the fact that many musicians - including Stockhausen himself! - referred to the instruments that we would consider *almglocken* as "cowbells" for much of the 20th century.

**The Codification of the Almglocken**

*Zyklus* was, within the Western concert tradition, the first unaccompanied solo work written for fixed-instrumentation multipercussion. Among unaccompanied solo multipercussion works in general,

[97] Beck, *Encyclopedia of Percussion*, 4.

only John Cage's *27'10.554"* (1956) for open-instrumentation multipercussion beats it.[98] I draw attention to this fact because the cowbell's presence here, on the ground floor of the solo multipercussion idiom, is an intriguingly parallel to the cowbell's presence in other significant developments in the percussion idiom: its usage in the earliest drum kits as a holdover from theater sound effects, its inclusion in Mahler's dramatic and controversial expansion of the orchestral percussion section, and even its appearance in the setup of Milhaud's *Concerto for Percussion* (the first concerto for multipercussion setup and by extension the first modern percussion concerto).

The development of the *almglocken* idiom after *Gruppen* and *Zyklus* is most clearly traced by observing similar uses of cowbells that came afterwards. In *Gruppen*, thirteen pitches from across a range of over three and a half octaves were selected. In *Zyklus*, the performer has a certain additional degree of freedom as they are directed to select four *almglocken* from adjacent pitches on a given scale. The next large step forward in the development of this practice came in 1961 with the premiere of Peter Schat's *Signalement* for six percussionists and three contrabasses, which features fully chromatic *sets* of cowbells stretching from F#3 up to C7. This range is a whole tone narrower than that which stretches from the lowest to highest bell in *Gruppen* (F3-C#7), but the sheer number of bells (43) used to play *Signalement* dwarfs that of *Gruppen*.

The score to *Signalement* refers to these chromatic cowbells as *cloches à vache*: that is to say, in French, literally "cowbells." The score does not contain stipulations about their tone or their sound character, and as far as the technical writing goes, Schat utilizes the same technical language - including rapid scalar passages - on the cowbells that he does on the vibraphones, xylophones, or marimbas.

Why, then, would I include this work in the discussion of the *almglocken* tradition? The answer is that *Signalement* is a kind of signpost along that tradition's path of development. In order to explain this, we must jump ahead a few years to Messiaen.

Olivier Messiaen wrote for tuned cowbells very comparable to those in *Signalement* in three works for large ensemble, all written during the 1960s: *Couleurs de la Cité Céleste* (1963) for solo piano and wind ensemble; *Sept haïkaï* (1963) for solo piano, wind ensemble, and eight violins, and *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum* (1966) for wind ensemble. In all three cases the instruments are labeled

[98] Steven Schick, *The Percussionist's Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 4.

*cencerros*, meaning “cowbell” in Spanish. The ranges in the three pieces are all subsets of the range of cowbells required for *Signalement*, with the full F#3-C7 spread required only in *Et Exspecto*. In all three pieces the bells are played in sets layed out in the manner of an ordinary keyboard, and are used as fully melodic percussion instruments. The setup, for *Et Exspecto* at least, can be seen in rehearsal footage captured in 1965 for the French public television series *Les Grandes Répétitions* (shown in Figure 24).

*Figure 24:* Cencerros *visible in rehearsal footage prior to the premier of* Et Exspecto*. From* Les Grandes Repetitions *(1965).*

It is clear from the image that Messiaen’s *cencerros* are the same squat, round shape as Stockhausen’s *almglocken* - that is to say, they seem to have begun life (as it were) as the same sort of resonant central European cowbell that Stockhausen’s did. Messiaen’s *cencerros* in their logistical reality - their ranges and the way that they are set up and played as keyboards - also strongly resemble the *cloches à vache* of *Signalement*. And this of course means that like the *cloches à vache* of *Signalement*, the *cencerros* of Messiaen’s music fill a range that is a whole step narrower than the range between the largest and smallest *almglocke* in *Gruppen*.

Even if neither Messiaen nor Schat used the word “almglocken,” their tuned cowbells join Stockhausen’s *almglocken* as the foundation of the whole instrumental practice. I place them there not only on the bases of their common features with *almglocken* - the fact that the cowbell parts of these works are played on the cowbells that American percussionists refer to as *almglocken* today - but on the basis of evidence suggesting an actual historical continuity that connects them.

Peter Schat wrote *Signalements* for famed French sextet the Percussions de Strasbourg. This group, still active today albeit with an entirely new membership, was formed in 1959 by Pierre Boulez to serve as the percussion section in a Strasbourg performance of his cantata *Le Visage Nuptial*.[99] The Percussions de Strasbourg also have a longtime association with Olivier Messiaen, and played (using their own instruments) on the premiers of several of his works, including *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum*. They are credited (for playing themselves) in the aforementioned episode of *Les Grandes Repetitions*. Messiaen specifically praised the “marvelous resonances” of their metallic percussion instruments, including their *cencerros*, in conversation with Claude Samuel, and indicated that he wrote *Et Expecto* with those specific instruments in mind.[100]

By Messiaen’s description, therefore, the Percussions de Strasbourg were, in the 1960s, in possession of a large, resonant set of chromatically tuned cowbells, which ranged from F#3-C7. Barring the possibility of the group owning multiple such sets, it stands to reason that the *cloches à vache* which Peter Schat wrote for in *Signalement* were one and the same - not just of identical construction, but the same exact individual instruments - as the *cencerros* which Messiaen wrote for in *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum*.

I reached out to Francois Papirer, a present member of the Percussions de Strasbourg, to ask about the history of the *almglocken* set still visible today on the “Instrumentarium” page of the group’s website. In a personal communication he told me that the instruments, which they still call *cencerros*, are not the same set that was used to premier the aforementioned Messiaen works, since all of them have been broken and replaced over the years - though I must say, whether or not that actually means it is not the same set depends on the reader’s feelings regarding the Ship of Theseus paradox. Papirer also

[99] “Presentation,” Percussions De Strasbourg, accessed 4/26/2023, https://www.percussionsdestrasbourg.com/en/les-percussions-de-strasbourg-2/presentation/.
[100] Olivier Messiaen and Claude Samuel, *Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel*, trans. E. Thomas Glasow (Portland, Or.: Amadeus Press, 1994), 97.

suggested that the bells had originally belonged to the group's original conductor Pierre Boulez, on the basis that the group's tuned gongs had similarly been given to the group by Boulez.[101]

This suggestion, however, lines up nearly perfectly with the recollection of Stockhausen. To refer once again to his 1985 interview with Michael Udow, Stockhausen stated "the most crucial problem started right away when other musicians tried to find the same type of cowbells. For example, [Pierre] Boulez then went to the factory and bought three complete chromatic octaves of cowbells."[102] Stockhausen does not give a date to this event, but if it is accurate, it could be the missing piece that connects all the pieces and sets of tuned cowbells that have been thus far described in this chapter.

Stockhausen only mentions three chromatic octaves, and since the set owned by Strasbourg went down to F3 as well, that range is unaccounted for by this recollection. But the bulk of the range is accounted for, and it is possible that Stockhausen in this interview made a generalization for conciseness of speech when referring to an event that had occurred decades earlier.

It nevertheless seems possible that the tuned cowbells owned by the Percussions de Strasbourg - variously called *cencerros* or *cloches à vache* by the composers who scored for them - could in fact be from the same agricultural cowbell factory in Lindau that Stockhausen purchased the *almglocken* used in *Gruppen* from. The late Christoph Caskel, who gave the first performance of *Zyklus* and played on the premier of *Gruppen*, referred to this same cowbell factory decades later in an interview with Jonathan Hepfer, saying that it produced "beautiful, big cowbells **[almglocken]**.[103] These weren't intended for music, but rather for cows!"[104] I have not been able to find information about this factory, however, and a deeper search of German-language resources to learn more about the facility that may have produced the very urtext of the modern *almglocken* is another topic that the breadth of the present study has forced me shunt into the future.

As for why Messiaen did not follow Stockhausen's terminology, and used the term *cencerro* rather than *almglocken*, we once again can only speculate. It is certainly not the case that Messiaen's *cencerros*, despite their name being the Spanish for "cowbell," are intended to "evoke" cows, in contrast

[101] Email to the author, March 13, 2023
[102] Udow, "An Interview with Karlheinz Stockhausen," 6.
[103] This clarification is Hepfers, but the emphasis is mine. I emphasize it because of how the construction here mirrors Stockhausen's "*almglocken* ('Viehschellen') from the *Zyklus* score.
[104] Hepfer, "Christoph Caskel," 56.

with Stockhausen's *almglocken*. By all appearences Messiaen, *like* Stockhausen, wrote for his cowbells on the basis of their sonic qualities rather than their cultural ones. It has been suggested – e.g. by Messiaen biographer Nigel Simeone[105] - that the *cencerros* in that work are inspired by the struck metal instruments and gongs used melodically in Balinese gamelan. Messiaen does not appear to have made this explicit in his writings, but there has been much scholarship since his death establishing the influence of gamelan on Messiaen's music more broadly. As part of a survey thereof (which unfortunately covers neither the *cencerros* nor *Et Exspecto*), Amelia Puspita made in her 2008 DMA dissertation a compelling argument that Messiaen had a familiarity with *gong kebyar* from its presence in the Dutch Pavillion at the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition.[106] Perhaps in the cowbells of Stockhausen and Schat he found an instrument, finally available to him to compose for, that could recreate this sound.

**Codification by Manufacture**

In the present day, however, performers of these works do not need to travel to the cowbell factory that once existed in Lindau or to any other cowbell factory. The percussion instrument industry has now codified *almglocken*, and made their attributes - their appearance, sound, and range - more concrete.

Steve Weiss Music of Philadelphia sells *almglocken* in the pitch range F3-A7, a range that stretches a major sixth higher than the range called for by Messiaen or Schat.[107] Germany's Kolberg currently sells an instrument that is visually near-indistinguishable but which they call a *cencerro*, and which is available in the pitch range F3-F7 (a major third less than Weiss).[108] Percussion Source of Coralville, Iowa, sells *almglocken* from F3-C7, just clearing the range called by Messiaen and Schat. This

[105] Nigel Simone, "Reaching for Messiaen's Dream: Et Exspecto on La Meije," Ashgate Publishing Blog, accessed 5/15/2023, https://ashgatepublishing.wordpress.com/tag/et-exspecto-resurrectionem-mortuorum/
[106] Amelia Puspita, *The Influence of Balinese Gamelan on the Music of Olivier Messiaen* (DMA dissertation: University of Cincinnati, 2008), 33.
[107] "Almglocken," Steve Weiss Music, accessed 4/26/2023 https://www.steveweissmusic.com/product/almglocken/almglocken#full-description
[108] "Cowbells & Cencerros," Kolberg, accessed 4/26/2023 https://www.kolberg.com/Cowbell-Cencerro-gestimmt/CBC1

same range is available for purchase from Rhythmes & Sons of Illkirch-Graffenstaden (titled “cowbells” when one shops by individual pitch and “almglocken” when one buys chromatic sets).[109]

We have seen that the evidence suggests that Messiaen and Peter Schat wrote for the massive ranges of *almglocken* in their work not to ask their performers to spontaneously put together pitches of cowbells into chromatic sets, but to write music to be played on chromatic sets of *almglocken* - more specifically, a single set of roughly three octaves plus a fifth - that had already been assembled. It has been suggested that Pierre Boulez was responsible for the assembly of the set. But a snapshot of the present day availability of the *almglocken* for purchase and rental shows now how the parameters of an instrumental practice suggested by several works written for a single “instrument” made of at least 43 tuned cowbells have been rendered concrete by the fact that institutions and ensembles can now buy or easily rent their own.

There is now such a thing as a conventional range for the *almglocken*, for example. No seller I found offered pitches below F3. It may well be the case that there is no cause for a seller to do so, since none of the works described thus far (nor any other work I have come across) require such pitches. And none of those works, it seems, were able to write for pitches lower than those which were in the possession of the Percussions de Strasbourg - though we cannot say for certain whether lower pitches might have been available from the Lindau cowbell manufacturer should they have been required.

This is how the *almgocken* was codified as an instrument. It began with very specific instruments - from specifically-pitched cowbells from a particular factory which sound a specific way, selected by Stockhausen, for a single piece. Soon after, one or more sets of bells which chromatically filled in the wide intervals between Stockhausen’s pitches were assembled - seemingly by Pierre Boulez, and seemingly from the same factory. Works of music were written for the specific set of bells owned by the Percussions de Strasbourg. And now, in the present day, the most consistently used pitches from that set - F3-C7 - form the range of widely standardized tuned cowbells, which are often called *almglocken* but sometimes *cencerros* and sometimes simply “cowbells,” and which can be purchased from percussion instrument manufacturers.

[109] “Bells, small bells, & cencerros,” Rhythms & Sons, accessed 4/26/2023, https://www.r-sons.com/en/percussion-instruments/concert-accessories-percussions/bells-small-bells-cencerros

I have relied here, rhetorically, on retailers because it is the fact that *almglocken* can be retailed today that in a sense "legitimizes" and makes definite the *idea* of the almglocken as an instrumental practice available to the modern percussionist. It codifies them by manufacture. It makes it an instrument that not only exists in the record of music history as an extravagant orchestrational feature of the 20 century European avant-garde, but one that present-day composers - even student composers - can write for and expect those playing their music to be able to rent, if not have on hand.

But while there is a kind of unity and consistency in the range, construction, and sound across this instrumental practice, there is still not a consistency of naming. *Cencerro* and *almglocken* are still both used to describe the instruments in this practice by some speakers, and instruments *outside* it by others. And so despite Stockhausen's seeming wish for the instrumental tradition he founded, it is still often necessary for percussionists to be aware that *almglocken* are cowbells, if only to process that they are the same instruments as Messiaen's *cencerros*.

**Beyond *Almglocken***

The purpose of this chapter has been not to survey all uses of *almglocken* in the Western concert repertoire, but rather to examine factors in the creation of the *almglocken* practice that influence how the practice coalesced in the mid-late 20th century. We will, however, conclude by surveying some post-Messiaen developments.

I will enumerate here some works whose usage of *almglocken* constitute "conventional" writing for the instrument. The examples in William Hibbard's percussion solo *Parsons' Piece* (1969) are from the early years of this development and are written without specified pitch, but are directed by the score to be hung in a similar manner to that described by Stockhausen for *Gruppen* and are treated as resonant instruments, their sound often prolonged by delicate rolls with soft beaters. By contrast, the "Tuned Cowbells" in Donald Hunsberger's *Star Wars* transcriptions for wind ensemble are used fully melodically in the third movement, "Battle in the Forest." In the first chapter of this dissertation I already have mentioned Betsy Jolas' 1991 composition *Etudes Aperçues*, which is written for "vibraphone and 5 cowbells" but which I consider part of the *almglocken* repertoire because the cowbells in question are both of a written pitch and described by Jolas in the program note as "resonant." The compositions I

describe here are musically varied, but they share family resemblances with one another - be they resonance or pitch - which translates into the practical reality that *almglocken* are the instruments used to play them.

To round out the chapter and the body of this dissertation, however, I will now examine in detail two compositions from the postwar musical landscape that form a pair of contrasting apotheoses of the *almglocken* tradition, and indeed of the cowbell traditions in music more broadly. The first a solo for *almglocken*: *finalbells* by Eric Richards. The second is a chamber work for five players playing twenty-five cowbells: *Under the Umbrella* by Jo Kondo. The philosophies of these instrumentations - the cowbells themselves, how they are played, and how they are referred to and written for by the composer - demonstrate just how much, and in such varied ways, the conception of cowbells as musical instruments have evolved from the 19th century to the present day.

***finalbells* (2004)**

Eric Richards (1935-2019), in *finalbells*, stipulates a specific and clear instrumentation. The piece is written for "16 suspended Swiss brass cowbells (almglocken) tuned stepwise chromatically from the f below middle c (F3) to the g' above (G sharp 4)." I would note here that "Swiss brass cowbells (almglocken)" is, like the similar construction created by Jonathan Hepfer's editing of his interview with Christoph Caskel, an intriguing inversion of Stockhausen's "*Almglocken* ('Viehschellen'). The method of playing these *almglocken*, throughout the piece, is (in Richards' words) "rubbing the surface of the bells with slivers of a SuperBall in specific areas thereby producing the harmonics indicated in the score." It is unclear exactly what Richards means by "slivers," but my experimentation with commercially available friction mallets (sometimes called "superball mallets") suggests that they would be suitable for this piece.

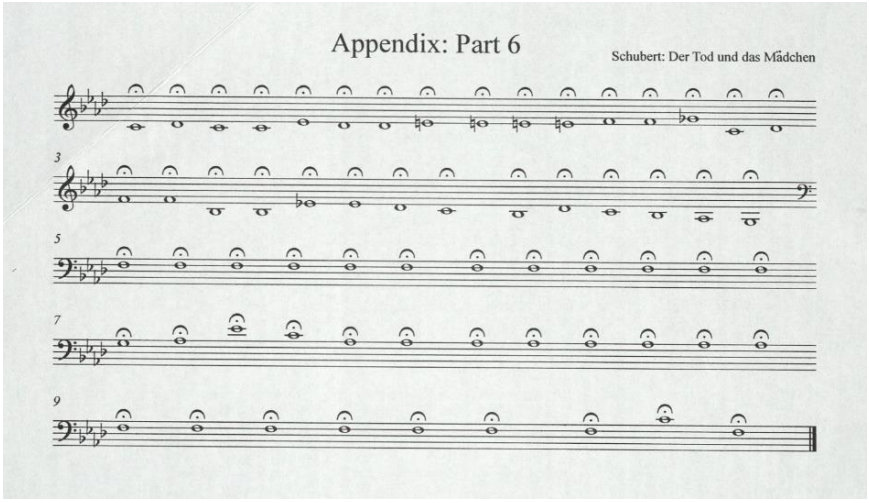



*Figure 25: One example of the pitch material for* finalbells*' backing track.*

Foreshadowing the do-it-yourself works of modern percussion composers like Jason Treuting, Eric Richards' score consists of what are essentially detailed instructions for how to finish the piece, plus a notated version of a prior realization recorded by Alan Zimmerman. Included with the score are several sets of pitches; these are excerpts from several songs by Franz Schubert ("Tod und der Madchen," "Der Doppelgänger," "Schwanengesang," "Liebesbotschaft," "Der Atlas," and "Die Taubenpost") and the opening of the first symphony of Edward Elgar, all rendered in ungrouped, free whole notes (see Figure 25). The performer is then to record sixteen tracks, using the six above-listed sets of pitches as materials, playing each pitch for as much or as little time as they see fit, and assemble the tracks (using tape or more likely a DAW) using what Richards refers to as "masking patterns:" timelines showing when tracks should fade in and out. In practice, the act of rubbing each bell will produce harmonics not necessarily related to the bell's fundamental pitch. These harmonics will accordingly be different from each bell, and therefore each rendition of *finalbells* will feature different pitch material as well as different timing of pitch material.

Finally, there is what Richards refers to as an "solo obligato part" (shown below in Figure 26); like the other parts, it is for rubbed almglocken. This part, intended to be played by a live performer accompanied by the track whose construction is outlined above, is through-composed with specific timings, a feature that couples with the unspecified timing of the pre-recorded tracks to create a balance

of designated and undesignated textures and harmonies. Considering Richards' use of the word "obligato," it is curious to note that Alan Zimmerman's recording does not feature this part at all.

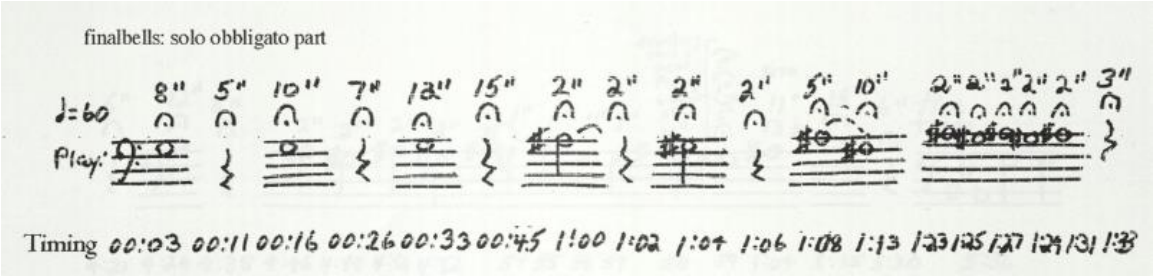


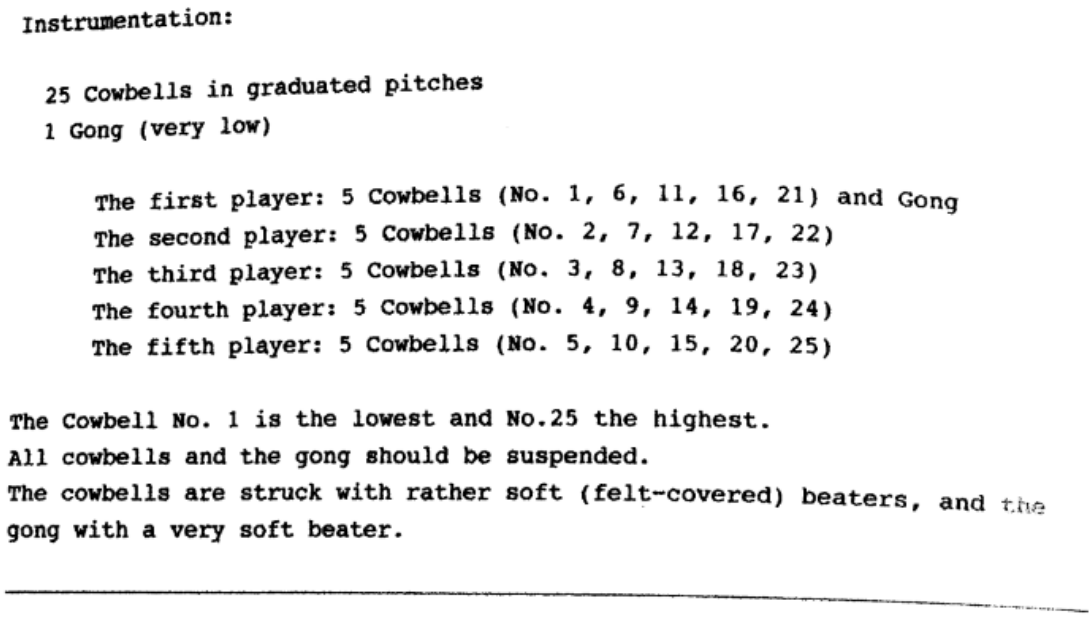

*Figure 26: Excerpt from* finalbells*' solo obligato almglocken part.*

I have chosen to draw attention to *finalbells* - a work which has only been recorded once and is not widely performed or heard - because in its distinctive if not unique technical approach to the *almglocken*. The method of sound production - the "rubbing with slivers of a Superball" - represents perhaps the ultimate casting aside of any possibility of programmaticism, the kind that Berlioz once suggested was completely inseparable from the idea of a metallic percussion instrument. Mahler and Strauss trafficked in this programmaticism. Stockhausen made a conscious effort to cast it aside and Messiaen seemingly ignored it, but they - and all the other composers who followed them in writing for the almglocken - still had one crucial foot in the programmatic world: the act of striking.

Cowbells - all the cowbells described in this dissertation, from the cow's neck to the charivari to Cuba to Strasbourg - have always been struck idiophones. Whether it is internally struck with a clapper or externally struck with a stick, the act of sound production has been one of *striking*. But *finalbells* takes these familiar objects and uses them in an entirely unfamiliar way: as friction idiophones. This simple change turns the sound of the almglocken to a sound without associations, more electronic than percussive. In this way is *finalbells*, the only work truly for almglocken and almglocken alone that I have found, a culmination of sorts to the *almglocken* tradition. It is in sound the furthest yet removed from cows that these bells have yet been made. But Richards still clarifies that by "almglocken" he means a certain kind of cowbell.

***Under the Umbrella* for five percussionists (1976)**

*Finalbells* remains firmly within the boundaries of the *almglocken* tradition at least as far as the instruments themselves are concerned, but it pushes the *technical* boundaries of the tradition with its friction-based playing method. In *Under the Umbrella*, on the other hand, Jo Kondo transcends the *almglocken* tradition. *Under the Umbrella* is not *written for almglocken* - it is written, explicitly, for cowbells. As we will see, in *Under the Umbrella*, the word "cowbell" can contain *almglocken*, but also many things besides.



Instrumentation:

25 Cowbells in graduated pitches
1 Gong (very low)

The first player: 5 Cowbells (No. 1, 6, 11, 16, 21) and Gong
The second player: 5 Cowbells (No. 2, 7, 12, 17, 22)
The third player: 5 Cowbells (No. 3, 8, 13, 18, 23)
The fourth player: 5 Cowbells (No. 4, 9, 14, 19, 24)
The fifth player: 5 Cowbells (No. 5, 10, 15, 20, 25)

The Cowbell No. 1 is the lowest and No.25 the highest.
All cowbells and the gong should be suspended.
The cowbells are struck with rather soft (felt-covered) beaters, and the gong with a very soft beater.

*Figure 27: Instrumentation from Kondo's* Under the Umbrella*.*

Jo Kondo (b. 1947) was a student of Messiaen, and when *Under the Umbrella* was composed and premiered for Nexus, the *cencerros* of *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum* a decade earlier could well have still been ringing in his ears. Kondo's vision of a stage full of cowbells differs from Messiaen's in one fundamental way, however: his are not pitched. Or rather, they are pitched - they are organized and assigned to the five players by their pitch - but this pitch system is theoretically unrelated to the Western 12-note octave or any other tuning system. Kondo's direction in the score (shown above in

Figure 27) simply reads “25 cowbells in graduated pitches.” According to Bob Becker, who played on the premier, Kondo specifically did *not* want a chromatic set of almglocken.[110] This has not prevented some modern performances from using just such a set (for example, a video recording made by the University of Oklahoma),[111] but in the defense of those performers who do choose to use *almglocken* to play this piece, no such note is found in the score. It *is*, however, found in the score of a later Kondo work, *Nocturnal* (1996). I will not be analyzing this work in detail, as its treatment and organizations of its cowbells is identical to that in *Under the Umbrella*, but its score does instruct performers to avoid “bells tuned in any systematic scales or temperament” - an instruction which we *might* surmise retroactively applies to Kondo’s earlier work as well. Accordingly, the following discussion of *Under the Umbrella* (especially as regards to its instrumentation) also applies, in large part, to *Nocturnal*.

Though percussion music, especially drum music, tends to be music where note values are of somewhat less obvious importance compared to music written for non-percussion instruments, *Under the Umbrella* features note values which are meant to be rigorously observed. The score (pictured) is skeletal in appearance, with the overwhelmingly most common duration, outside of the predominantly roll-based third movement, being the sixteenth note. These note values are, according to Kondo’s instructions in the score, to be expressed literally. The performer is meant to fully mute each bell with a hand when its duration ends. This serves the piece’s densely hocketed rhythmic language (referred to by Kondo as *sen no ongaku* or linear music)[112] which, provided the performers have chosen adequately resonant bells, would otherwise be at the risk of losing clarity or rhythmic drive. I would also argue that the prominence of muting in the technical language of the work implies that the performer should attempt to play the piece with as resonant of bells as possible. Kondo’s directions, particularly his statement that the bells should be suspended and struck with soft beaters, suggest this is his wish as well.

The 25 cowbells used in the piece (the entire instrumentation save for a single gong which is struck a single time) are, once ordered, divided into five groups of five, and each of the five players uses

[110] Email to the author, January 27, 2023
[111] “‘Under the Umbrella’ by Jo Kondo,” Ricardo Coelho de Souza, Michael Barnes, Cody Criswell, Christian Parnell, Tyler Romine, Bradley Regier, YouTube video, published 9/24/2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1ygNv3KxkM&t=4s.
[112] Bob Becker, “More From Bob’s Archive (Part 11) - Jo Kondo and *Under the Umbrella*,” Nexus, accessed 4/26/2023, https://www.nexuspercussion.com/2022/10/more-from-bobs-archive-jo-kondo-and-under-the-umbrella/

a setup consisting of the corresponding bell from each of the five sets - that is to say, player 1 uses bells 1, 6, 11, 16, and 21; player 2 uses bells 2, 7, 12, 17, and 22; and so on. The piece is in four movements; of these, three are in common time and feature a rhythmically uncomplicated but hocketed musical language - the five parts combining to form straightforward composite rhythms. The truly contrasting movement, the third one, is a timbral contrast. The bells are mainly played with tremolos (single stroke tremolos with soft yarn mallets), with occasional struck punctuations. In its rhythmic language the third movement varies between strict rhythmic unison and a kind of subtle polyphony quite distinct from the dry, interlocking figures in the other three movements. The muting technique which served this dry purpose in the other movements is in the third movement reappropriated as an ensemble gesture of punctuative silence to break up or end phrases.

Cuban-American cowbells are contraindicated in *Under the Umbrella* by this muting technique. Non-*almglocken* cowbells are quite dry, and certainly will not ring for some of the durations specified in the slower movements of the work (up to 5 quarter notes at 92 beats per minute, or 3.26+ seconds, at the end of the second movement). An ensemble understanding Kondo's use of the word "cowbell" literally is therefore faced with a resonance problem. Agricultural cowbells, especially larger ones, are more resonant, though would of course need to have their clappers removed to play this work. However, performance practice tells us that Kondo's use of the word "cowbell" is not literal. According to Bob Becker,

"Bells meant to be worn by cows, camels, and buffalo are common throughout cultures around the world, and many of them have inventive shapes and lovely sounds (with clappers removed)... In order to select 25 cowbells for UTU, each member brought the best-sounding (in his opinion) bells from his instrument collection to the first rehearsal. There were a few Swiss almglocken, but most of the bells were from India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Indonesia."[113]

The timbral richness of their recording makes an argument for this broad understanding of "cowbell" as artistically preferable, and justified. Kondo's "cowbells," after all, have nothing at all to do with

[113] Bob Becker, "Kondo and *Under the Umbrella*," accessed 4/26/2023.

cows, even just based on the published score. They serve no programmatic purpose which might be thwarted by bells that do not sound adequately bovine. The word “cow” carries significance in Kondo’s score only insofar as it suggests a particular sort of bell - small, metal, and resonant. In this work by Kondo, performance practice understands many sorts of small bells to meet the definition of “cowbell” - to fall under its umbrella, so to speak. In this regard *Under the Umbrella* demonstrates the power that the word “cowbell” can still have over the *almglocken* tradition - to denote it in an all-encompassing way that lumps it in with its cowbell cousins, and by Nexus’ interpretation, many other bells besides. It reinforces the actual nature of the distinction between the two, summed up here with an adage that verges on triteness but remains the most succinct description possible - not all cowbells are *almglocken*, but all *almglocken* are cowbells.

# Conclusion

## For Me, the Cowbell

During the process - carried out intermittently since spring 2021 - of researching this document, I often corresponded with my close friend Tucker Johnson about my findings, workshopping and brainstorming many of the hypotheses and historical connections explored in the preceding chapters. Johnson is a Rochester-based composer and, at the time of this writing, will soon be beginning a PhD in music composition at the Eastman School of Music. Amazingly, while fulfilling all the academic requirements of that institution's Masters' program in the same field, he also found the time to synthesize all the cowbell facts I was bombarding him with into a composition for solo multipercussion which I was able to premier on the lecture recital that accompanied this dissertation, on March 7, 2023.

This composition is entitled *...for me, the cowbell…* As the work took shape, I was repeatedly amazed at how the process of its conception (and my preparation for playing it) engaged with, and in turn forced me to engage with, the questions that I had about the cowbell. These were questions about what it was that I hope to succinctly say about this instrument that I have now developed a near-obsessive relationship with.

How, I had asked from the first day when I began to plan this document, will I be able to comprehensively explain the difference between different kinds of cowbells? How did the distinction between *almglocken* and cowbells develop? What is the relationship between the cowbells that cows wear and the cowbells that drummers hit with sticks? Do the cowbells that drummers ring while sonically masquerading *as* cows in Mahler's symphonies have something to do with it? Not only was my approach to preparing this work influenced significantly by the writing of my dissertation, my approach changed as, due to new insights in my research, the dissertation itself changed. It occurred to me then that an exploration of my approach to Johnson's solo would serve as an elegant structure for the concluding matter of the present dissertation.

**Choosing the bells**

Johnson's directive to the performer of *...for me, the cowbell…* regarding instrumentation is as follows, taken from the score.

*…for me…* requires sixteen cowbells or similar bell instruments and a Cow Box toy, which is turned to produce a cow-like sound. The performer is asked to organize these bells into four discrete groups of at least four bells each. Organization should be based on the performer's sense, and does not require the four groups to sound identifiable, but that would be a way to organize them. Groups I-IV will correspond to the staff numbering in the score. Notehead locations within the number staves are to be interpreted as high and lower bells within their respective group, outlining the contours to be played in each group.

Much like Jo Kondo's *Under the Umbrella*, the scope of what instruments the setup of *…for me, the cowbell…* might potentially be constructed from is determined by the performer's definition of the word "cowbell." In Kondo's work, the range of bell types and accompanying range of timbres was made very broad by a deliberately inclusive understanding of that word. Johnson, however, makes such inclusiveness his explicit wish by calling for "cowbells *or similar bell instruments*" (emphasis mine).

This, however, simply shifts the question from "what is a cowbell?" to "what bell is similar to a cowbell?" And this question can be answered in several ways. By what criteria shall I judge a bell to be similar to a cowbell?

By association with animals? This is essentially the stance that Nexus brought to *Under the Umbrella*. Under this criteria any sheep bells, goat bells, camel bells, or elephant bells that I as the performer have access to might be considered for use in *…for me, the cowbell…* This understanding of the word "similar" might be called "functional similarity." But what about physical similarity? What about bells that physically resemble cowbells in their appearance or construction? Even this criterion begs the question of whether in the previous sentence "cowbells" referred to agricultural cowbells or clapperless cowbells. African iron bells, for example, are similar in construction to the latter but not the former.

I will readily admit that such a decision-making process, especially when spelled out in this way, is a kind of quibbling with semantics. But in a work such as this - as with the Kondo - the semantics in question have an outsize effect on the sound of the performance itself, since they will determine what instruments the piece is played on to begin with. Johnson has furthermore expressed to me that the wording of "cowbells or similar bell instruments" is *deliberately* open-ended, and that it was his intention that the performer (e.g. me) make such a decision as this when constructing the setup of *…for me, the cowbell…*


*Figure 28: My setup for* …for me, the cowbell…

Accordingly, shown in figure 28 is my setup, using the minimum-allowed 16 bells. My four groups are visually and sonically distinct. They are suggestive both of the possibility of a complete cowbell classification and of different interpretations of the phrase "cowbells or similar bell instruments.

In my setup, Group 1, the uppermost group, consists of modern Cuban-American cowbells, all four of them manufactured by Latin Percussion. Bell 1d is, in fact, the same Black Beauty pictured and

described in the Introduction. Group 2 is made up of *almglocken* of the pitches C5-D4-E5-G5. These pitches were selected to suggest a colorful C major tonality, in contrast with the pitches of Group 1, which suggest a somewhat jazzy G7.

Groups 3 and 4, unlike Groups 1 and 2, are laid flat on a trap table instead of mounted. This was a choice forced by the fact that the instruments I wished to construct these groups from, by and large, are not designed to be mounted for playing. I experimented with ways to keep these non-mounted bells from becoming too muted, including taping them to thin foam dowels or laying them out on pieces of egg crate foam. None of these resulted in equivalent resonances across the four groups, but I embrace this contrast of resonances between the groups as an aspect of the contrast of timbres that I sought.

Group 3 is a mixed selection of clapperless struck idiophones. Bells 3a, 3b, and 3d are all African in origin. 3a and 3b are from my personal collection. 3a was sold by online retailer Djembe Direct under the name "Alo bell (Iron Cow Bell),"[114] with *Alo* not being a term that I have encountered outside of online retail contexts. 3b was retailed by Steve Weiss music under the name "Ghana single gong."[115] These two, on the basis of their construction, fall into the category of iron bells. 3d is a *kenkeni* bell from the University of Maryland's inventory, a struck idiophone which is broadly similar in form and function to iron bells, but which (with its split-sided, bladelike construction) stands much less likely to be mistaken for or conflated with any "cowbells." I include these three bells on the basis that in their *sound* - piercing, metallic, and dry (especially with them on the table) - they are *similar* to cowbells. They are not cowbells.

Bell 3c, on the other hand, is a *cow*bell. It was, in fact, given to me as a wedding gift (yet another wedding cowbell) by a colleague in the University of Maryland percussion studio. She purchased this cowbell from an antique store near her home in Boston. It came, in fact, with a tag claiming that it was once worn by a cow by the name of "Gertie," which I have left intact (and which can be seen in the photograph). Bell 3c - "Gertie's bell" if you will - seems then to be an agricultural cowbell by manufacture and, historically, by use. But Gertie's bell no longer has a clapper. There is a loop inside the bell where

[114] "African Alo Bell with stick - Iron cow bell - large and low," Djembe Direct, accessed 4/26/2023, https://www.djembedirect.com/african-alo-bell-with-stick-iron-cow-bell-large-and-low/
[115] "Overseas Connection Ghana Single Gong - Small (G730A)," Steve Weiss Music, accessed 4/26/2023, https://www.steveweissmusic.com/product/osc-ghana-style-single-gong-agogo-bell/authentic-world-percussion

the clapper hung once, but the clapper is gone now (see Figures 28 and 29) - rusted away or cut off by some previous owner or seller, perhaps.

*Figure 29: "Gertie's bell," exterior.*

*Figure 30: "Gertie's bell," interior. Note empty loop for clapper attachment.*

Group 4 also features an “odd bell out.” Bells 4a, 4b, and 4d are all agricultural cowbells with intact clappers, and like Bell 1c, Bell 4a was pictured and described in detail in this work’s introduction. My decision to play horizontal cowbells with intact clappers was inspired by my observation that in the cowbell practices which involve external striking - e.g. the Cuban one and the American theater/jazz one -

the removal of the clapper to prevent unwanted noise is *a* step in the process of adoption. This means that the sound of a *clappered* cowbell struck from the outside, which is accompanied by a sort of elongated buzz not unlike the snares of a snare drum, is underrepresented in music. I therefore chose to form Group 4 from bells that would produce this sound.

However, the keen-viewer may have already begun to wonder how Bell 4c fits into this paradigm. From its external appearance it seems that this bell does not belong. And indeed, it is *not* an agricultural cowbell. It is in fact another Latin Percussion-made model from my collection, specifically my LP Matador. Its external structure - with mounting hardware instead of a loop for a leather strap - betrays this just as much as its lack of a clapper would if its mouth were towards the viewer.

So why is the LP Matador in Group 4 with the agricultural cowbells, and why is Gertie's bell in Group 3 with two iron bells and a *kenkeni*? The answer is their *sounds*.

Early in the process of learning *…for me, the cowbell…*, early in the writing process of this dissertation, I intended for the four groups of cowbells ("or similar bell instruments") that make up the work's setup to reflect a categorization system that I was devising. This was to be a system into which all cowbells both musical and nonmusical could fit. The categories were as follows: agricultural cowbells (or "true cowbells," I once thought to call them), "Cuban" cowbells (having not yet understood the cowbell's independent, concurrent presence in American drumming), *almglocken*, and iron bells (which I included, as a category, on the basis that they seemed to commonly be confused for cowbells).

And as I was using this method to organize all the cowbells that I was using to play the piece, I realized that, within this ethos of classification, there was a bell in my collection that I couldn't quite place. The bell in question was Gertie's bell. I initially placed this bell with the agricultural cowbells because it seemed accurate to say that the bell in question was, itself, *also* an agricultural cowbell. But because Gertie's cowbell didn't have a clapper, it lacked the prolonged buzz on impact that its fellows had. During passages of *…for me, the cowbell…* which featured only Group 4, it stuck out like a sore thumb, and during passages that used Group 4 in conjunction with other, non-clappered groups, Gertie's bell would always sound more like the other groups than it did the rest of its own group. Indeed, in being an agricultural cowbell without its clapper, Gertie's bell sounded more like the cowbells I was coming to think of as Cuban-American (instead of simply Cuban) than anything else.

It was at this point that I realized that if I was to place Gertie's bell in Group 4 with the agricultural cowbells, I was making a choice to classify that cowbell by its manufacture, which stood in contrast to both its use (as a musical instrument) and its sonic characteristics.

I had already been trying, unsuccessfully, to find a double *gankogue* example that could serve as both Bell 3c and Bell 3d. I had yet to find a pair whose pitches made a proper order with the two iron bells I already had and liked. But my realization that Gertie's bell didn't sound right in Group 4 made me realize that, in terms of sound, this bright, short, and muted cowbell fit sonically better with Group 3. I then tried the *kenkeni* as Bell 4d and found the combination of timbres very appealing.

At this point, I filled the 4c space in the setup - previously occupied by the clapperless Gertie's bell - with my LP Matador. In order to make it sonically fit with the rest of Group 4, I loosened the mounting hardware until it jangled every time the instrument was struck.

At this point, the four groups of bells I organized for *…for me, the cowbell…* experienced a change of ethos. They were no longer categories that I planned to go onto apply to the totality of cowbells in and beyond music. They pretended to far less. They were now just categories of sounds, defined by their sonic resemblance to one another and distinctness from other groups, rather than their origin or any rhetorical "separation." The groups roughly conform to some of these labels - the *almglocken* of group 2 clearly fit the bill of *almglocken* - but there are also bells in this setup that transcend labels, like Gertie's bell.

This is why prior systems that place cowbells in neat boxes - *almglocken* and not-*almglocken*, *cencerro* and *almglocken*, frog-mouth and square mouth - have never succeeded in being comprehensive. They lump disparate uses of physically similar cowbells together as single musical practices, and they obscure the fact that wherever cowbells have been *adopted* into music, there must have been a point when a cowbell - an extant object manufactured for another intended use - is used *contrary* to that intended use. The simplicity of the cowbell - with or without an easily removable clapper - makes it easy to move between categories based on use. *This* is why the cowbell resists classification, and why I realized in the end that my performance of this composition was better served by an optimization of the required groups that focused on creative combinations of sounds, rather than categories that tried to "correctly" classify the bells. Ultimately, whatever extramusical associations (or

identifying factors) the bells might have, I concluded that in a musical setting it was their sounds that really mattered.

**"The bell that a cow normally is wearing"**

In a 2016 lecture entitled "Why Political (New) Music," the composer and lecturer Johannes Kreidler argued that music has an inherently political dimension in part because none of its elements can be completely removed from extramusical association. By way of support he evoked Helmut Lachenmann's observation regarding the *almglocken* in Stockhausen's works.

"For Stockhausen the cowbell is also just [*sic*] one parameter in his whole setup, whereas Lachenmann says, 'Come on, a cowbell is just a bell that cow normally is wearing.' So the *aura* of the instruments is a semantic thing."[116]

Kreidler is paraphrasing here; the quotation in question is from Lachenmann's essay "Bedingungen des Materials" and reads as follows (as translated by Tucker Johnson):

"What does the cowbell [*Kuhglocke*] in Stockhausen's Gruppen or Zyklus still have to do with its rural function, and what is it doing next to the celesta?"[117]

This quotation inspired the title of *…for me, the cowbell…* This title is a paraphrase of Kreidler's paraphrase of Lachenmann; the "me" if the title is Lachenmann himself. It also refers to the process of choosing and organizing the bells used to play it, as described in the preceding section, but it is important to note that the ultimate origin of the quote is this statement by Lachenmann which suggests that Stockhausen's efforts to symbolically excise the cow from the cowbell - the genesis of the *almglocken* tradition - are futile. This is because no matter what names Stockhausen calls the cowbell it will still look like a cowbell, and no matter how he directs the performer to mount and play it, or how writes for it, it still

[116] Johannes Kreidler, "Why (Political) New Music?" recorded August 4, 2016 at Ferienkurse für Neue Musik Darmstadt, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byT5_jyJEq0&t=866s
[117] Helmut Lachenmann, "Bedingungen des Materials," in *Ferienkurse '78,* ed. Ernst Thomas (Mainz: Schott, 1978), 46.

might sound like a cowbell. And accordingly, it will be out of Stockhausen's control whether or not the audience member *associates* the presence of the *almglocken* with the cowbell's other life as a non-musical object - its "rural function" as Lachenmann puts it.

I also cannot help but draw attention to the wording of Kreidler's paraphrase, and the particular way in which he re-words Lachenmann's criticism. "A cowbell is just a bell that a cow normally is wearing." Did Lachenmann really mean to make that statement? I do not think so. Kreidler's paraphrase imparts a kind of universality to Lachenmann's statement which places it at odds with the global reality of cowbells in music. The bell that a cow "normally is wearing" to a German may well not be the most familiar cowbell to an American.

But Lachenmann's original statement, applied to Stockhausen's *almglocken*, is an insightful statement, and of more use than Kreidler's because it does not lump disparate cowbells together. We have seen that Stockhausen's *almglocken* were purchased from a factory in Lindau. Lachenmann grew up in Stuttgart, just over 200 kilometers away, and it is quite possible that Lachenmann was intimately familiar with the sounds of cowbells extremely similar to those purchased by Stockhausen in *their natural habitat* - that is to say, on the necks of cows. This is a factor beyond Stockhausen's control. It is not an indictment of the instruments - Lachenmann used them himself in *Inteieur 1* (1966) for example.[118] It is simply an observation of factors which can affect the processing, by listeners, of these instruments.

[118] Gary Smith, *Instrument and Implement Selection and Setup, Performance Strategies, Structure, and Interpretation in Helmut Lachenmann's Intérieur I* (DMA dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 2016), 12.


*Figure 31: My Cow Box.*

It is this inevitable connotation that Tucker Johnson plays off of with the presence of the toy that he refers to as a Cow Box (my particular example says “cow in a can” on the side, as shown in Figure 30). The instrument is played - turned on its side to produce a soft but clear “moo” sound - only twice in the piece, both instances near the work’s conclusion. Johnson’s piece is structured into many small sections, titled “Pastorales,” “Processionals,” and “Recitatives.” There are four of each. The Cow Box is played first at a dramatic pause after the final recitative has concluded, with the note “ländlichen funktion und struktur” (“rural function and structure”), echoing Lachenmann. There follows a violent, kinetic coda using all four groups of bells, another Cow Box note, and then the piece concludes with two bars of swelling rolls (see Figure 31).

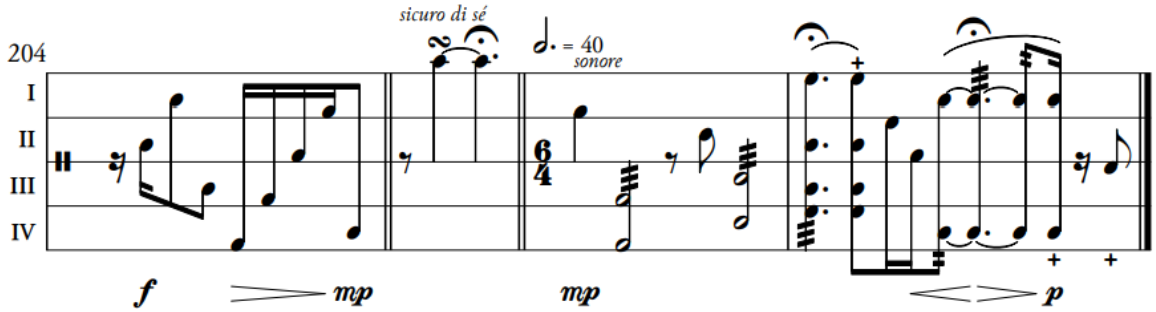



*Figure 32: final bars of* …for me, the cowbell…, *including Cow Box (marked* sicuro di sé*, or "self-assured").*

The Cow Box is not very loud, and accordingly Johnson scores for it not only to be played solo, but with a large enough break before for all sound from bells to settle. I, as the performer, fill this space with a broad motion where I pick the Cow Box up off my stand and lift it toward the audience. In a gestural choice influenced by Johnson's decision to represent the sound with a turn embellishment over the note head, I waft it like a glass of wine, tilting it (and producing the moo). And this is a humorous gesture. In the premiere recording of *…for me, the cowbell…*, stifled laughter can be heard from the audience during both of the Cow Box moments. Johnson has, in personal communication, authorized me to acknowledge that there is a comic element to both conception and the execution of this moment.

Throughout these pages I have called attention to ways in which the cowbell, now and historically, has been treated as somehow intrinsically funny or particularly ripe for parody by musicians, observers of music, and writers. Oftentimes this has occurred in conjunction with the cowbell's otherness in musical settings, an otherness that is owed to an awareness that musicians, observers of music, and writers have of the cowbell as a non-musical object, concurrent with its status as a musical instrument. Insofar as the cowbell's non-musical function is, in general, the adornment of cows, then, the concept of cattle - of animals, of the barnyard, of agricultural work - is a *feature of* the cowbell's otherness. And so long as the word *cow*bell continues to have the power to denote all the things it currently does - cowbells in tropical music, cowbells in classic rock, cowbells in Mahler, *almglocken* - all these instrumental practices will retain some amount of that bovine connotation.

This is why the humorous conclusion of *…for me, the cowbell…* - the pause in the music, the rasing of the small cylindrical object, and the "mooed" punchline - is both the best possible ending for an cowbell obsessed work of music and a suitable punctuation for a broad look at the cowbell in music. It functions as an acknowledgement of the cowbell's carnivalesque heritage and its othered history in music, and insofar as the work is an explanation of the concept *of* the cowbell - conceived as it was in parallel with my research here - it utilizes these things to further the work's artistic ends.

So I embrace the humor of this musical moment. And I embrace the humor of the cowbell. If the reader presently finds or has found cowbells to be somehow inherently funny, I do not ask them to reconsider, or to stop laughing at "More Cowbell" or its derivative jokes and slogans. It is, on the contrary, my hope that the reader who laughs at cowbells will understand this practice as part of a historical tradition, dating back centuries, which hitherto has gone unappreciated by musicians and which has intersected with, and influenced, the cowbell's musical development.

**Future areas of study**

And so we have come to the end of this dissertation. In spite of what feels to me like the significant length of the document, I am acutely aware of the fact that I have sacrificed many individual possibilities of depth for the sake of breadth. Many if not most of the individual uses of cowbells in music discussed here could potentially have been expanded into a dissertation-length treatment in their own right. My undertaking from the beginning, however, was to take as broad a view of the cowbell as possible and to orient all these practices in relation to one another, musically and historically. As such, I was forced by the sheer limitations of my time in this degree to leave many areas of research which I expect to be fruitful for future work by myself and, perhaps, by others.

Among these potential future research projects - or articles, or monographs - I would identify the following as potentially especially fruitful.

- A wide-ranging archeological and ethnographical study of animal bell usage worldwide, which stands to directly relate to the scholarship of the cowbell in music insofar as it can place the

cowbells which *have* been adopted into music, developmentally, among other similar non-musical bell practices which have not been so adopted.

- A study of cowbells used as sports noisemakers, a practice which I often found referenced in 19th century newspaper articles surrounding baseball.
- A search for more primary sources regarding the Cowbellogian act, with an eye towards reconstructing the act itself (including its musical aspects and its theatrical ones).
- A similar search for primary documentation regarding the uses of cowbells in late 19th century American theater percussion, especially when the practice of mounting clapperless cowbells (commonplace by 1920) first appeared in America (and whether or not it was influenced by Cuban bell practices).
- Likewise, a search for primary documentation (likely in Spanish-language archives) of the adoption of cowbells in place of iron bells by Afro-Cuban musicians.
- A systematic review of cowbell usages in popular music - from the Anglosphere and beyond) in the mid-20th century, with the goal of determining with greater certainty if (as I have hypothesized here) the popularity of tropical music in the 1950's precipitated a shift among the earliest rock drummers towards a Cuban-influenced use of the cowbell as a timekeeper rather than as a sound effect.
- A search of Stockhausen's significant untranslated writings (e.g. the *Texte* volumes) for any references to the origin of the term *almglocken*: whether Stockhausen coined it, where it was coined if not by him, and if his rationale for the usage of the term was (as I have hypothesized) a desire to separate his cowbell practice from prior ones and simultaneously distance the bells from the implication of cattle.

Until such time as these projects can be undertaken, the picture of the cowbell's history and development I have presented here will remain incomplete. But I do hope and believe that the outline thereof contained in this dissertation is a step - if a small one compared to what must still be done - towards a deeper understanding of this instrument (and non-instrument).

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