



The Singing Tower

Carillon Celebration Concert

November 14, 2021
3:00 p.m.



First
Plymouth

Dear friends,

It is a privilege and joy to welcome you today as we celebrate the return of First-Plymouth's iconic Singing Tower. Over the past 90 years, thousands and thousands of people have gathered at First-Plymouth to the sound of Nebraska's first carillon, calling us to worship, for weddings, for concerts, and for funerals. It became clear to us during the pandemic just how special our carillon is to our community. I'll never forget the 'carillon in the car' concerts that culminated in all of us honking our horns to express our delight in the music and to sound our appreciation for Kathie Johnson, our devoted and generous carillonneur. The tender loving care that Kathie has offered to our carillon, encouraging and shepherding this restoration project, is a deep blessing. To all who have contributed to the life and ministry of this church at any point, we are giving thanks for your gifts today as we celebrate one of First-Plymouth's treasures-- an instrument that sings beyond our sanctuary into the neighborhood to which we belong and into the community which we are called to serve. May God continue to bless those who find inspiration and hope ringing from this place. To God alone be the glory of this most amazing day!



Tom Trenney, Minister of Music at First-Plymouth Church

The sound of church bells warm the heart. It seems to harken to a time when villages and towns had a stronger sense of community and purpose.

But we celebrate the return of our bells today not simply with nostalgia of times past but with the joy of seeking more beauty, peace and unity in our world today.

Rev. Dr. Jim Keck, Senior Minister at First-Plymouth Church



First-Plymouth's Carillon

First-Plymouth's carillon was the first true carillon in Nebraska. A carillon consists of at least 23 bells chromatically arranged and manually played. The person playing the carillon is called a *carillonneur* or sometimes *carillonist*.

The carillon is played on a console that resembles an organ and requires physical exertion when the carillonneur manually depresses a wooden baton with a slightly closed fist. The motion of the lever is carried to the bell clapper by a wire and the sound is produced when the clapper strikes the inner wall of the stationary bell. The feet play the pedal keyboard to assist with the heavier bells.



The original 1931 carillon bells were cast by John Taylor & Sons Foundry, Loughborough, England. A major renovation was completed in 1990 by Olympic Carillon, Inc., Port Townsend, Washington. At that time the carillon bells were increased from 48 bells to 57 bells. The largest bell weighs over 5,000 pounds and the smallest 30 pounds. Bell metal consists of 78 percent copper and 22 percent tin which is heated to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. First-Plymouth's bell tower is 171 feet tall.



The largest bell in the carillon weighs over 5,000 pounds.

The 24 bells on the outside of the tower are ornamental only.

Concert Schedule

The Star-Spangled Banner

John Smith 1750-1836
Arr. Milford Myhre

Anton Brees, bellmaster of the Bok Singing Tower in Lake Wales, Florida, and at that time considered to be the leading bellmaster in America and the world, played the dedication concert of First-Plymouth's magnificent carillon on Memorial Day, May 30, 1931. His recitals continued throughout the week with a variety of hymns, patriotic pieces, and classical music. Each concert included, "The Star-Spangled Banner". With this in mind, we begin today's concert with "The Star-Spangled Banner".

Tis' The Gift to be Simple

Joseph Brackett 1797-1882
Arr. Milford Myhre

Tis' The Gift to be Simple was composed in 1848 by Shaker Elder Joseph Brackett. It sums up the central beliefs of the Shakers that satisfaction is not achieved through attaining power or wealth. Instead, it is realized through humility and freedom from worldly goods.

Arranger Milford Myhre followed Anton Brees as the carillonneur at the Bok Tower, Lake Wales, Florida, becoming the second carillonneur to hold this esteemed position for 36 years.

'Little Fugue'

G.F. Handel 1685-1759
Arr. Ira Schroeder 1902-1994

Ira Schroeder was carillonneur at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa from 1931-1969. He was a founding member and a president of the Guild of Carillonners of North America (GCNA). Schroeder was a renowned recitalist throughout the United States and Europe. Upon retiring he moved to Lake Wales, Florida, and worked on the Anton Brees Carillon Library of the Bok Tower Garden. Schroeder wrote and arranged numerous pieces for the carillon.

Jacob Mason, carillonneur

Wachet auf (Sleepers Awake)

J.S. Bach 1685-1750
Arr. Patrick Roulet

Christmas Time is Here

Vince Guaraldi 1928-1976

Jeremy had planned on taking part in the 2020 Christmas extravaganza, When Love Came Down, for First-Plymouth but a snow storm cut him short of his debut on the carillon. We are pleased to hear him play today. It is never too early to hear Christmas music.

Jeremy Spale, Carillonneur

To God Be the Glory

Wm. H. Doane 1832-1915
Arr. Lee Cobb

From "A Hymn Suite for Carillon", by Lee Cobb "Commissioned by Brent Shaw in 2016 for the 85th anniversary of the "Singing Tower" carillon at First-Plymouth Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Kathie Johnson, who first introduced Brent to the carillon"

Brother James' Air

James L. Macbeth Bain 1840-1925
Arr. Kathie Johnson

Written in celebration of the completion of the 2021 renovation of First-Plymouth's carillon.

Bain's was a Scottish composer who was known to his peers as Brother James. The lyrics to the hymn are based on the tranquil and comforting words of the 23rd Psalm that begins:

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want,
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.
He leadeth me, He leadeth me,
The quiet waters by.

In this arrangement, listen for the gently flowing stream as it travels along the river bed, comforting, healing, and protecting the sacredness of life. The water representing the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Arioso (from A Simple Suite for Carillon)

Ronald Barnes 1927-1997

A Simple Suite for Carillon, by Ronald Barnes was commissioned by Ray and Kathie Johnson in recognition of First-Plymouth Congregational Church hosting the 1993 Guild of Carillonners in North America Congress to showcase the newly renovated carillon that took place between 1988-1990. The three-year project included adding nine additional bells, moving the playing console one floor higher, and replacing the bell frame.

Ron premiered his composition at the 1993 GCNA Congress at First-Plymouth where he began his life-long career in the carillon world. This was the last GCNA Congress Ron performed at due to his failing eyesight. He retired in 1995 from his position at Berkeley.

Barnes's style of composing focuses on the carillon as a concert instrument. Most of his works are characterized in more of a romantic style with a singable melody.

Concert Schedule

Preludio #2

Matthias Vanden Gheyn 1721-1785

The “Venden Gheyn 300 Challenge” is underway. The year 2021 marks the 300th birthday of Matthias Venden Gheyn, a Flemish composer in what is now Belgium. The GCNA has challenged carillonneurs around the world to play a work of Venden Gheyn’s sometime during 2021 to celebrate this outstanding virtuoso of carillon, organ, and composition.

Music Box Dancer

Frank Mills 1942 - present
Arr. Ray R. Johnson 1940-2003

Frank Mills is a Canadian pianist and recording artist. This uplifting piece was written in 1974 and never intended to be a hit. It made the B Side of the recording, but the DJ liked it better than Side A, The Poet and I.

Mills couldn’t think of a title for his piece until his daughter asked him to fix her music box with a ballerina that spins around. While using the Crazy Glue to fix the ballerina’s broken arm, Mills realized the music was reminiscent of a music box dancer. Thus, a piece that wasn’t intended to be recorded, had become one of the top pieces heard in the 1970’s

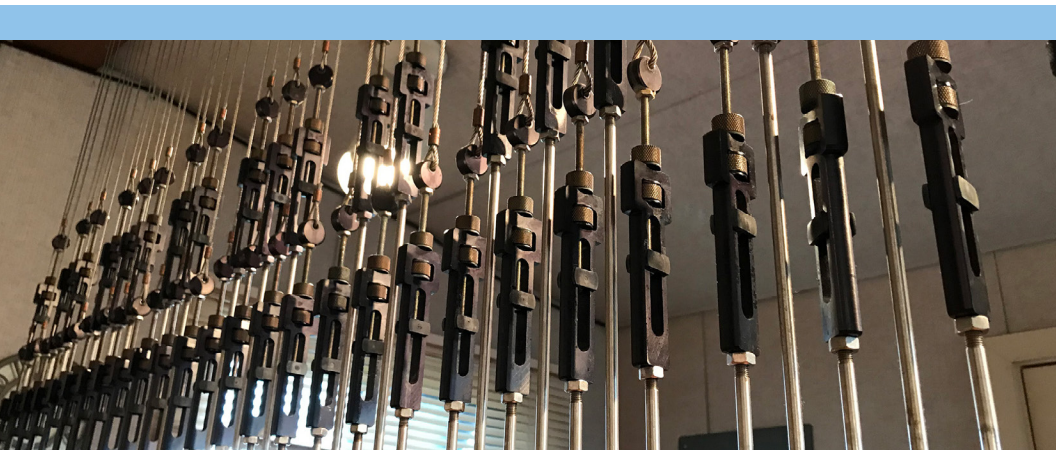
Blessings from the tower.

The Lord Bless You and Keep You
Words from Numbers 6: 24-26

Peter C. Lutkin 1858-1931

The Lord Bless you, the Lord keep you,
May God’s love ever always surround you;
Protect you and guide you in all that you do;
Our prayer for you. Amen.

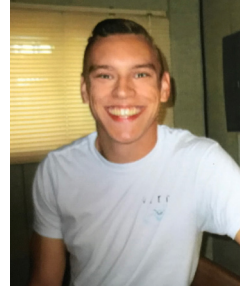
Kathie Johnson, carillonneur



Biography of Performers

Jacob Mason

Jacob Mason, a native of Firth, NE, has been a lifelong member of First-Plymouth UCC and is a member of the Plymouth Choir. A 2019 graduate of Norris High School, Jacob is currently a junior and Student Body President at Nebraska Wesleyan University. He is double majoring in History and Political Science with a minor in Religion & Philosophy. At Wesleyan, Jacob sits on the Board of Governors, leads the student government, is a member of the men's swim team, has taken organ lessons, has sung in the University Choir, sat on the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, and worked on the Student Life COVID-19 Task Force. As a longtime pianist and organist, Jacob began taking carillon lessons from Kathie Johnson in 2018 and continues to enjoy playing "heavy metal" at First-Plymouth.



Jeremy Spale

Jeremy Spale graduated from UNL in 2008 with a Bachelor's in Music Education with percussion as his primary instrument. After a career change that led him to other pursuits, Jeremy has been playing professionally since 2010. He has worked with ensembles like the Plymouth Brass, the Abendmusik Chamber Orchestra, Nebraska Wesleyan choral and instrumental groups, and Sounding Light while also being a frequent participant in worship services at First-Plymouth and other local churches that have given him the opportunity to showcase the many instruments in his collection.



Kathie A. Johnson

Kathie grew up on a farm located in the Allegheny Mountains in southwestern Pennsylvania. She earned a double major in Church Music and Education at Jamestown College, a Presbyterian church college in Jamestown, North Dakota. Upon graduation she moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, to teach in the Lincoln Public Schools.

Wanting to get familiar with her new home, Kathie began her adventures in Lincoln by attending various events. One of those events was the dedication of the new Schlicker organ at First-Plymouth. The organ program was preceded by a carillon concert given by carillonneur, Ray Johnson whose skill and performance intrigued Kathie. She began her studies with the local carillon guild that Mr. Johnson taught at that time. Kathie helped Ray with the carillon, as needed, throughout their marriage.

Kathie has been very active at First-Plymouth teaching, directing handbells, children's choir, percussion team, puppet ministry, and serving on church boards. In 2005 Kathie accepted the position of Director of Children & Family Ministries. Retiring from this leadership in 2013, she began to play the carillon again on a regular basis for church services, weddings, other special events, and has the joy of mentoring Jacob Mason on the carillon. Kathie is an Associate Member of the GCNA. Currently, she has been documenting the history of First-Plymouth's carillon.



First-Plymouth's Carillon Legacy

Myron Roberts

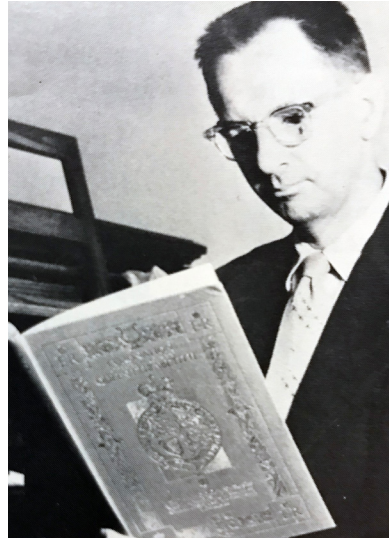
1912-2004

Myron Roberts was a nationally known professor of organ and a composer of organ works, choral music and other instruments. He joined the faculty at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, around 1942 where he taught organ and music theory for 34 years. In addition to teaching at UNL, Professor Roberts served as organist at First-Plymouth from 1940-1956.

Quoting Myron in his 1993 article, titled, "Carillon Playing at First-Plymouth Congregational Church: An Art Reborn" when he began his position as organist at First-Plymouth, the carillon was about eleven years old. There was no tradition of carillon playing in America at that time and no one trained to play it properly.

Through no fault of the carillonist at First-Plymouth, all that was being played were hymns as written, in one or two parts with the same dynamic level and same tempo with a range of one or two octaves. Even with these limitations the church members enjoyed their carillon.

This was about to change through the guidance of Professor Roberts and several of his organ students whom he encouraged to learn to play the carillon during the time he was at First-Plymouth. Today we recognize those students: Ronald Barnes, Milford Myhre, and Ray Johnson.



Tour of the Carillon tower

Due to Covid restrictions, bell tower tours are temporarily suspended

Ronald Barnes

1927-1997

Carillonneur at First-Plymouth 1946-1950

Ron Barnes is regarded with the highest respect by all who play the carillon, because of numerous contributions he made to the art of carillon performance and composition.

Ron, a native of Lincoln, Nebraska, remembers at the age of four, his parents took him to the carillon dedication concert that Anton Brees played in 1931. He remembered looking up at the tall tower and the bright light in the tower. At the University of Nebraska, he studied organ with Myron Roberts, who encouraged him to learn the carillon at First-Plymouth Congregational Church. Barnes began his long association with the carillon in 1946 at First-Plymouth.

According to Professor Roberts, Ron had a 'natural affinity for the bells.' He read every book or document he could get his hands on and spent a summer in Canada to study the carillon. When he returned to Lincoln, he was appointed assistant organist and carillonneur at First-Plymouth. He studied at Stanford University writing his thesis on the preludes of Matthias van den Gheyn.

Ron went on to accept carillon positions at Stanford University, California; University of Kansas; Washington National Cathedral, Washington, D.C.; and, the University of California at Berkeley.

For many years Barnes was a major force in establishing an American approach to performing, composing and arranging for the carillon that have become a standard in modern carillon repertory. His interest in the carillon was unlimited when it came to playing techniques, composition, bell founding, playing mechanisms, tower design, and recording techniques. He was active in the Guild of Carillonneurs of North America (GCNA) and the World Carillon Federation and performed world-wide concerts. Many carillonneurs are indebted to Ron for his contributions in leadership, teachings, and the wisdom he has given to the carillon world.



Carillon Renovation



Verdin Bell Company

We express our special thanks to The Verdin Bell Company, of Cincinnati, Ohio, who worked over the past five months to renovate and update First-Plymouth's carillon. The project included restoration of the bell frame, update and repair of the playing console and transmission system, repair of the umbrella system, and replacing some of the original bell clappers and annealing older bell clappers to extend their lifetime and improve tone quality.

Milford Myhre

Carillonneur at First-Plymouth 1950-1953

Milford Myhre grew up in Saint Edward, Nebraska, attended the University of Nebraska, and studied organ with Myron Roberts. At the suggestion of Ronald Barnes, a senior at UNL and carillonneur at First-Plymouth, Milford took his advice that



if he would play the carillon at the church, he would have access to practice on their magnificent Kimball organ. Barnes was an excellent carillon mentor and Myhre's worked with him for a semester and he was hooked for a lifelong career as a carillonneur.

Further studies took him to the University of Michigan and the Royal Carillon School in Mechelen, Belgium. He taught at Culver Military Academy, Indiana, before being appointed carillonneur of Bok Tower Gardens, where he served for 36 years. He retired in 2004.

Milford has received many awards for his contributions in performance, composing, arranging, and teaching carillon. He has performed concerts throughout the United States and Europe; and, is recognized for his leadership in the GCNA and the World Carillon Federation.

First-Plymouth's Carillon Legacy

Raymond R. Johnson

1940-2003

Carillonneur at First-Plymouth 1964-2003

Ray Johnson grew up in Stromsburg, Nebraska. At the age of four, when he came home from church, he would sit at the piano and play the hymns that were sung at church that morning. His parents started him with piano lessons at that time and he flourished in music with a variety of instruments.

Ray attended the University of Nebraska and studied organ with Myron Roberts. When Roberts asked if he would be interested in playing the carillon, Ray said, "I'll try anything once". That "once" turned into 39 years.

Carl Zimmerman, (see below) gave Ray some pointers on how to play the carillon, but it was through the lessons, advice and guidance of Ron Barnes that Ray cultivated his love of the carillon. He was an association member of the GCNA. Although Ray held employment in another field, he was kept busy playing for church services, weddings, special church gatherings, and carillon concerts. Ray's love for the carillon was exhibited by the skill and dexterity of his performances. He always said he played the finest carillon in the country.



Carl Scott Zimmerman

1940-Present

Carillonneur at First-Plymouth early 1960's

Carl studied carillon at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut where he served as Assistant Carillonneur for three years. He studied carillon with Ron Barnes at the University of Kansas.

When Zimmerman was stationed at Offutt Air Force Base, in Omaha, he came to Lincoln to play the carillon for church services at First-Plymouth once a month and mentored a small group of students. When the military relocated Carl, he was never near another carillon, but stayed very active in the carillon world. His travels have taken him to carillons over the U.S. and Europe. He has written books about Carillons of the Americas and Carillons of the World; and, has been the creator and webmaster of the GCNA's website.



