

RESOUNDING TRADITION



FOR 125 YEARS, students have rung the Crouse Chimes, providing a sonorous soundtrack for the University community

By Pablo Mayo Cerqueiro



You must climb a 70-foot ladder to reach the platform with the levers.



First installed in 1889, the Crouse Chimes are rung up to three times a day and on special occasions. For decades, members of the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity held the honor of ringing the bells. The Chimesmasters took over the bell-keeping duties in 1989. Chimesmaster Alex Ganes '15 (top left and facing page) helps carry on the tradition today.

Above: A student from years past poses in the largest bell, nicknamed "Big John," which weighs about 3,000 pounds.

AS OFTEN AS HIS SCHEDULE ALLOWS, ALEX GANES '15 climbs up Crouse College's bell tower to toll more than 10,500 pounds of tin and copper. Using his hands and feet, he shoves himself against the wooden levers that make the 10 Crouse Chimes sing, performing tunes as old as the "Alma Mater" and as new as Miley Cyrus's "Wrecking Ball." After 15 minutes of physical madness, Ganes returns to his life as a music composition major while the last notes of "Westminster Quarters" vanish in the Syracuse air. "It's a nice chest workout," he says, joking.

For the last three years, Ganes has lived a secret life as a member of the Chimesmasters, a student society that's been in charge of playing the campus bells since 1989. With him as its chair, the eight-person group rings the Crouse Chimes three times a day during the school week—morning, lunchtime, and evening—and for special events. For the bells' 125th anniversary this year, the

Chimesmasters played a concert for the local community, reenacting the first time the chimes resounded at the University on the evening of June 3, 1889. "The chimes are part of the culture of Syracuse University," says Professor Patrick M. Jones, director of the Setnor School of Music. "They create an aura."

Music students and faculty founded the Chimesmasters society after the brothers of the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity, the original bell ringers, gave up the chore when they left campus in 1985. Although multiple people used to play the bells together, today the Chimesmasters tend to do the job in the solitude of the tower. "You used to not be able to do it by yourself because it was considered to be too dangerous," Ganes says. Cellphones have made playing alone possible. But it's understandable why students couldn't do it in the past.

To access the chimes, the bell keepers can only en-



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ter the tower through a door in a corner of a room in Crouse College. Then, they must climb a 70-foot ladder to reach the platform where the levers are—the hard work happens here. An old stairway connects this level with the area above holding the bells. There's also an extra floor where the Chimesmasters have their lounge: the very top of the Crouse needle.

Since the early days of Crouse College, the bells have been looking over the SU campus. Toward the end of the 19th century, John Crouse, the building's benefactor and a University Trustee at the time, bought the first nine chimes—weighing from 375 to 3,000 pounds—from Clinton H. Meneely Bell Foundry of Troy, New York, for roughly \$5,000. Crouse never saw his building finished, but he did hear the bells before his death in summer 1889. He passed away 24 days after the chimes first thundered “Carol Sweetly Carol” on the Hill. This is how a local newspaper narrated the inauguration of the Crouse Chimes: “Last night, as twilight began to fall and the heavens to shake out their sable ropes of night, here pealed forth upon the air from the college on University Hill the sweet, harmonious tones of the first chime of bells that ever greeted the ear of Syracuse.” The bells' original notes constituted a C-major scale from C to C with B-flat. In 1937, a 10th chime, high D above high C, was added.

For decades, the brothers of Delta Kappa Epsilon were responsible for ringing the Crouse Chimes, except during World War II, when the Alpha Phi sorority took on the duty. John B. Churchill '59 was the brotherhood's pledge master when he was studying at SU. Back then, the fraternity had about 50 members. Despite being a psychology major, Churchill played piano by ear and taught numerous brothers how to ring the chimes. “All the pledges had the assignment to play

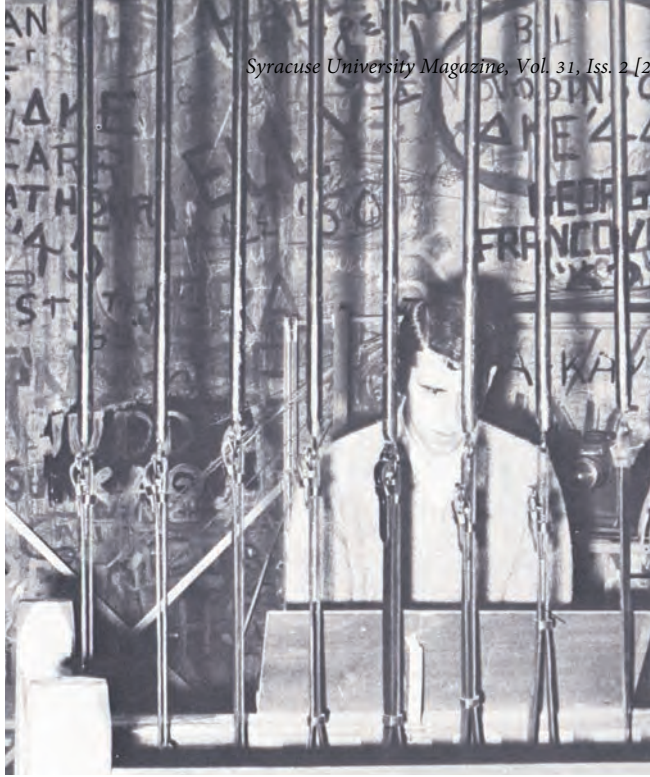
the bells at one time or another,” he says. “The playing of the bells was fun because you had a variety of simple tunes you could ring. But the bells were heavy, so you really had to work hard to get them to function.”

In their century and a quarter of history, the Crouse Chimes have seldom been silent. They stopped ringing in 1981-82 for repairs and when the Delta Kappa Epsilon brothers stepped down as official bell keepers a few years later. Through tradition, the chimes have laced a bond between Crouse College and the rest of the campus. “The chimes and the bell tower are a constant source of fascination and delight for those who visit Crouse College and one of the reasons I love working in the building,” says Ann Clarke, dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts. “But whether the chimes ring in times of joy or sadness, generations of students and alumni will forever remember them as part of their Syracuse University experience.”

Like an old rock, the inner walls of the Crouse tower have layers of history, represented through the graffiti and signatures of those who played the chimes. Legend says that the late radio and television personality Dick Clark '51, a Delta Kappa Epsilon brother, etched his name on the surface. For the past 20-something years, an old, yellowed notebook has kept record of all visitors to the tower. One of the most recent names is Rebekah Timerman '17, a music industry major who joined the Chimesmasters this spring. Timerman remembers her first experience ringing the bells as nerve-racking. “It was absolutely terrifying,” she says. “I was really worried that people were listening and they would think it was terrible.”

New members of the society play the chimes accompanied by another Chimesmaster during their first semester as bell ringers. “You're scheduled with some-

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one else every time," says Timerman, who also plays the clarinet. Timerman joined the Chimesmasters with her Setnor School friend Jesse Wilhelm '17, so they usually went up the tower together in the spring.

As a Chimesmaster, one of Timerman's responsibilities is adding two songs every month to the ever-growing collection of bell-arranged tunes the society keeps. For example, she's arranged "Call Me in the Afternoon" by Half Moon Run and "Say Something" by A Great Big World. As a personal trademark, each Chimesmaster also plays a unique five-note rhythm during every bell-

ringing session. "We play the 'Westminster Quarters' first, just to mark what hour it is, and then we play our rhythms, so if there happens to be a Chimesmaster who's listening they can know who it is," Timerman says.

Alex Ganes, the chair of the Chimesmasters, was Timerman's gateway into the organization. Working as a teaching assistant in an ear training course, Ganes saw talent in Timerman and Wilhelm and took them up the Crouse tower at the end of the fall semester to show them around. "I just happened to be at the right place at the right time," Timerman says. How Ganes became involved with the group as a first-year student was serendipitous, too. It all started when he accidentally heard an across-the-hallway conversation between two members of the society. "I just heard two people whispering 'Chimesmasters,' and I knew it was my moment," he says. Ganes tries to keep that aura of mystery around the society he felt when he entered SU. "Some people think it's automated, some people think the piano tuner does it," Ganes says. "It's interesting. It's like, 'Who's ringing the bells?' That's the mystery of it."

For Timerman, the new Chimesmaster, the beauty of anonymously sharing a song that echoes across the Hill lies in knowing that she's giving listeners a soundtrack to their day. "I like the idea that I'm playing," she says, "and I can do something for the community, but they don't know it's me." <<

To play, bell ringers push levers connected by cables to the bells, as demonstrated by Walter Pfeiffer (foreground) and Jim Potts G'69.

