



Bells of Dubuque

Concert will showcase 7 downtown churches
by MARY NEVANS-PEDERSON

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Dubuque -- For a full hour Sunday, Dubuque's

downtown will ring with the pealing of scores of church bells in a concert written by a popular Iowa musician.

Patrick Hazell, of Washington, Iowa, has done this before - in his hometown of Burlington, Iowa, and in Izhevsk, Russia. Seeking another Iowa site for a bell concert, he found dubuque to be perfect.

"You've got to have a number of churches (or other buildings with bells) in close proximity and having them all sit in a valley is even better," said Hazell, 58, who has performed live blues and honky tonk music across the Midwest for 43 years.

Earlier this year, Hazell scouted out which churches had bell towers. Of those he approached, seven congregations agreed to be part of the 7 p.m. concert. Hazell then tested all the bells in each church, cataloging the notes each play and the length of each toll. He took the information back to his studio and created an hourlong concert. Two ringers will be assigned to each church Sunday.

"I have always liked bells," Hazell said. "Most people don't realize bells have overtones that don't start showing until they are played for a length of time. When there are multiple bells playing, a synergy happens and a harmonic interplay beyond the individual notes."

At St. Raphael Cathedral, Sister Ruth Jackson, SVM, pushed switches to ring the church bells as Hazell matched the notes on his harmonica.

"I'm excited about this connecting of the downtown churches for something of beauty and inspiration," Jackson said.

Tim LoBianco, an ordained deacon who serves as pastoral administrator at both St. Mary and St. Patrick Catholic churches, called Hazell's project "very creative." "Bells have always been used to call us to something important - to worship or to some emergency. It is wonderful to use them to create music," LoBianco said.

The 1913 chime with 13 bells at St. Luke's United Methodist Church is played for 10 minutes before each worship service and for some special occasions. Nancy Woodin, St. Luke's music coordinator, is thrilled that her church will be part of the concert. "It's not often that churches get to work together," she said.

The single bell at First Congregational United Church of Christ will peal in time to Hazell's music, said the Rev. Nancy Bickel, co-pastor. "Mainline Protestant churches have always celebrated music and encouraged creativity and this sounds like an innovative project," she said.

Bells: 2 ringers will be at each church
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The Rev. Victor St. George, pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran Church, thinks the concert, although a secular event, "will uplift people and make them think about their relationship with God." The church's bell is rung monthly.

The three bells at St. John's Lutheran Church also are still rung by hand. Pastor Steve Mayring plans to invite the church's neighbors over to listen to the concert outside the church.

"This is a testament to the vitality of Dubuque's downtown, that it is still alive and its churches are still active," he said.

Hazell hopes the weather cooperates for Sunday's concert. Windy conditions would be the worst, he said.

To listen to the concert, Hazell suggests getting away from traffic sounds. Hazell plans to pick a spot on one of the bluffs overlooking downtown.

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