

Description of artwork
Hack the Bells
Tom Loughlin

During my time as a U.C. Berkeley graduate student, I remember listening for the carillon when I was on campus during the day. The music tended to be either beautiful or whimsical (or both). It always had an impact on my mood, and frequently prompted conversation with people around me. It may be the only music today that the entire U.C. Berkeley community hears collectively.

Although students now use technologies that their 1914 predecessors could scarcely have imagined, they still hear the bells ringing throughout the campus, and they are still young people committed to intellectual and social engagement. The words that Professor Flag gave to the first bells surely remain true:

*We ring, we chime, we toll,
Lend ye the silent part.
Some answer in the heart,
Some echo in the soul.*

I propose to hack the Campanile's bells in a way that will explore old and new technologies and how they might facilitate or undermine social connection on the U.C. Berkeley campus.

Description of the proposed piece

I would like to invite U.C. Berkeley community members to participate in a campus-wide sound art piece involving individuals' smart phones and the Campanile's bells. For a week in advance of the piece, I will publicize the event through campus radio, social media, and other means.

As the appointed hour approaches, participants will use their smart phones to access an *a capella* version of the Beach Boys' song "God Only Knows" on Youtube. When it is time, the carillon will begin to play the instrumental introduction to the song (perhaps with French horn accompaniment). As the familiar introduction ends, participants will press play on their smart phones, attempting to sync the vocals on their phones with the instrumental part being played by the carillon.

Of course the timing won't be perfect. I envision clusters of participants – perhaps classrooms full of students – listening as multiple smart phones play the vocals slightly out of sync with each other and with the Campanile's bells. Because of the structure of the song, every part of the music harmonizes with the surrounding elements. So while the resulting sound might be echoed and haunting, it will not be disharmonious. And every location within earshot of the Campanile will feature a different version of the piece, depending on how many participants with smart phones are in that spot, the volume of each smart phone, the timing of the playback, and the natural acoustics of the location.

Participants will be invited to document the piece and share it through social media using a distinctive hashtag. So shortly after the end of the piece, Instagram, Facebook and other sites might erupt in a flurry of videos and/or photographs. For anyone who doesn't experience the piece directly, this collective documentation will be the only way they can get a sense of what it was.

To assist your evaluation of this proposal, I invite you to get a feel for the piece in one (or more) of the following ways:

1. Create the piece yourself

If you are in a group where three or more people have smart phones that can access Youtube, please search "SFAIemergency" on Youtube (with no space between the words). (SFAI stands for San Francisco Art Institute.) You will see a video entitled "God." Please attempt to have everyone start the video at the same time. Don't worry if the timing is off – that's part of the piece.

2. Listen to a simulation through headphones

I have submitted a music file illustrating how the piece might sound. Listening to the file with headphones is the best way to experience a simulation of the kinds of spatial effects that will result from several nearby phones playing the Beach Boys' vocals.

3. Listen to a simulation over speakers

Listening to the submitted file over speakers in a small group won't capture the spatial effects of the piece, but it might be a better simulation of the social dynamic that the piece might evoke.

Thank you for your consideration of my proposal.