

# Call to Prayer

---

Anyone who has spent any time in an Islamic city would be well aware of the charm that is created by the Call to Prayer that echoes out five times a day from the many minarets. The ringing of bells has a similar charm in the Christian world. As a child I spent some time in a small town in Germany where the air seemed to be constantly filled with the sound of the Catholic and the Protestant church bells. In Melbourne the bells of St Pauls Cathedral manage to assert themselves above the noise of the trams and the traffic.

The idea I had in mind while writing “Call to Prayer” for the Federation Bells was one of calling people together to appreciate the world they live in, regardless of their beliefs or origins. I hope as people stand and listen to the Islamic and Christian (and perhaps a touch of gamelan) themes on Aboriginal ground they will feel a sense of oneness and take delight in their diversity and marvel at their beautiful surroundings.

I would have liked to have included sounds from other religions but I have to concede that I would have been stretching my skills a little too far.

Not all of the composition is overtly religious. In some parts I was just having lots of fun exploring textures and effects. Ideally I imagine that the listeners will stand somewhere amongst the Bells and be constantly surprised with the sounds going on around them. This is one of the things that makes the Federation Bells so unique. When listening to a band or an orchestra, unless you are a performer, the sound comes from one direction or completely fills the room. With the Bells the audience can be right amongst the music.

## About John Coutts

I am a mechanical engineer living in Melbourne, having worked in mechanical design, robots, software and control systems.

Music has always been a big part of my life. I learnt clarinet at Ballarat Grammar which had an excellent music school and played in the concert band.

I developed a passion for composition and for a while wrote mainly clarinet music which I recorded on a 4-track cassette recorder. When I discovered computers and midi a whole new world opened up. In the privacy of my bedroom I wrote a lot of music and in the process developed a sense of what works and what doesn't.

Another passion of mine is alternative tuning systems. I became fascinated in the mathematics of tuning and eventually wrote a program for writing music in any tuning system I can dream up.

In about 2012 I first attempted to compose for the Federation Bells. Like any instrument it takes a while to learn. It has its idiosyncrasies and charm. I feel that the range of compositional, computer and perhaps engineering skills have set me up well to write for the Bells.

## About Winning

It's very exciting to win the competition. It's also very exciting just to hear my own composition resounding through Birrarung Marr. This is one of the great things about the Bells. Anyone can compose and hear the results of their work in a public arena, even an engineer. It's nice to think that throughout the year passers-by will often be drawn in and enjoy, maybe even be enthralled by "Call to Prayer" or any other of the competition entries. But all I have done is create a string of bytes to drive the Bells. I am enormously grateful to the people who conceptualised and built the instrument. They are my silent partners. Also the Melbourne City Council has to be commended for continuing to promote the Federation Bells and nurture the sounds of Melbourne.