SONATA FOR CARILLON........................... Robert Moore (born 1921)
(1957) Retrospection
Passacaille
Frolic

Robert Moore, now retired, was active for many years as an organist in Oklahoma City. He wrote several compositions for organ and for choir, and in addition wrote two carillon compositions for his friend and colleague, James McGaughy, organist and carillonneur at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Oklahoma City. The first, Toccata for 42 Bells (the size of the carillon at Westminster) is a well-established staple in the repertoire of American carillonneurs. Lesser-known is the second, larger work, this three-movement Sonata.

As the composer commented, the first movement, Retrospection, is “historic” in nature, and therefore uses not only the traditional sonata form, but also features strong open fourths and fifths. After a free flourish serves as an introduction (which the composer likens to a medieval figure beating with a hammer in each hand), the movement commences in a modified classical sonata form. A bold first (“A”) theme is introduced, followed by a second, gentler (“B”) theme in a contrasting but related key. (The second theme is recognizable here as it is confined to higher bells.) The presentation (exposition) of the two themes is followed by a short but sophisticated development of the first theme. Fragments of the theme are tossed around in a three-voice texture, surrounded by various accompanimental figurations. In a “typical” classical sonata form, the next section would be a recapitulation, in which the two main themes are reprised, but remaining in the same key, usually leading to the conclusion of the piece. In this case, the return of the “A” theme is straightforward
enough. The “B” theme is presented in a much bolder form, in yet another contrasting key, followed by another development section, with the theme presented in the bass range under a “toccata” figuration (rapid patterns of accompanying notes) in the higher range. Finally, an expanded treatment of the flourish that opened the movement returns for a powerful conclusion.

A Passacaille (or Passacaglia) is a set of variations on a theme that is repeated over and over, usually in the bass, with the actual variations happening mostly in the accompaniment. Moore’s treatment of the form is freer. The composer chose the French form of the title for this movement, as he views it as being in a French impressionistic style. The rather jagged theme is presented plainly at the beginning, but for several subsequent presentations, the notes are changed, with only the rhythm of the theme being relatively constant. One accompanimental figuration that appears early in the movement (with the rhythm long–short–short–long–long) is later developed to a dramatic buildup, leading to a striking presentation of the original theme in arpeggios and octaves. This quickly gives way to a softer, straightforward presentation of the theme, leading to a beguiling, intimate conclusion.

Frolic is written in rondo form, where a recurring theme alternates with contrasting themes along the way (ABACA). It has the character of a jaunty rhythmic dance, in the manner of many Dutch carillon sonatas and suites. The composer remarks that it is no ballet, but rather a bucolic, rustic harvest dance, with heavy “country” feet. The percussive open fifths are even more prevalent here than in the first movement. The “A” sections are in three parts, always ending with the lively main theme moving to the bass range. The “B” section involves slower, rich chords preceded by a quick pedal note at each change of harmony. The “C” section grows more naturally out of the lively 6/8 time figurations of the “A” section, but with some dramatic key shifts and with the actual theme from the “A” section absent. In the final appearance of “A,” the theme is expanded with additional, quite dramatic figurations. The effect is powerful and memorable.

ADAGIO, FOR HARPSICHORD .................. Joseph–Hector Fiocco (Transcribed by Wendell Westcott) (1703–1741)

Fiocco was a noted choirmaster and harpsichordist who lived and worked in Antwerp and in his native Brussels (Belgium). This piece, from his Suite No. 1 for harpsichord, is one of many Fiocco pieces which have been transcribed for carillon, in this case by the former carillonneur of Michigan State University. This piece beautifully displays the way in which the carillon can put across a musical phrase!

TOCCATINA: SILVER BELLS ........................ Wendell Westcott
Wendell Westcott served for nearly forty years as carillonneur of Michigan State University. As an arranger of music for carillon performance, he was very prolific. He also wrote a few compositions for the instrument. Westcott served as the dedication recitalist for most of the new carillons installed in the United States by the Petit & Fritsen bellfoundry in The Netherlands. In 1960, he was called upon to play the dedication recital of the immense 77-bell Petit and Fritsen carillon at Kirk-in-the-Hills Presbyterian Church, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. (That instrument has still never been surpassed in number of bells.) Naturally, Westcott wanted to take full advantage of the resources offered by that mammoth instrument, so he wrote this little piece to use the top octaves of the Kirk carillon. It’s a short “trifle,” but a delightful one, and it lends itself admirably to performances on a wide range of instruments. Here, it provides a perfect vehicle for the fifth octave of bells.

John Courter served as Professor of Music and College Organist at Berea College, Berea, Kentucky, from 1971 until his retirement in 2007. The college installed a carillon in 2002, and he then became College Carillonneur there as well, and he continued in that capacity until his untimely death. He initially studied carillon with Wendell Westcott during his student years at Michigan State University. He also studied in a master class with Staf Nees (director of the Royal Carillon School in Mechelen, Belgium) there in 1961. Courter later studied at the Netherlands Carillon School, earning the “Practical Diploma” in 1988 and the Performing Artist’s Diploma in 1996. He also had impressive credentials as a concert organist. He twice was a prize-winner in the Carillon Composition Competition organized by The Guild of Carillonneurs in North America, and by the end of his life, he had risen to the position of being the foremost composer for carillon in the US, with an excellent following worldwide.

Suite No. 4, quite possibly the last work he completed for carillon, was commissioned by Grand Valley State University, which has carillons on its campuses in Allendale and Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The opening movement, Celebration, passes through many moods right from the start. A series of contrasting themes are presented and developed somewhat, suggestive of a sonata form but freer in structure. The first of those themes returns in the final section, bringing the work to an appropriately joyous close. The second movement, Chanson triste (Sad Song – sounds a little better in the French), is a slowish, waltz-like piece, with the main theme,
though somewhat songlike, being quite chromatic. A contrasting middle section is a bit more animated, with a sweeter melody in a major key. After the return of the first theme, the final section features a brilliant flourish that runs up to the higher ranges of the carillon and back. The final movement, *Toccata festiva*, is in a cheerful major sonority again. Both the melody and the accompanying figuration at the beginning section are predominantly pentatonic (the same scale one would arrive at by playing only on the black keys of a piano). A second theme, somewhat jaunty in its rhythm, serves as an effective foil to the first section. In the course of that section, several modes are explored (major key sonorities, with slight adjustments to certain notes). The return of the opening section brings the movement, and the *Suite* overall, to an appropriately bright conclusion.

**ENGELS NACHTEGAELTJE** .......................... Jacob van Eyck (ca. 1590–1657)

Jacob van Eyck was the renowned blind carillonneur of the city of Utrecht, The Netherlands. Sought after as a teacher and as an expert on bells, he was famous for his keen sense of hearing; he collaborated with the Hemony brothers in their development of the first truly well-tuned carillons. (Less than a decade after van Eyck’s death, the Hemonys installed two carillons in Utrecht, which are still two of the finest historic carillons in the world.) Van Eyck supplemented his income further with frequent performances on the recorder, at which he was also highly skilled. He also published two volumes of pieces for the recorder, entitled *Der Fluyten Lust-hof* (*The Pleasure Garden of Flutes*), which were successful enough to be published in three different editions within his lifetime. The enduring appeal of these pieces is underscored by the fact that several modern editions are currently available. Most of the pieces in these collections were variations on psalm tunes (Dutch Reformed hymns) and popular melodies of the day. It stands to reason that van Eyck would have played many of these pieces on the carillon as well. (At the time, there was no written literature for the carillon.) The melody of *Engels Nachtegaeltje* (*Little English Nightingale*) is of English origin, probably an instrumental tune initially, but later to set to words as well. It was arranged for keyboard, lute, cittern, violin, and numerous other instruments of the time, but it was van Eyck’s setting that brought it to such a high point of virtuosity. In typical Baroque variation style, each variation features faster note values than the previous one, making it increasingly showy and challenging. The rapid repeated notes, especially in the last variation, are obviously an imitation of lively birdsong. Since this piece was written for a single-line instrument, harmonies are supplied by the figuration, in the same manner as with music for unaccompanied violin. In this performance, I am
supplementing van Eyck’s variations with some additional harmony, essentially improvised.

A SUMMER’S NIGHT ................. John Pozdro & John Gouwens
(completed 2003)

For over four decades, John Pozdro taught in the Department of Music Theory and Composition at the University of Kansas, which he chaired for many years. With the fine carillon at Kansas and the outstanding carillonneurs who held forth on it during his tenure, he was inspired to write several fine compositions for this instrument, in addition to many superb pieces he has written for other musical media. Pozdro’s carillon compositions earned such respect in the profession that he was the first composer to be commissioned twice by The Guild of Carillonneurs in North America.

This particular piece had a rather unique genesis. Dr. Pozdro and I had worked together on several occasions, notably on pieces commissioned by The Guild of Carillonneurs in North America; I had also been in contact with him several times over the years regarding aspects of his carillon pieces. He once expressed an interest in writing a piece for me, and not long thereafter, I approached him about the possibility of my commissioning one from him personally. Over a period of time, he sent me many pages of sketches, and I was very enthusiastic about what he was doing. For personal reasons, however, it seemed for awhile as though the piece would not be completed. I then asked him in the fall of 2003 if he would be amenable to my trying to assemble a piece from the best musical ideas in his drafts; he enthusiastically agreed. He had sketched several music ideas representing various aspects of a night scene, and I used most of them, at times extending some ideas a bit (generally in his musical language). The various musical representations, therefore, follow his original ideas and concept. Soon we were taking turns “tweaking” it, and quite often, we had surprisingly similar reactions to the developing piece. Through this highly unusual (and totally congenial!) collaboration, the two of us created a piece with which we were both delighted!

Of special note in this piece is the use at several points of a variation of the so-called “mystic chord” created by Russian pianist-composer Alexander Scriabin. The chord appears both as bright, high-pitched arpeggios and with the notes redistributed to form a powerfully sonorous block chord. A Summer’s Night contains musical representations of stars, a single shooting star, a meteor shower, a “dance of Venus,” gathering clouds and a thunderclap, various appearances of the moon, and finally, a comet disappearing into the distance with a flicker.
Arthur Meulemans was a distinguished conductor and composer, in Belgium. In 1942, after serving for twelve years as music director and conductor for the Belgian Radio Symphony Orchestra (the first to hold that position), he devoted himself exclusively to composition. He wrote large amounts of music, including fifteen symphonies and numerous concerti, and all of these reflect the influence of French impressionistic music. Through his familiarity with the carillon tradition in Mechelen, center of the carillon art at the time, Meulemans was inspired to write nine works for carillon, some of which are major landmarks in the repertoire. He introduced a daring new idiom to carillon music, challenging the capabilities of the performer and the instrument. Many of his carillon compositions are also captivating listening as well.

Staf Nees, director of the carillon school at Mechelen, encouraged Meulemans to write a piece depicting “Moonlight over Saint Rombouts’ Tower.” (Saint Rombouts’ is the cathedral whose formidable carillon is the centre of Belgian carillon activity.) The resulting work, De Kathedraal (in its Flemish spelling), is perhaps the best-known and most beautiful of all his carillon compositions. (*Diptych* simply means a work in two movements.) *Moonlit Night* (Maannacht) is one of the most ethereal pieces ever written for the carillon. Meulemans uses tremolandi and chromatic scale figures, common to much Belgian carillon music, in a whole new way, creating effects of a unique gossamer delicacy. *Sunday Morning in the Summer* (Zondagmorgen in de Zomer) shows the rhythmic drive and energy common to many of Meulemans’s compositions. A dramatic foil to the first movement, it evokes a brilliant, festive atmosphere, with many figurations depicting the ringing of nearby church bells, at times overshadowed by the great bells of Saint Rombouts. With this work, Meulemans placed unprecedented demands on the responsiveness of the carillon, thus playing an important role in the development of the carillon and the skills of those who play it.

*Program notes by John Gouwens*
ABOUT THE CARILLONNEUR

John Gouwens has served as Organist and Carillonneur of The Culver Academies since the fall of 1980. In 1989–90 and again from 1996 to 2004, he also served as Choir Director of The Academies. A former student of Albert Gerken, he studied carillon at Indiana University, The University of Michigan, and The University of Kansas, and holds music degrees from the latter two schools. He has been a featured recitalist and lecturer at ten congresses of the Guild of Carillonneurs in North America, and hosted the 1985 and 2004 congresses at Culver. In the fall of 2002, he was appointed Visiting Lecturer in Carillon at Ball State University, offering recitals and instruction as requested by the University.

Gouwens has toured extensively, playing recitals throughout the United States and Canada, also making six European concert tours, most recently in 2005.

In the Guild of Carillonneurs in North America, Mr. Gouwens has served for many years as chairman of the Composition Committee, which sponsors composition competitions and commissions new carillon compositions. He also has served for several years on the Music Publications and Student Examinations committees. He has several competition honors to his credit in carillon, improvisation (on carillon), composition, and organ performance. His carillon compositions are published by the GCNA, by American Carillon Music Editions, and by the Royal Carillon School of Mechelen, Belgium. In 2003, he wrote the first American carillon teaching book (and presently the only one available worldwide), Playing the Carillon: An Introductory Method, published by The Guild of Carillonneurs in North America, now in its third printing.