The Secret Behind Mead Chapel’s Bells

Have you ever wondered why every Friday evening you can hear Mead Chapel’s bells ringing? Maybe you haven’t, but I certainly have! I’d always wonder, who was this mysterious person who would come every Friday to ring the bells. Every Friday, I’d explore the insides of the chapel to no avail, and it seemed that no one seemed to know who it was.

However, this last Sunday noon I finally got the chance to meet the person at the center of this mystery, George Matthew Jr, and I learned that the bells that we can hear every Friday are actually part of an instrument called a carillon. Mr. Matthew is the Carillonneur for both Middlebury College and Norwich University, and has been playing the carillon for well over sixty years. He led me to a secret door on the second floor (unsurprising for a building as old as Mead Chapel), that lead to where the carillon and its bells are.
As a student at the Chinese school, I’m well aware that music is often called the universal language, but as someone who’s never been too into music and musical instruments, I never put much stock into that common saying. However, hearing Mr. Matthew play the carillon was both a solemn and lively experience that definitely allowed me to understand the meaning behind this saying. He described a magical scene to me he saw once of the carillon playing at night in Belgium when people are celebrating Christmas and you can see all the stars, and I think the due to its history and distinct sound, that scene probably more than anything else gives a good idea as to what the music of the carillon evokes. No matter where you are in the world, as clichéd as it sounds, music really does appear to transcend borders, and that is the ideal I figure we hear at the Chinese school should attempt to follow its footsteps in building bridges.

And on that note, despite the fact that most of them are found in North America and Europe, Mr. Matthew stated that the popularity of carillons has been rising around the world in the last few decades, and actually, this year China finally got its first carillon in Beijing. Who knows, perhaps once of you will be lucky enough to play it some day?