

PRESS RELEASE

New music for church bells to ring in the New Year of the UK 2012 Olympics

The year of the UK 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games will open with the ringing out of wild bells thanks to a new piece of music by composer Howard Skempton. Bellringers across the country will ring in the New Year with the piece, *Five Rings Triples*, supported by The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, which has commissioned the piece as part of the Cultural Olympiad's 'New Music 20x12' programme.

Howard Skempton, an experienced composer (perhaps best known for *Lento*, his Proms piece for the BBC Symphony Orchestra), is fascinated by the history and challenges of writing for church bells, and is working closely with ringers near his home in Leamington Spa to ensure that his composition can be performed at as many churches as possible across the UK.

Describing his approach, Skempton said: "Bells are both beguiling and mechanical. Their sound is evocative and yet bell-ringing itself seems more like a workout than a musical performance. My aim from the outset would be to honour a centuries-old tradition."

Bells have fascinated artists down the ages, from Tarkovsky to Martin Creed, Gavin Bryars and Brian Eno. For this commission, Skempton will work with the grain of the method ringing tradition, which originated in English church towers in the 17th century, but can now also be found in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Method ringing defines the rules for the sequence in which bells are rung, rather than offering a set tune, and this may be the first composition for church bells to adopt the principles whilst breaking the rules in subtle ways for new possibilities to emerge.

Kate Flavell, President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, said "I am very excited at this new type of opportunity for ringing. This is an invitation to the world to celebrate with us the art of bell ringing, one of the UK's cultural treasures. We

intend to ring this piece whenever possible during 2012, particularly in connecting with any Olympic celebrations, including during the torch relay in the 70 days before the Opening ceremony.”

The first performances will form part of the celebrations at the turn of the New Year 2012, with other performances up and down the country during the Olympic year, including in Birmingham on 6 May, in Chester on 2 June (marking the Queen’s Jubilee), opening Spitalfields Festival on 8 June, and at London’s Southbank Centre on 15 July alongside other music written for the New Music 20x12 programme. It will be broadcast by BBC Radio 3, and will be released on CD by Universal during 2012.

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For more information about the project and for interviews, please contact Ed McKeon at Third Ear on 07737 228006 / ed.mckeon@thirdear.co.uk

Photos are available upon request. Please contact Ed McKeon at Third Ear on 07737 228006 / ed.mckeon@thirdear.co.uk

Note to editors:

Howard Skempton, composer of the new work, and Kate Flavell, President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, may be available for interview. Please contact Third Ear.

Howard Skempton studied in London with Cornelius Cardew from 1967, discovering a musical language of subtle simplicity. He has forged his own path, producing more than 300 works – many pieces being miniatures for solo piano or accordion, which he calls "the central nervous system" of his work. Many of his compositions have been recorded, including 11 discs on NMC and several more on Sony Classical and Delphian Records, with performers as wide ranging as the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BCMG, pianist John Tilbury, Ensemble Bash, Noszferatu and vocal group Exaudi. The title of the new piece is ***Five Rings Triples***, associating the five rings of the Olympic Games symbol with the sets of five repeated blows of the treble (lightest) bell and with ‘triples’, the change ringing term for the seven bells performing the musical pattern.

The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers oversees and promotes all new compositions submitted for publication in *The Ringing World*. It has an experienced compositions committee that promotes and encourages the art of composition for bells, publishes collections, and checks and reviews compositions for wider dissemination. The project will raise awareness of Britain’s bell-ringing tradition and highlight how composers can work within this framework. It will leave a distinctive new piece that rings across the country and internationally can perform. Above all, the call to reflection, and to celebrate will ring in people’s imaginations for years to come. New Music production company Third Ear

