at USCDornsife, we see bells differently.
We at USC Dornsife are grateful for diverse traditions and the best of friends.

During the holiday season, the sound of bells reminds us of both — they call us together for celebrations of people and ideas that chime with creativity.

I hope you’ll join us in exploring bells from many different perspectives.

Wishing you the best for a happy and healthy new year!

Amber D. Miller
Dean of USC Dornsife
Anna H. Bing Dean’s Chair

Along U.S. Route 101 in California, cast metal bells hang from shepherd’s staffs placed periodically along the roadside. Historians note that the route from San Diego to Sonoma traced El Camino Real — “The Royal Road” or “The King’s Highway” — connecting the state’s 21 missions, each a day apart by horseback. The bells were erected at the turn of the 19th century to commemorate Golden State history and are now maintained by the California Department of Transportation.
When the Victory Bell kept by the winner of the USC-UCLA rivalry game is rung, it moves in a circular motion. Physicists know that the bell produces several modes of vibration that push molecules in the air back and forth, forming sound waves. The bell's tonal quality depends both on the listener's location and on the amount of time that has elapsed since it was struck.

Embraced by the 1960s hippie counter-culture of which they became a symbol, and worn by flamboyant rock stars like Jimi Hendrix and David Bowie, groovy bell-bottoms had become the height of mainstream fashion by the 1970s. The style, however, originally flared 150 years earlier when American sailors adopted the practical, bell-shaped pants because they could be rolled up, allowing the wearer to work in bare feet.

Any discovery of a 5th-century bell krater gets the attention of archaeologists and art historians. Ancient Greeks used these terracotta vessels to dilute wine with water. Ancient writers note that it was important to prescribe the right ratio of alcohol for different social occasions: 1:3 (wine to water) for long conversations and symposia; 1:2 for parties and celebration; and 1:1 for "injudicious evenings in the service of Aphrodite."

The bell curve represents the normal—or Gaussian—distribution of any set of random data points, such as a large number of coin tosses. Although the shape's link to probability statistics was first uncovered by French mathematician Abraham de Moivre, it was later named after German mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss, an outcome few statisticians could have predicted.

From Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*, references to bells have long played a significant role in literature. Arguably the best-known example is Victor Hugo's 1831 novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, the story of outcast Quasimodo, who as the bell-ringer of Notre Dame finds comfort in the cathedral bells— even though they are the cause of his deafness.
The bell jelly is a small, delicate marine organism related to jelly fish that thrives in calm, coastal waters, feeding primarily on plankton and other small creatures as it moves gently from sea floor to surface and back again. Not a true jelly fish, the bell jelly is actually a hydromedusa, a name that any classics enthusiast should instantly recognize as a reference to the infamous snake-haired Gorgon of Greek mythology, Medusa.

First introduced into the Christian Church in AD 400 by Paulinus of Nola, the use of bells in calling the faithful to worship had become widespread in Europe by the early Middle Ages. Buddhist monks and nuns have used bells as part of their daily meditation practices since ancient times. Bells also play an important role in Hindu culture where their sound is considered auspicious, welcoming divinity and dispelling evil.

As society evolved, bells challenged the authority of nature to organize time. Native Americans arose at sunrise and worked according to nature’s schedule, until mission bells brought the rigid structure of clock time. When industrialization moved people from farms to factories in the 1800s, labor historians say, bells signaled the shift from working for oneself to working on someone else’s schedule.