

# PITCHMAN

JEFF MILLER (2)



**Musician, tour guide, historian, promoter –** Lyle Anderson does it all for the rare instrument he loves.

## By Jenny Price '96

On a campus full of professors and instructors charged with educating thousands of students, Lyle Anderson '68, MMusic'77 is quick to say he's not a teacher.

But that's not exactly true.

"Are you going to ring that bell?" urges a third-grader, whose voice emerges from a buzzing mass of fidgety limbs as Anderson explains the historical significance of the Wisconsin Sesqui-centennial Bell housed on the ground floor of the Memorial Carillon Tower on Observatory Drive.

"Do we really have to go up more stairs?" sighs another as Anderson guides students from Madison's Marquette Elementary School along a metal staircase to the top, where eye-popping views of Lake Mendota and Picnic Point await.

"It's part of the adventure," Anderson says as he continues leading the children up to see the carillon's fifty-six bells. He plays them on what resembles a church organ, with a keyboard and pedals connected by wires to individual clappers inside each of the bells, which range in size from fifteen to nearly seven thousand pounds. Most people aren't sure how the instrument works and assume that he is either swinging wildly from a rope or running from place to place to ring the bells, says Anderson, who marks his twenty-first year as university carillonneur this summer.

"I have any number of friends right now that I've known for years, but have never been to the tower, who I'm sure have a very peculiar conception of what it is [like] when you play," he says.

Anderson, who grew up on a farm near Abbotsford, Wisconsin, began learning to play the carillon while working toward an undergrad-

Gesturing to the bells above him, Lyle Anderson, university carillonneur, explains how the instrument works. A summer carillon concert series is scheduled for Sundays at 3 p.m., June 24-August 5, and Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., July 5-August 9.

uate degree in linguistics. He also studied the organ, and his teacher, Professor John W. Harvey, then the university's carillonneur, encouraged Anderson to pursue further instruction at the Netherlands Carillon School in Amersfoort.

"I didn't have any sort of intention of, 'Say — I'm going to be the carillonneur of this place one day.' It wasn't anything like that," Anderson says.

Eventually, he followed Harvey's advice after completing his master's in music history, spending a year in the Netherlands, and earning a diploma from the Carillon School in 1980 following a year abroad that cleaned out his savings account.

"Three-quarters of the way, Dad had to send me money, and I thought, 'Boy, how embarrassing is this for being in your mid-thirties,'" he says.

Anderson returned home and began working at a mix of jobs he still holds today, including his post as carillonneur, to which he was appointed in August 1986.

"Nobody makes a living at this — not much of a living — and he's got all of this stuff pieced together and it works really well," says David Johnson, who has known Anderson for fifteen years and plays carillon at House of Hope Presbyterian Church, in St. Paul, Minnesota. "He stays very busy and he moves around a lot."

For more than two decades, Anderson has worked for the State Climatology Office, which he currently manages, answering questions from the public about Wisconsin's climate. He also plays organ for two local churches and works on the production crew for the public radio quiz show *Whad'Ya Know?*

When it comes to the carillon, Anderson says he never saw the instrument as a life's goal or calling, or "any of those sort of high, idealistic, spiritualized things."

"All of these things for me just happily coexist," he says.

Anderson was an original cast member of *Whad'Ya Know?* when it went on the air in 1985, but first met host Michael Feldman '70 when he was in the audience of his Saturday morning show from the Club de Wash in Madison. "His hair and beard have turned white in the interim," Feldman says.

With patient guidance from Lyle Anderson, eager third-graders take turns at the carillon's keyboard, which, along with pedals, is connected by wires to clappers inside each of the bells.

Among other *Whad'Ya Know?* duties, Feldman says, Anderson writes the copy for "all of the prizes and stuff we give away ... which is pretty funny." He also occasionally appears on air to answer questions about weather and the French Renaissance, and he serves as the program's phone screener, "which means that he lets anybody on the air," Feldman says.

"He's never said that anyone cannot be on the air for any reason, which is just characteristic of Lyle," Feldman says. "He's very open — maybe not ideal for a screener."

Being open fits with Anderson's mission to show students how the carillon works. As the third-graders experience the rush of being next to the bells, some of them crouch down to peer through a small screen in the floor to watch him playing below. In the song's quiet moments, Anderson taps the keys firmly, but gently with closed fists, his feet tucked underneath the wooden bench. As the music on the page before him swells, his arms move more quickly and his feet join in to create more notes.

"That. Was. Awesome," one boy says as he descends the ladder stairway after Anderson finishes his mini-performance. Anderson rewards their enthusiasm with a chance to play. The half-dozen students clamber up the short staircase to the console to take their turns, resulting in a mash-up of bell sounds from their eager hands and feet.

"Everybody's listening to your lovely, random sounds," Anderson says before the group heads down the stairway in search of ice cream.



"It's fairly indestructible, fortunately," he says of the instrument after they've gone.

While Anderson has no official carillon students, he's opened the tower to those interested in learning, including Brooke Becker '08, a computer engineering major.

"I used to have classes up by the tower ... I heard it and I thought, 'Whoa, what is that?'" Becker says. After she sought out Anderson to learn more about playing the carillon, he gave her both a key to the building so she could work on her technique and the chance to perform on Wednesdays or Fridays when he is out of town.

With only 167 carillons in the United States, being part historian and part promoter is central to the job for the small group of people who play the instrument. That's a role Anderson assumes with ease, says Johnson, who has performed on UW-Madison's carillon.

"He takes people up into the tower after every recital, whether it's his own or someone else's, and he does extensive tours of the instrument," Johnson says. "When it's been my turn, I'm sitting downstairs just kind of relaxing, waiting to go have a beer. But I listen to what's going on, and he is teaching up there." 🍀

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Writer Jenny Price '96 joined the *On Wisconsin* staff this spring. Her background includes seven years as a reporter and editor for The Associated Press. She once skipped a political science discussion to tour the carillon tower.