

CARMINA REVEALED (PART 3)

GLOCKENSPIEL

Orff indicated 3 *Glockenspiele*. The conductor's score and the vocal score indicate exactly the same (remember that this is the only term that Orff wanted to remain in the original German and not in Italian. Please check my previous article).

Because of the writing, it seems like the composer had keyboard glockenspiels in mind, but using "regular" ones is totally fine.



Except for the usual discrepancies (articulation, dynamics, etc.), the glockenspiel part is acceptable edition wise. It features many delicate passages and solos, perfect for showing musicianship and a variety of colors and timbres.

The three glockenspiels are used together only in No. 24 (*Ave formosissima*). That includes, also, the final roll into No. 25. There is a beautiful tradition in Germany which consists in doubling the three glockenspiels part with altar/Sanctus bells.



That adds a very shimmering, sparkling and vibrant color to the part that I like very much and that I play every time I can. Conductors love it!

XYLOPHONE

Orff indicated 1 *Xylophon* in the manuscript. The Italian term *Xilofono* is used in both the conductor's and the vocal score, which is a correct, perfect translation. Be aware that he indicated *Kastenxylophon* in some of his later works ("Antigonae", for instance), referring to the "boxed" xylophone used in the Orff pedagogical method. It is not the case in "Carmina Burana", where a regular orchestral xylophone is asked for.

The xylophone part features the usual discrepancies with the score. That will be dealt with in a future book.

Check the final passage in No. 12 (*Olim lacus eram*), as those “double stops” can be tricky. They are much easier to play on a flat xylophone, with levelled “black” and “white” keys, so popular in central Europe.



That can be played using one stick in each hand, one-handed while holding two sticks, alternating both hands while holding two sticks in each one... There are quite a few ways to play that passage, but the *stringendo* and the *diminuendo* make it worth some practice!

BELLS

Orff indicated 3 *Glocken* in the manuscript. That was translated as 3 *Campane* in both the conductor's score and the vocal score.



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The translation into Italian is correct. The problem arises when translating *Glocken* and *Campane* into English, as “chimes” and “bells” will be used depending on what side of the pond you are in, but the important thing is that, however you name them, Orff was asking for church bells.

He wants them in No. 5 (*Ecce gratum*), where long and ringing tones are asked for. You can check the Belin Philharmonic playing church bells.

He also asks for *Röhrenglocken*, which are *Campane tubolari* in both the conductor's score and the vocal score, which is a perfect and literal translation: “tubular bells”.

He asks for tubular bells in No. 13 (*Ego sum abbas*, C-D) and No. 14 (*In taberna quando summus*, F).

The very clear indication asking for two different types of bells (*Glocken/Röhrenglocken* – bells/tubular bells) is an unequivocal sign that Orff specifically wanted that differentiation: church bells for the longer and “ringier” tones in No.5; tubular bells, easier to damp, for the more articulate and rhythmical passages in No. 13 and No. 14.

Glocken is church bells. Apart from the terms *Glocken* and *Röhrenglocken*, Orff also used the term *Platten Glocken* (bell plates) in No. 13 (this will be discussed in the next article). This demonstrates that the composer knew very well the different kinds of bells that he wanted in

the different numbers. So, simply "bells" indicates church ones. When Orff wants a different type of bells he indicates it (*Röhren* and *Platten*).

To me, the difference in timbre and character is worth the effort in trying to follow Orff's instructions. I know; getting real church bells can be hard and expensive, but I think it is worth it.

CYMBALS

Orff indicated *2 Paar Becken* in the manuscript. The conductor's score and the vocal score indicate *4 Piatti*.

The manuscript indicates "2 pairs of cymbals" but, as there is not a single indication in the whole work to double clashed cymbals and nothing is said about suspended cymbals, "2 pairs" is referring, quite obviously, to two different types of cymbals: clashed and suspended. That is corroborated by the later edition of the conductor's score and the vocal score: "Four cymbals", using pictograms for the clashed and the suspended.

This is one of the indications that can lead to confusion. We, of course, need two cymbals to clash them, but we only need one to play it suspended. The indication "2 pairs" in the manuscript is misleading because, if we are too literal (and too many percussionists like being too literal...), we may think that two pairs of two cymbals are needed but, in fact, Orff is telling us that he wants two types of cymbals: clashed and suspended.

That literality was embraced with joy by the Italian translator, who used "4 cymbals" instead of "2 pairs" (well, he/she was good at Maths). That last indication has no obscure or arcane meaning: we do not have to use 4 cymbals in "Carmina Burana"; we have to use clashed and suspended cymbals. Period. How many, yes, is up to us because we are performers and we choose between many options depending on the musical context. It is not that Orff specifically requested four cymbals. We must be intelligent and see beyond the mere instructions.


The manuscript is crystal-clear when it comes to indicate what cymbals are clashed and which are suspended. They are always PERFECTLY indicated using pictograms in their corresponding stave. A detailed list indicating which is which will be published in a future book.

Although not indicated in the part, the tradition is to play the two very soft cymbal strokes in No. 9 (*Reie*) using a *zischend* technique.



TAM-TAM

This indication is, together with the *Cymbel* one, the least understood because it got lost in translation and, because of that, it has led to an incorrect choice of instruments.

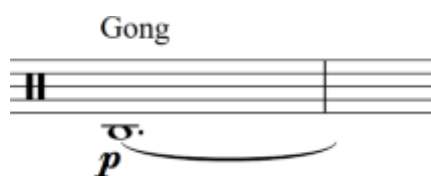
The manuscript states *1 Grosser Gong in*  *, 1 kleiner Gong (oder Glocken platten immer in n° 13).*

That translates as *1 larger gong in* ,  *1 smaller gong (or bells plates always in No. 13).*

This is where the translation got it utterly wrong, and tradition has done nothing but to dive deeper into the mistake.

The manuscript asks for a larger gong tuned to a low D. We know that, at that time, the terms “gong” and “tam-tam” were almost interchangeable, both meaning the same instrument. The thing is that a low D perfectly matches the harmony and doubles the low voices in the numbers where this instrument is requested (No. 1 and No. 25 -*O Fortuna*-; No. 12 -*Olim lacus eram*-; No. 14 -*In taberna quando summus*-).

The problem is that Orff was very inconsistent when writing for the larger gong/tam-tam in D. In No. 1, *O Fortuna*, he uses a low D, but preceded by a percussion clef, thus an undefined pitch.



When the bass drum makes its entrance, he writes it exactly one octave above (still using percussion clef). We obviously do not use a D-tuned bass drum. Was Orff maybe writing in such a way so that it was neat on the paper?



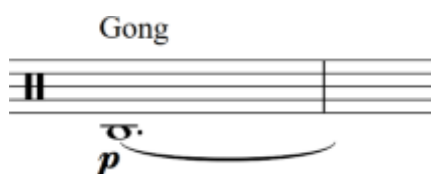
That percussion clef is disconcerting, but the low D surely fits the harmony. In No. 12 he writes the following:



This time he uses, indeed, a low clef, meaning a determinate pitch. But in No. 14 he goes back to a percussion clef:



In the final O Fortuna, he writes, again, a low D, but the undefinition is there, as he uses the percussion clef again:

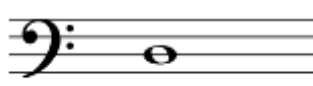


As you can see, Orff's writing is very inconsistent regarding the gong. Sometimes he uses a bass clef, sometimes a percussion cleff, not being positive about whether or not the gong/tam-tam should be of determinate pitch. Even the nomenclature is inconsistent, as he sometimes uses "Gong" and others "Grosser Gong".

We have to take into account that a low D tuned-gong is a very expensive instrument. It is not hard to imagine how difficult would have been in the 30s to get that instrument. We also must know that Orff specifically asked for nipple gongs in some of his later works ("Oedipus der Tyrann", *Javanisch Gongs*; "Antigona", Buckelgongs – "humpbackgongs"-).

Yes, these are later works ("Antigona" 1949, "Oedipus der Tyrann", 1951-1958). Maybe Orff knew of tuned gongs later in his career. That could be the reason why he was much more specific in the above-mentioned works. Being "Carmina Burana" his earliest success, he maybe was not familiar with tuned gongs yet. Maybe he was, but the difficulty of getting a low D made him more pragmatism and reconsider his requests. Who knows! It would be interesting to contact the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra (the one which premiered the work) and ask if they had a low D tuned gong available at that time.

The practice today is to use a large unpitched tam-tam. We will never positively know if Orff wanted a tuned gong, but I have an option for you... We can use a large unpitched tam-tam and, at the same time, strike a D-tuned gong to give that sense of pitch and to reinforce the harmony. I use the following D because it is the lowest D-tuned Thai gong that I own (I hope I owned one producing an octave lower!!):



So, knowledge is paramount to make informed musical decisions. You can use an unpitched large tam-tam, you can use the asked-for low D

gong or you can use a combination of a tam-tam and a D-tuned gong (the octave will depend on what is available). All of them are viable and valid to me, as Orff was not undoubtedly specific, and that means that the decision is on us, as he delegated for not being unequivocal. Be musical and do not be afraid of experimenting.

Regarding the *hoher Gong* (*higher gong*) asked for in the manuscript, it is only requested in No. 13 (*Ego sum abbas*). The list of instruments at the beginning of the manuscript indicates *1 kleiner Gong (oder Glocken platten immer in N^o 13)*; also the manuscript, at the beginning of No.13 features, to the left of the corresponding stave, *hoher Gong (ev. Mehrere & glockenplatten)*.

The former means *1 smaller gong (or bell plates always in No. 13)*; the latter means *higher gong (eventually more than one plus bell plates)*. As we can see, the manuscript itself offers inconsistent information (smaller/higher; only bell plates as a substitute versus bell plates plus several gongs as a substitute). The important thing is that, in No. 13, the main option for Orff is to use a smaller, higher gong. As an option, eventually (that is, under certain circumstances -and those circumstances are that a higher, smaller gong is not available or that more percussionists are available to play those many alternative instruments-), Orff offers a possible substitute (again, contradictory in the manuscript itself): bell plates (on the list of instruments at the beginning of the manuscript) or more than one smaller/higher gong PLUS bell plates as indicated at the beginning of No. 13, also in the manuscript. See that Orff wrongly writes the alternate instruments: *Glocken platten* (written in different ways both times; once separate, the other one all together), as the correct term is “Plattenglocken”. That reinforces my idea that, at that time, Orff was still not very familiar with certain percussion instruments (remember what we discussed above regarding the large gong).

Things get more complicated when those terms were translated into Italian. Whoever made the translation paid attention only to the word *glocken* from *Glocken platten*. As we already know, *glocken* means “bells”, *campane* in Italian, and that stuck for ever in No. 13. The problem is that *campane* (which was wrongly translated as singular –“campana”- instead of the correct plural) NEVER appears complete in the percussion score, which features the abbreviation *Camp*. In the conductor’s score and the vocal score, all the information regarding the higher/smaller gong vanished, and the information regarding the plates too, thus the word *Campana* is the only information available. The translation deprived us of vital information.

Note that what we now take for granted (ship’s bell) is INEXISTENT in any of the sources. Ship’s bell is NEVER mentioned in the manuscript, the conductor’s score, the vocal score or the percussion part. The indication *Campana* (singular, but it should be *Campane*, plural) is only a vague reminiscence of the original substitute *Glocken Platten* (which is plural). How did we get to this crazy point? Because the vital information in the manuscript was omitted and not well translated in the edition. The crucial point is that Orff wanted a higher/smaller gong in

No. 13, offering different options (bell plates) just in case that smaller/higher gong was not available.

The question arises again: is that a higher/smaller gong or a tam-tam? The manuscript uses a percussion clef:

The image shows a musical score for a percussion instrument. The staff is a five-line staff with a percussion clef (a stylized 'H' shape). Above the staff, the word 'Becken' is written. Below the staff, the text 'hoher Gong (ev. meherere & glockenplatten)' is written. A box labeled '91' is placed above the staff. The staff contains a series of notes, mostly eighth notes, with some rests. The notes are marked with a 'ff' (fortissimo) dynamic. The staff is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

That suggests an unpitched instrument, thus a tam-tam. Note that Orff never mentions what pitch that “gong” should be (contrary to what he does with the larger one), neither he specifies a pitch for the bell plates; that is irrelevant in my opinion, as the tubular bells already provide the C and D. So, the bell plates are only “noise makers” that reinforce the drunken and humoresque character of this number.

Let us try to put some order. The main instrument indicated by Orff in No. 13 is a higher/smaller tam-tam. Because he suggests using more than one, I would use a small chao gong (maybe 18” or 16”, but that is up to you) plus an opera gong (several is also valid), all played simultaneously by one player. Why an opera gong? Because I believe that the ascending/descending pitch (that is up to you) perfectly matches the “hangover” spirit of *Ego sum abbas*. Also, the richness of combining those two timbres contributes to the noisy character of this number.

You can do many things. It is up to you to use your imagination and musicality to get to a satisfactory musical solution, but remember that the now stablished ship’s bell option is INEXISTENT in any of the sources.

Play a small tam-tam/gong of any type, play two small gongs/tam-tams simultaneously, play even more holding two mallets in each hand, play a couple of gongs/tam-tams with one hand and a couple of plates with the other... Be creative and musical. The important thing is that the instruments should be small (as per Orff’s own indications) so they can be rhythmically precise and they are easy to damp at the end of each two-bar phrase.

Setting them using a frame is super convenient, as it facilitates playing (they do not swing like crazy) and damping.



CYMBEL

This is, no doubt, the most obscure indication in Orff's "Carmina Burana", but it is much easier than what it seems if we use logic and common

sense. The manuscript reads *1 Paar Cymbeln*.

First (and this is important), *Cymbel* is the former spelling of *Zymbel*. The latter is the one in use today. The term *Zymbel* narrows down the options and facilitates things (see again, how it seems that, in his early works, Orff was still not perfectly versed on percussion instruments).

There are several instruments known in German as Zymbel:

1.- In the European Middle Ages, rows of tuned bells struck with a hammer.



2.- Strings instruments like the harpsichord, the Hungarian cimbalom and the dulcimer.

3.- A register in organs. Also, the mechanism producing such effect register (*Zymbelstern*, the "Star Cymbal", consisting of rotating stars fitted with bells, jingles, chimes, cymbals, etc.).

4.- Very small and high pitch bells.

5.- Idiophones consisting of circular, bent metal plates, with *zymbel* being synonymous of "small cymbals".

It is quite obvious that our main suspect is candidate number 5.

A crucial clue is that Orff indicates *1 Paar* ("one pair"). That perfectly matches the definition, where *Zymbel* equals "small cymbals" (plural, a pair at least).

We may be tempted to assign the Zymbel to a pair of small clashed cymbals, but Orff (as we have already seen above), already indicated “2 pairs of cymbals” (clashed and suspended). Should he had wanted a smaller pair of clashed cymbals, he would have written that indication, as he did, for instance, with the larger gong (*1 grosser gong*) and the smaller gong (*1 kleiner gong*), but he did not. *Zymbel* and *Becken* are terms different enough so as not to mistake them or believe that they should be close relatives. We have the “cymbal colour” covered with the clashed and suspended cymbals. The *Zymbel* is clearly a different instrument.

The indication *1 paar* positively indicates that we should use two “circular, bent metal plates”. That, together with the use of the percussion clef, indicates that we are in the presence of unpitched instruments. That rules out tuned crotales completely.

Tuned crotales are not played hitting one against the other: they are played with a stick, and the indication “1 pair” clearly indicates (as with the clashed cymbals) that they must be hit one against the other. Also, except for No. 20 (*Veni, veni, venias*), the *Zymbel* is always played together with the glockenspiel, which is already providing real pitches. Should Orff have wanted pitches being played by the Zymbel, he would have written them using a treble clef, but he did not, as the glockenspiel is already providing them.

Another clue is that the Italian translation in the conductor’s score and the vocal score is *Cymbali antichi* (*Piatti piccoli*). Antique cymbals are, indeed, tuned crotales, but we tend to forget that crotales can also be unpitched in the form of finger cymbals. The clarification (*Piatti piccoli*), meaning “small cymbals”, corroborates that we are in the presence of two discs struck one against each other. The stubborn percussionist believes that *Cymbaly anticchi* can only be “tuned crotales”; he/she then reads *Piatti piccoli* and believes that *Piatti* can only be “cymbals” (which, literally, means “discs”) and his/her brain explodes because he/she finds a pitched instrument followed by an unpitched one in the same description and that is inconceivable to him/her. The Italian translator, bona fide, was trying to help and to clarify: *Cymbali antichi* (yes, finger cymbals), which are, indeed, small discs. *Piatti piccoli* is an obvious clarification (note the parenthesis) for anyone not familiar with the term *Cymbali antichi*.

Again: we are not dealing with tuned crotales, as Orff would have written the specific pitches, but he did not. We just have to see that discrepancies arise when percussionists try to assign pitches (many are possible, so Orff was correct assigning none) to a part that, in the other hand, was written in ALL THE SOURCES using a PERCUSSION CLEF. Do not be picky, do not split hairs but, instead, use the Occam’s razor: if no pitches were written, you do not have to search for the pitches that the composer did not write for.

So... We are not dealing with small, clashed cymbals, as we already have a “group of cymbals” in the score (clashed and suspended). We are neither dealing with tuned crotales, as there are no written pitches and the glockenspiel is already providing them.

The logical and musical solution (but the one that we try to avoid because we tend to be too literal and too enclosed in definitions) is a pair (Orff asks for it!!) of non-pitched (Orff uses a

percussion clef!!) finger cymbals (that is what *Zymbel* means and that is *Cymbali antichi* and *Piatti piccoli* mean!!). Does that shake your most profound convictions? Sorry about that; I am here to shed light, not to confirm biased or preconceived thoughts.

On the other hand (and this is a mere personal opinion), I have never liked the term “Antique cymbals”, as “antique” entails a “valuable”, “collectible” meaning. I would use “Ancient cymbals”, which to me, yes, has the “from the past” meaning. My opinion is that the French *Antique* was translated into English as the “false friend” *Antique* when it should be *Ancient* (but this, to be honest, has nothing to do with the point being discussed!!).



A nice sounding pair of finger cymbals is fine to cover the part. I use a pair of Tibetan tingshas and I get nothing but praises from conductors and colleagues.