

Ten Bells for Turning Forty

Ten Bells for Turning Forty was written as a fortieth birthday present for the clarinetist Andrew Sparling, whose playing I have enjoyed and admired since I first heard him perform at Huddersfield in 1992. The 'Ten Bells' of the title, represented in a crassly literal-minded way in the performance, is a pub on the corner of Commercial Street and Fournier Street, London, where Andrew's birthday gathering was to have taken place.

The clarinet music consists of ten gestures which are chosen by the player from a repository of twenty-two variants of seven basic types ("tropes") given in the score, according to a strict set of rules. The percussionist has ten fixed tropes, the first six consisting of a single bell strike. The piece is conceived as a sort of enigmatic game or ritual, with the players obeying arcane rules.