Resound: Bells of Ancient China

On view October 14, 2017, Freer|Sackler

Musical innovations in the Bronze Age meld with today’s digital technology in this interactive exploration of ancient Chinese bells. Thousands of years ago, Chinese musicians worked with foundry technicians to cast matched sets of bronze bells of different sizes to produce a range of tones. They developed oval-shaped bells that, depending on where they were struck, produced two distinct pitches with an intentional interval between them. “Resound” investigates this advancement with displays of early instruments, including a graduated set of matched bells discovered together in a Chinese tomb, videos of ancient bells being played and chances for visitors to compose their own music on virtual bronze bells.

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Bell (bo) with birds and tigers
China, Yangzi River valley, ca. 1050–900 BCE
Gift of Arthur M. Sackler
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1987.36

Bell (bo) with birds and dragons, from a set of four
China, Shandong province, State of Jin, Houma foundry, Eastern Zhou dynasty, late Spring and Autumn period, ca. 500–450 BCE
Gift of Arthur M. Sackler

Bell (yong) with taotie masks and birds
China, Shandong province, State of Jin, Houma foundry, Eastern Zhou dynasty, late Spring and Autumn period, ca. 500–450 BCE
Gift of Arthur M. Sackler

These six bells represent a matched set intended for use with other instruments in musical ensembles

Bells (yong) with dragons from a matched set (bianzhong)
South or southeast China, Eastern Zhou dynasty, late Spring and Autumn period, ca. 550–450 BCE
Gift of Arthur M. Sackler
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In the later Bronze Age, bells like these were made in sets with members of different sizes yielding different notes.

(Largest to smallest)

**Bell (bo) with birds and dragons, from a set of four**
China, Shanxi province, State of Jin, Houma foundry, Eastern Zhou dynasty, late Spring and Autumn period, ca. 500–450 BCE
Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment
Freer Gallery of Art F1941.9

**Two bells (bo) with felines and dragons, possibly from a set of four**
North China, Eastern Zhou dynasty, late Spring and Autumn period, ca. 550–500 BCE
Gift of Arthur M. Sackler

**Bell (bo) with felines and dragons**
China, Shanxi province, State of Jin, Houma foundry, Eastern Zhou dynasty, late Spring and Autumn period, ca. 550–500 BCE
Gift of Arthur M. Sackler
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery S1987.282

**Bell (nao) with taotie masks**
China, Yangzi River valley, ca. 1200–1100 BCE
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