

Preserving Europe's Bells

Voice-over 1:

It's a cold and cloudy spring afternoon in the monastic island of Reichenau, on the shores of Constanza Lake in Southern Germany.

Climbing the bell tower, where no tourists are allowed, is an unusual visitor with a small suitcase. He's part of a European effort to preserve, restore and improve the continent's bells, some of which are over eight hundred years old.

Voice-over 2:

This is the oldest bell here, cast in 1361, and is part of UNESCO's world heritage site at Reichenau, whose bells are the only ones given this UN distinction. Right from the start of Christianity, bells were the symbol of harmony. People were convinced that evil was repelled by the sound waves. It was also a symbol of unity, of meeting.

Voice-over 1:

From his small suitcase, he takes different diapasons that help him to identify and to measure a wide array of bell tones.

Kurt Kramer has been studying bells for forty years. He considers them to be the oldest known musical instrument, with their own mechanical soul.

Voice-over 2:

It's only by thinking this way that I can really know this bell and its real character. If I look at the electronic measurements I can understand its physics, but I don't really understand the bell. With the diapasons, and this is now confirmed by experts everywhere, I can really get to know a bell's true sound and character.

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