



## *Toll the Bell*

*A city-wide sound installation presented by Penn Live Arts  
in collaboration with The Office of the Chaplain*

### Background

The City of Philadelphia is experiencing an unprecedented level of gun violence. In 2021, 506 Philadelphians were victims of fatal shootings, and an additional 1,831 Philadelphians were injured in non-fatal shootings. The number of people murdered by guns in Philadelphia increased by 63% from 2017 to 2022, relative to only a 1.6% increase in population. Similarly, over the last decade, the United States has experienced a massive increase in this form of violence. In 2022, over 44k Americans were killed and an over 38k injured in incidents related to gun violence. In fact, since 2017, the U.S. has experienced a 19% increase in the number of deaths and 22% increase in the number of injuries from guns.

This data, coupled with the increased frequency of mass shooting events and the disproportionate impact on communities of color, centers gun violence as one of the most important challenges facing our city and our country. In 2013, 15-year-old Hadiya Pendelton was killed by a stray bullet on the streets of Chicago just days after performing at former President Obama's inauguration. In response, her friends launched the #WearOrange campaign and National Gun Violence Awareness Day. On June 4th, 2022, one day after Philadelphia came together to commemorate National Gun Violence Awareness Day, three people were killed and another eleven injured in a shooting on Fourth and South Street.

On the first Friday in June, and the weekend immediately following, people across the country wear orange to honor Hadiya and other victims of gun violence; using the traditional hunter's color of orange to draw attention to this national issue. As the City attempts to mitigate the impact of this perpetual violence, **Penn Live Arts looks to use the arts as a catalyst for positive social change and as a platform to advocate for a safer Philadelphia.**

### The Problem

Despite the prevalence of daily homicides and their impacts on diverse Philadelphia communities, most residents are only generally aware of these statistics. Mass shooting events in large public areas like Center City draw more media attention, while despite the frequency of gun violence incidents in other areas - specifically in neighborhoods composed primarily of people of color – these events go largely unnoticed by many Philadelphia residents.

Across Philadelphia, there are several advocacy groups for common sense gun reform, including many who participate in the #WearOrange campaign and National Gun Violence Awareness Day. To date, there has yet to be any coordinated event in Philadelphia which seeks to raise widespread acknowledgment of this issue while using the arts as a medium to convey urgency and awareness.

### **Project Overview**

Historically, church bells have been used as a tool for calling a religious community together, marking the time of day or night, but also to warn residents of impending danger – a coming storm, a hostile threat – and as an aural device to promote contemplation. This use of sound as a call to action is also seen outside of religious traditions. For example, every year on Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel, air raid sirens sound for two minutes and citizens stop what they are doing to participate in silent reflection. In a similar way, the sound of the bell in our project will serve as an experiential catalyst both for the individual who hears it and for the community at large who experiences this sonic device collectively.

**Toll the Bell is a sound installation activating church bells throughout Center City and West Philadelphia, simultaneously and for a sustained period, presented by Penn Live Arts, Penn's Office of the Chaplain, and a diverse group of Philadelphia-based community partners.**

On **June 7th, 2024**, collective bell ringing and other sonic devices, will be used to commemorate the victims of gun violence in Philadelphia while raising awareness to support common-sense gun reform.

### **Project Day**

At noon on **June 7th, 2024**, participating churches and organizations will commence bell ringing and other sonic devices, for **10.6 minutes** to represent 106 people killed by a firearm in the United States every day. ([Source CDC 5-year gun death injuries stats](#))

**From 11:30-12:30pm, participant sites will be open for quiet reflection, prayer, and meditation.** PLA staff will be on hand to pass out a project description with links to more information on gun violence prevention and programs working for change in Philadelphia and nationally.

### **Participant Requirements**

PLA seeks partners who wish to participate in making an impact in Philadelphia for the prevention of gun violence. There is no cost for participating organizations, but they should be able to contribute through a sonic device and by making their space available to the public for one hour on June 7th. In addition:

- For church sites, the Toll the Bell project requires working church bells or a digital recording that can make a sustained sound by an experienced operator.
- For other sites, a reading, recording, or traditional sound may be contributed.
- Participating sites will allow PLA staff to hand out project description flyers.
- Participants agree to be listed in all press and marketing materials.
- Participants agree to make their space open to all Philadelphians regardless of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, creed, national or ethnic origin, citizenship status, age, disability, veteran status, or any other legally protected class.

### **Penn Live Arts Contacts**

Christopher Gruits, Executive & Artistic Director

Phone: 215.898.5828

E-Mail: [gruits@upenn.edu](mailto:gruits@upenn.edu)

Kathleen Kardos, Executive Assistant & Artistic Coordinator

Phone: 215.898.6702

E-Mail: [kkardos@upenn.edu](mailto:kkardos@upenn.edu)

Leah Falk, Director of Education & Engagement

Phone: 215.746.4246

E-Mail: [leahfalk@upenn.edu](mailto:leahfalk@upenn.edu)

Al Freeman, Director of Marketing & Ticketing

Phone: 215.898.9081

Email: [freemana@upenn.edu](mailto:freemana@upenn.edu)