Fire Horse

Commissioned by the Yale University Guild of Carillonneurs 2026

Naoko Tsujita

Program Note

The year 2026 is known as the year of the Fire Horse in the Chinese zodiac cycle, which combines the twelve animals with the ten Heavenly Stems. The Fire Horse symbolizes strong energy, passion, and power. It can represent success, growth, and prosperity, but it is also associated with instability, chaos, and even disaster. In Fire Horse, I explore both sides of this symbol. Living in a time of global uncertainty, I found myself drawn more toward its darker qualities. When I completed my work, this piece reminded my husband of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, an image of destruction and upheaval. Throughout the piece, I contrast the repeated notes in the high range, which suggest an angelic or heavenly voice, with tritone and dissonant harmonies that evoke a darker, more unsettling quality. These opposing elements exist side by side, like yin and yang -two forces that depend on each other and cannot be separated. Although the music conveys tension and distortion, I hope listeners will also hear strength, resilience, and a sense of hope.

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