

Your bell is centered somewhere around D. - Georgi Limonov, the bell-caster

In the material we use for the bell, we put 80 per cent copper to give it a brazen sound; and to make it sweet, we add 20 percent tin. And various other herbs for the nuances that come next. That's the main mix. The exact ingredients are the company's secret, but that's the basics. We add 20 percent tin. That's the Veleganovs' recipe since donkeys' years.

The liberation of Plovdiv from the Turkish yoke¹ was greeted with the chiming of a Veleganovs' bell. But it hasn't been preserved; in fact no one knows what has happened to it. There is one pub in Plovdiv which bears the name of *Kambanata* (The Bell), above the pub is the Church of St. Virgin Mary, there, on one *salkam* (acacia) - that's a Turkish word - the bell was hung and tolled for the first time. So before me, there were three generations, even four, who practiced this craft. But the bell-casters who are truly the best are three generations.

Everything is man-made, isn't it? But the question is where you will start from, at which level. After all, we have the privilege of relying on the generations before us.

The technology has never been written down. Everything is oral and has been handed down by word of mouth. That's why there is no leaking of information. That's how it has remained. When my father-in-law passed the secrets to me, because it was him who introduced me to this craft, the condition was that I should hand them down to my son. This was the condition. With a lot of experience, they've changed the shape of the bell in order to achieve the best.

The oldest bells which bear the name of Lazar D. Veleganov, they are slightly more elongated; their shape is a bit more specific. While these shapes, which have been created now, date back to the mid 20s, they are cast by Blago Veleganov.

We have 9 bells in one monastery, from 2,5 to 20 kg, which are tuned B-flat major scale, and they are tolled on holidays. For the One-hundredth Anniversary of the April Uprising² my father-in-law, may he rest in peace, cast a copy of the Bell of Klisura, the historic one, which announced the uprising. Now, Grandpa Lazar's bell – which is an exact copy – it's in the belfry and tolls while the original is in the museum.

The five bells in front of the Banner of Peace Assembly³ are our work, too. Inside, there should be one bell with children of different nationalities. That was Grandpa Lazar's gift to the Assembly. And one sculptor made the human figures on the *horo* (a ring-dance). These are the more famous bells cast before 1989.

¹ Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman Empire for five centuries, from 1396 to 1878, known as the era of the “Turkish yoke”. Traditionally it is **still** seen as a period of darkness and suffering.

² The April Uprising was an insurrection organised by the Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire from April to May 1876, which indirectly resulted in the re-establishment of Bulgaria as an independent nation in 1878.

³ A memorial of bells erected, during the socialist era, by Ludmila Zhivkova for the occasion of the International Children's Assembly ‘Banner of Peace’. Ludmila Zhivkova was Minister of Culture at the time and daughter of the head of the country **and communist leader** Todor Zhivkov.

It's true that for the Bell of Klisura, Grandpa Lazar got paid around – just for the labour – half a flat, a big one, he could get it at the time. Calculate this now; I need to cast around 50 or 100 bells. If we go to work in England, we will be better paid, 5-6 or 7 times better.

Generally, there is almost no place without a bell by the Veleganovs Company. People talk of 400 bells cast by Grandpa Blago Veleganov, but they are much more. And we have cast over 400 here, in the last 15 years.

At the moment, we are casting a bell for Odrin, for the Church of St. St. Konstantin and Elena. Before that, there was also another bell which went to Turkey. It's unusual, but they have Christians there, too. There are two-three bells for the Western parts, but mainly the bells go to Bulgaria.

When you start, it takes around a month and a half to two months to cast the bell. It depends on the weather. It's a question of technology. For each bell a separate cast needs to be made. So there is no rush in this work.

Each bell is centered on some tone. The bigger the bell, the lower the tone. Here for example, this little bell is centered somewhere around D. When it gets cleaned up, it can drop by half a tone, more or less. It may have a higher ring as well but this will be at the bell's expense: instead of ringing 100 years, it's going to ring 50. There's no point. To achieve this tone with this volume, I need to make it thinner, to thin it out, because it's takes a beating - the striking with the tongue - it's a serious beating, what do you think...

The tongue determines the intensity of the sound, if it's a small tongue, it won't have enough power to strike, and tongues are still very different.

This bell is around 40 kg, it's centered somewhere around A. 60 kg is centered somewhere around E. 100 kg is centered somewhere around C.

There are sound frequency meters which measure the sound. Today, we are in the 21st century. Once I worked in the aviation with plane engines and so I've grown deaf. While grandpa Lazar was a musician, he knew. In the past, there used to be tuning forks, you checked the sound. We still have tuning forks, including those that look like whistles. But we don't use them. We keep them like museum relics, to know how it used to be, because there are other methods now.

The good thing about this work is that you can see the fruit of your efforts. The bell is ready when you are listening to it. Such a thing cannot be always fulfilled in a man's life. Even though it's one of those brief joys, still they are of importance.

2nd August, 2008, in a conversation with Metodi, Mariana, Diana, Albena at Plovdiv.