

Do You Hear

What I hear on winter nights is mostly silence; maybe a train whistle, far away; otherwise, just the wind—except at the holidays, when the whole world throbs and sways with melodies, emotions, and memories all achingly familiar and impossible to ignore.



One year, in the big old house where I grew up, my father strung wires from the turntable in the parlor, somehow through the ceiling, to speakers all around the downstairs. Even up in my room I could hear the French horns, the harps of gold, the rum pa pum pum.

I could hear my mother's vibrato as she sang along. Then the doorbell, the stamping of snow boots, and the voices of elderly aunts and cousins pulling my young self down to the party.



These days, the holidays can sometimes play a darker chord. Last January, a friend told me she had felt lonely on and off all through the season, despite family, despite friends. I knew what she meant. Have you ever heard a frozen lake groan in the moonlight as the ice expands and contracts? The earth shudders, and a deep wail seems to rise up from everywhere all at once. What is the sound of loneliness at the holidays? It's kind of like that. Maybe you've heard it too.

And the cure? That's what the bells are for. From towers, turntables, telephones, they all ring out the same brief message: you are not alone. We are all, in fact, one. Rejoice.



Sleigh bells still ring where I come from. I know because my brother sent me a video. My cell phone pinged and there it was, a little movie where countless tiny bells jingle from the shoulders of prancing horses pulling sleighs, all wrapped in my brother's love for me. Pings and bells, they are all of a piece nowadays. And they all add up.

Tonight, I'm going to call that friend I mentioned. I'm going to start calling her more often, and I'm making a list of all the voices I want to hear before too much time goes by. We are one. Are you listening?



Coda: New Year's Resolution. Learn to recognize the voices that ride on the winter wind. I suspect they have a lot to say.

