

Tune Books
Through the
Years

Tune Books, simply put, are collection of songs compiled by an editor, composer, or other entity for use by choirs, clubs, families, schools, and other groups for communal singing purposes. The earliest collections that we can call tune books were religious music collections such as psalters and hymnals. The large psalter in this case (on the left) is from 1591 and would have been used by choirs in the Catholic Church during regular services.

But many collections of tunes were used for the purpose of instruction. Books like the *Musical Exercises for Singing Schools* (on the right) by American composer Lowell Mason (1792-1872), who co-founded the Boston Academy of Music in 1833, were invaluable tools in teaching children to sing and helped spread music education to public schools throughout the United States.

In this exhibit you will find numerous books from mostly American tune book traditions, selected mainly from the holdings of the American Music Research Center, a part of the Special Collections & Archives department in CU Libraries. Three of the cases display a different aspect of how tune books were used—religious, instruction, and popular vocal music—while the last case is dedicated to collections written by William Billings (1746-1800), who began publishing music in 1770 and is considered to be the first American choral composer.

William Billings:
Father of
American Choral
Music

love: And JE—SUS found on ev—ry Chord.

Wake ev'ry Breath, & ev'ry String, To bless the great Redeemer King; His Name thro' ev'ry Clime ador'd. Let for Gra-ti-tude, and Love Thro' all the Notes of Mu-sic

(Paul Revere sculp.)

A Canon of 6 in One with a ground, the Words by Rev. Dr. Byles; Set to Music by M. Billings.

All the Grounds to be continually sung by 3 or 4 deep Voices, with the 6 other parts

Frontispiece from the *New England Psalm-Singer* (1770), engraved by Paul Revere.



Frontispiece from *Continental Harmony* (1794)

William Billings (1746-1800) was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and only attended school up through the age of fourteen. He lacked any thorough formal music education and was a self-taught musician. He died in poverty for most of the 19th century his music largely neglected except in rural and Southern communities that retained earlier musical traditions.

Because of this, many of Billings' tunes contributed to the development of Shape Note/Sacred Harp singing in the nineteenth century (see the Religious Music case for examples), but it wasn't until the latter half of the 20th century that Billings' music truly saw a musical and scholarly revival.

In his life time, Billings was a well-known composer and singing master, and his collection *The New England Psalm-Singer* (1770) featured the tune "Chester," which become an anthem during the Revolutionary War (Book 1). In Boston, Billings was also involved in Singing Schools, which were formal schools for the public to attend and learn to sing and perform in choirs. These were largely formed to spread literacy of written music and to generally increase the quality of singing in church services, especially for multi-part harmony. For this reason, all of Billings' collections (and many tune books, generally) begin with a brief primer on music theory. *The Singing Master's Assistant* (1778), *Psalm-Singer's Amusement* (1781), and *Continental Harmony* (1794) all feature these (Books 2-4 respectively). In addition to the four books displayed here, Billings' also published two additional collections: *Music in Miniature* (1779), and *The Suffolk Harmony* (1786).

The Complete Works of William Billings was published from 1977-1990 and was co-edited by Karl Kroeger, head of CU's music library from 1982-1994 and donor of countless tune books to the AMRC's collection.

Religious Music:
Tunes in
Church and
Home

By far, the majority of CU's Tune Book collection is taken up by compilations of religious music. These books mostly take the form of protestant hymnals, but there are many other types of collections represented. Among these are what are called "psalters," which is a book containing the Psalms of David, which many protestant churches felt were the only texts proper for singing during services. Psalters were not always published with music, though, as many psalms had generic tunes that a congregation would know how to sing. Included here is an antiphonal from an early 15th century Italian collection (Book 1), and handwritten on vellum. Additionally, examples of various types of collections are displayed (Book 2).

The middle shelf includes two psalters that demonstrate various settings of these texts from 1578 and 1637 (Books 3 and 4 respectively). The pocket sized psalter also demonstrates how these books would be available for personal use and could be utilized for home worship as well as during services. Also included is a facsimile edition of the 1550 notated *Booke of Common Praier Noted* by John Merbecke (Book 5) used in the Anglican Church, though it was quickly rendered out of date when the Prayer Book was revised in 1552.

The bottom shelf contains two hymnals of Shape Note tunes, a notation style created in 1801 as a teaching device in singing schools. Included is the 1854 edition of *Southern Harmony* (Book 6), open to the hymn "New Britain," better known today as "Amazing Grace." Also included is *Die Pennsylvanisch Choral Harmonie* from 1873 (Book 7), which was printed with both German and English texts for use by Pennsylvania's diverse German-American community, popularly known as the "Pennsylvania Dutch."

School Songs:
Instructional
Method Books

Singing schools were among the first music education institutions in the Americas, but private instruction on instruments, such as piano, were popular. This was especially true once domestic manufacturing of pianos began in the late 18th century (Book 1). But still vocal instruction dominated American music education, especially in schools (Books 2 and 3).

Lowell Mason (1792-1872) co-founded the Boston Academy of Music in 1833, the first school for music higher education in the United States. The *Manuel of the Boston Academy of Music* went through many iterations, but even in 1834 it serves as an exhaustive primer on the fundamentals of music (Book 4). However, Mason's book was preceded in America by the instructional pages in the beginning of tune books along with the more extensive *New and Compleat Introduction to the Grounds and Rules of Musick* (1764) by Daniel Bayley (Book 6) and *The Art of Singing* (1792) by Andrew Law (Book 5), along with numerous other method books. *The Village Harmony* (1797) is a good example of a tune book that begins with a primer on the rules of music and was a popular collection of sacred music that was sung in singing schools and religious services (Book 7). It went through numerous revisions through the years.

Modern college music students are well acquainted with sight singing classes, and the 1947 *Sight-Singing Manual* (Book 8) demonstrates that such nightmares are not a new occurrence for freshman music majors.

Pop Music:
The Early
American Hit
Parade

There was a lot of overlap between sacred and popular music, and many tune books aimed at youth choirs, clubs, and home use would include some religious music (Book 2). The earliest music collection compiled by an American was James Lyon's 1761 book *Urania, or A Choice Collection of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems and Hymns* (Book 1), which included six original songs composed by Lyon. *The American Muscial Miscellany*, published in 1798, contained numerous songs popular in the early United States.

One of the most popular forms of songs and entertainment in the 19th century was Minstrel Songs, performed in stage shows by performers in blackface make-up. These songs would employ Pidgin English aimed at making fun of slaves, and many of these songs have endured in American popular music. *The Ethiopian Glee Book* (Book 4), published in 1848 and supposedly compiled by "Gumbo Chaff" who was "First Banjo Player to the King of the Congo," contains many standards of Minstrel Shows including "De Rose ob Alabama," "Zip Coon," and "De Boatman's Dance."

For pianos, Binders Volumes, individually curated collections of piano music bound for a specific person, were very popular in the 19th century. The collections featured a wide variety of music, including opera excerpts, solo piano music, and accompanied songs (Book 5).

Many people, though, would write down tunes in personal notebooks, transcribing them by ear (Books 6 and 7). Such personal manuscript books are often an invaluable source of folk tunes for both voice and instruments, especially the fiddle.