

Choirbook Sing-Along Activity

Created by Robin & Graham Bier
Vocalists, Les Canards Chantants



To begin this activity, watch a demonstration by Les Canards Chantants by clicking the play button on the video!



Glencairn Museum's 460-year-old, 157 page music book is over two feet tall! Its pages are made of vellum (calf skin) and its covers are made of wooden planks and leather with decorative metal work.

In this activity you will learn how such a huge book was used, what the music was for, and how it might have sounded!



How was this book used?

The music contained in this large book is a collection of music required for religious services. This music was sung by monks at several services each day, and the reason for the large size of the book is so that the entire choir could see and sing from the same copy! This book was definitely not made for one single person to hold!



This picture from a manuscript in the collection of Getty Museum shows how a large group of monks would have sung from a single choirbook. Image courtesy of the Getty Museum's Open Content Policy.

Even though the book is 3.5 times bigger than a modern hymn book, it seems like it would still be difficult to see from afar! However, the monks were not entirely reading from the book, it was mostly there to help in case they forgot or needed a quick reminder. Most of the singing that happened in monastic choirs at the time was memorized.

Your turn!

Think of a song that you know fairly well, and see if you can write down all the words. Place your written song somewhere where you can see it from a distance, and then try singing it! Could you sing it all the way through without looking?

Ask someone else to do the same with a song they know. Can you both stand together to view the words and sing without forgetting any?

Share your at-home activity creations with us on social media by tagging us @glencairnmuseum #glencairnmedievalfestival or email a photo to info@glencairnmuseum.org

