

# The Comprehensive Psalter

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## The Comprehensive Psalter

The text of this psalter is from the 1650 Scots Metrical Version (SMV) so I will not review the text itself. I do not know if this psalter is available for purchase any longer as the fpcr.org catalog appears to have disappeared.

### Background

Others could give far more information on the history of the psalter but this is how I understand it. The Texas congregation, under the direction of Richard Bacon, had been using RPCI's split-leaf psalter for a while but replacements were either expensive or hard to get and were less sturdy for pew psalters (and after seeing children using psalters one can guess why that was a concern!). The RPCI psalters were indeed a bit fragile. For this reason they decided to create their own, sturdy pew psalter. Yet split-leaf psalters were too impractical to produce so it was decided for both practicality and cost to have a single page with music above and psalm stanzas below. "Comprehensive" refers to the entirety of the psalter as being valuable to the Christian in worship.

### Format

The binding is sturdy and of good quality, simple and elegant. The pages too are good paper and should stand up to plenty of use.

One of the interesting things about this psalter is that it is split into sections with the intention that if you sing a section a day, and all six sections again on Sunday, you will have sung twice through the psalter in the year.

Interestingly, the committee (or session) chose to use some of the “second versions” in the main portion, but allowed for the “first version” in the “alternative version” section at the end of the psalter.

## Typesetting

The typesetting is clear and the font easy to read. Psalm headings (i.e. “A Psalm of David”) are included and fit well. One complaint I have, (and perhaps that is just preference) is that the heading showing the portion of the psalm (i.e. “Psalm 29:1–6”) is in a sans-serif font while the rest of the psalter is in serif. I found it somewhat jarring to the eye, but I admit that is minor.

A second complaint I have is that it is sometimes confusing when singing through the entirety of a psalm that no distinction is made between entire psalms and psalm portions in the headings. An example of these headings is “Psalm 22:1–10” which is only the first 10 verses of 31 total, while “Psalm 23:1–6” is the entire psalm. It becomes confusing if one turns the page and finds out they already sang the whole psalm. This has annoyed me to the point where I have even considered using a sharpie to make the correction. But my bibliophilia will not allow me.

The third complaint is that the CM lines have been combined (i.e., instead of 8, then 6 on the next line, it is 14 per line). This makes it a little more difficult to sing “line by line” and I find myself losing my place sometimes if I have to glance away. I suspect this was done in the interest of space.

The indices are very useful and contain first lines, tunes, composer’s names, and a glossary of unfamiliar words. I also find the “loudness notation” *mf*, *m*, *mp*, etc. to be helpfully placed next to the text. It gives a sense of connectedness and emotion to the psalm as we really focus on the words.

## Music

The music is arranged much in the way of the split-leaf psalter, but without the split. That is, the music is on top and the words are underneath. I find this arrangement very satisfactory because it is much easier for me to read in an entire line and continue singing while tending to say, small children! It is also easier for me if I need to learn the music as it is more compact. I understand the value of having the words and music together (in-between the lines), in learning parts for example, but the more I have sung from a psalter

the more I have grown to love the split format as a personal preference.

Many of the tunes are older and while this is nice for historical purposes, some of them are just simply not good tunes in my mind and many of them have a sameness to them. I can read music but my wife cannot and even after singing a tune for 20 stanzas she would still not have the tune memorized. There are some really beautiful old tunes that are easy to learn (Tallis' Canon comes to mind), but many of the old tunes have a wandering and unpredictable feel to them. I suspect that this was done primarily to avoid copyright issues, the inside page says all the tunes except for two of Ruddell's are believed to be in the public domain.

That said, the committee really did strive to match tunes to words in a way that was fitting the mood and I think largely did succeed. A while back I downloaded the MIDI files of all the tunes in the psalter but the link appears to be bad now (along with the psalter link), so if anyone is in need of the midi files I presume I can share them.

I also think that the tunes are in a singable range for the most part, which is nice since very few psalm singers have the range of Sarah Brightman!

## **Conclusion**

I really like this psalter in general and it is probably one of the best media for enjoying the SMV, with the main contestant being *The Scottish Psalms* by the Free Church of Scotland. I also really like the blue ribbon that comes for marking.