



Dr Katherine Butler of Northumbria University and James Smith of the Lit & Phil

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Singing workshop with a 'catch'

***London's Burning*, *Frère Jacques* and *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* are all songs many of us will be familiar with from childhood – but you might not be aware that the history of these 'rounds' or 'catches' as they are also known, goes back hundreds of years.**

An event organised by Northumbria University, taking place later this month, will give people the opportunity to learn and perform a variety of catches, including several from a book housed in Newcastle's Lit & Phil library, dating back to 1709.

The event is taking place as part of Being Human – a national festival celebrating and demonstrating the ways in which the humanities help us to understand ourselves, our relationships with others, and the challenges we face in a changing world.

Catches are generally sung in three or four parts, with the same melody being sung by each singer but starting at different times. They rose to popularity in the 16th and 17th centuries, which is when the tune for *London's Burning* first appeared (though originally it was Scotland that was burning!).

Many of the songs express the joys of singing and drinking together with good companions. As they are generally quite simple tunes, they are very accessible, with no prior musical or singing experience needed to join in.

The Northumbria University event has been organised by music historian [Dr Katherine Butler](#) and will take place from 6pm to 8pm on Tuesday 14 November, at the Lit & Phil in Newcastle.

She said: "Singing catches is great fun as it's not about a performance, it's just about the pleasure of singing in the moment with other people. Catches date back hundreds of years giving us a fascinating glimpse into the past, yet there's still a timeless appeal to singing these songs today."

James Smith, Music Librarian for the Lit & Phil added: "Giving people a chance to sing from books in our collection is a fun way to show how important our music collection is."

Those attending the event will be given a [sneak preview of the songs they will be singing on the night](#) and get the chance to vote for the catches they would most like to learn.

As Dr Butler explains: "We wanted to give those not familiar with catches an opportunity to find out more about how they work and sound, so we are giving people a peak into our early rehearsals and posting recordings of several catches online in advance of the event. We are now asking people to vote for their favourites, and those will be the catches we will learn on the day."

In addition to the public workshop, Dr Butler and her team will be holding

another event in partnership with Converge, who offer educational opportunities for adults with lived experience of mental ill-health.

Northumbria University has been involved in the Being Human Festival for a number of years, and [last year was one of six festival hubs hosting events across the UK.](#)

Each year the festival is based on a theme, with Rhyme and Reason the theme for 2023. With their playful approach to sense and nonsense, catches are ideal for celebrating this theme.

Find out more about the public workshop and book your place [here](#).

Listen to the event team trying out some of the catches and 'like' your favourites on the 'Pop Up Catch Club' [playlist](#).

Dr Butler teaches on Northumbria University's Music degree programme, which includes [Foundation Year](#) and [BA \(Hons\)](#) courses. [Last year saw the first cohort of students graduate from the Music degree.](#) Among them was choral scholar Caitlin Hedley, who will be supporting Dr Butler in leading the singing at the Being Human event.

Northumbria's Music degree team organise weekly free lunchtime concerts during term time, taking place in St James's Church, opposite Sutherland Building. These are open to the public and informal, with attendees encouraged to bring along their lunch and stay for as long as they wish. For more information, follow the Northumbria Music Instagram account [@northumbriamusic](#).

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