

The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer Schools

Greg Skidmore, Artistic Director
Peter Phillips, Patron

CRMSS Ontario 2023 Report

A Double Bill: 150 years of English Polyphony

The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer Schools organization (CRMSS) celebrated its fifth year in Ontario with its first "CRMSS Ontario" course. The addition of "Ontario" to the name was as a result of a new "CRMSS Pacific" course being launched in Vancouver, which also took place in May 2023. That was a great success, and a report on that course is also available.

CRMSS Ontario 2023 took place from **Saturday, May 13th to Sunday, May 21st, 2023**. It was a week that resonated with the unmistakable beauty of English Renaissance polyphony. This year marked the anniversaries of two renowned 'Bills': **William Cornysh** and **William Byrd**, who died 100 years apart (in 1523 and 1623 respectively). Together their work marks out the entire High Renaissance in England and we took the opportunity of this double anniversary year to immerse ourselves in the rich and varied world of Tudor polyphony, including works by other famous composers such as Thomas Tallis and Orlando Gibbons but also unearthing gems from lesser known composers like John Mundy and Thomas Appleby. After rehearsing this excellent music all week, we sang in three public events: the church services of **Choral Evensong** and **Latin Choral Vespers**, and a public concert that brought our week to a close.

The course was held on the campus of Huron University College, with all the participants gathering in the college chapel for morning rehearsals, with other classrooms opening up space in the afternoons for chamber choir and consort-sized rehearsals of 10-12 people per ensemble. As at every CRMSS course, we sang (and played!) nothing but wonderful Renaissance polyphonic music, from morning until night, for more than a week!



CRMSS Ontario 2023 Staff



Much of the life of a CRMSS course springs from the musicality and dedication of our tutors, the team made up of professionals working in this area from around the world. This year, **Matthew Long** and **Tom Castle** joined CRMSS Founder and Artistic Director, **Greg Skidmore**, on a flight from the UK, where they regularly sing with top ensembles such as The Tallis Scholars, I Fagiolini, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, The Dunedin Consort, Stile Antico, and Gabrieli Consort. Joining the UK contingent were **Sharang Sharma**, Director of Choral Music at Huron University, and **Dr. Kate Helsen**, professor of Musicology at Western University. Matt, Tom, and Sharang gave

individual voice lessons throughout the week for those participants specifically interested in focusing on solo repertoire and coaching, while Kate took care of the musicological side of things, curating the music library with additional pieces from Western's Music Library, (and making sure the snack table was never empty at break time!) **Lucas Harris**, with his expertise in Lute Song and early instrumental and consort music, completed the Tutor team, offering participants a chance to hone their lute song skills with a real, live lutenist! Together, the tutor team performed an afternoon recital on the second full day of the course exclusively for the participants, featuring consort and solo pieces from Renaissance England, introducing the kind of music in store for everyone for the rest of the week.



Instrumental music at CRMSS Ontario 2023

The CRMSS tradition of "**Lute Day**" was notably expanded this year, kicking off the week on **Saturday, May 13th** with a flourish. **Lucas Harris** spent the entire day with an assembled army of lutenists from both Canada and the United States, and was also joined by **Joe Lanza** on violin, **Joe Phillips** on viol, and **Astrid Coffee** on the traverso. Lucas led an informal concert for the vocal participants toward the

end of the day, to welcome them to CRMSS, featuring his 'merry bande of players'. There was of course lute repertoire performed but we also heard music intended for a 'broken consort' including Renaissance string instruments and a flute, and some of our singing tutors (**Sharang Sharma**, **Dr. Kate Helsen**, and **Greg Skidmore**) even joined in with some songs!

A prominent role for vocal soloists

Of course, the English Renaissance is known not only for its choral prowess but its solo songs and aires as well. For any singer who signed up, **Matthew Long** gave generously of his vocal expertise in technique and coaching sessions that ran simultaneously with the mass choir and chamber choir rehearsals throughout each day.

Participants were able to share their work on these pieces at the informal, 'sharing' concert at the end of the week, for the rest of the participants, and a few solos were even peppered throughout the final public concert.

Lucas Harris was also available through the week to work with singers on Lute Songs of their choosing, either from a repertoire stack brought in for the week, or the fruits of a singer's own research.

Drama was ever present in the performances of all of our soloists and in our final concert, even costumes and props were used to great effect!



Music in its liturgical context

As in previous years, two choral services during the week allowed CRMSS participants to share their work with a broader audience: a **Choral Evensong** at London Ontario's St. Paul's Cathedral and a **Latin Choral Vespers** in the awe-inspiring Chapel of St. Thomas Aquinas at St. Peter's Seminary. It is a founding CRMSS principle that the importance of singing these pieces in their 'natural habitats' is something better experienced than theorized about. For congregants, these services were a rare chance to hear this astonishing music fit together with a liturgy equally as old, yet as vibrant in 2023 as in 1623.

Each evening, CRMSS participants gathered for **Compline** open to the public but a much more intimate event. Another practice that has become a tradition at CRMSS courses, this quiet service, mainly made up of plainsong, provided a peaceful way to conclude each day. A motet or anthem featured during the day's rehearsal might become that evening's Compline anthem, reconnecting the worlds of plainchant and polyphony in a practice now almost forgotten after 400 years.



Academic endeavours



In addition to the rehearsals and voice lessons, CRMSS offered its participants two afternoon **lectures** that were meant to deepen the participants' understanding of the repertoire. **Dr. Susan Lewis** explored English and Roman madrigals written to be performed in specific garden spaces owned and cultivated by the aristocracy during the Renaissance, decoding some of the symbolism inherent in music designed for nature's splendor. On the next day, **Dr. Kate Helsen** delved into the biography and historical context of William Byrd, describing a life caught in a political web of Elizabethan intrigue.

Sharing and partying!

A highlight of the week was the **informal sharing concert** on the last evening which became more of a party and less of a concert after about two hours of singing. Participants were happy to share the results of their small-group rehearsals or lute song lessons, as well as some laughter. New friendships, inside jokes, and light banter tend to result from such an intensive, beautiful week of making music together and the CRMSS community spirit again shone through, encouraging everyone to take risks and tackle this complicated and challenging repertoire confident that they are supported and among friends.



... and finally, a public concert

The course culminated in the **final concert**, open to the public and held at **St. Paul's Cathedral** in London Ontario, on Sunday, May 21 2023. The program featured mass choir pieces, chamber choir selections, madrigals, and solo lute songs from throughout the broad English Renaissance tradition. It was well-attended, and there were even a few familiar faces in the crowd, as some participants from previous CRMSS courses came back to cheer us on!



What's next

Looking ahead to 2024, we are thrilled to announce that our long-time patron, **Peter Phillips** (director of the world-famous UK-based ensemble, **The Tallis Scholars**), who has supported us since the very beginning in 2018, will be in attendance at CRMSS Ontario 2024 as our Guest Artist. Participants will have the extraordinary opportunity to sing Thomas Tallis' monumental "Spem in alium" motet for 40 voices under Peter's guidance. Peter Phillips is one of the most celebrated Renaissance polyphonic specialists of our time and The Tallis Scholars, celebrating their 50th anniversary in 2023, are recognised globally for their iconic performances and as the undisputed "rock stars" of this genre. Anticipating a larger turnout, CRMSS Ontario 2024 will be moving to a new space in London, Ontario, for the **Saturday, May 18 to Sunday, May 26, 2024** course. As we bid farewell to Huron University College, we extend our heartfelt thanks for their hospitality in the past, but eagerly await another year of stellar musical memories. **CRMSS Pacific 2024** will also expand and take place from **Sunday, August 4 to Sunday, August 11, 2024** in Burnaby, BC. We are excited to welcome members of The Gesualdo Six onto our tutor team there. Please continue to find details of both our courses on our website (crmss.org) as they are published.

The last word



CRMSS, now "CRMSS Ontario", has made a name for itself, over the past six years, as a week-long **intensive** experience that is both immensely enjoyable and musically challenging. An **immersive** experience, participants begin their first rehearsal each day at 10 AM and Compline finishes at around 9:30 PM each night. In between, singers are treated as thinking musicians, but also as friends. The repertoire, often misunderstood as 'too difficult', 'over intellectual', or 'too complex' becomes not only approachable but astounding and deeply moving in its beauty. Participants, both returning and

new, discover and rediscover the freshness and life affirming power of this ancient music. A CRMSS course is a place where anyone willing to work hard and work together can experience the immeasurable rewards this music has to offer. We seek out those rewards, and are guided by them. There is one word that effectively sums up what CRMSS Ontario 2023 was for us and what every CRMSS course seeks to be: **a deeply felt and beautifully expressed joy.**

CRMSS Ontario 2023: Fact sheet

- 45 singing participants
- 9 instrumental players
 - 6 lutenists
 - 1 violinist (Joe Lanza), 1 viol player (Joe Phillips), 1 flautist (Astrid Coffee)
- 6 members of staff
 - 3 from the UK:
 - Greg Skidmore, Matt Long, Tom Castle
 - 3 from Canada:
 - Dr. Kate Helsen, Sharang Sharma, Lucas Harris
- 3 venues
 - Huron University College
 - St. Peter's Seminary
 - St. Paul's Cathedral
- 8 preformed small groups, given silly names related to our "English" course theme
 - "City" groups: Lincoln, Ingatestone, Eton, Lambeth
 - "Food" groups: Yorkshire Pudding, Cornish Pasty, Fish & Chips, Bangers & Mash
 - Each group contained 10-12 singers
- 2 Chamber choirs
 - Byrd Chamber Choir
 - Cornysh Chamber Choir
- 2 Lectures
 - Dr. Susan Lewis
 - Renaissance Garden Culture and the Madrigal in England
 - Dr. Kate Helsen
 - William Byrd: wanted dead, alive, or Catholic
- 10 church services
 - 8 nightly Compline services in the chapel at Huron
 - 1 Latin Choral Vespers at St. Peter's Seminary
 - 1 Choral Evensong at St. Paul's Cathedral
- 1 theme: "A Double Bill: 150 years of English Polyphony"
- 1 utterly unforgettable week!

Ensemble Repertoire at CRMSS Ontario 2023

Thomas Appleby

Magnificat

John Sheppard

Libera nos 1

Libera nos 2

William Byrd

Alleluia, Ascendit Deus

Beati mundo corde

Descendit de coelis

Great Service

Miserere mihi Domine

O quam gloriosum

O rex gloriae

Praise the Lord all ye Gentiles

Precamur 1 (Christe qui lux)

Timete Dominum

Tristitia et anxietas

Thomas Tallis

In pace

Jesu salvator saeculi

Mihi autem nimis

John Taverner

Le Roy Kyrie

Thomas Tomkins

Oft did I marle

Preces & Responses (Evensong)

The fauns and satyrs

Then David mourned

Michael Cavendish

Come, gentle swains

Orlando Gibbons

Hosanna to the Son of David

O Lord, in they wrath

Christopher Tye

Ad te clamamus

Deliver us good Lord

Praise the Lord ye Children

Thomas Hunt

Hark, did ye every hear

John Ward

Hope of my heart

John Mundy

Lightly she whipped

Thomas Weelkes

Now every tree

Robert Parsons

Ave Maria

Domine quis habitabit

Robert White

Exaudiat te

Regina coeli

Peter Philips

Ascendit Deus

Beata Agnes

Regina coeli

John Wilbye

Alas! What a wretched life

O wretched man