

THE CANADIAN RENAISSANCE MUSIC SUMMER SCHOOL

The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School 2018 Report

Greg Skidmore, Artistic Director

Peter Phillips, Patron

Success!

For one week in May and June 2018, the first ever **Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School** (CRMSS) was held in London, Ontario in Canada. Drawing together participants and tutors from the UK, the USA, and Canada, the event filled both the chapel at Huron University College and the church of All Saints Hamilton Road with beautiful Renaissance choral, consort, and solo music for seven full days. In its inaugural year, the standard of music making exceeded all expectations and confirmed that there exists in Canada both the appetite and the ability to study and serve the music of the Renaissance at the highest levels.

The overall experience was exciting, uplifting, and - for founder Greg Skidmore - hugely promising for the future. Much was untested in the Summer School's first year, but the week was such a resounding success that very soon after our final Eucharist, the team of tutors decided to establish The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School as an annual event.

"My experience at CRMSS belongs among the highlights of my choral singing life."

-Lisa

The 2nd annual Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School will take place from **Sunday, May 19th to Sunday, May 26th 2019**. More information can be found at crmss.org or by emailing info@crmss.org

Dates and Venues for CRMSS 2018

All the participants and tutors met on the evening of Sunday, May 27th 2018 in the chapel at Huron University College, on the campus of Western University in London, Ontario. After the first session that evening, we had a chance to meet and chat over a glass of wine.

Over the course of the week, we used the chapel, a classroom, and accommodation facilities at Huron as well as the sanctuary and parish hall at All Saints Church, Hamilton Road. The chapel at Huron was our main rehearsal venue and we performed services of Vespers and Compline there each evening throughout the week. We used various spaces at All Saints throughout the course and we both performed our final concert there on Friday, June 1st 2018, and provided polyphonic music during their High Mass on the morning of Sunday, June 3rd 2018.

"The obvious love of and dedication to beautiful music that informed everything we did created a refreshing and inspiring atmosphere."

-Elizabeth

Tutors and Participants

There were seven tutors at CRMSS 2018:

- **Greg Skidmore**, founder and Artistic Director
- **Dr. Kate Helsen**, administrator and part of the academic team
- **Matt Long**, soloist coordinator
- **Emily Atkinson**, small groups coordinator
- **Dr. Roseen Giles**, with Dr. Helsen, part of the academic team
- **Andrew Pickett**, singing teacher and small groups coach
- **Lucas Harris**, lute tutor and accompanist

These tutors represented traditions of excellence from across Renaissance music performance and academia in the United Kingdom (The Tallis Scholars, The Sixteen, The Gabrieli Consort, I Fagiolini, The Cardinall's Musick, and many others), Canada (Tafelmusik, Helios Vocal Ensemble, Western University), and the United States (Duke University). The CRMSS 2019 tutors can be found at crmss.org/tutors.html

**"All the tutors were super knowledgeable, kind, experts in their field,
and very good at what they do!"**

-Ariana

There were 30 participants at CRMSS 2018, comprising a balanced SSATB choir. They ranged in age from 21 to 66, with the most common age being 24 and all but 8 participants under 35. The overwhelming majority of participants had completed undergraduate music study, and many were currently practicing or seeking soon to enter professional music..

One lutenist attended the course as a participant. She helped accompany some singers during solo sessions and also benefited from one-on-one time with Lucas Harris, our lute tutor, during his two day visit to the course.

The participants hailed from across Canada, representing all of Canada's major cities from coast to coast. There were some 'locals' (from London, Ontario) as well, and we even had one American among us! It was truly a national event.

Repertoire

In choosing repertoire for the first CRMSS, Greg Skidmore sought a theme of 'There Is No Theme'! Instead, he and the other tutors presented the Renaissance as the rich and varied period that it is, spanning more than 150 years of music, across sacred and secular genres, from music for large forces and grand occasions to songs written for soloists and consorts in intimate settings.

**"The large range of repertoire we sang in the choir was amazing
and everyone was so engaged."**

-Vanessa

The participants were able to work on a large amount of repertoire throughout the week, the two course booklets prepared beforehand alone comprising 23 works by composers ranging from Josquin des Prez to Claudio Monteverdi and including famous names like Tallis, Victoria, and Lassus alongside lesser performed composers such as Juan Esquivel, Peter Philips, and Henricus Isaac. Throughout the week, small groups worked on a further 13 pieces, and the participants were also encouraged to bring and perform their own choices.

Solo singing played an important role during CRMSS 2018, with Matt Long leading the tutors in offering everyone a 30-minute one-on-one vocal technique lesson if they wished, as well as more detailed coaching for those with more solo experience. He focused on Giovanni Coprario's *Songs of Mourning*, but a wide range of repertoire was explored and each participant's tuition was tailored to their individual strengths.

Particular choral favourites over the course of the week were Tomas Luis de Victoria's *Alma redemptoris mater* a8, and *Veduto il miser* from Lassus' 'Lagrima di San Pietro'.

Small ensemble singing

All singers took part in organized, tutor-led small ensemble singing on the first day. Each participant had a chance to explore consort (in many cases one-voice-per-part) singing in two groups with contrasting repertoire. In the days that followed, many continued to work on that repertoire with the same singers, and also mixed with other singers to explore other music. Several participants brought music with them as well and formed their own groups, following up their reading sessions with further rehearsals and tutor coaching.

"... a high-quality singing experience."

-Ariana

Lectures

On four afternoons during the week, our tutors gave lectures on a wide range of topics:

- **Dr. Roseen Giles** gave a paper entitled "'Don't worry, this will sing itself', and other musical fictions" about the practice of *musica ficta*
- **Andrew Pickett** presented "'Drop the beat' - Introduction to the theory & practice of vocal ensemble intonation"
- **Dr. Kate Helsen** introduced us to some of her fascinating new research in "What's in a Riff? Chant DNA in modal polyphony"
- **Greg Skidmore, Matt Long, and Emily Atkinson** took part in a roundtable discussion led by Dr Giles entitled "Being a Professional Singer in the UK", taking questions on every aspect of their professional lives in the UK

Collaboration with the Gregorian Institute of Canada

As a special honour in our first year, we were able to work with the Gregorian Institute of Canada during their annual Colloquium, also held at Huron University College. We sang with them in three church services and it was a privilege to collaborate with them and their guest clinician Sven Edward Olbash from San Francisco, placing our polyphonic music in its proper liturgical context.

Banquet

After a jam-packed week getting to know each other through singing stunning music, participants, tutors, and their guests were invited to attend a banquet purely for social camaraderie on the final evening of the course. Inevitably, it wasn't long before the stage in the hall was occupied by a series of spontaneous performances. Towards the end of the night, a completely unplanned reading session of choral favorites unfolded, with singers reading from smartphones using digital scores they shared with each other via WhatsApp on the spot. Many participants cited this as an especially memorable moment.

"It was just a lot of fun from beginning to end."

-Gerry

Looking forward to CRMSS 2019

After such a wonderful and truly successful week, our task now is to make CRMSS 2019 even better! We are planning more venues and better travel, better access to accommodation and food, a different approach to small groups, and a refreshed solo singing component. Please get in touch via email (info@crmss.org) with any questions, engage with us on social media, and do apply to come and be surrounded by glorious Renaissance music and people who love it just as much as you do!