

## **The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School 2022 Report**

Greg Skidmore, Artistic Director  
Peter Phillips, Patron

### **Back to full strength!**

In many ways, CRMSS 2022 felt like a return to normal after a difficult but rewarding CRMSS 2021 held under more stringent pandemic conditions. And what a welcome return it was! We were back at Huron University College, on the campus of Western University in London Ontario, where we got our start back in 2018. CRMSS 2022 was our largest event yet, and it was wonderful for everyone to sing in a big choir after so many months of restrictions.

At CRMSS 2022 there were quite a few new faces as well! We were honoured to welcome Robert Hollingworth, the director of one of the UK's leading Early Music vocal groups I Fagiolini, as our very first CRMSS Guest Artist. As well as having Robert with us, we also hosted a group of five students from the UK, our first CRMSS International Scholars. All studying together at the University of York in England, they hailed from England, Ireland, the United States, and Australia. We were so delighted to sing at St Peter's Seminary again, and at CRMSS 2022 we sang both a Choral Vespers service there and our final course concert, which was open to the public.

But the basics of the CRMSS experience remained the same: total devotion to wall-to-wall Renaissance music for an entire week, sung and played with passion and joy in a great community.

**“It was one of the best musical experiences I have had in a long time.”**

### **The CRMSS Experience**

CRMSS 2022 began on the evening of **Sunday, May 22nd** and our final course concert was on the afternoon of **Sunday, May 29th**. The beautiful campus of Huron University provided us with many spaces for small groups, chamber choirs, and singing lessons but the focus of the week was Huron's chapel, where the tutti sessions were held, as well as our evening Compline services and an internal performance, just for course participants, toward the end of the week. We also travelled the short distance to St Peter's Seminary twice, basking in the glory that is their Chapel of St. Thomas Aquinas, a truly magnificent space, both visually and acoustically.

As in previous years, there were a few different types of ensembles and music-making contexts. Everyone was involved in daily singing with the full group, numbering more than 50 singers, but this was also split in half to form two chamber choirs, working separately. There were regular small-group sessions as well, ranging from five up to 13 or 14 singers. Some of these small groups were pre-formed and some formed as the week went on. Most of the small-group sessions were led by a member of our tutor team, including by our international guests.

**“As ever, I was impressed with the very high quality of the tutti choir.”**

**“I always felt so good after large group rehearsals and it was mostly because of Greg's way of building community while still being precise and demanding.”**

An important part of all of our CRMSS courses to date has been giving participants the opportunity to sing Renaissance music as a soloist if they wish. This reflects our strongly held belief that solid vocal technique applies to singing music from the Renaissance absolutely as much as it does to singing music written in other eras. This year we were glad to welcome back Toronto-based lutenist Lucas Harris and soprano Katherine Hill, who led the solo singing side of CRMSS 2022.

Another CRMSS tradition was again enjoyed in 2022. Each evening, including after our very first rehearsal, we sang the 'night prayer' Anglican church service of Compline. While we did sing Renaissance polyphonic music during this service each night, the majority of it was sung to Gregorian plainsong. Compline was a great way to bring a busy day at CRMSS to a close as a group and this year it was magical to be back in the chapel at Huron during these services.

At CRMSS 2022, many different performances took place of multiple kinds. We held an internal performance on Friday, May 27th which was an opportunity for everyone to share with the rest of the course anything that they had been working on during the week. That concert was also Robert Hollingworth's last event with us, as he was unable to stay until our week finished. During this event he conducted the tutti group in a performance of the music he had been working on, as well as both chamber choirs and some small groups.

**“The best thing about CRMSS for me personally was getting the opportunity to improve my reading and ensemble skills with excellent singers.”**



On Saturday, May 28th we sang a Choral Vespers church service at St Peter's Seminary, which was open to a public congregation. Not a concert performance but instead a church service with a large amount of music in it, singing Choral Vespers required that we learned a large amount of Latin plainsong as the service was conducted entirely in Latin, in the Roman Catholic Tridentine rite.

**“Singing in the seminary was a fun surprise.”**

Our final event was a concert, again at St Peter's Seminary, to which we invited friends, family, and other members of the public. This concert took place on Sunday, May 29th at 2:30pm. We only were able to present a selection of the vast quantity of music we covered during the week at this concert, but it included tutti choir repertoire, both chamber choirs, small groups, and soloists.

As a very special treat, our CRMSS International Scholars gave a recital for the rest of the participants and staff on Tuesday, May 24th. This was an a cappella vocal concert, and listening to their five-voice consort was a real highlight of the week.

We again held Lute Day in 2022, on Monday, May 23rd, and so the very first performance of the week was in fact our assembled lutenists joined by soprano Katherine Hill and some of our CRMSS International Scholars.

## **The biggest ever CRMSS**

In 2022, we bounced back from the pandemic with some truly impressive numbers:

- 11 members of staff, including the 5 CRMSS International Scholars
- 43 singer participants
- 7 lutenists on Lute Day

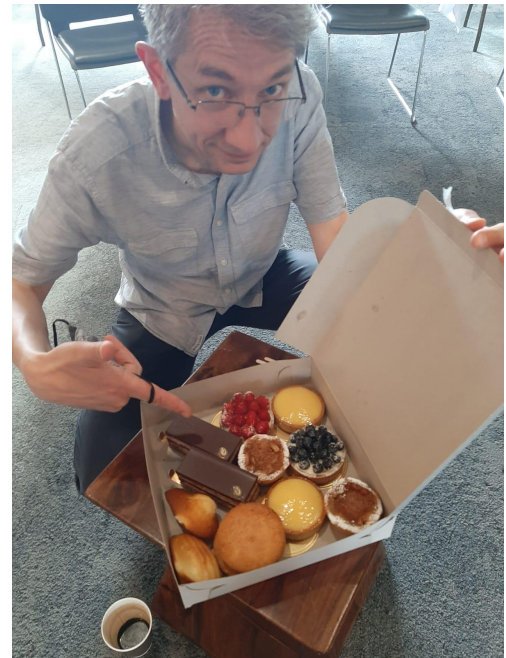
Our tutor team was led by Founder and Artistic Director, **Greg Skidmore**, a Canadian baritone and conductor now living and working in the UK. **Robert Hollingworth**, CRMSS 2022 Guest Artist, also led tutti and chamber choir sessions, as well as working with small groups and soloists. Robert also gave a talk about the history of his group, I Fagiolini, and participated in a 'Ask Me Anything' session.

**“I really loved Greg’s style, he was so encouraging.”**

**“Robert was amazing, but I was surprised by how goofy he was! So much fun.”**

We were joined again by lutenist **Lucas Harris** and soprano **Katherine Hill** and the two of them collaborated on the busy and hugely successful solo singing component of CRMSS 2022. Katherine also gave many vocal technique lessons, both individually and in small groups, to any of the participants who wanted a session with her. More than a dozen participants chose to work on the repertoire of little-known but beautiful Spanish songs for solo voice and vihuela (a type of Spanish lute), made accessible in several modern anthologies gathered by Lucas Harris. CRMSS concerts at the end of the week featured stunning songs by the vihuela composers Mudarra, Narváez, Pisador, and Daza, accompanied by Lucas on lutes of different sizes which effectively transposed the songs to suit each voice.

**Sharang Sharma**, Director of Choral Music at Huron, was again on our tutor team, and he led small groups sessions, gave individual singing lessons, and generally provided incredibly useful musical support throughout.



While CRMSS is a performance-based course, any serious exploration of Renaissance music must involve a commitment to engaging with scholarship and the huge academic literature that surrounds the field. Our academic lead in 2022 was **Dr. Kate Helsen**, who secured for the whole group private access to some wonderful Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts held in the library at Western University. Kate is also a professional singer, and she led small group sessions and sang in the chamber choirs and tutti ensemble.

Our five **CRMSS International Scholars** (Sarah Keating, Izzie Palmer, Rachel Singer, Josh Adams, and T.J. Callahan) were on hand every day to provide internal leadership across the tutti, chamber choir, and small groups contexts. Their role was mainly to sing alongside the other participants, but they also were incredibly helpful to the rest of our staff team by doing odd jobs and generally being great people to have around!

At CRMSS 2022 we continued our tradition of welcoming participants from all across Canada. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were again well represented and others came from Quebec, Alberta, and many places in Ontario. We again enjoyed working with a few of our friendly neighbours to the south; singers from Indiana and Connecticut were there as well.

**“Sadly, I came to Early Music late in life but I can't get enough of it.”**

**“The best thing? Singing beautiful music with wonderful singers, without spending time on 'learning', but getting right into the music.”**



### **Lute Day at CRMSS continues to grow**

Following the success of CRMSS's first Lute Day in 2021, the new tradition continued in 2022 with a larger band of pluckers: a merry band of five lute participants joined CRMSS lute tutors Lucas Harris and Terry McKenna for a full day of Spanish music-making. The day began with a technique class about the Spanish *dedillo* right hand technique, then proceeded with a series of lute ensemble sessions in which the whole “pluck band” prepared arrangements of Spanish polyphony crafted by Ray Nurse of Vancouver, BC. Some of these arrangements were performed with the lutenists alone and some with soprano Katherine Hill singing along (including Josquin's famous *Mille regretz*, which most pluckers know from the version for vihuela by Spanish composer Luis de Narváez). A special treat was preparing a version of Victoria's *Alma redemptoris mater* in which one of the CRMSS International Scholars, soprano Sarah Keating, together with the lute band made up one choir, while the remaining four CRMSS International Scholars (singing from the chapel balcony) made up the other. An informal concert in the evening featured all these works, solos from Lucas and Terry, and Katherine singing Daza's vihuela song *Gritos dava la morenica*. A final bonus from lute day was hearing Lucas Harris and participant Andrew Donaldson play duets at the evening Compline service: they improvised on a Diego Ortiz ground and also played one of Andrew's own compositions.

### **Polyphonic Journeys through Iberia and The New World**

The repertoire theme at CRMSS 2022 was defined by the glory, breadth, intensity, and variety of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Renaissance music. This gave us a huge amount of material to work with, but some composers naturally took pride of place: Tomás Luis de Victoria's genius and prolific output was central to all that we did at CRMSS 2022.

We concentrated especially on his iconic collection of music for Holy Week, his Tenebrae Responsories, working on eight of those beautiful pieces in various small groups. His double choir motets *Salve Regina* and *Alma redemptoris mater* were also favourites. (For those who might remember all the way back to CRMSS 2018, this was in fact the second time that Victoria's *Alma redemptoris mater* a 8 became somewhat of a CRMSS anthem.) We also sang some of his peerless 1605 Requiem, of course, but an unexpected treat was learning his massive, triple-choir *Laetatus sum* which we sang both during our Vespers service and as the opening number in our final concert.

The other 'household name' composers of the Spanish Golden Age (Cristobal de Morales, Francisco Guerrero, and Alonso Lobo) made up a considerable portion of our repertoire as well. Lobo's *Versa est in luctum* battled it out with Victoria's setting of the same text and no clear winner was decided. We also sang and loved Guerrero's famous *Ave virgo sanctissima* - of course we did! Morales' *Manus tuae Domine* was definitely the sleeper hit of the week.

The music of the Portuguese masters of the early part of the 17th century, chief among them Duarte Lobo and Manuel Cardoso, was also deeply explored. Duarte Lobo's six-voice Requiem mass was a highlight of this repertoire, as was the Kyrie from Cardoso's *Missa Miserere mihi*. Some of this repertoire was being encountered for the very first time by many at CRMSS 2022, participants and staff alike, and the sense of uncovering hidden gem after hidden gem made the week a real joy.

We also explored even less well-known repertoire by composers associated with Spanish and Portuguese polyphony, such as Pierre de Manchicourt, Juan Esquivel, Gines Perez, and Sebastian Aguilera de Heredia. Heredia's double choir *Magnificat* setting was in fact the centrepiece of our Choral Vespers service at St Peter's Seminary.

We also learned some polyphony from the New World, including by the most famous composer working in Mexico during the 17th century, Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla, and by Hernando Franco, a missionary working in rural Guatemala.

**“By far, the repertoire we get to learn and sing on a daily basis is the best part of CRMSS.”**

Lucas Harris managed to find for us some rarely performed music by Spanish vihuela composers Alonso Mudarra, Luis de Narváez, Diego Pisador, and Esteban Daza. For everyone, these were an unexpected pleasure and our soloists at CRMSS 2022 excelled themselves in learning complicated and engaging repertoire very quickly and pulling off polished and captivating performances.

### **Time spent not singing...**

While the purpose of coming to CRMSS is definitely to fit as much Renaissance music into 7.5 days as is physically possible, we do take a few breaks to give our voices a rest and encounter the music through discussion and scholarship.

**“I really loved Robert's talks on how to tune chords  
and I was starting to really get the hang of it by the end of the week.”**

Robert Hollingworth, in a lecture entitled **Method to the Madness**, took us through the story of his group I Fagiolini's unique journey over the past few decades. I Fagiolini is especially known for offering audiences non-conventional means of engaging with Renaissance music, but his musical interests encompass 20th-century French repertoire, South African traditional music, and much besides. Robert is constantly intrigued by both the dramatic and the comedic, and I Fagiolini's approach to music making is vivid, varied, and always innovative. His talk was completely fascinating.



In another truly unique afternoon, **Dr. Kate Helsen** secured for us a private viewing of specially collected and curated items from the archives of the impressive library at Western University. These ranged from mediaeval prayer books to Renaissance music manuscripts and prints, many of which had only recently been given to Western. To be given privileged access to these priceless historical artefacts, including the opportunity to handle some of them and read the music contained in them, was a real treat and connected the music we were learning to its material past in a truly tangible way.

All of our international staff (Robert Hollingworth, Greg Skidmore, and the five CRMSS International Scholars) held an **'Ask Me Anything'** session in Huron's Great Hall. This was an opportunity for the course participants to inquire about life in the choral world in the UK as a student, get a glimpse into 'real life' as a professional travelling musician, and discuss different

approaches to education in music and making music performance appeal to wider and new audiences. This session turned into more of an open discussion rather than merely a one-sided event, and everyone benefited from the range of views expressed. In the end, it was clear that the single motivating factor behind everything we as musicians do must be a love for the music itself, and the urge to bring the joy we feel when we are inside it to others.

## And a few other things

On our first evening, as is becoming another CRMSS tradition, we enjoyed some refreshments outside on the grounds of Huron University. This was an opportunity for everyone to get to know each other and is a great way for us to mark our first evening together, nestled in between the end of our first rehearsal and our first Compline.

We held another event just for conductors this year as well, though it was slightly smaller and more focussed. We discussed conducting techniques specifically related to leading choirs in contrapuntal and imitative polyphony, and our conducting participants had a chance to work one-on-one with Robert Hollingworth and lead some of the music we had been working on in the larger groups.

On our last night together, we feasted on pizza, snacks, and drinks, and it was great to let our hair down by having a big party, celebrating our week together and the friendships we'd made. Some of us even gave Victoria and Cardoso the night off, applying our vocal skills to the likes of Freddy Mercury, Whitney Houston, and Beyoncé!



**“It was a wonderful program! I really didn't quite expect to enjoy myself so much!”**

## **The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School adds an ‘s’**

After such a huge success at CRMSS 2022, and finally now able to look forward, we are so proud to be able to announce that The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School is becoming... The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer Schools! As part of our long-term ambition to provide as many high-quality opportunities for Canadians to experience Renaissance music right across the country as we can, we are launching our first course on the west coast, **CRMSS Pacific 2023**.

We are starting small, with the intention to grow CRMSS Pacific to be an equal partner with what we're now calling CRMSS Ontario in the next few years. From **Friday, May 5th 2023** until **Sunday, May 7th 2023** we'll be hosting a weekend of Renaissance music immersion at St Helen's Parish in Burnaby, British Columbia, a suburb of Vancouver. Details of this weekend are firming up, but we are so pleased that the community at St Helen's, with its excellent acoustic and ample other facilities, has agreed to host us. Our website will be the best place to keep abreast of these plans as they shape up: [crmss.org](http://crmss.org)

Our regular CRMSS course in London, Ontario - now known as **CRMSS Ontario 2023** - is also happening next year, with theme, venue, and tutor plans already in place. In 2023, the Renaissance music world celebrates two English composer anniversaries, one of which you *may* have heard of before. In 1523, William Cornysh the Younger died. Cornysh was a major composer of works found in The Eton Choirbook, the first and most important source of English music in what might loosely be called The Renaissance or Early Modern period. Cornysh was hugely influential on all English composers who followed him: Fayrfax, Taverner, Tye, Tallis, Sheppard, Parsons - the list goes on. In fact, the list goes on all the way to another, much more famous Englishman, who died exactly 100 years later, meaning we celebrate him in 2023 as well. This is none other than William Byrd himself, possibly the greatest English composer of his generation, if not the entire period. These two Williams together represent the entirety of the English Renaissance music narrative, and we plan to explore all of that fully at CRMSS Ontario 2023.

**CRMSS Ontario 2023** will take place between **Saturday, May 13th 2023** and **Sunday, May 21st 2023**, based mainly at Huron University College. Full details of all our events are still being finalised, but we are excited to welcome back **Matt Long** to our tutor team, as well as **Sharang Sharma**, **Dr. Kate Helsen**, and of course our Founder and Artistic Director **Greg Skidmore**. It's a special pleasure for us also to say hello to **Tom Castle**, a new recruit!

The best place to learn about all of our activities, including something very special in the planning for 2024 (think music for 40 parts...), is on our website: [crmss.org](http://crmss.org)

Please also engage with us on social media:

- [fb.com/canrenmusss](https://fb.com/canrenmusss)
- [twitter.com/canrenmusss](https://twitter.com/canrenmusss)
- [instagram.com/canrenmusss](https://instagram.com/canrenmusss)

Everyone at CRMSS is so looking forward to welcoming you to our events next year, and beyond.

## CRMSS 2022 by the numbers

- 43 singers
- 7 lutenists
- 11 members of staff
- 5 CRMSS International Scholars
- 1 CRMSS Guest Artist
- 2 amazing venues
- 10 pre-formed small groups
- 2 chamber choirs
- 12 participants focusing on solo singing
- 1 conducting masterclass
- 3 lectures
- 1 giant party!
- 8 Victoria Tenebrae Responsories sung
- 12 voices in Victoria's *Laetatus sum!*
- 2 *Versa ests*, 2 *Requiem aeternams*
- 16 different composers
- 8 choral church services (7 Compline, 1 Choral Vespers)
- 4 performances (3 internal and 1 for the public)
  
- ... **1 absolutely amazing week of brilliant music making!**