

The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer Schools

Greg Skidmore, Artistic Director
Peter Phillips, Patron

CRMSS Ontario 2024 Report

“Bigger” than ever!

The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer Schools' "CRMSS Ontario 2024" course, held from **Saturday, May 18th to Sunday, May 26th, 2024** at New St. James Presbyterian Church in London, Ontario, was an extravagant success. The week centered around preparing and performing Thomas Tallis' 40-voice motet *Spem in alium*, which was conducted by our **Guest Artist**, the internationally renowned **Peter Phillips** from the UK, founder and director of **The Tallis Scholars** and CRMSS Patron. We knew we needed a lot of participants in order to realize our dream of performing this enormously complex and beautiful piece at a CRMSS course, and we were not disappointed! This year saw the largest turnout yet, with over 70 participants, and featured an impressive lineup of tutors from both the UK and North America.

“Thank you so much for this phenomenal course.

Everything about it has been amazing, from the excellent tutors, beautiful selection of music, fun performance activities, interesting talks, sublime concerts, and extraordinary organization.

May I express my gratitude and admiration for what you have created.”

- **Anna Lin, CRMSS Ontario 2024 participant**

An international and expert group of staff



It was an enormous joy and honour to welcome our CRMSS Patron, **Peter Phillips**, the director of **The Tallis Scholars** to London, Ontario to be our **Guest Artist** at CRMSS Ontario 2024. His work with The Tallis Scholars over 50 years at the top levels of international performance give him unrivaled experience and knowledge of this repertoire. He worked hard with us, getting to know many of the participants individually and encouraging us to rise to his exacting standards. What an opportunity!

The rest of the tutor team, led as usual by our founding Artistic Director, **Greg Skidmore**, was composed of many distinguished professional singers, including **Matthew Long**, **Tom Castle**, and **Victoria Meteyard** from the UK, all renowned singers associated with groups such as **The Tallis Scholars**, **The Sixteen**, **I Fagiolini**, **Gabrieli Consort**, and **Tenebrae**. Four more members of the tutor team hailing from Canada were:

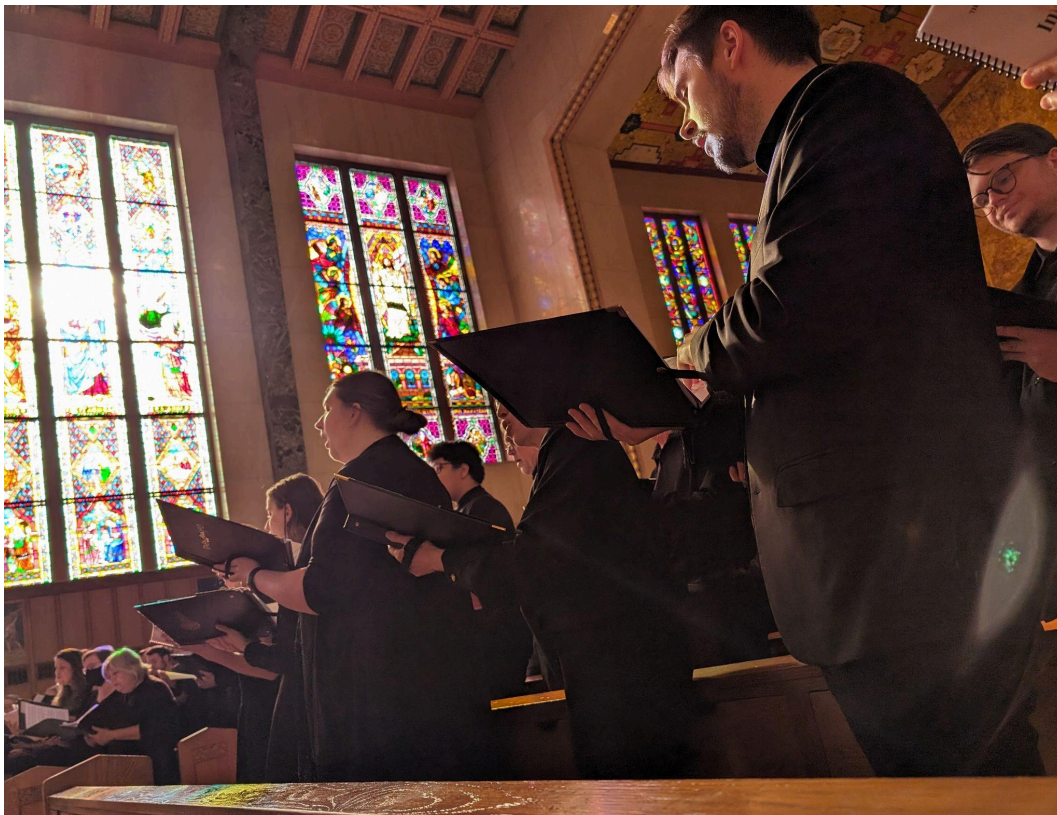
Lucas Harris, Sharang Sharma, Andrew Pickett, and Dr. Kate Helsen. Additionally, we again welcomed a group of **CRMSS International Scholars**, students studying for a performance master's degree in the Solo Voice Ensemble Singing program at **York University, UK** under the leadership of Robert Hollingworth, who brought enthusiasm, talent, and leadership.

“In today’s world ‘teach to understanding’ has largely been replaced by ‘train to standard’. But CRMSS exceeded my personal gold standard of mentoring by powers of ten.”

- Christopher Brown, CRMSS Ontario 2024 participant

LARGE repertoire

The theme for this year's course was *Polyphony Top 40: Tallis' Spem in alium and other extravagances*. Our focus was on performing large-scale works requiring a huge number of vocal parts and this repertoire included not only Tallis' ***Spem in alium*** but also Alessandro Striggio's motet ***Ecce beatam lucem***, movements from his 40-part mass setting (with the 60-part Agnus Dei), and two 12-part pieces: a Magnificat setting by Tomás Luis de Victoria and a motet by Francisco Guerrero. Participants were divided into three different types of ensembles that rehearsed throughout the week: tutti choir, chamber choirs (each numbering roughly one third of the whole group), and small groups (of around 12-14 people). Each ensemble worked on Renaissance pieces written for five or more parts by composers working at the richest and most impressive courts of the day, such as **Orlande de Lassus, William Byrd, Giovanni Gabrieli, and Claudio Monteverdi**.



Solo singing again was a major focus

As with every CRMSS course, providing opportunities for vocal soloists to explore Renaissance repertoire was very important at CRMSS Ontario 2024, in amongst all the “huge” choral music.

Matthew Long again led this side of the course, helped extensively by **Tom Castle** and **Victoria Meteyard**. This year there were an unprecedented 22 vocal soloists who had a chance to look more fully at repertoire for vocal soloist, and work with **Lucas Harris**, one of Canada's leading lutenists.

Lute Day was bigger and better

We again welcomed instrumentalists at CRMSS Ontario 2024. **Lute Day** took place on Tuesday, May 21st, during which lutenist participants joined the course for a day and worked with **Lucas Harris** on repertoire for that instrument, as well as on accompanying song repertoire sung by some of our participants and staff members. We also welcomed a guest staff member to be with us for Lute Day: **Wilma Van Berkel**, a lutenist, luthier, and faculty member at Western University. Lucas and Wilma led a group of lutenists through consort repertoire and **introduced young guitar students**, mostly teenagers, to the lute for the first time. It was a special pleasure to have Wilma with us, and we look forward to having her more heavily involved in the future.



**“I very much enjoyed Lute Day, the faculty recital, and the concert.
It looked like the whole week was terrific. The visit by Peter Phillips was a real bonus.”**

- Mitchell Hammond, Lutenist participant

So many performances!

At every CRMSS course, our nightly **Compline** church services are a wonderful way to bring each day to a close, as plainchant and polyphony progress naturally one from another. We continued this tradition at CRMSS Ontario 2024, while our other liturgical performances took advantage of our numbers to present more 'extravagant' choral music and put it in context. Our **Latin Choral Vespers** service this year was held at the **Chapel of Windermere on the Mount** on Friday, May 24th, and also included a few pieces conducted by Peter Phillips. We tackled more “epic” repertoire including the expansive *In exitu Israel*, a collaboration between William Byrd, John Sheppard, and William Mundy, and other multi-voice compositions by Victoria, Guerrero, Tallis, and Juan Esquivel.



The week also included two **staff recitals**: the first was a moving hour of intense music-making by our guest students from

the UK, the **CRMSS International Scholars**; and the second was a 45-minute offering from the entire tutor team conducted by Peter Phillips, featuring pieces like Monteverdi's *Audi caelum* from his 1610 Vespers, a stunning Guerrero motet, and several lively English madrigals. Some of the staff, including **Matthew Long**, also performed solo lute songs accompanied by Lucas - a special treat.

The final concert on Sunday, May 26th was a resounding success, with a sold-out audience in New St. James Presbyterian church giving a standing ovation after the concluding performance of **Tallis' Spem in alium**, conducted by **Peter Phillips**. Greg Skidmore led the Striggio mass and several other selections, and two other members of the tutor staff, Sharang Sharma and Andrew Pickett, conducted one chamber choir piece each. The **CRMSS International Scholars** included a small set for this concert as well, to spell-binding effect, and a few of the **small groups** performed for the public as well. There were also performances from a few of our **soloists** to round out a varied concert program.

... and a lot to talk about, too



Again in traditional CRMSS fashion, the course featured three musicological **lectures**: **Dr. Susan Lewis**, Vice-Provost of Western University and a Renaissance specialist, spoke about the musical activities in Europe's northernmost courts; **Dr. Kate Helsen** presented a paper on the connection between Striggio's 40-part mass and Tallis's 40-part motet; and **Andrew Pickett** discussed tuning theories and techniques. Additionally, a special 'Fireside Chat' with **Peter Phillips and Greg Skidmore** took place towards the end of the week and provided participants with insights into Phillips's remarkable international career, his lifetime

of contributions to Renaissance polyphony, and his thoughts on how this amazing music works and what it's like to travel the world performing it.

“After this week, my vocabulary for working with Renaissance music has expanded massively...”

- Peter Koniers, CRMSS Ontario 2024 participant

Social events played their role in fostering a sense of joy and lasting friendship among participants. The **opening night** social featured some refreshing juices and fruit kebobs, and the final night's **sharing concert and party**, held at St. John the Evangelist's parish hall, included pizza, wings, and mixed drinks. These gatherings offered participants a chance to unwind and celebrate their achievements with each other.

“CRMSS was a glorious celebration of Renaissance music and kindly camaraderie!”

- Natalie Griller, CRMSS Ontario 2024 participant



Overall, **CRMSS Ontario 2024** was an extraordinary event, very much living up to its "extravagant" billing. We performed some of the most spectacular and complex choral music ever written, worked with world-renowned experts, and spent a whole week obsessing over Renaissance polyphony in all its greatness. We left with enhanced skills, yes, but also new friendships and unforgettable memories of a week dedicated to the splendor of Renaissance music. Very little can compare to the exhilaration of being "inside" a piece like *Spem in alium* and we managed it with real energy and style. Our "large scale" ambition for this course was realised!

CRMSS Ontario 2024 by the numbers

- 74 Participants
- 8 Tutor staff + 5 CRMSS International Scholars = 13 Tutors
- 1 Founder and Artistic Director, Greg Skidmore
- 1 Patron and Guest Artist, Peter Phillips
- 3 Locations (New St. James, Western University, St. John the Evangelist)
- 54 separate pieces of music
- 12 Small Groups (named after feasting foods and wealthy patronage houses)
- 3 Lectures (by Dr. Susan Lewis; Dr. Kate Helsen; Andrew Pickett)
- 2 Staff Recitals (by CRMSS International Scholars, and by the entire Tutor Team)
- 8 Nights of Compline
- 5 Lutenists on Lute Day
- 236 cans of sparkling flavoured water consumed
- 36 CRMSS t-shirts purchased
- 200+ audience members at our final concert
- 1 zoologically fascinating ant-mimicking spider
- 1,000 degrees Celsius all week
- 4040 utterances of "It's fine"