

The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer Schools

Greg Skidmore, Artistic Director
Peter Phillips, Patron

CRMSS Pacific 2023 Report

A Foray into Western Canada

2023 was a very exciting year for The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer School, which, while using the familiar and beloved acronym CRMSS, officially became The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer *SCHOOLS* with the running of its pilot course in Vancouver, British Columbia. The two courses are now distinguished as "CRMSS Ontario" and "CRMSS Pacific", both wonderfully successful in bringing Renaissance polyphony to more people in Canada.

"I had such an incredible experience attending CRMSS Pacific 2023."

CRMSS Pacific 2023 took place from **Friday, May 5th to Sunday, May 7th, 2023**. This weekend course in Vancouver was a concise "taster" of the week-long version that is familiar to past participants of CRMSS Ontario. However, it was no less comprehensive in offering exquisite polyphonic music from the Renaissance. We indulged in singing beautiful motets and madrigals, sacred and secular music, and even broke off into smaller groups. Some singers also took advantage of the opportunity to work on solo Lute songs. All of this music was shared with people from outside the course at daily Compline church services and at High Mass on the morning of Sunday, May 7th. There was an internal concert, only open to participants of the course, on our last day together in the afternoon.

"CRMSS Pacific 2023 was a tremendous highlight of my spring.

The repertoire was delightful, and the environment was supportive, challenging, and hilarious (sometimes all at once)!"

CRMSS Pacific 2023 was held at the beautiful **St. Helen's Catholic Church**, whose marbled sanctuary was the perfect place for our participants to experience singing (and playing) Renaissance polyphony. Beginning in the sanctuary every morning after some tea, coffee, and light refreshments, we would spread out into chamber choirs and small ensembles, and rehearse in the numerous classrooms of the St Helen's School. The cohort of over 35 registered participants drew people from many parts of Canada and the United States, including Florida, California, Alberta, Saskatchewan and even Ontario! CRMSS Pacific 2023, in this way, brought together people in much the same way as our CRMSS Ontario courses famously have done since 2018!

"Thanks to all the organisers for assembling a fantastic choral bomb of a weekend!"

CRMSS Pacific 2023 Staff

Our CRMSS tutor team comprises professional musicians from different parts of the world and is at the heart of every course's success. Flying in from the UK, CRMSS' Founder and Artistic Director, **Greg Skidmore**, shared his wealth of knowledge and expertise in Renaissance music, which he has cultivated over many years singing with top ensembles such as The Tallis Scholars, I Fagiolini, The Sixteen, Tenebrae, the Gabrieli Consort, and others. From Ontario, we had **Sharang Sharma** join us, who has been Choral Music Director at Huron University College, and regularly sings with Tafelmusik Baroque Chamber Choir, Elmer Iseler Singers, and Soundstreams Choir 21. Also joining from Ontario was lutenist **Jonathan Stuchbery**, who appears regularly with Tafelmusik, Aureas Voces, Pacific Baroque Orchestra, and Capella Intima, among other groups.

“The instructors were top notch. Each of them offered a unique perspective on technique, song interpretation, and so much more.”

Greg steered the ship of CRMSS Pacific 2023 as conductor of the tutti and chamber choirs. He also worked with all the small ensembles as they explored the vast madrigal and motet repertoire from the period. Sharang gave individual voice lessons and coaching sessions, focusing on healthy singing technique in solo, choral, and consort settings. Jonathan led sessions not only for our vocal participants wanting to learn more about the lute-song repertoire and its stylistic idiosyncrasies, but also for other lutenists who joined him for our CRMSS Pacific 2023 **Lute Day**. It is always a treat to sing with a real, live lutenist! The fruits of all our tutors' coaching, paired with the participants' hard work and enthusiasm, were evident in the beautiful music shared on Sunday the 7th at our internal concert.



...more on the Internal Sharing Concert

At the internal concert on the afternoon of Sunday, May 7th 2023, the two chamber choirs, all the small groups, and the soloists working with Jonathan on solo vocal repertoire accompanied by the lute, shared their musical progress with their peers through many beautiful performances. We heard exquisite motets by Weelkes, L'Heritier, Guerrero, Sweelinck, Lobo, and Palestrina, as well as solo material by Monteverdi and Arcadelt. It was truly heartening to witness the high level of sophistication that everyone was able to achieve with just a few hours of work on each piece.

“The instructors set a challenging pace, and I think everyone’s expectations were exceeded by how much we accomplished and how well we all sang together.”

Over the short CRMSS Pacific 2023 weekend, we looked at and performed nearly 30 pieces of polyphonic music from the Renaissance, with each piece having its own set of challenges and rewards for us to enjoy. An absolutely tremendous feat! The CRMSS Pacific 2023 Fact Sheet lists all the music that was to be found at CRMSS Pacific, should you like to whet your appetite for next year.



Ensembles of all sizes!

The CRMSS Pacific 2023 group of participants was split into three consort-style **small groups**. This provided everyone the opportunity to work with different sets of people in a smaller, more intimate environment and develop the core skills of ensemble and collaboration which are at the heart of Renaissance polyphony and its performance. These small groups tackled music in four, five, and sometimes even six voices with one or two singers per part.

The full group was also split into two **chamber choirs** which were aptly named the *Lassus* and *Emendemus* chamber choirs, for the reason that the Lassus choir worked on two pieces by the master Flemish composer, Orlando Lassus, and the Emendemus choir worked on two settings of the *Emendemus in melius* text - by Cristobal de Morales and William Byrd. Some of these pieces had been long-time favourites of our participants, but this fact did not overshadow their discovery of some brand new pieces of polyphonic music as well - some that had never been recorded at all, by any choir, anywhere in the world.



The **tutti choir** brought all the participants and tutors into a larger ensemble that sang at nightly Compline services and at High Mass on the morning of Sunday the 7th of May 2023. With complex music to match the extensive forces available, this large choir mustered all the available energy from participants and tutors alike, and was a strong argument in favour of music-making in a large group setting. The excitement and adrenaline was palpable at many points when all the voices joined together. Having these ensembles of varying sizes not only gave us an opportunity to learn music written for various configurations, but also afforded us many chances to form friendships with our fellow participants.

"I made some wonderful new friends and am eagerly awaiting another opportunity to sing with them from well-after-dawn to just-after-dusk."

Music in its liturgical context

In addition to being attracted to the sheer beauty of Renaissance polyphonic music, many participants come to a CRMSS course to experience high-quality church music in its intended liturgical context. Each evening, all of the CRMSS Pacific 2024 participants gathered for an intimate **Compline** service that was open to the public. A 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 that was rehearsed during the day's sessions might become that evening's Compline anthem, reconnecting the worlds of plainchant and polyphony in a practice now almost forgotten after 400 years.

"I was excited about the chosen repertoire, and the opportunity to sing Compline each night."

CRMSS Pacific 2024 also participated in St Helen's Church's **Eucharistic Mass** on Sunday, May 7th, where the congregation and clergy gave us a very warm welcome, appreciating our singing of movements from various polyphonic Mass settings. We offered the beautiful Kyrie from Cardoso's *Missa Miserere mihi*, Gloria from Tallis's *Missa Puer natus est nobis*, Sanctus from Rore's *Missa Praeter rerum seriem*, and the Agnus Dei from Palestrina's *Missa Ut re mi fa sol la*, with each movement taking us all on a journey to a different point in the Renaissance.



A more-than-just-singing experience!

Each CRMSS course in the past has offered a variety of enriching experiences that participants take home with them. While making new friends and performing Renaissance music have always been core components of the CRMSS experience, the week-long courses have always featured round-table discussions with visiting tutors, lectures by experts in the field, sessions in reading Renaissance notations, and excursions to archives to see primary sources.

We were very lucky to have **David Skulski**, founder of the Vancouver Early Music Society, and **Christina Hutten**, professor and coordinator of the early music department at University of British Columbia, join us for a riveting round-table discussion at CRMSS Pacific 2023. The tutor team joined David and Christina on the panel, which provided valuable insight in the role of historical music within the larger classical music industry, especially in Vancouver and British Columbia. David shared wonderful anecdotes from the burgeoning years of the Early Music movement in Canada, even recounting some struggles faced at the time. Christina shared her thoughts and observations on the future of historically informed performance practice in Canada, informed by her experience of teaching students at a range of levels. The wide scope of the round table discussion, touching on many different aspects of the study and performance of Renaissance music in Canada, was in many ways a microcosm of the CRMSS experience itself.

“The course scratched my artistic, academic, and collaborative itches in a way no other group has been able to do before or since.”



Strike up the band!

The inclusion of instrumental music has been a staple of our CRMSS Ontario courses ever since the first course in 2018. Over the past few years, it has evolved into a dedicated day-long session where lutenists and other historical instrumentalists get together to learn and appreciate some unique repertoire. Jonathan Stuchbery offered a taster **Lute Day** during which lutenists based in the Vancouver area and further afield could take part in the CRMSS experience and work with an expert lutenist. It was wonderful to have the enthusiastic instrumentalists join us for a day!



Future plans for CRMSS Pacific

“I loved the course... but it was too short!”

CRMSS Pacific is here to stay. Next year, in 2024, it will be expanded to last for a full week! CRMSS Pacific 2024, will, therefore, join CRMSS Ontario 2024 as an equal partner as The Canadian Renaissance Music Summer Schools expands its offering across the country.

The dates of CRMSS Pacific 2024 are:

**Sunday, August 4th
to
Sunday, August 11th
2024**

Along with the expansion in length comes a significant increase in the size of our tutor team. Greg and Sharang will be back, as will Christina Hutten in an expanded role, leading a workshop for keyboard players interested in Renaissance instruments and performance practice. Greg is bringing with him some of his colleagues from the UK as well, and while details of those tutors are still being finalised, the team is certain to include members of **The Gesualdo Six**. Lucas Harris will join us from Ontario to work with lutenists and provide accompaniment for soloists and small groups throughout the week. Sarah Poon will lead a workshop for string players, and also provide a “viola da gamba petting zoo” experience open to everyone, allowing participants who have never touched the instrument to have a go at playing in a viol consort!

**“It’s a testament to the skill of the directors and instructors
that we were from all walks of life and all skill levels,
but still put forth high-quality music.”**

Join us as we dive deep into Renaissance music for an entire week. Experience tutti, chamber choir, small group, and solo singing as well as working with lutenists, keyboard players, and “petting a viol”! Nightly Compline services will prepare us for singing at High Mass at the end of the week, and lectures and discussions will provide context for the music being made. We’ll arrange some run-out church services elsewhere in the Lower Mainland area, and you will also be able to enjoy a private recital given by our tutor team.

2023 was about establishing a foothold on the west coast and bringing the CRMSS experience, albeit compressed, to Vancouver for the first time. In 2024, we will spread our wings. We invite you to join us as we leap into a fully fledged, week-long, immersive, Renaissance-first tour-de-force!

“I would encourage anyone and everyone who enjoys singing to attend.”

CRMSS Pacific 2023 Fact Sheet

Tutti and Chamber Choir Repertoire

William Byrd	Emendemus in melius
Manuel Cardoso	Missa Miserere mihi: Kyrie
Orlandus Lassus	Lauda Jerusalem Pater noster
Cristobal de Morales	Emendemus in melius
Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina	Jubilate Deo omnis terra Missa Ut re mi fa sol la: Agnus Dei
Peter Philips	Regina caeli
Cipriano de Rore	Missa Praeter rerum seriem: Sanctus & Benedictus
Thomas Tallis	Missa Puer natus est nobis: Gloria Te lucis ante terminum
Robert White	Christe qui lux (I)

Small Groups Repertoire

Francisco Guerrero	Trahe me post te
Jean L'Héritier	Surrexit pastor bonus
Alonso Lobo	O quam suavis est
Palestrina	O magnum mysterium
Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck	Gaude et laetare
Thomas Weelkes	Hosanna to the Son of David

Soloist Repertoire

Thomas Campion	As by the streames of Babylon (from original facsimile)
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Selections by Jacques Arcadelt, John Dowland, Claudio Monteverdi, and others.