

# Royal Musical Association's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference

By Janneka Guise

Thanks to the CAML Research and Professional Development Scholarship and an [Oxford Music & Letters Grant](#), I attended the [RMA 150 Conference](#) in London, UK, September 11-13, 2024.

The Royal Musical Association (RMA) was founded in 1874 to “put the study of music on a more professional footing.”<sup>1</sup> It was one of the first musicological societies in the Western world.<sup>2</sup> The conference welcomed approximately 200 delegates. The first two days were held in Senate House (University of London), and the third day was held at the British Library (where the archives of the RMA are located) with that day meant to highlight the following themes:

- British Library music collections (encompassing manuscripts, archives, printed editions and sound recordings)
- National and transnational public and private musical collections
- The role of libraries, collectors & collections over time
- National and transnational public and private musical collections

My paper, “Surviving and Thriving: 68 Years of a Canadian Music Library Society,” was placed in the British Library programme on Day 3. The programme was massive, with 8 concurrent sessions throughout each day. This is apparently typical of an RMA conference. While reviewing the selections and deciding what to attend was rather daunting, the vastness of the programme meant there was really something for everyone. Here are some of my highlights:

## Day 1 (Senate House)

Session Title: “The Last Musicologists”

This was the first of two sessions I attended on musicology and the climate crisis. Four UK scholars presented ways they are centring sustainability and climate change in their teaching and learning: Renee Timmers (University of Sheffield), Lawrence Davis (University of Liverpool), Erin Johnson-Williams (University of Southampton), Helen Prior (University of Hull). Rob McKay, a sound artist, presented the fascinating collaborative project “[Following the Flight of the Monarchs](#).”

---

<sup>1</sup> “About,” RMA 150 Conference, Royal Music Association, accessed October 7, 2024, <https://rma150.wordpress.com/history/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. For more information about the RMA, see Alec Hyatt King and Julian Rushton, “Royal Musical Association,” in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), published January 20, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.24008>.

### Session Title: “Renaissance”

My favourite presentation from this session was Brigette De Poi (University of Sydney, Australia) presenting her doctoral research on “Monteverdi’s Plague.” She used incredible primary sources from Venice archives to uncover clues to the 2-year gap in documentation of Monteverdi’s life in Venice from 1630 to 1632. We know Monteverdi lived in Venice at that time, and 35% of the Venice population died of the Black Plague during those 2 years. De Poi made a compelling case for where Monteverdi lived, and the impact of the plague on his life and composition thereafter.

### Session Title: “Music at the Frontlines of Crisis”

This was the second of two sessions on musicology and the climate crisis. These presenters were more focused on fieldwork. Luca Gambirasio (University of Cork) studies the so-called eco-festivals in Tuscany. Two presentations, that of Perminus Maturi (University of Namibia), and that of Amanda Bayle (Bath Spa University) and Crispin Dirwai (University of Zimbabwe), described tree-planting partnerships in Zimbabwe to restore and preserve Indigenous culture.

## Day 2 (Senate House)

### Session Title: “Gender Inequality and Irish Popular Music”

Two presentations stood out to me here. The first was Áine Mangaoang’s (University of Oslo) discussion of Sinead O’Connor and deaf culture. Beginning with her 1992 song “Success (has made a failure of our home),” O’Connor included sign language interpreters in several of her music videos. The second was Laura Watson’s (National University of Ireland, Maynooth) presentation about songs of the Irish Reproductive Rights and Repeal Movement. She is compiling a database of what she calls “Repeal Songs” that deal with the 2018 referendum that repealed the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment and allowed the government to legislate access to abortions.

### Session Title: “Folk Music”

Mollie Carlyle’s doctoral research “The Life and Legacy of Stan Hugill,” aka “The Last Shantyman,” stole the show in this session. The term “shantyman” was used exclusively for merchant sailors who led their fellow sailors in the singing of shanties during their work on board commercial sailing ships. Hugill sang the last shanty on a commercial sailing vessel, and later published *Shanties of the Seven Seas*.<sup>3</sup>

### Session Title: “Publishing Music Scholarship in the Age of Open Access”

This session was a disappointment, but I include it here anyway because of its interesting approach. There were four presenters: Robert Adlington (Royal College of Music) representing music scholars, Chris Banks (Imperial College of London, and RMA Publications Committee), Kate Brett (Cambridge University Press), and Michael Middeke (Boydell & Brewer). Because *CAML Review* has been a Diamond open access journal (free for authors and free for readers) since 2011, it is easy to forget that most of the rest of the musicology and music library world is not yet open access. I had hoped

---

<sup>3</sup> Stan Hugill, ed., *Shanties of the Seven Seas* (Routledge, 1961).

that this session might offer some guidance and resources so other music societies' journals might move to a Diamond OA model. Instead, the presenters gave the audience the standard definitions, challenges and opportunities of Green and Gold OA, talked about wealthier institutions signing "read and publish" agreements with some publishers, and barriers to Diamond OA (e.g. publishers cannot afford it, authors worry about legitimacy for tenure and promotion). I found it disappointing because they offered nothing new and gave publishers and authors easy outs for not exploring the Diamond OA option.

## Day 3 (British Library)

Keynote: Alex Ross "The End of Music Criticism"

Well-known for his books such as *The Rest is Noise*, Ross is the music critic for *The New Yorker*. He gave an interesting global history of music criticism, and then lamented the slow death of the occupation in the American Press. He sees the decline starting in the 1990s with the rise of the Internet and click-based statistics. Most music critics are freelance in the United States now, with only three individuals across the country in salaried roles. While Ross was an engaging speaker with an "aw-shucks" self-deprecating style, it was made clear during the question period that he failed to acknowledge his privilege in the way he "fell into" his role at *The New Yorker*, and that the field of music criticism is alive and well elsewhere in the world.

IMAGE 1: HELMUT THE CAML VISITING THE BRITISH LIBRARY. PHOTO CREDIT : JAN GUISE.



## Session Title: “Panel Celebrating the RMA in Context”

This panel had representatives from the boards of the International Musicological Society, the International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance, and the RMA. They each presented their societies’ histories to place that of the RMA in a historical context. I was sitting in the audience with Rupert Ridgewell, president of the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres (IAML), who was not invited to join the panel (even though he was our host at the British Library that day!). As the self-described CAML historian, I was interested to hear the histories of these other societies.

My session was in the last time slot on the last day, and I worried that nobody would attend. I was therefore surprised to see twelve people in the room! My session was well-received, and attendees had good questions for me afterward. I was thrilled to represent CAML (and IAML) to this international audience. In the accompanying photo you can see me wearing a CAML T-shirt from 1997, courtesy of Lisa Philpott, and Helmut the CAML camel sitting proudly on stage behind me (see image 1)

IMAGE 2 : JANNEKA GUISE WEARING A CAML T-SHIRT FROM 1997 WITH HELMUT THE CAML CAMEL SITTING PROUDLY ON STAGE. PHOTO CREDIT: JANNEKA GUISE.



## Conclusion

It was a pleasure to raise awareness of CAML and IAML in a space filled with musicologists and theorists. I enjoyed learning more about the RMA and the history and context of that association, as it provided additional context for my research into CAML's history. Having never visited the British Library before, I reached out to IAML President Rupert Ridgewell, Curator of Printed Music at the British Library, who gladly gave me a personal tour of some of their musical treasures. Seeing autograph manuscripts by Byrd, Purcell, Elgar, and Handel certainly lent an air of gravitas to my

visit. It reinforced to me why we must continue to stress the importance and longevity of printed music to our library administrators, in an era where e-scores and artificial intelligence are dominating the professional conversation.

## Bibliography

Hugill, Stan, ed. *Shanties from the Seven Seas*. Routledge, 1961.

Royal Music Association. "About." RMA 150 Conference. Accessed October 7, 2024.

<https://rma150.wordpress.com/history/>.