

Review of HISS 2014

Roberta Diamond (soprano) and Ignacio Lusardi (tenor)

Having only just moved to London, HISS was one of our first musical experiences in the UK. It was an adventure in many senses. First of all, we had never travelled that far north in the world ever before! We were quickly made to feel very welcome, however, and got right into the busy schedule of classes, rehearsals and jam sessions.

At first, I must admit, the range of sessions and classes was a bit overwhelming. There were so many options, across such a broad range of repertoire and styles. We found ourselves bouncing from one class to the next on the first day, not quite knowing where we most wanted to be. In the end, I decided to go with what I knew least about, which was the English ballad repertoire, and Ignacio decided to try his hand at continuo playing.

Saying that, the interesting theme of the French-English connection did give the week a good sense of continuity and by the end of the week we felt that we had been given a great overview at the musical results of such an important historical period.

Scarborough was a beautiful and very apt setting for HISS. It was peaceful and welcoming, as well as full of interesting stories and histories, as the wonderful Vivien Ellis revealed to us in her class on Ballads from Scarborough. The campus was perfectly suited to productive music-making, always offering a spare room or nook to form impromptu ensembles.

Indeed, this impromptu work was one of our favourite aspects of the HISS experience. All the participants were so keen to share their (often very different) musical experiences and create something new from something old. This culminated in a delightful musical banquet on the last night of the course, where we witnessed an amazing array of performances and talent, and had a lot of fun!

Perhaps it was in these collaborations that the essence of HISS was made most clear. Coming from an academic background in historical performance, I think we often forget or underestimate the importance of folk music in understanding and interpreting early music. Spending a few days combining the two was really an enlightening experience for us.