



## 5 MINUTES WITH ... CORALINE GROEN

By Laurence Vittes

**O**n February 2, when **Coraline Groen** took first prize in the 27th Netherlands Violin Competition in Utrecht, performing works by Mozart and Ravel, you could imagine her sweeping down the stairs at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam to play for the first time as a soloist.

By the time all concerts were canceled due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the 24-year-old Groen had been playing for three weeks as a new member of the second violin section of the **Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra**. She was rehearsing with pianist Rik Kuppen for a recital at a festival on the island of Schiermonnikoog. Thanks to her competition win, she was to embark in July on an international concert tour playing Brahms' Double Concerto.

Her plans were, unavoidably, changed by the global pandemic.

Groen lives in the same house with four musician friends, who also happened to be members of a piano quintet called **de Formule** (the Formula). The ensemble had recently completed multi-disciplinary performances of Shostakovich and Dvořák, and were working on César Franck. With their concerts canceled, Groen and her colleagues made a video clip inspired by Shostakovich reflecting the enforced minimalist intimacy of their “scary basement”—perhaps a scenario for classical-music landscapes of the future. In an interview from her home in The Hague, Groen called this project “being creative at times of unemployment.”

### What benefits and influences do such unconventional chamber-music projects bring to the way you play conventional repertoire as a soloist?

First of all, a lot of fun. I started de Formule with some of my best friends—four of whom are roommates. Up until now, we had collaborated with theatrical directors, dancers, and lighting designers. To be able to create a convincing performance with five, you have to have a clear story for the music you will play. We go into the musical score very thoroughly, most of the time learning it by heart and always knowing exactly what every motive, melody, line, or accompaniment means. It is something that enriches the experience of playing so much, and is something I also aspire to when playing traditional solo or chamber-music concerts.

### How are you handling the hiatus?

At first, I thought of recording some pieces and songs with my boyfriend, who plays the bayan. After a week or so, I put my violin down and it stayed in its case for three weeks. Because of the competition, my graduation in December, and the job at the orchestra, I had not had a break for a long time; I needed time to process, reflect, and find out what I wanted instead of forcing myself to keep on practicing. Doing sports, administration, cleaning, reading books, cooking, taking time to sort out the pictures on my laptop, listening to music, and watching some series has led me to re-experience my inner motivation and love for violin playing.

### How are you staying creative and motivated?

I am enjoying setting my own goals for practicing solo repertoire and polishing solo concertos—without any pressure. Some days I play for several hours; some days I don't play at all, or I only play through a piece for fun. It's nice to have the time to live at a somewhat slower pace, and I have to admit, practicing when you have had more than enough sleep turns out to be surprisingly effective! Some days it is still difficult, when it seems that it could be 2021 before we can play live concerts again, but I guess we all experience those feelings.

### Is there more to come from the basement?

Yes! Now that we have overcome our fears of going into a dark basement, we are very excited about an unknown door we cannot open . . .

### That's a lot of togetherness in your living situation.

I feel blessed to be living together with my

friends and fellow musicians; it makes what they call in Holland an "intelligent lockdown" more bearable. Additionally, I have the chance to play live chamber music—although we have mostly been eating and playing ping-pong in the basement! We do have some concrete plans for performing in a new society where we need to social distance, and we are looking for partners to collaborate with. For the moment I cannot tell too much about that, of course. Coming soon!

### What plans have you made for your re-emergence into the sunlight?

I can't wait to see my colleagues again, and in the fall I hope to pass my trial time in the orchestra. I have lots of exciting plans—and the energy to bring them alive. But for now, health and safety are most important. On that basis, I am in a very good place with everything I need and a lot of love.

## CORALINE GROEN'S GEAR

**INSTRUMENT** Until recently I had been playing a Willibrord Crijnen, 2006, on loan from the National Musical Instrument Foundation (NMF). Since January I have been playing on a J.B. Vuillaume that I have on loan from a colleague in the orchestra.

**BOW** I have been playing on a Andreas Grütter from the NMF, 2003. I am also trying out a François Nicolas Voirin that I am probably going to buy with the money I won from the competition.

**STRINGS** On the Crijnen I always used Thomastik-Infeld Vision Solo, with Pirastro Eudoxa for the E string; they don't fit the Vuillaume really well, however, so I am trying out different strings at lower tensions at the moment.

**CASE** BAM

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