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ALUMN IN THE SPOTLIGHT

CHRISTOS TSOGIAS-RAZAKOV



Photo by Allard Willemse

[Christos Tsogias-Razakov](#) (BA'18 & MM'20) is a Greek classical Oboist, a researcher of Hellenic oboe repertoire, and a specialist in oboe reed-making with his own cane fields. Christos studied for his bachelor's and master's at the Royal Conservatoire and he has performed with the Greek National Radio Television Orchestra (ERT), Dutch Ballet Orchestra Amsterdam Chamber Orchestra, and Amsterdam Festival Orchestra and is since 2020 the principal oboe of the [Athens Philharmonia Orchestra](#).

The Alumni Office spoke with Christos about the two years after graduating, being a working musician during the pandemic, and his new Ph.D. candidate journey at the University of Macedonia of Thessaloniki (Greece) in collaboration with Ionian University, Corfu (Greece).

By Celia Swart

October 20 2022

[alumni office] You graduated with your masters in 2020, what have you been doing the past two years?

[\[Christos Tsogias-Razakov\]](#) Well, I would say that my life has changed quite a bit! At the start of the first lockdown in March 2020, my mother had a lot of worries about the pandemic and booked me a flight back to Greece. I remember that day so well: after visiting a concert in the Royal Concertgebouw I packed a small bag to be a couple of hours later on a plane back to Greece. I had a plan in mind that I would perhaps return for graduation after a month or so, but little did I know I would return to the Netherlands only until after two years. Up until that time I had been living in the Hague for six years and I had left almost everything behind in the Hague - my friends had to clean out my flat and send some of my favourite books and stuff back to Greece.

My final months at the Royal Conservatoire were online, including my graduation concert. It was a quite an important experience for me because I had to explore all the facets of having recording quality where I had to deal with cables, microphones and technology. In my current work practice, this was a very useful skill to have learned.

I had in mind to perhaps have a professional life in the Netherlands, I was very satisfied with my life in the Hague. During the pandemic, all the concerts in the Netherlands were postponed and my plans too were very unsure and unstable. In Athens, I did audition for the Athens Philharmonia Orchestra and got a position as an oboist. During covid, I could continue working for them since the orchestra made rare recordings of music works by Greek composers. I considered myself very privileged to be working as a musician during the pandemic. Since I had my master's degree from the Royal Conservatoire in June 2020, I continued my research about oboe repertoire by Greek composers as a Ph.D. candidate in the frame of a university in Greece.





Photo by Athens Philharmonia Orchestra

[AO] That sounds very exciting! Can you tell us more about your Ph.D.?

[CTR] In my Ph.D. I am creating a catalogue of pieces for oboe written by Greek composers. This too made my life during the pandemic very productive. I have found compositions that nobody, for centuries, gave attention to before. They have been forgotten and bringing them to the surface gives my community easy access to these pieces. I organized a locally search for these pieces and I want to inspire living composers to create new oboe pieces.

This investigation for my Ph.D. thesis was something totally new to me compared to my studies at the Royal Conservatoire. At the Royal Conservatoire, I was performing with various ensembles and orchestras and my master's research on reeds was one of a more practical nature. Right now, the nature of creating the first worldwide catalogue of oboe repertoire by composers has a different approach: I researched the biographies of composers, historical books, archives, and online research sites, where for my Master's exposition I had to do experiments and interviews. I never envisioned being this person who spends a lot of time behind a laptop - I started my Ph.D. meanwhile the pandemic was thriving and I really discovered new aspects of myself.

[AO] How has your time at the Royal Conservatoire shaped you to who you are today?

[CTR] Looking back, I count myself to be incredibly lucky with my teachers at the Royal Conservatoire and I considered them my mentors, parents and friends. I only applied to the Ha Leiden and have found there everything I needed: I got oboe lessons from Alexei Ogrintchouk, Karel Schoofs, Ali Groen, and Ron Tijhuis. Remco de Vries was coaching me on orchestral excerpts. Fajo Jansen we worked on stage presentation-body work and I followed classes with Jed Wentz, who was teaching the relationship between rhetoric and Music over the centuries. I could follow some lessons at Leiden University. Besides the amazing teachers, I was very satisfied with all the orchestra projects and masterclasses. It was top for us oboists. Needless to say, I never thought of going to another conservatoire.

In addition, traveling from a different country is a big deal on an emotional and psychological level. A new country, a new language and a new culture. I didn't know anybody in my first year. My teachers were the first people that helped and shaped me into who I am today. In those six years, they have set an example of routine and how I could be a professional, an artist, and how to produce and organize projects. Three years after graduating I still remember things they said to me during my time at the Royal Conservatoire. The way they shape you is something that will carry out for the rest of your life.



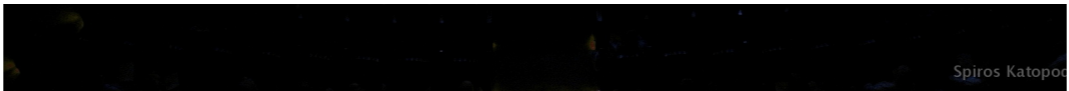


Photo by Spiros Katopodis

[AO] At the moment you have a position in the Athens Philharmonia Orchestra. How have the projects at the Royal Conservatoire prepared you for professional life?

[CTR] I applied many things from my study to my today's professional practice. During my studies at the Royal Conservatoire, I had opportunities to play with various ensembles (e.g. Reed Quintet) and especially with Dutch orchestras outside of the school, such as the Dutch Ballet Orchestra Amsterdam, Dordrecht Chamber Orchestra, and the Amsterdam Festival Orchestra. These experiences showed me what it was like to perform and work with these kind of ensembles and orchestras.

At the same time, I did face some challenges. At one of the conservatoire projects, I remember playing a symphony that was very demanding and I was not satisfied with how I was playing. Later, I had to perform this symphony again with another professional orchestra. I noticed while performing that it went quite well. And a few months ago, I had to perform again the same symphony, but now I was able to perform it by heart.

During my studies, these projects were significant, when you are placed in a professional environment and encounter people that are professionals. I could recognize my abilities, my weaknesses, what needed further developing and how I could work efficiently. In the conservatory, the projects can feel like a safe bubble, and going outside this bubble can be quite a shock, therefore I am happy I collected many experiences while I was still studying and had a safety net of teachers that supported and guided me.



[AO] Beginning this year we moved The Royal Conservatoire to a new location in Amare in the heart of The Hague. Have you visited this new building?

[CTR] Yes, I did! When the news reached me of the new building Amare, I felt strongly that I had to visit Amare. Visiting the new building felt bittersweet – I am happy there is a new building with the best facilities, but all my memories of my time at the Royal Conservatoire are in the previous building. I spend so much time there, it really was my second home. I spend hours practicing, following lectures, rehearsing - it was the place where I saw all my friends, teachers, and colleagues every day. But, at the same time, I realized that it is not necessarily the place itself that makes those fond memories, but all the amazing people I have met over the years do.

I am an alumnus now and perhaps with the old building closing, my time in the Hague has also metaphorically closed a fase in my life, a period where I have grown and developed imr on a professional and personal level, which I feel very happy and positive about.

[AO] Lastly, what does the future hold for you?

[CTR] Currently I returned to my birthplace and I keep building on the catalogue of unrecorded and unknown compositions for oboe by Greek composers. I am willing to record these p presented them to the public through lectures, performances and produce musical recordings.

Since the pandemic, I am cautious to talk about my future, which I feel is very unpredictable. The Netherlands holds a special place in my heart, but living in my homeland has various privileges to contribute with the knowledge that I took from the Netherlands. I also want to keep things open regarding projects, where I look forward to new opportunities and starting r collaborations. I would also like to spend more time as an entrepreneur in the cane fields (material for reeds) and reed-making, based on the master research, that I did at the Royal Conservatoire with the support of the Onassis Foundation. Alongside, the Athens Philharmonia Orchestra and doctoral research, for the academic year 2022-2023, I will collaborate as teacher and leader of chamber music ensembles for all ages, at the Municipal Conservatoire of Thessaloniki, Greece.

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Royal Conservatoire
The Hague

Contact

Royal Conservatoire Alumni Office

Juliana van Stolberglaan 1

2595 CA The Hague
Netherlands

alumni@koncon.nl
[+31 \(0\)70-315 15 28](tel:+31703151528)

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