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In Utrecht, three finalists at the Nederlands Violconours

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 **Netherlands** [Mozart](#), [Saint-Saëns](#), [Ravel](#) – [Nederlands Violconours \[2\]](#): Leon Blekh, Charlotte Spruit, Coraline Groen (violins); Residentie Orkest The Hague / Anja Bihlmaier (conductor). TivoliVredenburg, Utrecht, Netherlands. 2.2.2020. (LV)



Coraline Groen (violin), Residentie Orchestra, & Anja Bihlmaier (conductor)
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Mozart – Violin Concertos No.4 K.218; No.5, K.219

Saint-Saëns – Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso

Ravel – *Tzigane*

Playing third in the final round with orchestra of the 27th Nederlands Violconours, Coraline Groen gave stunning performances of Mozart's Violin Concerto No.4 K.218 and Ravel's *Tzigane* to take home first prize. From the start, in Mozart's Concerto No.4, K.218, the 24-year old virtuoso from The Hague played with multidimensional phrasing and flawless timing. It was clear this would be her night.

Whether over a few short bars or arcing over larger sections, Groen always demonstrated exhilarating thrusts of energy, often capped off by magnificent cadential trills. In the opening of the third movement, she and the orchestra were as if one. (Not surprisingly, before the competition began, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra asked her to join the ensemble.) In her body language, she alternated between intense focus and command, and a sense of looking at time and motion from a higher Olympian perspective. Paying full respect to the composer, she let the score unfold in the way it was intended.

All participants had been required to write their own cadenzas. Groen responded with

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sequences that seemed improvised but were actually carefully scripted, often magical. In the first movement she included a left-hand pizzicato that captured the impudent sense of fun, and then transmuted it into radiant gold, and then ultimately earthly human warmth. In addition, along the way she added intriguing connecting passages and stylish endearments. Portamento appeared only occasionally and was hardly missed.

The third movement was a total delight in which the razor-sharp Residentie Orchestra was fully complicit. Anja Bihlmaier (the new music director beginning next season) sealed the deal with structural accents in the basses and cellos in the sequence that wrapped up the movement, capping a remarkable performance. After it was over, the audience was totally silent before acknowledging Groen and Mozart with warm applause.

In Ravel's *Tzigane* Groen played with equal command, relentlessly drilling down deeper and deeper into the variations until their incorruptible insanity disrupted every bit of the composer's intricate blueprint. As her interpretation exploded, an audience that had held itself in check roared with delight. Suddenly you could imagine Groen sweeping down the stairs at the Concertgebouw, to play for the first time as a soloist. By then she will have graduated to Brahms and Sibelius, but for one evening at the TivoliVredenburg in Utrecht, her Mozart won the day.

Under normal circumstances the second-prize winner Charlotte Spruit would have made it a much closer contest. In addition to tackling the Ravel, the 19-year-old from Hilversum played Mozart's Concerto No.5 K.219 with shape, color, substance, unwavering beauty and elegance of tone.

And against such stiff competition, third-prize winner Leon Blekh showed flashes of a refreshing coltish talent on the rise in Saint-Saëns's Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso. And in Mozart's K.218 (each contestant did one of the two concertos), the 20-year-old from Antwerp showed ease, relish, refinement and confidence: when he took the wrong turn at a Mozartian fork, he knew to take a quick look at the conductor's score to find his way.

Laurence Vittes

More information on the competition is [click here](#).

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