

IN CONVERSATION WITH

AVI TALER

Avi Taler, pianist, singer and educator, completed his undergraduate and postgraduate orchestral and choral conducting degrees at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music in Tel Aviv University, Israel. He then took the postgraduate Master of Performance Conducting course at the Royal College of Music under the guidance of professors Toby Purser, Peter Stark, Howard Williams and visiting professor Martyn Brabbins, where he was a fellow of the Polonsky Foundation and Bnei Brit Trust. He was supported by the America-Israel Cultural Fund and the Colton Foundation. Avi has given performances with orchestras and ensembles in England and Israel; having a deep interest in musical education, he has led and directed youth concert bands, choirs and other ensembles.



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Hi Avi! What did you study at the RCM and when did you graduate?

Hi, and thanks for this interview! I did my Master of Performance in conducting, graduating in 2020, with a deferred graduation ceremony last summer.

Do you have an RCM highlight to share?

My time at the RCM was full of highlights, but one of the most memorable was a recording session we conductors took with a student-led orchestra in Abbey Road Studios. Standing at the same studio where some of the most celebrated albums and soundtracks were recorded was a very powerful and emotional experience.

Congratulations on your success with the RPS Enterprise Fund! Can you tell us more about the project that you have received funding for, ExploSound?

Thank you very much! ExploSound was originated by my composer friend and RCM alumnus Thomas Foster, who graduated the same year as me. ExploSound is a new music ensemble and collective dedicated to diversifying contemporary art music's audience, exploring innovative concert formats, and producing relevant new creative work. The funding from the RPS was for our debut event, where brand new pieces commissioned specifically for this event and tailor-made for its unique set up would be performed.

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When and why did you first develop ExploSound?

During lockdowns, Tom and I felt that many venues and ensembles had spent periods trying to force traditional work into an online format which led to results that will always be substandard to the in-person experience. These works were usually not created with digital in mind and were not as effective when experienced in this way. Our project was meant to unlock the artistic possibilities of the obstacles associated with remote performance, generating creative responses to the difficulties of the digital stage and pieces that exploit digital to reach their fullest and most inspiring potential. The project meant to generate unique and innovative pieces of music and a fresh audience experience. Initially, the idea was to create a complete online event and performance, where all participants are remote. Time has passed and things have changed since, and we have to respond to the current reality, where performances in person are available and distancing is not a substantial part - however those do not belittle our intentions and the importance to explore remote platforms of performing.

Can you tell us about the application process for the RPS Enterprise Fund? Do you have any tips for those who may be applying in the future?

Just after we started testing and rehearsing as an ensemble, we saw that the RPS was offering the new Enterprise Award, celebrating the creativity and extraordinary response of musicians to the shocking void lockdown had created. We had to introduce our project, its uniqueness, importance and practicality, and send a breakdown of how we were going

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to use the funded amount if we received it. It was actually an interesting process which I hadn't had to deal with earlier, and I found it quite learning. My tips would be - give

enough time to refine your proposal and thoughts, put down realistic financial amount ranges, and have a second option plan for if the funding does not work exactly to your plan.

How do you plan to balance the creative and administrative processes within ExploSound?

Both Thomas and I have been dealing with both the creative and administrative aspects of ExploSound, and we're balancing things quite well according to our strengths and fields of knowledge: creatively, I am to shape the sound and help the musicians come up with a musical result which will serve the scores; Thomas will be composing some of the music and will be responsible for choosing the composers and pieces for us to programme. Administratively, we have been sending proposals, funding requests, queries to venues and sponsors, and recruiting musicians. I think our teamwork allows us to have a good balance.

What are your plans for the future of for ExploSound?

Unfortunately, my musical career has been on a hold for a while due to personal family circumstances. The reality which made us come up with ExploSound has changed as well, and we are now working on rescheduling our debut event and adjusting the ensemble's concept with the current condition. Once the debut event happens, we hope we can reach out to many audiences, composers and venues, and come up with a long term event series.

What do you wish you knew when you were starting out, and what advice do you have for students looking to develop similar projects?

I am very grateful that the RPS saw the potential in our project and decided to award us. Their advice and support are very helpful. I don't know if it's my place to give advice to students, but I'd say - think big, always exploit the existing devices and break the boundaries. Also team up with people you trust and like working with, two heads are better than one.

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The focus of today is 'Finding my Funding'. Do you have any advice for students relating to this?

Finding funding can get tedious and boring, it consumes a lot of time and energy, and is easy to neglect or postpone when we musicians can actually make music and create. However, there are no shortcuts when it comes to this, and we always need to get ourselves the financial resources to make our programmes and projects work. My advice (which I myself don't always stick to) is - have your CVs ready and up-to-date, keep notes of contact people you can reach out to when you have an exciting project, stay in touch with them, leave notes of your agenda, projects' purposes and schedule, and don't hold yourself back from trying every option possible - you never know where the help may come from!

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