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## Intense, energetic and truly cathartic

Age, Melbourne

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## MUSIC

### MAHLER 9 ★★★★★

Australian World Orchestra, Hamer Hall, November 22

Reviewed by **TONY WAY**

Eagerly awaited and never disappointing, this year's appearance of the Australian World Orchestra, a reunion of many of Australia's best orchestral musicians from across the globe, resulted in a magisterial account of Mahler's Symphony No.9.

Written during a period where the composer was challenged by the death of his daughter, tensions in his marriage and the diagnosis of a life-threatening heart condition, the symphony is a supreme act of musical catharsis in which Mahler confronts his demons and creates a unique and astonishing testament to the enduring value of human life.

Under the baton of the orchestra's founder Alexander Briger, the players manifested their formidable knowledge and love of the music in a performance of finely honed detail and intense emotional energy.

Such precision and power paid immediate dividends in the lengthy opening Andante, where its haunting allusions to death and extraordinary orchestration were illuminated by an adroitly nuanced sense of timbre particularly in the wind and brass.

Displaying enormous versatility, the orchestra vibrantly inhabited the strange sound-world of the inner movements. The perverse black humour of the second movement in which a rustic dance takes on a

ghoulish character was well realised, while the third-movement Rondo-Burleske bristled with vehemence.

Initiated by searing string tone, the symphony's long, aching apotheosis was delivered with compelling sincerity, rising and then falling into a mood of quiet hope, aided by slowly dimmed house lights.

Remarkably conducting the 90-minute-long score from memory, Briger channelled the players' obvious camaraderie into a life-affirming encounter that recalled the landmark Melbourne performance of this work by the Chicago Symphony under Georg Solti in 1988. For another generation, this account will live long in the memory of those fortunate enough to have experienced it.



Photo: Helga Salwe

**Alexander Briger conducts the Australian World Orchestra.**