

# Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra/Harding

**Start time:** 7.30pm

**Approximate end time:** 9.20pm, with no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

## Programme

**Rick van Veldhuizen** *mais le corps taché d'ombres* (UK premiere)

**Gustav Mahler** Symphony No 9

1. Andante comodo
2. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers
3. Rondo-burleske
4. Adagio

**Daniel Harding leads the Concertgebouw Orchestra in a pairing of Mahler's Ninth with a contemporary work that addresses similar subjects of life and death.**

'My pieces are always above all expressions of vitality, of a thrust through life without compromise. The darker side to this – derailment, contamination – has proved to be recurring motif in my body of work. In the darker corners lies so much wonder, curiosity, beauty and pain that it would be a pity not to seize every opportunity to explore them.'

In describing his own music, Dutch composer Rick van Veldhuizen touches on themes that pervade Mahler's: the tussle between life and death, between 'beauty and pain'. It was precisely this tension that inspired Rick van Veldhuizen's *mais le corps taché d'ombres* ('but the body stained with shadows'), a phrase borrowed from Jean Genet's poem *Le condamné à mort* ('The condemned man'). The poem, a passionate declaration of love and grief, was written for and about the poet's beloved friend Maurice Pilorge as he languished on death row.

Rick van Veldhuizen's *mais le corps taché d'ombres* is a companion piece to Mahler's Ninth Symphony, and was commissioned by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Mahler Foundation. The composer explores the symphony's finality, its sense of looking back at life, by juxtaposing the joie de vivre of 1970s disco with contrapuntal writing influenced by Berg and Ligeti, interspersed with hints of Mahler's sweeping melodies.

Mahler was acutely conscious of the precedent of composers such as Beethoven, Schubert and Bruckner dying before they could complete their 10th (numbered) symphonies, and was determined to thwart the trend. He reassured himself with the thought that *Das Lied von der Erde* 'counted' as his ninth symphony, so that his Ninth was really his 10th – but, despite making significant inroads into his 10th Symphony proper, he died before he could finish it. That the Ninth proved to be his last complete symphony intensifies its valedictory tone.

Death stalks much of Mahler's music, so its presence in the Ninth is not new, but here he squares up to it with a profoundly vulnerable sense of courage, expressed through an exquisitely painful lyricism so poignant as to be at times almost unbearable. The Austrian summer light that infused his earlier music seems here to have attenuated to a sliver of wintry sunshine, illuminating the past even as the shadows lengthen.

Alban Berg described the first movement of Mahler's Ninth as 'the expression of an exceptional fondness for this earth, the longing to live in peace on it, to enjoy nature to its depths before death comes. For he comes irresistibly. The whole movement is permeated with premonitions of death. Again and again it crops up ... most potently of course in the colossal passage where this premonition becomes certainty'. The movement is threaded through with a sighing two-note motif which, in the finale, is widened to become a more direct reference to a motif from Beethoven's *Les adieux* Piano Sonata. The earlier composer labelled this motif 'Farewell', as did Mahler in a draft of the first movement.

barbican

The sighing motif emerges after the faltering palpitations of the introduction – a rhythm interpreted by Leonard Bernstein as a reference to Mahler's irregular heartbeat following the diagnosis of his heart condition. An expansive, longing melody on the violins recurs, each time building to yearning climaxes – and each time contrasted with episodes of tortured chromaticism, dissonant and funereal. The orchestral textures are then pared right down during the wistful passage that ends the movement.

In the two central movements, elements of nihilism, even horror, are unleashed. The scherzo, in the Austrian Ländler dance-style, is earthy, at times grotesque, with a drunken waltz and a gentler, nostalgic section that recalls the sighing motif. The 'Rondo-Burleske' is dedicated 'To my brothers in Apollo' – a jibe at detractors who criticised Mahler's counterpoint. Mahler defiantly proves them wrong with his remarkably modern treatment of dissonant, fragmentary contrapuntal lines, the fiendish tone interrupted by a serene interlude in which the shrill woodwind motif heard earlier in the movement is transformed into a sweet trumpet melody before being taken up by the strings in music that anticipates the finale. But the reprieve is short-lived, and chortling clarinets herald the gradual return of the devilish counterpoint.

Mahler saves the slow movement until last. Beethoven's 'Farewell' figure is quoted in the first main theme on strings (the shape of which also recalls the funeral hymn *Abide with me* – possibly a coincidence, although it's possible Mahler heard the hymn in New York). Richly scored lyricism is contrasted with sparse, ghostly passages that are even more ethereal than the first movement's chamber-like final section. There is a devastating climax, and the horns quote the Eighth Symphony's motif associated with the words 'Ewig, Ewig' ('Eternally, Eternally'). Do the fragile final bars – with the last chord marked 'esterbend' (dying away) – signify peaceful resolution or aching desolation? Perhaps Mahler, whose music so often inhabits the points of tension between life's contradictions, finds a reconciliation between the two: in facing loss, something inexpressibly precious is gained.

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Produced by the Barbican

# Performers

**Daniel Harding** conductor

## Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

violin I

**Vesko Eschkenazy**  
**Liviu Prunaru**  
**Tjeerd Top**  
**Marijn Mijnders**  
**Ursula Schoch**  
**Marleen Asberg**  
**Keiko Iwata-Takahashi**  
**Tomoko Kurita**  
**Henriëtte Luytjes**  
**Borika van den Booren-Bayon**  
**Marc Daniel van Biemen**  
**Christian van Eggelen**  
**Mirte de Kok**  
**Junko Naito**  
**Benjamin Peled**  
**Nienke van Rijn**  
**Jelena Ristic**  
**Valentina Svyatlovskaya**  
**Michael Waterman**

violin II

**Caroline Strumphler**  
**Susanne Niesporek**  
**Jae-Won Lee**  
**Anna de Veij Mestdagh**  
**Herre Halbertsma**  
**Marc de Groot**  
**Arndt Auhagen**  
**Elise Besemer**  
**Leonie Bot**  
**Coraline Groen**  
**Caspar Horsch**  
**Sanne Hunfeld**  
**Mirelys Morgan Verdecia**  
**Sjaan Oomen**  
**Jane Piper**  
**Eke van Spiegel**  
**Joanna Westers**

viola

**Santa Vižine**  
**Michael Gieler**  
**Saeko Oguma**  
**Frederik Boits**  
**Roland Krämer**  
**Guus Jeukendrup**  
**Jeroen Quint**  
**Eva Smit**  
**Martina Forni**  
**Yoko Kanamaru**  
**Vilém Kijonka**  
**Edith van Moergastel**  
**Jeroen Woudstra**

cello

**Gregor Horsch**  
**Tatjana Vassiljeva-Monnier**  
**Johan van Iersel**  
**Benedikt Enzler**  
**Chris van Balen**  
**Joris van den Berg**  
**Jérôme Fruchart**  
**Christian Hacker**  
**Maartje-Maria den Herder**  
**Boris Nedialkov**  
**Clément Peigné**  
**Honorine Schaeffer**

double bass

**Dominic Seldis**  
**Pierre-Emmanuel de Maistre**  
**Théotime Voisin**  
**Mariëtta Feltkamp**  
**Rob Dirksen**  
**Léo Genet**  
**Felix Lashmar**  
**Georgina Poad**  
**Nicholas Schwartz**  
**Olivier Thiery**

flute

**Emily Beynon**  
**Kersten McCall**  
**Julie Moulin**  
**Mariya Semotyuk-Schlaffke**

piccolo

**Vincent Cortvrint**

oboe

**Alexei Ogrintchouk**  
**Ivan Podyomov**  
**Nicoline Alt**  
**Alexander Krimer**

cor anglais

**Miriam Pastor Burgos**

clarinet

**Calogero Palermo**  
**Olivier Patey**  
**Hein Wiedijk**

e flat clarinet

**Arno Piters**

bass clarinet

**Davide Lattuada**

bassoon

**Andrea Cellacchi**  
**Gustavo Núñez**  
**Helma van den Brink**

contrabassoon

**Simon Van Holen**

horn

**Katy Woolley**  
**Laurens Woudenberg**  
**José Luis Sogorb Jover**  
**Fons Verspaandonk**  
**Jaap van der Vliet**  
**Paulien Weierink-Goossen**

trumpet

**Miroslav Petkov**  
**Omar Tomasoni**  
**Hans Alting**  
**Jacco Groenendijk**  
**Bert Langenkamp**

trombone

**Bart Claessens**  
**Jörgen van Rijen**  
**Nico Schippers**

tenor/bass trombone

**Martin Schippers**

bass trombone

**Raymond Munnecom**

tuba

**Perry Hoogendijk**

timpani

**Tomohiro Ando**

percussion

**Mark Braafhart**  
**Bence Major**  
**Herman Rieken**

harp

**Petra van der Heide**  
**Anneleen**  
**Schuitemaker**

piano

**Jeroen Bal**

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**Jan Ummels**  
**Ton van der Meer**

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