

PRESS KIT  
**THE EMPIRE OF LIGHTS**  
**KIM YOUNG-HA**  
**ARTHUR NAUZYCIEL**



**Théâtre National de Bretagne**  
Direction Arthur Nauzyciel  
1 rue Saint-Hélier, CS 54007  
35040 Rennes Cedex  
**T-N-B.fr**



**THE EMPIRE  
OF LIGHTS  
KIM YOUNG-HA  
ARTHUR NAUZYCIEL**

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**TOUR  
2017  
— 2018**

Rennes, Théâtre National de Bretagne  
09 11  
– 18 11 2017

Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand  
22 11  
– 24 11 2017

Bobigny, MC93  
05 12  
– 10 12 2017

With **JI HYUN-JUN**  
**MOON SO-RI**  
**JUNG SEUNG-KIL**  
**YANG DONG-TAK**  
**YANG SAVINE YOUNG-MI**  
**KIM HAN**  
**KIM JUNG-HOON**  
**LEE HONG-JAE**

Duration 1h50

3



© DR

After the novel by  
**KIM YOUNG-HA**  
Direction  
**ARTHUR NAUZYCIEL**  
Adaptation  
**VALÉRIE MRÉJEN**  
**ARTHUR NAUZYCIEL**  
Set  
**RICCARDO HERNANDEZ**  
Lights and video design  
**INGI BEKK**  
Film making, image and video editing  
**PIERRE-ALAIN GIRAUD**  
Sound  
**XAVIER JACQUOT**  
Costumes  
**GASPARD YURKIEVICH**  
Makeup and hairdressing  
**BAEK JI-YOUNG**

Show created from the 4th to the 27th of March 2016 at the National Theater Company of Korea (NTCK).

Production déléguée : Théâtre National de Bretagne – Rennes.  
Coproduction : CDN Orléans/Loiret/Centre as part of the France-Korea 2015-2016 Year. With the support of Korean Cultural Center in Paris.



# THE PROJECT

## THE EMPIRE OF LIGHTS

Kim Kiyeong is a foreign film importer, an ordinary man like many others. His wife, Mari, is a salesperson in a car dealership. Nothing in their lives attracts attention. The couple live in dull anonymity in Seoul, a city where they blend in. Then the arrival of an email suffices to throw their ordinary existence into turmoil.

A few cryptic lines – « order number 4 » – take Kim back to what he was in the past: a spy, operating now in South Korea for over 20 years. Suddenly, this ordinary man has only 24 hours to return to his native North Korea and abandon the life he carved out for himself without anyone knowing who or what he is in fact.

Kim Kiyeong's final 24 hours in South Korea are the focus of Arthur Nauzyciel's production of *The Empire of Lights*.

The playwright, Valérie Mréjen, deconstructs the plot, which unfolds like a crime novel, and offers a personal rewriting of events that oscillate between truth and subterfuge. Arthur Nauzyciel tracks the footsteps of Kim Kiyeong and his wife Mari, a couple which innocently say goodbye to each other in the morning, then meet again radically changed in the evening. Mari has no idea who or what her husband really is. In an unconscious echo of the summons given to her husband, she too goes through her day, experiencing at the close a personal revelation that completely transforms her.

Division lies at the heart of this stage production, combining live performance and film sequences that guide the narrative. A nation, severed in two, suffers from an unhealed wound; as the hours go by a man and a woman grow further and further apart; the end is a collapse of two souls, spelling rupture and estrangement. Like two realities that collide and dislocate, truth is eroded, lies hold sway, and memories haunt the mind. Things move back and forth irreconcilably between what is and what isn't, what was and what will be. Arthur Nauzyciel's quest is personal, a reflection of himself. His zest for touching on the apparent normality of things, with the wave of a theatrical hand, is well-known.



**What was your primary concern when adapting the novel to the stage ?**

Simply said, it was to focus on the trajectories of Kiyeong and Mari. The main theme of the novel is love: wasted love. And separation. The same thing separates the couple and the country. I wanted to spotlight how the tragic past of Korea continues to affect the lives of Koreans today, how everyone bears that past in his or her being, often without realizing it. I'm told that the writer invented some of the stories, included real ones he'd either heard or that people told him, then put them all together into the novel.

For the stage performance I took this a step further and asked the actors to share their own memories of the division of the two Koreas. Then, using stories from the novel and stories from the actors, we turned the play into something like a ritual ceremony on stage. Theater is an ambiguous space between truth and lies, reality and illusion, and in this instance between fictional theater and documentary.

**As a foreigner, how did you approach this very Korean novel?**

I met with Kim Young-ha and we soon realized that we shared quite a few things in common, in particular cultural references, some of which appear in the novel. Our shared commonalities were sufficiently universal that they obviously could interest Korean and European audiences alike. The spy story is a hook that Kim Young-ha uses to touch on other topics as well. The secret separating Mari and Kiyeong has universal resonance. You don't have to be a spy to have secrets; everyone has something to hide, things we want kept hidden or things we're too afraid to share with others.

**I'm told that you actually visited the places in the novel with Kim Young-ha?**

That's true. I wanted to connect the places with the story. No doubt, Kim Young-ha had his reasons for choosing this or that place. I felt the need to appropriate them for myself. The city itself is a character in the plot. Two people move constantly around the city. Their trajectories are different, but they keep moving. One is running away from something, the other is wandering, almost floating.

**Is that why you use film in the production ?**

Before I even started working on the adaptation, I knew I would include a film in the show and the filmed image would play a significant role. It's the first time I've used film as much in a theatrical production. It's not just a scenic device; it's not there to explain things either. It adds to the atmosphere, instilling a certain mood. The film sketches a certain possibility and lets me deal with various levels of reality and time. By having close-up shots on faces, making places look ghostly, almost spectral, I'm able to convey a certain melancholy, a certain loneliness.

I'm very much a fan of the cinema and was interested in exploring the possible connections between theater and cinema. In actual fact, my curiosity for Korea comes in part from Korean movies, which have been distributed in France for a good ten years or more. It's also the reason I wanted to work with the actress So-ri Moon I saw in movies by Chang-dong Lee and Sang-soo Hong.

**How do you see Seoul as a character in the production ?**

The biggest difference between Seoul and its equivalent in France, Paris, is that the past is omnipresent in Paris. Most of the buildings in the city center date from the 17th century. In Seoul it's as if the past has been swept away. You can't know what the city looked like before it was demolished and rebuilt. Often we don't realize we carry the seeds of the past within ourselves, that all these stories are somehow ingrained in us, that we are the product of history. The past can weigh us down, but it's important to connect with it and use it to move forward. This project is about memory.

**That would seem to make sense more generally in the context of your work, I mean the idea that theater is a ritual.**

That's true, for me theater is more than entertainment. It can help us explore ideas, unravel complex feelings and profound emotions. The two-hour framework provides a genuine human experience. At the theater people come together in the same space; some people create an illusion for others who want to believe in it. It's very special; there's something almost mystical in the exchange.

The show doesn't aim to put characters on stage; what it does is have people speak and bear witness for others. For example, there's no Kiyeong, but the actor Ji Hyun-joon, who speaks for Kiyeong, for all the Kiyeongs. We're not representing The Empire of Light in some illustrative mode. By telling fragments of testimony, shards of memory rise to the surface, personal stories become inserted between fiction and History, with a capital H, and theater gives a voice to those who are absent, to those who are invisible. I love it when the theater blurs the boundaries between dream and reality, between the living and the dead. That's when it becomes the netherside of the world. And in that sense, it becomes ritual.

# ARTHUR NAUZycIEL

## DIRECTOR

After studying visual arts and cinema, Arthur Nauzyciel trained as an actor in the school of the Théâtre National de Chaillot (Paris) run by Antoine Vitez (1978). He began his career as an actor then turned to stage directing. His first production as a director was *Le Malade imaginaire ou le Silence de Molière*, after Molière and Giovanni Macchia for the théâtre de Lorient, CDN (1999), followed by Samuel Beckett's *Oh les beaux jours* (*Happy days*) for the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe (2003) and the Teatro San Martin in Buenos Aires (2004).

Since then there have been numerous productions in France and abroad: Thomas Bernhard's *Place des héros* (*Heldenplatz*) at the Comédie-Française (2004), the entry of the Austrian author into the repertoire of France's national theater; Kaj Munk's *Ordet* (*The Word*) staged at the Avignon Festival (2008) and at the Théâtre du Rond-Point during the Paris Autumn Festival (2009); *Jan Karski* (*mon nom est une fiction*)/*Jan Karski* (*my name is a fiction*), adapted from the novel by Yannick Haenel, staged at the Avignon Festival (2011). *Faim* (*Hunger*), based on Knut Hamsun's novel, with Xavier Gallais at the Théâtre de la Madeleine in Paris (2011); Anton Chekov's *La Mouette* (*The Seagull*) staged in the Cour d'honneur of the Papal Palace at the Avignon Festival (2012); *Kaddish* by Allen Ginsberg (2013), reading created at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme then at the Avignon Festival (2013).

Arthur Nauzyciel works regularly in the United States: in Atlanta he staged two plays by the French playwright, Bernard-Marie Koltès: *Black Battles with dogs* (2001), also presented in Chicago, Athens (at the International Festival), and in France at the Avignon Festival (2006); and also in Atlanta, B-M Koltès's *Roberto Zucco* (2004); in Boston, for the American Repertory Theater, Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party* (2007) and William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (2008), which went on tour to the Paris Autumn Festival and the Ibero-American Theater Festival in Bogota, Colombia.

Arthur Nauzyciel has created a number of shows abroad that were then revived in France or at international theater festivals: Samuel Beckett's *L'Image* (*The Image*) in Dublin (2006) with Damien Jalet and Anne Brochet, Lou Doillon later Julie Moulier, the production was also staged in Reykjavik, New York, Paris, China, Japan; Marie Darrieussecq's *Le Musée de la mer* (*The Sea Museum*), performed at the National Theater of Iceland (2009); Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party*, revived for the National Theater of Norway (2012). He has also worked for dance and opera. In 2011 he staged the opera *Red Waters* by Keren Ann Zeidel and Bardi Johannsson (*Lady and Bird*) and contributed to the creation of *Play* by the choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and the dancer Shantala Shivalingappa. He regularly works with other artists on his projects: Christian Fennesz, Miroslaw Balka, Damien Jalet, Sjon, Erna Omarsdottir, Winter Family, Valérie Mréjen, Étienne Daho.

Arthur Nauzyciel is a recipient of the Villa Médicis Hors les Murs Prize. His production *Jan Karski* (*mon nom est une fiction*) was awarded the Georges-Lerminier Prize.

From 2007 to 2016, Arthur Nauzyciel has been the director of the Centre Dramatique National Orléans/Loiret/Centre.



## KIM YOUNG-HA

### AUTHOR

Born in 1968, Kim Young-Ha began his professional writing career in 1995 with the publication of *A Meditation on Mirror* shortly after his military discharge. At the same time he was the host of a book-themed radio program on the South Korean radio. He published his first novel, *I Have a Right to Destroy Myself*, in 1996, winning the much-coveted 1st New Writer's Award, given by Munhak Dongne. A prolific writer, he has since published six novels and four collections of short stories, including: *The Pager* (1997), *Whatever happened to the Guy Stuck in the Elevator* (1999), *Why, Arang* (2001), *Quiz Show* (2007), *A Murder's Guide to Memorization* (2013) and *I Hear Your Voice* (2015). Kim Young-Ha achieved international acclaim with the translation of his first novel *I Have a Right to Destroy Myself* in French in 1998 and in English in 2007. His historical novel *Black Flower* was awarded the Dong-in Prize. His fourth novel, *Your Republic is Calling You* (2006 in Korean, 2009 in French as *L'Empire des Lumières*, 2010 in English), investigates the question of identity in a democratic Korean consumer society. Kim Young-Ha is often held up as an icon of the new generation of writers who grew up in modern Korea, no longer under the sway of dictatorship.

## VALÉRIE MRÉJEN

### ADAPTATION

Over the past two years, Valérie Mrejen has been invited to numerous festivals and art exhibitions in France and abroad (Palais de Tokyo, The Georges Pompidou Center, Tate Modern, Brooklyn Museum...). In 2008 The Jeu de Paume in Paris devoted a retrospective to her work titled *La Place de la Concorde*. She has published several short stories (*Mon grand-père*, *L'Agrume*, *Eau sauvage*, éditions Allia; *Forêt noire*, *Troisième personne*, éditions P.O.L.) and produced several short films, documentaries, and a feature film, titled *En ville* (2011). Banal expressions of intimate anecdotes, lovers quarrels, and family rifts and break-ups form the rich soil of her films and books alike. Her talent lies in capturing the moment on screen and on the page. She staged her first show in 2014 at the Orleans National Stage (CDN Orléans), titled *Trois hommes verts* [Three Green Men], inspired by the work of sound effects technicians for the movies. Also in 2014 she produced a short film for Arthur Nauzyciel's production of Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish*. Since January 2017 she has held an appointment as Associate Artist at the TNB. She has carte blanche for a show during the Spring Festival of the TNB (*Printemps du petit TNB*), programed for March 24/25th 2018, a weekend of performances open to children in particular.

## RICCARDO HERNANDEZ

### SET DESIGN

Born in Cuba and raised in Buenos Aires, he studied at the Yale School of Drama in New Haven, Connecticut (USA). He works regularly on Broadway, where he has won many awards for productions such as: *Topdog/Underdog*, and *Porgy and Bess* (Tony Awards 2012). He has also worked for the opera, designing sets for Philip Glass (*Appomattox*) and Diane Paulus (*Lost Highway* based on the David Lynch film). In the theater he has worked for many stage directors such as George C. Wolfe, Ron Daniels, Rebecca Taichman, Robert Woodruff, Ethan Coen, Janos Szasz, John Turturro, Steven Soderbergh, and for Julie Taymor in *Grounded*, with Anne Hathaway.

For Arthur Nauzyciel, he created the sets for *Julius Caesar*, *Jan Karski (my name is fiction)*, *Red Waters*, *Abigail's Party*, *The Seagull (La Mouette)*, *Splendid's*, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant (Les Larmes amères de Petra von Kant)*, and *The Empire of Lights (L'Empire des lumières)*.

Riccardo Hernandez teaches stage design at Yale University.

## INGI BEKK

### LIGHTS

### VIDEO DESIGN

From Iceland, Ingi Bekk works internationally as a video and lighting designer. He has worked both in theater and opera. His recent work includes *The Tempest* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *1984* (The Reykjavik City Theater) and *The Pearl Fishers* (Tel Aviv Opera). He regularly works with the director Katie Mitchell, most recently on *Schatten (Eurydik sagt) (Shadow Eurydice Speaks)* for the Schaubühne Berlin, and *Travelling on One Leg* for the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg. One of his video creations is currently touring with the Irish indie rock band Two Door Cinema Club; he has worked for other rock bands as well, such as Blur and Backstreet Boys. *The Empire of Lights* is his first collaboration with Arthur Nauzyciel.



## XAVIER JACQUOT SOUND DESIGN

He studied at the School of Drama of the National Theater in Strasbourg where he graduated in 1991. He served a long apprenticeship with Arthur Nauzyciel from his first show and on almost all of his creations. He was a permanent member of staff at the National Theater in Strasbourg from 2004 to 2008. He has created soundtracks and videos for Stéphane Braunschweig and continued to work from him as a freelancer at the Paris theaters La Colline and L'Odéon. He also works for Christophe Rauck, Macha Makeïe, Marc Paquien, Anouk Grimberg, Marie-Christine Soma, Éric Vigner, Balazs Gera, Agnès Jaoui, Le Collectif DRAO, Cécile Gheerbrant, and Thierry Collet.

Xavier Jacquot regularly teaches at the School of Drama of the National Theater in Strasbourg.

## PIERRE-ALAIN GIRAUD VIDEO

Pierre-Alain Giraud is a video director and editor. He produced documentaries, short films and animated films. In 2011 he directed a feature-length documentary, titled *Everything Everywhere all the time*, which was selected for several film festivals. He collaborated on a trilogy with Erna Ómarsdóttir and Matthew Barney. He is currently preparing a feature-length action movie, *Aimé*, and a feature-length documentary, *Le Dernier Voyage de Gerhard (Gerhard's Last Journey)*. He is also the co-author of a series of animated films, titled *À Boire et à manger (Food and Drink)*. He is also a musician with Michael Wookey.

*The Empire of Lights* is his first collaboration with Arthur Nauzyciel.

## GASPARD YURKIEVICH COSTUMES

He studied fashion design at the Studio Berçot in Paris. He was awarded First Prize at the Hyères International Fashion festival in 1997. He presented his first collection in 1998. His style is personal and recognizable: a subtle mix of traditional fashion and contemporary design. He subtly adapts his costumes to the associated setting. His fashion shows are opportunities for artistic experimentation and include live performances, live music and design. He has collaborated with the Crazy Horse, Didier Faustino, Cocorosie, Edouard Levé, the Cartier Foundation, and The Pompidou Center. His most recent creation is *Onepiece*, a new collection concept composed entirely of women's dresses in the studio style: creative, contemporary.

He worked with Arthur Nauzyciel on *Red Water, Faim (Hunger)*, and *Les Larmes Amères de Petra von Kant (The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant)*.

« Arthur Nauzyciel moves his actors to share their memories of stories from the South and the North, then inserts them as leitmotifs in the narrative plot. The result is a tender inquiry into the human soul in a fusion of dialogues and confessions, spoken at a table equipped with microphones, and accompanied by filmed sequences that take the spectator outside the theater. Performed by two extraordinary actors, So-ri Moon and Ji Hyun-joon, the thwarted romance between Mari and Kim proves to be authentic, just beyond compare. The Empire of Light offers a deeply-moving vision of the capacity of resilience of two people in love. With its claim to contemporary drama, the play has all the hallmarks of classical tragedy as well. »

– Les Inrockuptibles

« Adapted from the novel by Kim Young-ha, Arthur Nauzyciel's stage version, titled *The Empire of Light*, underscores all the complexity of Korean society. Subtle and profound. [...] Eight actors are seated at a long table laden with microphones, as if for a dubbing session. Video images of these characters moving around Seoul scroll across the screen behind. Little by little the actors rise from their chairs and assume their places on stage as actors. But when the silent images, realized with a touching sense of intimacy, materialize beyond their backs, the atmosphere is suddenly strange: thus split in two, they take the shape of apparitions. Personal stories and History with a capital H are subtly combined in a stage performance that should enable the audience to grasp contemporary Korean society in all its complexity. With fine stage presence, the actors achieve a genuine burst of empathy. The most experienced ones (Ji Hyun-Joon as Kiyeong, and the sensitive So-Ri Moon, the famed Korean film actress, in the role of Mari) are calm giants of the stage : discreet, patient, intense. »

– Télérama





**Théâtre National de Bretagne**  
Direction Arthur Nauzyciel  
1 rue Saint-Hélier, CS 54007  
35040 Rennes Cedex  
**T-N-B.fr**



#### **TNB CONTACTS**

##### **JEAN-BAPTISTE PASQUIER**

Head of production and  
international development  
T +33 (0)2 99 31 55 33  
M +33 (0)6 79 04 57 04  
jb.pasquier@t-n-b.fr

##### **EMMANUELLE DE VARAX**

International booking /maïa  
+33 (0)6 61 17 03 51  
emmanuelle@maia-arts.org

##### **NATHALIE GASSER**

Press  
+33(0)6 07 78 06 10  
gasser.nathalie.presse@gmail.com

##### **ANNE CUISSET**

Deputy director  
a.cuisset@t-n-b.fr

##### **NATHALIE SOLINI**

Secretary general  
n.solini@t-n-b.fr

