



**PHILIPPE QUESNE**  
*Cosmic Drama*

A postapocalyptic space opera

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## **Cosmic Drama**

A postapocalyptic space opera

Recommended age: 10 +

## **Concept, direction and scenography**

Philippe Quesne

## **Artistic associate**

Elodie Dauguet

## **Video**

David Fortmann

Lukas Wiedmer

## **Lighting**

Benjamin Hauser

## **Dramaturgy**

Angela Osthoff

Camille Louis

## **With**

Raphael Clamer

Jean-Charles Dumay

Annika Meier

Julian Anatol Schneider

Gala Othero Winter

## **Production**

Theater Basel

## **Distribution**

Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne ▼

Supported by the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès within the framework of the *New Settings* Program.



**THEATER  
BASEL**

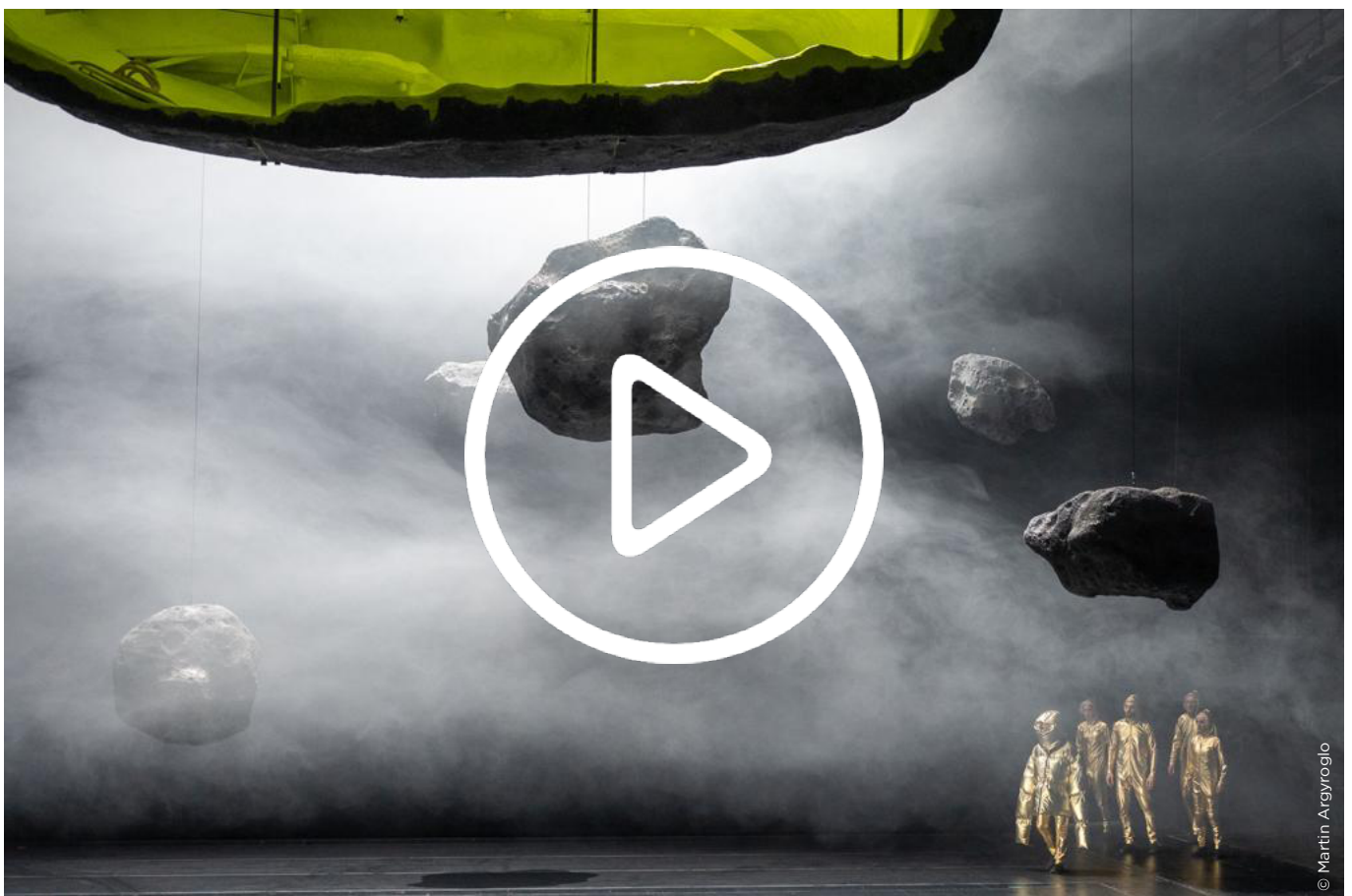
**VIDY** THÉÂTRE  
LAUSANNE

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Onstage, a spacecraft makes its way through the vastness of space. The Earth has come to an end. Everything has been conquered; everything has been destroyed. A small group of survivors is exploring the galaxy. A sort of space arc preserving what remains of nature, art and human civilisation.

In his creative process, artist and director Philippe Quesne begins by establishing a specific spatial concept, a scenography, which then becomes the space for performance. His plays take place, for example, on a desert island (*Crash Park*, 2018), in a mole's den (*La Nuit des taupes*, 2016), in snow-covered forests (*La Mélancolie des Dragons*, 2008) or in an arts centre in the middle of a swamp (*Swamp Club*, 2013). *Cosmic Drama* takes place in a kind of meteorite/space vessel. In this environment both epic and intimate (the ideal setting for his theatre), Philippe Quesne follows the journey of these survivors, a small group of characters who are sometimes strange but always endearing...

With his laconic sense of humour and sharp eye for dissecting the behaviour of small human communities, he observes with great tenderness the fragility of humankind and its ambivalent relationship with nature. Machines, special effects and video projections bring to life this melancholy, science-fiction fable, partway between a daydream and utopia.



Interview by Aude Lavigne, August 2018

**Your theatre creations depict small human or animal communities that are confronted with a problem (...). Would you say that your theatre asks the following question: “How are we going to get out of this situation?”**

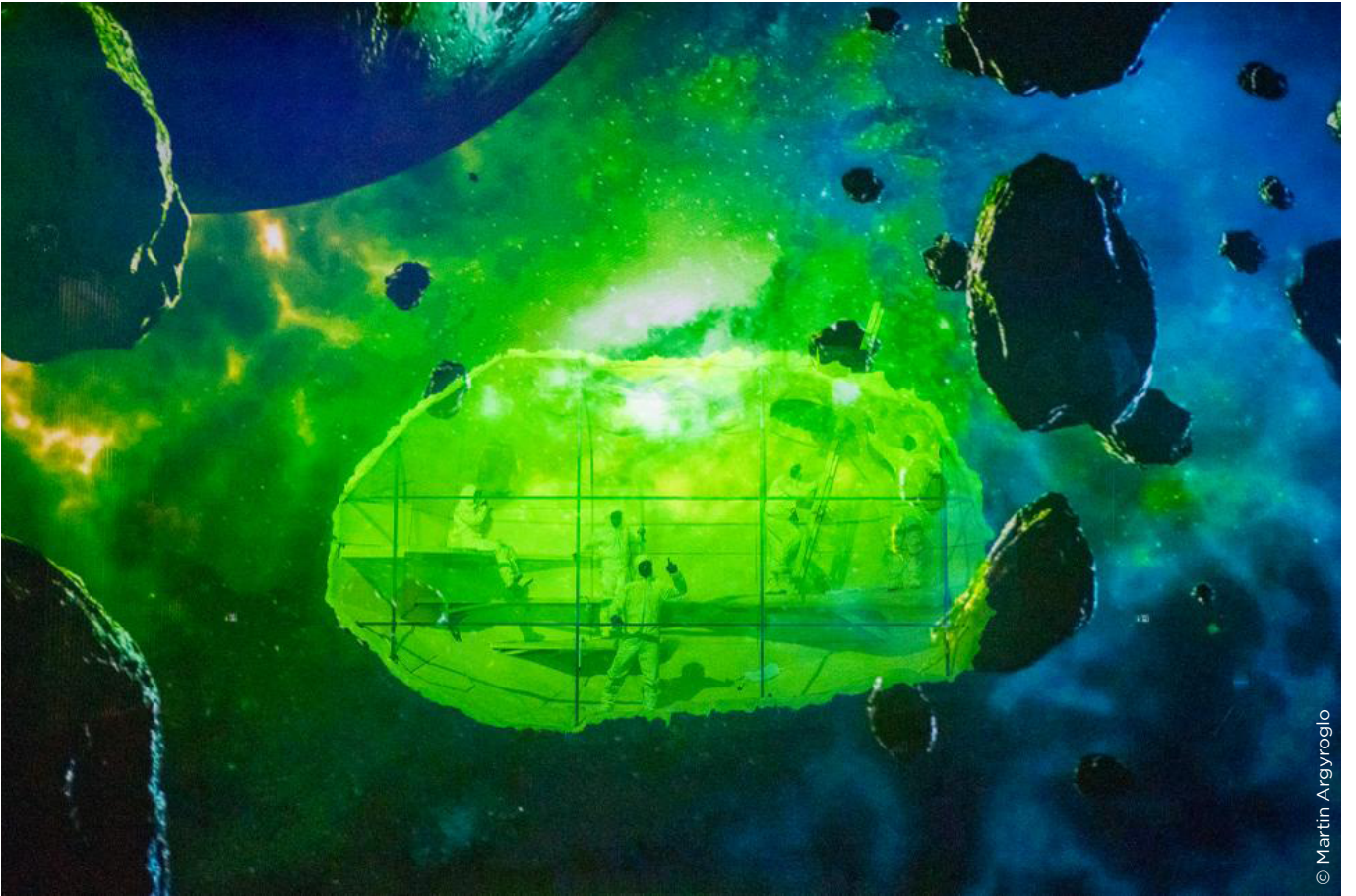
Rather than getting out of something, I would say that it's more a question of accepting failure. These are two different things. You can accept a breakdown, like in the play *La Mélancolie des Dragons*, which opens with a car breaking down in the middle of a snowy forest. The characters soon forget about the part they need to fix the car. They start to think that things aren't so bad in the middle of the forest. The situation has gone in a new direction; they accept that they're not going to get out, and so they move on to something else, they have other resources. They don't say that their lives will be ruined by having been stuck there. What will they do when they discover part of an airplane that will never take off again? Perhaps they won't be that unhappy. As we speak, we're in the middle of rehearsals, so anything is possible... But right now, I find them all so happy to be on a tiny artificial island, in a few centimetres of water. I have a group that appears to be telling me that they are enjoying the disaster that allows them to inhabit a world onstage. I'm not sure if they actually want to return to the economic and social reality of the world outside. In my plays, there is often a certain pleasure to be found in inventing a world out of whatever situation the characters find themselves in.

**Tell us about the way you work with the actors.**

Each person present brings their own notion of the subject. What they give me is what I take from them. They bring suggestions related to their personality, their imaginary world, their references, their lyrical talent, the intelligence of their movements, and so on. The pact we enter into is part of the writing process, and we share responsibility for it. They know that if they don't suggest a song to me today, in three months' time it won't be in the creation. For this performance there is a group made up of core members from Vivarium Studio, my theatre company, with whom I have worked since the very beginning. They are helped by new “Jedis”, like in Star Wars, who have also joined in. I wanted to introduce new performers, because in an airplane you don't often know the other passengers. There is a lot of support between the actors, a sort of mutual assistance, where the experienced ones help the new ones. In my shows, it almost seems as if “anyone” could perform with us; this can sometimes make the audience want to join us onstage. I think this is an important aspect for those who appreciate our type of theatre. It holds the promise of a possible change-over.



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“Wow! Right from the beginning of the evening, Philippe Quesne offers us the most immersive show: lighting artist Benjamin Hauser has created a virtual universe that fills the space, where a multitude of luminous dots dance, where black rock bodies cross paths and come dangerously close; an audio world worthy of the name science-fiction, pushing pathos to the extreme. Steven Spielberg could not have done better. (...) Ironic and dreamlike, this cosmic drama is full of intelligence: an entertaining and poetic investigation into humans and nature *à la française*.”

## **NACHTKRITIK**

“The most attractive aspect of this ‘cosmic drama’ is the courageous leap from the technoid age to the age of playfulness. One small step for theatre, one giant leap for humankind. And if these space clowns aren’t dead, they are still floating out there today. Somewhere in Philippe Quesne’s galaxy of images.”

## **BASLER ZEITUNG**

“An adventure is about to begin: the crew leaves the spacecraft. The adventure takes them through a sea of fog, between weightless rocks. With only a song, *Ursonate* by Schwitter, and a poem by Rilke, they try to enter into contact with the rocks. (...) This ‘cosmic drama’ by Philippe Quesne makes fun of the exaggerated worries we have about the cosmos. Well-known musical pieces such as *Moon River* or the *Moonlight Sonata* are featured. With spirituality and wonder, this cosmic drama reflects the love humankind has for nature.”

## **SRF 2 KULTUR**

“*Cosmic drama* is fundamentally ironic : even when the fourth wall is officially lifted, it actually remains fully active. We are watching, but we do not see what is really happening. In this respect, the performance is similar to the climate crisis : we see that it is there, but we keep thinking that it will not really strike ‘us’, and if so, it will blow over anyway.”

## **PZAZZ.THEATER**

Born in 1970 in the region of Paris, Philippe Quesne was educated in fine arts at the École Estienne and then at the Arts décoratifs in Paris. He then worked as a director and stage designer for theatre, opera and contemporary art exhibitions for 10 years.

In 2003, he created the Vivarium Studio theatre company, bringing together a group of actors, artists and musicians and creating shows as both author and director in which the scenography is envisaged as an ecosystem into which he immerses his performers. His shows form a repertoire that has toured the world: *La Démangeaison des ailes* (2003), *Des Expériences* (2004), *D'après nature* (2006), *L'Effet de Serge* (2007), *La Mélancolie des dragons* (2008), *Big Bang* (2010), *Swamp Club* (2013), etc. He has also published four booklets on the relationship between humankind and nature : *Actions en milieu naturel* (2005), *Petites réflexions sur la présence de la nature en milieu urbain* (2006), *Thinking About the End of the World in Costumes by the Sea* (2009), *Bivouac* (2011).

In 2012, he was invited by Ange Leccia and the Pavillon at the Palais de Tokyo to create a set alongside ten artists and curators in residence. That same year, he contributed to the HAU Berlin's joint production based on David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*, with a specific creation at the Berlin Institut für Mikrobiologie und Hygiene. At the same time, he developed performances and interventions in public spaces and natural sites, and exhibited his installations at large art shows, such as the Biennale de Lyon in 2017 and 2019.

Abroad he has created several original shows: in Japan, *Anamorphosis* (2013) for four actresses from the Oriza Hirata theatre company; in Belgium, with the production house Campo, *Next Day* (2014), a play for children aged from eight to eleven; in Germany, *Pièce pour la Technique du Schauspielhaus de Hanovre*, *Caspar Western Friedrich* (2016) and *Farm Fatale* (2019) at the Munich Kammerspiele, as well as directing the opera *Usher* by Debussy & Annelies van Parys (2018) at the Berlin Staatsoper.

From 2012 to 2014 he was the artist associated with the Théâtre de Gennevilliers while Pascal Rambert was director, and he developed the programme for the Festival des jeunes créateurs. From 2014 to 2020, he was director at the Nanterre-Amandiers national drama centre, where he created *Le Théâtre des négociations* (2015), a simulation



of the climate summit with sociologist Bruno Latour and his team, *La Nuit des taupes / Welcome to Caveland* (2016), *Crash Park, la vie d'une île* (2018), and with Jean-Luc Godard's collaborators he invented the *Parcours JLG Livre d'Image*.

More recently, in 2019 he represented France at the Prague Quadrennial and won the prize for the Best Country Pavilion with his *Microcosmos* installation. As a scenographer he developed the theatre spaces for *Hate* by Lætitia Dosch, *Le Théâtre et son double* in 2020 for Gwenaël Morin, and *Cascade*, also in 2020, with choreographer Meg Stuart, all created at the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne.

Alongside these activities, for many years now he has run workshops and seminars at art schools : La Manufacture in Lausanne, Das Art Amsterdam, Écoles des Beaux-Arts, University Paris X Nanterre, the Villa Arson in Nice, etc. In early 2021, after seven years as director of the CDN Nanterre-Amandiers, he once again started up his theatre company Vivarium Studio. In May 2021 he created *Das Lied von de Erde* by Gustav Mahler with the Vienna Klangforum at the Wiener Festwochen.

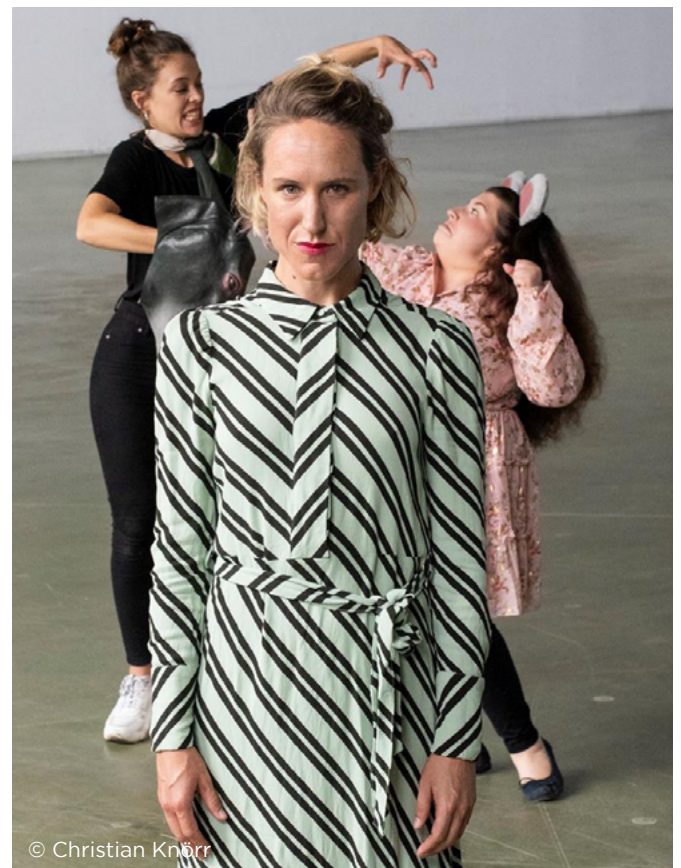
French actor Jean-Charles Dumay has performed in theatre productions under the direction of Krystian Lupa (*Perturbation*, based on the work by Thomas Bernhard), Stanislas Nordey (*Pylade and Calderon* by Pier Paolo Pasolini, *La Dispute* by Marivaux), Frédéric Fisbach (*L'Annonce faite à Marie* by Paul Claudel, *Tokyo Notes* by Oriza Hirata, *Bérénice* by Jean Racine), Jean-Pierre Vincent (texts by Jean-Luc Lagarce and H. Mankell) and Karim Belkacem (*Blasted* by Sarah Kane). In the film industry, he has primarily worked with Bertrand Bonello, Wim Wenders, Xavier Beauvois, Olivier Assayas, Alain Gomis, Djamel Bendeddouche, Cheick Ndiaye, Anthony Cordier and Bertrand Tavernier. Since 2014 he has acted in *L'Astragle* by Brigitte Sy, *La Femme de la plaque argentique* by Kyioshi Kurusawa and *Polina* by Angelin Preljocaj. He has performed under the direction of Philippe Quesne since 2016, in *La Nuit des Taupes*, *Crash Park* and *La Mélancolie des Dragons*.



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# ANNIKA MEIER

From 2002 to 2006, Annika Meier studied performing arts at the University of Music and Theatre in Rostock. She then performed at the Lucerne Theatre, the Oberhausen Theatre and was invited to the HAU Berlin, Theater Dortmund, Thalia Theater Hamburg, and the Zurich Opera. From 2012 to 2017, she primarily worked with Herbert Fritsch at the Volksbühne Berlin. In 2014, she went on air with *Zeitstövchen*, a series of interviews on YouTube. In 2016, she cofounded the HappyEndCompany, whose production was presented at the Treibstoff Festival Basel and the Schlachthaus Bern. From 2017 to 2019, she was hired by the Berliner Ensemble, the Berliner Schaubühne and the Schauspielhaus in Bochum. She has been a permanent member of the Theater Basel ensemble since the 20/21 season.



© Christian Knörr

Julian Anatol Schneider studied performing arts at the Bern University of the Arts. Before beginning his studies, he was a member of the Junges Theater Basel and performed in *Punk Rock* directed by Sebastian Nübling. Since 2014 he has performed at the Lucerne Theatre, the Zurich Schauspielhaus and Theater Basel, as well as in the Zurich Festival and the AUAWIRLEBEN theatre festival in Bern. He was a member of the Für Vier company, which was awarded the 2019 Faust Prize in the children and teenage theatre production category. Julian Anatol Schneider has also been awarded a scholarship from the Fondation Friedl Wald. He has been a permanent member of the Theater Basel ensemble since the 20/21 season.



## GALA OTHERO WINTER

Gala Othero Winter completed her acting studies at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg. While studying she was hired at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg. During this time, she worked with directors such as Katie Mitchell, Johan Simons, Karin Henkel, Victor Bodo, Christoph Marthaler, Herbert Fritsch, Simon Stone, Karin Beier, Jens Rachut and Paulina Neukampf. For her role as Frieda Foldal in Karin Henkel's production *John Gabriel Borkman*, she received the Alfred Kerr Prize for performance in Berlin in 2015. In 2016, she was awarded the Boy-Gobert Prize from the Fondation Körber. Gala Othero Winter has been a permanent member of the Theater Basel ensemble since the 20/21 season.



Raphael Clamer, born in Basel in 1975, trained as an actor at the Munich School of Performing Arts from 1993 to 1996. He performed at the Zurich Opera in *Oberon* by Carl Maria von Weber (directed by Johannes Schaaf) and *Der Freischütz* (directed by Ruth Berghaus) as well as at the Burgfestspiele Jagsthausen (including *Der Diener zweier Herren* by Goldoni, directed by Torsten Bischof). From 1998 to 2000 he was a resident at the Nationaltheater Mannheim, and from 2000 to 2004 at the Zurich Schauspielhaus. This was where he first met director Christoph Marthaler, with whom he still works closely today. At the Zurich Schauspielhaus, he performed in the productions *Hotel Angst* (2001) and *Das goldene Zeitalter* (2003) by Marthaler and more recently in *Mir nämeds uf öis* (2017). At Vidy he performed for Marthaler in *Das Weisse vom Ei (Une île flottante)* (2014) and *Tiefer Schweb* (2018). Raphael Clamer has also acted in various German and Swiss film and television productions and has worked as a narrator for radio plays and audio books.



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