

Stages Theatre Center and Columbia University /
Oscar Hammerstein II Center for Theatre Studies present

The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria

by

Fernando Arrabal

Derrick Demetrius Parker The Architect
Elijha Mahar The Emperor

Abraham Celaya Director / Translator
Curt Beech Scenic Designer
Allison Achauer Costume Designer
Nicholas Raymond Keslake Lighting Designer
Michael D. Mortilla Music & Sound Designer
David Lee Perkins Production Stage Manager
Colleen Cortes Sound Operator
Gay Iris Parker Associate Producer
Tono Carbajo Graphic Designer
Gregory Beech Assistant Scenic Designer
Modique Burgess Nurse / Back Stage crew



Director's Notes

When I started considering choices for my thesis two authors battled in my head for the production spot: Pinter and Arrabal. What attract me most are the layers of their works. How they tease the audience. You think they are talking about something, but this something is linked to something else that suggests another idea that brings you to the core of their concerns.

The fact of Arrabal's incarceration in 1967 for writing a blasphemous dedication during a book-signing session at Galerías Preciados in Madrid became the clear example of fascist absurdity about "purity of thought," the "fundamentalism" of religious beliefs and the distinction between "us" and "them" that in the case of *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* is "me" and "them." The play had been written almost 10 years earlier, but acquired then a very specific meaning. When Arrabal's plays were performed hush-hush—mostly in university circles—they always ended up with political demonstrations. We would go out shouting slogans of freedom, and the "grises" (police uniforms were grey) would come and would arrest some people, hit others...

Arrabal's work was the closer to my soul. First thing I had to do: a fresh

translation to be able to bring out the different layers of the play: from personal to social, from political to religious.

In *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria*, Arrabal looks at 20th-century fixations on isolation, control and love through the games and role reversal of the Emperor (civilization, the destroyer, the power) and the Architect (nature, innocence, trust, the builder), and tries to find a rationale behind all those myths of "civilization:" love, religion, hard work, family, patriotism... But who could be those characters in this allegorical work? What if the Emperor were a politician who betrays his country (the Mother) and tries to find redemption through the "condemnation" by the part of the citizens (the Architect)? The net result is that everybody is guilty by association, by not standing up to this manipulation; that is why the story in the play is cyclical mimicking History itself. There is no redemption, only switching of roles. Pessimism? Just read the news.

There is another level of meaning in the play: we do what we can with the tools that have been bestowed on us. Science has shown us the dual structure of our brain: a million years or so ago we received out of the blue, in a kind of evolutionary hick-up, an over-sized brain that can do marvelous things such fantasize and create, but that also easily runs amok. It was grafted onto the old brain that is in total harmony with nature (The Architect), and continues to be essential for our survival on this planet. Arthur Koestler in his essay "*Janus, a summing up*," implies that the "schizo construction of our minds" is reborn with every childbirth. This concept ties-in with the way Arrabal ends the play. The Architect has lived for thousands of years. That also ties-in with Koestler's "old-brain" conception.

The Architect and The Emperor of Assyria shows us the resulting dual nature of our mental make-up in a colorful dialogue between the two brains. No taboos or sacred niches are tolerated! It is a timely reminder of the fundamental origin of so much madness in our world.

"If it is not erotic, it is not Interesting!"

Fernando Arrabal

FERNANDO ARRABAL (Playwright) was born in Melilla (Spanish Morocco) on August 11, 1932. He studied law in Madrid before moving to Paris in 1954. In 1962 Fernando Arrabal founds the "*Panic Movement*" together with Roland Topor and Alexandro Jodorowsky. "*Panic*" comes from the God Pan, the All. The "*Panic*" man was a man of total refusal, refusal of all danger, he did not expose himself and did not die a hero's death. With Jean Benoit, he often sees Andre Breton's surrealist group. In June of 1967 Arrabal visits Madrid to sign his book *Arrabal Celebrating A Ceremony of Confusion*; at the event one of his admirers asks him to write a *Panic dedicatory*. As a result of it, in July, accused of blasphemous writing, is incarcerated by the fascist government of Spain; but an international uproar led by Samuel Beckett forced his liberation mid August. Arrabal then returns to France and stays there until the death of Franco in 1975. Still living in Paris, at present Arrabal has an active part in Spain's cultural life. In 2001 he received the prestigious Premio Nacional de Teatro (National Theatre Award). Fernando Arrabal has published 12 novels (among which is the autobiographical *Baal Babylone - Viva la muerte* in 1959), 6 collections of poems, nearly 70 plays (his complete theater works have been published in 19 volumes in France), 16 essays and epistles (among which the famous *Letter to General Franco*, published during the dictator's lifetime), nearly 150 books for bibliophiles and poems illustrated by Dali, Picasso, Saura, Olivier O. Olivier, Dorny, Cortot, Pouperon, Fassianos... A few of his best known plays in English translation are *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* (1967) which premiered in 1971 at Britain's National Theatre, *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers* (1969), *The Cucarachas from Yale* (1988), *The Red Madonna* (1988) and *The Body-BUILDER'S Book of Love* (1990). The sun never sets on his plays, among the most performed in the world.



Derrick Demetrius Parker
(Architect)

This is Derrick's L.A. debut.

Derrick has a varied theatre & TV television background. Most recent theatre

works include: *The Cherry Orchard* (Lapahkin) and *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* (Henry). Other Theatre credits include: *Ma' Rainey's Black Bottom* (Levee), *Comedy of Errors* (Pinch), *Merchant of Venice* (Tubal), *The Boys Next Door* (Lucian) & *Play On!* (Old Globe Theatre premiere directed by Sheldon Epps). Derrick has landed principal TV roles on *Law & Order*, *Guiding Light*, and *Homicide Life on the Street*.

A North Carolina native, Derrick completed his graduate school (classical) training at The Old Globe Theatre/University of San Diego, and his undergraduate at East Carolina University where he also played football.

Abraham Celaya (Director). After having his MFA in Philosophy, Abraham decided to become a performing artist training with Adela Escartín (Cuba), Le Théâtre du Soleil (ARTA) & Peter Brook's Company. An accomplished performer in his natal Spain, he came to California in 1993 to work as Directing Associate with Mr. Benny Sato Ambush in the ACT's production of *Pecong*. Celaya directed his own productions at the Playwright's Center & the New Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, Cleveland Public Theatre/Health Museum, Nosotros Theatre in Hollywood, and the Lankershim Center (NoHo). As a directing intern at The Old Globe Theatre he assisted Mr. Sheldon Epps in the musical *Play On!* Celaya was choreographer / dramaturg for Ms. Lisa Peterson's production of *The American Bullfighter* for Taper Too & CALARTS productions.

In 1999 Ms. Anne Bogart invited Celaya to join Columbia University Theatre Directing Program and *The Architect and The Emperor of Assyria* is his graduation thesis. New York credits: *Creature/Creations* by E. Griffiero and his own translation (Schapiro Studio), *Cities Of The Plain* by Mark Schultz (Horace Mann Theatre), *Pilgrimage Of Memories* (Based in the life and work of Luis Buñuel) by Lorenzo Buford (Horace Mann Theatre) and *Tea Time* by Lorenzo Buford (Schapiro Theatre) with Tony Award winner Gretha Boston. Celaya is a member of ADE (Theatre Directors Union of Spain).

Thanks to this great team!

Elijha Mahar

(Emperor)
Elijha is appearing at Stages for the first time. Elijha's stage credits include *Lovers and Other Stranges* (Richie), *Being of Sound Mind* (Dillon),

The Athiest in All of Us (Russel), *False Bravado* (Rufus), *Straight Jacket and Tie* (Russel), *La Ronde* (The Poet), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (Roma), *A Dybuk* (Chonen), *The Taming of the Shrew* (Hortensio) and *Fact or Fiction: Solos in Harmony V* (Monologue, Adiction). Television credits: *The Profiler* (NBC), *Crusade* (TNT), *The Wayans Bros.* (WB), *X-Files* (FOX), *The West Wing* (NBC), *Jag* (CBS), *Guilty as Charged & Philly* (ABC). Film credits: *The Base II*, *Bartime*, *Murder.com*, *Drifting & Devil's Fancy*.

A Washington native, Elijha is a graduate of Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

