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Death
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the university of rochester international theatre program presents

DANTON’S DEATH

by georg büchner
translated & adapted by robert auletta

directed by david melville kennedy
set design by andrew boyce
costume design by emily rebholz
lighting design by matthew richards
sound design and original music by greg hennigan
fight direction by steve vaughan
dramaturgy by klaus van den berg
voice & acting coaching by danny hoskins

production staff

production stage manager ............................................................ frances swanson
assistant production stage manager ............................................ nina desoi
assistant stage managers ............................................................ cassandra donatelli/props
kevin gessner/run crew max lettaconnoux/sound
alex quinones-bangs/lights isaac richter/costumes
master electrician ................................................................. erica greenbaum
assistant m.e. ........................................................................ david moiseev
audiovisual engineer ............................................................... bruce stockton
assistant lighting designer ...................................................... jeff englander
assistant director meridel phillips
wardrobe supervisors .............................................................. camber hansen-karr & alex rozanksky
fight captains ........................................................................ philip dumoucheil & esty thomas
musical directors ................................................................. katherine crowe & samantha levine

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DANTON’S DEATH runs approximately 2 hours with one 15 minute intermission.

write a one act play

a note about the program

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Georg Büchner
1813–1837

Georg Büchner was born in the small town of Goddelau on October 17, 1813, in the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt in the German Confederation, and grew up in the nearby capital of Darmstadt. He was expected to become a doctor, like most of his family before him, and as a student he planned on studying anatomy. However, his early education also brought him into contact with classical poetry and philosophy, which would influence him for the rest of his life.

His studies in Strasbourg, France, from the time when he was eighteen years old until he was twenty, introduced him not only to the new radical atmosphere in post-revolutionary France, but also to his future wife Minna, the daughter of the clergyman he lived with. After his return to Hesse-Darmstadt to do another year of medical study, they announced their engagement. Described by his friends as a hard worker but somewhat arrogant and impatient, Büchner’s radical political and philosophical opinions made him a bit of an outsider. It was during his final year at medical school that Büchner’s political convictions began to appear in his writings. The general revolutionary mood in Strasbourg had made an impression on him, and the politically oppressive environment of German society infuriated him. It was this that led to founding of the Society of Human Rights, which in turn brought about his association with Friedrich Ludwig Weidig, the head of a liberal political group and publisher of an illegal revolutionary journal. Büchner’s first published work was *Der Hessische Landbote* (The Hessian Courier), his pamphlet for Weidig’s press, in 1834. The pamphlet was directed towards the peasants of Hesse-Darmstadt, and in its message it recognized their current social conditions and called for economic revolution. Since Büchner was not directly cited as the author of the paper, and also because it was never actually distributed, he was able to escape government arrest and live in Darmstadt for five weeks in early 1835. During these weeks, while he stayed in his parents’ home under the guise of doing medical research in his father’s lab, Büchner channeled his stress and insecurity into writing *Dantons Tod*. He was in desperate need for money, which prompted his writing, but his letters to Minna during this time also show an emotional need to express himself creatively. He sent his play to a publisher in March of 1835, but a warrant for his arrest was issued in June, before he had heard a reply, and he was forced to flee to Strasbourg. In the next year, he wrote *Lenze*, a short story studying the brilliant, but insane, poet J.M.R. Lenz, and the satirical comedy *Leoncre und Lenza*. He also spent time furthering his scientific studies. His anatomical work on the barbel fish earned him a spot as a lecturer at the University of Zürich, where he moved in 1836 to start his career and also to continue writing. In Zürich, he began the play *Woyzeck*, which would become his unfinished masterpiece. But having long been prone to illnesses, Büchner died of typhoid fever on February 19th, 1837. He was only twenty-three years old.

Greg H. Hennigan (Sound Designer and Composer). Regional credits include: *The Breath of Life* (Westport Country Playhouse), *Romeo & Juliet* (New Jersey Shakespeare), Glengarry Glen Ross (Dallas Theater Center), *The Mistakes Made* (Yale Repertory Theatre). New York credits include: *The Children’s Hour* (Austoria Performing Arts Center), *Exit Cuckoo* (The Barrow Group), *Mrs. Barry’s Marriage* (45th Street Theatre), *White Hot* (HERE Arts Center). University credits include productions at Yale, Bard College, and Louisiana Tech. He has assisted on a newly realized John Cage piece entitled *James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp and Eric Satie: An Alphabet*. Greg is also the composer/sound designer for the iPhone app “Twiddle”.

Klaus van den Berg (Dramaturg): is an Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville where he teaches theatre history, theory, and dramaturgy on both undergraduate and graduate levels. Areas of study include cultural conceptions of space, nineteenth and early twentieth-century Scandinavian drama, postmodern theory and late twentieth-century intercultural performance. He received his PhD at Indiana University, and has published essays in books on August Strindberg, Richard Wagner, George Tabori, and Walter Benjamin and essays for Theatre Research International, Theatre Survey, Theatre Journal, Brecht Yearbook, Monatshefte, Bulhentechnische Rundschau. He is regularly contributing as a performance critic to Theatre Journal and Western European Stages. He is currently working on a book on Walter Benjamin’s image theory and performances in twentieth-century German theatre. He is also the resident dramaturg for the Clarence Brown Theatre, a professional LORT company located in Knoxville, specializing in stage adaptations and translations. For the Clarence Brown Theatre he has been the production dramaturg for Mein Kampf, The Seagull, Arcadia, The Oedipus/Caligula Project, The Brecht File, Nora, Buried Child, Metamorphoses, Trojan Women, Prince of Homburg, Triumph of Love, and Romeo and Juliet. In addition to working at the Clarence Brown he has also dramaturged shows and projects for 7Stages in Atlanta, the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, and the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.

Steve Vaughan (Fight Director) is a Certified Fight Director and Certified Stage Combat Teacher of the Society of American Fight Directors. Steve has choreographed over 350 professional productions and as many University and High School shows. He teaches and directs at Niagara University and has numerous regional credits in Western New York including Shakespeare in Delaware Park, Irish Classical, Kavinoky, Studio Arena, GeVa Theater, and ArtPark. Steve has also worked at Blackfriars Theatre, Shipping Dock and returns to the U of R for his fourth production. He has over 50 New York Soap Opera credits as stunt coordinator and fight director.

Danny Hoskins (Voice & Acting Coach) is an actor, director, teacher and playwright, originally from the Rochester area, who has been working nationally and internationally for the past 12 years. He has served as Interim Director of Theatre at Elmira College, taught acting and voice at the University of South Carolina, developed and directed original works for young actors at the Alliance Theatre Company and co-founded the South Carolina-based company, Pineapple Productions. Mr. Hoskins is in his second year with SUNY Brockport as an adjunct professor of theatre and currently serves on the board of Blackfriars Theatre. He has toured nationally with his one-man adaptation of Hamlet and internationally, through England and Romania, with Pineapple Productions’ Moose Mating. His acting credits include: *Death by Joyce* (Hartford Stage Company), *Crimes of the Heart*, A Christmas Carol and Shakespeare’s R & J (The Alliance Theatre Company), *Moose Mating* (Siubai International Theatre Festival), *King Lear* and *Hay Fever* (Theatre South Carolina); The Hamlet Project (Trustus Theatre), *Little Shop of Horrors* (St. Croix Festival Theatre); and *The Fantasticks* (Kennesaw Stage). His directing credits include *Take Me Out* and *Moose for Blackfriars Theatre, and Children of Eden for Elmira College*. Mr. Hoskins holds an MFA from the University of South Carolina.
I have been studying the history of the Revolution. I feel as though I have been annihilated by the dreadful fatality of history. I find a terrible uniformity in human nature, an inexorable force, conferred upon all and none, in human circumstances. The individual is merely a foam on a wave, greatness mere accident, the rule of genius is puppetry, a ridiculous wrestling with an iron law in which the greatest achievement is simply to become aware of it, to overcome it is impossible [...] I accustomed my eye to blood. But I am not the puerile knife-blade. ‘Most’ is one of those words of damnation with which men are chattered. The verse: ‘It must needs be that offences come but were undo him by whom the offence cometh is appalling. What is it in us that lies, murders and steals?

Georg Bückner, in a letter to Minna in 1835, while writing Danton’s Death
By the time Louis XVI became King of France in 1774, the country was in a state of extreme distress. A rising national debt due to repeated famines and the country’s involvement in various wars placed more pressure on the peasant class for taxes, striking a chord with the changing ideology of the Enlightenment, which advocated for the sovereignty of the people. The Revolution, started in 1789, the King called together the Estates-General, the convention of the combined three classes of nobility, clergy and common people. The demands of the third estate, the working class, put great pressure on the King, and eventually they withdrew from the convention and created the National Assembly. Forced to meet in a nearby tennis court, they took what became known as the Tennis Court Oath, calling for a new constitution and declaring their power in the state. Although the King reluctantly ordered the other two estates to join in a change in mankind, a “new man,” or a new order of things. Danton’s passivity and ennui are the expression of a despair that he attempts to hide behind the facade of Epicureanism. Danton’s case demonstrates that human development is not only limited materially, but also spiritually.

In fact, Büchner makes his drama not so much out of Danton as out of death. The play is a set of marvelous variations on the anguish of existence. It keeps on restating in newer, more compelling ways the basic theme that life is atrocious, morality non-existent, action pointless. Death, nothingness, is what Danton craves (and his compulsive sexuality is part of this death-wish); but he reaches the ultimate in existential despair when he realizes that the created thing cannot cease to exist.
Epicureanism was a philosophical mode of thought that originated with Epicurus, a Greek philosopher who lived from 341-270 BC. The basic source of knowledge for Epicureans was sensation, and so they determined the purpose of life to be finding pleasure. All cognition, according to Epicurus, could be reduced to sensation. Because of this, Epicureanism has a reputation of being preoccupied only with physical desires and appetites. But Epicurus also emphasized the importance of moderation and simplicity, because the main pleasure in life is knowledge, which can only be found through virtue and temperance.

Büchner makes several allusions to Epicurean philosophy in Danton's Death, usually because Danton is viewed by those around him as being a sensualist, excessively focused on the physicality of the world. Danton himself even references the idea with his mocking line to the virtuous Robespierre: "All men are Epicureans, as the case may be; some crude, and some refined. Christ was the finest of all." But Büchner sharply contrasts this view of Danton with the character's personal moments, in which a very different philosophical attitude can be seen—his extremely existential worldview.

Existentialism, unlike Epicureanism, was not a prominent form of philosophy until the mid-20th century, long after Büchner's death. Philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger have often been cited as the original existentialists, but the idea did not really develop until the 1940s, when French writers Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus built on those earlier writings in their own work. The main concepts of existentialism are based on the idea that human existence cannot be understood merely by science or psychology. Instead, who we are is determined by our choices. Human free will is crucial to existential philosophy, but it also leads to the isolated view that humanity is alone in the universe (seen in Nietzsche's nihilistic line that "God is dead"). This idea is consistent with Büchner's own atheistic beliefs.

The existential theme of Danton's Death is most clear during those moments in the play where the paradox of death is contemplated. As Danton says, "There's that damned argument: something cannot become nothing. Everything is packed and swarming. The void has been annihilated. Creation is its wound." But Büchner also explores his own epistemic ideas in the play, in Danton's reflection on the nature of knowledge in his opening conversation with Julie. Most notably, Büchner's own atheism and existentialism are seen in two important monologues. The first is Robespierre's haunting speech after his argument with Danton, where he realizes that he is alone spiritually, physically and emotionally. The second is at the beginning of the second act, where the character Tom Paine uses a philosophical proof to show the non-existence of God.

Büchner's religious, political and theoretical opinions were all innovative in the sense that he was critical of traditional beliefs, and chose to undertake the task of creating his own. As John Reddick writes of Danton's Death in Georg Büchner: The Shattered Whole, "The flickering image of the world that [Büchner] evokes is profoundly un- and anti-classical, and consciously remote from the prevailing conventions and expectations of his age." The play exposes Büchner's genius in creating a work that was not only dramatically, but also philosophically, far ahead of its time.

CAST

Boy .................................................. Michael Amato†
Danton ............................................... John Amir-Fazli
Jacobi/Dumas/First Executioner ............ Tad Bezerra
Tom Paine/Second Executioner ............. T. Bohrer†
Woman Playing Cards/Citizen ............... Kelsey Burritt
Wife/Citizen ........................................ Jessica Chinelli
La Croix ............................................. Eric Cohen
Marion/Lucille .................................... Catherine Crow
Julie .................................................. Katherine Crowe
Citizen/First Carter ............................. Lilly Dickerson
Legendre ........................................... Christopher DiStasi
Herman ............................................. Philip Dumouchel
Philippeau ......................................... Alma Ann Flood
Citizen/Soldier .................................. Juan de la Guardia
Citizen ............................................. Kara Heon
Simon/Soldier/Warder/Citizen .............. Spencer Klubben
Rosalie ............................................. Anna Kroup
Gentleman/Soldier/Mercier ................. Adam Lanman
Woman Playing Cards/Fouquier ............ Samantha Levine
Citizen ............................................. Melissa Martin
Robespierre ....................................... Kevin McCarthy
Citizen/Gentleman/Soldier/Second Carter .. Dexter Nicholson
Philibert .......................................... Renato Rengifo
Camille ............................................ Christine M. Rose
Citizen ............................................. Danielle Wedde
Adelaide ........................................... Rebecca Weiss
Saint-Just ......................................... Jonathan Wetherbee*
Camille Desmoulins was a revolutionary journalist and a close friend of Danton. He first published *La France Libre* (“Free France”), accusing the monarchy of exploiting the people, during the Great Fear. Desmoulins was also involved in the August 10th movement, and became Secretary-General under Danton. His paper, *Le Vieux Cordelier*, was first published in December of 1793. Although he was close with Robespierre, his publication eventually came to criticize the Committee of Public Safety enough to condemn him to the guillotine as an accomplice of Danton.

Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just was one of the most prominent figures of the Reign of Terror, and a close friend of Robespierre. Saint-Just took part in leading military operations in and around France, and was the President of the National Convention during the trial of the Dantonists. He strongly believed in revolutionary ideals, but was also part of the Jacobin Club that was accused of being dictatorial during the Reign of Terror. These associations led to his execution, along with Robespierre, in the summer of 1794.

Marie-Jean Hérault de Séchelles was an active member in the Revolution, beginning with the storming of the Bastille prison. Hérault, although originally from an aristocratic family, was a member of the Legislative Assembly, the Jacobin Club, and later the Committee of Public Safety. His leadership early on in the Convention was key in the arrests of the Girondins, but he came to be associated with Danton, leading to his own arrest and execution.

Silvestre La Croix was another member of the National Convention, and part of the early Committee of Public Safety. As time went on, however, La Croix became openly opposed to many of Robespierre’s methods. He was accused of conspiracy against the Revolution along with Danton, and he was tried and executed as a member of the Dantonists.

The rivalry between factions lays bare the paradoxes within the Revolution. For the Dantonists, freedom and emancipation represent the ultimate realization of pleasure—really just a variation of the old aristocracy—and Robespierre’s despotism is merely a new form of the old despotism and tyranny. Danton and Robespierre both believe that the role they play in history is a decisive one, and one they have created for themselves. But in reality, history made possible their roles and decided how long they would play them.

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You see, we didn’t make the Revolution, it made us. And when all is said and done, I would rather be guillotined, than guillotine. The fury of men begins to disgust me. We should be able to sit in peace with one another. There’s been some awful error in our creation. There’s some nameless element missing. But we won’t find it breaking each other’s bodies open, and tearing wildly through one another’s guts. As alchemy, it’s a pitiable display.

Danton (II,i)

The dramatist is in my view nothing other than a historian, but is superior to the latter in that he re-creates history: instead of offering us a bare narrative, he transports us directly into the life of an age; he gives us characters instead of character portrayals; full-bodied figures instead of mere descriptions. His supreme task is to get as close as possible to history as it actually happened.

Georg Büchner, in a letter to his family in 1835

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Danton’s history on stage reveals a split in attitudes between the majority of productions which have wished to portray the whole Revolution and a minority which have made the play a study of Danton in private. Yet the work actually needs a balanced use of both.

Julian Hilton, author, in his biography, Georg Büchner

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Walter Hinderer, Georg Büchner: Complete Works and Letters
Shakespeare was certainly an influence on Büchner because of the latter's education, but also because of the German playwright and philosopher, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing was one of the first dramatists to popularize Shakespeare in Germany, making an impact on later writers, including Büchner.

Some critics have compared Büchner's protagonist to Shakespeare's Hamlet. In his meditative monologue after leaving Paris, Danton compares death to amnesia, and contemplates the surreal attraction that it exercises over him. But, like Hamlet, he cannot comprehend the possibility of ceasing to exist. These realizations are most evident in his later words, "Dying is a miserable experience—for animals, the logical finale; for men, the most illogical distortion."

But even more noticeable is Robespierre's Macbeth-like reference to living in a "house of dreams," while he agonizes over how to deal with his severely repressed thoughts and desires. His image of a "bloody finger" is comparable to Lady Macbeth's "damned spot" of blood, both showing the guilt they feel for the deaths they have been responsible for.

**Danton's Death & Meta-Theatre**

One of the most striking aspects of *Danton's Death* is Büchner's use of meta-theatre, the concept of drawing attention to the dramatic nature of the play by using theatrical elements within it. Büchner's repeated references to masks and puppets, especially Camille's belief that the people are horrified by the 'glittering, surging creation' of reality and only want to see marionettes, is a political statement about the contrast between reality and the persuasion of the masses, as well as a literary and somewhat ironic statement about the nature of the work itself.

But the several instances in which scenes almost comment on themselves mark much more vivid examples of the play's self-examination. In one such instance, two gentlemen discuss the new play at a nearby theatre, drawing an indirect comparison between the illusion of drama and the beliefs of the general public. Sharply opposed to this is the reality of their political situation. Büchner expresses it in the idea of the puddle that the first gentleman is afraid of. Anthony Kubiak (Harvard University), in his essay "Danton's Death and the Dictates of Theory," writes, "The revolution is in every sense theatre: it is true theatre operating as 'the site of violence' in the celebratory song of the guillotine, and it is also operating as Büchner's play, the secondary emanation of an actual historical pain."

Even Danton, throughout the play, recognizes the theatricality of his own death. At first, when death is only a far-off possibility to him, he muses about it playfully, saying, "There's something to be said about leaving the stage with a fine gesture, and hearing the applause—even though the stage blood has suddenly become painfully real." But after he has accepted that he will, in fact, die, the references become realizations that he is being toyed with by fate, and must instead play out his death in the theatre of history.

**Danton's Death & Shakespeare**

**Pierre-Nicholas Philippeau** was a follower of Danton and a member of the National Convention. Philippeau was critical of the Committee of Public Safety, along with many of the revolutionary military leaders he had worked with to mobilize troops against counter-revolutionaries in western France. His views also caused his arrest and execution along with Danton.

**Louis-Sebastian Mercier** was a dramatist who was strongly influenced by Enlightenment ideology. Mercier wrote about working-class people, emphasizing views against the monarchy, but was associated with the moderate Girondists in the National Convention. He was imprisoned for his views, but released after the fall of Robespierre. His book, *The New Paris*, published in 1799, was very influential for Büchner while the latter was writing *Danton's Death*.

**Adrien Marie Legendre** was one of the leaders of the masses who stormed the Bastille prison, and also took part in the attack on the Tuileries on August 10th. Later, Legendre was a member of the Jacobin Club, like Robespierre and Saint-Just. When Danton was arrested, Legendre initially defended him and argued for his release, but changed during the course of the trial to support the execution of the Dantonists.

**Antoine Quentin Fouquier-Tinville** was the public prosecutor for the Revolutionary Tribunal during the Reign of Terror. He was a close friend of Desmoulins, but also responsible for the convictions of nearly 2,500 people, including the Queen, the Girondists, the Hébertists, and the Dantonists. He himself was also later sentenced to die by the guillotine.

**Arnaud Martial Joseph Hermann** was the president of the Committee of Public Welfare. He ran the trials against Danton, as well as the trials against Girondists earlier in 1794. His illegal activities in fixing the juries for the trials, along with Fouquier-Tinville, led to his own arrest and execution.
important factions in the national convention

GironDists ("Les Brissotins" or "baguettes"): The GironDists were originally unified with the Jacobins, but became the most conservative of the factions in the Convention when they refused to support the Terror. Their mass arrest was publicly demanded and eventually occurred on May 31, 1793, after which they were tried and executed.

Dantonists ("Les indulgents" or "indulgent ones"): Despite their own contributions to ending the monarchy, the Dantonists came to be seen as "moderates" in the Convention because of their eventual call for the end of the Terror. This led to their mass execution after the trial of Danton.

Jacobins ("La Montaigne" or "the Mountain"): The Mountain was the left-wing side of the Convention, which was led by Robespierre during the Terror. The Jacobins became the driving force of the government during the Reign of Terror.

Hébertists ("Les enragés" or "enraged ones"): These "enragés" consisted of the followers of Jaques Hébert, the political journalist and radical supporter of the sans-culottes. Originally a member of both the Jacobin and Cordelier Clubs, Hébert came be to seen as extremely dangerous due to his views and his calls for public uprisings. The execution of the Hébertists sets the scene for the beginning of Danton's Death.