

**ORIGINAL CAST PRODUCTION**  
**DANTON AND ROBESPIERRE**  
OPERA IN THREE ACTS

MUSIC BY **JOHN EATON**      LIBRETTO BY **PATRICK CREAGH**

in the Indiana University Opera Theater Production with (in order of appearance):

<b>Drunk</b>	<b>William Percher</b>
<b>Fish Wife</b>	<b>Debra Dominiak</b>
<b>Baker's Wife</b>	<b>Diane Coloton</b>
<b>Prostitute</b>	<b>Paula Redd</b>
<b>Danton</b>	<b>James Anderson</b>
<b>Robespierre</b>	<b>Tim Noble</b>
<b>Couthon</b>	<b>Randy Hansen</b>
<b>St. Just</b>	<b>Kevin Langan</b>
<b>Louise (Danton)</b>	<b>Mary Shearer</b>
<b>Gabrielle Danton</b>	<b>Nelda Nelson</b>
<b>Camille Desmoulins</b>	<b>Gran Wilson</b>
<b>Lucille Desmoulins</b>	<b>Edith Vanerette</b>
<b>Tallien</b>	<b>Raul Mattei</b>

**Ensemble of Citizens, Chorus of Citizens, Male Chorus of Delegates (approx. 250 people)**  
**Orchestra of 120**  
**Thomas Baldner, conductor; chorus masters: Alan Harter, Jan Harrington, Lawrence Weller; associate conductor (musical preparation): Richard Duncan**

JOHN EATON (b. 1935) has achieved international recognition as a composer of opera and of electronic and microtonal music.

He has given concerts throughout Europe (he was the honored guest of the Soviet Composers' Society in 1977) and Latin America, as well as the U.S.A. He was among the first performers of live electronic music.

Eaton's music was chosen to represent the U.S.A. in 1970 at the International Rostrum of Composers (UNESCO). He has received a citation and award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1972). He has lectured at the Salzburg Center in American Studies (1976) and was Composer in Residence at the American Academy in Rome. He is the winner of 3 Prix de Rome and 2 Guggenheim Grants, and commissions from the Fromm and Koussevitzky Foundations, the National Endowment for the Arts, the North German Radio, Young Audiences of America, and the Public Broadcasting Corporation (the last was for his opera for television, *Myshkin*, which won the prestigious Peabody and Ohio State Awards and has been seen by an estimated 15,000,000 people in the U.S.A. and abroad).

He is (1979) professor of music, chairman of the composition department, *and* artistic director of the Center of Electronic and Computer Music at Indiana University. His compositions have been recorded on CRI, Decca, and Turnabout Records and are published by Shawnee Press.

All of the singers and performers were students at Indiana University — over 400 in all.

THOMAS BALDNER, internationally known symphony orchestra conductor has been guest conductor of Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic, London Philharmonia, Santa Cecilia in Rome and the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires. He has recorded numerous contemporary works for nearly all radio networks in central Europe. Since 1977 he has been head of Indiana University's Department of Instrumental Conducting.

## BACKGROUND OF THE OPERA

The French Revolution is generally considered the beginning of modern history. It contained nearly every trait of modern societies in embryo and was one of those moments in which the human soul's every tendency — toward nobility or degradation, toward lofty idealism or the basest corruption, toward intense love and fierce hate — was writ large: the very stuff of opera!

In its most extreme period — from the 1791 citizens' army repulsion of the invasion staged by the massed forces of the counter-revolutionaires and the armies of the countries which sought to destroy the infant republic, to the abrupt end in 1794 of the Reign of Terror, which (often overlooked in the macabre shade of the guillotine) was one of mankind's earliest attempts to form a rational society based on political, social, and economic liberty and equality — in this most extreme period, two extraordinary leaders were pitted against each other: Danton, the saviour of the Republic, and Robespierre, the would-be architect of the new society.

Danton was first and foremost a humanist; Robespierre, an idealist. Danton, a realist in terms of ends who was willing to give each person the freedom to pursue his own happiness as long as it did not impinge on other's ability to do likewise, loved and was loved by people. Robespierre, an idealist in terms of ends, but often a complete realist in what means he used to achieve his ends, loved *The People* and wanted to impose his dreams on them, by brute force if necessary.

In Robespierre's defense, it must be said that some extreme measures were indeed necessary if this inchoate mass, which had suffered such intolerable cruelties under decadent aristocrats for years, was to be transformed into his ideal citizenry by measures such as right to work laws, graduated taxes, universal education and a United Nations. Both leaders had their share of "truth and right" — in fact, they desperately needed each other: Robespierre was guillotined only 113 days after the death of Danton.

Perhaps their separate visions are common with those of other pairs in other revolutions: Trotsky (Danton) and Lenin (Robespierre) — with St. Just, the "Apostle of Blood," who, like Stalin, loved only *The Revolution* — Castro and Che Guevara, Chou En Lai and Mao Tse Tung. Certainly in writing DANTON AND ROBESPIERRE I did not feel that I was creating a morality play or a remote historical piece but rather that I was addressing our own time in terms people of today would understand only too well.

## THE MUSIC

For years I have been fascinated by and devoted to the development of a richer yet simpler music based on notes (pitches) other than those found on the piano keyboard. The possibilities of expressing psychological nuance and dramatic movement are enormously expanded by singing and playing notes that lie between the white and black keys. This should not be thought of as theoretical or artificial — on the contrary, every performer of folk and vernacular music in the world (including jazz, bluegrass, and other musics of our own culture) uses such subtle inflections and nuances constantly and naturally.

How does one use these microtonal materials within the musical mechanism of our own Western formal (classic) music? My solution is to divide woodwinds, brasses, and pianos into A and B groups: the A group is tuned normally; the B, a quarter-tone lower — approximately one-half the distance between neighboring notes on a piano keyboard. These pitches are not rigidly fixed, however. From the quarter-tone positions players on woodwind and brass instruments can adjust their notes slightly, while singers and players on stringed instruments need only fix the position of the accurate quarter tones as a compass point to chart their journey into the rejuvenating regions of microtonal melody. The turning of the three harps divides the distance between neighboring piano notes into three parts: one sounds normally, the second a sixth of a tone higher, the third a sixth of a tone lower.

The electronic instrument, on the other hand is tuned in "just intonation" — that is, all the pitches are put in harmonic relation to one note. In that system, some keys are wonderfully true, but others become increasingly sour. I use this peculiarity to express the particular revolutionary vision of Robespierre. It is pure at the outset of the organ prelude, but the further it moves away from the basic key and into remote keys, and by analogy, the more deeply involved Robespierre becomes with specific human and social problems, the more the music becomes impure or inhuman sounding.

The prelude recurs several times (in the music accompanying the September Massacres, in Robespierre's Hymn which begins Act III Scene III, and in the scene accompanying the height of the terror following the guillotining of Danton), and reflects in microcosm the process of moving from the absolute purity of the basic key to the greatly out of tune final chords (a dissonance which is augmented later by techniques of electronic music).

In Robespierre's "Mad Scene," Act III Scene VI, the prelude, played electronically, forms the basis of the musical and dramatic movement. Robespierre begins singing with the harmony of the prelude, but goes more and more out of tune with it, like a man losing control of his mind and soul. On top of this, the orchestra reiterates the music associated with killing throughout the opera, and also accompanies the September Massacres and the references to the executions of the Reign of Terror. The three strands coexist and develop with varying degrees of independence.

—notes by John Eaton

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Produced by Carter Harman

Engineering at the University by Thomas Wood, at the premiere, April 1978.

THIS IS A COMPOSER-SUPERVISED RECORDING.

*(original liner notes from CRI Lp jacket)*

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

DANTON: <i>The most energetic and heroic of the leaders of the French Revolution.</i>	Tenor
ROBESPIERRE: <i>Pitiless in his rectitude. "The Incorruptible."</i>	Baritone
SAINT JUST: <i>Most intransigent and bloody of all the revolutionaries.</i>	Bass
COUTHON: <i>A misshapen cripple in a wheelchair.</i>	Tenor
CAMILLE DESMOULINS: <i>Youngest and most tender-hearted of Danton's party.</i>	Tenor
LUCILLE DESMOULINS: <i>A flighty girl, extremely ambitious for her husband.</i>	Soprano
GABRIELLE DANTON: <i>The first wife of Danton.</i>	Soprano
LOUISE DANTON: <i>The second wife of Danton who marries him after the death of Gabrielle.</i>	Soprano
DRUNK: <i>A comic character who is nevertheless capable of moments of heroism.</i>	Bass-Baritone

### *Minor Characters*

Fishwife, Baker's Wife, Prostitute, Soldier, Three Men of Paris, Roland, Two Speakers, Marat, Six Women of Paris, Three Thugs, Servant, Citizen, Tallien, Mme. Tallien, Clerk, Prisoners and Judges, Official, Sanson, Guards.

### *Groups*

Citizens of Paris/Rabble (mixed ensemble)  
Crowd/Volunteers (large chorus)  
Delegates (male chorus)

## SYNOPSIS

### ACT ONE

*Scene One:* It is late August of 1792.

The newly-born French Republic is threatened by an advancing army of Prussian, Austrian, and emigré troops. The border town of Longwy and the fortress of Verdun have fallen. The way is clear to Paris. The curtain opens on a two-level stage. Only the lowest level is illuminated. There is a crowd scene. Panic. "The enemy is at the gates!" — What to do? "Let us go to the Assembly — let us ask our leaders. Let us ask Danton!" The crowd sweeps off as the upper level of the stage is lit, showing a meeting of the Assembly. Roland in panic advises abandoning Paris. Other deputies agree. Danton checks them: "Do not speak of flight! Make sure the people do not hear you!" At this point the people sweep in. Danton addresses them, rouses them to patriotic fury. They must save France and save the Revolution. Danton leads the people off amid wild enthusiasm.

Only a few remain behind. They are the conspirators who plot the September massacres. The prisons will be broken into and more than 1100 inmates brutally slaughtered. They then go off, leaving only Robespierre. He drops his arms like a blade, which signals the beginning of the massacres.

*Scene Two:* A room in Danton's house. Danton's first wife, Gabrielle, and her confidante Louise, who will marry Danton after Gabrielle's death, sing of Danton's heroism. Enter Camille Desmoulins who tells them of the massacre going on in the prisons. They are scandalized and terrified. Danton enters full of fire: The people are in arms! The women beg him to intervene and stop the massacres. He refuses. With the whole safety of France depending on the popular fury which he has aroused, he will do nothing to check its impetus. He leaves. Gabrielle gives vent to her doubts and fears.

*Scene Three:* Upper stage. Danton high up, in the position from which he rallied the crowd. He urges them off to the front. His urgings continue. As the scene progresses his words become less frequent, more muted, as if from exhaustion.

Meanwhile, on the lower stage, Robespierre speaks. His words: "Justice! Strike! Tyranny! Vengeance!" grow to the point of hysteria.

### ACT TWO

*Scene One:* The streets of Paris a year or so later. The country is saved but the people are hungry and dejected. The reign of Terror has begun. Shadow of guillotine. "Give us bread," etc. A drunk bewails the absence of Danton. Enter Robespierre and St. Just, with a group of ruffians. Robespierre comforts the people: Their sufferings are noble, for their cause is noble. St. Just then calls for further Terror: It is the aristocrats, the traitors, who are starving the people.

*Scene Two:* Danton and his new wife in the country. Their happiness. They sing a duet dwelling on their private as opposed to public life. Enter Camille and Lucille with news of the Terror in Paris. Robespierre is becoming a dictator. None of us are safe. You (Danton) must come back.

Danton decides not to go but in rushes a messenger with the "good news" of the death of the leaders of the right. Danton lashes out at his "good news": Who will be safe now? All leave except Danton and Louise.

Danton, against Louise's wishes, decides to go. Louise loyally decides to go with him, come what may. Premonitions of the worst. She leaves to pack. Danton, left alone, is haunted by the massacres and sings a soliloquy of intense anguish.

*Scene Three:* On his return to Paris, Danton is acclaimed by the Assembly. Danton calls for an end to the Terror. Wild jubilation. St. Just, who has been present all along, sidles out and fetches Robespierre. As these two enter, dead silence falls on the Assembly. Robespierre marches to the highest point and, after a pause, bids Danton a patronizing welcome. Jubilation breaks out.

### ACT THREE

*Scene One:* A dinner has been arranged to try to reconcile Robespierre and Danton. Danton states the case for moderation. Robespierre sits unmoved, in his brocaded waistcoat, dangling a gold watch. When he replies, it is in curt, insinuating formulas ("Republican virtue cannot consort with whores," etc.). Danton pleads for a united front, gets nowhere, and eventually breaks down in tears.

*Scene Two:* Lucille sings a lament for France. Camille rushes in. He has decided to attack Robespierre and plead for clemency and an end to the Terror in his paper. Lucille urges him on to "greatness."

*Scene Three:* Beginning of the plot against Danton. Robespierre, St. Just, and Couthon. They sign an act of indictment against Danton and Camille.

*Scene Four:* The Revolutionary Tribunal. Danton defends himself, rising to heights of patriotic fervour. For the moment he seems triumphant.

*Scene Five:* Dark stage. The faces of Louise and Lucille. They recount the betrayal of Danton.

The cold light of dawn. Danton, Camille and others are led in to execution. Camille weeps and struggles wildly. Danton tells him to be a man. Danton says his last words to the executioner, "Show my head to the people. It is worth seeing," and turns to the guillotine. BLACK OUT.

*Scene Six:* Danton's death brings the height of the Terror, Robespierre almost maniacally repeats his phrases, bits of speeches, justifications, etc. BLACK OUT.

*Entrescene:* In complete darkness, whisperings begin, growing into a confused babble of voices, which gradually rise in pitch and strength as words become discernable: Robespierre, St. Just, Assassins. This is the conspiracy to bring down Robespierre.

*Scene Seven:* Suddenly lit up, the Full Assembly. Tallien stands on the rostrum. He shouts Robespierre's name. All the delegates except St. Just and Couthon bellow their accusations against Robespierre. He rises to defend himself, but is unable to speak. "He is choking on the blood of Danton!" "Seize him! Seize him!" Robespierre grabs a pistol from one of the guards and cries: "People of France, with me perishes the Revolution!" and shoots himself. His arm is deflected, however, and rather than killing him the bullet hits his jaw.

He, St. Just and Couthon are bundled off to the guillotine. At this point the crowd rushes on, bawling insults and singing in chorus: "Death to the tyrant!", etc. Robespierre, as his head is pushed down, gives an unearthly cry. The guillotine falls.