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Woyzeck

By **Georg Büchner**

Co-produced by City Theatre Reykjavik,
the Young Vic and BITE:05, Barbican as part of YOUNG GENIUS

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as part of YOUNG GENIUS



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1. Georg Büchner's Life and Work

Georg Büchner was born on 17th October 1813 in the small village of Goddelau in the Grand-Duchy of Hesse (now Germany). His atheist father was a former military surgeon and eventually became director of the grand-ducal medical college. He had a keen interest in history and often read popular historical texts to his six children, and he pushed for Büchner to study medicine. Büchner's mother, Caroline, on the other hand, introduced her son to romantic poetry, music and folk song.

Büchner was a hard-working student and went to the prestigious Grand-Ducal Gymnasium in Darmstadt in 1825. Here he started to read both Shakespeare and Goethe, and here too, his interest in politics was awakened. The collapse of Napoleon's empire had led to political chaos, and Büchner was critical of the restriction of civil rights that ensued. After he graduated in 1831, he delighted his father by enrolling at the University of Strasbourg to study medicine. Shortly after arriving in Strasbourg, he fell in love with the daughter of his landlord, Minna Jaeglé, and they became secretly engaged.

During his first stay in Strasbourg, he read several French authors as well as the Sturm-und Drang¹ writer JMR. Lenz, and became increasingly involved in the political debate. He familiarised himself with various revolutionary theories, and read historical accounts of the 1789 French revolution.

In 1833 Büchner transferred to the University of Giessen. But isolated in this provincial town and separated from his fiancée, Büchner fell into a depression which was compounded by an attack of meningitis. This dark period seems to have propelled him into action, though, because in March the following year, Büchner and a group of friends and students formed the Society For Human Rights – essentially the first communist organisation in Germany. Shortly afterwards, Büchner wrote a political pamphlet called *The Hessian Messenger*, which highlighted the differences between rich and poor and urged the peasants to rebel against the current social order. Several of Büchner's friends were arrested, but Büchner himself managed to escape to Strasbourg.

Whilst still agitating on behalf of the Society For Human Rights, Büchner wrote his first drama – *Danton's Death*, completed in January 1835. He sent the manuscript to editor Karl Gutzkow, who published a slightly revised and less sensational version in instalments in his journal Phoenix. The first performance didn't take place until 1902.

Back in Strasbourg, Büchner now shifted his focus from medicine to natural sciences. He also translated two plays by Victor Hugo, and wrote his only biographical study of the writer Lenz. He also completed his second play, the comedy *Leonce and Lena*, which he wrote for a competition but failed to submit on time.

Aiming for a post at the University in Zürich, Büchner wrote his first scientific dissertation on the nervous system of fish and received his doctorate in 1836. A couple of months later, he dazzled the entire science faculty with a lecture on cranial nerves, and was immediately made a lecturer. It was probably also during this time that Büchner started work on *Woyzeck*, basing it on an actual criminal case from the 1820s.

¹ A German literary movement characterised by expression of emotional unrest (lit. 'storm and stress')

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Büchner was infuriated by what he saw as a prevalent small-mindedness in society, and by the trivial concerns of the petty bourgeoisie. In *The Hessian Messenger* he wrote: 'The life of the rich is one long Sunday. They live in fine houses, they wear elegant clothes. They have well-fed faces and speak a language of their own. But the people lie before them like dung on the fields.'

In drama he saw the same divide, claiming in a letter of 1835 that the idealistic poets, Schiller included, had given the world nothing but 'puppets with sky-blue noses and an affectation of pathos, not men of flesh and blood with whose joys and sufferings I can sympathise and whose actions inspire me with horror and admiration.'

The ambition to put real people on stage and to aim for social reform and truth and honesty in the representation of life set Büchner apart from his contemporaries. *Woyzeck* is considered the first ever working-class tragedy. Previously, characters from the lower classes had been used in drama only as comic relief, and Büchner's contemporaries all set their tragedies among the middle-classes. Aesthetically, Büchner was also ahead of his time in his use of folk songs, terse dialogue and a radical fusion of naturalistic and expressionist impulses. There was no context for his work in the 1830s, and none of his plays were performed during his lifetime.

Early in 1837, Büchner had to interrupt his teaching due to a serious cold, and in February it became clear that he had contracted typhus. The manuscript of *Woyzeck* still incomplete, he died after seventeen days of illness, with his fiancée at his side, not yet 24 years old.

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2. Table of Key Dates

- 1804 Friedrich Schiller writes his last play, *The Robbers*.
- 1812 Napoleon invades Russia and is forced to retreat, losing almost 600,000 men in battle.
- 1813 Georg Büchner is born in Hesse, Germany.**
- 1814 Prussia invades France after Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig. Two million lives are lost in the wars.
- 1815 The German Confederation is established.
- 1819 August Friedrich von Kotzebue, one of the most popular playwrights of the time, dies.
- 1825 Büchner goes to the Grand-Ducal Gymnasium to study.**
- 1828 Russia declares war on Turkey.
- 1830 France invades Algeria.
- 1831 Büchner enrolls at the University in Strasbourg to study medicine. He falls in love with Minna Jaeglé and they become secretly engaged.**
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe writes the second part of *Faust*.
- Belgium gains independence from the Netherlands.
- 1833 Büchner transfers to the University of Giessen.**
- Slavery is abolished in Britain.
- 1834 Büchner writes the radical political pamphlet *The Hessian Messenger*. He moves back to Strasbourg to escape arrest.**
- 1835 Büchner completes his first play, *Danton's Death*. He writes his second play, *Leonce and Lena*, for a competition.**
- 1836 Büchner receives his doctorate. He begins work on *Woyzeck*.**
- 1837 Büchner contracts typhus and dies at the age of 24.**
- 1878 The first version of *Woyzeck* is published by Karl Emil Franzos under the title *Wozzeck*.**
- 1902 The first performance of *Danton's Death*.**
- 1910 A revised version of *Woyzeck* is produced by Max Reinhardt.**

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3. A Brief Synopsis and Background to *Woyzeck*

Büchner's original play survived in four fragmentary manuscripts. Although his final intention for the work can never be entirely known, a probable scene order has been generally agreed on since the first authoritative text on the play was published in 1967. There is however, a great deal of room for interpretation, and in Gisli Örn Gardasson's adaptation the scene order has been altered and new songs by Nick Cave included, replacing the folk songs in the original.

At the opening of Büchner's fragmentary play, *Woyzeck*, a soldier, is already showing signs of mental distress. He is in a field with his friend Andres, and he thinks he can hear voices. Marie, *Woyzeck*'s common-law wife and mother of his child, is mesmerised by the handsome Drum Major in the street. Later, *Woyzeck* and Marie go to the fairground close by, and the Drum Major returns Marie's glances. He presents her with a pair of gold earrings, but when *Woyzeck* discovers her with them she claims she's found them in the street.

Woyzeck continues with his duties, plagued by an increasingly restless mind. He carries out his duties as the Captain's barber, but the Captain insults him and refers patronisingly to his poverty. When *Woyzeck* tries to explain his situation, the Captain simply scoffs 'you think too much'. Marie, meanwhile, cannot resist the Drum Major's advances and makes love to him, though she denies it when *Woyzeck* confronts her. *Woyzeck* undergoes a series of cruel experiments at the hands of the Doctor, who has for some months insisted that he eat nothing but peas. When the Captain, the Doctor and *Woyzeck* meet in the street, the Captain teases *Woyzeck* about his wayward wife, and *Woyzeck*'s tormented mind begins to spiral out of control.

At an inn, he watches Marie and the Drum Major dancing, and later hears a voice telling him to 'stab her'. He turns to his friend Andres, who offers no consolation. A fight breaks out between the Drum Major and *Woyzeck*, which the Drum Major easily wins. *Woyzeck* goes to buy a gun, but finds he only has money for a knife. He takes Marie into the woods and stabs her to death and leaves her body in a pond, before returning to the inn to dance with the other guests. When they spot blood on his hands, he rushes out and throws the knife in a pond, then follows it out into the water.

In Gisli Örn Gardarsson's adaptation, the play is set in an industrial landscape, and *Woyzeck* and his tormentors are factory workers and managers.

The workers arrive, among them *Woyzeck*. He tries to talk to his common-law wife Marie who is the mother of his child, but the bullying Captain orders *Woyzeck* to wash him. While he does so, the Captain ridicules *Woyzeck* and derides him for not having any morals. When *Woyzeck* is finished washing the Captain, the Doctor arrives. The Doctor is conducting a medical experiment on *Woyzeck*, whereby he is forced to live on water alone. The Doctor compares *Woyzeck* to an animal and treats him with cold, scientific contempt.

Marie, returns and tells *Woyzeck* the tragic folk story of an abandoned child. *Woyzeck* sings a clumsy love song to Marie and presents her with a new dress for the party. They are interrupted by the loud and extravagant arrival of the Drum Major, factory owner and predatory thug. Marie is immediately spellbound by him.

The workers prepare for a celebration. Marie arrives in her new dress, to wait for *Woyzeck*. The Drum Major arrives first, flirts with her and gives her two red roses. When *Woyzeck*

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arrives, Marie claims she found the flowers on the ground. They join the party, but soon Marie is dancing with the Drum Major. During the party, the Sergeant humiliates Woyzeck in front of the others, and Woyzeck seeks support from Andres, who is increasingly disturbed by Woyzeck's obsessive behaviour.

The Drum Major then gives a rousing speech about the success of the factory, and reveals a huge water tank as a symbol of the company's prosperity. He seduces Marie, and they make love in the water.

When Woyzeck enters, the now drunk Captain teases him about Marie's infidelity, and the Doctor who is also present marvels at Woyzeck's physical reactions. Woyzeck grows increasingly distraught, and watching the Drum Major and Marie dance again, he tells Andres he can hear voices encouraging him to drown her. He seeks help from the Doctor who shows no sympathy.

Now alone, Marie sings a song of guilt and regret. Woyzeck arrives almost out of his mind with jealousy and delirium, and is viciously beaten by the Drum Major, who spits on him, and leaves. Marie tends to the injured Woyzeck, but he draws her into the tank and drowns her. He holds her body and repeats the story of the abandoned child, before turning on the watching crowd and telling them to consider their own sins. He then slips under the water.

When Georg Büchner died in 1837, the text of *Woyzeck* was incomplete. Four different drafts were left behind with his brother Ludwig, and the intended order of the scenes has been hotly debated by critics and directors alike. In the early 1870s, Karl Emil Franzos began interpreting the various manuscripts in an attempt to put each scene in narrative order. He also added some text of his own – some very poor, some brilliant. Because the text had faded so much in the intervening years, Franzos decided to treat the pages with a chemical, which made it easier for him to see the ink. These drafts still exist, but Franzos' chemical experiment has meant that it is almost impossible to interpret the text today.

The scenes were first published in 1878 as *Wozzeck* (the title was supplied by Franzos, and seems to have stemmed from the illegibility of Büchner's tiny handwriting) and a revised version was produced for the first time in 1910. Because of the lack of a definitive version, every director who chooses to produce the play has to make fundamental choices about the narrative. This poses a great challenge, but may also go a little way to explaining the play's great popularity with directors.

Büchner based his play on an actual criminal case. In the medical journals he was reading at the time, a debate raged over the mental competence of convicted murderer Johann Christian Woyzeck, who had been beheaded in Leipzig in 1824 for killing his mistress, Frau Woost, in a fit of jealousy. The couple had been seeing each other for a few years, but Frau Woost had continued to prostitute herself with local soldiers. The real Woyzeck had been a soldier and a barber, who had become unemployed and homeless, and after his arrest he had shown signs of hallucinating and paranoia. However, the medical examiner, Dr Claurus, had deemed him legally responsible and condemned him to death as a deterrent to others. After the trial, Claurus' evaluations were published, as were various contesting articles. It was highly unusual to conduct mental evaluations of criminals in this way, and Büchner followed the debate with great interest.

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Büchner's first draft is basically a re-arrangement of the documents from the Leipzig criminal case, but it is already clear that his Woyzeck is rather different from the real-life one. Instead of being unemployed, the fictional Woyzeck is a common soldier, at the time one of the most insignificant occupations on the social scale, with a status not much higher than that of a serf. His poverty, however, and his dependence on others, were strong factors in his developing mental instability. The characters of the Doctor and the Captain are both representatives of the exploitative social system which degrades the poor, and Büchner even has them quote short passages from Claurus' statements on the real-life Woyzeck.

Ultimately, the moral of Büchner's play is a clear and brutal one: a society based on violence breeds violence, and the oppressed strike out at their own before attacking their oppressors. In many ways, his perception of society, albeit bleak, was full of insight, and the play continues to speak to us urgently today.

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4. Theatre in Georg Büchner's Germany

At the time of Georg Büchner's birth in 1813, the German theatre was thriving and prosperous. In fact, at the turn of the century, German theatre was considered the finest in Europe, and could even boast one of the most famous playwrights of the time in the world, August Friedrich von Kotzebue.

Kotzebue wrote his first play in 1787, and until his death in 1819 he wrote more than 200 plays, thirty-six of which were translated into English. His plays included domestic drama, historical plays, verse plays and farces, and his great skill lay in his sensitivity to public taste, knowing exactly how challenging to be without alienating a less discerning audience.

If Kotzebue was the common man's dramatist, two playwrights fought for the claim to be the dramatist of the élite. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote his first play in 1773, and continued to work in and heavily influence the theatre until his last work, the second part of *Faust*, in 1831. His contemporary and eventual creative partner, Friedrich Schiller, was equally if not more popular with the educated theatregoers, and from his first play *The Robbers* in 1782 to his last, *William Tell* in 1804, his influence, too, was immense and continues to be felt in Germany today.

The two men met in 1794, and when Schiller moved to Weimar in 1799, they set about making the Weimar theatre one of the most famous and respected in Europe. Among their ideas was the plan to make the disparate Weimar ensemble into a true, homogenous group of actors, and Goethe set out a list of rules to this end, describing how the actors should speak, in which accent, principles of movement and many other things. As in most other theatres of the time, the Weimar troupe rehearsed no more than six to ten times before performing, but Goethe made sure it was time well spent. He was notoriously strict with verse speaking and rhythm, sometimes even beating out the rhythm like a conductor when the actors spoke. He also developed a system of blocking, whereby he divided the stage into squares and instructed the actors to move in such a way that would create the most pleasing stage picture. In many ways, Goethe was one of the very first directors, and his efforts resulted in a nation-wide fame for the so-called Weimar classicism.

The new Weimar theatre opened in 1798, seated about 500 people, and showed an eclectic mix of plays. Although Goethe would have preferred to produce only his own and Schiller's work, the theatre relied on box office income for two-thirds of its budget, and he had to bow to public tastes. Consequently, the theatre showed musical plays or operas, and popular plays such as those by Kotzebue, alongside productions of plays by himself and Schiller. Following Schiller's death in 1805, Goethe's interest in the theatre waned, and he resigned from his post in 1817.

Around the time of Büchner's birth, a new trend labelled Romanticism was beginning to blossom in Germany. In theatre, this meant a revived interest in the works of Shakespeare, as they were thought to embody the new ideas of a higher, spiritual truth outside human experience. Apart from a continued interest in these classics, a few new types of plays emerged.

Ludwig Tieck was a fervent admirer of Elizabethan theatre, and wrote a number of plays which can best be described as 'fantastic comedies', based on fairy tales like *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Puss in Boots*. Another type of plays, called 'fate tragedies', were greatly in

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vogue between 1810 and 1820, and the most popular playwright in this vein was Zacharias Werner, whose *The Twenty-Fourth of February* (1809) was a huge success.

Another prominent playwright of the early nineteenth century was Heinrich von Kleist, who was almost completely unknown until a volume of his collected plays were published in 1826, fifteen years after his death. Many of Kleist's plays remain in the German repertoire today, most notably *The Broken Jug* from 1808 and *The Prince of Homburg* from 1811.

The status of the actor in this period was relatively high. In the government funded troupes, actors were considered civil servants, and enjoyed the same wages and pension rights. By the middle of the 19th century, Germany had 65 permanent theatres which employed over 5,000 actors, singers and musicians. The strong sense of ensemble, however, which was promoted by Goethe, declined after 1830 as a result of a growing focus on star performers. These 'stars' rarely rehearsed with the other actors, and often demanded that other roles be altered to give them more prominence. The stable ensemble acting style within individual companies consequently became increasingly disparate.

The two most prominent theatres between 1800 and 1830 were the National Theatre in Berlin, and the Burgtheater in Vienna. In Berlin, architect and stage designer Karl Friedrich Schinkel was instrumental in the design of the theatre space. In terms of costume, theatres generally used one of five styles: classical, medieval, 16th century, 17th century and contemporary. This didn't really change until the mid-to late 1800s, when a major historical overview of the history of costume was published by Jakob Weiss.

Even though Büchner's vision of art and society was radical and new, his thoughts were echoed elsewhere. Towards the end of his life, in the early 1830s, a new group called the Young Germans came to the fore. They were mainly united in their dislike for all things romantic, and worked for social awareness and greater correspondence between the arts and current political events. The two most influential writers of this group were Karl Gutzkow and Heinrich Laube, both of whom were repeatedly in conflict with the strict censorship then in force. This meant that most of their plays were not performed until after the widespread revolutions in 1848, but because their work was so closely linked to current events, the plays are rarely performed today.

In spite of the prosperity of German theatre in this period, invention was frowned upon and classics enjoyed a very high status. This might go some way to explain why Büchner's work was not produced for the first time until almost a hundred years after his death, by the legendary director Max Reinhardt in 1910.

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5. Social and Historical Context

Georg Büchner was born in a time of great political upheaval in Europe. In 1812, a year before his birth, Napoleon had invaded Russia, but had been forced to retreat because of the severe Russian winter and had lost almost 600,000 men. Seeing an opportunity to defeat Napoleon while his forces were weakened, a number of countries joined together in the so-called Sixth Coalition (including the United Kingdom, Prussia and a number of German states), and defeated Napoleon at the battle of Leipzig in 1813.

The victory at Leipzig rapidly led to the invasion of France in 1814, and Napoleon was forced to abdicate. The wars are thought to have cost almost 2 million lives, and saw some of the bloodiest battles yet in Europe.

In 1815, following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the German Confederation was established at the congress in Vienna. This was a loose organisation of Central European states, including the Austrian Empire and the Prussian kingdom. The member states were fully sovereign, and pledged mutual defence in case of war.

Social conditions in 19th century Germany were harsh. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, German farmers were hit by particularly severe weather conditions, leading to failed crops. Many areas hadn't yet begun to feel the benefits conferred by mechanisation in the wake of the industrial revolution, and unemployed farmers were struggling to make ends meet. The numbers of beggars and people needing state assistance rose rapidly and immigration, primarily to America, was common. In some cases, the immigration was assisted by the state, which was relieved to see the last of such dependent citizens.

Urbanisation compounded the problem. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, 20% of the population lived in the towns – a century later, the figure was 80%. This rapid rise in urban population led to cramped and inhospitable living conditions. The government did what it could to alleviate the situation, for example by assigning allotments for growing vegetables to the poor.

These harsh conditions extended into most areas of society, including the law. Corporal punishment was extremely common, often performed in public. Upon arriving in prison, criminals would receive a specific number of blows relating to the severity of their crime, often with birch rods or other wooden implements.

In order to boost nationalism in the years leading up to the Napoleonic wars, universal conscription had been established. Every able-bodied man between the ages of 17 and 45 had to do military service. The basic unit was a regiment, which was usually stationed near, and supported by the local city. This meant that a man in the military could spend all his time surrounded by friends and family, but it also meant that there was a risk of a whole village's male population being wiped out in one battle.

Other areas of society, however, were advancing. The new technologies brought on by the industrial revolution meant that scientific invention, and speculation, were booming. One area of medicine that had begun to attract particular attention was the knowledge of the human psyche, or psychology. Around the turn of the century, the philosopher Friedrich Goos attempted to combine philosophy and psychology by suggesting that mental problems are caused by the suppression of physiological processes. The treatment of mental patients also came under scrutiny, with inquiries into often horrific conditions in England and Germany. In

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1829, the restraint of hospital patients was abolished in England, and some practitioners promoted the abolishment of drugs in treatment. Others claimed that mental problems were genetic and hereditary, using Darwin's recently published theory of the survival of the fittest as verification for their ideas.

In the build-up to the revolutions in Berlin in 1848, political unrest grew stronger. Caught in the limbo between the demise of the feudal system and the establishment of industrialisation, there was widespread discontent with the state. It was against this background of approaching revolution and change that Büchner developed his radical political and artistic ideas.

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6. Interview with the Director Gisli Örn Gardarsson

What attracted you to the play when you first read it?

Well, at first it didn't really attract me at all because it's a difficult play to envisage on stage. As a piece of writing in itself on the other hand, it's pretty impressive, especially if you think about the fact that Büchner was only 23 when he wrote it. It is thought that the play was almost finished when he died, because apparently he wrote to someone that he had a play under construction that would take another week to finish. But you can do a lot of work in a week, so I don't know whether it really was almost finished or not. What's interesting about this is that you can make up your own mind about the play and nobody can really say anything about it. Nothing is right and nothing is wrong.

As I went through the play again and again, I got drawn to the aspect of jealousy in it. And then I got pretty interested. That is something I understand and something I'm prepared to take on as a challenge.

What kind of preparatory work have you done for rehearsals?

I've done loads of workshops with the actors, where we try and discover the theatrical language of the play and how the scenes could be linked. I feel that there are gaps in the story – not necessarily in the dialogue, but somehow in the flow of it – so the aim of the workshop is to find what those missing links might be. I then sit down and create an adaptation which is the foundation for what we use when we enter the next stage of rehearsals.

I also try and prepare the visual world of the production as much as possible without actually seeing it. This enables me to have something concrete to attack with the actors. Of course things change and develop during the rehearsal period, but at least it's built on something that was there at the beginning.

Could you describe a little about how you work in the rehearsal room?

First it needs to be said that every production will have a different approach. So with *Woyzeck*, I could probably divide our rehearsal period into two stages:

First we do a lot of physical work. We take on the whole theatre space we will be working in and look for ways to portray the story on every level possible – visual, physical, emotional. This is basically our 'research period', when we try out different approaches and ideas. During this period everything is very open and everyone is involved in every aspect of the work.

After the 'research period' I have a much clearer idea of how to actually structure that play and in what order I think it's best to have the scenes. So I sit down and create an adaptation. With *Woyzeck* I don't see myself as someone who merely stages a play, but rather as an artist who is creating a story and a production based on the scenes from Büchner's *Woyzeck*. This doesn't mean that I do not have full respect for Büchner's text, because I completely do and it's pretty much all there in my version too. I guess the difference is that I do not serve the play. The play serves me and us.

This is also the period where I cast the play and decide what element I want each character to have. And from there we create the production of *Woyzeck*.

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What do you think the challenges are in directing this play?

The challenge lies in making the decision regarding what storyline you want to follow, and what story you want to tell. The play is open to various interpretations and perspectives, so I think it's important to choose what you want the main focus to be and use the rest of the ingredients to feed that focus.

How do you think the play can speak to an audience today?

I think it can say a lot of things. I try to be clear about what I would like it to say, and I always base that on something I would find interesting myself as an audience member. If it's of value to me, hopefully it will appeal to others as well.

What do you hope the audience will get from the experience?

I wouldn't want to spoil the surprise by telling them!

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7.

Creative Team

Director	Gislí Örn Gardarsson
Music	Nick Cave, Warren Ellis
Lyrics	Nick Cave
Design	Börkur Jónsson
Lighting	Lárus Björnsson
Assistant Director	Jón Atli Jónasson
Sound	Ólafur Örn Thoroddsen
Costume Design	Filippía Elísdóttir
Musical Arrangement	Pétur Þor Benediktsson
Voice and Text Coach	Ellen Newman
Movement Consultant	John-Paul Zaccarini
Icelandic Translation	Jón Atli Jónasson
English Translation	Ruth Little, Gislí Örn Gardarsson, Jón Atli Jónasson
Producer	Rakel Gardarsdóttir

Cast

Woyzeck	Ingvar E. Sigurðsson
Marie	Nína Dógg Filippusdóttir
The Captain	Víkingur Kristjánsson
The Doctor	Harpa Arnarsdóttir
The Drum Major	Björn Hlynur Haraldsson
Andres	Ólafur Egill Egilsson
Margret	Árni Pétur Guðjónsson
The Sergeant	Erlendur Eiríksson
Entertainer	Ólafur Darri Ólafsson
The Swan/Assistant	Jóhannes Níels Sigurðsson
Choir	Andri Ólafsson, Bjarni Bjarnason, Haraldur Ágústsson, Haraldur Björn Halldórsson, Hjalti Þór Þórsson, Ívar Örn Árnason, Karl Erlingur Oddason, Karl Sigurðsson, Kristbjörn Helgason, Kristján Dereksson, Steingrímur Karl Teague

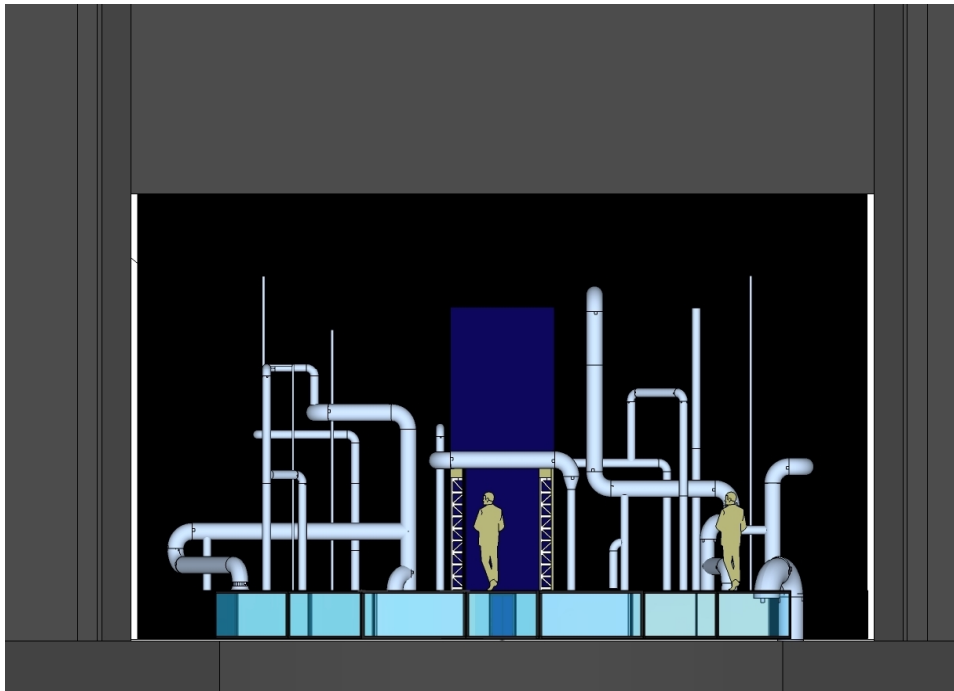
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8. Design Images

Börkur Jonsson's set design for *Woyzeck* was inspired by large-scale industrial settings such as petrochemical plants and hi-tech factories. He drew also on the design of the giant hydro and geo-thermal power plants which mark the Icelandic landscape. His aim was to create an environment in which individuals work like machines and are dominated by technology, by wealth they do not possess, and by the control and exploitation of natural resources. Rather than starting with a model box he created computer generated images which provided the cast and creative team a sense of the set design.



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9. About the Young Genius Season

There's ability, there's talent and there's genius.

When we came up with the idea for Young Genius we were faced with a huge number of questions. Everyone is born with creative abilities of various kinds. Talent, it seems to us, is the result of a relationship: between an individual and a particular parent or teacher or even an audience. What is genius? Can it be measured? Some even deny it exists. How is it that some people can 'do it' almost – or so it seems – without thinking and almost as soon as they begin? We wanted this season to be a celebration of that extraordinary phenomenon: artists who know at once who they are, who find their voice the moment they start to speak.

We decided to focus on plays that were written before the playwright reached the age of 26. We read a great many plays and were delighted and astonished at the range and creative force leaping off the page through history. From the fifteenth century to the 1990s, from Africa to America to Europe, young, bold playwrights were making themselves heard, reinventing their craft and changing the future of theatre.

Selecting six plays for production was almost impossible. The plays we've chosen range from Elizabethan comedy to French surrealism to modern British drama, and span more than four hundred years of playwriting.

From the dawn of Elizabethan theatre, we chose Christopher Marlowe's epic **Tamburlaine The Great**, a powerful story about greed and politics, adapted in a new version by David Farr. Written just twenty years later, Francis Beaumont's **The Knight of the Burning Pestle** is an anarchic romp, satirical and hilarious. Then we leap ahead in time – two hundred and thirty years – to Georg Büchner's visceral pre-modernist **Woyzeck**, a withering tale of poverty and madness. Sixty years on, and Alfred Jarry is causing a theatrical scandal with **Ubu the King** in a Paris sizzling with artistic activity, presented here in an outrageous new version by David Greig. Sixty years later, Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka writes **The Lion and the Jewel**, an exuberant example of 'total theatre' which points towards the Nobel Prize Soyinka was later to receive. Finally, we reach the present, with Sarah Kane's radical, shocking **Phaedra's Love**, a re-working of Seneca's tragedy which has only been seen once before in this country.

To match these works of young genius, we set about finding the most exciting directors and designers we could. Led by our desire to be both local and international, we gathered six creative teams from all corners of the world. Geniuses all? You decide. What we're sure of is that these 17 full and workshop productions celebrate – across the ages – youthful ambition, provocation, experimentation, confidence and the joy of creativity.

Join us. Be inspired.

WOYZECK

Resource Pack



10. Bibliography and Further Reading

Georg Büchner and the Birth of Modern Drama by David G Richards (State University of New York Press, 1977)

Büchner and Madness by James Crighton, (Bristol German Publications, 1998)

The Drama of Revolt by Maurice Bernard Benn (Cambridge University Press, 1976)

Lenz and Büchner: Studies in Dramatic Form by John Guthrie (Verlag Peter Lang, 1984)

The Rehearsal of Revolution by T M Holmes (European Academic Publishers, 1995)

History of the Theatre by Oscar G Brockett (Allyn & Bacon, 1995)

Links

<http://www.littlebluelight.com/lblphp/intro.php?ikey=2>

General information about Büchner's life and work

<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc29.htm>

A biography

<http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5188>

Another biography

<http://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec=true&UID=10376>

Background information to *Woyzeck*

<http://www.io.com/~jlockett/Grist/English/woyzeck.html>

An analytical essay about 'human reduction' in *Woyzeck*

<http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=1353>

Some information about German Romanticism

<http://www.geocities.com/al6an6berg/woyzeck.hym1?200527>

A brief account of the difficulties of interpreting the *Woyzeck* manuscript

<http://www.litencyc.com/php/contemporaries.php?rectype=3&uid=10376>

A list of Büchner's contemporaries