

BURN

It's not what you know.



An Original Two-Act Musical
Book, Music & Lyrics
by
Gary Robert Hanson

Production Guide

Artistic Vision and Production Information

What happens when everything you believe is consumed by fire?

Against the backdrop of Joan of Arc's triumph and tragedy, *Burn* follows a man whose faith is shattered by events he cannot explain and a choice he cannot forgive.

Why *Burn*?

Joan of Arc has inspired countless books, films, plays, and musicals. *Burn* takes a different path. Rather than retelling the story of an iconic historical figure, it explores the lasting impact one extraordinary life has on the ordinary people drawn into its orbit. By placing Louis de Contes—a young seminarian searching for certainty—at its center, *Burn* offers audiences a fresh perspective on a familiar story while remaining rooted in the historical events that shaped it.

At its core, *Burn* is a character-driven musical that combines intimate emotional storytelling with the scale and theatricality of epic historical drama. Humor, romance, conflict, spectacle, and profound personal loss exist side by side, creating an experience that is both emotionally engaging and theatrically satisfying.

For performers, *Burn* offers richly developed principal roles whose emotional journeys evolve over the course of the story. For audiences, it presents timeless questions of faith, certainty, forgiveness, and compassion without reducing them to simple answers. For producers, it provides a work whose ensemble-driven storytelling and flexible orchestration allow productions of varying scale while preserving the emotional impact at its heart.

Artistic Vision

Burn unfolds through memory. As Louis recounts his experiences with Joan of Arc, the boundaries between past and present begin to dissolve. Memories are not simply described; they are relived. People long gone return to the stage. Old wounds reopen. The person we become confronts the person we once were.

This structure allows the audience to experience events as Louis experiences them—not as fixed historical facts, but as living memories shaped by love, regret, grief, and longing. The result is a theatrical world where history and memory coexist, and where the past remains capable of transforming the present.

Though the story spans decades and encompasses battles, courts, cathedrals, and villages, its focus remains intensely personal. History is experienced not through kings and generals, but through the relationships that define Louis's life. The epic and the intimate exist side by side, creating a theatrical experience that is both emotionally immediate and historically expansive.

Most stories about Joan of Arc ask a single question:

Who was Joan?

Instead, *Burn* asks a different one.

What was it like to know her?

Ultimately, *Burn* is less concerned with explaining Joan than with exploring the lives transformed by her. Louis's journey from certainty to humility becomes the lens through which the audience experiences her extraordinary legacy.

In the end, the lesson he learns is remarkably simple:

It's not what you know.

Major Themes

The Limits of Knowing

Louis begins the story convinced that the path to God can be found through study, doctrine, and disciplined understanding. His education has given him confidence—not only that he has found a path to faith, but that it is the only path. Joan never argues against knowledge. Instead, she quietly exposes its limits by living a faith that cannot be reduced to explanation or earned through intellect alone. Louis's journey is not a rejection of learning, but a surrender of the arrogance that insists every truth can be understood before it can be believed.

The Loss of Self

Louis's greatest loss is not his faith, but his identity. At the beginning of the story, he defines himself through his education, his calling, and his certainty that he understands the path to God. As Joan challenges his assumptions, war exposes the brutality of the world, and tragedy strips away the people

and ideals that once sustained him, those foundations begin to crumble. By the time Joan is gone, Louis is left questioning not only what he believes, but who he is.

Burn explores the profound disorientation that follows when the identities we construct can no longer sustain us. It asks whether a life can be rebuilt after every source of meaning has been consumed by loss, and whether true healing begins not by reclaiming the person we once were, but by discovering the person we are meant to become.

The Burden of Guilt

For twenty-five years, Louis carries the conviction that he failed the people he loved most. He interprets every loss as a personal failure and spends decades seeking atonement for burdens that were never his to bear. *Burn* examines how guilt can distort memory, identity, and self-worth, and how true healing often begins with self-forgiveness rather than self-punishment.

The Power of Human Connection

The relationships at the heart of *Burn* shape every major turning point in the story. Joan challenges Louis's assumptions. Tariq broadens his understanding of faith and humanity. Catherine demonstrates courage in the face of prejudice and fear. Through friendship, love, mentorship, and sacrifice, the musical argues that our lives are ultimately defined not by what we achieve, but by the people we influence and the connections we forge.

Musical Language

The musical language of *Burn* mirrors Louis's emotional journey. As his world expands and ultimately fractures, the score moves with him—from playful to ponderous, from gentle to angry, from intimate reflection to overwhelming spectacle. Musical style is never an end in itself, but a dramatic tool that reveals character and emotional truth.

Moments of vulnerability often strip away accompaniment altogether, allowing unaccompanied voices to expose the characters' inner lives with startling intimacy. In contrast, battles and moments of collective triumph unleash the full orchestra, while Louis's anger erupts through driving contemporary rhythms rooted in rock and jazz influences. Throughout the score, instrumental colors reinforce the emotional landscape: the warmth of the harp accompanies moments of grace, military colors evoke humor and camaraderie, mournful brass underscore loss, and lyrical woodwinds offer moments of tenderness and reflection.

The Visual World

The visual language of *Burn* reflects Louis's emotional journey as much as its historical setting. The musical begins in the warmth and intimacy of Domremy, a "nice, little village" where life feels ordered, familiar, and secure. As Louis follows Joan into a larger world, the stage expands with the scale of military campaigns, royal courts, and cathedrals, mirroring both the growing scope of history and the

unraveling of his identity. By the end of the musical, that vast world contracts once again into the stark isolation of Louis's modest room, where the memories of a lifetime become his only companions. The physical journey—from village to battlefield to court and finally back to solitude—traces the emotional arc of a man who loses everything he believed defined him before discovering a new understanding of himself.

Principal Characters

Burn is driven by six principal characters whose lives intersect Joan of Arc's. Together they embody the musical's central themes of faith, doubt, love, sacrifice, authority, and redemption.

Younger Louis de Contes

Male, late teens to early 20s

The primary protagonist of *Burn*. Brilliant, ambitious, arrogant, idealistic, and intensely curious, Younger Louis believes that knowledge, discipline, and study can provide answers to life's deepest questions. Convinced that learning can solve nearly any problem, he often mistakes understanding for wisdom and certainty for truth.

Though intellectually gifted, Louis struggles to understand faith, grace, and the limits of reason. His desire to prove his worth often blinds him to the value he already possesses. Over the course of the story, he witnesses extraordinary events while searching for meaning, purpose, and a place in a world that increasingly defies explanation.

Character Arc: Certainty → Doubt → Loss → Disillusionment

Elder Louis de Contes

Male, 40s–50s

The narrator, guide, and emotional frame of the musical. Twenty-five years after Joan's death, Elder Louis lives alone in Domremy, consumed by regret and convinced that he failed the people he loved most. Bitter, isolated, and emotionally exhausted, he has spent decades carrying burdens that were never his to bear. Beneath his bitterness lies the same certainty that defined him as a young man, now turned inward: an unshakable belief that he alone understands the meaning of his failures.

As he recounts his memories, Elder Louis is forced to relive the defining moments of his life and confront the beliefs that have imprisoned him for years. Through the retelling of his story, he gradually discovers that the failures he has allowed to define him are not the truths by which his life should be measured.

Character Arc: Guilt → Self-Recrimination → Acceptance → Healing

Joan of Arc

Female, late teens

Brilliant, compassionate, courageous, and deeply faithful, Joan is a young woman whose certainty about God's love stands in stark contrast to the doubts of those around her. Yet she is not immune to uncertainty herself. When first confronted with her calling, Joan questions why God would choose an ordinary peasant girl for an extraordinary mission. She longs for the simplicity of the life she knows and initially resists the path set before her.

As she gradually accepts her calling, Joan becomes a source of inspiration, challenge, and transformation for everyone around her. Seen entirely through Louis's memories, she is neither an untouchable saint nor a distant historical icon, but a vividly human young woman whose faith, compassion, humor, and courage leave an enduring mark on the lives she touches.

Though her earthly journey is brief, her influence reverberates throughout the entire musical.

Character Arc: Doubt → Acceptance → Conviction → Sacrifice → Legacy

Tariq ibn Tarif

Black Male, 30s

A Muslim refugee who happens upon Domremy, Tariq is intelligent, fearless, perceptive, and quietly wise. Having survived war, displacement, prejudice, and profound personal loss, he understands both the beauty and fragility of life. Unlike Louis, whose worldview is shaped by books and study, Tariq's understanding comes from lived experience and the scars he bears.

Initially an intellectual rival to Louis, Tariq gradually becomes his closest friend and greatest challenge. Realistic without becoming cynical, he sees people as they are rather than as he wishes them to be. His honesty often unsettles Louis, while his compassion continually inspires him.

His wife and child murdered years before, Tariq approaches happiness with caution. But his caution is overcome by the gentle ministrations of Catherine d'Arc, Joan's sister. Ultimately, their love helps inspire Louis to seek a purpose beyond the walls of the seminary.

Through his friendship, courage, and unwavering loyalty, he becomes one of the story's moral centers, teaching Louis that faith is measured not by certainty, but by how one chooses to live in the face of uncertainty.

Character Arc: Survivor → Outsider → Friend → Protector → Enduring Influence

Catherine d'Arc

Female, early 20s

Compassionate, practical, and quietly courageous, Catherine serves as an emotional anchor throughout the story. While others are drawn toward destiny, conflict, and grand causes, Catherine is guided by a simpler conviction: that love is worth the risk it demands.

Her relationship with Tariq requires her to confront prejudice, uncertainty, and social expectations. Unwilling to settle for the familiar or the safe, she chooses a future defined not by convention but by

possibility. In doing so, she offers Tariq a reason to hope again and provides one of the story's clearest examples of courage expressed through love.

Through Catherine, both Louis and the audience gain a deeper understanding of Joan. Where Catherine is grounded and readily understood, Joan remains elusive and extraordinary, helping illuminate the qualities that make her both inspiring and perplexing.

Character Arc: Curiosity → Love → Courage → Loss → Endurance

Bishop Pierre Cauchon

Male, 50s–60s

A powerful bishop and influential church official, Cauchon is intelligent, disciplined, politically astute, and deeply committed to preserving the authority and stability of the Church. He is not motivated by cruelty, but by a conviction that order, hierarchy, and institutional survival must be protected at all costs. Cauchon never sees himself as a villain; he believes he is protecting both Church and kingdom from chaos.

To Louis, Cauchon initially represents everything admirable about the Church: learning, authority, tradition, and certainty. As events unfold, however, Louis witnesses the growing gap between the ideals the Church proclaims and the actions it is willing to justify. Through Cauchon's choices, Louis experiences the profound disillusionment that will haunt him for decades.

Cauchon serves as both a powerful antagonist and a tragic figure. His failure is not a lack of faith, but a willingness to subordinate compassion and truth to politics, ambition, and institutional self-preservation. In doing so, he becomes the embodiment of the Church's greatest failures and the catalyst for Louis's crisis of faith.

Character Arc: Authority → Compromise → Condemnation → Legacy of Failure

Production Overview

Book, Music & Lyrics

Gary Robert Hanson

Format

Two-act musical

Running Time

Approximately 2½ hours (including intermission)

Cast

6 principal roles, 9 featured + ensemble

Orchestra

- Small pit orchestra

Available Materials

- Script
- Demo Recordings

Contact:

Gary Robert Hanson

Email: grhanson@weallburn.com

Phone: 561-563-9560

Website: <https://www.weallburn.com/producer>