Antoinette, an Opera in One Act

Colin McMahon
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
David Myska
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in Music

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Abstract

*Antoinette* is a chamber opera in one act. It is a dramatization of the events leading to the execution of Marie Antoinette and is 30 minutes in length. The narrative of the opera was developed together with Vancouver based poet Ray Hsu, who wrote the libretto. *Antoinette* is intended to address modern societal issues through musical drama. These issues represent the biographical reality of the characters but are intended to resonate with modern audiences. Themes will include overconsumption, the dangers of so-called “Strong-man Politics”, mortality, and feminism. *Antoinette* is written for five principle vocalists (soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone, bass) accompanied by a chamber orchestra which consists of a flute, clarinet, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, vibraphone), piano, violin, viola, violoncello, and contrabass.

Keywords

Music, composition, opera, Canadian opera, chamber music, vocal music, French Revolution, Marie Antoinette
Acknowledgments

Antoinette was written with help and collaboration from an incredible number of artists. I would first like to acknowledge my primary collaborator on this opera: Ray Hsu. He worked closely with me to develop the story for this opera and wrote this incredible libretto, which I have had the privilege to set to music.

I would like to thank Prof. David Myska, my advisor and mentor, who has provided invaluable guidance and support in the creation of this opera. I would also like to thank the second reader on this thesis, Prof. Paul Frehner, for his time and advice.

Numerous musicians have consulted with me on the particulars of their instrument and voice type so that Antoinette could be the best that I could make it. These musicians include conductor Dylan Maddix, flutist Roseline Ou, clarinetist Scott MacDonald, percussionist Jake Schindler, pianist Brian Cho, violist Katie McBean, and the vocalists Daniela Agostino, Brianna DeSantis, Patrick Bowman, and Chad Louwerse. I cannot thank them enough for their time and recommendations.
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Instrumentation and Dramatis Personae

Instrumentation:

1 Flute
1 B♭ Clarinet
1 Piano
1 percussionist (snare drum, bass drum, vibraphone)
1 Violin
1 Viola
1 Violoncello
1 Contrabass

Dramatis Personae:

Marie Antoinette – Mezzo-Soprano
Maximilien Robespierre – Tenor
King Louis XVI of France – Bass
Gilbert du Motier – Baritone
Maid of the Royal Household – Soprano
Page left blank to facilitate page turns
ANTOINETTE
An Opera in One Act

Music by Colin McMahon
Libretto by Ray Hsu
Prologue

Apprehensive $\text{=} 60$

Maid

Marie

Robespierre

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Apprehensive $\text{=} 60$

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
With Passionate Charisma \( \approx 100 \)

**Robespierre** address the audience as though they are a crowd of French commoners.

Cit-i-zens! At last, France is in the throes of Liberty.
Rob: Marie, has had her cake while we hunger.
outside the gates of Versailles.
so long, our country has sung for the scraps under the royal
Now we have come to learn...
we must demand a table of our own.
Rob

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

No one will break our chains for
We must seize our fate.
with our own hands. Our hands have tilled
the field,
our hands have cut the thread.

Now our hands must
write the future, must write our laws.
The
\[ q = 100 \text{ (a tempo)} \]

\[ \frac{4}{4} \]
world turns by our hand, our
Our hands are first and last. We alone choose to stay in...
Rob: chains. We alone choose to undo them. What choose you?

Fl.

Cl.

pp

S. D.

pp

B. D.

pp

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
Scene 1

(The royal apartment of Versailles. Marie is alone on stage, busy choosing flowers for the coming ball)

Unsettled $= 132$

Maid

Marie

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Unsettled $= 132$

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
(Louis enters and calls to his wife, but stays at the opposite side of the stage as they speak)
Welcome back. How was the hunt?

- - dame!
Wonderful. The hounds could smell blood for miles.

How delightful.
Are you ready for our ball?

I think so. I feel exhausted just thinking about it.
(du Motier enters from behind Louis) (bowing a bit too low)

Gilbert du Motier. But

Your Highness.

Gah! Who is this?
Ah! du Mo-tier! Yes. I re-mem-ber one of your dis-tin-guished sol-diers.
I fought for you in America. Up-held all you, I think.
He has been a most that is good and noble. Kept the guns firing and the goods flowing.

---

He has been a most that is good and noble. Kept the guns firing and the goods flowing.
loyal servant. Rumours of his in-subordination are not to be listened to.

(bows to Louis again)

That would
Wait. What are we talking about?

be a blanket statement
Your Highness? m'lord

Why, hel-lo.

Good, let us feast! The soon-er we get this ov-er with,
How true, your Majesty.

the sooner it is over with
I'm starving. Fetch me something before the feast begins.
Of course, your Highness. Cake?

What-ever's fine.
(the Maid brings Marie a table filled with dessert, then exits)

This is starting to feel like a long night.
All this to my table.
does it take. What I hold before me now has traveled untold lengths.
From one pair of hands to another, to another.
All those hands around the world. My hand, the
choosing hand, will be last. If point, and the world will spring into action.
My hand is last and first.
Scene 2

(in Tuileries Palace after the Revolution, where the Royal Family is being held in house arrest)

\( \text{Daunting } \breve{\text{j}} = 120 \)

Maid

Robespierre

du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B\(_b\)

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

\( \text{Daunting } \breve{\text{j}} = 120 \)

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
Al-right Gilbert, you have your wish.

You and I both wanted this.

For...
Bah! Come now, Robespierre. All this noble talk of "Truth" and "The
There is a People* it doesn't fool me. We both know you get off on this.
world of difference between us. You want power over a

We both want power. That's all there is.

f mp

ppp

mf

S. D.

B. D.

Vib

Pno.

Vln

Vla.

Vc

Cb.
single woman.

And you want power over all men. Same thing
You will get what you want, which is what you deserve: the Assembly hereby
names you its prison guard its thug

Of course O lord of Revolution.
That should be all of them
That they would be spared? They are the weak.

You, maid.
Yes, sir. For whom? My God.

Get this cell ready. For a King without a crown and soon without a head. You
And the Queen? This is against God. Her missed a spot. I have a special place for her.
High-ness does not deserve this.
I don't care what

De-serve? What do you de-serve?
I deserve any more._ I care that I survive._ I must finish the

Why survive when you can live?
There is much to do.

No, I think you have a minute-little one.

(du Motier follows the Maid off stage)
Scene 3

(Marie is alone pacing the stage)

With Fear Setting In $q=72$

Marine

Robespierre

du Motier

Vibraphone

Piano

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

(Marie is alone pacing the stage)
I have a talent for making sense. And
no-thing makes more than being decent. Being

Mar

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb
When have I not

Being a mother.
want-ed the best for my coun-try

my fam'
ly my home. That I think can...
not be misunderstood

Even a hardened heart
knows I mean well. People only know. People only know.
Frantic $j=108$

Louis enters followed by the Maid who is carrying clothing, pacing and stressed, he hands a simple shawl to Marie and starts debating between which of two peasant hats to wear.

Almost! Almost there!

We have to go now. What are you
I just need a few things to do -ing?
Things? What things?

gather I need to figure out I just I just
Lou - is
Listen to me
We

I just need to put few things in place
Mai

Mar

dont. Have. Time. Did you hear that? A blade being sharpened, making de-

Lou

Hear what?

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

60

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
Mai

Mar

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

64

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

All I need is a

sessions for us.
(Marie grabs Louis just as du Motier enters)

God damn you. Fuck

Par don the intruision. I will handle

mo-ment to get my thoughts.

my.
(Robespierre enters, catching up) it from here, Marie. How unwise to rush about during a rev - o - lu -
Marie, you know better than to try and escape the will of "The Prophecy."
M' lord... Robes - pi - erre.

Who are you?

One of the people.
People. You don't know Marie,
She has shown me kindness. You don't

So what? And what should I know?

You don't know Marie, -
She has shown me kindness. You don't
know my hus-band was one of your "Peo-ple". You don't know what he used to

He is a man like any other. You don't

know my hus-band was one of your "Peo-ple". You don't know what he used to
You're not listening to me.

know what you defend.

Why protect your cage?
You don't have to do this. She's

No-thing to lose but her chains. Shall I lib - er - ate her? Is - n't this touch - ing?
Mai

Mar

donething

Rob

Only thing worse than an enemy is a traitor.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

cb.

87
You were this close to walking out unscathed.
(du Motier escorts Marie and Louis off stage. While being lead out Marie gestures to the Maid to hide.)

Run!  Hide!

Gilbert, back to their cage. Give her a good cleaning if you'd like.
Foreboding ($j=72$)

An - y-thing for pro-gress
An - y-thing
O, Ma-

Foreboding ($j=72$)

(pressing to himself)
How straight an arrow our births lead to our rie, Marie._

If circumstances were different.
O, how can love and hate be two sides of a coin?
can the flight of life lead unerringly, as if nothing we choose

Such chance rules our lives. What

lead unerringly, as if nothing we choose

What
could bring the slightest deviation

we see as our chance to have a few pleasures
in a short lifetime fate snatches from our jaws.
What can I do? What do I do, Marie?

I can almost taste it.
(du Motier drags the Maid offstage, the Maid screams from offstage)

Mai

(can almost taste... you.)

Fl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
(Robespierre address the audience as though they are the National Assembly)

Solemn $q = 112$

Marie

Robespierre

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

Fel - low coun-try- men_ of the Nation'al As-sem-bly: I ex - e-
cute your will. Louis Capet denounced you as rebels. Yet he has rebelled against
Nature.

He is not here for any trial.
For if he may be in-no-cent then we, dear ci-ti-zens,
may be guilty.
He has hung the sword over every
one of you. Now the tables turn. His
name, brings war upon us, the scale of his crimes
de·mand jus·tice. With re·gret I say this truth: Lou-

Rob

is must die so the nation may live.

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

is must die so the nation may live.
(Marie and Louis are alone on stage)

(Louis takes off his crown and sets it on the ground)

was the state. I was...
That is why you needed people who

Most times I didn't want to be.
care a-bout the state, a-bout you.

Yes, Marie I know you care.
(Louis begins to exit, but stops. He looks to Marie for help)

care a-bout you too.
Mar (Marie almost says something, but looks away instead)

Lou (Louis finally gathers himself and exits)
repeat as needed until Louis is offstage

Guillotine from offstage
Resigned \( \frac{\text{pp}}{q} \) (\( \frac{=}{} \))

Resigned \( \frac{\text{pp}}{q} \) (\( \frac{=}{} \))

Resigned \( \frac{\text{pp}}{q} \) (\( \frac{=}{} \))

Resigned \( \frac{\text{pp}}{q} \) (\( \frac{=}{} \))

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Resigned \( \frac{\text{pp}}{q} \) (\( \frac{=}{} \))

Resigned \( \frac{\text{pp}}{q} \) (\( \frac{=}{} \))

Resigned \( \frac{\text{pp}}{q} \) (\( \frac{=}{} \))

Resigned \( \frac{\text{pp}}{q} \) (\( \frac{=}{} \))
times will pass and some brave new world will come and
Thought beauty was forever
but maybe it must pass, to be beautiful. And,
like all things swept in to the dust bin for a new world. Yet death
(Marie picks up Louis’s crown)

has always been
Mar

wait in the wings.

wait in the wings.

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb
Scene 5

(Robespierre enters to speak with Marie)

Marie

Seething \( j=96 \)

Robespierre du Motier

You.

Well. Me? You give me too much credit. You mean "the Peo-

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

\begin{align*}
\text{Seething } j=96
\end{align*}
How dare you.

Do you think I did this?

No, you
How delusional you are.
How dare you.

He is dead skin that must be shed for a new body political to be born.
How dare you, you strange little man. If there tru-
- ly is a "Peo - ple" then they can tear you down
as eas- i- ly as they take Lou- is and I
You are no dif -
If there truly is a "People" you will not be spared.
That's what I thought.

I know.

Robespierre, it has been decided.

Mar

Rob

duM

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb

(Robespierre strikes her)
Mar

Rob

duM

Fl

Cl

S. D.

B. D.

Vib

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
great re-gret I pro-nounce you not a Queen but just an-oth-er dead wo-man.
You may call me Marie.  

(suddenly du Motier feels sorry for Marie and guilty for the pain he has caused)  

Your Highness I know,
Mar

Get out Gilbert, Get the fuck out.

Rob

I have been unkind.

duM

(exit)

Fl

Cl

S. D.

B. D.

Vib

Pno.

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb
My hand was last and first. The chain ends here.
I am killed not because of what I chose. So much in such lit -
One choice always more right than another. I chose...
too much in a world where choices matter so little.
I chose too often in a world where choosing mattered too much.
I undid myself.
And who will choose for me...
now? Fate? What choice is left? What choice do I have?
A Tempo (\( \text{\textit{\textbar{J}=64}} \))

Mar

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb
repeat as needed until Marie is offstage

Guillotine from offstage
End of the Opera
Curriculum Vitae

Name: Colin McMahon

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:
- The University of Western Ontario
  London, Ontario, Canada
  2011-2015 B.Mus. (Music Composition)
- The University of Western Ontario
  London, Ontario, Canada
  2015-2017 M.Mus. (Music Composition)

Honours and Awards:
- Paul Ohashi Summit award
  2015
- Ontario Graduate Scholarship
  Master’s Program (OGS-M) - Declined
  2016-2017
- Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
  Joseph Armand Bombardier (CGS-M) - Award Recipient
  2016-2017

Related Work Experience:
- Teaching Assistant
  The University of Western Ontario
  2015-2017
- Part-Time Assistant Librarian
  The University of Western Ontario, Music Library
  2014-2017

Publications: