Antoinette, an Opera in One Act

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree 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.
# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgments.....................................................................................................................iii
Table of Contents.....................................................................................................................vi
Instrumentation and Dramatis Personae..................................................................................v
Score...........................................................................................................................................1
  Prologue.................................................................................................................................1
  Scene 1....................................................................................................................................20
  Scene 2....................................................................................................................................42
  Scene 3....................................................................................................................................64
  Scene 4....................................................................................................................................98
  Scene 5...................................................................................................................................121
Curriculum Vitae......................................................................................................................146
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

Score is non-transposing

Apprehensive $\cdot=60$

Maid

Marie

Robespierre

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Apprehensive $\cdot=60$

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
Robespierre address the audience as though they are a crowd of French commoners:

Citizens! At last France is in the throes of Liberty.
Rob Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Marie, has had her cake while we hunger.
outside the gates of Versailles. For
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.
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
world turns by our hand, our
Our hands are first and last. We alone choose to stay in
chains. We alone choose to undo them. What choose you?
Scene 1

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

Unsettled $\frac{3}{4}=132$

Maid

Marie

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B♭

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Unsettled $\frac{3}{4}=132$

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.
Are you ready for our ball?

I think so. I feel exhausted just thinking about it.
Elegant \( \frac{1}{4} = 112 \)

**Mai**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

**Mar**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

(du Motier enters from behind Louis) (bowing a bit too low)

**duM**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

Elegant \( \frac{1}{4} = 112 \)

**Lou**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

Gah!

Who is this?

**Fl**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

**Cl**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

**S. D.**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

**B. D.**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

**Vib**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

**Pno**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

**Vln**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

sul tasto

con sordino

**Vla**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

sul tasto

con sordino

**Vc**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

**Cb**

\( \frac{3}{4} \)

Gilbert du Motier. But

Your Highness.

Your Highness.

Bowing a bit too low

But (du Motier enters from behind Louis)
one of your distinguished soldiers.

Ah! du Mo
tier! Yes. I rem-
ber
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.
That would not be the case.

loyal servant. Rumours of his in-subordination are not to be listened to.

(bows to Louis again)
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.
(the Maid brings Marie a table filled with dessert, then exits)

This is starting to feel like a long night.
Mar

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

this.

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... I 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)

Daunting $\approx 120$

Maid

Robespierre

du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Daunting $\approx 120$

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
Al-right Gilbert, you have your wish.

You and I both wanted this. For

Combative \( \cdot = 60 \)

You
Bah! Come now, Robespierre. All this noble talk of "Truth" and "The...
There is a Peo-ple* it does-n't fool me. We both know you get off on this.
You want pow'{}r o{}ver a world of dif'{}rence be'tween us.

We both want pow'er. That's all there is.
single woman.

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

Of course O lord of Revolution.
That should be all of them.
the bastards and bitches that pampered royalty
What did they think?
That they would be spared? They are the weak.
You, maid.
Yes, sir. For whom?

Get this cell ready For a King without a crown and soon without a head. You

My God.
And the Queen?

This is against God. Her missed a spot. I have a special place for her.
Highness does not deserve this. I don't care what you deserve?
I deserve anymore, 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.
Scene 3

(Marie is alone pacing the stage)

With Fear Setting In $\dot{=}72$

Maid

Marie

Robespierre

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B♭

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

With Fear Setting In $\dot{=}72$

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
I have a talent for making sense. And
nothing makes more than being decent. Being
hu-man. Be-ing a moth-er. When have I not
want-ed the best for my coun-try

my fam'

p p p subito
Mar: "ly my home. That I think can-"
not be misunderstood

Even a hardened heart
knows I mean well. People only know. People only know.
We have to go now. What are you (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) Al-most! Al-most there!
Mai

Mar

do-ing?

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
Things?

ge - ther I need to fig-ure out I just I just
I just need to put a few things in place.
Mai

Mar

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
All I need is a

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

God damn you.  

Fuck

Par - don the in - tru_ _sion.  I will han - dle

mo - ment to get my thoughts.  my.
(Robespierre enters, catching up)

it from here, Marie. How unwise to rush about during a revolution...
Mai

Mar

Rob

duM

Lou

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Ma - rie, you know bet - ter than to try and es - cape the will of "The Peo - tion."
M' lord__ Robes - pi - erre. One of the

Who are you?__
People. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness. You don't know Marie, she has shown me kindness.

So what? And what should I know?
know my hus-band was one of your "Peo-ple". You don't know what he used to

He is a man like an-y o-ther. You don't
You're not listening to me.

Why protect your cage?

know what you defend.
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?

You don't have to do this. She's
On-ly thing worse than an en-e-my is a trai-tor.
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.)

Ran!  Hide!

Gilbert, back to their cage. Give her a good clean-ing if you'd like.
Foreboding (╯=72)

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

(musing to himself)

90
How straight an arrow our births lead to our Marie, Marie. If circumstances were different.
O, How, in the eyes of God, how can love and hate be two sides of a coin?
Mai
can the flight of life lead unerringly, as if nothing we choose

duM

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Such chance rules our lives. 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.

bowled

mf

p pp p pp p pp
Mai

duM

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

(du Motier drags the Maid offstage, the Maid screams from offstage)

(can almost taste... you.)
Scene 4

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

Solemn $\frac{1}{2}$=112

Marie

Robespierre

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Solemn $\frac{1}{2}$=112

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

Fell low coun-try- men of the Nation'al Assem-bly: I ex - e-
cute your will. Lou- is Ca-pet de nounced you as re-bels. Yet he has re-belled a-gainst
Nature.

He is not here for any trial.
For if he may be innocent then we, dear citizens,
may be guilty
He has hung the sword over every
one of you. Now the tables turn. His
Rob

name, brings war upon us, the scale of his crimes
de-mand jus- tice. With re-gret I say this truth: Lou-

flautando

ppp

pp

pp

pp

de-mand jus-tice. With re-gret I say this truth: Lou-

flautando

ppp

pp

pp

pp

flautando

pp

pp

pp

pp

flautando
Rob

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)

37

was the state. I was...

(Louis takes off his crown and sets it on the ground)
Yes. That is why you needed people who
Most times I didn't want to be.
care a-bout the state, a-bout you.

Yes, Ma - rie I know you care. I

B. D.

S. D.

Pno.

Vib.

Fl.

Cl.

Vla.

Vln.

Vc.

Cb.

Mar

Lou

48 48 48

pp pp pp

mp mp mp

48 48 48

pp pp pp

mp mp mp

48 48 48

pp pp pp

mp mp mp
(Louis begins to exit, but stops. He looks to Marie for help)

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

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

Guillotine from offstage
Resigned $\downarrow=56$ (\(\downarrow=56\))

These pp will pass.

soft mallets pp pp pp pp pp pp

Resigned $\downarrow=56$ (\(\downarrow=56\))
times will pass and some brave new world will come and
Mar

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb

72

pp

p

pp

go.

I thought beauty was forever.
but maybe it must pass, to be beautiful. And,
like all things swept into the dust bin for a new world. Yet death
(Marie picks up Louis's crown)

has always been
wait-ing in the wings.

wait-ing in the wings.
(Robespierre enters to speak with Marie)

Seething $\mathbf{J}=96$

Marie

Robespierre du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

You.

Me? You give me too much credit. You mean "the Peo-
How dare you.

Do you think I did this? No. you
How delusional you are.

brought this on yourself.

Listen Marie Louis is dead
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 easily as they take Louis and I
You are no dif -
If there truly is a "People" you will not be spared.
That's what I thought.

Robespierre, it has been decided.

I know...

Mar

Rob

duM

Fl

Cl

S. D.

B. D.

Vib

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
Mar

Rob

duM

Fl

Cl

S. D.

B. D.

Vib

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
great regret 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,
Get out Gilbert, Get the fuck out.

I have been unkind.

(exit)
Resigned $\downarrow=64$
My hand was last and first. The chain ends here.
I am killed not because of what I chose. So much in such lit -
- de things. One choice al-ways more right than a- noth-er. 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 un-did my self. And who will choose for me._
now? Fate? What choice is left? What choice do I have?
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
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2011-2015 B.Mus. (Music Composition)

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