Antoinette, an Opera in One Act

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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

Score is non-transposing

Apprehensive $\dot{=} 60$

Maid

Marie

Robespierre

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
With Passionate Charisma \( \text{\textit{=100}} \)

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

"Citizens! At last France is in the throes of Liberty!"
Rob Marie, has had her cake while we hunger.

Fl. P

Cl. f

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno. p

Vln. ff

Vla. p

Vc. p

Cb. p
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.
No one will break our chains for
We must seize our fate.
Rob

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

with our own hands. Our hands have tilled
Rob

the field,
our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Rob

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Fl.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Cl.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

S. D.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

B. D.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Vib.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Pno.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Vln.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Vla.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Vc.

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Cb.
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)

\textbf{Unsettled $\dot{z}=132$}

Maid

Marie

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

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!
How delightful.

Mar

Lou

Wonderful. The hounds could smell blood for miles.

Fl.

Cl.

p — mp

3

p — mp

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
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?
one of your distinguished soldiers.

Ah! du Mo-tier!

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

(bows to Louis again)
Wait. What are we talking about?
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.
This is starting to feel like a long night.
Mar

this.

All this to my table.
How much $q = 76$.
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 $\frac{J}{J} = 120$

Maid

Robespierre

du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
Al-right Gilbert, you have your wish.

You and I both wanted this.

For
Bah! Come now, Robes-pi-erre. All this no-ble talk of "Truth" and "The
There's a People*

It doesn't fool me. We both know you get off on this.
world of difference between us.

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

You want power over a

We both want power. That's all there is.
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 Rev-o-lu-tion.
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...
And the Queen? This is against God. Her missed a spot. I have a special place for her.
High-ness does not de-serve 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—

(du Motier follows the Maid off stage)
Scene 3

(Marie is alone pacing the stage)

**With Fear Setting In**

\[ \text{\textit{q}} = 72 \]

**no ped.**

**With Fear Setting In**

\[ \text{\textit{q}} = 72 \]
I have a talent for making sense. And
no-thing makes more than being decent. Being
When have I not been

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

Mar

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
ly my home. That I think can
not be misunderstood

Even a hardened heart
knows I mean well. People only know. People only know.
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.

Louis! We have to go now.

Almost! Almost there!
I just doing?

I just I just need a few few things to-
54
Ma

54
Mar
Things?

54
Lou
get
ther
I
need
to
fig-
ure
out
I
just
I
just

54
Fl.

54
Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
I just need to put few things in place.
Mai

Mar

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

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Hear what?

&
sions for us.

All I need is a

p
(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 revolu-

71
Ma - rie, you know bet - ter than to try and es - cape the will of "The Peo-

tion.
M' lord Robespierre.

Who are you?

One of the ple".
People. You don't know Ma-rie,
She has shown me kind-ness. You don't

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

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?
done nothing

Only thing worse than an enemy is a traitor.
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 ($\frac{\text{m}}{\text{s}}=72$)

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

(musing to himself)
How straight an arrow our births lead to our rie, Marie. If circumstances were different.
O, How, in the eyes of God, 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

p

mp

pp

mp

mp

arco
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. I
(du Motier drags the Maid offstage, the Maid screams from offstage)

(Mai)

can almost taste...

you.

(fl)


(cl)


(s. d.)


(b. d.)


(pno.)


(pno.)


(vln.)


(vla.)


(vc.)


(cb.)


(f)


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Scene 4

[Robespierre address the audience as though they are the National Assembly]

Solemn \( j = 112 \)

Marie

Robespierre

Fell-ow coun-try-men, of the Na-tion'al As-sem-bley: I ex-e-

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Piano

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
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,
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 na tion may live.

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

mp

S. D.

ppp pp ppp

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

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

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.
Mar

Lou

Fl

Cl

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

care a-bout the state, a-bout you.

Yes, Ma - rie I know you care.

I care a-bout the state, a-bout you.
(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 $\dot{=56}$ ($\dot{=}q$)

I too will pass.

These

Resigned $\dot{=56}$ ($\dot{=}q$) $\text{soft mallets}$
times will pass and some brave new world will come and
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
waiting in the wings.
waiting in the wings.
(Robespierre enters to speak with Marie)

*Scene 5*

*Seething* \( j = 96 \)

Marie

Robespierre du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B\(\flat\)

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Seething \( j = 96 \)

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

Well. Me? You give me too much credit. You mean "the Peop-
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 strikes her

I know.

Robespierre, it has been decided.
f (Satisfied in his victory)
Marie Carpet, it is with
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,
Get out Gilbert, Get the fuck out.

I have been unkind.

(exit)
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 ten 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?
repeat as needed until Marie is offstage

Guillotine from offstage
End of the Opera
Curriculum Vitae

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