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Antoinette, an Opera in One Act

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Graduate Program in Music

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of 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
(Robespierre address the audience as though they are a crowd of French commoners)

With Passionate Charisma $\approx 100$

Cit - i-zens! At last France is in the throes of Lib - er-ty
Marie, has had her cake while we hunger.
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

with our own hands. Our hands have tilled

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

46

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

3:2
the field,
our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must
The future, must write our laws.

Rob

write

Fl.

ff

ff

Cl.

ff

ff

S. D.

ff

ff

B. D.

ff

ff

Vib.

ff

Pno.

ff

Vln.

ff

Vla.

ff

Vc.

ff

Cb.

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff
world turns by our hand, our
Our freely hands are first and last. We a-lone choose to stay in freehand.
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$lat$

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!


How delightful.

Wonderful.
The hounds could smell blood for miles.
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?

Elegant \( \text{q} = 112 \)

Pno.
one of your distinguished soldiers.

Ah! du Mo- tier! Yes, I re-mem-ber
I fought for you in America. Upheld all you, I think.
He has been a most noble. Kept the guns firing and the goods flowing.
loyal servant. Rumours of his insubordination are not to be listened to.

That would
Wait. What are we talking about?

be a blanket statement
Your Highness? m'lord

Why, hello.

Good, let us feast! The soon-er we get this over 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.
\[ \text{Mar} \]

\[ \text{Fl.} \]

\[ \text{Cl.} \]

\[ \text{Vib.} \]

\[ \text{Pno.} \]

\[ \text{Vln.} \]

\[ \text{Vla.} \]

\[ \text{Vc.} \]

\[ \text{Cb.} \]
What I hold before me now has traveled untold lengths.

Mar

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
From one pair of hands to another, to another.
All those hands a-round the world. My hand, the
choosing hand, will be last. I point, and the world will spring into action.
119 freely

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 $\dot{=}$120

Maid

Robespierre

du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Daunting $\dot{=}$120

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
Al-right Gilbert, you have your wish.

For you and I both wanted this.
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._

52
single woman.

And you want power over all men. Same thing

39
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 rea-dy For a King with-out acrown and soon with-out 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 anything, 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 or one.

(exit)

Mai

Vil

Pno.

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb

Cell.
Scene 3

(Marie is alone pacing the stage)

With Fear Setting In \( \frac{\text{q}}{72} \)

No ped.

\( \frac{\text{p}}{4} \)

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I have a talent for making sense. And
no-thing makes more than be-ing de-cent. Be-ing

Mar

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb
human. Being a mother. When have I not...
want-ed the best for my coun-try

my fam'
Mar. — the "home. That I think can-
not be misunderstood

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

Almost! Almost there!
I just did that, I just did that, I just need a few few things to-
Things?

What things?

gle - ther I need to figure out I just I just
I just need to put a few things in place.
"d "nt. Have. Time. Did you hear that? A blade be-ing shar-p ened, ma-king de-ci-

Hear what?
- sions for us.

All I need is a

All I

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 revolution.
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?

(clearly very nervous)
People. You don't know Marie, She has shown me kindness. 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 any other. You don't
You're not listening to me.

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.
(Mme. Motier escorts Marie and Louis off stage. While being lead out Marie gestures to the Maid to hide.)

\[ q = \frac{h}{h} = 72 \]

Run! Hide!

Gilbert, back to their cage. Give her a good cleaning if you'd like.

\[ q = \frac{h}{h} = 72 \]
An - y-thing for pro-gress
An - y-thing
O, Ma-
How straight an arrow our births lead to our Marie.

If circumstances were different.
O, How, in the eyes of God, deaths?

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
could bring the slightest deviation

we see as our chance to have a few pleasures
in a short life time fate snatch-es 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)

(can almost taste... you.

(du Motier drags the Maid offstage, the Maid screams from offstage)
Scene 4

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

Solemn \( \frac{4}{4} = 112 \)

-Marie-

Robespierre

| Fel - low coun-try- men_ |
| of the Nation'al As-sem - bly: |
| I ex - e-

-Louis-

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

(Solemn \( \frac{4}{4} = 112 \))

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

\( pp \)
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.
I demand justice. With regret 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.
(Marie and Louis are alone on stage)

(Marie and Louis are alone on stage)

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

I was...
Mar

Yes.

Lou

Most times I didn't want to be.

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
care about the state, about you.

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

care about 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
I *too* will pass.

These

Resigned \( \text{\textit{q}}=56 (\text{\textit{q}}=56) \)

63 soft mallets

pp

p

pp

pp

p

pp

p

pp

Resigned \( \text{\textit{q}}=56 (\text{\textit{q}}=56) \)
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)

\[
86 \quad \text{has always been}
\]
wait-ing in the wings.

wait-ing in the wings.

\[ \text{poco rit.} \]
Scene 5

(Robespierre enters to speak with Marie)

Seething $j=96$

Marie

Robespierre du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

You.

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

Seething $q=96$

You.
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-poli-tic to be born.
How dare you, you strange little man. If there true

\begin{align*}
J &= \frac{J}{64} \\
J &= \frac{J}{64}
\end{align*}
- ly is a "Peo - ple" then they can tear you down
as easily as they take Louise and I
You are no dif -
rent. 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

(Robespierre strikes her)
Mar

Rob

$f$ (Satisfied in his victory)

Ma - rie Ca - pet, it is with

duM

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

$\frac{44}{130}$
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.
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 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
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
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Honours and Awards:
Paul Ohashi Summit award
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Related Work Experience:
Teaching Assistant
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