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

Apprehensive \( \textbf{\dot{\textbf{j}}} = 60 \)

- **Maid**

- **Marie**

- **Robespierre**

- **du Motier**

- **Louis**

- **Flute**

- **Clarinet in B**

- **Snare Drum**

- **Bass Drum**

- **Vibraphone**

- **Piano**

- **Violin**

- **Viola**

- **Violoncello**

- **Contrabass**

Score is non-transposing
With Passionate Charisma $=100$

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

27
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.
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 $\nu=132$

Maid

Marie

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in Bb

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.

Won-der-ful. The hounds could smell blood for miles.
Are you ready for our ball?

I think so. I feel exhausted just thinking about it.
Elegant \( \frac{3}{4} = 112 \)

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

Your Highness.

Gah! Who is this?

con sordino sul tasto

sul tasto con sordino
one of your distinguished soldiers.

Ah! du Mo
tier! Yes. I re-
member
I fought for you in America. Up-held all you, I think.
He has been a most 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, hello.

Good, let us feast!

The sooner we get this over with,
How true, your Majesty.

the sooner it is over with
I'm starvation. 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.
Mar

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

this.

All this to my table.
Mar

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
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 $\nu=120$

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-pierre. 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
You will get what you want, which is what you deserve: the Assembly hereby.
names you its pri-son gaurd 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?

My God.

Get this cell ready For a King with-out a crown 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 does not deserve this. What do you deserve?
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 or two.

(du Motier follows the Maid off stage)
Scene 3

(Marie is alone pacing the stage)

With Fear Setting In $q=72$

Maid

Marie

Robespierre

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

With Fear Setting In $q=72$

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
I have a talent for making sense. And
nothing makes more than being decent. Being

Mar

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb
hu-man. Be-ing a moth-er. When have I not_
want-ed the best for my coun-try
my fam'
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)

Lou: Almost! Almost there!

We have to go now.

What are you (Frantic q = 108)
I just need a few things to do -ing?
Things?
What things?
ge-ther
I need to figure out
I just
I just
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

Hear what?

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

 mf

 mf

 mf
All I need is a solution 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.
Ma-rie, you know bet-ter than to try and es-cape the will of "The Peo-
tion.
M' lord,Robes-pierre.

One of the ple*.

Who are you?
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 an-y o-ther. You don't
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.

duM

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
You were this close to walking out unscathed.
Mai

Mar

Rob

duM

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

\( q = 72 \)

Mai

Mar

Rob

duM

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

\( q = 72 \)

Mai

Mar

Rob

duM

Lou

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

\( q = 72 \)

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B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

\( q = 72 \)
Foreboding ($j=72$)

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

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Fl.

Cl.

duM

Mai
How straight an arrow our births lead to our Marie. If circumstances were different.
deaths?

O, How, in the eyes of God,

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

The flight of life 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 snatch-es from our jaws.
What can I do?  What do I do, Marie?

I can almost taste it.  I
139 \( \frac{1}{4} \) \( \text{j=144} \)\( \frac{1}{4} \) \( \text{j=1} \) \( \text{j=72} \)

(knocks over a prop)

\( \text{Mai} \)

\( \text{duM} \)

can almost taste...

\( \text{Fl.} \)

\( \text{Cl.} \)

\( \text{S. D.} \)

\( \text{B. D.} \)

\( \text{Vib.} \)

\( \text{Pno.} \)

\( \text{Vln.} \)

\( \text{Vla.} \)

\( \text{Vc.} \)

\( \text{Cb.} \)

\( \text{(du Motier drags the Maid offstage, the Maid screams from offstage)} \)

\( \text{spoken} \)
Scene 4

(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

Fellow countrymen of the National Assembly: I ex - e -
cute your will. Louis Capet deounced you as rebels. Yet he has rebelled against
Rob

Nature.

He is not here for any trial.
For if he may be in-no-cent then we, dear ci-ti-zens,
Rob: may be guilty.

Fl.

Cl.

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb
He has hung the sword over every
Rob
Fl.
Cl.
S. D.
B. D.
Vib.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

one of you.

Now the tables turn.

His

p

p

p

p

p

p
name brings war upon us, the scale of his crimes
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)

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 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 a-bout you too.
Mar

Lou

(fl)

(Vln)

(Vla)

(Vc)

(Cb)

(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 \( \frac{\mu}{=56} \) (\( \frac{\mu}{=} \))

These too will pass.

Resigned \( \frac{\mu}{=56} \) (\( \frac{\mu}{=} \))

\( \text{soft mallets} \)

Resigned \( \frac{\mu}{=56} \) (\( \frac{\mu}{=} \))
times will pass and some brave new world will come and
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...
waiting in the wings. waiting in the wings.
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

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

_menu_
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 true
- 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.

I know.

Robespierre, it has been decided.

Mar

Rob

Robespierre strikes her

duM

Fl

Cl

S. D.

B. D.

Vib

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

\[ \text{\( q = 96 \)} \]

\[ \text{\( j = \frac{3}{4} \text{ (} j = 96 \text{)} \)} \]
Ma-rie Ca-pet, it is with
great regret I pronounce you not a Queen, but just another dead woman.
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 -
- the things. 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?
Mar

Fl.

Cl.

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

repeat as needed until Marie is offstage

Guillotine from offstage

rit.

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End of the Opera
Curriculum Vitae

Name: Colin McMahon

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:

The University of Western Ontario
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