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Antoinette, an Opera in One Act

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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
ANTOINETTE
An Opera in One Act

Music by Colin McMahon
Libretto by Ray Hsu
Prologue

Score is non-transposing

Apprehensive $\frac{\text{l}}{\text{e}}=60$

Maid

Marie

Robespierre

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

Apprehensive $\frac{\text{l}}{\text{e}}=60$
(Robespierre address the audience as though they are a crowd of French commoners)

With Passionate Charisma $\approx 100$

Cit - i - zones! At last, France is in the throes of Lib - er-ty

With Passionate Charisma $\approx 100$
Rob

Mairie, has had her cake while we hunger.
outside the gates of Versailles.

For ff

mf

f

f

f

f

f

f

mf
Rob Fl.

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
Rob

the field,
Rob

our hands have cut the thread. Now our hands must

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
write the future, must write our laws. The

-vib-
Our hands are first and last. We alone choose to stay in

Rob

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
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 Bb

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?
one of your distinguished soldiers.

Ah! du Mo tier! Yes, I re mem 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.
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

30
Your Highness? m'lord

Why, hel-lo.

Good, let us feast!

The sooner we get this over with.

Your Highness?
How true, your Majesty.

the sooner it is over with

pp
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.
Mar
Fl.
Cl.
S. D.
B. D.
Vib.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

this.
All this to my table.
\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Mar} & \quad \text{Cl.} & \quad \text{S. D.} & \quad \text{B. D.} & \quad \text{Vib.} & \quad \text{Pno.} & \quad \text{Vln.} & \quad \text{Vla.} & \quad \text{Vc.} & \quad \text{Cb.} \\
\end{align*} \]
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 \( \text{\texttt{\textbackslash v}} = 120 \)

Maid

Robespierre

du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Daunting \( \text{\texttt{\textbackslash v}} = 120 \)

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
Al-right Gilbert, you have your wish.

You and I both wanted this.
Bah! Come now, Robes-pi-erre. 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 dif'rence between us. You want pow'r over a

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

f ↳ mp
And you want power over all men. Same thing...
Mai

Rob

You will get what you want, which is what you deserve: the Assembly hereby

duM

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
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 rea-dy 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

Mai

duM

Fl

Cl

S. D.

B. D.

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb

Deserve? 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-little one.
Scene 3

(Marie is alone pacing the stage)

With Fear Setting In \( q = 72 \)

Maid

Marie

Robespierre

du Motier

Louis

Flute

Clarinet in Bb

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

With Fear Setting In \( q = 72 \)

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass
I have a talent for making sense. And
no-thing makes more than being decent. Being
Mar

human. Being a mother.

When have I not

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
want-ed the best for my coun-try

my fam'
That I think can—
not be misunderstood

Even a hardened heart
knows I mean well. Peo-ple need on - ly know. Peo-ple need on - ly 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)

“Almost! Almost there!”

We have to go now.

Frantic = 108

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
I just doing?

I just need a few things to-
What things? 

I need to figure out I just I just
I just need to put few things in place

Lou - is Listen to me We
don't. Have. Time. Did you hear that? A blade being sharpened, making decision.

Hear what?
All I need is a

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

God damn you. Fuck

Par don the instru_ion. 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 rev olu...
Marie, you know better than to try and escape the will of "The Proposition."
M' lord. Robespierre.

One of the ple".

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,
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 touching?
On 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.)

Grun!  Hide!

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

(exit)
Foreboding ($j=72$)

(musing to himself)

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

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.
How straight an arrow our births lead to our Marie, Marie. If circumstances were different.
120

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
could bring the slightest deviation

we see as our chance to have a few pleasures

128
in a short lifetime fate snatches from our jaws.
What can I do? What do I do, Marie?

I can almost taste it.

What do I do, Marie?
(du Motier drags the Maid offstage, the Maid screams from offstage)

can almost taste...

you.

(q = 144)

(q = 72)

(f = 72)

arco

mf

f

ff

mp

pp

mf

pp

f

Vic.

Pno.

S. D.

B. D.

Fl.

Cl.

Mai

duM

(vibrophone)

(q = 144)

(q = 72)
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

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

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

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: Louis.
is must die so the nation 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.

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)

I care about you too.
Marie almost says something, but looks away instead.

Louis finally gathers himself and exits.

Mar

Lou

Fl

Cl

S. D

B. D

Vib

Pno

Vln

Vla

Vc

Cb

mf

f

ord.

mp

mf

f
repeat as needed until Louis is offstage

Guillotine from offstage
These pp will pass.
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.
Scene 5

(Robespierre enters to speak with Marie)

Marie

Robespierre du Motier

Flute

Clarinet in B

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Vibraphone

Piano

Violin

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

You, (with venom)

Well.

You give me too much credit. You mean "the People"?

Me? (pp pp pp pp)

Illegible text

Illegible text

Illegible text

Illegible text

Illegible text
How dare you.

Do you think I did this? No, you
How delusion-al you are.

brought this on your - self.

Listen Marie Louis is dead
How dare you.

He is dead skin that must be shed for a new body politic 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.

Robespierre strikes her

I know...
Mar (Satisfied in his victory)
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?
A Tempo ($j=64$)

Fl.

Cl.

S. D.

B. D.

Vib.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
rit.

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)
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