

The A.R.T. Reintroduces France's Most Memorable Queen, Marie Antoinette

The story usually goes “rags to riches,” but this fall, the American Repertory Theater (in conjunction with Yale Repertory Theater) reminds us that sometimes history likes to prove itself otherwise. With the world premiere of *Marie Antoinette* this last weekend, playwright David Adjmi tells the story of France's most notorious Queen on the downward spiral from riches to rags—all in the public eye of a very scrutinous (and revolutionary) French populace.



Any of you who snoozed through this world history lesson, listen up! The Austrian-bred Marie was the original tabloid Queen: a teen who was plucked from home to marry a French heir (Louis XVI) in a diplomatic power play, forced to parade about Versailles at its peak of opulence with encouragement from the general public, and then defamed, dethroned, and beheaded by that very same public. The Harvard Square based organization is here to make sure you get your fill of this misunderstood woman in a much more entertaining fashion than high school did.

The play dubs itself a “tragicomedy” and after seeing it ourselves, they nailed it. The Rebecca Taichman directed show masterfully teetered the line between emotional drama and witty hilarity, producing a modern interpretation of an individual with major historical value. The script was edgy, irreverent, and definitely jolted the audience, all while framing the tensions of the French Revolution in a way that begged the viewer to draw parallels between the income inequality of 2012 and that of the late eighteenth century monarchy. In spite of those riled up sentiments, you can't help but feel sympathetic toward Marie as she was (in the words of Adjmi) “part of a vast machinery that she didn't create” and never really had the realization or ability to opt out even if she had awakened to the realities of the turbulent situation around her. There is no denying that this Queen of France is a conflicted, challenging character to represent—a task which lead actress Brooke Bloom manages seemingly effortlessly.

Moving on to the clothes, designed by Gabriel Berry, we were enthralled by the fun, gaudy, and colorful frocks worn by the high society ladies. Their exaggerated silhouettes emphasize the peacocking of the era's aristocracy and the costumes slowly move toward the simple street clothing of the masses as Marie is stripped of her extravagance. Any cake lover coming in close contact with the props should be prepared to experience hunger pains. The towers of French pastries are a major tease for being artificial goods! And the damask drenched set is host to many sheep and a big bang involving lots of cork (though our lips are sealed on any further details as far as that goes).