

# THE REVOLUTIONISTS

By Lauren Gunderson



'...you can't write the world if you're not in it! You can't change it if you can't see it!  
And you can't be a hero if you're too scared to show up.'

Marianne Angelle, *The Revolutionists*

**Welcome** to The Curators' Theatre and our new home, Christ Church, a venue with a dynamic history.

Our second production, *The Revolutionists* is a feminist play, 'a universal story told in the hearts and bodies of women'. In the introduction to her play, Lauren Gunderson tells us that this work 'is mostly a comedy. The play is based on *real women*, *real transcripts*, and *real executions*. But remember it's a comedy'. Irreverent, witty and thought-provoking, *The Revolutionists* sheds an alternative light on history, exploring its erasure

of women and the power of both the artist and the pen to lead the charge against injustice and inequality. Gunderson positions her play within the Reign of Terror (1793), a period of tyranny and violence. Despite the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the (Male) Citizen*, it was a time in which the rights of women were denied and slavery endorsed. Against this brutal backdrop, Gunderson's themes and ideas are presented in a light-hearted manner (one that would do French and Saunders, Tina Fey or Amy Poehler proud), but make no mistake - this playwright uses comedy as a weapon.

A revolutionist is someone who wants to transform political and social structures, to change the world. Gunderson's characters are *revolutionists* and one, in particular, Marie Antoinette, is the catalyst for a revolution. Amidst the frenzied paranoia, brutal suppression and paralysing fear of their time, these women and women like them acted with courage, dignity, intelligence and creativity. It is this that Gunderson wants us to remember. She is above all concerned with legacy and that the legacy of these women, buried in history, not be forgotten. Vive les femmes! Vive la Revolution!

**The TCT Team**

**THE  
CURATORS**

**2 - 26 March 2021**  
Christ Church  
9 Chippendall Street  
Milton 4064

**A [C] F** AUSTRALIAN  
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*The Revolutionists* is performed by arrangement with Music Theatre International Australasia Pty Ltd,  
on behalf of Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Curators' Theatre acknowledge the country on which we work, a place of age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We acknowledge the traditional custodians and caretakers of this land, the Turrbal and Jagera people as the first Australians, and pay respect to the Elders, past, present and emerging. We honour all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and express gratitude to the artists, storytellers, painters, weavers, dancers and musicians of this ancient culture who have, through their endurance and creativity, inspired us.

## Running Time

2 hours 20 minutes plus interval.

## Warnings

This play contains coarse language and spoken references to violence which are historically-based.

## About Us

TCT creates new and re-imagined work. Our aesthetic combines text-based theatre with highly theatrical scenography to create visually dynamic live performance. Stylistically different, TCT strives for politically, artistically-charged responses to the pressing themes underpinning our lives within twenty-first century, global culture. Described as evocative, unorthodox, innovative, outstanding, TCT works inter-generationally,

## Social Distancing Notice

In this performance, the actors will not be socially distancing. COVID safe practices have been employed throughout the rehearsal period to avoid any risk of COVID transmission.

## Evacuation

In the unlikely event of a fire, please follow the ushers' instructions and leave the building in an orderly manner.

bringing together emerging and senior artists to create performances that explore our shared humanity.

Co-founded by Michael Beh and Peter Crees in 2017, TCT has produced *Uncle Vanya* (Magda Artz), *The Quighting Time* (Anywhere Festival), *The Third Beauty* (Spring Hill Reservoir), *Ghosts* (Red Hill) and *Vincent River* (Milton). Core members include Michael Beh, Adrienne Costello, Peter Crees, Lisa Hickey,

Amanda McErlean, Helen Strube, Elizabeth Wherrett, with associate artists Warwick Comber, Lauren Roche, Bethany Scott and Patrick Shearer.

We value Courage + Boldness; Collaboration + Welcome; Authenticity + Diversity; Creativity + Inventiveness; Integrity + Respect in the performance-making process.

## Thanks

The entire team at Anglican Parish of Auchenflower - Milton: Amerson Stephenson, Kym Reid and Hilda Maclean.

George O'Farrell for his work in ticketing, *Front of House and budgeting*.

Chris Goeldner for his assistance with *technical production and set construction*.

Natalie Scalia for *catering and front of house dressing*.

Our incredible FOH Volunteers and Gregg Goriss, Richard Bradford, Michelle Boyd, Quintin Diggles, Ethan Beh, Brett Doyle, Jacquie Carroll, John Nobbs, Villanova Players and Lucy Moxon



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*'By showing people that revolutions needn't be so bloody. That they can be kind and creative. I'm telling you...'*

*This play. Will be. Important.'*

Olympe de Gouges, *The Revolutionists*

## Synopsis

Set in Paris, 1793, during the Reign of Terror, four courageous women — a writer, a freedom fighter, a queen and an assassin - meet. Into the studio of the very real but forgotten French playwright, philosopher and feminist advocate, Olympe de Gouges, wafts the glittering, vivacious but confused Marie Antoinette. The heroic Charlotte Corday stops by - dagger in hand - on her way to assassinate that monster of the Revolution, Jean-Paul Marat, in his bathtub. Joining this unlikely mix is Marianne Angelle, a freedom fighter from Saint-Domingue. She is intimately acquainted with the forces of colonial oppression and she won't stand for it anymore, especially when France is engaged in its greatest revolutionary battle for Liberté Egalité Sororité! (That's right, Sororité!)

## Director's Notes

I discovered Lauren Gunderson's incredible play, *The Revolutionists* two years ago. It was doing the run of American theatres nationwide and had just been staged at Pittsburgh's City Theatre, a company that I greatly admire. In that season, Gunderson was the most performed playwright in the USA after Shakespeare. I brought the play to the notice of the Curators' team. We read it and loved it. We secured the rights for the Australian Premiere production for July last year. Then the COVID-19 pandemic occurred and theatres all shut down. The production was postponed and so almost a year later, here we are in a new venue (our wonderful Chippendall St home) with an entirely new iteration of this most wonderful play.

For me, women's voices have always rung strong and loud. I am a boy who grew up in small town in Far North Qld, with a life framed by the beliefs of a formidable single mother, two incredible grandmothers and an amazing sister. They were all revolutionists in their own way, forging new pathways, dealing with the issues and hardships of life and making that life wonderful and possible. Throughout my life, I have known many similar women who have worked tirelessly to forge identity, embrace their own truth, tirelessly help

others and not succumb to the strictures of social norms. Helen, Libby, Amanda, Lisa and Adrienne – the core of The Curators' Theatre are all such incredible women. I honour them and thank them.

I have always believed in the power and voice of women, of absolute equality between genders. I have never endorsed the discriminatory treatment of women (or of anyone). So, it is natural that I wholeheartedly support Gunderson's incredible voice in this play, the vital manifestation of Olympe de Gouges, a woman so far ahead of her time (whose name and accomplishments were so effectively eradicated from history books), and the compelling stories of the other intoxicating characters, Marie Antoinette, Charlotte Corday and Marianne Angelle (a composite of a number of real women). In celebrating them, I celebrate the wonderful work of the four amazing actors who bring them to life tonight; Lisa Hickey, Asabi Goodman, Amanda McErlean, and Lauren Roche.

I hope you enjoy the wit and theatricality of this production. Thank you to all the splendid creatives who have made our spectacular vision real. The hyperbolic set and magnificent costumes (an extra special thank-you to

Jan Mandrusiak) combine with the luscious lighting and splendid song to enhance the communication and reception of the play's fundamental message. The power of each character's story echoes through the ages and manifests in the world we live in today that so very much still needs to hear de Gouge's beliefs and proclamations. Why has it taken so long? Why is it still taking so long? The women of Belarus are standing up for freedom and solidarity. An 80-plus-year old woman leads the charge.

As the echo from the play resounds and refracts across centuries, continents and civilisations, we still wonder who we are? Who are we? We are still aghast at the stifling of women's voices and the repression of women's agitation for social change which is exemplified by de Gouges' story.

For me, I am still that boy who grew up in a small country town on the Atherton Tablelands, supported and loved by four women. So I want to dedicate this production to them, all of them now departed from this world, all of them still ever-present. To Denese, Margaret, Coral and Marise, you are my good heart, you are my soul, and you made me who I am.

Four women can make one hell of a difference.

*'I fear we shall not know the rightness of our revolutions nor the heroes of our stories for generations to come.'*

Marie Antoinette, *The Revolutionists*

## Cast & Creatives

Olympe de Gouges	<b>Lisa Hickey</b>	Choreography	<b>Sarah O'Neill</b>	Ticketing Manager	<b>Gregg Goris</b>
Marianne Angelle	<b>Asabi Goodman</b>	Production Manager	<b>Elizabeth Wherrett</b>	Producers	<b>Michael Beh</b>
Marie Antoinette	<b>Amanda McErlean</b>	Stage Manager	<b>Sarah O'Neill</b>		<b>Helen Strube</b>
Charlotte Corday	<b>Lauren Roche</b>	Lighting Operator	<b>Bethany Scott</b>		<b>Elizabeth Wherrett</b>
Director	<b>Michael Beh</b>	Marketing Manager	<b>Nikolina Gagic</b>	For more detailed information and extended biographies about the cast and creatives of <i>The Revolutionists</i> , please go to our website: <b><a href="https://www.curators.com.au/creatives">https://www.curators.com.au/creatives</a></b>	
Costume Designer	<b>Michael Beh</b>	Marketing Team	<b>Helen Strube</b>		
Costume			<b>Lauren Roche</b>	For background material on Lauren Gunderson, go to her website: <b><a href="https://www.laurengunderson.com">https://www.laurengunderson.com</a></b>	
Co-designer /		Production			
Realiser	<b>Jan Mandrusiak</b>	Photography	<b>Naz Mulla</b>	<b>Music Credits</b> <i>Feelin' Good</i> Written by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley. Musical Comedy Prod., Inc Administered by Cromwell Music of Australia Pty Ltd. <i>The Catwalk</i> composed by Paul C McD.	
Set Designer	<b>Michael Beh</b>	Film Maker	<b>Wayne McPhee</b>		
Assistant Set		Graphic Design			
Designer	<b>Bethany Scott</b>	Website	<b>Peter Crees</b>		
Lighting Designer	<b>Bethany Scott</b>	Venue Manager			
Music Director /		Covid-19 Coordinator	<b>Elizabeth Wherrett</b>		
Arranger	<b>Paul C McD</b>	Front of House			
Sound Operator	<b>Sarah O'Neill</b>	Manager	<b>Elizabeth Wherrett</b>		
Dramaturgy	<b>Helen Strube</b>				



### **Olympe de Gouges, (1748-1793) Playwright, abolitionist, activist, mother, humanist, thinker**



Born Marie Gouze in 1748, Olympe changed her name (a blend of her mother's and father's names) at 18, upon the death of her first and only husband. She refused to marry again, understanding that marriage would limit her political freedom and that the intellectual rights to her writing would be the property of her husband. She moved to Paris with her son and commenced a long-term relationship with the wealthy Jacques Biétrex de Rozières. She travelled throughout France with her own theatre company. Records vary, but de Gouges is said to have written between sixty-four and ninety political 'pamphlets, brochures and placards', forty-five plays and 'theatre pieces',

as well as twenty-nine novels and short stories. As a champion of Women's Rights, de Gouges authored the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791). Her Declaration called for the right for women to divorce their husbands, the suppression of the dowry system, social services for orphans, widows and the elderly, equal access to education, the right for women to seek employment without permission from their husbands and the regulation of prostitution. De Gouges also called for the right to vote, to engage in free speech, the dissolution of capital punishment and the abolition of slavery in the French colonies.

Olympe de Gouges supported the revolution but she could not condone its violence and she openly criticised Robespierre and his Reign of Terror. She was executed by guillotine on 3 November 1793 after her relationship with the Girondists and her loyalty to 'the cause' were questioned. A pamphlet calling for a plebiscite and a play that she had written were used against her. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft, inspired by Olympe de Gouges, published *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

### **Marianne Angelle, Freedom fighter, abolitionist, mother**



Marianne is a composite character created by Gunderson to address what the playwright saw as the hypocrisy of the French Revolution. Whilst the cry for Liberté, Égalité and Fraternité resounded throughout France, it still engaged in slavery. The slaves on the island of Saint-Domingue, in response to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and The (Male) Citizen, lobbied the new National Assembly. This gave rise to sympathetic Parisian support for the abolition of slavery in Saint-Domingue. In 1791, the slaves rose up, demanding their rights and an end to the plantation system which was the source of their oppression. As the struggle continued, the wealthy planter class was displaced, planters executed and slavery was eventually abolished. This was the birth of the first free republic in the Americas, Haiti.

Gunderson blends two concepts to arrive at Marianne Angelle; that is, La Marianne (the French Republic's symbol of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity) and the name 'Angelle', which means Messenger from God. Marianne stands at the intersection of many ideas and representations but primarily she symbolises institutional hypocrisy and in dramatic terms, she is not only a spiritual guide but speaks to systematic 'erasure' of female presence. In the character's words 'You destroy me because no-one writes me down.'

### **Charlotte Corday, (1768-1793) Assassin and daughter**



A name synonymous with the murder of Jean-Paul Marat, Marie-Anne-Charlotte Corday d'Armont assassinated Marat in his bath tub. Descended from a minor aristocratic family, Charlotte received an education through the abbey in Caen. She sympathised with the Girondins who, after their expulsion in May-June 1793 from the National Convention, she had come to know as refugees in Caen. She was particularly inspired by Charles Barbaroux ultimately seeing the Girondists as the saviours of France. She was convinced that the teachings of radical journalist Jean-Paul Marat were driving the country's descent into terror. This informed her motivation to

take his life. Telling her family that she was going to England, Charlotte went instead to Paris. She stayed in a small hotel, purchased a kitchen knife and set up a meeting with Marat under the pretext of an interview in which she would disclose Girondist 'names'. Once she had gained entry, she stabbed Marat, who at the time suffered a skin disorder and was taking a medicinal bath. Corday was resigned to the fact that her act would lead to her own death.

Charlotte's actions exploded the 'public/private' mythology about women, redefining what a woman could be considered capable of. At first, she was thought to be the mindless 'actor' for a male counterpart and she was subjected to a virginity test. Convicted by the Revolutionary Tribunal, she was guillotined on the Place de la Révolution, on 17 July 1793.

### **Marie Antoinette, (1755-1793) Queen, wife, mother, night-owl**



Marie arrived at Versailles as a young bride. Some twenty-three years later, after a life of excess and oblivious to the suffering of her subjects, Marie had become the most reviled person in France. Her husband Louis XVI, who was considered ineffectual, created a power vacuum into which Marie stepped, acting decisively when he could not. The threat of dissolving the National Assembly, food shortages, overwhelming taxes and possible independence from absolute rule inspired by the American Revolution, culminated in the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1798, and the Women's March on Versailles (5 October 1789). These events signalled the end of

Marie's reign, the rise of the French Revolution and ultimately her death by guillotine. In the hours before her death when counselled to show courage, Marie answered, 'The moment when my ills are going to end is not the moment when courage is going to fail me'.

## **Biographical Sources**

Olympe de Gouges: <http://www.hollyarmishaw.com/olymppe-de-gouges.html> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympe\\_de\\_Gouges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympe_de_Gouges)

Saint-Domingue Revolution: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/07/french-revolution-bastille-day-guide-jacobins-terror-bonaparte/>

Marie Antoinette: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/marie-antoinette-134629573/>

Our next Curators' Theatre production is *Winter*, a season of Short Australian Works, July / August 2021 at our home at **9 Chippendall St, Milton**.

Look out for more information coming soon at [curators.com.au](http://curators.com.au)

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