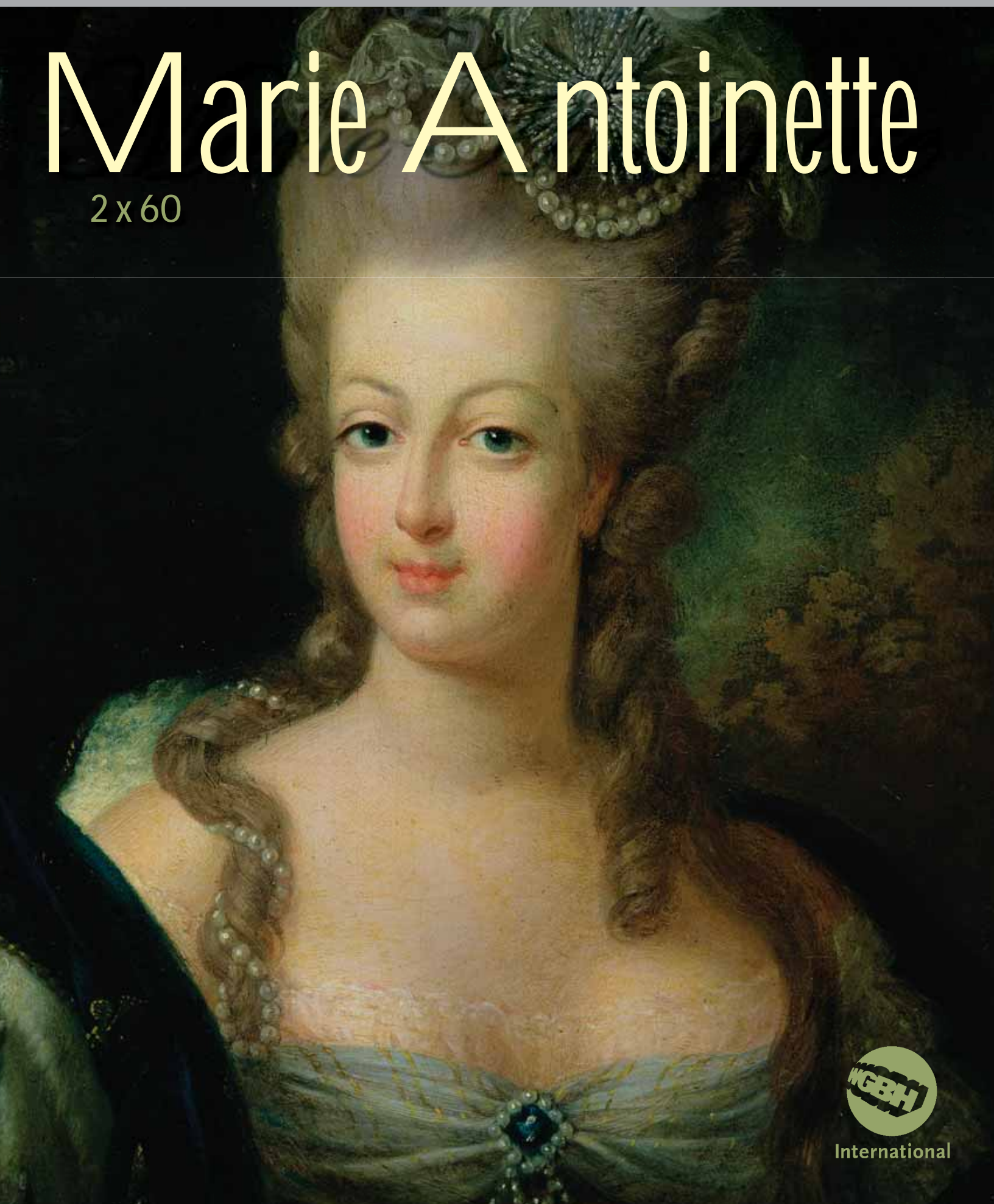


Marie Antoinette

2 x 60



International

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"I have ever believed that had there been no queen,
there would have been no revolution."

THOMAS JEFFERSON

"Surely never lighted on this orb,
which she hardly seemed to touch,
a more delightful vision."

EDMUND BURKE

"Your beauty frankly is not very great.
Nor your talents nor your brilliance."
...a letter to Marie Antoinette from her mother,

MARIA THERESA, EMPRESS OF AUSTRIA.

Her name has become synonymous with the French monarchy and all its excesses, but there is more to the story of Marie Antoinette than the simplistic tale of how a frivolous sovereign helped provoke the uprising that became the French Revolution. She was, in fact, a tender-hearted, complex woman, whose tragic awakening came too late to save her from the guillotine. Without losing sight of the dire inequities in 18th century France, we plan to paint a surprising portrait in which Marie Antoinette emerges as a sympathetic and, in the end, courageous figure. This two-hour film traces her journey from the splendors of her childhood in the palaces of the mighty Austro-Hungarian Empire to her final hours in a squalid French prison cell. To tell the story of Marie Antoinette is to relive the great revolution that unleashed the forces that shaped our modern world.

From her disastrous marriage which remained unconsummated for seven years to her tortured relationship with her iron-willed mother, Marie Antoinette's life was a long list of humiliations. Sacrificed to 18th century power politics, she arrived in France when she was fourteen, a naive foreigner eager to please, hardly prepared for the intrigues of the court at Versailles. Light-hearted, charming, graceful, she threw her energies into an endless whirl of extravagant parties, never troubling to ask who was paying for the luxuries she took for granted. The revolutionaries who stormed the Bastille found the Queen a ready target for all that was wrong with France. Torn from her 100-room palace when a mob of some 7,000 women marched on Versailles, thrust into a common jail, she was plunged into despair, only to be transformed by her suffering. "Tribulation," she said, "first makes you realize who you are." Her wealth and crown had made her heedless of the poor and the powerless. With new awareness and regal dignity, she mounted the steps of the scaffold, conscious of her failures, doomed by her own tragic flaws, a young woman trapped in a tumultuous moment of history.

CREDITS

Producer, Director, and Writer: David Grubin

A David Grubin Production in association with CinéTévé for PBS and ARTE.

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