

FILM

Marie Antoinette

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Pop music on the sound track heralds Sofia Coppola's "Marie Antoinette" (USA, French/English, colour, 123 mins). In Austria of 1768, friendship between Austria and France is cemented by marriage between the youngest daughter of the King of Austria, with the French dauphin. Marie Antoinette (Kirsten Dunst) is instructed that the court of France is not like Vienna, Marie's mother, the Queen of Austria advises her daughter to listen closely to the Austrian Ambassador in France. All eyes are on the new Queen of France, but Marie plays with a small mirror, cards, and stretches out to sleep. At the Austria France border, the countess and mistress of the household supervises the handover, at the ceremonial structure. Clothes, jewellery and dogs are left behind in the carriage from Austria. All Austria is left behind, and the bride is not allowed to retain anything of foreign court. The countess promises French dogs. Wearing new clothes, the dauphine rides in a coach through France. There are sword duels in the forest. The coach halts on muddy grounds. The dauphine Marie clutches a new pup. The French foreign minister, and the grandfather king, discuss the bosom of the arch duchess.

Louis August (Jason Schwartzman), the dauphin, in a red jacket, bows before the dauphine. They hug, and the dauphine, Louis, looks like a child. The horse drawn carriages proceed to Versailles. At the court, the retinue of maids and valets, and noble princesses fix the dauphine's bedroom and clothes. The Archbishop prays in the cathedral, and the dauphin puts a wedding ring on Marie Antoinette's finger. A kiss on the cheeks is followed by growing of the wedding edict by the couple. The king toasts with music, dances, fireworks in the gardens of Versailles, and church bells. But nothing happens between the dauphin and the dauphine on the wedding night. Next morning new clothes and jewellery are handed to the dauphine by household valets and princesses of charges. Marie Antoinette is at the breakfast table with the dauphin, who makes keys as a hobby. The husband spends more time with the stable boys. The king's mistress, Madame Dubarry commoner, blurps at the dinner table. It was noticeable that the dauphin was not exactly interested in the dauphine. After day long hunts, the dauphin is exhausted in bed. The dauphin spends his days with horses, buglers, and hunting dogs. The royal marriage remains unconsummated. Marie's mother through letters advises Marie to conceive. The inability to inspire sexual passion in the dauphine continues. Every morning the maids pull the curtains on the royal bridal bed. The dauphin is indifferent, and sleeps with his back to the dauphine. He reads about locks in bed. The first mechanical locks were made of wood. The dauphine enjoys her fruits. Baths are fully clothed. The Austrian ambassador Lombard, advises Marie, as to where would she be if there was a rupture between the royal families.

The dauphin is on hunting excursions. The king sends a doctor to visit the couple. At an opera, Marie Antoinette claps, but clapping is not permitted at court performances. The entire audience stand and clap, and the performers take a bow. Marie's mother writes that Marie's sisters and sisters-in-law were in a

process of conception. The importance of charm and patience are emphasized. Nothing is certain until an heir is produced. At night the dauphin hugs Marie with apologies, and falls back. Marie is sad on hearing another countess delivering a healthy baby boy. Food, champagne, dresses, shoes, jewellery, card games culminate in a masked ball in Paris. There are swirling period dances, with riveting pop music. There are overhead crane shots of the spectacle, and close ups of the dauphine. The royal court discuss— has the dauphine been deflowered? An officer of the Swedish army, Count Basel, (Asia Argento) holds the dauphine's hands, and informs that the king is ill with small pox. Madam Dobarry is sent away from the royal court, with a letter from the king. The king dies, and the dauphin becomes Louis XVI. The dauphin prays : "Dear God guide and protect us." Friends along the Seine river, celebrate the birthday of Marie Antoinette with dances, champagne, and gambling games. There are Chinese acrobats balancing twirling hand fans. The shadow of sun rays on the water lakes, bring into account expenditure by the royal household. The Americans ask for help to their Revolution. The ministers decide that funds for America, would show strength of rest of Europe. Small rise in taxes became inevitable. The emperor of Austria visits. Jasmine Tea is received from the Chinese emperor. Elephants arrive in the royal garden.

King Louis XVI at last makes love to Queen Marie Antoinette, and the marriage is consummated. A girl is born, and the baby is held up in the royal gardens, amongst new dresses. As the child grows up in the flower gardens, the council of ministers decide to encourage austerity. Artistic temperament develops. Escaping from protocol, invitations are sent to members of royalty, for first performance of musical theatre, where the new Queen sings, the role is of a farmer, with a groom. There is a ball before soldiers are shipped to America. 'The marriage of Figaro' is performed for royalty. At the masked ball, Count Basel grabs Marie Antoinette, proceeds indoors, and makes love. Soon Count Basel rides out, and Marie is dejected with a heavy heart. Battle fired broken cannons and coffins return. France continues to aid America. Marie Antoinette denies having offered cakes to the starving. Speeches of revolutionaries favour own trade. A letter from Marie's brother conveys the news of the demise of their mother. Marie collapses. A second child is born, and Marie becomes mother to a dauphin. She paints in the garden with her children. There are stickers on the paintings: "Beware of deficit", and "Beware of crisis." News arrives that the Bastille has been stormed by the mob. The royal family takes flight. Marie Antoinette decides to stay in Versailles. Royal staff leave for Metz. The king is advised to return immediately from hunting excursions. Before hundreds of mobs, Marie decides that her place is next to the king.

The mob breaks palace glasses, waving arms, farm tools and torches, Marie Antoinette is at the verandah. Overhead shots capture the revolutionaries in the court yard. The king and queen, are at a deserted dining table, with red wine. The revolutionary guards escort the royal family in a coach, with children. Sunlight enters the coach, but "Good bye" is hushed. Sofia Coppola traces the growing up of Marie Antoinette from exile from Austria to the golden prison of Versailles enveloped in luxury and festivity. Avoiding a historic biopic or a royal biography in costume, "Marie Antoinette" builds sympathy with youth and innocence.

Modernity of the theme is underlined by a mixture of classical and baroque music with pop rock of The Cure, Air, Phoenix, New Order, The Strokes and Bow, Wow, Wow. Lance Accord's camera of long takes absorbs the opulent costumes of Milena Canonero and the royal fields. The external turbulence of the French Revolution is touched elliptically. Frivolities and melancholies are always noticeable. The film was screened at the 37th IFFI, Goa. □□□