

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

*Finds a big, gay American crowd
in a small Parisian night club.*

THE X's—it's best that they remain an unknown quantity—have just sailed for home after a two-week visit to Paris. The Y's, whom we now consider as former friends, had given them our address, with assurances that my wife and I would be delighted to show them what goes on in Paris at night.

During those two weeks, we each disposed of a daily average of two glasses of champagne, three imitation-whisky highballs and about one quart of assorted white, red and pink wine (you order pink wine when one visitor wants steak, another oysters and the third doesn't like the looks of the waiter). Without a doubt, we saw enough anatomy in night clubs to get through the first year or two of medical school.

It's not that we have anything against the X's, all by themselves, nor that we're spoilsports. It's just that the X's and the Y's and the rest of the alphabet get together somewhere in the United States every year and draw up a schedule so that we can't spend a night at home from early March until late October. By the time we succeed in wearing down one invasion wave, its troops go home on rotation and fresh replacements move in on us.

Then, it's expensive. For one thing, our *concierge* does not enjoy being awakened at four a.m. on five

successive mornings to push the little button which opens the front door of our apartment house. And when she is unhappy, she burns, consuming 1,000-franc notes at an alarming rate. The same holds true for the garageman, who has to be persuaded to unpadlock his big double door by anyone thoughtless enough to stay out after midnight.

Worst of all, you never know what to expect. We remember the night we escorted an elderly gentleman, who was well-heeled enough to buy the luxurious hotel where he was staying, to a restaurant specializing in twenty-five varieties of *hors d'œuvres*. He plowed his way through the menu, washing it down with Scotch and soda while the proprietor stared in horror, and then, at the end, told us:

"You know, I never spend more than fifty cents for a meal in New York—I eat at the Automat."

He had something in common with another traveller, the friend of somebody's dentist, who called us up one spring day to tell us to meet him and his wife at the Ritz, where they were staying, for lunch.

Lunch at the Ritz, for my wife, meant a morning at the hairdresser and the complete disruption of the household while she went through her wardrobe. Finally, we arrived on the scene, joined the dentist's friend and his wife for a drink and asked if we could drive them any place.

"Oh no," said the gentleman, "Let's eat here—it's good and it's cheap."

We looked at each other, but it was his party. Once in the dining-room, the gentleman waved away the menu.

"We know what we want, thanks," he said to the waiter. "Let's have some *hors d'œuvres*."

It must have been the chef's day off. The *hors d'œuvres* consisted of nothing more than a few tomatoes, beets and hard-boiled eggs served, of course, on silver armor plate. As appetizers, they were wonderful—we were hungrier than when we had walked in. When the waiter cleared the plates away, the gentleman told him:

"That's fine—now bring us some strawberries for dessert."

The bill for this orgy worked out to about two dollars apiece, which our host paid with a satisfied smile.

"I told you it was cheap," he said, "It takes a foreigner to show you people Paris."

Not all visitors are in this class, but nearly 300,000 Americans come to France every year and you can't expect all of them to be perfect. The 1951 tourist season, incidentally has begun to hit its stride after a miserable beginning caused by what travel-agency men prefer to call "international events." It's still too early to analyze statistics, but the trend this year seems to favour France and Spain, the latter because of its low

supervision of the great French decorating firm of Jansen, and became a suitable setting for the display and sale of the sumptuous furs *Revillon* creates.

Through the years the efforts of a thousand craftsmen culminated in the fabulous furs that enjoyed the sponsorship of the gay nineties, the great fortunes of the new century and the roaring twenties—*Revillon's* list of customers became a *Livre d'Or*, every woman of note wore *Revillon* furs; crowned heads, oriental potentates, society women, famous beauties and stars of the opera and stage, Sarah Bernhardt, Lillian Russell, Emma Eames, Julia Marlowe, Anna Held, Cléo de Mérode, enjoyed the service of *Revillon's* great designers and fitters. Important social events or tragic happenings often were connected with *Revillon's* customers. In the Titanic disaster, in 1907, old employees recall that Colonel John Jacob Astor's last loving gesture was to wrap his young wife in a sable coat before placing her in a life boat. He gallantly had given up the place assigned to him to another woman passenger and went down with the great ship.

In the world of finance such names as Oscar Lewisohn, J. P. Morgan, Otto Kahn, Charles Schwab, James Brady, etc. were found on the same ledgers as the crowned heads of Europe or Asia. The *Revillon* furs of this fabulous period were immortalized by the expressive pen of the famous artist Drian. It can easily be understood that these continuous efforts went on as individual management (which is

bound sooner or later to come to an end) was replaced by management by a group, which is more enduring. Vacancies are immediately filled by *Revillon* trained men of equal merit. Here in New York the torch has recently been picked up by Maurice Crevel, as executive director. In a short space of time, less than two years, he has with unusual foresight and ability brought new life and stamina to the New York branch. His twenty-seven years of training in *Revillon* in Paris under the old master Victor *Revillon* (namesake of the founder) have borne fruit. The great past, over 200 years of cultivated creative art in furs, relives at 11 West 57th Street. Frequent trips to the renowned Paris house of *Revillon* assure perfect co-ordination of ideas. This is the modern *Revillon* "Oui-oui-coot."

1723-1951. — Notwithstanding all the difficulties and complicated details of the fur industry, *Revillon* developed its precious fur scents to complement its beautiful furs; perfumes specially adapted to animal pelts, with special oils that could not possibly endanger the delicate texture and lustre of the various priceless guard hairs. Careful tests were made under the supervision of master chemists and these perfumes are now known under the following names: *Carnet de Bal*, *Cantilène*, *Latitude 50* and *Amour d'Aria*.

Primarily developed to bring out the glamour of furs, these delightful scents of enchanting, lasting fragrance have become the fascination of smart women the world over.



NOTA: Most of the material and reprints are from the book, *Two Centuries of Fur Trading; the Romance of the Revillon Family*, by Marcel Sexe, printed by Draeger-Frères, Paris, Dec. 1923.

REVILLON wishes to give the following Credits:
Décor by Jansen Inc., Paris and New York; Jewels by Cartier, Paris and New York; Accessories by Lederer, Paris and New York; Hats by Mr John, Inc., New York.

BLACK BROADTAIL coat with push-up sleeves which can be adjusted to give a cape effect. The softly knotted cravat of Sapphire Mink looks like a small scarf tied under the collar.



THE ABBAYE, the tiny night club across the street from the Church of St. Germain des Prés, where Gordon Heath (below) and Lee Payant, (above) sing three hundred songs a week, ranging from *Au Clair de la Lune* to *The Twelve Days of Christmas* and *Minnie the Moocher*. Heath's real profession is that of an actor.

prices. Austria, the buy of 1950, has been forced to raise hotel rates as much as thirty per cent in some cases. As for Italy, travel men believe that 1951 will prove to have been a breathing-spell following last year's Holy Year invasion. The Festival of Britain, Paris travel brokers report, sent hordes across the Channel from the continent and hotel space became as scarce as Scotch in London. Bri-

tain's much talked-about shortages proved no deterrent to visitors who discovered that, in too many other European countries, high prices are just as effective in imposing an austerity regime.

Nevertheless, the longshoremen sometimes go on strike on the Channel coast, or fog closes in Le Bourget and Orly, Paris' two airfields. Then we have a few unexpected days to become

reacquainted with ourselves, our children, our friends and, eventually, Paris.

It was on one of these nights, wandering no place in particular in the Saint-Germain des Prés section, that we landed in the *Abbaye*—and that was enough to convince us that the Americanization of Paris is now complete. Apart from institutions like the *Bal Tabarin* and the *Folies Bergères*, Parisian night life has always

centered around small, intimate places. It was therefore somewhat of a shock to discover that the smallest place of all was run by two Americans. It certainly must be the most intimate too—at the beginning of the evening, my wife sat on my lap and by the end, most of the other customers as well were draped over the bar, the windowsills and each other.

The *Abbaye* seemed to be the best available antidote to our previous diet of gypsy violins and champagne served by headwaiters with a pair of flunkies in tow to carry the swizzle-sticks. Unfortunately, an indeterminate number of other persons had had the same idea. The only ones who had seats all to themselves were Gordon Heath and Lee Payant, who were running the place. At that, they were sitting on a banister.

Heath looked familiar. Actually, he was well-known to American theatre-goers who saw him play a Negro officer opposite Barbara Bel Geddes in *Deep are The Roots*. Thirty-two and a bachelor, Heath still considers himself more an actor than a singer.

He first came to Europe in 1947, when *Deep are The Roots* visited London. When the show left, he stayed, hoping to land another part (even if he now makes his living with his baritone and his guitar, he's happiest when he's playing *Othello*). But he didn't, so he returned home to New York and worked with the American Negro Theatre until he decided to try Europe again.

THIS time, he went to Paris, though his heart was in London, professionally speaking. However, the French were a little more lenient than the British in the matter of letting English-speaking actors enter their country—there was much less danger of their competing with native products.

Putting *Othello* in mothballs, Heath decided to try his guitar. Within a few months, he became fairly well-known to patrons of night spots on both banks of the Seine as a singer of French, American and English folk songs as well as more modern ditties. It was a living but he didn't like it.

"In those places," he recalled, "people came more to look than to listen—and it's no fun trying to compete with low-cut evening gowns."

[In June 1949, he ran into Payant, a casual acquaintance, who by that time was winding up a ten-week visit to Paris and wishing he weren't.

Payant, who is now twenty-six, had worked in radio and nightclub spots in Seattle before Margaret Webster's touring production of *Hamlet* took him through forty-one states in 1948. *Hamlet* actually brought him all the way to Paris, for his earnings paid his fare. Four days before he was to sail for home, he found he was in the night-club business with Heath, whom he had originally met in New York.

TWO years later, they are in danger of becoming Paris landmarks. Every night, 100-odd persons of all ages and nationalities manage to find room inside the *Abbaye*, which is about as big as the living-room of an emergency housing-project home. Its seating capacity is thirty.

"There's no getting away from it," Payant said, "We'll be out of business the day Paris passes a fire law."

The drawing card at the *Abbaye* is the partners' multi-lingual repertory of folk-songs which enables the listener from almost anywhere to feel at home and yet hear something new.

For example, Heath and Payant, alternating with their guitars, might sing, in succession, *The Foggy, Foggy Dew*, *Auprès de ma Blonde*, *Jacob's Ladder*, a chunk of Edith Piaf's favorites and wind up with *Frankie and Johnny*. They run through 300 songs or so a week.

Heath takes care of the spirituals and the heavier items in general, while Payant may come up with something like *Put the Blame on Mame* or its French counterpart. English-speaking members of the audience usually want to hear their own folk-tunes—either English or American. French listeners seem to prefer spirituals and blues classics—it makes no difference what the words happen to mean—and also appreciate hearing their own language every so often.

Heath and Payant try to keep an ear out for requests. They have even sung numbers into the telephone for an *habitué* of the *Abbaye* who was languishing first in London and later on the French Riviera. Both times, he called long distance to hear *Monsieur Lenoble*, first made popular by Edith Piaf.

"That's a typical modern French song," Heath explained, "all about a guy who puts his head in the oven after his wife runs off."

During the past two years, the partners have been able to solve incidental problems connected with

operating a bar until two a.m. on one of the quietest streets in Paris. For one thing, they have the police on their side. The neighbourhood stationhouse is only a few doors away and often passersby are warned to make less noise by the cop standing outside. He wants to hear the music.

Sylvie and Pascal created a minor crisis. They happened to be the children, aged six and eight respectively, of the family living in the apartment above the bar. On one occasion, their father told Heath and Payant that they would have to do something about the noise or he would think about calling the police. The singing, he said, put the kids to sleep, but the applause woke them up again.

The partners laid down a ban on applause in the *Abbaye*, which lasted until they got the idea of letting customers snap their fingers. Now everyone snaps his fingers and Sylvie and Pascal sleep soundly. In a way, it's more practical. With a hundred or more normal bodies jammed into the *Abbaye*, anyone clapping his hands was a public menace.

The *Abbaye* keeps the partners comfortably and pays for Payant's guitar lessons, but it's not going to enable them to retire young. Its popularity is against it. Prospective customers can now walk in, hear two or three songs and slip out before the waiter can fight his way up to them and put a drink in their hands.

PRICES are not high and few people ever order a second round (this is in the best tradition of small Paris night spots where the price of one drink includes the show). At the *Abbaye*, customers can sit and nurse a beer all evening for 200 francs (about sixty cents) and many of them do. ^{250 fr.}

"We've even had someone hang onto a cup of coffee for three hours and then try to send it back because it was cold," Heath commented.

Another tradition of the *Abbaye* requires Payant to consume a quart of milk every night while he sings. He first went on milk last year after the strain of singing in the bar, rehearsing for a play in the afternoon and filling a role in another play during the first part of the evening began to tell on him.

When he recovered his health, he tried to stop, but Frenchmen in the audience protested. It was well worth the price of admission just to watch a grown man drinking milk in Paris. END