



Strumming guitar and singing mournful song, ex-Broadway actor Gordon Heath entertains overflow crowd in his Paris night club, L'Abbaye. Interracial American team of Heath and partner Lee Payant sing over 300 songs weekly in small club started after chance meeting in 1948, four days before latter was to sail for home.

*Ebony  
Lee  
1952*

## GORDON HEATH

**Smart Paris night club is operated by ex-Broadway Negro actor and his white partner**

**S**MALLEST and most talked-about night spot in Paris today is the L'Abbaye, operated by Negro Gordon Heath, 34, and white Lee Payant, 28, two young American actors turned singing guitarists.

The chief attraction of the intimate club is the partners' large repertory of English, French and German folk songs, plus a few South African veldt numbers recently added to the ballads, spirituals and classics. Two unique Abbaye innovations, a candle light re-

quest period and the substitution of finger snapping for applause, along with a less-than-a-dollar charge for drinks, has turned the cozy little club into the new mecca for sophisticated Parisians and a place high on the must-see list of tourist guide books.

Although the Left Bank boite offers much musical pleasure to its customers, it has few physical comforts. No bigger than a housing project living room, only 40 of the hundred-some patrons who go nightly into the Abbaye

find seats at the knee-high tables. Among the celebrities who have gladly stood to hear Payant and Heath, who is called the "new brown toast of Paris," are Lena Horne, Elliott Roosevelt and Rita Hayworth. Guests find seats behind the bar, in window sills and on each other's laps. The entertainers themselves perch informally on a bannister or a high stool overlooking the tables.

Says Payant, ruefully, "The day Paris passes a fire law, we're out of business!"

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Posing for French artist Jean Boulet, slim, good-looking Gordon Heath makes pleasing model for poster which advertised his recordings. Boulet and many other young artist friends of partners have exhibited work on walls of intimate club.

# The Toast of the Town



Heath is joined by lady friends. He was first American to sing there professionally.

## CUSTOMERS AT CLUB SNAP FINGERS, NEVER APPLAUD

A HUSHED QUIET falls over the picture-lined wall of L'Abbaye as Gordon Heath, lanky, six-foot-two baritone begins to sing. Devotees of the popular Paris night club draw in their stomachs as if to make room for one more eager customer and inhale a last bit of oxygen as they listen in rapt silence to the one-time Manhattan messenger boy wail the haunting *Foggy, Foggy Dew* or Lee Payant deliver *Aupres de ma Blonde*. ← *its a bust*

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On banks of Seine, behind Notre Dame Cathedral, Heath chats with patient school-boy fishermen whom entertainers claim "never catch anything." Collegiate appearance of youthful singing team often causes them to be mistaken for Paris visitors.



Watching painter at work in front of club L'Abbaye, Heath and Payant watch for new talent. They hang works in their club and often sell paintings. Club is located on most paintable and painted corner in Paris.



Listening to jazz trumpeter Johnnie Heawood at Ringside Club, Heath relaxes at popular Paris rendezvous of Negro entertainers. Late hour spot owned by Brooklyn Negro Dick Edwards is "strictly Stateside," serves fried chicken and sizzling music.

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Gazing from window of their bachelor apartment, Heath and Payant reflect their contentment with life in Paris. Posters characterize wall decorations of partner's newly-refurbished home. Heath has written 12 songs, arranges all music.

## PRINCESS MARGARET HEADS SINGERS' CELEBRITY LIST

THE LIST of celebrities who frequent L'Abbaye is long and impressive. Partners Gordon Heath and Lee Payant have entertained such greats as French singer Jean Sablon, the noted designer Jacques Fath, Comtesse de la Failaise, Burl Ives, Eartha Kitt, Libby Holman and Josh White, *Lena Horne*

The greatest triumph, however, came in 1951 when Lady Diana Cooper asked Heath and Payant to sing privately on Thanksgiving Day for Princess Margaret at the Cooper's chateau in Vineuil. Only 25 guests were present, including Greta Garbo, Alain De Rothschild and Nicholas of Yugoslavia. Because the British, for security reasons, laid down a strict ban on pictures of the glittering affair, news of the royal performance never got to the newspapers.

Princess Margaret chatted with the entertainers at the buffet, told them she liked *Jacob's Ladder* and *Green Grow the Rushes* most of all. Said Heath, "She was simple and charming . . . but Garbo was most exciting of all."

Like the Princess, a great many patrons of L'Abbaye like the spiritual *Jacob's Ladder*. Other favorites are another spiritual, *Little Boy*, the French folk song, *Petit Moulin*, and *Philibert*, a French ditty arranged as a duet.

Heath sings mostly spirituals and heavy folk tunes, while Payant takes care of the lighter numbers. English and American visitors prefer to hear their own tunes, but the French, although they appreciate a song in their native tongue, cannot seem to get enough of Heath's spirituals and blues classics.

The two partners sing seven nights a week, sometimes for five hours straight. They have even sung numbers into a telephone for a steady customer, who was vacationing first in London and then on the French Riviera. Both times the wealthy music lover called long distance to hear *Monsieur Lenoble*, first made popular by Edith Piaf.

Continued on Next Page



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Choking the evil iago in London production of *Othello*, Gordon Heath scored a triumph in the title role. He has also played Hamlet in England and says he would give up Paris club for steady roles as Shakespearean actor.

**HEATH ONCE STARRED AS OTHELLO ON LONDON STAGE**

WITTY, unpredictable Gordon Heath upset many a crystal gazer's predictions when, after his dramatic success in the Broadway hit play, *Deep Are The Roots*, and his role as Othello in London, he turned up as a singer in a Paris bistro. Before his conversion to the cabaret, he was one of America's most promising young Negro actors.

New York-born Gordon Heath cannot remember a time when he was not intent upon a stage career. At 13, he began to collect newspaper clippings about the theater and to read every book he could find on acting. When he was 18 he left home because "there just wasn't enough room for me and the junk that I was collecting." The real reason was his father's disapproval of the time he spent in amateur theatricals.

His first acting break was as an understudy in a short-lived play called *South Pacific* (not the hit musical), a play about a "neurotic" Negro who finds himself in Japan. Heath appeared in several off-Broadway productions including *Pygmalion*, *Eve of St. Mark*, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *Garden of Time*. He later made the Great White Way in *Anna Lucasta* and *On the Town*. *Deep Are the Roots* first took him to Europe in 1947. Returning to New York he worked with the American Negro Theater until he made up his mind to try Europe again.

A few months after shelving his acting career, Gordon Heath was fairly well known as a folk singer. It was during this time that he ran into Lee Payant, also an actor who could sing. They teamed up and opened L'Abbaye.

In many ways Gordon Heath is the most successful of a group of young American Negroes performing in the French capital. "I like it more each day," says Heath. "Paris has been kind to me."

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