

After 10 Years, Friends Are Prosperous in Paris

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WEEKEND PARIS BUREAU

[1958]

PARIS—The Latin Quarter and Greenwich Village each has been claiming the title of capital of the art world for many decades. The case is being constantly argued out of court in the bistros of Saint Germain-des-Pres and in the bars near Washington Square.

The roles of prosecutor and witness are played by the artists themselves. Their attacks and answers range from ingenious to insane. Some of the most interesting testimony heard to date is that of transplanted or expatriot artists—Frenchmen in New York, Americans in Paris.

One such hearing was held on a recent drizzly evening on the Left Bank in a small apartment decorated with lots of color, several woodcuts and many books. Here, with The WEEKEND as court stenographer, Gordon Heath and Lee Payant discussed the merits of New York (where Gordon hails from and where Lee appeared on stage) versus those of Paris (where the two have lived and worked for more than 10 years).

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GORDON AND LEE first met in New York. Like many American artists, they dreamed of coming to Europe to study and work. However, it was by sheer chance that their paths crossed again in Paris, where Gordon was playing a violin "in snob night clubs on the Right Bank" and where Lee had just about reached the end of his financial resources on a 10-week trip through Europe.

They joined forces and announced the opening of the Bar de l'Abbaye, 6 bis Rue de l'Abbaye, "between the steeple of Saint Germain-des-Pres and the Place de Furstemberg." Theirs was to be a place where people would come not merely to drink, but also to listen to good entertainment. They wondered if they'd last a year. Now, more than 10 years later, Gordon and Lee have a repertoire of over 400 songs, and the Abbaye is overcrowded every night with enthusiasts of French, English and American folk music.

Gordon and Lee are convinced that the Abbaye would never have succeeded in New York, where it is almost impossible to start something on a shoestring. Here they started with little and had little to lose.

"It costs so much to make a mistake in America," Lee commented. We sing 40 or 50 songs a night," Gordon added. "At least 10



MOST Americans come to Paris to be entertained. Some, like Lee Payant and Gordon Heath, come to be entertainers. They've played at their own Bar de l'Abbaye, in the heart of Paris' Latin Quarter, for more than 10 years.

of them are not identified—they're thrown in because we liked them. In a night club in New York, we would sing only 10 songs and all of them would have to be perfect."

Both agree that one of the blessings of Paris is its unwritten law granting freedom for artists. "There is no false pressure here," Lee noted, not looking at his watch. "Paris allows tranquility and space. The stimulation in New York can't be enacted because of all the pressure."

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"THE SNOBBERY of physical and social pressure does not exist in Paris as it does in America,"

Gordon explained. "In Paris you can find out what you want to do and you can make mistakes."

During the past 10 years, Gordon and Lee have discovered that they want to do lots of different things in the realm of creative art and, being in Paris, they have been able to realize most of their artistic ambitions.

"We like Paris and want to stay here," said Gordon. **"Here we have found a basic work to do (in the Abbaye) as a jump-off point."**

And they have jumped far and wide. Many of Lee's daylight hours are spent dubbing French films into English (he recently completed one by Gerard Philippe) and doing UNESCO-type radio programs. And Gordon frequently takes off for England to be shot by cinema and television cameras (though he's never been away from the Abbaye and Paris for more than a few months).

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AND STILL, somehow or other, they have spare time. Then they prove that they are also talented in drawing. Together, they have done enough woodcuts to leave little white space on the walls of their apartment and of the Abbaye. Currently, their work is being exhibited at the Ethical Culture Society in New York. Once they have an idea for a woodcut, Gordon usually draws it and Lee cuts it. They also design stationary, book plates and material for publicity.

"We're not set up in a blatant commercial way," Gordon remarked. "That would be a full time job. But from being something we did in our spare time, this has developed into a relatively commercial activity."

Even after 10 years, Paris is still inspiring Gordon and Lee.

"We have more new ideas than we can talk about but no immediate projects," Gordon said. "We're always talking about doing theater and would like someday to have our own."

This being Paris, perhaps some day they will.