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*Dramatic Publishing*



# THE 13<sup>TH</sup> OF PARIS

By

MAT SMART



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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MAT SMART

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(THE 13<sup>TH</sup> OF PARIS)

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For the Staff and Board  
of  
The New Harmony Project

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*The 13<sup>th</sup> of Paris* premiered at City Theatre, Pittsburgh, Pa., in January 2008. It was directed by Melia Bensussen, and featured the following:

## CAST

Vincent .....Matthew Dellapina  
Jacques.....Edmund Genest  
Annie ..... Theo Allyn  
Chloe ..... Bridget Connors  
Jessica ..... Jenny Wales  
William..... Gregory Johnstone

## PRODUCTION STAFF & CREW

Artistic Director..... Tracy Brigden  
Managing Director .....Greg Quinlan  
Set Designer ..... Judy Gailen  
Costume Designer ..... Pei-Chi Su  
Lighting Designer..... Andrew David Ostrowski  
Sound Designer .....Joe Pino  
Production Stage Manager ..... Patti Kelly  
Dramaturg.....Carlyn Aquiline

*The 13<sup>th</sup> of Paris* was commissioned by South Coast Repertory and developed at The New Harmony Project 2006 Conference.

# THE 13<sup>TH</sup> OF PARIS

## CHARACTERS

VINCENT .....late twenties, American

ANNIE.....his girlfriend, early thirties, American

JACQUES .....fifties or older, French

CHLOE.....thirties or forties, French

JESSICA.....early thirties, American

WILLIAM ..... her husband, mid-thirties, English

*The 13<sup>th</sup> of Paris* is performed without an intermission.

## THE 13<sup>TH</sup> OF PARIS

Night. Paris. A small, studio apartment with a balcony. There are brightly colored, strangely angled walls and an unusually high, strangely angled ceiling. The apartment is full of bizarre, flea market furniture. There is a sink and mirror, but no bathroom or kitchen. No bed can be seen. In the corner, an old record player.

On the desk, there is an open suitcase full of old letters. No clothes, only letters.

VINCENT, an American man in his late twenties, stands in the middle of the room. He wears a new pinstripe suit, but no pants. The pants are draped over a nearby chair.

JACQUES, an older French man, wears a pinstripe suit and hat. He looks impeccable.



VINCENT. I'm trying to tell you something here, will you just—

JACQUES. (in a thick French accent) And what can you tell me? I'll tell you what you can tell me—nothing! Anyone standing in the middle of a room with no pants knows nothing. Zero. Fft. Without the pants you have zero credibility. No one will listen to what you have to say.

VINCENT. Can you just—

JACQUES. Put on your pants.

VINCENT. It helps me think.

JACQUES. Think! Nothing you think without pants is worth thinking.

VINCENT. It's two in the morning.

JACQUES. It makes no difference what time of day it is. Do you buy pork chop from the butcher who does not wear pants? No! You go to the seafood man that day. "Sorry, *mon amour*, but I have brought home *les poissons pour le dîner*. The quality of the pork was suspect!"

VINCENT. I'm not a butcher selling pork.

JACQUES. You never know.

VINCENT. What?

JACQUES. You never know these days.

VINCENT. No, I know. I will never be a butcher. I will never sell pork.

JACQUES. Oh, you young people—you're too good for everything and so you move from one thing to another. "I think I like this." "No, I think I like this." "Let me float through my life as one hundred different things." Where is the substance?

VINCENT. It's gone.

JACQUES. Gone. Fft. No conviction. No staying power.

VINCENT. We can't finish anything!

JACQUES. You are not supposed to agree with me! You need to be convinced that you're living life the best it's ever been lived.

VINCENT. That's what you did.

JACQUES. Of course we did.  
And what do you think you're doing?

VINCENT. I have no idea.

JACQUES. No, no, no. You have to say, "we're living life the best it's ever been lived."

VINCENT. Yeah, well...

JACQUES. "Yeah, well..." Finish your thought. "Yeah, well..." You young people need to learn how to form complete sentences.

VINCENT. Yeah, well...us “young people” kindof suck.

JACQUES. Oh, the poop that falls from your mouth.  
Put on your pants. You won’t speak like such an idiot if you  
are wearing your pants.

VINCENT. Wait, this just in—

(VINCENT touches his ear like a newscaster  
with an earpiece)

I’m an idiot with or without the pants.

JACQUES. Ouf. I’m catching you on a bad day.

VINCENT. No, this is a good day. I’m in Paris—Paris for the  
very first time!

I come to your neighborhood and go to your favorite café—  
which is still there—and I have a croissant and an espresso  
and watch these old, beautiful couples walk by on the  
sidewalk. The men in great suits. The women in fantastic  
dresses and these crazy hats. Whispering. Walking.  
Strolling—arm in arm. It’s like any one of them could’ve  
been you and Grandma—and I see a suit store and so I just  
go in and buy a nine-hundred-dollar pinstripe suit. I go have  
a steak *au poivre* and a bottle of wine and I stumble around  
the neighborhood and say to every couple that passes me—  
young and old: *Bonsoir*, lovers! Today is a good day. Today  
there is hope for love. Here in the *treizième arrondissement*  
of Paris maybe the love that lasts fifty years—maybe it is  
still possible.

JACQUES. It is.

VINCENT. I look from your balcony—

(VINCENT rushes to the balcony and throws the doors open. He stands on the balcony and throws his arms up in the air)

And I see the other balconies with flowers and the street that is a two-way street but only wide enough to fit one small car and I think here—here! Love is possible! *Bonsoir, Paris! Comment allez-vous?*

JACQUES. (correcting VINCENT's English pronunciation of Paris with the French pronunciation) *Bonsoir, Paris! Comment allez-vous?*

VINCENT. *Bonsoir, Paris! Comment allez-vous?*

JACQUES. *C'est bon.*

JACQUES and VINCENT. *Bonsoir, Paris! Comment allez-vous?*

JACQUES. Shh! You'll wake up the neighborhood!

VINCENT. *Bonsoir, neighborhood!*

JACQUES. Come inside, you imbecile!

(JACQUES pulls VINCENT inside the apartment)  
You sound like all of the other foolish American idiots! Love is possible anywhere and everywhere. Not just in *Paris*. It's true—love is possible even in...Illinois.

VINCENT. No, it's not.

JACQUES. It is! The people are too fat—but yes—love is still possible in Chicago.

VINCENT. It's not!

JACQUES. What happened with Annie? This must be about Annie—yes? Did you ruin things with Annie?

VINCENT. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know I don't know I don't know anything about anything.

JACQUES. Shh. What is wrong? You are in such a state—what is the matter?

VINCENT. Last night.

I was at dinner with Annie and...

(VINCENT looks at his watch)

And we're supposed to be doing it again—right now—we're supposed to be having dinner. I'm standing her up.

JACQUES. She doesn't know you are here?

VINCENT. No one does. I just...left.

Because...I don't know—I don't know—we were at dinner last night and...

I love her—we've been dating three years now and I love her more than I've ever loved another person in my life—

JACQUES. Yes—

VINCENT. And she loves me—

JACQUES. Wonderful.

VINCENT. And we talked about our days. We talked about everything we could possibly talk about and then we...we run out of things to say. And we sit in silence. Eating.

Eating. Silence. I mean—I cannot think of one thing to say. I love her. I want us to have a lovely conversation, but I can't think of anything. And we're just eating. Eating. Silence. Silence. And then we start having this conversation between the salt shaker and a packet of Sweet-and-Low. Just sounds. Like—

(VINCENT makes a couple of sounds like a salt shaker)

And—

(VINCENT makes a couple of sounds like a packet of Sweet-and-Low. Then he makes a couple of sounds like a salt shaker and a packet of Sweet-and-Low having a fight with one another)

And that goes on for like twenty minutes. Because we have nothing else to talk about. And I'm like "what the hell are we doing?" And then I look up and see this middle-aged couple across the restaurant—fifty, fifty-five—kind of overweight. Frumpy. And they aren't talking either—they are basically like...grunting to each other. Like occasionally grunting. With these totally bored looks on their faces—I mean, they are way past the point of being bored—and they are just slowly shoveling the food into their mouths and grunting and I look at Annie and we're just shoveling food into our mouths and making these stupid sounds and we're totally bored too—in a way—and look back and forth and back and forth and I can't stop thinking about you and Grandma and the anniversary and I take Annie back to her apartment, even though it's still early she's falling asleep—she falls asleep—and I pick her up and put her in her bed and tuck her in and kiss her. She smiles and doesn't open her eyes and I...I walk outside and go to my apartment and get all of your letters and put them in my suitcase and drive to O'Hare and yes there is a 10 p.m. flight and yes there are

seats available and so I buy an eighteen-hundred-dollar ticket to Paris and—

(VINCENT reads from a letter on the table)

*“D’une certaine façon mon amour pour toi a grandi depuis le petit déjeuner ce matin.”*

“Somehow my love for you has grown deeper since breakfast this morning.”

You wrote that to her so many times over the years—and you always meant it—didn’t you?

JACQUES. I did.

VINCENT. How?

(JACQUES looks at VINCENT as if to say, “If you have to ask...”)

Help me, Grandpa! I’m here! I am finally here! Tell me how I can have a love like the love you had. Because I have no idea! None. Zero. Fft. I don’t know I don’t know I don’t know anything about anything.

(covers his mouth and yells the following)

Aaagh! I suck!

JACQUES. Perhaps you need to...ah...put on your pants?

VINCENT. Stop with the—

JACQUES. Try it.  
Please try it.

VINCENT. I don’t go outside like this.

After the day—I come in the door. I take off my shoes. I take off my pants. It’s what I do. Every time.

JACQUES. “I don’t know anything about anything.”  
Didn’t you just say this?

VINCENT. Probably.

JACQUES. You did.

“I don’t know anything about anything.”

This is the...existential clarity that comes after taking off the pants?

Put on the pants, hmph? While you still have a small amount of credibility.

VINCENT. But I—

JACQUES. (yells) Put on the pants!

(VINCENT puts on the suit pants)

VINCENT. Shoes too?

JACQUES. Not as important as the pants, but yes—why not?—*chaussures aussi*.

(as VINCENT tucks in the shirt, buckles the belt  
and puts on his shoes)

Where did you get this?

(JACQUES inspects the jacket)

VINCENT. Down the street.

JACQUES. Which place?

VINCENT. It’s new.



JACQUES. Custom.

VINCENT. Of course.

JACQUES. And the tailor?

VINCENT. He was good.

JACQUES. Hmph.  
He was competent.

VINCENT. Yeah, well...

(VINCENT is fully dressed. He stands up straight)

There.

JACQUES. Let me see.

(JACQUES adjusts VINCENT's tie and collar, then points to the middle button on VINCENT's jacket)

Always.

(JACQUES points to the top button)

Sometimes.

(JACQUES points to the bottom button)

Never.

(VINCENT buttons the middle button of his suit jacket)

How much did you say you paid?

VINCENT. A lot.

JACQUES. Good.  
How long did it take?

VINCENT. I went in there at about three this afternoon and he had it done by eight. It was extra.

JACQUES. Same day. That is the way it should be done.

VINCENT. The way you did it.

JACQUES. No matter how late. No matter how many orders I had. Same day.

Yes, Vincent, yes—you haven't embarrassed yourself. You need a hat, but this will do...

(VINCENT points to a square box)

*Bien fait!*

(JACQUES rubs his hands together in anticipation. He opens the box. He takes out the hat and inspects it carefully)

Mm-hmm...*bravo*.

May I?

VINCENT. Of course.

(JACQUES drops the hat to the floor and stomps on it several times. He practically squeals with joy. He picks it up and shapes it with his hands. He holds it up and inspects it. He drops the hat to floor again and stomps on it. He picks it up, shapes it)

JACQUES. *Et voilà*.

(JACQUES licks his hand, smooths VINCENT's hair and places the hat on his head. JACQUES backs up and looks at the angle of the hat, he adjusts it on VINCENT's head)

How's that? Here, come look. How is that?