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**I Love to Eat**  
**(a love story with food)**

By  
JAMES STILL

**Dramatic Publishing Company**  
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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JAMES STILL

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(I LOVE TO EAT)

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Janet Allen, Artistic Director; Steven Stolen, Managing Director.”

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at the Perry-Mansfield New Works Festival.”

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Also the James Beard Foundation, Fales Research Library/NYU, Paley Center for Media (Los Angeles and New York), UCLA Film & Television Archives, NBC and the Library of Congress.

And all of James Beard's cookbooks and dozens of magazine and newspaper articles in which Beard was interviewed over the years.

“To entertain successfully, one must create with the imagination of a playwright, plan with the skill of a director, and perform with the instincts of an actor.”

—James Beard  
*Menus for Entertaining*

“And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-blossom which my aunt used to give me (although I did not yet know and must long postpone the discovery of why this memory made me so happy) immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden which had been built out behind it for my parents (the isolated segment which until that moment had been all that I could see); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square where I used to be sent before lunch, the streets along which I used to run errands, the country roads we took when it was fine.”

—M. Proust  
*Remembrance of Things Past, Swann's Way*

“Like almost everyone else in this country, the pig has been placed on a diet ... ”

—James Beard  
*Gourmet*, 1969

*I Love to Eat* was premiered at the Indiana Repertory Theatre in Indianapolis on Oct. 1, 2011.

CAST:

James Beard ..... Robert Neal

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... James Still

Scenic Design..... Robert M. Koharchik

Costume Design ..... Guy Clark

Lighting Design ..... Ryan Koharchik

Sound Design ..... Rick Thomas

Dramaturg ..... Richard J Roberts

Stage Manager ..... Joel Grynheim

Artistic Director ..... Janet Allen

Managing Director ..... Steven Stolen

In a revised script, the play was produced at Portland Center Stage in Portland, Ore., opening on Jan. 11, 2013.

CAST:

James Beard ..... Rob Nagle

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... Jessica Kubzansky

Scenic Design..... Tom Buderwitz

Costume Design ..... Jeff Cone

Lighting Design ..... Daniel Meeker

Sound Design ..... John Zalewski

Casting ..... Rose Riordan

Stage Manager ..... Jeremy Eisen

Artistic Director ..... Chris Coleman

*I Love to Eat* was further developed by the Denver Center Theatre at Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School & Camp in Steamboat Springs, Colo., as part of the New Works Festival.

# **I Love to Eat**

## **(a love story with food)**

### CHARACTERS

James Beard

### SETTING

Beard's brownstone in Greenwich Village, New York.

### TIME

The middle of the night. 1984.  
A few months before Beard's death.



## PRODUCTION NOTES

Though the play is “realistic,” it is more a state of mind, a middle-of-the-night salon hosted by James Beard. Yes, it takes place in his home—but it doesn’t have to be a Smithsonian installation; the play is more theatrical than that. But there are things that are essential: a big refrigerator that is capable of surprise, a big three-sided kitchen island, and an overall sense of personal place. Why have one telephone when you can have five? The food he makes onstage should be real. Please, no miming. “Elsie the Cow” should be a little weird, surreal and fun. Music, sound and lights are all partners in the storytelling.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

### **The Joy of Cooking a Play**

*Joyful*. That's how I can best express the process of working on *I Love to Eat*.

I have big opinions about solo plays. I've been a student of the form for years and still thrill to a single actor bravely holding the stage and creating a unique bond with an audience. Solo plays are also demanding for audiences—they require a willingness to spend time with one actor, often without much spectacle, which invites (and risks) even more intimacy. And while I love a good story well told, it isn't just the story that makes a solo play. Even a fascinating character embodied by a brilliant actor might not be enough to hold our true attention for 75-90 minutes. There is something more ... and it's that something more that I crave as an audience, that I demand from a solo play I'm writing.

*I Love to Eat* is the third solo play I've written. I never would have written any of them if I didn't believe that there was something special and unique driving the experience. For *I Love to Eat*, it was initially my interest in early television that led me to James Beard. I knew Beard as the jolly, expressive face on cookbooks and as a kind of culinary stamp of approval. But I knew nothing about the man, his humanity, his humor, his eccentricities, his true greatness, nor his flaws, fears and tender heart. Like the onions he loved so much, writing about Beard has been an experience of peeling away layers, discovering something new only then to discover yet another layer. He has quite generously revealed himself to me through the ways he talked about food, through his many sly appearances on television for nearly 40 years before his death in 1985, and especially through my conversations with people

who knew him, respected him, were in awe of him and a little mystified by him. My process has been one of research and scholarship, instinct and hunch. I've talked to people who knew him via email and phone and in person in multiple trips to New York and Sonoma. I even tracked down a little known episode of *I've Got a Secret* that he appeared on in 1954. I've made some of his recipes and spent time in his townhouse in Greenwich Village, which is now the home of the James Beard Foundation. And I've spent months thinking about food. Lucky, lucky me.

When I write a play about a real person, I hope I get it right. In the end I'm writing a character named James Beard who hopefully captures an essential essence of the real James Beard. I do feel true responsibility, though, not only to the people who so generously shared their memories of Beard, but also a strange and undeniable obligation to Beard himself. Still, one word continues to sum up my time spent on this play: *joy*. I felt joyful writing this play, I loved returning to it every day, and more than ever I loved the discoveries, the surprises, the ways Beard revealed not only the story of this play but also the *theatre* of this play. And that's the thing I eluded to earlier, the thing I'm really looking for in a solo play: what makes it more than a monologue, and how is it theatrical? Beard loved the theatre, loved the opera; his own flair as a unique performer was legendary. *I Love to Eat* celebrates all of that—right alongside his love of connecting with people and a love for good, fresh food simply prepared.

—James Still

# I Love to Eat

## (a love story with food)

*(In darkness.*

*The Overture:*

*An oven timer starts to beep, joined by the dinging of an egg timer at different intervals, then an incessant microwave timer completes the playful trio.*

*More sounds: the breaking of eggs, water boiling, steaks sizzling, champagne corks pop-pop-popping, wooden spoons vigorously stirring in bowls, knives chopping in different rhythms, whisks, electric mixers, Cuisinarts, blenders, pots and pans clanking like cymbals ...*

*Louder and overlapping, a joyful culinary orchestra—unique and whimsical, authentic and grand.*

*Joining the overture now in a kind of culinary/opera mash-up, Jussi Björling's tenor voice bursts into Puccini's "Nessun Dorma" as ...*

*A big, sub-zero refrigerator suddenly begins to mysteriously glow from the inside.*

*As "Nessun Dorma" builds ...*

*The culinary orchestra builds too ...*

*The refrigerator door slowly opens and ...*

*Fog rolls out.*

*All sounds and music grow louder as something tries to free itself from inside the refrigerator:*

*A big arm ...*

*A big leg ...*

*Two big hands ...*

*“Nessun Dorma” swells and ...*

*A spotlight hits a big, bald-headed man just as he triumphantly emerges from inside the refrigerator. It isn't subtle, it isn't even graceful. And the only sound louder than the music now—is the man's laughter.*

*Meet JAMES BEARD.*

*He's dressed in [big] silk Chinese-style pajamas and [big] Chinese slippers.*

*Handkerchief in hand, BEARD alternately mops his brow and waves toward the audience.)*

BEARD. Hello! Hello!

*(“Nessun Dorma” builds to a climax.*

*Flower petals rain from the heavens ... BEARD basks in his own ticker-tape parade.*

*“Nessun Dorma” finishes to loud applause and cheers, which BEARD acknowledges gratefully with bows and laughter and more bows. He is having the time of his life.)*

BEARD (*cont'd*). Moderation??? I'm against it!

*(The lights change.*

*Inside BEARD's cozy brownstone on West 12th Street in the Village. New York.*

*1984.*

*The middle of the night.)*

BEARD (*cont'd, catching his breath*). I haven't had so much fun since using a blow torch on *The Tonight Show* to make a six-foot crepe suzette. I had just written a little book of recipes for a blow-torch manufacturer. To bake it, we had to construct a special pan that was six feet long by three feet wide. It was without a doubt THE biggest crepe suzette the world had ever seen. My motto: "Why Not?"

*(The phone rings.)*

BEARD (*cont'd, delighted*). Oh goody-goody!

*(To the phone.)*

Hello? // Yes, this is James Beard.

*(Laughing.)*

Yes, THE James Beard—// All those cookbooks, that's right—// You do? // All twenty-six of them, yes, that sounds—// Thank you, dear. But why did you call if you didn't think I would—

*(To the audience.)*

A Mrs. Martin from Kansas—

*(To the phone.)*

Now the only thing that will make a souffle fall is if it knows you're afraid of it. Are you afraid of it? // Oh. // Ohhh. // Ohhhhhh. Yes, it certainly does sound dreadful but that's how it is in the kitchen: sometimes it all goes boom.

*(To the audience.)*

A culinary crisis in Kansas ... I've never been able to say no.

*(To the phone, very focused.)*

So gird your apron a little tighter, dear, and here's what you're going to do: LAUGH ABOUT IT. Then hurl it out the window! // Well pour it down the drain then. // Yes, madam, every last bit of it! It's not Easter, no need to try and bring it back from the dead.

*(To the audience.)*

I've never had a cooking lesson in my life—ever.

*(To the phone.)*

Mrs. Martin? Did you pour it down the drain? // And don't you feel better, wasn't that FUN? // Because food should taste good and it should always be fun ... // No, no no! forget about "cuisine!"

*(To the audience.)*

The very word makes me want to throw up ... "cuisine." And don't even get me started on "gourmet." I have about as much use for "gourmet" as I do a tank top! I prefer the word "epicure"—don't you?

*(To the phone.)*

EPICURE. It's honest and straight-forward—just like your dinner which I know is going to win you much applause. // Fine, fine, forget the souffle and make your mother's potato salad then.

*(To the audience.)*

The potato has had a highly successful career but not without some setbacks. Whoever invented the deep-fried potato surely didn't realize the awful sin he was committing.

*(To the phone.)*

Yes, fine, serve it with the ham—why not? // Cheer up, dear—if all else fails, simply be amusing. You can get away with anything if you're amusing. And let me know how it all comes out, will you, dear? Mmm hmm, goodbye now.

*(He hangs up the phone.)*

BEARD *(cont'd, to the audience)*. Always have a listed phone number, that's my philosophy. Someone might call.

*(The phone rings.)*

BEARD (*cont'd*). Oh goody-goody!

(*To the audience.*)

Alexander Graham Bell also invented the metal detector.  
'Tis true!

(*To the phone.*)

Hello? Julia! // Yes, yes, wonderful! // I do but I'll have to call you back. Company, yes, that's right. // No, I don't believe you know them—but I'm sure they know you.

(*To the audience, loud whisper.*)

JULIA CHILD.

(*To the phone, looking out at the audience.*)

Well I don't know. Maybe—300 or so?

(*Laughing.*)

Yes, just a little intimate gathering of friends. No, that was last week and I'm afraid it was something to forget in a hurry. // You know I don't enjoy criticizing, I'd rather be enthusiastic than bitchy but the veal rolls were as thick as sewer pipes and the Potatoes Anna were tough as a whore's heart—yes, all the way to the center.

(*To the audience.*)

Even the Apple Charlotte was overdone—

(*To the phone.*)

Who told you that? // Hm. Well he certainly is handsome and a brilliant technician but obviously he knows nothing about food. Where are you? Ah ... *La Pitchoune* ... (**NOTE: mispronounced as "La Peetch" per Julia.**)

(*To the audience.*)

Julia's house in the South of France—*magnifique!*

(*Music ... conjuring ... the lights dreamily changing around  
BEARD ...*)

BEARD (*cont'd*). The markets of Cote d'Azur ...  
an early morning,



a woman selling freshly picked peaches out of a baby carriage,  
a man with eyes the color of the sea ...

looking at me—

at—ME?

A man looking at me—

smiling—

AT ME!

Then—disappearing into the tender scent of Jasmine ...

my heart in his mouth ...

*(Music out.)*

*Faint sound of Julia's voice chatting away on the phone as lights restore.)*

BEARD (*cont'd, to the phone*). First of the season? Oh heavenly luck! Shall I ring you back later then? Goody. Give Paul my love. Mmm hmm. *Adieu.*

*(He hangs up the phone, looking at the world maps that paper the kitchen walls ...)*

BEARD (*cont'd, to himself*). *Adieu.*

*(...)*

When Julia Child came to New York for the launch of her first book—this was 1961—her editor wanted to know who she'd most like to meet. Julia said, "Beard." I'd read her book and thought it extraordinary. Everything but the chapters on chicken and meat—that part of the book needed work. Still—

*(Admission.)*

I wish I'd written it.

*(Genuine.)*

It really was that good.

*(He makes himself a drink: Glenlivet scotch, on the rocks.)*

BEARD (*cont'd, remembering*). The first time we met was in my kitchen where I greeted Julia with my hands covered in egg whites. I was teaching a class on how to make a soufflé by using your hands—the hands are the original cooking utensil, you know—it was just a perfect way for us to meet. Julia looked at me—that face like one long exclamation point dotted by her mouth open in amazement. I knew she was dying to try it herself. So I threw her a big party and welcomed her to the chorus line. But Julia was never a chorus girl—Julia was a star. From the beginning, she was sensational, absolutely. We weren't—competitors—exactly: she's all about the art of French cuisine, I prize everyday American cookery; her recipes can be as long as a novel and as intimidating as a scientific experiment while mine are more like little American folk tales meant to assure the reader that cooking isn't just for experts. But Julia and I share essential ingredients: a passion for good food, good laughs, and good gossip. And we're both tall! I'm an inch taller and she's an inch more famous. But only an inch! I recently made Julia's garlic mashed potatoes again and oh my heavenly taste buds! TWO heads of garlic! But I question if the cream sauce is needed so I'm going to play with her recipe. That's how food works, how it's always worked: variations on a theme. There are no new recipes, only new ways to prepare them. Everyone assumes Julia had the first cooking show on television—not true! I was the first! 1946. It was called “James Beard in *I Love to Eat*”—1946!—the first time there'd ever been a cooking show on television—

*(Sound: cowbells clanking.*

*Sound: slide whistle as a cowbell drops in from above.*

*BEARD removes a note attached to the cowbell, then watches the cowbell fly out to the sound of slide whistle in reverse.)*

BEARD (*cont'd, reading the note*). “Dear Mr. Beard, from Elsie the Cow / Correction requested, I insist on it now / You mangled the title, it wasn’t complete / The show you refer to was—”

*(Lights suddenly change.*

*Sound: television theme music.)*

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER (*V.O.*). “ELSIE Presents: I LOVE TO EAT. Delivered by—BORDEN’S. And featuring James Beard ... ”

*(BEARD scrambles to put on his apron, suddenly playing the TV chef, not sure how to use the camera to his advantage. His style is suddenly a little too performative, big but without his natural charm ... )*

BEARD (*to the camera*). I guess you all know by now that I LOVE TO EAT.

*(Sound: canned applause.)*

BEARD (*cont'd, to the camera*). Yes, EVERYBODY loves to eat and everybody’s interested in food. So tonight, friends, we’re getting ready for New Year’s Eve. So of course, it’ll be ... eggnog!

*(Sound: canned “ooos!” and “ahhs!”)*

BEARD (*cont'd, to the camera*). I’ve already got things started ... and the delivery man should be here with some of BORDEN’S EGGNOG any minute now.

*(Lights suddenly change, and we’re back in BEARD’S brownstone.)*

BEARD (*cont'd, to the audience*). The truth is, I can't stand eggnog—anything to please the sponsor, anything that might get the viewer's attention, the showier the better. For one episode they wanted a big bowl of ice cream that went all the way up to the ceiling—but the lights in the studio were hotter than Hades—which meant we had to use mashed potatoes to LOOK like ice cream. Remember, it's 1946! Studio 3G at NBC. Television is brand new, black and white, and we were making it all up as we—

*(The phone rings.)*

BEARD (*cont'd*). Oh goody-goody!

*(To the phone.)*

Hello? Hi, kiddo. // Goody goody wonderful! Who's paying and where are you staying?

*(Doom.)*

Oh. Really? Well, suit yourself, but in plain language: it ain't all that. The hotel itself is horribly over-rated and the restaurant has the worst service in London. // Twaddle! Who told you that? // Names! I want names! // Well that bastard is wrong, wrong, wrong. It's the same old pomp and glop—that's why I always stay at the Savoy. The most ravishing views of the Thames at dawn, Monet painted it looking out from one of the windows! It'll break your heart if you have one. I have another call, kiddo—can you hold on?

*(To the audience.)*

The two most fabulous inventions of the century: the Cuisinart and CALL-WAITING.

*(To the phone.)*

Hello? // Mrs. Martin from Kansas! How's the dinner coming?

*(Good.)*

Yes ...

*(Better.)*

Yes ...

*(Bad.)*

No-no-no! // Because ham and Bordeaux just aren't friendly. // Champagne! Chilled and in its virgin state // yes, VIRGIN! // No-no-no, we aren't using that word, remember? Anything I can do you can do too. Don't be afraid to try new combinations. It's the cook who unifies the meal, what you cook is a reflection of YOU. // Trust me: Champagne gives the ham a glory it's never known. Now light those candles and *bon appetit!*

*(Back to other call.)*

You still there? Oh goody. Now: the Savoy Hotel. Let us not forget that Escoffier was its first chef. Sarah Bernhardt lived there, Caruso SANG there—// yes, Oscar Wilde and Lord Douglas, well—you know—//

*(He laughs himself silly, more laughing, can't stop laughing ... OK, it's a little pervy.)*

BEARD *(cont'd, to phone)*. Don't we all!

*(Settling down.)*

Plus where else in the world can you bump into the ghost of D'Oyly Carte floating around singing *The Mikado*? Did I ever tell you about that unforgettable meal I had in a monastery in Japan?

*(To the audience.)*

The entire meal was made up of FLOWERS!  
Terrifically exciting—