

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

presents

April in Paris

a comedy by

John Godber

Premiere on 27 April, 2017

Preview Performances on 24, 25 and 26 April

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours

Matinee Performances at 11.00 Hours on Tuesdays
and Fridays beginning 2 May

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Dear English Teacher,

The English Theatre will premiere **APRIL IN PARIS**, a comedy by John Godber, on 27 April, 2017, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 24, 25 and 26 April.

Nominated for the Laurence Olivier “Comedy of the Year” in 1994, the play shows the profound effect that travel abroad can have on its two characters. With superb dialogue the story is both funny and poignant.

Bookings for the play have already started. See the cover of this publication for dates and times of performances. The text of the play may be obtained at www.samuelfrench.co.uk or www.amazon.com.

Teachers who would like to be invited free of charge to a dress rehearsal of the play should contact us at: marketing@englishtheatre.de

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ABOUT THE PLAY:

This comedy by one of Britain’s most popular playwrights is a brilliantly funny look at the English abroad. Al and Bet lead a quiet, boring life in Yorkshire. After twenty years of working for the same company, he has lost his job and cannot find another one. Frustrated with their life and worried about their future, the marriage has stagnated. Then she wins a “Romantic Breaks” competition in a magazine. The prize: a holiday for two in Paris. This is their first experience travelling abroad and it has a profound effect on the way they afterwards view their life and the world. They sort out French cuisine, struggle with the French language, art, strange sexual mores and fight off muggers in the Metro, etc. The play is about the re-awakening of interest, the blossoming of talents and the re-energising of a relationship. It is also about finding some identity with the world outside your own country.

“genuinely funny...” The Times

“brilliantly simple, powerful piece of popular theatre.” The Guardian

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

John Godber was born in Yorkshire in 1956, and therefore has an intimate understanding of Bet and Al, the characters from Yorkshire in **APRIL IN PARIS**. His plays have been performed across the world. **BOUNCERS** was nominated “Comedy of the Year” in 1985 and won seven Los Angeles Critics Circle Awards and five awards in Chicago in 1987. Some of his other plays include **ON THE PISTE**, **TEACHERS (sic.)**, **BLOOD SWEAT AND TEARS**, **HAPPY JACK**, **SEPTEMBER IN THE RAIN**, **HAPPY FAMILIES**, **WEEKEND BREAKS**, **IT STARTED WITH A KISS** and **BIG TROUBLE IN THE LITTLE BEDROOM**. The author’s TV work includes **CROWN COURT**, **GRANGE HILL** and **BROOKSIDE**. He wrote and co-directed the BBC2 six part series **THE RITZ** and its sequel **THE CONTINENTAL**. His screenplay **MY KINGDOM FOR A HORSE** starring Sean Bean was nominated for a BAFTA award. John Godber’s feature film **UP ‘N’ UNDER** was released in 1998. The author is also a well-known teacher and director in Britain, and has served as creative director at Theatre Royal Wakefield since 2011. He is married with two daughters.

Summary of
APRIL IN PARIS

Act I

The play opens in Al and Bet's living room in a small town in Yorkshire. The present. Evening.

Bet is reading a magazine as her husband Al, a man in his late thirties, enters. He has recently lost his job as a house builder after working for the same company for twenty years. Now, unable to find employment, he spends most of his time painting pictures. Bet, although still employed as a seller of shoes, has become obsessive about entering competitions in magazines.

Bet: (looking at magazine) Oh yes, this looks good.

Al: What is it?

Bet: A competition...

Al: Don't enter another competition.

Bet: Why not?

Al: It's embarrassing...What are you trying to win?

Bet: A life... somewhere away from you.

Since Al lost his job, their marriage has stagnated into constant quarrelling with each other. She resents the fact that they can no longer afford to go out in the evening with friends. He is annoyed if she spends a few pounds on a scarf. When he shows her the painting he has been working on, she is clearly not impressed. It is like all the others he has painted: a black and white industrial landscape. She would be ashamed to show it to anyone, she says. He tells her to shut up and enter another competition.

That is exactly what Bet does. A few months later she receives notification that she is the lucky winner of a romantic trip for two, all expenses paid, to Paris. She is elated. Al, however, is not. He is worried that she might not have her job when they return. And "you can't speak a word of French," he tells her. "I can buy a book," she answers.

Al: I'm not going.

Bet: Yeah, I know, great. I'm going and you're not, and that's that. I'll go with Rita.

In the next scene we see Bet and Al on the ship with their suitcases. He apparently has changed his mind about going to Paris. Bet is bursting with excitement. He is concerned about the weather and asks if she brought along seasick pills in case he needs them during the crossing.

After depositing their suitcases in their cabin, they go to the ship's restaurant. He is uncomfortable sitting so close to other people and wishes they had gone away for a few days somewhere in England. Bet, noticing a couple sitting near them, says, "I bet they're French."

Al: They're not French, are they?

Bet: Well, they're having wine.

Al: Look at that lot there. They're having curry but they're not from India, are they? You do talk some rubbish at times.

Al is pleased that it is buffet style in the restaurant because that means he can eat as much as he wants. When he goes back to the buffet table for the third time, however, Bet is embarrassed. After dinner they decide not to see the film being shown on board because they would have to travel backwards while watching it. They go instead to the lounge and sit in a corner near the bar listening to soft piano music. Al thinks it "a bit French" when Bet orders a white wine and not a pint of beer as he does. With the help of a tourist guide they work out what they are going to do in Paris. Al fears that he will not like any of the food there. Bet looks forward to seeing the Eiffel Tower, shopping on the Champs-Élysées, visiting Notre Dame, etc. Al says that he has heard that Pigalle is an interesting place to go to.

Bet: Well, it's all sex shops and all that, isn't it?

Al: Is it?

Bet: You know it is...I mean there's lots more to see. Opera. Louvre.

Al: Oh yeah, opera, great.

He warns Bet that they will have to be careful in Paris because he has been told that "they're sex mad over there."

Bet wants to go to the disco on board. "Well, I'm not dancing with you," Al tells her. "So what's new?" she answers. In the disco Bet dances alone to the music while Al looks on.

“She’s the oldest one dancin’ but she’s not bothered,” he observes. Al wishes he could join in, but something stops him.

The dancing and heat in the disco have made Bet feel queasy, so they go out on deck for some fresh air. To their surprise they see that the ship has not yet left the harbour. They are still in Hull. It is getting stormy. As the ship begins to rock, Bet feels even more queasy. She suddenly runs to the side of the boat and throws up. Recovering from her sickness, she says, “It must be them chocolates.” Bet wants to go back inside now, but Al wants to stay where he is. He feels ashamed, he tells her, because everybody else on board has paid for the trip and they are there for free. He wonders what they will do for a holiday next year if he does not find a job. “What a bloody country we live in. We’ve had to win a bloody holiday,” he says. Bet points out that thousands of others are in their situation and tries to pull him back inside where it is warm.

Al: You go, I’m staying here. (Pause) Go then, go read a book. (Pause. Shouting) It’s my holiday – I want to do what I want.

Bet: Oh, I could push you off this boat... Push you off and start my life again. You’d be down there floating about with a belly full of beer.

The ship has meanwhile left the harbour. At sea Al sees a light shining from the coast of England. He asks Bet if she has looked lately at the people in the streets at home. They look sad, he says. By now Bet has become completely fed up with Al’s pessimism. She does not know what to do or say to cheer him up.

Bet: I wish I’d come with Rita.
Al: I told you to. But you never listen.
Bet: You spoil everything.
Al: I’ve never done anything right for you, have I? Not in ten years.

Bet goes to Al and they hug. He thanks her for staying with him. Then he breaks the mood by saying, “Your breath stinks of sick.” “Thanks,” she replies. He tries to put his arm around her. Finally she gives in.

Al: (excited) Paris...bloody hell.

As the lights fade to blackout, Al waves goodbye to England.

Act II

Al and Bet have arrived in Paris by bus and checked into their hotel. After walking around the city for six hours, they are tired and need a rest. In Café Trocadero Al is upset because the menu is only in French. With the help of a phrase book Bet thinks she recognizes fish and steak on the menu, and, to be safe, decides that that is what they had better have. Leaving Bet alone to order for them, Al goes to find the toilet. He is stunned when, after descending two flights of stairs, all he finds is a hole in the ground with two places at the side for his feet. He cannot decide whether to use the facility or not. Finally, deciding against it, he returns to Bet in the restaurant. She has ordered fish for herself (which she finds delicious), but has mistakenly ordered Steak Tartare for Al, believing it to be a normal steak. He looks at the plate of cold raw mince with a raw egg in the middle.

Al: What is it?
Bet: Just don’t make a fuss, I didn’t know, just eat it, everybody’s looking...

He manages to wash it all down with the help of some English tea.

Out on the street again, Bet persuades Al to go up in the Eiffel Tower for a view of Paris. Because he hates heights they compromise by not going all the way to the top. At one of the stations on the way up, she buys a flag with the Tower on it for her mother; he purchases a model of the Tower in a snow storm. As they look out over Paris, she senses that he is beginning to enjoy himself a bit and wants him to show it by giving her a kiss. He resists. “I’ll throw you off the Tower if you don’t,” she says. He politely pecks her on the cheek.

Their next stop is the Louvre. Here Al is overwhelmed by the paintings of the old masters, but it is the Mona Lisa that especially impresses him.

Bet: I didn’t think you’d like it, I thought you’d say it was rubbish.
Al: Look at the colours...He’s tried to blend all the colours, you see, like smoke. Bloody hell, it’s brilliant.

Surrounded by so much artistic talent, and realizing that he could never equal it, Al insists on leaving the Louvre. He needs a “rest from an overdose of art,” he says.

Across from the Louvre they stop at Café Rousseau. Bet’s feet are hurting her, so she tells Al to order her a cup of tea and a cream cake while she goes to buy a plaster. He panics at the thought of being left alone and having to speak French to the waiter. “Just say ‘tea’. They’ll know what you mean,” she tells him. In her absence he is terrified that one of the waiters will approach his table. When a waitress comes to him and says “Bonjour,” he makes a dash for the street to find Bet. With the help of her phrase book she has bought a plaster for her foot and a T-shirt for Rita’s son. She is disappointed that Al did not stay in the café and order them something. He claims that he did not stay because all the waiters ignored him.

Back at their hotel they get ready for a night out in Paris. Al would prefer to just go to bed, but Bet is eager to “hit the town.” “I’ll need a bloody holiday when I get back,” he complains.

They are soon wandering around Pigalle. They pass a sex supermarket but are too intimidated to go in. The Folles are too expensive for them, so they decide on Madame Arthur’s, a night club where the waiters speak English. They drink cheap wine and eat oysters, prawns and snails. When the lights go down and the show starts, Al is astounded that he is actually enjoying the performance. “I never thought I’d sit and watch grown blokes dressed up as women for three hours,” he confesses. The funniest thing for Bet is that all the male performers have shaved their legs. The alcohol and entertainment produce a big change in both Bet and Al. They relax, laugh and kiss. He notices how nice she looks. She replies that he looks nice too, even attractive. Then, gazing into each other’s eyes, they repeat softly their names to each other, something they have not done in a long time.

At half-past one in the morning they stagger out of the night club. Due to the late hour they take the Métro back to their hotel. On the Métro they sense that they are being watched by a group of four men who, according to Bet,

look like gypsies. Al thinks he sees one of the men steal another passenger’s wallet. Bet fears that the four strangers have guns and that she and Al are being targeted because they are English. When the four men start moving towards them, Al tells Bet to watch her handbag. Then he breaks away from her and confronts the strangers aggressively.

Al: (screaming) You French bastards...come on...I’m English and I’m not having it...I’ll take you all on...What are you looking at...you stinking sods. I’ll knock your bloody teeth out.

The four men quickly get off the Métro and run away. The other passengers, also frightened by Al’s outburst, get off as well. Bet now wonders if the four men were really muggers intending to rob them. “Well, if they weren’t,” Al says, “there’s four blokes who think there’s an English nutcase on the Métro.”

The next morning Bet and Al are preparing to leave Paris, but, before they do, she insists on visiting Notre Dame. Inside the famous cathedral Bet wants Al to kneel down and say a prayer. With some reluctance he does so. Afterwards she asks him what he prayed for. “That we don’t miss our bus,” he answers. Their conversation turns serious. She remarks how lucky they are to have been in Paris and to have seen all the wonderful things there. He wonders why they are not nicer to each other and what he would do if Bet ever left him.

Bet: Why should I stay with you?

Al: Well, I love you.

Bet: You never say it.

Al: I’ve just said it.

Neither of them wants to go home. Al would like to live in Paris forever and paint pictures. Bet has always fancied going to India. “Let’s bloody stay here!” he shouts. “Ssshhh!” she answers quickly, presumably objecting to the bad language he is using in church.

In the last scene of the play Al and Bet are back home in Yorkshire. Paris is now a memory that they try to keep alive by listening to the music of Jacques Brel, attempting to speak French to each other and having croissants with their coffee. Al is now the one who searches magazines for competitions that

would take them abroad again. He has found a competition that would take them to Mexico if he can just come up with the right words for a slogan that a company is looking for.

Al: (reading from a magazine) "Say in not more than fifteen words why you would like to go to Mexico."

Bet thinks he is going too far in his enthusiasm for foreign travel. With the money he is spending on magazines, she points out, they could take a trip to Whitby, or somewhere else in England. "I'm not going to bloody Whitby," he replies. Once you have seen a bit of the world, he explains, your head is never the same again, you want to see more of it. Or, as Bet answers, it can make you appreciate the beautiful things in your own country. But Al is not convinced. "Bloody Whitby, I could cry," he says as he exits.

He returns almost immediately, bringing with him a picture he has painted during the week that they have been back home. He holds it up so Bet can see it. The painting is not at all like the black and white landscapes he produced before their Paris trip. It is a very colourful montage of Parisian scenes. "It's brilliant," she says. "We could sell that, get some cash." Al, however, wants to keep the painting. He is clearly aware of the change in his attitude towards life and the world that the painting represents. Suddenly he comes up with the words for the competition that might win for them the trip to Mexico: "Hot as chilli, clear blue skies, Mexico is a big surprise."

Multiple-Choice Exercise

1. Since Al lost his job, his and Bet's marriage has (a. improved, b. stagnated, c. ended).
2. Al spends most of his time (a. reading, b. painting black and white pictures, c. playing golf).
3. Bet has become obsessive about (a. cooking, b. shopping, c. entering competitions).
4. Bet wins a trip for two to (a. Paris, b. Hong Kong, c. the Canary Islands).
5. On the ship Al feels ashamed because (a. he is dressed improperly, b. Bet will not accompany him to the disco, c. everybody else has paid for the trip and he has not).
6. In Paris Al and Bet speak French (a. fluently, b. with the help of a phrase book, c. only to each other).
7. On the Métro they (a. lose their money, b. meet some nice French people, c. imagine that muggers are going to rob them).
8. In the Louvre Al is overwhelmed by the (a. modern art, b. Mona Lisa, c. sculpture).
9. Al and Bet (a. are happy to leave Paris, b. decide to remain there, c. do not want to go home).
10. In Paris Al and Bet's relationship (a. gets better, b. gets worse, c. stays the same).
11. After the Paris trip Al's painting (a. continues to be black and white, b. is more abstract, c. is more colourful).

Answer Key:

- 1.b, 2. b, 3. c, 4. a, 5. c, 6. b, 7. c, 8. b, 9. c, 10. a, 11. c.

Interpretative Exercise

1. Describe Bet and Al's life before they went to Paris.
2. How did their trip affect their relationship, Al's painting and their attitude towards life and the world?
3. What are some of the positive things that travel abroad can do for a person?
4. Are Al and Bet's experiences abroad only typically British, or are they very much like anyone's first trip outside his or her own country. Compare their problems and reactions with your own experiences abroad. What effect has foreign travel had on you?

