

# **The English Theatre of Hamburg**

*Established 1976*

Presents

## **BOEING BOEING**

a Farce

**by Marc Camoletti**

**(English Version by Beverley Cross and Francis Evans)**

**Premiere on 16 November, 2017**

**Preview Performances at reduced prices on 13, 14 and 15 November**

**Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours**

**Matinee Performances at 11.30 Hours on Tuesdays and**

**Fridays beginning 21 November**

**The English Theatre of Hamburg**

**Lerchenfeld 14, 22081 Hamburg**

**U-Bahn Mundsburg**

**Telephone: 22 77 089**

**[www.englishtheatre.de](http://www.englishtheatre.de)**

# The English Theatre of Hamburg

*Established in 1976*

Dear Teachers and Friends,

The English Theatre will premiere BOEING BOEING on 16 November, 2017, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 13, 14 and 15 November. Bookings for this sophisticated farce have already started. See the cover of this study guide for dates and times of performances. The text of the play may be obtained at [theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk](mailto:theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk) or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Teachers interested in being invited free of charge to a dress rehearsal of the play on 12 November at 19:30 should contact [marketing@englishtheatre.de](mailto:marketing@englishtheatre.de)

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Marc Camoletti (1923—2003) was born a French citizen of Italian descent in Geneva, Switzerland. After trying his hand at painting, he discovered that his real talent was writing for the theatre. Although best known for his hugely popular farce BOEING BOEING, he also penned a string of other international stage hits during a career of more than forty years. His plays have been produced in fifty-five countries, reaching millions of people. Among his successes are comedies such as LA BONNE ANNA, PAUVRE EDOURD, L'AMOUR PROPRE, DUOS SON CANAPE, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, LE BLUFFEUR, LA CHAMBRE D'AMI and DON'T DRESS FOR DINNER which The English Theatre of Hamburg produced in 2002. Marc Camoletti was awarded Knight of the Legion Honor, one of France's greatest honours, for his outstanding contribution to the theatre. He passed away in 2003 at the age of 79.

## **ABOUT THE PLAY**

BOEING BOEING began its life in Paris in 1960 where it ran for 19 years. The English language version opened two years later in London and ran for seven years. Three years after its London opening, the play was made into a film starring Tony Curtis and Jerry Lewis. In 1991 The Guinness Book of Records listed it as the most frequently produced French play in the world. Long a staple in repertory theatres throughout the United Kingdom and the United States, BOEING BOEING was revived in London's West End in 2007 with Mark Rylance. It was transferred a year later to Broadway where it won six Tony Award nominations and two Tony Awards, including Best Revival of a play and Best Actor (Mark Rylance).

BOEING BOEING's goal is simply to entertain. True to its roots in French farce, we observe a character's attempt to conceal the violation of a social norm (usually sexual) and the character's ultimate return to social tradition (monogamy and marriage). In this case the character is Bernard, an American architect living in Paris in the swinging 1960s. He has proposed marriage to three beautiful young women of different nationalities: Italian, German and American. This is all possible because each of the women is an airline stewardess, and thanks to their different layover times in Paris, Bernard is able to entertain them separately in his flat without them knowing of each other's existence. Everything goes well until flight schedules are changed and all three women show up the same day on Bernard's doorstep. Luckily, Bernard's French housekeeper and an old friend from the United States are there to help him keep the three women in separate bedrooms. But preventing the beauties from bumping into each other becomes increasingly chaotic and hilarious with each passing moment.

## Characters in BOEING BOEING

**Bernard:** An American architect living in Paris who is engaged to three women at the same time.

**Berthe:** Bernard's loyal, but moody French housekeeper.

**Robert:** An old friend visiting Bernard from the United States.

**Gloria:** An American airline stewardess engaged to Bernard.

**Gabriella:** An Italian airline stewardess who is engaged to Bernard as well.

**Gretchen:** A German airline stewardess, also engaged to Bernard.

## Summary of BOEING BOEING

**Setting:** The living room of Bernard's flat in Paris with doors leading to various bedrooms, a bathroom and a hallway to the front door and other areas of the flat.

**Time:** A spring day in the 1960s

### ACT I

Bernard, a middle-aged American architect living in Paris, has three fiancées with different nationalities: Italian, German and American. He is able to entertain them all in his flat, albeit at different times, due to the fact that each of them is an airline stewardess with different layover times in Paris. At the opening of the play it is Gloria, the American working for TWA, who is in town. During breakfast with Bernard, she irritates his French housekeeper, Berthe, by requesting another pancake with ketchup. Bernard, who expects his Italian fiancée to be landing soon in Paris, urges Gloria to hurry up so she will not miss her next flight out, departing in an hour.

As Gloria is about to leave for the airport, Robert, an old friend of Bernard's from the States, arrives unexpectedly. The two men have not seen each other since their time at university 20 years ago. Robert is impressed that Bernard has such a "gorgeous" fiancée in Gloria, and hopes that he "can find something half as good". After Gloria leaves, Bernard makes drinks for himself and Robert. He brags that he not only has one fiancée, but three, and that he has no plans to marry any of them. This strikes Robert as highly immoral,

and he is shocked when Bernard suggests that he should do the same thing. Bernard then explains how easy it is to keep the women from meeting each other. He simply has to pay close attention to their flight schedules. He has given them all keys to the flat; but if two of them were in Paris simultaneously, he would simply spend the time with one woman in a hotel in the countryside and tell the other one that he will be away on business for a day or so.

Berthe is annoyed when told that Robert will be staying in one of the extra bedrooms while he is in Paris. That means much more work for her in addition to the constant going and coming of the three women in Bernard's life. "Now America's gone," she complains, "I've got to change the room for Italy and then make up the room properly after she's gone, before Germany gets here." She also has to change the women's photographs and adapt the cuisine depending on which nationality is there. Rather than argue with Berthe, Bernard reminds her that Gabriella, the Italian, will be arriving at any moment for lunch.

They hear the front door open and slam shut. It is Gabriella who enters wearing the Alitalia airline uniform. She runs to Bernard and kisses him warmly. "Have you behaved yourself, Darling?" she asks playfully. After being introduced to Robert, Gabriella goes to the bathroom to clean up a bit before having lunch. The telephone rings and Bernard picks it up. It is Gretchen, his German fiancée. She is calling to say that her flight has been delayed in Stuttgart and she will therefore be arriving in Paris at 11:00 p.m. instead of 7:00 p.m. that evening. As Bernard is hanging up, Gabriella returns from the bathroom. She wants to know who was on the telephone. "Was it another woman?" she asks suspiciously. Bernard, echoed by Robert, assures her it was a wrong number. "Come and eat. Italian cuisine today," Bernard says. He then follows Gabriella and Robert into the dining room.

### ACT II

Afternoon. Bernard has accompanied Gabriella, who had only a three hour stopover this time, back to the airport. Berthe is cleaning the master bedroom in preparation for Gretchen's arrival later that evening. The telephone rings in the living room. Berthe answers it. Gretchen is calling again to say there was another change of schedule. She is already in Paris, she says, and will be staying for three days this time, much longer than usual. "Well, then, see you soon,"

Berthe replies. After hanging up, she exclaims, "Mon Dieu! Trois jours avec l'Allemagne..." The doorbell rings. She makes another negative exclamation in French and answers the door.

Robert comes in with his luggage that he has picked up at the station. Berthe reluctantly directs him to one of the spare bedrooms. She is offended that he wants to go to his room right away rather than talk to her a bit. "Monsieur Bernard's exactly the same," she says. She then complains about how undervalued the work of a domestic servant is. She advises Robert to avoid taking up Bernard's lifestyle and to get married before he gets any older, "while you're still worth it", she says. Annoyed by her comments about his age, Robert thanks her for the advice and goes to his bedroom.

Gretchen bursts through the front door wearing her Lufthansa uniform. She is wild to see Bernard again and distraught when Berthe tells her that he has gone out on business. "I love him so much! Every time I come home I seem to love him more, and every time I go it just tears me to pieces!" she declares. "You're very intense, aren't you?" Berthe says. "I'm worse than that – I'm passion itself," Gretchen replies. She then goes to the master bedroom to await Bernard's return.

When Berthe has left the living room, Robert appears and goes to the bathroom to wash his face. He returns to the living room with a towel and some of Bernard's aftershave, which he accidentally sprays in his eyes. He sits down with the towel over his head to remove the aftershave. Gretchen comes out of the master bedroom. Believing Robert to be Bernard, she throws herself on top of him and kisses him passionately. She quickly realizes her mistake and apologizes to Robert profusely. But he obviously enjoyed it and asks her to do it again. She categorically refuses, saying that her German soul would regret betraying Bernard for the rest of her life. She returns to the master bedroom and shuts the door.

Bernard and Gabriella come back from the airport. There was a change in her flight schedule and she can now stay overnight in Paris with Bernard. He has been trying in vain to persuade her to spend the night with him elsewhere. When she heads for the master bedroom, Robert, aware that Gretchen is already in there, shouts "No!" and blocks the door. Gabriella and Bernard are confused, unable to understand Robert's behaviour. He frantically tries to signal Bernard

that Gretchen is in the master bedroom, but Bernard and Gabriella just get more and more upset with him for blocking the door. Robert finally claims that he has already unpacked some "personal things" in there which would embarrass Gabriella if she saw them. She gives up and goes into another bedroom angrily slamming the door.

Whereupon Gretchen comes out of the master bedroom on her way to the bathroom to take a bath. Seeing Bernard, she throws herself at him. "Bernard lieblich! You're back!" she exclaims. Realizing now the reason for Robert's strange behaviour, Bernard kisses Gretchen quickly and tells her he has to go out again for a short while. He then pushes her into the bathroom and closes the door just before Gabriella, still angry at Robert, comes out of the guest bedroom. With much cajoling, Bernard is able to persuade the stubborn Gabriella to stay overnight with him in a hotel in the countryside. After she and Bernard have left the flat, the telephone rings. Berthe, who has nearly reached the breaking point with all the chaos in the flat, answers the phone. It is Gloria, Bernard's American fiancée, with a message for him. Due to a storm over the Atlantic her flight has turned back, so she will be spending the night in Paris after all. After hanging up the phone, Berthe turns to Robert and says, "We're in for a bumpy night."

### ACT III

Evening. Gretchen and Robert come in from the dining room. He is complaining that the sauerkraut they had for dinner was heavy on the digestion. "Absolutely not!" Gretchen declares, irritated that he seems to be denigrating German food. She also appears to be upset because he betrayed Bernard by flirting with her all through dinner. Robert admits that he is romantically obsessed with her and attempts to kiss her. She pushes him away and goes into the master bedroom.

Berthe reminds Robert that the American will be there soon and that he, in Monsieur's absence, will have to deal with her. Gloria soon arrives. Berthe tells her that Monsieur had to go out on business again, but will be back soon. When Gloria heads for the master bedroom to get out of her uniform, Robert springs into action, blocking Gloria from entering the bedroom and discovering Gretchen in there. He tells Gloria that Bernard said he could have the room. She points out that in America, where she comes from, the woman of the house gives such orders, not

the man. “Well, in France, it’s the man who gives the orders,” Robert replies. When Berthe totally agrees with him, Gloria vows to pursue the matter further with Robert after she grabs a bite to eat. She and Berthe then go to the kitchen.

Gretchen comes out of the master bedroom. She informs Robert that she is going to take a walk. He insists on going with her, but she forbids him to accompany her and leaves the flat.

Gloria returns from the kitchen prepared to pursue the matter about women giving the orders in the household. She tells Robert that America is such a great country because this is the case. It gives men time to concentrate on producing the money that ensures a stable economy, she points out. In addition, women in America can get a divorce in six weeks, and if the man does not pay alimony, he goes to jail. Although she loves Bernard, she could never marry him, she says, because she would then have to live in Paris where women do not have the same favorable set-up.

Bernard returns home without Gabriella. She was so infuriated at being forced to leave the flat, and suspicious that he was hiding something from her, that she made a scene in the hotel restaurant and walked out on him. Bernard is now alarmed to see Gloria in the flat. Assuming that Gretchen is there as well, he tries to get Gloria to spend the night with him elsewhere. But she is tired, she says, and insists on remaining there. The front door is heard slamming shut in the hallway. Is it Gabriella? Bernard quickly drags Gloria with him into the only spare bedroom that is still available.

Gabriella bursts angrily into the living room looking for Bernard. After being told he is not there, she calms down a bit. Near tears, she tells Robert how much she loves Bernard and wishes he would marry her so they could always be together. She then says goodnight and goes to her bedroom.

Bernard comes back into the living room and is informed by Robert that Gretchen could return from her walk at any moment. Realizing that both Gabriella and Gloria could come out of their bedrooms at any moment as well, Bernard panics. As Robert tries to calm him down, Gretchen appears. She says that on her walk she realized that she really enjoyed kissing Robert, in spite of her protests at the time. And now, rather than being dishonest to Bernard, she feels it is her

duty to tell him that she likes Robert more than him. Robert is overjoyed. As Bernard tries to come to grips with this blow, Gabriella enters the living room. She immediately demands to know who the strange woman (Gretchen) is. Grasping for an answer, Bernard blurts out, “Robert’s fiancée”. Relieved by the news, Gabriella tells Gretchen proudly that she is engaged to Bernard and gets him to confirm that they will soon be getting married. Although taken aback by this revelation, Gretchen seems willing to forgive Bernard’s cheating on her and remain silent about it. Both women say they are exhausted. They go to their respective bedrooms after being promised by the men to join them shortly.

Berthe comes into the living room dressed in her coat and carrying a suitcase. She can no longer cope, she says, with the stress of dealing with three women in the household, and is therefore giving him her notice. As he tries to persuade her to continue working for him, Gloria appears wanting to know when Bernard is coming to bed. Berthe takes this opportunity to give Gloria a letter which arrived for her earlier. It turns out to be from a Mexican millionaire, whom Gloria has also been seeing, asking her to marry him and to join him right away in Acapulco. Bernard is appalled that Gloria has had another man in her life besides him. “I’m with the guy that marries me first,” she tells him. Soon thereafter, she kisses both Bernard and Robert affectionately and leaves to catch the next flight to Mexico.

Having observed Gloria’s final departure, and after being assured that Robert is taking Gretchen off Bernard’s hands, Berthe sees that a maid’s life could get a bit easier in the flat with just one woman, Gabriella, to cope with. She agrees to stay with Bernard after being promised a forty percent raise in her wages.

After Berthe has left the living room, the telephone rings. Bernard answers it. The call is from an employee at the airport offering to introduce him to another airline stewardess—this time, a former Samba queen from Brazil. Bernard refuses to accept the offer, explaining that he will soon be getting married. But Robert, who has been listening to the conversation, tells Bernard to get the Brazilian’s details for him. Bernard cannot believe that his friend really wants to start doing what he has been doing. He nevertheless hands the phone to Robert and tells him to talk to the employee himself. Bernard then goes to the kitchen. As Robert is speaking on the phone he is

interrupted by Gretchen who appears at her bedroom door in a sexy nightdress. She tells him that she will never again be able to fall asleep without him wishing her a goodnight. After which she disappears into the bedroom closing the door. Robert, looking at the door, tells the man on the phone that he has changed his mind and will not need his services after all.

Bernard returns from the kitchen with two bottles of champagne. He gives Robert one of the bottles and suggests that they join Gabriella and

Gretchen in their bedrooms. The men knock on the bedroom doors which are quickly opened by the two women. Both Gretchen and Gabriella kiss their respective partners but refuse to let them enter the bedrooms. "We take marriage very seriously in Germany," Gretchen says to Robert. She is followed by Gabriella who says to Bernard, "We should think about these things, now that we're going to be married." Both women then close their bedroom doors, leaving the men to drink the champagne without them.

### Multiple Choice Exercise

1. BOEING BOEING is a (a. drama, b. farce, c. thriller).
2. The play takes place in (a. New York, b. London, c. Paris).
3. Bernard has (a. two, b. three, c. four) fiancées of different nationalities.
4. Berthe, Bernard's housekeeper, is (a. frustrated with her job, b. enjoys cooking various cuisines, c. has plenty of time to relax in Bernard's household).
5. The American airline stewardess, Gloria, likes (a. ketchup, b. whipping cream, c. maple syrup) on her pancakes.
6. Robert is (a. an old school friend, b. a neighbor, c. a business associate) of Bernard's.
7. The Italian airline stewardess, Gabriella, refuses to (a. marry Bernard, b. eat Italian cuisine, c. stay overnight in a hotel).
8. Robert falls in love with (a. Gloria, b. Gabriella, c. Gretchen).
9. Gloria leaves Bernard to marry a man in (a. the United States, b. Mexico, c. Canada).
10. Bernard ends up planning to marry (a. Gabriella, b. Gretchen, c. Berthe).

Answer Key:

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

### Interpretative Exercise

1. Describe Bernard's lifestyle and why his housekeeper Berthe has problems coping with it.
2. Why do you think that farces such as BOEING BOEING are so popular with audiences? Do you prefer farces to other genres such as dramas, thrillers or comedy-dramas? Explain why, or why not.