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PARIS

n o t e s

Euro April 11: .770
Euro March 9: .746
Rain Days: 14
High Temp: 68°F/20°C
Low Temp: 49°F/9°C
Nat'l Holidays: May 1, 5, 8, 16

MAY 2005

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ROYAL TREATMENT

By Vivian Thomas

The Palais Royal has changed little since the 1780s, when it was the city's fashionable heart

The moving men have gone. The stepladder has been folded away. And my friends, climbing one by one up the old staircase ... look out over the gardens of the Palais Royal and say to me: 'Ah! So you've found another country home.'

So wrote Colette from her new apartment overlooking the lawns, flowerbeds and arcades of her secret garden, the Palais Royal. Standing in that same garden today, I look up at her windows and can easily imagine her pale face, with its broad cheekbones, heavily made-up eyes and cloud of frizzy hair, looking down.

"Paris is not very familiar with Paris," Colette noted when she moved here in the 1920s. "So the gardens are known and frequented only by residents and immediate neighbors." It's not much different today. Crowds surge past on the Rue St-Honoré without suspecting that behind the Comédie Française and the imposing Conseil d'Etat lies a tranquil garden where the loudest sounds are the splash of a fountain, the chirping of sparrows and the happy cries of children playing in a sandbox. Its seclusion is ensured by the narrowness of its entrances; although there are many, not one gives a hint of what's inside, and this secrecy is part of its charm.

Physically, the Palais Royal has hardly changed at all since the 1780s, when its arcades were new and it was the city's fashionable heart. By the end of that decade it had become the birthplace of the Revolution. However, as the name implies, it was royal before it was Revolutionary, and its story starts with another famous French R: Richelieu.

Appointed prime minister to Louis XIII in 1624, the worldly cardinal began buying up land and houses near the king's residence at the Louvre. In 1629 he chose the architect Lescot to build him a sumptuous palace on the site of today's Conseil d'Etat on the Rue St-Honoré. Called the Palais Cardinal, it was a showplace for his art collection and library, with a grand theater in the Italian style. Its gardens were the most extensive and beautiful in Paris, with flowerbeds, statues and fountains arranged between double

rows of chestnut trees.

Although the centuries have destroyed nearly everything of Richelieu's palace, an interesting vestige remains. Enter the Palais Royal between the Café Le Nemours and the Comédie Française (south end), and you'll be in a large courtyard adorned by black and white columns. Cross to the wall on the right, and you'll see Richelieu's



Galerie des Proues, named for the sculpted ships' prows jutting from the wall. With their fierce faces and ramming devices, these warship prows are a reminder that the cardinal was also Minister of the Navy.

Richelieu died in 1642, leaving his palace to the king. When Louis XIII died a year later, his widow, Anne, left the uncomfortable Louvre and moved with her two sons into Richelieu's magnificent residence, changing its name to the Palais Royal. Louis XIV was five years old, his brother Philippe was three, and the gardens became their playground. The property was larger then, bounded by the Rue de Richelieu, Rue des Petits-Champs and Rue des Bons-Enfants, and the north end was wooded. The boys were left largely to their own devices—the future Sun King almost drowned one day in a fountain. He and his brother learned to ride here, were trained in sports and sharpened their military skills in their own miniature fort.

This idyll came to an end with the 1650

uprising called the Fronde. On two occasions, Anne, her sons and Cardinal Mazarin, warned about plots against the young king, fled at night to St-Germain-en-Laye. When the uprising finally ended in 1652 the royal family returned to Paris, but this time to the Louvre, which was easier to defend. Louis' lifelong distrust of Paris dates from this period; once he built Versailles he spent little time in the capital. For a while the palace housed royal relatives, and Molière entertained in Richelieu's theater until he collapsed onstage during a performance of "Le Malade Imaginaire" and died shortly afterward. In 1692 the king gave the Palais Royal to his brother, now Duc d'Orléans, and his heirs.

Passing through the hands of successive dukes, the refurbished palace became the scene of fabulous fêtes and famous suppers for intimates and mistresses. We owe the look of today's Palais Royal to the lavish lifestyle of its last owner before the Revolution, Louis-Philippe-Joseph. A gambler and big spender, he was so heavily in debt by 1780 that he hatched a building scheme that turned the property into an income-generating asset.

On three sides of the garden, he built rental pavilions. The ground floor was divided into sixty units, each with three arcades. Above these were apartments, some used by ground-floor businesses, others as dwellings. The project reduced the garden area by one-third; it also created three new streets: the rues de Montpensier, Beaujolais and Valois. The galleries were given the same names, and each of the 180 arcades was numbered. Those numbers are still used today. On the fourth side was a wooden gallery.

Luxury businesses eager to cash in on the city's new center of attraction quickly signed leases, and soon all of Paris flocked here to stroll, shop, see and be seen. Shops, cafés and the city's finest restaurants weren't the only businesses to move in; so did hairdressers, theaters, a riding school and a wax museum. In good weather café tables spilled out of the arcades into the garden.

When Thomas Jef- (continued on page 7)



As you will read in Petites Notes, City Hall is pushing a project to all but eliminate cars and buses from the city's center arrondissements. I question whether such a move would improve the city. While fewer cars would certainly be welcomed, having no cars would risk taking some of the life out of this very vibrant area and might make it more of a museum than a vital downtown.

I have not agreed with a lot of Mayor Delanoë's programs during his four years as mayor (Nuit Blanche and Paris Plage come to mind). I am not a resident of the city, so my opinion carries little weight, but before any city-center-shutdown project commences, I would like to see the mayor revisit an unrealized project that would improve the city—for visitors and residents alike—even more.

The previous mayor, Jean Tiberi, although shredded politically, got a lot right. Towards the end of his term, the City was building an uninterrupted, 7.5-mile walkway along the Seine (you can make the same walk today, but with a lot of confusing segues), from the Parc André-Citroën (15th) to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (13th). On Unesco's World Heritage List since 1991, the banks of the Seine are Paris' greatest single asset. The walkway that Mayor Tiberi was building would have cleared a special path to stroll on, with resting benches, refreshment stands, history placards, bathrooms, direction markers and many more trees. My guess is that had this project been realized, it would have quickly surpassed the Eiffel Tower as Paris' biggest attraction.

So why did the project get nixed? Politics, of course. It was Mayor Tiberi's project and not Mayor Delanoë's, and this mayor has presidential aspirations. So, he just couldn't walk the walk.

—Mark Eversman, Editor
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City Center Plans

The worst kept secret in City Hall most recently has been the mayor's plan for the "Allègement de la circulation dans les quartiers centraux." In short, this is a seven-year plan in three steps to rid the center of Paris of cars, trucks and tourist buses, and to promote alternative, "green" forms of transportation. Coincidentally (perhaps not), the plan would be completed in 2012, when Paris would be hosting the Summer Olympics, should Paris be chosen. The area concerned goes east-west from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la Concorde, and north-south from the Grands Boulevards (Blvd des Capucines, Blvd Montmartre, Blvd Poissonnière, etc.) to the banks of the Seine. This represents the outer perimeter of the 1st through 4th arrondissements (about two square miles). It's 6.5 percent of the city's area, home to 4.8 percent of its population (102,000 people) and the location of 11.5 percent of its jobs. The plan would be gradual: the first phase would include closing off several major streets, drastically increasing public parking rates (3E per hour), reducing all speed limits to about twenty miles per hour and building new bus lanes. This phase would be completed in 2007-2009. Phase two (2009-2010) would include imposing new restrictions on non-resident car usage and prohibiting all cars from the area on Sundays. Phase three (2010-2012) would more or less prohibit all non-resident cars and tourist buses, and provide for the renovation of two major arteries, Rue de Rivoli (east-west) and Blvd de Sébastopol (north-south). Why has the mayor been hush-hush with this plan? A lot of people, including car owners, local merchants and a good number of residents, won't be happy about it.

She's Back

What a long, strange trip it's been. On April 6, La Joconde, to the French, or Mona Lisa, to us, made what the Louvre hopes was her final voyage, back to her digs in the Salle des Etats (Denon Wing). For the last four years, she was residing in the Salle Rosa, 250 yards away, so that the Salle des Etats could be renovated (paid for by Nippon Television). However, these conditions were inelegant and less than perfect for viewing—just ask any of the eighty percent of the Louvre's annual 6.6 million visitors who visited her. It is believed Da Vinci painted her between 1502 and 1506. He then took her to Milan, then Rome and then France. After Da Vinci died in 1519, King Francis I bought the painting from heirs. She saw Fontainebleau, the Louvre, Versailles and then the Louvre again. She spent a little while in Napoleon's apartments in the Tuileries. In

1911, she was stolen from the Louvre—the event that would make her famous—and was recovered in 1913. During WWII she saw five different locations. In 1963 she saw New York and Washington, D.C., and in 1974 Tokyo and Moscow (where the humidity from rain-soaked viewers damaged her). Now, says the Louvre, she will never travel again—she's too fragile. But, after a thorough scientific checkup, they have declared her to be in very good health. In her new climate-controlled, glass-enclosed viewing wall, she will be as pretty as ever, thanks to special lighting that will bring out her color and detail. Thankfully, two extra entrances have been added to the Salle des Etats (which also houses sixty-eight Venetian masterpieces) so that the throngs—hordes, maybe—of people will be able to come and go with some fluidity.

Author Ali Akbar

He's not famous, but if you lived in St-Germain-des-Prés, you'd probably know him by his first name. Ali Akbar, 52, is Paris' last "vendeur à la criée," or paper crier. He starts at 1pm with an armful of the latest Le Monde newspapers and makes the rounds of St-Germain, six days a week. On a good day he sells about eighty copies and earns about \$20. He goes through places like the Café de Flore or the Café des Deux Magots, using charm, humor and personality to sell his papers. He's known—and loved—for the comical and ironic headlines he makes up to get people's attention: "Bush Junior has a baby with Monica." The regulars know and love him; visitors get a laugh. Ali fled his home and abusive father in Pakistan at 18, and eventually made it to Paris. He was homeless for a time but now lives in the suburbs with his wife and five children. And now Ali has another job: author. Along with his Le Mondes he is now selling his new book: "Je Fais Rire Le Monde, Mais Le Monde Me Fait Pleurer" ("I Make the World Laugh, But the World Makes Me Cry").

Church News

- The newest Catholic church in Paris just opened. St-François de Molitor (44 Rue Molitor, 16th) is a small but striking modern structure, coated in white marble. It will serve a parish of about 1,500 members. St-Molitor is the 106th Catholic church in Paris.

- An impressive new organ (especially adapted to play German Baroque music) is now playing in the Eglise St-Louis-en-l'Île (Rue St-Louis-en-l'Île, on the Ile St-Louis). It took twenty-five thousand hours of work to build and install. It is the 131st monumental organ in Paris, which are all maintained by the City, and will be officially inaugurated in June.

• PARIS •
B I T E S
By Rosa Jackson

P
B In an ever more cosmopolitan world, few people want to eat the same style of cuisine every day—even when they are traveling. Our taste buds have come to crave variety, which nutritionists say is the key to staying healthy. That might explain why, during a visit to Japan, I was so happy to come across toast sprinkled with cinnamon sugar in a Kyoto café and to find cheeses shipped all the way from Fauchon in the perfect re-creation of a French wine bar.

That said, if I had to consume a single cuisine every day for the rest of my life, Japanese would be up there with Italian and, you guessed it, French. Nearly every Japanese meal I have in Paris brings me pleasure disproportionate to the actual ingredients. I'm not talking about the ubiquitous take-out sushi, which I find extremely suspect, but about soba noodles, teppanyaki, sushi prepared before my eyes by expert hands and sakana (the Japanese equivalent of tapas). It's not just the food I love but the ceremony—the Japanese, like the French, believe in selecting the finest ingredients, respecting the seasons, presenting the dish with artistry and savoring it with a certain amount of ritual.

Some of my favorites—Yen for soba noodles, Higuma and Sapporo for noodle soups—haven't changed since I last wrote about Japanese restaurants for Paris Notes, but last month I made two happy discoveries, the first quite by accident. By a strange twist of fate I found myself covering the fashion trade shows in and around the Tuileries gardens for a well-known fashion trade magazine. On the third wearying day, I was keeping myself going only by promising myself something really nice to eat at the end of it all.

Being in the 1st arrondissement, I was well placed to satisfy my growing sushi craving (which had absolutely nothing to do with hanging around really skinny people for days—I planned on topping off my meal with a French pastry). It was getting late for lunch, so when I saw the inviting wood façade of **Foujita 2** I went straight in and sat up at the sushi bar.

Here, surrounded by Japanese diners and one American woman who ordered a few unusual dishes without looking at the menu, I realized what a good choice I had made. Though the intriguing menu included one of my favorite Japanese dishes—tonkatsu, breaded, fried pork with a tangy dipping

Nearly every Japanese meal I have in Paris brings me pleasure disproportionate to the actual ingredients

sauce—I stuck to my original craving and ordered the lunchtime sushi menu (11E), which came with a small salad and miso soup. I watched the lightning-quick chef put together my order, which arrived within minutes on its wooden slab. Based on the price, I wasn't surprised to see the usual salmon, tuna and bream, but the fish were impeccably fresh, the squid was silky, and the chef had added just the right amount of wasabi (something sushi chefs skimp on when catering to French tastes). I'll go back someday to explore the menu further, but Foujita 2 turned out to be the perfect place for a quick and satisfying solo meal—you pay at the counter near the entrance, so you don't have to wait for the check.

A few days later, two friends asked me to pick our dinner destination. "I'm thinking of a friendly, casual bistro or café somewhere lovely and central," said one of these friends. Sounds easy, right? Except that I was calling to reserve on the day of our dinner, and my popular French picks were either booked up or wouldn't take a reservation for 8:30pm (in the interest of having two sittings).

Somewhere in the back of my mind I remembered having heard of a little Japanese restaurant in the Rue de la Montagne-Ste-Geneviève, near the Panthéon (which fit the "lovely" criterion). A friend had raved about it years ago, also mentioning its unique Parisian quirk: the chef, Kenji, repairs antique watches on the premises. Both my friends love Japanese food, and fate smiled upon us when I found that **Asia-Tée** was still there and would welcome us at 8:30pm.

Kenji's love of antiques extends to the furniture, with an eclectic collection of art deco chairs and a granny-style wooden buffet that avoid any Japanese clichés. Tables are draped in white linen but the atmosphere is laid-back, like the chef himself. We quickly discovered that Asia-Tée (which translates as Relais d'Asie) isn't the place for an Asian-style snack—the tasting menu that two of us ordered stretched out over a leisurely two hours. Given the extremely generous quantity of food for the modest price (30E), we were grateful.

The real surprise here is the originality of the food, which liberally borrows from the French repertoire. Kenji is an excellent sushi chef (though you can't see him at work), but the specialty here is sakana, small tasting dishes that are also available in full portions.

The menu changes every season, and in early spring we had plenty of tempting dishes to choose from, many of them based on ingredients such as scallops or foie gras.

Our meal started with amuses-bouches of crunchy little mini spring rolls, a single piece of sushi and a creamy-centered crab croquette. Then we enjoyed a warming bowl of miso soup, followed by our sakana. We started with a few flawless sushi and beautiful sashimi drizzled with sesame oil. Next up was an equally silky slice of foie gras mi-cuit—nothing very Japanese about it—and the same crab croquettes featured in the amuses-bouches (they were very good, but seeing them for the second time I wished I had ordered something different). Finally came chunks of slow-cooked pork belly in quince and raisin sauce, and seared scallops with brightly colored julienne vegetables. The originality continued through to a dessert of poached quince with praline ice cream.

Portions were far from tiny, and by the end of the meal we were struggling to finish our plates. The waiter seemed to take this as a compliment. The food itself wasn't especially refined, but that's not the intention of sakana, which in Japan would be eaten as tapas-style snacks in a bar.

The third member of our group ordered a selection of sushi, tempura, sashimi and grilled fish (26E). Although these items were as delicious as ours, they came all at once, whereas our meal unfolded at an unhurried pace.

Asia-Tée is in my neighborhood, yet if I hadn't remembered my friend's words I might never have noticed this discreet restaurant. It shows once again that Paris holds no end of surprises for those who keep their eyes and ears open.

•Foujita 2: 7 Rue du Vingt-Neuf-Juillet, 1st. Tel: 1-49-26-07-70.

•Asia-Tée: 47 Rue de la Montagne-Ste-Geneviève, 5th. Tel: 1-43-26-39-90.

Rosa Jackson's Edible Paris: Rosa now has a Paris restaurant reservation service to complement her custom-designed food itineraries service. She will provide personalized recommendations and make your reservations: \$15 per recommendation; \$25 for a recommendation and reservation (www.edible-paris.com).

MIDDLE AGELESS

More popular than ever, the Cluny sheds light on the “Dark Ages”

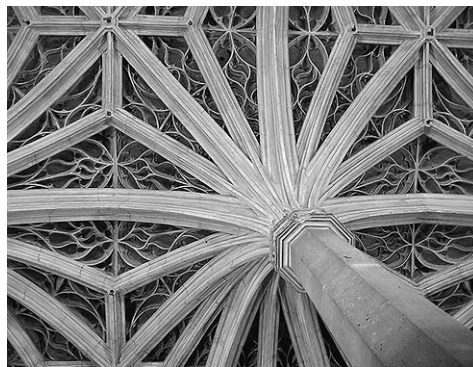
There is an abrupt visual fault line in the building that houses the Musée National du Moyen Age (the Cluny Museum). Just behind the tree dominating the gardens along its Boulevard St-Germain façade, a series of rounded Roman arches suddenly gives way to a pointed Gothic one. This shift from squat to soaring marks the meeting of two structures, where the vestiges of first-century Gallo-Roman baths are joined to the fifteenth-century residence of the Benedictine Abbots from Cluny. The shift also marks a symbolic opposition between two periods of Parisian history. It is where the classical antiquity of Lutetia, or Roman Paris, confronts the medieval spirituality of Gothic Paris. Even the buildings’ functions seem to confirm this contrary vision. The Roman baths were once an incredibly opulent (think lobby of a four-star hotel) but public leisure space where classes and genders mixed freely. The Cluny mansion, by contrast, was the private mansion and strategic base from which a powerful religious order exerted spiritual influence on the royal court.

Today, the collection housed inside those two buildings covers the sprawling thousand-year period separating the different cultures that built them. It’s called the Middle Ages (the fifth through fifteenth centuries) but like many terms we use in history, it conveys the value judgments of the historians who coined them. “Middle” suggests a static waiting period between two more refined epochs, classical culture and its subsequent “rebirth” (i.e., Renaissance). The incredible sophistication of the 20,000 objects in the Cluny’s collection reveals how deeply flawed that persistently popular notion is. Once inside the museum, visitors tend to forget negative stereotypes of “Dark Ages”—when blind faith prevailed over reason, and when an exclusive concern for life after death meant life on earth was a pious and joyless chore. Now that the Middle Ages are enjoying something of a Renaissance in twenty-first-century Paris, more of those visitors are making that same discovery. For the past two spring seasons, both of the Louvre’s major exhibitions have been devoted to medieval art, contributing to increased attendance at the Cluny and a renewed appreciation for this complex period.

In the early nineteenth century, when Alexandre Du Sommerard began the private collection that would serve as the Cluny’s nucleus, museums weren’t collecting or even exhibiting medieval art. Du Sommerard, however, was an open-minded history buff with a day job at the State’s Audit Office. Nothing too banal or bizarre was beyond his collecting interests. The unusual relics you see in the Cluny today—including fifteenth-century shoes, children’s toys and the thirteenth-century iron molds used to make Eucharist wafers—speak to his passion for the vivid details of everyday life. By 1832, Du Sommerard’s collection had grown enough that it needed to be housed in rented space in the Cluny mansion’s chapel. This was the birth

of today’s museum, made official by the State’s subsequent purchase of his collection and the entire Cluny mansion containing them. On the day of the museum’s grand opening—March 17, 1844—twelve thousand Parisians waited hours in line to get a glimpse Du Sommerard’s treasures. The staggering success of the new museum meant that his son Edmond, its first curator, easily found funds to increase the collections tenfold.

Despite their popularity in 1844, some of the same religious artifacts that Parisians lined up to see were considered politically suspect just fifty years before. In gallery 8 of today’s museum you will find the Heads of the Kings of Judah from Notre Dame Cathedral. These thirteenth-century sculpted heads are all that remain of twenty-eight colossal statues that once filled a gallery above the cathedral’s massive portals (the statues there



now are nineteenth-century replicas). In the heady days of Revolutionary revolt, images that seemed to glorify royalty, even kings from distant Judah, were targets of state-sponsored destruction. The new Revolutionary government ordered the statues torn down and sold off for building stone. These heads were secretly salvaged and buried in 1796 by a royalist sympathizer with a long view of history. The heads were accidentally rediscovered in 1977 during construction work on the Rue de la Chaussée-d’Antin. Although they have suffered damage, the skilled technique of medieval Parisian sculptors is still evident in the subtle details of wavy hair and beards and slightly open, expressive mouths. Some of the heads even show traces of bright paint that would have animated all of the cathedral sculpture, helping us visualize how different Notre Dame would have looked decked out in vivid hues of reds, blues and greens. Nearby, a torso of an Apostle (c. 1210) from one of the portals at Notre Dame tells the same tale of destruction by zealous Revolutionaries. It also reminds us that Parisian sculptors knew classical culture thoroughly. The apostle’s naturalistic sense of movement, as well as the grace of his drapery’s folds, rival those of a second-century Roman sculpture known as Julian the Apostate, next door in gallery 9 (the former Frigidarium of the baths).

The Cluny’s collection makes clear that medi-

eval art could be both religious and worldly. Culture was not closed to history or to other so-called “pagan” influences. Look for a set of twelfth-century carved capitals in gallery 10. These detailed scenes originally crowned the massive columns inside the Abbey Ste-Geneviève (where the Pantheon stands today). They have surprisingly sensual subjects, such as the nude figure carrying a vase representing Aquarius. Astrology is just one of the many profane subjects we find in art made for religious spaces. As is still the case today, the area around the Abbey was the intellectual center of medieval Paris. Its sculptural decoration reflects an urbane and broad-minded outlook.

Every nook and cranny of this quirky museum contains another revelation and stereotype-buster about medieval culture. In gallery 12 you’ll find a fascinating collection of lead badges collected by medieval travelers and discovered later in the River Seine. These were worn as proof of having made the journey to Europe’s great pilgrimage sites (think today’s souvenir shopping). The accompanying molds used to manufacture them suggest a robust tourism industry, flourishing as early as the fourteenth century. One naughty badge shows three phallic figures carrying a statue of a woman’s sex, a ribald satire of the Catholic cult of saints’ relics. Where did our notion of medieval “serfs” with a humorless devotion to an all-powerful church come from, anyway? For both lay and religious alike, striving toward the divine was not undertaken without a healthy dose of humor. Underneath the choir stall perches used by priests—like those currently installed in the jewel-like chapel upstairs (gallery 20)—you’ll find comical carvings of pigs playing the church organ, self-mocking caricatures of the priests themselves.

Even in a period where questions of spirituality reigned supreme, the pull of more worldly attractions remained just as intense. This tension is the central message in the Cluny’s most famous and enigmatic work of art, *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries (gallery 13). Five of the tapestries evoke the five senses. The lady playing the organ, for example, represents sound. In the sixth tapestry, we see the same woman putting her luxurious jewelry away, as she prepares to enter a tent poetically marked “To my only desire.” In renouncing the more immediately gratifying world of superficial delights, she obtains this superior “desire”—the sixth invisible sense of heart-felt understanding. The tapestries pay homage to sensual pleasures then, even as they point to their spiritual limitations. Today’s visitors may find this message as relevant in 2005 as it was in 1500, when a Parisian artist designed them. The challenges and preoccupations of this “pre-modern” culture, as it turns out, do not seem so remote from our own.

•Musée National du Moyen Age, Therme de Cluny: 6 Place Paul-Painlevé, 5th. Open: Wed-Mon, 9:15am-5:45pm. Site: www.musee-moyenage.fr.

—By Ellen McBreen

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O Chateau

By Paul B. Franklin

When it comes to wine, most of us are too sheepish to admit how little we actually know. While imbibing breeds likes and dislikes—Pinot Noir for some, Chardonnay for others—choosing a good bottle can be a befuddling chore. Trying to comprehend the mysterious alchemy of viticulture is even more vexing. Wine connoisseur Olivier Magny intends to change that. Last June, he created O Chateau, which offers intimate, informative and entertaining wine tastings. Whether you're a novice or an aficionado, the affable Magny will guide you on a journey of discovery, imparting his passion and enhancing your appreciation for France's beloved beverage.

The young entrepreneur—he's only twenty-four—spent vacations romping vineyard-packed Beaujolais, before deciding to spread the word about French wine. With O Chateau, Magny hopes to demystify the sacred brew of Dionysus. "Enjoyment should be the main focus of wine drinking," he admits, "and it doesn't have to be expensive." He lives up to these credos in all of O Chateau's wine-tasting experiences, each conducted in his impeccable English. French Wine Discovery (40E/person, 1.5 hours) provides an introduction to five quality but reasonably priced wines. Magny hosts this tasting in a magnificent medieval venue (now a Marais restaurant) that once served as a royal cellar. Here, you'll learn wine basics (proper tasting techniques, the enologist's lexicon) and receive tips on choosing wines, while tickling your palate and training your nose. With Plaisirs du Vin (50E/person, 2 hours), you'll savor seven wines from across the country. As you sip, Magny will explain the winemaking process (oxidation vs. fermentation, sweetness vs. acidity, how whites get white and reds red). He'll describe the vital role local "terroirs" play in generating personality in each bottle. He'll also teach you how to evaluate the characteristics of a vintage through its appearance, flavor and aroma; how to decipher labels; and how to pair certain types of wines with various foods—all in an uncomplicated, breezy manner. Plaisirs du Vin

takes place on the upper floor of a classic Parisian brasserie near the Hôtel de Ville.

For those who prefer a more focused experience, O Chateau proposes three additional options (available upon request). During BBC (75E/person, 2 hours), as in Bordeaux, Burgundy and Champagne, you'll encounter six outstanding wines from these three prestigious regions. Cheese and Wine (80E/person, 2 hours) explores the gastronomic chemistry of this consummate combination through five different varieties of "fromage" and "vin." Champagne (95E/person, 2 hours) speaks for itself. Magny will introduce you to five superior examples of this legendary libation. He'll reveal champagne's secrets (where do those bubbles come from?) and will supply you with the tools to appraise its unique properties. These specialty tastings are held at a quaint restaurant in the thick of St-Germain-des-Prés.

O Chateau tastings are limited to twenty people. And Magny personally chooses all the wines. Most are from modest French vineyards and cost, astonishingly, only 10E to 15E a bottle. Although these wines are unavailable on foreign markets, samples may be purchased after each tasting.

Magny possesses a refreshing mix of intelligence and unpretentiousness. Down to earth, he puts everyone at ease; his charisma is captivating. The ambiance he fosters during tastings is friendly and fun, but occasionally a trifle too informal. Before you leave, you'll receive a cheat sheet, which will come in handy the next time you're out to eat or at the wine shop. But most importantly, you'll go home confident and conversant, perhaps even impassioned, ready to share wine's pleasures with friends and family.

• O Chateau: 39 Ave du Dr-Arnold-Netter, 12th. Tel: 1-44-73-97-80. E-mail: contact@o-chateau.com. Site: www.o-chateau.com.



▲ PARIS VISITS ▼

City Walks of Paris

By Ethan Gilsdorf

On an unseasonably warm Saturday afternoon in mid-March, ten strangers assembled at the Hôtel de Ville plaza (4th). The group was as diverse as any random selection of Paris visitors: six Americans (from Connecticut, Florida, Maryland and New York City), two Peruvians and two British.

At first, what united them was only a desire to understand the history of these city streets. By the time this walking tour was over, these strangers also came to know each other a little bit better, too. "As we walk from stop to stop, you have to talk to people you haven't talked to before," said Connie Kubicek, our City Walks of Paris guide. She led the group on a two-and-a-half-hour amble, punctuated by historical and cultural anecdotes as well as by juicy tidbits of gossip from the Marais' royal heyday.

A "personalized and friendly approach" is the strategy of City Walks of Paris (formerly known as Walks of Paris), the latest company offering pedestrian tours of popular Parisian neighborhoods. "We are the twelfth company, in terms of Anglo-speaking walking tours," said David Mebane, who also owns two other related tour companies, Fat Tire Bike Tours (www.fattirebiketoursparis.com) and City Segway Tours (www.parissegwaytours.com). Both ambitious and market savvy, Mebane said he added the walking tours this year to build on his already burgeoning Paris tour business. "It's the natural progression. We want to be the Wal-Mart of Paris tours," Mebane said. According to Mebane, what sets his walking tours apart from the competition is his attention to American-style customer service. "The easiest thing I learned in marketing class is give customers what they want. No one wants to see the bottom of the 15th arrondissement, or the Place d'Italie."

Hence, City Walks of Paris' emphasis on well-known areas of Paris: the Marais, Montmartre and the Latin Quarter. To this basic menu of \$16 tours, Mebane has added more expensive choices: a Da Vinci Code tour (\$33.50

and a wine tasting experience (\$65). Customers can reserve City Walks of Paris tours in advance, or they can simply arrive at the meeting point as "walk ons" (though both the Da Vinci and wine tours do require advance booking).

His overall approach is to be informative without smothering his clients with endless detail. "We don't look over our 'professor glasses' at our clients, and we don't overwhelm them with Louis-the-whatever. We focus on anecdotes and interesting facts." Mebane scouts the walking routes and gives each of his guides basic background info, but it's up to someone like three-year Paris veteran Connie Kubicek to weave the material into a coherent story that reflects what she finds most intriguing.

"That's the thing with these tours," Kubicek said. "What do you choose to fill two-and-a-half hours?" Because Kubicek studied art history, her tours tend to focus more on architectural details, such as the location of a cannonball still lodged in the stone wall of a Marais hôtel particulier. But other guides might lean more towards World War II history or literary figures.

Even a Paris expert is bound to learn something new on one of the tours, such as Kubicek's explanation for why the Pompidou Center is painted in the four primary colors: red, blue, green and yellow. (To find out, take her tour.) By the time the tour ended, customers seemed to have appreciated not only the content of Kubicek's walk but also the camaraderie she helped create. "I really wish I could have done this on my first day or two in Paris," said Susan Dunigan, one of the tour participants. "This helps you meet people and get oriented."

• City Walks of Paris: 24 Rue Edgar Faure, 15th. Tel: 1-56-58-10-54. Site: www.citywalksofparis.com.



FLEURS-DE-LIS SEARCH

The ubiquitous symbol of French royalty really isn't a lily, it's an iris

It began as a game, a kind of scavenger hunt. The day was rainy, and we decided to do something indoors. Something unusual. We'd look for original examples of that symbol of royalty, the "fleur-de-lis." Whoever got the most would win.

It seemed easy enough—surely there would be scads of fleurs-de-lis all over Paris? Well, yes and no. After ruling out examples from the City of Paris' omnipresent coat of arms (where Charles V emphatically placed them, following the bloody and almost-successful revolt of 1357), we quickly realized that the Revolutionaries of 1789 had done a job on anything that bore even a whiff of royalty. "Off with his head!" had been accompanied by an equally frenzied rampage through palaces, churches and cloisters, all with the intent of destroying anything and everything connected with the hated French crown.

Well, then. Where to begin? I had an idea, and promptly led my husband to the oldest haunt of royalty in Paris, the Palais de Justice (1st). Roman and Merovingian rulers had built their palaces on this site, at the western end of the Ile de la Cité, and Capetian monarchs took up residence here under Louis the Fat. Philip the Fair replaced the old palace with a new one, which Charles V just as promptly vacated after the above-mentioned revolt of 1357. After that, the portion known as the Conciergerie became a notorious prison, incarcerating some of the most well-known prisoners of the day—Queen Marie Antoinette was the most famous of the lot.

To my chagrin, my husband spotted the first fleur-de-lis—on the clock tower at the corner of the Quai de l'Horloge. "My," I commented enviously, "there are fleurs-de-lis all over that." And indeed there were. Charles V, when he built this clock in 1370 (the oldest in Paris), made sure to stamp his royal emblem across the entire clock face as well as on the coat of arms at the top. "Well done," I added. "But don't think you can count every one of those guys. Everything on the clock counts together as one."

My husband (who was busy holding the umbrella) readily agreed, and the next prize was mine—the top of the entrance gate to the Palais de Justice. And then the competition fell apart as we began to spot fleurs-de-lis everywhere: along the gate, on top of the gate and above the entrance. "I suspect we haven't seen anything yet, though," I murmured, as we headed for my original destination, the tiny jewel box of Ste-Chapelle.

Ste-Chapelle, it is safe to say, was our prize. Built by Louis IX (St-Louis) to house the precious Crown of Thorns and other relics he had brought back to Paris, Ste-Chapelle is a virtual reliquary, covered with fleurs-de-lis and castles (the castles being the emblem of Louis' mother, Blanche of Castile). There they are, around the entrance.

There they are, as well, on every pillar and across the deep blue ceiling, like so many gold stars on a deep, dark night.

And that is just the ground floor, the place where the servants worshipped. Upstairs, where Louis' architect got serious, the windows shimmer with holy light, and the royal fleur-de-lis is stamped on every surface, in an acknowledgment of the easy relationship between the King of Heaven and the King of France. You'll probably catch the fleurs-de-lis on the pillars and the walls, as well as in the decorative background of those remarkable stained glass windows. But, overwhelmed by the windows, you may not see the royal symbol inlaid in the stone pavement beneath your feet.

Well, that was a humdinger, but we were not about to call an end to our treasure hunt. I want-



ed to see what the Sun King, Louis XIV, had done with the fleur-de-lis as a symbol of royal power. I remembered some good examples at Versailles, but the one I wanted in Paris lay inside the Louvre. Ducking a sudden shower, we made a beeline for Gallery 34 on the 2nd floor of the Sully Wing, and found our prize. There stood Louis, in all his pompous magnificence, fairly surrounded by fleurs-de-lis. "Aha!" I remarked, as we drew up to the famous portrait and took stock. "Look at that." And, sure enough, there were golden fleurs-de-lis all over his ermine-lined blue velvet robe, as well as on the heavy gold frame.

"How's that for over-the-top opulence?" I asked my husband, who simply remarked that he didn't much care for Louis' high-heeled shoes. "Fashion gone berserk," he added.

"Well, I think you'll like the next on our list of prospects," I promised, as I led him towards Gallery 4 on the 1st floor of the Richelieu Wing. There, the star is the scepter of Charles V, complete with a fine fleur-de-lis. It would have made a lovely addition to our list, except for the fact that it was gone—missing from action until 2006. We'll try again in a year or so.

In the meantime, the sun had come out, and we were ready to try our luck out of doors. This being a beautiful spring month, we headed for the Parc Floral de Paris, in the Bois de Vincennes,

where we were fortunate enough to find the park's extraordinary display of iris in full bloom. I've always adored irises, and the Parc Floral's collection is truly magnificent—thousands of plants in a mind-boggling array of species, textures and colors. Wandering among these exquisite blooms, I was in heaven.

But my husband was puzzled. "They're gorgeous," he agreed. "But what does this have to do with fleurs-de-lis? Isn't a fleur-de-lis a lily?"

I shook my head. I knew that "lis" or "lys" meant "lily," but deep in my heart I had always believed that the fleur-de-lis was modeled on that most royal of flowers, the iris. And, as it turned out, I was right. According to the experts at the Parc Floral, the shape that we call the "fleur-de-lis" is a stylized iris.

Well, then, challenged my husband, why didn't they call it a "fleur d'iris" to begin with, and save all the confusion? I had to admit that he had a point, but the Parc Floral guys had an answer to that one, too. It turns out that, back in the twelfth century, the iris was the royal emblem of Louis VII. His son, Philip Augustus, continued using it, and eventually a "Fleur de Louys" (fleur de Louis) became a "Fleur de Loys" and then a "Fleur de Lys."

"Hmmm," said my husband. "I guess that could happen over eight centuries. But it still seems sort of odd."

"Tell you what," I interrupted. "How about looking for other royal emblems? Like Francis I's salamander? There's a great sixteenth-century salamander carved over a doorway on Rue de l'Hirondelle ..."

"Or how about staying right where we are, and enjoying all this spring beauty?" he suggested.

"Good point," I agreed. And we did.

Note: For treasure hunters interested in tracking down that salamander, it's located over a massive doorway at 20 Rue de l'Hirondelle, 6th.

—By Mary McAuliffe

PAPER OR PIXELS?

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erson arrived in Paris in 1784, he went straight to the Palais Royal. In a letter to a Virginia friend he described it as “a particular building lately erected here, which has greatly enriched the owner of the ground, has added one of the principal ornaments to the city and increased the convenience of its inhabitants.” An inveterate shopper, Jefferson bought books, a clock and a set of ivory-handled knives here. He also dined in its restaurants, attended theater performances, played chess at the Café de Foy and had his portrait drawn by an ingenious mechanical device for tracing profiles.

Vestiges of these early businesses still linger under the arcades today. A sign at 153 Galerie de Valois (“Galerie” refers to the arcades) reads, “Guillaumot, engraver, in the Palais Royal since 1761.” At 1 Galerie Montpensier, faded signs advertise a *coiffeur* and “posticheur,” or wigmaker. And 161 Galerie de Valois still wears the sign of a “dentellière” or lacemaker. In some spots, colorful mosaic floors carry the names of previous tenants. The modern Café Corazza, at 11 Galerie de Montpensier, occupies the same location as the original Corazza, where literati once gathered for gossip and glaces. But the grandest relic of all is still alive and thriving: Le Grand Véfour, perhaps Paris’ most beautiful three-star restaurant, began as the humble Café de Chartres in 1784, and then was transformed into an elegant restaurant popular with clients like Napoleon and Josephine. Today its tables carry plaques naming famous diners like Hugo and Zola, and waiters are pleased to point out Colette’s favorite table in the corner.

By the time Jefferson sat for his portrait in 1789, the Palais Royal was a vortex of Revolutionary activity. It was uniquely suited for this role, since police were forbidden to enter the Orléans domain. In addition, the duke’s well-known antipathy for Marie-Antoinette and her circle, coupled with his popularity with the Parisian mob, turned it into an “anti-Versailles.” Activists gathered in the garden and Revolutionary fervor culminated on July 12, 1789, when a provincial lawyer named Camille Desmoulins made an incendiary speech outside the Café de Foy. Tearing a leaf from a chestnut tree, he turned it into a cockade, “green, for hope,” and called the citizenry to arms. Six thousand impassioned listeners responded. They decked themselves with leaves and, after plundering arms storehouses and gunsmiths’ shops, stormed the Bastille two days later. For the next few years the garden was the scene of murders, burnings in effigy and grisly torchlight processions with severed heads brandished on spikes.

The Reign of Terror was in full swing when a young woman from Normandy, bent on avenging the recently eliminated Girondins, entered Badin’s cutlery shop at 177 Galerie de Valois. Selecting a sturdy kitchen knife, she paid for it and, later that evening, plunged it into the chest of Jean-Paul Marat as he lay in his bath. Immediately arrested, Charlotte Corday was guillotined four days later.

The guillotine also awaited the Duc d’Orléans, although by 1793 he was calling him-

self Philippe-Egalité. After he lost his head, the government seized the property, but the shops and businesses remained, and in the frivolous post-Revolutionary years of the “merveilleuses” and their dandies, their popularity increased. Along with restaurants, cafes, jewelers and wig-makers were more and more billiard rooms, gambling salons and licentious young ladies who became an international attraction.

Napoleon, who enjoyed his first sexual encounter in the Galerie de Montpensier, later used the palace as offices, but after Waterloo and the restoration of the monarchy, Louis XVIII returned the mansion to the Orléans family. By then the wooden gallery sheltered sleazy sideshows and less expensive “filles de joie.” The new duke ended all that. Louis Philippe cleaned up both palace and gardens and tore down the wooden gallery. When the 1830 revolution put him on the throne of France, he lived here for several years before moving to the Tuileries, so the palace was briefly royal again. With the prostitutes gone and gam-

Le Grand Véfour, perhaps Paris’ most beautiful three-star restaurant, began as the humble Café de Chartres in 1784, and then was transformed into an elegant restaurant popular with clients like Napoleon and Josephine.

bling outlawed, the shops’ popularity waned and the Palais Royal began a long decline.

It would remain a sleeping beauty for over a hundred years. During this time artists and writers discovered it. Colette lived here twice, first in small rooms on the mezzanine from 1927 to 1929 and then, from 1938 to 1954, in a second-floor apartment in the Beaujolais gallery. Her friend Jean Cocteau lived above 66 Galerie de Montpensier from 1939 to 1963.

Today the Ministry of Culture occupies part of the former palace, the gardens are glorious again, and shops and galleries fill the arcades. A few that survived the long sleep—including an amazing tobacconist’s shop called A L’Oriental, behind the Comédie Française—are still an attraction. Besides everything for the smoker (including hookahs), it offers an eclectic collection of small antiques and curiosities. Down the arcade are several venerable shops selling French and foreign military and civilian decorations, as well as Drapeaux de France (13 Galerie de Montpensier), whose window displays of lead soldiers in battle formation are a magnet for little boys (and their fathers). A few dusty antique shops, rare books and stamp dealers remain, some of which are open only on weekends or by appointment.

The first sign that the Palais Royal was waking up was the controversy surrounding Culture Minister Jack Lang’s decision, in 1986, to install Daniel Buren’s columns in the courtyard. This was years before the Pyramid arrived at the Lou-

vre, and many Parisians, including some at the adjoining Conseil d’Etat, were outraged at the idea of a modern installation of black and white striped columns in this lovely eighteenth-century enclave. But demonstrations and even lawsuits failed to dislodge it, and the controversy succeeded in pushing the Palais Royal back into the spotlight.

One of the first new businesses to move in was the city’s most beautiful parfumerie, the Salons du Palais Royal Shiseido, at 142 Galerie de Valois. Attracted to the place for its seclusion and other-worldliness, perfumer Serge Lutens created this jewel-box boutique with hand-painted walls and ceiling in 1992. Today it carries twenty-one of his exotic perfumes, some of which are available nowhere else.

Recent years have seen a new flock of high-end shops settling in this magical garden. Didier Ludot has several addresses: 20 and 24 Galerie de Montpensier for vintage couture, and 125 Galerie de Valois for his little black dresses. The Galerie de Valois also has Le Prince Jardinier’s fancy gardening equipment and clothing at number 121, L’Eclaireur’s black-pearl jewelry and Italian housewares at 131, and Pierre Hardy’s open-toed stilettos, favorites of Gwyneth and Madonna, at 156. Designer Marc Jacobs is scheduled to move into the Galerie de Montpensier by the end of 2005.

Not far from Charlotte Corday’s cutlery shop, IBU Gallery, at 166 Galerie de Valois, displays the work of the artist Irena Borenza Ustjanowski, who’s known by her initials. She perished with her husband, famed breadmaker, Lionel Poilâne, in a helicopter crash several years ago. Her collaborator, Cyril Ermel, now presents her bold modern jewelry, sculpture and furniture. More art can be found outdoors, where the Ministry of Culture (whose garden this is) has opened it up to changing exhibits; next to arrive will be sculptor Alain Kirili, whose work will be displayed until the end of June.

Two charming shops in the Galerie de Beaujolais are right beneath Colette’s former apartment. La Boutique du Palais Royal, at number 93, is packed with colorful playthings, from wooden tops to elaborate marionettes; next door, Anna Joliet is a tiny shop filled with music boxes that play everything from “La Vie en Rose” to “Hey Jude.”

And what of Colette, who lived upstairs? She spent the last fifteen years of her life here, increasingly immobilized by arthritis but always writing. “We should not be unreasonably perturbed when our precious senses become dulled with age,” she wrote. “More than once of late, turning my eyes from my book ... toward the superb quadrangle that I am privileged to view from my window, I have thought ‘The children in the garden are not nearly so noisy this year.’” She died in her bed on Aug 3, 1954. A state funeral was held in the Palais Royal courtyard, within sight of her beloved country home in the heart of Paris.

•French speakers interested in the Palais Royal can take an excellent tour given by M. Cuvillier, who brings its history to life with anecdotes and illustrations; call (1) 47 03 92 16 for information.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Gustav Klimt

"Private Pleasures." These line drawings are frankly erotic. Unlike the elaborately decorative work Klimt is generally known for, here he reveals the female form in all its passionate simplicity. •Musée Maillol-Fondation Dina Vierny. Until May 31. Site: www.museemailol.com.

ON THIS MONTH

Matisse: A Second Life

Works from Matisse's last period (1941-1954). Exhibitions organized by the Musée du Luxembourg have become very popular. •Musée du Luxembourg. Until July 17. Site: www.expo-matisse.com.

Yohji Yamamoto

A selection of Yamamoto's designs from his first fashion shows, in 1981, to the present. •Musée de la Mode et du Textile, Palais du Louvre. Until Aug 28. Site: www.ucad.fr.

Calligraphy

The elegant calligraphy of Korea displayed alongside the brushes, paper and other writing tools used from 1392 to 1910 to create these little masterpieces. •Musée Guimet. Until June 6. Site: www.museeguimet.fr.

Paul Guigou

An unusual chance to discover the work of Paul Guigou (1834-1871)—"the gentle painter from Provence"—whose paintings exude the glorious light of the South of France. •Musée Marmottan-Monet. Until June 26. Site: www.marmottan.com.

Seduction

Organized in conjunction with the Belgian and Dutch natural history museums, this interactive expo explains the mating habits of over one hundred animal species, from snails to humans. •Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle. Until Jan 2006. Site: www.mnhn.fr/parades.

Richard Lindner

This expo, called "Adults-only," pays homage to Richard Lindner (1901-1978). Bold colors and intense sensuality mark the work of the "spiritual

father of Pop Art." •Musée de la Vie Romantique. Until June 16. Site: www.paris.fr/musees.

Ann Hamilton

The Maison Rouge, a new exposition space dedicated to innovative contemporary art and installations (see PN, Feb 2004), opens with the work of an American artist, Ann Hamilton (who represented the U.S. at the Venice Biennial in 1999). A very promising beginning. •La Maison Rouge-Fondation Antoine de Galbert. Until May 22. Site: www.lamaisonrouge.org.

Sartre

This exceptional expo of videos, photographs and manuscripts, as well as paintings by his friends, pays homage to the life and work of the philosopher, novelist, playwright and political-activist Jean-Paul Sartre—one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. •Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Grande Galerie. Until Aug 21. Site: www.bnf.fr.

Robert Wilson

On display are Wilson's original costume designs for the "Fables de la Fontaine," created for the current Comédie Française production. •Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint-Laurent, 1 Rue Léonce-Reynaud, 16th. Until July 24. Site: www.ysl-hautecouture.com.

Romanesque France, 987-1152

This is the first major expo of Romanesque art in France. An exceptional grouping of reliquary statues, illuminated manuscripts, precious objects and ivories from the mid-tenth to the mid-twelfth centuries. •Musée du Louvre. Until June 6. Site: www.louvre.fr.

Neo-Impressionism: From Seurat to Paul Klee

In 1886 Seurat and Signac exhibited their first pointillist paintings and influenced both Pissarro and the younger generation: Van Gogh, Dubois-Pillet and Charles Angrand. This expo, following the different branches of the movement down to German Expressionism and Italian Futurism, also marks the centenary of Fauvism. •Musée d'Orsay. Until July 10. Site: www.musee-orsay.fr.

Jules Verne

A joyous celebration of the life and work of Jules

Verne. •Musée de la Marine, Palais de Chaillot. Until Aug 29. Site: www.musee-marine.fr.

Brazil

This expo of the arts and crafts of the Amerindians of Brazil is just part of the many events organized during the City's "Year of Brazil." •Grand Palais. Until June 27. Site: www.bresilbresils.org.

Bacon and Picasso

Paintings by Francis Bacon and Picasso have been selected to show Picasso's influence on Bacon's work. Major works from the Musée Picasso, the Musée National d'Art Moderne, the Tate Gallery, the Moderna Museet and the Fondation Beyeler. •Musée Picasso. Until May 30. Site: www.musee-picasso.fr.

Poussin, Watteau, Chardin, David...

French painters from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. •Grand Palais. Until Aug 1. Site: www.rmn.fr.

101st Foire de Paris

A weird and wonderful expo of all the latest French inventions. •Porte de Versailles, 15th. May 12-22. Site: www.foiredeparis.fr.

French Tennis Open

The annual event to see and be seen at—and to watch a little tennis, too. •Roland Garros Stadium. May 23-June 5. Site: www.frenchopen.org.

COMING SOON

Grande Brocante

Antique dealers and local residents display their wares for a grand street sale. •Rue de Bretagne, 3rd. June 3, 4 and 5.

The Turn of the Screw

Opera in two acts, in English, by Benjamin Britten; based on the work of Henry James. •Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. June 7, 9, 11, 12. Site: www.theatrechampselysees.fr.

Fête de la Musique

Paris, all-day/all-night musical celebration of the summer solstice. •June 21. Site: www.fetedelamusique.fr.

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