



AN EVENING IN PARIS

World music critic Jane Cornwell has travelled the globe in search of the perfect tune and the ideal man. In this extract from her new memoir *The Whirl: Music, Men & Misadventures*, the Australian-born, London-based writer takes us to Paris on a date with a well-dressed jazz fan.

Christophe liked to meet me on the Pont des Arts, the footbridge over the Seine that links the Left Bank with the Louvre. He'd arrive early, sit on the middle bench and take in the view: Pont Neuf, the oldest bridge in Paris; Ile de la Cité, the tiny island with the copse of green trees and the hulking Notre Dame cathedral.

He never replied to texts telling him what time my Eurostar arrived. But there he'd be, on the bridge.

I'd see him before he saw me. I'd come out of the Métro at Louvre-Rivoli, taking a detour past the great glass pyramids in the museum courtyard, spotting him before I'd even crossed the road. Something always gave him away: a red fedora, a polka-dot bow tie, a shock of silk erupting from a bespoke breast pocket.

One time he was wearing a buttercup yellow suit and owlsh glasses with lime green rims. He was resting a hand on the brass knob of a walking cane, and chomping on a pipe whose carved duck's head sported a little orange beak.

The pipe wasn't lit. Christophe didn't smoke. The look was the thing that mattered.

"People respect you if you dress well," he said after we'd started chatting at the New Morning, a jazz club in the 10th arrondissement where I'd gone to review a Congolese band that played traditional tribal trance music on thumb pianos

amplified with old car alternator magnets. The band, whose name was Konono No.1, had just been signed to a hip Belgian record label; the music press in the UK and Europe was calling them the next big thing.

Christophe thought this was very funny since Konono No.1 were an institution in Kinshasa and had been playing there for decades. "Young people in the Congo don't listen to Konono anymore." He pulled at his cufflinks. "They like soukous and rap."

Christophe was tall, around 30, and so slim that I reckoned I could fit both of my hands around his waist if I squeezed him hard enough. He had high cheekbones, a wide nose and a pencil moustache like the circumflex on my keyboard. Even with the sweat patches under his arms – it was summer, and the place was crammed – he looked like he was someone.

I checked out his clothes: turquoise trousers, a shirt with fat purple stripes, a violet waistcoat with a mustard pocket silk and a fob watch on a looping silver chain: "Clothes make the man," he'd said in his heavy French-African accent, putting one

polished brogue in front of the other and spiralling his hand. There wasn't enough room for him to bow.

I was glad that I'd frocked up before I left my hotel in Saint-Sulpice, even if it was only in the olive-green Ghost dress I wore in

Santiago the summer before, and a pair of peach fabric mules from a second-hand designer shop in Islington that I rarely wore since they were always slipping off.

The upbeat vibe in the New Morning got strangers talking, in between watching various band members blowing whistles, beating drums, pinging the metal rods of their little boxy thumb pianos. The music was warping through a pair of old porte-voix speakers that looked like white lilies on stilts; whenever the sound built and broke, people put their arms in the air and whooped, like I used to do back in the day, in Heaven. I took out my notepad and made some notes.

Christophe looked over my shoulder. "Music is where the passions enjoy themselves." A pause. "Nietzsche." *The Whirl: Music, Men & Misadventures* by Jane Cornwell (HarperCollins, \$29.99) is out now.

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