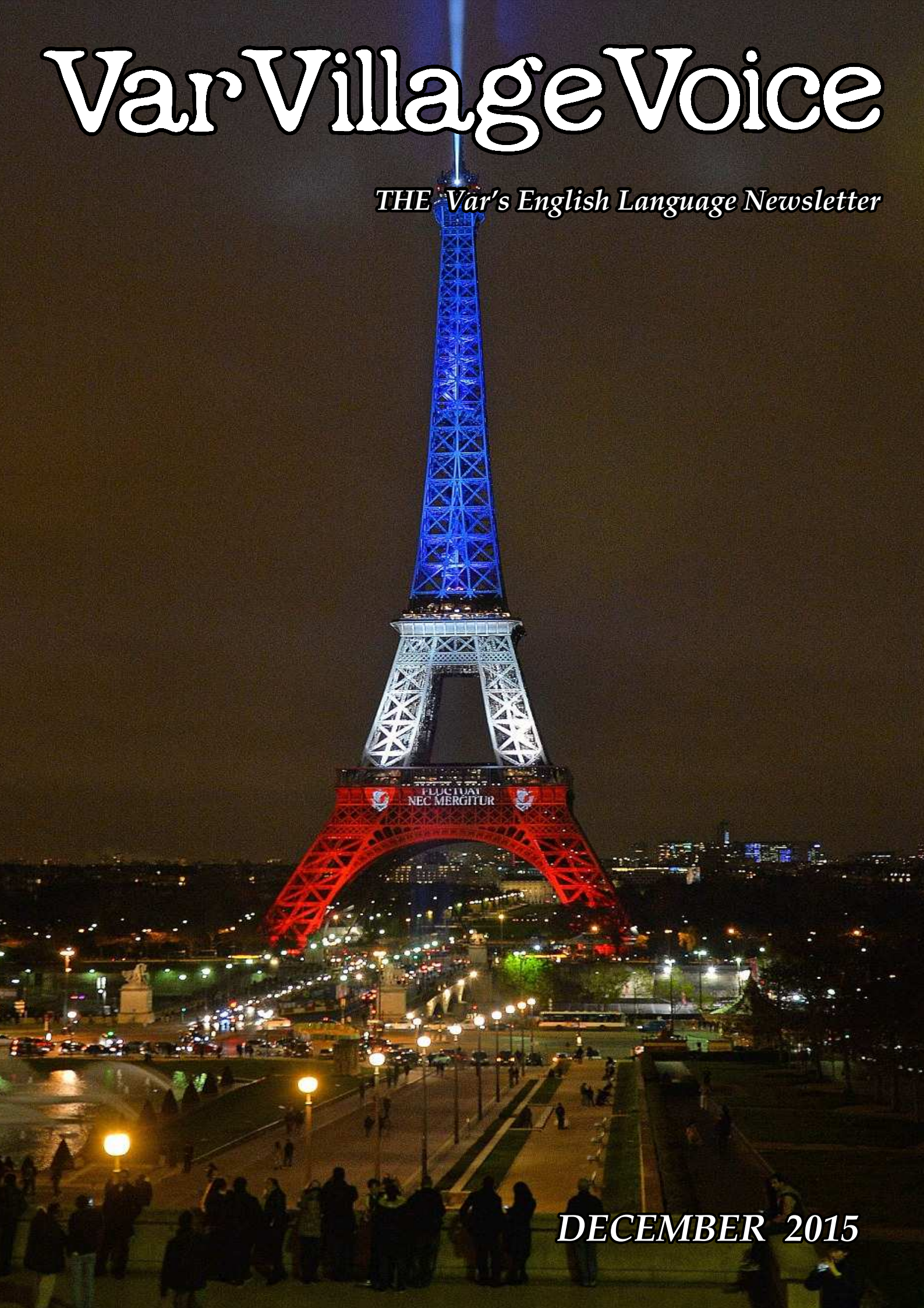


Var Village Voice

THE Var's English Language Newsletter



DECEMBER 2015



PARIS MASSACRE LONDON SHOWS SOLIDARITY WITH PARIS AND THE FRENCH

Along with practically every national monument worldwide, the National Gallery and Trafalgar Square went into mourning with Paris and the French displaying the French tricolour. Londoners came together with hundreds of French expats, to jointly mourn the horrific attacks Friday 13 November in Paris. Words cannot describe the horror of these attacks, strangers in cafes, kids out for a night of rock n roll, in the concert hall, massacred - waiters, bystanders tried to offer comfort to those who had been shot, were dying, holding their hands, and saying just try and breathe, hoping that medical help would arrive in time. And most of the victims were young people, out to enjoy themselves on a Friday night. We can only offer Solidarity and sympathy. And pray for the devastated families of the victims. Londoners, Brits, came together with their French neighbours in a spontaneous display of solidarity at the Football friendly held at Wembley Stadium,

standing shoulder to shoulder, doing their best to sing the Marseillaise in French, interweaving football scarves, flags, and the result of the match just could not have mattered less, what mattered was the fact that thousands came to support their French colleagues and neighbours.



Wembley itself lit up in the colours of the tricolour, and with *Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite* headlined the Stadium. The sophisticated commentariat, the chattering classes of North London are already at work, deploring the **Dianification of the Paris Horror:**

"I see we are moving through the five stages of post-tragedy empty gesture public mourning routine very swiftly. It goes something like this. First there is the news of the tragedy. Second is the reaction, summed up with the narrative "it is all our fault." Stage three is where we are told that we should worry about the potential victims of Islamophobia as opposed to the actual victims of Islamic terrorism. Stage four is full candle-lit vigil/light up building in appropriate colours (that should do it!) and Twitter hashtag campaigns. Stage five is

the political love in, this time in the form of a football match between England and France. None of us can even begin to understand the devastation these families are experiencing, the desolation and grief that lies ahead for them. A football match is just not going to cut it."

Well actually it is, it allows the public to share their horror, their grief, it allows them to mourn this most dreadful event. Yes, the mounds of flowers everywhere is stupid, but people should be allowed to mourn, to grieve this most horrific event. The deaths of these young victims have left families in mourning across France and as far afield as Britain, Egypt, Romania and Mexico.

The Italian city of Venice, *Il Serenissima*, gathered together this past week, to mourn the one Italian victim of this atrocity, student Valeria Solesin, killed at the Bataclan Music Hall. Solesin, a PhD student was studying demographics at the Sorbonne University, and was the only Italian among the 130 victims of the November 13 attacks.

A native of Venice, gondolieri solemnly rowed her coffin up the Grand Canal to St Marks square, where thousands of Venetians gathered to mourn her passing. Italy granted her a State funeral, which was attended by Italian President Sergio



The whole population of Venice seemingly turned out, to mourn their lost one.



At her family's request, religious leaders of various faiths spoke at the funeral, which was held outdoors on a sunny morning in front of the arched doors and domes of St. Mark's Basilica.

A pointless victim! Like the 129 others, and them families.

Perhaps one intelligent response I have seen in the Press is an article by a British Muslim Cleric, -DR-TAJ-HARGEY, who has said very vehemently "NOT in my name", and other Muslim groups in the UK have also joined in with their support, a movement which is now gathering strength through the various social media, as is "Pas en mon Nom" in France! But as he points out French Muslim Clerics should also be denouncing these atrocities.

Young French Muslim students have taken to social media, declaring #NousSommesUnis" proudly declaring themselves French, and Muslims and denouncing this atrocity, they are being joined by young Muslims world wide.

Everyone will play the Blame Game, Security Services will be held up for inspection, for their failures, how did these monsters evade border controls? Which at this time with vast immigration movements all over Europe, make a mockery of attempts to control movements of jihadists. But perhaps the most responsible article I have read is by Daily Telegraph correspondent Alastair Heath, who in his article - well worth reading - <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/europe/france/12004330/Frances-grim-estates-are-the-perfect-breeding-grounds-for-terrorism.html> points out that "No progress has been made tackling the crisis in France's housing estates in 20 years" He cites the sink estates round Mulhouse where he went to school, before moving to the UK, where the banlieusards lived, where police feared to tread. Just like the sink estates that ring Paris - Bobigny, St. Denis, Bagnolet - at the ends of the RER metro lines, which were not so long ago, just a few years, were the scenes of terrifying violence for days on end, cars on fire, molotov cocktail bombs thrown at the police. Sarkozy was in charge then and promised action, but nothing has happened to improve life for the young in these social housing ghettos.

As Heath says :

"The unfairness is staggering, especially in a Left-wing country obsessed with social justice and redistribution; in my day our Marxist teachers would lecture us endlessly about what they imagined were the inequities of American and British capitalism, blind to the home-grown failures of French dirigisme just around the corner.

Tragically, virtually no progress has been made tackling the crisis in France's housing estates since I finished school and moved to Britain 20 years ago. Much has changed in France overall, but all of my observations remain true, apart from the fact that there is now another route into the estate and a handful of buildings have been demolished. For those of us who love France, this is heartbreaking. The plight of the banlieues and those who live there is not just deeply immoral: their continuing isolation poses a major national security threat. Islamist extremists have found it all too easy to recruit in the cités, filling some of the void left by the collapse of other forms of authority and the state's wilful neglect."

Then, in the wake of the Paris riots, many wrote of the plight of the young in these estates, if their name was Mohammed, and sent in a CV for a job, they did not stand a chance of getting an interview,

even less a job. And thus became ripe for radicalisation

"Some 7 per cent of the population is crammed into 751 "zones urbaines sensibles", the official name for the sink suburbs. Only 20 per cent of their 4.4 million inhabitants own their homes, with the vast majority social tenants. **The idea that the problem is a lack of public spending has been tested to destruction since the riots of 2005.** "

"The real problem is the ongoing, multi-decade failure of French public policy in almost all areas. The red tape and taxes that prevent entrepreneurs from creating businesses and new jobs affect immigrants disproportionately. One shocking study revealed that in 2011, 23 per cent of Algerian immigrants and 25 per cent of Turkish ones were out of work, against 8.5 per cent for non-migrants, a far greater gap than any equivalent here in Britain. The situation is even worse for members of such groups trapped in sink suburbs. "

This is no excuse, they live in social housing paid for by the state, the taxpayer, with good medical systems, and education, but are still, totally excluded from the mainstream. A stupid indicator perhaps, but how many say those of Algerian descent are presenters, commentators on French TV?

And France like Germany has one of the highest Muslim populations in Europe, and unfortunately its young men and girls, for years have been ripe for radicalisation, fodder for Jihadism.

MESSAGE FROM MAYOR OF ST. ANTONIN VILLAGE

Comme vous tous, bien sur, je suis très affecté par l'effroyable tuerie de la nuit dernière à Paris.

Comme vous également, je partage la douleur des familles affectées par ces assassinats et pense beaucoup à elles.

Ces pensées affectueuses à l'endroit des victimes de ces attentats, sont aussi les vôtres, dans la mesure où elles s'expriment par le pavillon tricolore en berne au fronton de votre mairie.

Il ne me paraît pas judicieux d'aller au delà de ce témoignage d'empathie, car je crois qu'en de telles circonstances, la pudeur, la dignité et le respect, imposent que l'on s'exonère de toute surenchère compassionnelle.

C'est pourquoi je n'ai jugé bon de vous proposer un rassemblement pour porter témoignage de notre tristesse, tant j'ai la conviction qu'elle n'a pas besoin de s'exposer publiquement et bruyamment pour être profondément ressentie et partagée.

S'agissant de nos lendemains, je fais, comme il se doit, pleinement confiance aux autorités en situation, tant politiques qu'institutionnelles, pour prendre les décisions et mettre en oeuvre les mesures qu'ils jugent les mieux adaptées et les plus efficaces, pour garantir notre

sécurité, et préserver nos libertés fondamentales.

A mon modeste niveau local, comme tous les maires du département, je suis en relation avec les services préfectoraux qui, dans le cadre du décret déclarant l'état d'urgence, nous communiquent directives, orientations et dispositions à prendre.

Pour l'heure en voici l'essentiel.

- Les rassemblements de personnes sont à éviter ou à organiser en contact avec la gendarmerie et leurs organisateurs, afin de vérifier les mesures de sûreté et les contrôles d'accès.

- Les polices municipales seront mobilisées pour sécuriser d'éventuels rassemblements.

- Le congrès annuel des maires qui devait débuter lundi à Paris, est reporté à fin mai 2016.

- Il nous est demandé d'éviter les manifestations et rassemblements.

Nous serons régulièrement tenus informés des évolutions éventuelles de ces dispositions, et je vous en ferai bien sûr part aussitôt que j'en aurai connaissance.

Avec mes sentiments les plus cordiaux et les plus solidaires.

Serge Baldecchi

If you have a problem with the French of this message just let me know.

Basically flags are flying at half mast all over France, and he extends sympathies to all those affected. **President Francois Hollande has declared a state of National Emergency, it is suggested that public meetings, gatherings should be avoided. And this is very sensible. We should all be very aware, and be careful.** We can only pray at Christmas for all those devastated families, victims of this atrocity, a massacre of the innocents.



CHRISTMAS SERVICES

LORGUES

O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL to Lorgues
Wednesday 23rd of Dec at 11am

For a Bring and Share **Carol Lunch** with Lorgues with Fayence Chaplaincy unplugged Which is kindly being hosted at the home of **Lindsay Phillips, Domaine St Marc Lorgues.*** Everyone welcome, bring a little something to share for lunch and bring your voices to sing a few Carols. **Festive Fayre, Festive music, Fun and Fellowship**

Contact Lindsay at 04 94 67 69 17 or **Peter** at 04 94 73 93 37 for more details.

***750 Chemin de Pailles, Lorgues.**

13 December Christmas Service 11h

www.lorgueswithfayence.org/ 04 94 73 93 37

MONTAURoux

Sunday 20th Dec at 11am at the Presbytery in Montauroux for our Christmas Carol Service
Details and directions on our website at

[www.lorgueswithfayence.org.](http://www.lorgueswithfayence.org/)

Everyone welcome to come and sing, refreshments after the service.

Contact Hilary at 0494 477067 or **Peter** at 0494 739337

The collection at both venues will be going towards the Lighthouse project on Lesbos which is assisting refugees who are in transit and trying to re-build their lives.

Christmas Day - 25 December service 11h,
Christmas Day Lunch (turkey & trimmings, chez les Rosts, places limited tel 04 94 47 70 67.

ST. RAPHAEL – St. Johns Anglican Church, rue Paul Doumer.

The services for Christmas Carols are as follows:

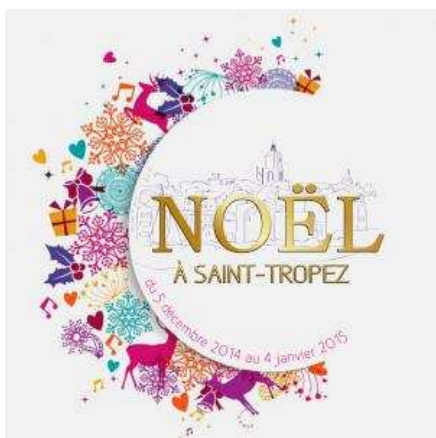
Sunday December 20th 10.30 am at St John the Evangelist St Raphaël Lessons and Carols for Christmas

Friday 25th December 1030 am (1030hours) at St John the Evangelist St Raphaël Christmas Day communion service

Sunday 27th December 1030 am (1030hours) at St John the Evangelist St Raphaël (regular Sunday Communion Service)
Thereafter every Sunday at 1030hours.

GRIMAUD

Friday December 18th 7pm (19 00hours) at St Michel, Grimaud village. Lessons and Carols for Christmas, mulled wine, and mince pies.



CHRISTMAS IN ST. TROPEZ

Christmas season kicks off in St. Tropez 4 December with the Christmas lights being lit, Place des Lices 18h. And the skating rink opens that day, until 3 January, It is only €2 to skate and hire skates, what a bargain.

19 – 21 December, the Salon Chocolat, 20 December the Pastorale, and 24 December Pere Noel arrives by boat in the harbour.

From 24 December they will be projecting brilliant illuminations, on the buildings all round the harbour, to 1 January.

27 December an organ concert with Musica Antica of Provence.

31 December Anchoiade, and Fireworks.

****For all events, it might be worth checking before you go anywhere, as due to state of emergency, events just might get cancelled.**



« Salle Jacky Mathevet »

Program

FILMS IN VO UPCOMING

Sunday 6 December 18h00– THE WALK featuring high wire artist at the world Trade Center towers

Wednesday 9 December 21h00 – THE MARTIAN, with Matt Damon, directed by Scott Ridley, a stand out performance!

Sunday 12 December 18h00 –DOPE, LA adventure

Sunday 13 December 18h00 – THE MARTIAN

Monday 14 December 21h00 – DOPE

Saturday 19 December 18h00 –

MADAME BOVARY with Ezra Miller, Mia Wasikowska & Pau Giamatti

Sunday 27 December 18h00 – SPECTRE the latest James Bond, with Daniel Craig

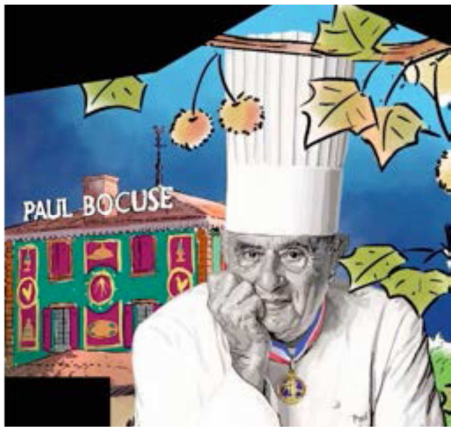
Sunday 3 January 18h00 – SUFFRAGETTE, with Carey Mulligan, Helena Bonham-Carter.



OPERA DE TOULON – THEATRE 6 December “Nelson” by Pierre Charrier – 17h

Modern comedy theatre piece contrasting two very different families.





LYON'S FESTIVAL DE LUMIERES CANCELLED Homage to Paris victims December 8

I had hoped to bring you an article about this year's LYON'S FESTIVAL DE LUMIERES, which this year was going to be dedicated to practically the patron saint of Lyon cuisine, Paul Bocuse, However the Paris events have overtaken, with security measures foremost.

Officials announced on Thursday that they had cancelled Lyon's annual Festival of Lights - one of the biggest celebrations in France - after the tragic terror attacks in Paris. Instead the city will pay homage to the victims of the attacks.

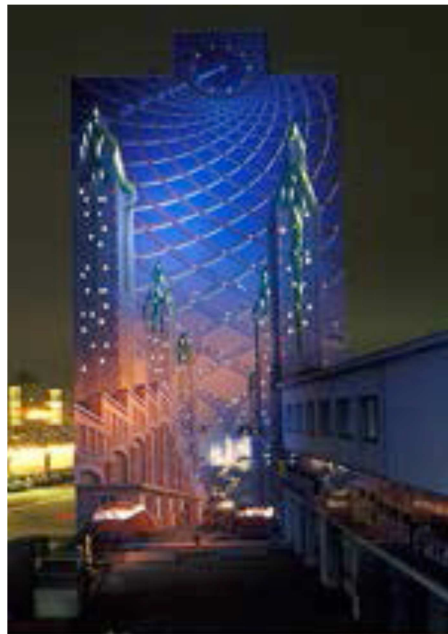


The four-day event was scheduled to start December 5th. Lyon mayor Gérard Collomb told the assembled media that the event would be replaced with a day of tribute on **December 8th**.

"There will still be thousands of lights on across Lyon. The whole city will be lit up," he told BFM TV.

Local prefect Michel Delpuech added that the event would have required a mobilization of police to the maximum level, which was simply unfeasible for a four-day period.

It's not surprising that such a popular event has been cancelled, not least considering the national state of emergency means all large public gatherings have been banned. The emergency measures were voted by lawmakers to remain in place for three months.



Despite this two of the city's landmarks, the "crayon" (the "tour Crédit Lyonnais") and the "tour Incity" will be illuminated, there will be an illumination on the Fourvière hill, and the names of the Paris victims will be projected onto the quaysides of the river Saône, which runs through the city centre.

In the run-up to the festival, 200,000 tea-lights will be distributed in schools, and householders are asked to place as many lights as possible on their windowsills in memory of those who died on 13th November.



What we missed – but then again – maybe Not!

"Not running risks for people in Lyon doesn't mean the terrorists have won," said the maire of Lyon Gérard Collomb.

"What they want, above all is to sow discord, put as against each other, create fractures in society along the lines of ethnic and religious origins, our life

choices," he said and added that the planned homage would send a strong sign of unity amongst people in Lyon. The Fête des Lumières is the highlight of Lyon's winter calendar, attracting more than four million visitors a year, and filling the city's streets with revellers who come for the illuminations, lightshows and other light projections and animations.

Finding a last minute hotel room or a restaurant booking becomes almost impossible, as does driving or parking in the centre of the city, as so many streets are pedestrianised for the festival. The festival celebrates the Virgin Mary, who is the city's patron saint; traditionally the city's people have honoured her on December 8 by putting tea-lights on their windowsills.

Maybe we too, should all put tea lights on our windowsills, to mourn the victims of Paris.



CONCERTS RIVIERA SINGERS – ANTIBES 4 & VALBONNE 10 December

Antibes Cathedral

The Riviera International Singers will perform a Christmas Carol concert in Antibes Cathedral on **Friday 4th December at 20h** for the benefit of the Antibes SNCM Lifeboat Company. After the concert English home-made sausages and mulled wine will be served by the Lifeboat staff. Tickets: 10€ for adults and 5€ for children. Advance tickets are available at Bluewater crew & training office: 7, Bld d'Aguillon, Antibes. For more information call 06 17 81 15 08 or 06 14 95 71 27

Valbonne

Get into the spirit of Christmas with the Riviera International Singers' Carol Concerts with traditional carols and Christmas songs at Valbonne church on **Thursday December 10**

at 20h and Saturday 12 December at the earlier time of 18h.

Come and sing along with us and have a cup of mulled wine after the concert.

Part of the proceeds go to local charities.

Tickets: Adults €10 (wine incl.); children under

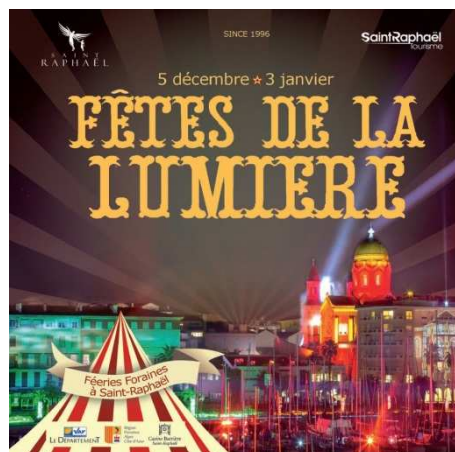
12: €5. Venue : Rue de la Paroisse, 06560

Valbonne. Tel. contact numbers: 06 17 81 15

08 & 06 14 95 71 27

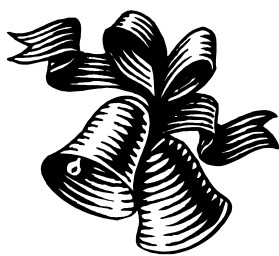
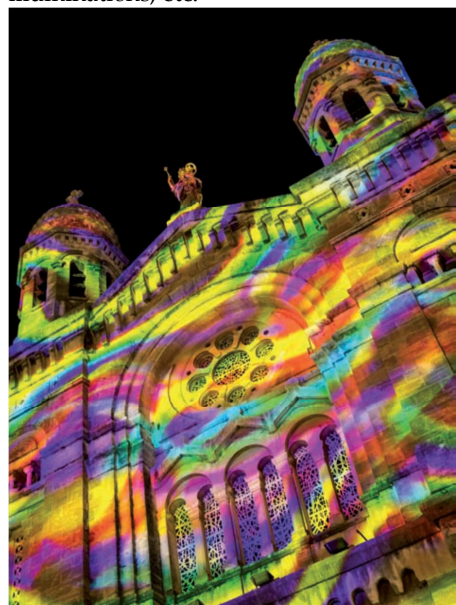
For more info visit the website

www.riviera-international-singers.com



ST. RAPHAEL ILLUMINATIONS 5 DECEMBER – 3 JANUARY

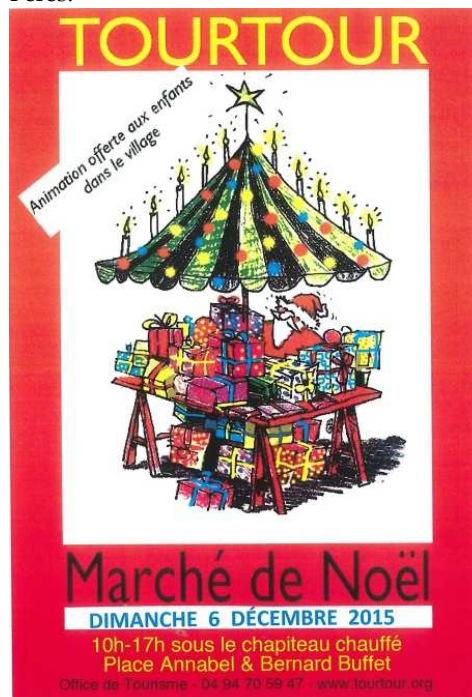
Wonderful treats in store for those who get down to St. Raphael, lights, illuminations, etc.



CHRISTMAS CONCERT SUNDAY DECEMBER 6

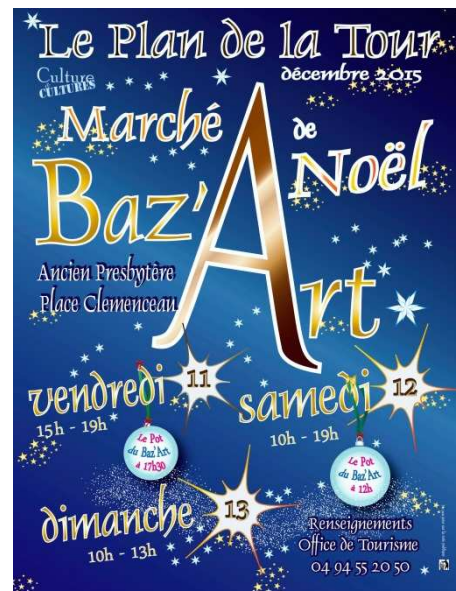
Eglise St. Victor, Trans en
Provence, Ensemble Vocal &
Instrumental of the CAD, with
Vivaldi's Magnificat. 16h. Free.

With Direction Isabelle Didiot, 1st violin
Pierre Bensaid, piano Pierre Laurent,
Soloists, Anne d'Ambra, and Arielle
Peres.



CHRISTMAS FAIR – TOURTOUR Sunday 6 December –

Gilly Phillips will be there, selling the very special Ronald Searle Christmas Cards. And Yolande says: Mostly the commercants sell varied knitwear; hats, shawls and scarves, local fresh fruit confitures, honey from the Var, many kinds of nougat, kid's books and toys, local Bio farm selling Bio products & olive oil hot food and mulled wine. I shall be selling my Tourtour Christmas greetings cards which have been popular for many years!



PLAN DE LA TOUR – CHRISTMAS FAIR – Friday 11, Saturday 12 & Sunday 13 December Animations, stalls, Christmas cards, etc.

Caroline says: This year's Christmas Baz'art takes place in the Ancien Presbytère on 11th, 12th and 13th December. The English stand will be selling charity Christmas cards, crackers, mincemeat, shortbread, etc. There are various other exhibitors, selling Christmas decorations, gift ideas, jewellery, patisserie, gourmandises, etc.

The Festivities continue 16 & 17 December with Christmas balades through the village, with lights, mulled wine and hot chocolate Workshops for children, Friday 18 December a Gouter with Father Christmas, Lights, Music the 13 desserts, and theatre.



DRAGIGNAN JAZZ FESTIVAL 11 & 12 DECEMBER , DRAGUIGNAN THEATRE SCOTT GRAND SEPTET

With Guitar Shorty, Joe Louis Walker, Joe Houston, Philip Walker, Debbie Davies, Anson Funderburgh.



CONCERT DE NOEL ENSEMBLE CHORAL DE LORGUES 12 December 20h30 Free At Blvd. Real Calamars , Lorgues

Concerts also :

Sanary 6 & 20 December, Christmas

Concerts Eglise St. Nazaire, 16h00

Draguignan 12 December

Roquebrune sur Argens – 12 Decembre

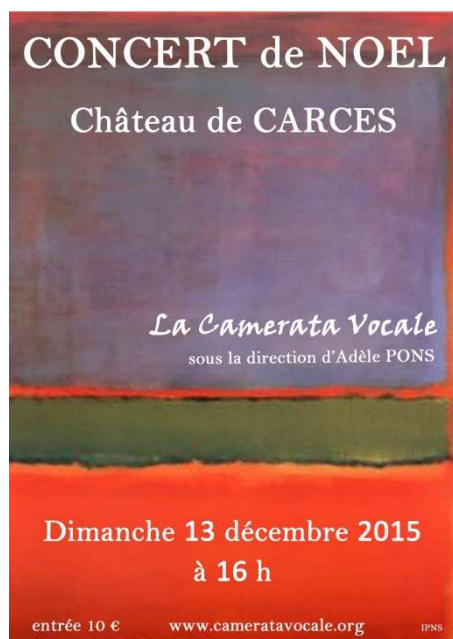
Solliesville 13 December

Sanary – 13 December

Toulon – 14 December

Regusse – 16 December, Eglise St. Laurent

Sanary



CONCERTS CAMERATA VOCALE

13 December – Carces – 16h
Chateau de Carces

16 December – Regusse, 20h

20 December – Vidauban
16h.

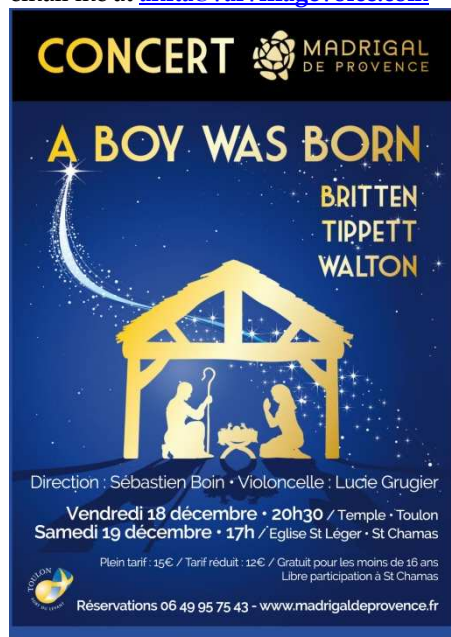
Concerts which are a traditional mix from Palestrini, Byrd, to more modern works, and traditional Christmas Carols.



VVV LIBRARY Wednesday 16 December

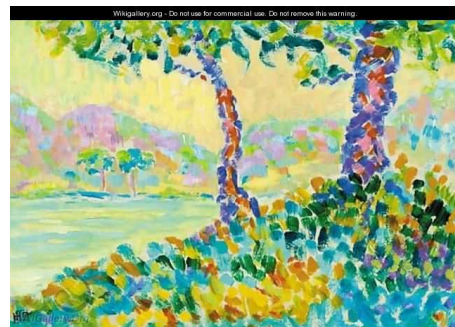
VVV Library day of the month for book and video/DVD swaps is **Wednesday 16 December**. The valiant Library team have already been sorting, selecting, filing, and also rejecting duplicates etc. Bring your books, DVD's and reading books. **However please! now that the rainy season is upon us, park in the designated parking area, to the right as you come up the drive, AND NOT in front of the house.**

It's all happening at **1142 Route des Miquelets**, just below St. Antonin village, outside Lorgues. If you need directions, email me at anita@varvillagevoice.com



CONCERTS MADRIGAL DE PROVENCE – Friday December 18 Temple, Toulon, 20h30 - Saturday 19 December Eglise St. Leger, St. Chamas, 17h. Tickets €15

Music by Britten, Tippett & Walton, a celebration of the nativity in music by English composers. Plus a work specially commissioned from Frederic Pattar Werthur, American composer.
www.madrigaldeprovence.fr



MUSEE DE L'ANNONCIADE - SAINT TROPEZ – «AUTOUR HENRI PERSON» 18 December – 7 March 2016

The Annonciade has a wonderful collection of fauvist works headed by a superb legacy from the Signac family – and the Annonciade's permanent collection features many of the fauvistes. Yet again they are devoting their latest exhibition to another of this group, Henri Person.. The exhibition runs from December to 18 March this year. Closed Tuesdays.



CONCERT CHOEUR MARE NOSTRUM HYERES 20 December Eglise St. Louis, Hyeres, 16h30 tickets €18





BAH – HUMBUG - AGAIN!

I make no apologies for repeating the article I wrote for the last Christmas issue, about how to make one's own superb Christmas Feast. It really needs no updating.

I am right now plundering Lidl Deluxe range for goodies, even as I write, as I have guests all over Christmas - which include their super pave de Cerfs (lovely steaks) canapes, venison roast, Italian cheeses, foie gras, you name it, and all at very low prices!

“As you can imagine, I get literally bombarded with lots of Press Announcements, Publicity, you name it, and yet again I got something about a Wonderful Christmas Dinner that I should, in theory, alert readers to – happening mid December, I suppose around the time of Festivals of Lights, Lucia, and the Provençal Gros Souper. This particular dinner snagged my attention because of its price – just a mere €75 per person, or €140 for two, and a special reduction €650 for a table for 10 – admittedly the latter with a Magnum offered! It was from a local wine domaine. – darlings a Cru Classe outfit.

****Update: This year prices are: €79 per person, €150 per couple, and €700 for table of 10. Just think what you can do with €150 – such a meal, wow! I actually enquired what comprised this sumptuous repast – and the response was: GROS SOUPER**

Les 7 plats - Ravioles provençales, servies à l'assiette
Veloute potiron, servis en soupière
Brandade de morue, servie en pot individuel
Gâteau d'omelette, servis à l'assiette
Filet de daurade à l'anis, servis à l'assiette

Fritte de panais, Tampura d'artichauts et Beignet de courgettes, servis en plat
Fromages de chèvre et de brebis servis à l'assiette avec un mixte japonais(salade)

Les 13 desserts:

Les fruits, melons, pommes, raisins, poires mendiants, noix, noisettes, amandes, figues sèches, amandes
Les spécialités, nougat noir, nougat blanc, pompe à l'huile, pâte de coing, tourte de blette
Gee Whiz, and the high lights are Brandade to Morue, and Dorade, Wow! So. now you know ! And don't you think you can do better for €150 per couple!

“This sort of thing, price for a meal, always totally knocks me off my perch, I splutter for a while, and examine the menu and think, I can put something like that together.

And, admittedly it is nice going out somewhere, sitting down in a convivial and one hopes, nicely heated atmosphere, (although to my recollection, loads of restaurants round here, and other places, are notoriously mean on the heating!) knowing someone else has done all the work, and will have all the washing up and clearing up to deal with.

But still. €140 (€150) for a couple – give me a break.

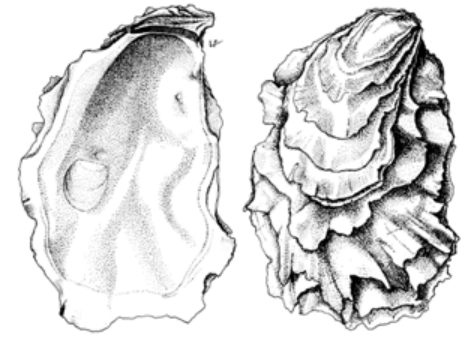
And for me the most enjoyable part of a festive meal at this time of year, apart from the food, is the company, the people you are talking to, the laughs, and conversation you all have round the table. Going out to a strange place, you just might get that, then again, you might get stiffed with the most boring people you have ever come across.

So although it means work, and for the hardest working part of any partnership, it does mean hard labour in the kitchen – one can do so much better, certainly for €75.

So if you are a partnership, or if you are inviting friends, divide the labours, be totally authoritarian about it – you are going to do this, you are going to do that – or else! Invitees can bring a dish, to be decided beforehand – and not pasta salad! You can devise absolutely splendid menus, as luxurious, at a quarter or less of the price, and as wonderful as any you may find in our local hostelleries.

For a start, I think nothing beats a platter of seafood to start with, with a lush presentation of oysters. And I say this despite the fact that I am unfortunately totally allergic to this shellfish, although I eat and adore everything else. But it looks so wonderful, it starts things off with a bang, and I will be putting it out

for my Christmas guests. All the supermarkets will have barriques of oysters, of all sizes, qualities, and they will be on sale in Lorgues high street and elsewhere.



I get the impression that people are wary of oysters, due to the difficulty of opening them. And this is where you exile the chaps to do the manly stuff in the garage. It's not really hard, take a tip from the Bretons who do it for a living outside all the Brasseries in Paris, they wrap their left hand in a tough piece of rubber, from a tyre, or similar, to protect their hands, or say thick kitchen cloth, as the knife can slip – you grasp the oyster firmly in the left hand with heel, where the muscle joins the two shells, anchored by your thumb, and dig the oyster knife in at the point, and it should be a special oyster knife, strong and pointed, where you can see the two join, into this heel, you will be surprised, you will succeed, you cut that muscle, and then slide the knife under the top shell, clean it all into the bottom shell. If I can do it, so can you. You can buy oysters a bit ahead of time, check the dates on the box, and keep in the cool for example in your garage, even in the bottom of a not too cold fridge, drape wet sacking over until you want to use them, within a day or so, maximum preferably, but they will, like clams, last, provided you keep an eye on them.



You can also use clams, my favourite, if you can get them the right size, but the French don't really understand clams, they tend to sell them too large, the large are only fit for soup, or stuffed clams, not for eating raw. But the right size, “little necks” they are delicious. The nearest one can get to

them are prairies, I would not advise palourdes or venus shellfish, nice but not quite up to the standard one wants, they are best for throwing in a pasta, like the smaller vongole, the Italians sell. But praires can be very good, they like, clams need opening in a different way, clasp firmly again in left hand, protected from the knife, but with the heel in the palm of the hand and the top uppermost, or, hold it firm on your counter surface, and try to get the knife in between the two halves of the shell from the top, again you should have a strong sharp edged knife to get between the two shells - it takes a while to get the knack, but you can also just slightly loosen them, when you need to serve them by putting near small heat, so they open. Clean top into the bottom half, and as with oysters, serve with lemon, and/or vinegar shallot sauce, or even with tabasco!

The best place to buy seafood in this region is definitely the seafood/fish counter at Hyper U, Les Arcs, best selection, and freshest.

Nothing can beat the splendour and visual luxury of a seafood platter, decorated with greenery or seaweed, lemon slices, shrimps, large shrimps, gambas, crab legs, maybe some bulot (whelks) loads, lashings of oysters, prairies, fresh cooked langoustines, if you can find them, and also if you can find them oursins. Delicious.

But, there are lots of alternatives, for example nothing beats a good soup in winter, and not expensive, it can be cooked up beforehand, the day before and kept chilled. How about a nice fennel soup, or leek and potatoe, with the cream tossed in at the last moment before serving.

Or what about a delicious avocado mousse, smothered in freshly peeled shrimps, all pink and green, so another winner, which can be prepared, and kept chilled beforehand.

My favourite also for guests at this time of year, is foie gras. I have no qualms about it, the duck livers come into the supermarkets, at the same time as loads of "magret de canard"! I bought a couple for the freezer in Hyper U, around €10 or €11 each, not exactly expensive.

(Update: Lidl has lobes of foie gras, 300gr. €10.99!- see latest recipe in this issue!)

I will defrost one lobe, perhaps press into a small casserole, so it takes its shape, when thoroughly defrosted, I will then cover with alcohol, wine, or perhaps brandy, others use vodka, your choice,

and will poach it gently in the oven for at least half an hour or less, testing to make sure it is cooked.

Then you take out and drain off the rich fat to save for cooking perhaps roast potatoes, and chill well in the fridge. Again it can be prepared the day before. A largish lobe will make superb hors d'oeuvre for perhaps 8 people, with hot toast, and again looks wonderful, sliced and presented on a platter. Excellent, very possibly better than one can get in any restaurant here.

As for the main course, well one needs to be on the qui vive, for game, venison, which comes into some of the better supermarkets around now.

One should also keep an eye on the promotions coming into LIDL from now on, they tend to be fantastic, from hors d'oeuvres, onwards. They are absolutely excellent, for example they had large salmon roasts a week or so back, ready prepared. Their Deluxe range in snazzy, classy black and white packaging is fantastic, and very reasonable. I already have some of their venison and ostrich steaks packed away in the freezer. Our Christmas dinner was from Lidl last year – I am not telling what it was, as readers will plunder ahead of me, but it was superb, And not expensive.

(Update: Lidl has venison roasts, €12.99) I am not a fan of turkey, and will do anything to avoid it. But everyone to their own.

And with the main course, one can have so many original vegetables. Apart from green vegetables, I love puree of celeriac, super expensive restaurants quite often feature puree of topinambours (Jerusalem artichokes), which have such a delicate taste, which I would love to do, provided I could find the secret of peeling them, perhaps one needs to dip them in hot water, and the skin peels off, that would be nice, or puree of courgettes, with all sort of potatoes, my favourite, gratin dauphinoise.

All of these are not difficult. I admit a large turkey, could be a challenge, the size, the time it takes to cook, the space it takes in the oven, making it difficult to prepare anything else, all of that, which is one reason for not doing it, so preferably find an alternative, and plan ahead.

Then a little light salad, say slices of avocado, with segments of grapefruit, and seedless, or deseeded grapes, just a little freshner.

And as for dessert, what could be easier, wonderful ice cream cake, or buche de

Noel from the freezer, or ice cream with fresh fruit salad. Or Trifle! Or rich bread and butter pudding, the male favourite! Or fresh orange salad, arose with alcohol. Wonderful.

So, one can make a superb Christmas meal, for a quarter of the price, and have a wonderful time.

We can do so much better, So BAAH HUMBUG INDEED



NO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER BY TRENCHERMAN

My first visit to Venice was in July 1956, the sun was shining and it was quite busy. The first restaurant we visited was Trattoria alla Madonna.

When I was there last week, the sun was shining and it was quite busy, as was Trattoria alla Madonna.

We dined, there as we always do on our first evening, and I feasted on Soft shell crabs followed by grilled eel from the lagoon with a Pinot Grigio by Jerman to tee up my appetite and an Amarone by Masi to wash it all down, as always.

Habit is both a friend and a foe, but it is my habit to visit Venice every year in November when it has quietened down somewhat, and I visit the same restaurants, often ordering the same menu and drinking the same wines and walking away looking forward to the next time.

Venice does not change and neither do my tastes, which have always been taken by great ingredients simply cooked, and simplicity is the Venetian way, with food that is.

Our November trip is well attended with friends, some who come every year and leave all arrangements to me.

On the Friday morning we go to the market at the Rialto and climb across, what must be the worlds oldest shopping mall, and descend into the melee of stalls selling every ghastly souvenir that can be made in China for 10 cents and sold for 10 euros. The 17th century setting gives an almost comical appearance to the vendors as it must have in the 17th century. The Venetians have been traders forever: as we pass the madness of plastic gondolas and ghastly carnival masks, we arrive at the food market, a gem of freshness and presentation and then on to the fish market where there is no smell of fish, it is that fresh.

The pace of this stroll is easy and relaxed as members get distracted and stop and wander but there is a small café, which offers great coffee for those who want it or great spritz for those who need it.

Then back across the fish market a small wooden pier to take the Trahetto across to San Sofia. The traghetto is an old Gondola that now ferries market traders and shopper across the busy Grand Canal for a euro or two and has been doing so forever.

When we arrive at San Sofia we wander down the Strada Nova to La Cantina, a relatively new bacari, but with old-fashioned standards.

Not a very 'touristi' place, they prefer to know you, but believe me, it is worth persevering.

Francesco Zorzetto, the co-owner, is one of the great Venetian eccentrics; obsessed with his cooking and the care he puts into the choice and preparation of his food is legendary as is his ability to let his sense of Venetian drama escape from time to time; I once saw him chase a supplier out of the restaurant brandishing a kitchen knife. Other customers did not even look up.

There is no menu here, but there is Natasha (a Moldovan beauty) who will point you in the right direction.

It goes like this; I order a bottle of Pinot Grigio and she brings something else saying you should drink this it is excellent - she is right.

I order some mantis shrimps, she brings oysters tasting fresher than when they left their beds - she is right.

Nowadays I just say lunch for 7 and it arrives. Always delicious, always fresher than you can believe and always cooked simply. Raw was popular this year,

ceviche was there too. The soup here is always a treat whatever it is and they are the nicest people you can wish to meet.

Lunch lingers here, and so do we.

The next day there is pressure to return but I am a refusnik and usher my reluctant crew to Alle Testiere.

This small osteria has probably the best food in the city.

Bruno and Luca are modestly proud of what they do and despite its success and the undoubted opportunities to open a larger place, they like it how it is, and stick stubbornly to their lasts.

Once again simplicity and freshness is the order of the day, if it was not fresh and in the market that morning, it will not be on the menu; preparation and presentation are obsessions. I once watched him buy a white truffle from a forager and it was a master class in sniffing; weighing and negotiating. It would have been on the menu that night and whatever it adorned would have been the best dish on earth.

My magnificent 7 agreed that this was wonderful and it would have been a crime to miss it.

Saturday evening means the opera, and this year it was Idomeneo, Mozart's first opera.

Despite the fact that we had the royal box, and despite the fact that Mozart wrote great music, the fact that a woman played the lead role (as a man) brought a panto feeling to what is one of the most boring pieces I have ever walked out on.

Sunday brought another great lunch of mainly 14th century recipes, a real change of pace, but that is another story.

So next year it will be my 60th anniversary of visiting Venice and on the first evening there we shall go to.....

So no change there.
Pip, pip

FRENCH PIANISTS BY ROBERT TURNBULL

Both Lucas Debargue's dazzling playing during the last Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow confirmed what many piano lovers suspect, that we are entering a golden age of French pianism. You could say it was about time.

A handful of the greatest pianists of all time were Francophone, of course. Alfred Cortot, Marcelle Meyer and Samson Francois were among the first French pianists to be recorded extensively. Francois was hailed in Britain for touring factories and camps during the war years. But one didn't seek them out to hear Rachmanninov. The cognoscenti looked elsewhere, towards Berlin, New York and Moscow for their interpretations of the warhorses. They wanted the heavier and more muscular sound of Bosendorfers and Steinway (with its new third pedal), rather than the lighter Pleyels and Erards. In those days French pianists tended to be written off as stylists or colourists, limited in repertory and perhaps too precious to convey the required passion or grandeur. Many French critics agreed! It wasn't really until the very tardy establishment of French piano music within the standard concert repertory that things changed. As the works of Debussy, Ravel and, latterly, Messiaen became mainstream, so French pianists began to enter our consciousness.

Since Debargue's triumph attention has focussed on Paris's 1,200 strong Conservatoire National Supérieure du Musique in Paris. It's notoriously hard to enter: most applicants are expected to be already 'formed', so the competition is blisteringly intense. It prides itself on rigorous discipline and 'policing the fingers', with 'brand name' teachers such as Michel Béroff, Frank Braley and Michel Dalberto expecting students to sacrifice everything to practise all day. But not everyone takes to it.

It's a 'complex environment', according to



the Serbian-American Ivan Illic, an iconoclast whose experiences at the CNSM helped form his musical values and catalyze his unique and multi-faceted career. 'The CNSM produces a higher level of pianistic accomplishment', he says, 'but it's also an unhealthy environment that makes pianists peak too early, is absurdly narrow when it comes to repertory and limits their abilities later on in life.' For Illic, 'the real heroes of the French musical establishment are the no-name teachers in the regional conservatories who sweat blood to get their students in the CNSM'. But what of the old Anglophone-Francophone divide, the cultural wall that separates the two nations? Does it still exist? The only British pianist to appear at France's most famous and longest piano festival at La Roque d'Anthéron last year was Benjamin Grosvenor, who for the French is currently *rosbif du jour*. British heavyweights Paul Lewis and Stephen Hough have profiles in France, but neither Stephen Osborne nor Charles Owen enjoy a strong presence, even though both specialize in French music. Is the pool of British talent drying up? Not a single entry of the 2009 Leeds competition was British, although that number improved to three out of 71 competitors last year. If French pianists peak too earlier, it's also probably true that British pianists get better, later. The French meanwhile are coming to Britain with an unprecedented frequency. The Brits are already very familiar with Pierre Laurent Aimard, Helene Grimaud, Alexandre Tharaud, and Jean-Yves Thibaudet. Apart from Debargue, a new generation includes David Kadouch, Adam Laloum, David Bismuth, and Bertrand Chamayou. At this stage, if any wall has been breached, it's more like the one that divided Berlin for so long: when that came down, all the traffic appeared to go in one direction!

It seems who gets to play what and where is as much about representation as talent or nationality. The reason that some artists have a strong presence in one country and not at all in another, is more than anything about business. 'The French have a very different way of doing things', says Francoise Clerc who runs the classical music programme at London's Institut Francais, which aims to forge closer links between the two countries. 'Rather than talk to middle men, it's a point of pride for French promoters to be able to call artists directly

to make the invitation and negotiate a fee'. Clerc feels that many French managers simply don't know how to address their British counterparts. 'The French aren't great strategists and would prefer not to do the kind of networking that the British consider part of the job'. Of course there are exceptions. Tiberghien signed up with Askenas Holt agency, just as Helene Grimaud, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Alexandre Tharaud and Pierre Laurent Aimard are global figures through the tentacles of their management. Chamayou's profile in Britain has been rising since he is joined up with Harrison Parrott. But it's an approach that has hindered not only British careers but French ones. Clerc cites Philippe Bianconi, Phillippe Cassard, Vanessa Wagner and Romaine Descharmes as examples of artists with very low profiles in the UK. When Cyprien Katsaris, a name in US, was invited to play in London two years ago it was his first time in 14 years, in spite of a career that spans continents. An interesting case of 'reverse discrimination' is that of Cedric Tiberghien, a BBC New Generation artist, who having become very popular in the UK couldn't get work in France for many years. For the serious professional, London has to be 'cracked'. Fees may be lower in under-subsidized Britain, but it's still considered a worthy investment for the French to perform there and a stepping stone to the United States and ultimately the Carnegie Hall. Language is crucial. The French media is read in France, that's it. The English language media is disseminated around the world. As is often pointed out, technical skills are not enough. Once upon a time, the Everest for most piano students was Ravel's *Scarbo* from *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Today any aspiring French pianist can play it 'in his sleep', Youtube the piece and the results are practically indistinguishable. The focus instead is how to carve out your niche in an era where technical perfection is a prerequisite, in other words, to 'brand' yourself. 'I have heard incredible musicians who failed to have a big career. They just wanted to focus on music and waiting to be noticed. That approach doesn't work anymore', says Sigier. Today, French pianists attend seminars to teaching them how to create a project but also how to sell it, how to present it, how to seduce concert organizers, not to mention

agents'. Networks exist to help pianists but to enter them you need more than talent. To that extent it's up to you!

**** And if you want to read a totally fascinating book all about pianos, from Bechsteins, to Pleyels, every make you have every heard of and a lot you have never ever heard of – read the charming book *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank*, by T. E. Carhart. Utterly riveting. Did you know THE best piano now is Italian? ED.**



PARIS IS NOT BURNING By MORT ROSENBLUM

I was asleep among olive trees with a P.G. Wodehouse novel on my chest, blissfully unaware, when a friend called from Miami to make sure I wasn't a statistic up in Paris. A lifelong traveler with serious smarts, she knew that 8 million people in and around the French capital were unscathed. But terrorism, as it is designed to do, terrorizes.

So far, the main reaction is shocked belief. A young friend came by to help whack away brush. He watched TV over my shoulder for a moment and then turned away in silence, eyes moist. Unable to compute monstrous inhumanity so alien to our hillside, he simply went to work. A few shots echoed in the distance. It's wild pig season. Hunters had absorbed the news from Paris and were back at it, stalking a fat sanglier - wild boar - for dinner. Guns worry me in America. Here, if I don't wear brown and scruffle in the bushes, I trust guys with permits and small-bore carbines.

France does not scare easily. During four decades based in Paris, I've never figured out that shibboleth about French cowardice. Duplicity perhaps. Unlike in some brand-name countries, government here tends not to be hypocritical about its hypocrisy. French presidents, essentially elected monarchs, shape principles to suit the nation's interests. Yet when the need arises, French troops do much of the West's dirty work.

I often joke that U.S. policy in Africa is to fight bad guys down to the last Frenchman; it's not that funny. As I

covered the war in Bosnia, when Americans held back, I stuck close to the French Foreign Legion. As a society, the French resist infringement on their rights and freedoms - by authorities or anyone else. The Charlie Hebdo horror rattled Parisians 10 months ago, but they had seen worse. Life soon relaxed back to its usual pace.

Yet now, at calamitous extremes in a post-9/11 world that it tried hard to move in a different direction, France faces its greatest challenge since Liberation in 1945.

The French know war too well to use the word lightly or to wage it without reason. Yet President Francois Hollande, his voice quavering after police rushed him to safety from a soccer match, condemned "un acte de guerre" - an act of war. He pledged to respond mercilessly. The question is, against whom?

Hollande singled out what the French and others call Daesh, the Islamic State, which says it punished France for bombing its positions in Syria. But for many here, ISIS is as much a state of mind as a geopolitical entity. Beyond its own actions, it inspires other groups and loners.

If Hollande has declared an amorphous war on terror, as President George W. Bush did in 2001, France could get ugly. Like some Sorcerer's Apprentice nightmare, each casualty creates countless more people who hate enough to kill. Self-styled jihad is an outlet for dead-end frustration among young Muslims from immigrant families who see European societies not as melting pots but rather as mezzes of dishes that don't mix.

A certain Robin Hood appeal attracts a wide following. Friends tell me, among other instances, of three young Christian women they know in a prosperous town near Paris who sneaked off to Syria. On November 13, 2015, the attackers attempted to enter the Stade de France in Paris.

But the bulk of extremist support comes from impoverished housing developments like one near Paris, which prosecutors say produced at least one of the eight Friday the 13th assailants. The French call these "les banlieues." The term, a misnomer, means suburbs. Slum is not much better. They are multistory projects on streets with such names as Moliere and Monet meant to evoke the glories of France.

Some history is important here. When I came to France in the 1970s, Lebanon was in flames, and brushfires smoldered elsewhere. Terrorism was mostly sponsored by states. Moscow and Teheran, among others, adopted it as diplomacy.

French authorities allowed terrorist groups sanctuary as long as they operated elsewhere. Into the 1980s, as terror evolved into the poor man's weapon, tacit accords came unstuck. Police and intelligence agents struggled to keep the lid on.

Back then firearms were scarcer than decent jobs in the banlieues. Still, police were reluctant to confront unfocused hostility. One tough teenager told me, "There is nothing here, nothing. All we can do for fun is take the metro to Paris and beat up a Frenchman."

One Friday in the 1990s, I took note of the shoes piled high before prayer at an outdoor mosque: yellow Senegalese slippers, sandals of every sort, gleaming Nikes, scuffed trainers, fancy French pumps. If anyone got to these disenfranchised young men of disparate background, it was their imam.

After 9/11, Bush used the word "crusade," and told the world that people were with us or against us. Many in the banlieues chose the latter. With open borders in Europe, guns came in at a fast clip. Israel's conflicts with Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank fed fiery rhetoric.

Tension spiked in 2003. During those months before the Iraq invasion, American correspondents in Paris fought with editors on desks back home who wanted to know why France, true to its reputation, was too chicken to join in. The French were ready, I told my editor, but first they wanted to hear from inspectors about Saddam's reported banned weapons. He asked why France wasn't grateful for Normandy? It was, I said, and Americans ought to thank the Frenchman Lafayette for not having to drink English tea every day at 4 o'clock. It is not that simple.

Torture pictures from Abu Ghraib made the difference. The banlieues turned sharply political. Extremist recruiters found eager listeners among committed zealots and rebels seeking a cause. Eventually, and inexorably, France found itself in the thick of it. Embittered Sunni militants who survived torture in Iraq created ISIS. A free-for-all conflict engulfed Syria. After the daily paper Le Monde revealed that Bashar al-Assad had

used poison gas on civilians, Hollande ordered French jets to exact punishment. He stood them down when Britain and the United States demurred. And now unholy warriors with a death wish and no regard for innocents have brought an unwanted war home to the Seine.

If the French hold onto what has kept their society solid, responding to the specific threat and not giving in to terror, the danger may well recede. If not, and excessive repression plays into the hands of fanatics, we are all in very serious trouble.

Rosenblum, former Associated Press special correspondent and ex-editor of the International Herald Tribune, attempts to save the world on a weekly basis, not too successfully, along with reporting trips. Join in on Facebook at Reporting Unlimited and add your name to this ConstantContact list. Or drop a note to mort.rosenblum@gmail.com. For more: <http://www.mortrosenblum.net>



Paris, Friday the Thirteenth

By ARTHUR GOLDHAMMER FOR THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

As Auden reminds us in his poem "Musée des Beaux Arts," suffering takes place "while someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along." As it happens, I was on a bus from Boston to New York when terror erupted in Paris this Friday the Thirteenth. The reports I received on my phone were still sketchy, mentioning only *une fusillade*. Perhaps it won't be so bad, I thought.

I went to my hotel and changed for the evening's event, a conversation with the French historian and political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon, which was to take place at the bookstore Albertine in a Fifth Avenue building owned by the French government. On the way uptown I took a phone call from a friend in Paris, who was calling to assure me that she and her family were all right.

Only then did I begin to realize the magnitude of the attack. When I reached the consulate, I found TV trucks and police and klieg lights waiting at the door. In the next block, in front of the bookstore, more police. Inside, I was informed that the evening's event had been canceled "for security reasons," but when I identified myself as one of the participants in the program, I was invited inside to join a small group of French officials gathered around a computer screen to watch the news from the scene. It was then that I discovered that one of the attacks, on Le Petit Cambodge restaurant, had taken place a stone's throw from another restaurant in which I had dined myself a little more than a year ago.

Imagine an unpretentious side street in a neighborhood that has come up in the world in recent years. It reminds me of Harvard Square in the 1960s: young, hip, and animated, a little seedy by daylight, a little louche by night. Along the nearby Canal Saint-Martin you can find itinerant drug dealers, enlaced couples, and legions of the lovelorn hoping to become enlaced themselves. On warm evenings—warmer than one finds in mid-November—the picturesque canal is a place where people like to eat "à la grecque," with wax paper for their plates and paper cups for the inevitable wine, when it is not simply sipped from open bottles passed from hand to hand. This is not a part of Paris where the strategists of war and peace or the financiers who decide the fate of the euro gather. It is a Mecca (forgive the blasphemous metaphor) for young people out for a good time. So is Le Bataclan, the concert hall on the Boulevard Voltaire on the other side of the canal. It was a 19th-century music hall on what was then a boulevard notorious for its risqué entertainment offerings. On the evening of November 13 it happened to be hosting a concert by an American rock band, the ironically named Eagles of Death Metal, a B-list band that had nothing to do with heavy metal but will henceforth forever be linked to mass death. There are much larger concert venues in Paris, but access to these stadium-like fortresses is more difficult than at Le Bataclan, where the attackers could simply walk in the front door, kill the small number of gatekeepers, and proceed about their grim business.

The message is thus that the Islamic State is at war not only with French policy in Syria but also with the French (and Western) way of life.

What strikes me about these targets is that the attackers did not choose to go after symbols of state power or sites with ideological valence (such as an allegedly anti-Muslim newspaper or a Jewish market,

as they did last January). They did not attack places where the rich and powerful congregate. They struck instead at the *joie de vivre* itself, at places where regular people go to unwind after work, to eat, drink, watch sports, flirt, converse, and be merry. **A statement** issued by ISIS after the attack equated this *joie de vivre* with "prostitution and vice": "The targets included the Bataclan theatre for exhibitions, where hundreds of pagans gathered for a concert of prostitution and vice." The message is thus that the Islamic State is at war not only with French policy in Syria but also with the French (and Western) way of life. What we consider innocent pleasure, they consider vicious and contrary to the word and will of God.

Such a declaration confronts policymakers with a dilemma. It is one thing to face an enemy whose aims we can comprehend but quite another to face an implacable nemesis whose thinking simply baffles us. As **one writer** recently put it, "We hide this from ourselves with theories and concepts that do not bear deep examination." Since the attacks last Friday, we have heard any number of such theories and concepts. What I have written above probably adds to these futile attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible.

In Brooklyn on Saturday night I was introduced to a prominent Algerian writer, to whom I presented my inchoate notion that ISIS had deliberately shifted from ideological targets to what for lack of a better word I will call "civilizational" targets. They seek, I proposed, to negate the secular way of life altogether, to denigrate all earthly pleasure as "prostitution and vice." He expressed no surprise at this interpretation. ISIS, he said, is following the Algerian playbook. In Algeria, terror was first focused on the colonial government and military. Then, in a second phase, it turned to cafés and bars. And then he paused before adding a further observation: When that failed to produce the desired result, rebels turned to a new target, softer still than restaurants and watering holes. They went into small towns and villages, where there were few police and soldiers, and began simply killing people *en masse* before the authorities could intervene. So the worst may well lie ahead of us, and it seems increasingly likely that there will be no alternative to the unpalatable one of another direct intervention in the Middle East, possibly in alliance with Putin's Russia. As Robert Kuttner has recently **written**, "In a nation such as ours that cherishes democracy, this brand of *realpolitik* is never pretty—and it can be executed well or badly. It makes strategic sense only when all the other options are

worse." To this the counterargument is of course that the last Western ground intervention in the region is what created ISIS. But those who accept this counterargument must explain what the alternative to extirpating ISIS is. Compromise seems impossible. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of refugees are fleeing the joyless life that the Islamic State promises them. The Paris attacks, coming on the heels of the refugee crisis, have made it clear that the ISIS menace cannot be contained within one region of the world. It is a global threat that can no longer be wished away.

www.prospect.org



A Table: Le foie gras recipe – A Festive season recipe just in time for Christmas & New Year.

Michelin-starred chef Jean-François Piège shares his secrets for foie gras for Christmas Eve and New Year dinner parties)

2 lobes of duck foie gras (450 to 550 g)
2 tbsp. of cognac
2 tbsp. of white port
13 g of salt per kg of foie gras
2 g of sugar per kg of foie gras
2 g of pepper per kg of foie gras
400 g duck fat

Preparation

1. Remove the vein from each lobe.
2. Put the cleaned lobes in a large dish. Pour in cognac and white port and stir this mixture. Add salt and pepper. Then sprinkle with a little sugar.
3. Heat the equivalent of a glassful of duck fat (be careful not to let it boil) and pour into the dish.
4. Bake at 120 ° C. After a few minutes (5-10), press the lobes to see if they are done. If they are hot to touch they are cooked.
5. Remove from oven and cool to room temperature for 30 minutes.
6. Put the lobes in a terrine: those at the bottom with the curved part down, those above curved side up. Save the duck fat from the pan.
7. Place a press on top of the terrine in the bowl and put a weight on top (two full glasses of water for example) and

refrigerate.

8. Some hours later take it out of the refrigerator. Pour remaining duck fat on top in order to "protect" the foie gras and prevent oxidation. Return it to the refrigerator.

It should be left in the refrigerator for one to two weeks before serving

HOORAY FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET!

Wow! Guess what! Yet again experts have found that the Mediterranean diet is one of the best, the healthiest for several reasons.

Most of us have known the elements of the benefits of the Mediterranean diet for some time, so it is no surprise.

Various studies have found that following the diet could halve the risk of heart disease, cut the risk of breast cancer by 68 per cent, and help to ward against dementia. Most recently, a study from Columbia University found that following a Mediterranean-style diet could help to preserve brain cells as we age and slow the rate at which the brain shrinks by five years.

The research, published in the journal 'Neurology', showed people who followed the diet had a larger brain volume than those who didn't.

Study author Doctor Yian Gu, of Columbia University, said: "These results are exciting, as they raise the possibility that people may potentially prevent brain shrinking and the effects of ageing on the brain simply by following a healthy diet."

What is the Mediterranean diet?

The diet is centered around eating the traditional foods and drinks of the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea such as Italy, France, Greece and Spain. Though their cuisines differ depending on the country, their diets are primarily based on vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans, cereal grains, olive oil and fish, and very importantly, garlic.

To start eating a Mediterranean-style diet it is recommended to increase your intake of bread, pasta, fruits, vegetables and fish, while limiting how much meat you eat.

Here is a good Aubergine recipe.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large red onion, halved, then sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 large red pepper, deseeded and chopped
- 1 large courgette, sliced
- low-sodium salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 400g can of chopped tomatoes
- 1 large aubergine
- 2 tbsp porridge oats
- 3 tsp grated Parmesan

METHOD

Preheat the oven to 200C/400F/gas mark 6. Pour the olive oil into a saucepan set over a medium heat. Sauté the onion, garlic, red pepper and courgette, with a good pinch of low-sodium salt, for about eight minutes, until they all begin to soften.

Add the tomatoes and simmer for 15-20 minutes, until the tomatoes have reduced right down and you have a thick ratatouille. Season further, if desired.

Cut the aubergine in half. Scoop out the flesh from each half, leaving a rim of about 0.5cm of flesh. Lay the aubergine halves face down on a baking tray and pour in a little water. Bake for about 12 minutes, until they start to soften.

Turn over and bake for another five minutes.

Mix the oats and Parmesan together and season to taste. Spoon the ratatouille mixture into the aubergine halves, pressing it down firmly.

Divide the Parmesan topping between them. Return to the oven for another 12 minutes. Serve with a side salad.



Beat the deadline to get a refund from the French taxman

France has to reimburse millions of euros to non-resident owners who have sold or rented out their properties since 2012. A London-based French tax law expert explains how to get money back

Since July 2012, individuals with rental income from French properties and/or capital gains from the disposal of French properties have paid social contributions at the rate of 15.5pc in France.

Because these contributions were funding public services in France, which non-residents could not benefit from, they were considered unlawful by the European Court in a [ruling in March](#) of this year. France now has to refund hundreds of millions of euros it took from those home-owners.

The larger claims will relate to non-residents who have sold French property since July 2012. The amount paid by these individuals will vary but we have seen cases where, for example, a property has been sold for around 550,000 euros in 2013 having been acquired in 2000 and the individuals have paid social charges in excess of 15,000 euros. There are some cases where much more has been paid. In order to claim back the social charges paid, it is necessary to file a demand with the tax office local to where the property was sold in France. Those who have paid the charges on rental income will have to file a claim with the French tax office where they file their annual returns, which will be the non-residents' service in most cases.

You have to provide all personal details and details of the property ownership and sale (where relevant). You also have to provide confirmation that you are affiliated to a social security system outside of France and the details of the bank account where funds should be transferred.

We have been assisting people with these claims, which must be presented in French. The claims need to be filed in writing and should be sent by a method

which provides proof of delivery. If you are doing this without a lawyer, the safest way is to hand-deliver and get a receipt, or use recorded delivery at the very minimum.

"The timings are strict – those who sold during 2013 have until December 31 to file their claim but we say that anyone who has sold should file by this deadline"

France is only inviting claims from EU residents who can prove that they are affiliated to another social security system. They are also repaying only 13.5pc of the 15.5pc paid, on a technicality. In our view this approach does not go far enough and the full sum plus statutory interest should be claimed by all non-residents. We also advise claiming the sums paid for tax representation in France on a sale, which generally amounts to 1pc of the sale price, as this was also contrary to EU law.

The chances of recovering the 13.5pc element are now extremely strong for those who are resident in the EU – you can expect the French government to review your whole file before refunding the sum due, but they have stated that refunds will be paid.

You do not have to hire a lawyer in order to pursue a refund, but it makes sense to appoint lawyers with local knowledge to ensure the correct details are included in the right format. The costs can be fixed, although they depend on the size of your claim.

The timings are strict in France – those who sold during 2013 have until December 31 to file their claim but we say that anyone who has sold should file by this deadline to avoid any arguments about being out of time.

According to the French government, those who sold in 2012 are already out of time. However this is perverse and people in these circumstances should seek legal advice on the steps available. Those with rental income from 2012 onwards should still be in time to claim.

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A WELCOME DISTRACTION

By **SIMON EVELEIGH**

Sport has been an important part of my life ever since I can remember and I am one of many millions across the globe who, when picking up a newspaper, generally turn to the sport pages first. Rugby and cricket are my favourites, but I love sport in all its varied forms. Whether it is as a player, coach, administrator or mere spectator, the whole tone of a weekend can be set by how your team fares.

As we were told so many times as children, "it's only a game" and "it's the taking part that matters". Unfortunately, that often gets forgotten, particularly at the highest levels of professional sport, where vast sums of money depend upon the outcome of a match.

The horrific events in Paris on 13th November brought home how trivial sport really is and that there are far more important things going on in the world. However, strangely, in the aftermath, sport also became increasingly important. The chance to forget about the ills of the world by chasing a ball around has always been one of sport's great attractions, but it also can bring people together. The Saturday and Sunday after the Paris murders many sports matches were cancelled, as a mark of respect for those who had lost their lives and, at the higher level, to avoid the complications associated with thousands of people congregating in a confined area. That decision was very understandable. However, the Côte d'Azur rugby committee took a different view, asking that matches be played, with a minute's silence being respected before kick-off. This decision to play on was, as far as I was concerned, the right thing to do, showing that we, the civilised world, will not be cowed by terrorists and their hatred, and that we will carry on meeting up with friends and strangers to watch a "trivial" game and enjoy a drink together afterwards.

On the Tuesday after the terrorist atrocities, and with a different shaped ball, England and France met at

Wembley. If ever proof was needed that far more binds the French and the English together than separates us, then this was it. We have spent most of the last thousand years fighting each other, but we are free, democratic countries, both (rightly) proud of our own contributions to the world and (wrongly) sometimes dismissive of the other's contributions. Therefore, the symbolism of the tricolore flying high and the Marseillaise being "sung" by the home crowd was huge, as was the headline on the front page of *L'Equipe* the following morning; "Thank You".



RIP Jonah Lomu, great All Black player, who just died at the tragic early age of 40.

Tongan, 6ft5 and powerfully built, he also possessed the speed of a bullet, and powered through 63 tries. He shaped the modern rugby game.

All European Cup matches to be played in France that weekend were cancelled, including the Toulon/Bath encounter, so Toulon's quest to win their fourth successive title did not get underway until the following week, when they travelled to Coventry (yes, it still sounds strange!) to play Wasps.

Wasps were the last English team to win the European Cup, in 2007, and have known some dark days in the intervening years. In 2012 they only ensured their Premiership survival on the final day of the season and were in very real danger of going out of business completely. In the three years since, Wasps have secured the financial backing which all clubs at the highest level require and twelve months ago relocated permanently to the Ricoh Arena in Coventry.

On the pitch, under the calm guidance of former Welsh prop Dai Young, Wasps have developed a number of excellent

young English players ((Joe Launchbury, Joe Simpson, Elliot Daly) but have also spent wisely on their overseas contingent and play a brand of rugby that ensures that their supporters generally get value for money.

Wasps had opened their European campaign with a very impressive win in Dublin against Leinster, so Toulon knew they would be in for a tough day when they travelled to Coventry. Quite how tough though, took many people by surprise.

The defending champions were outplayed in almost all facets of the game and eventually went down 32-6.

In what is a highly competitive group, the fact that Wasps got a bonus point and Toulon came away completely empty-handed could well have a huge bearing come the final reckoning at the end of January.

As far as domestic action is concerned, Toulon produced a stunning display to thump Montpellier 52-8 at the beginning of the month.

This is being written in advance of the trip to Clermont to play the league leaders. Before the game, Toulon sit in fourth position, seven points behind Clermont, but level on points with the teams in fifth and sixth places.

In the month of December, Toulon play twice in the Top 14, at home to Agen on 5th and away to Toulouse on 27th. In between these matches, they have back-to-back fixtures with Leinster, when they will be hoping to get their defence of their European title back on track. The home match is on Sunday 13th December. In January, the European group stages will come to an end, with Wasps coming to the Var on the weekend of 16th (date and timing to be confirmed). The following week, Toulon wrap up with a very tricky trip to Bath.

To help clear your head after the Christmas and New Year excesses, there are far worse ways than going to watch a match at Mayol and Toulon host Pau on 2nd January.

Other matches in a very busy month are a visit to Bordeaux on 9th and a home fixture against Stade Français on the final weekend.

With best wishes to all readers for Christmas and the New Year. Let us hope that by the time that I write again, Toulon's European dream will still be alive.

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TRAVEL NEWS

Easyjet have just announced three new routes out of Marseille Airport.

As from 27 Mch 2016. There will be 6 flights a week, except Saturday, from Marseille to Bordeaux, price starting at €35. From the 14 May 2016, there will be 3 flights a week, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, throughout the season, from Marseille to Amsterdam, prices from €45. And as from 28 June 2016, there will be 2 flights a week, Wednesdays and Saturdays, from Marseille to Glasgow, prices from €52.

Meanwhile, if all goes well, it is just vaguely possible that Toulon-Hyeres Airport, now under the new management of Vinci, might negotiate a new route with Easyjet from Toulon Airport, one hopes to London Gatwick – it's all apparently to play for in the New Year. So good luck Vinci, that new route would be wonderfully welcome to all us in the Var!

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