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Ambassador's Activities

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E-Mail: press@ambafrance-uk.org
Web: www.ambafrance-uk.org

Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

“My Night With Philosophers”
at the *Institut Français du Royaume-Uni*

07 June 2013

Friends,

Chère Monique,

Cher Laurent,

Thank you all for enthusiastically accepting our invitation to **spend the night together** for this second edition of My Night with Philosophers! One of the most famous Londoners, Samuel Johnson, said, “Whoever thinks of going to bed before 12 o’clock is a scoundrel!” I take it there are no scoundrels among you tonight, and that you will all take up the challenge to stay up until dawn, as did your 3,000 predecessors last year!

Once again, we’re offering you “Un voyage au bout de la nuit”, “A Journey to the end of the Night”, not because the *Institut Français* favours moonlighting in any way, but because we believe, as have many thinkers and creators before us, that there are truths that can only be seen when it’s dark.

Most of the philosophers being honoured this year had particular affinities with the night: Bergson, Aristotle, Pascal, Hegel, Nietzsche and of course Wagner all shared the belief that the life of the mind generally begins at night!

I thank the 60 philosophers who have joined us this evening from all four corners of Europe: from France and the United Kingdom but also Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Belgium and Switzerland. Together, they’re preparing to shed light on four major areas of contemporary thought: metaphysics, politics, knowledge and ethics.

In this European Year of Citizenship, I warmly thank the European Commission and its representation in the UK for their support, as well as the EUNIC network, the Italian Cultural Institute, the Czech Centre, the *Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles*, the Swiss Embassy and

the Balassi Institute. We're very pleased that one of our conferences, on European citizenship, is going to be broadcast by BBC Radio 3.

Tonight, you can also discover the hottest French philosophers of the moment, through a special programme entitled "New French moment", as well as a unique panel discussion – organized jointly with the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in Paris – devoted to Jean-Paul Sartre.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the event's maestros: first and foremost, the *Paris Sciences et Lettres contingent*, headed by Monique Canto-Sperber, who brought their material as well as intellectual support by bringing together philosophers and creative people from the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, *Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris* and the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs*. My thanks also go to the *Maison française d'Oxford* and the *Lycée français Charles de Gaulle* for their support, and to Mériam Korichi for her invaluable insight.

Finally, our heartfelt thanks go to our partners, without whom this event would not have taken place: Claire Fox's Institute of Ideas, *La Vie des Idées* **magazine** and **BBC Radio 3**, as well as France 24, Renault, Oxford University Press, *Librairie La Page* and the **band** Luminous Frenzy. They have all put their talents into this evening, which will bring together **leading thinkers and flashes** of electronic music, theatre and performance.

Friends,

For this particular Midsummer Night's Dream, the *Institut Français* invites you to become what Shakespeare called the "merry wanderers of the night." To give you some inspiration, Saint-Emilion has provided us with unique samples of what Robert Louis

Stevenson described as “bottled poetry”. These wines are Bordeaux’s finest, and we hope you enjoy them!

Thank you all for coming, and we wish you a night full of discoveries and enlightenment!