

La Comédiathèque

Stage Briefs

Jean-Pierre Martinez

comediatheque.net

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Stage Briefs

A sketch comedy

Jean-Pierre Martinez

A theatre can also be the setting for funny stories where the theme... is the theatre itself. 28 very short scenes, each no longer than a page.

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1. A Dramatic Entrance

The stage is empty. Rhythmic music, reminiscent of an action film, plays. A character slowly walks on with a walking frame. Once they reach the middle of the stage, another character enters, also with a walking frame, and calls out.

One – Hey! Wait for me!

Two – What?

One – I said wait for me!

Two – All I ever do is wait for you.

One – Well, if you didn't walk so fast.

Two – The director told us to make a dramatic entrance.

One – Right...

He suddenly speeds up and overtakes the other, then returns to his slow pace.

Two – What's got into you?

One – You told me to hurry up.

Two – But I didn't tell you to overtake me!

One – Well, now... catch up if you can. A dramatic entrance...

He continues walking slowly until he exits the other side of the stage.

Two – Wait for me... I said wait! He didn't say a dramatic exit...

He hurries slowly after and exits.

Blackout.

2. Incognito

Two characters enter. As they pass each other, they stop.

One – Do we know each other?

Two – No, I don't think so.

One – That's what I thought. We don't know each other.

Two – You know, apparently, I'm not worth knowing.

One – Neither am I. No one can bear me.

Two – And no one can stand me.

One – So no point getting to know each other, right?

Two – When you're not worth knowing, it's best to stay discreet.

One – You're right. Let's pretend to ignore each other and travel incognito.

Two – I'll go this way.

One – And I'll go this way.

Two – I didn't even see you.

One – I can't stand you already.

They exit.

Blackout.

3. No Smoke Without Fire

Two characters enter. As they pass each other, they stop.

One – Excuse me, do you have a light, please?

Two – Yes, but I won't give it to you.

One – And why's that, if I may ask?

Two – Because smoking is very bad for your health! Smoking kills. It's written on cigarette packets. And between you and me, in a theatre, it could be quite dangerous too.

One – Oh no, it's not to light a cigarette... nor to set the theatre on fire.

Two – Really?

One – It's to set fire to a house.

Two – Why would you want to set fire to a house?

One – It's my wife's lover's house.

Two – In that case... (*He hands the other a box of matches.*) Take the whole box. Just in case your wife has more than one lover.

One – Thank you.

Two – You're welcome, it's only right.

He exits. The other takes a cigarette from his pocket and lights it.

One – I really need to quit...

He exits.

Blackout.

4. A Stupid Face

Two characters enter. As they pass each other, they stop.

One – Why are you looking down on me?

Two – I'm not looking down on you.

One – Then why are you giving me that sideways look?

Two – I'm not giving you a sideways look, I'm looking at you in profile.

One – If you've got something to say, say it.

Two (*standing directly in front of him*) – From the front, it's not much better.

One – And you're saying that to my face?

Two (*walking behind him*) – Would you prefer I said it behind your back?

One – What now?

Two – It's even worse from this side.

One – Are you mocking me or something?

Two – No, it's just that, no matter how I look at it, your face doesn't sit right with me.

One – I'm really sorry about that.

Two – Don't apologise. It's not your fault you've got a stupid face.

One – You think I've got a stupid face?

Two – Oh, absolutely. In fact, you've perfected it. From every angle... yes, you've got a real stupid face.

They exit.

Blackout.

5. Celebrity

One character is already on stage. Another enters, looks at them, and then speaks.

One – I know you. You're someone famous.

Two – Famous?

One – You're a celebrity, aren't you?

Two – What kind of celebrity?

One – Ah, I can't remember the name... That guy, you know...

Two – And... famous for what?

One – I can't recall... But you're on TV, aren't you?

Two – You must be mistaken, I assure you.

One – Mistaken? With who?

Two – Sorry, I'm not who you think I am. But you know, I'm not surprised. People often mistake me for someone else.

One – Really?

Two – Yes, a celebrity, actually. But no one's ever been able to tell me who.

One – Damn.

Two – You really can't think of who it might be?

One – No... I had it on the tip of my tongue earlier.

Two – Oh well. If it comes back to you, let me know. Honestly, I'd love to know who I look like.

One – Yeah, especially if it's someone famous.

Two – You, on the other hand, your face doesn't ring any bells at all.

Blackout.

6. Dead for the Theatre

Two characters enter. As they pass each other, they stop.

One – Well, I thought you were dead...

Two – But I am dead.

One – That's what I thought! How long has it been?

Two – Nearly two years now.

One – Ah, yes... And what did you die of again?

Two – I died of boredom. I'd gone to the theatre to see a play by a contemporary writer. The usher found me slumped in my seat during the interval.

One – Was it really that boring?

Two – Bored to death. It was a play about migrants crossing the Channel on rafts to reach England.

One – Oh, that play... Yes, I remember... But it's a great topic...

Two – Apparently, the writer spent three months in Calais to “soak up the atmosphere.” He wrote the play from the balcony of his five-star hotel with a sea view. Perhaps he didn't quite capture the experience...

One – And... are you absolutely sure you're dead?

Two – Certain... and if you can see me, it means you're dead too.

One – Sorry. I'm the author of that play that did you in.

Two – Seems like it didn't go well for you either.

One – Drowned. I should never have gone swimming right after eating. The meals are just so indulgent at these luxury hotels.

They exit.

Blackout.

7. A Little Corner of an Umbrella

Two characters, one holding a closed umbrella, walk to the middle of the stage. They stand still side by side.

One – Lovely weather, isn't it?

Two (*surprised*) – Oh... I'm not sure.

One – You're right, it looks like it's clouding over.

Two – Did I say that?

One – Yes, I think it's going to rain...

He opens his umbrella. The other looks at him, puzzled.

Two – How could it rain? We're on a stage, in a theatre.

One – Exactly... you could play along.

Two – Play along?

One – If I say it's going to rain, you act like it's going to rain. (*Pause.*) And even in a theatre, it can rain.

Two – Really?

One – If there's a leak in the roof, for example.

Two – Right...

One – So?

Two – Yes, I think I felt a few drops.

One – If you'd like to share my umbrella...

The other steps under the umbrella with him. They exit.

Blackout.

8. The Colour of a Kiss

Two characters of opposite genders, staring into the distance.

One – Look, a rainbow.

Two – Oh yes...

They admire the rainbow.

One – It feels like there's a colour missing.

Two – Aren't all the colours there?

One – All the ones we can name, anyway.

Two – What do you mean?

One – In a rainbow, the colours don't have clear boundaries.

Two – Red only exists because one day someone said, “This is where red starts and this is where it ends.”

One – They say the Inuits have far more words than we do to describe the colour of snow.

Two – So we see through our mother tongue as well.

One – It's words that draw the boundaries between things, people, and colours.

Two – And what colour do you think is missing?

One – I'm not sure... The colour of all tongues when they mix together.

Their faces move closer as if for a kiss.

Blackout.

9. Polyglot

One character is already on stage. Another enters and speaks to them.

One – Vous parlez français?

The other looks offended.

Two – For heaven's sake, I'm English...

One – That's not the point.

Two – What is the point then?

One – Vous parlez français?

Two – Are you French?

One – No.

Two – So why are you asking if I speak French?

One – To start a conversation.

Two – In French? Why not in German as well?

One – Sprechen Sie Deutsch?

Two – I'm English, I told you! English!

One – Sorry, I thought you were a polyglot.

Two – Polyglot?

One – I just wanted to practise a foreign language. For fun.

Two – Polyglot... Honestly! Keep it polite at least!

He exits. The other hesitates for a moment before addressing the audience.

One – Hablan español?

Blackout.

10. Background Noise

Two characters enter. They stand still side by side.

One – Don't you hear a noise?

Two – A noise? What noise?

One – I don't know... A noise... Like... Tick, tick, tick...

Two – Tick, tick, tick...?

One – Or maybe tock, tock, tock...

Two – Tick, tick, tick or tock, tock, tock?

One – You really don't hear anything?

Two – Now that you mention it... Yes, maybe...

One – What do you hear?

Two – Knock, knock, knock.

One – Like someone knocking on a door?

Two – Or maybe more like tock, tock, tock. What about you?

One – Tick, tick, tick.

Two – Tock, tock, tock.

One – Tock, tick, tock, tick...

Two – Tick, tock, tick, tock...

One – I don't see a clock.

Two – And we don't have a watch either.

One – But time keeps passing anyway...

Blackout.

11. Not Like Roses

Two characters, side by side.

One – It doesn't smell like roses around here.

Two – No, it's more like...

One – Violets.

Two – Yes... Or maybe lavender.

One – I'd say more like lily of the valley, don't you think?

Two – Lily of the valley?

One – Or cornflowers.

Two – Cornflowers... I don't know what they smell like.

One – Or poppies.

Two – Do poppies have a smell?

One – I don't know. They're flowers. They must smell like something.

Two – Or perhaps lady's slippers.

One – Lady's slippers don't smell of anything, do they?

Two – I'm not sure... It depends on the ladies...

One – Lady's slippers don't have a scent. Whereas here, it smells more like...

Two – Whatever it is, it doesn't smell like roses.

One – No.

Blackout.

12. What's Happening

One character is already there. Another arrives.

One – What's happening?

Two – I don't know... (*Pointing at the audience*) Look, there's a crowd gathered. Something must be happening.

One – Ah yes, you're right... What are they looking at?

Two – Who knows... But when lots of people are looking in the same direction, something must be going on.

One – And what direction are they looking in, exactly?

Two – Looks like they're looking... our way.

One – Then something must be happening.

Two – But what?

One – What could possibly be happening?

Two – I don't know.

One – I'd say nothing's happening, don't you think?

Two – If people are looking in our direction, something's happening.

One – But we're looking in their direction.

Two – So? What's happening?

One – I don't know, it looks like... a crowd.

Two – Yes, that's it. A crowd.

Blackout.

13. Pickpockets

One character, seemingly waiting. Another arrives. Silence.

One – Are you waiting for the train?

Two – We're on a platform. They just announced over the speaker that a regional express is arriving at platform two. We're at platform two. So yes, I'm waiting for the train. And you? Waiting for the tide?

One – Sorry, that was a silly question.

Two – I should apologise. I'm a bit on edge today, but I shouldn't have snapped at you. I ask silly questions sometimes too, you know...

One – So, you're waiting for the train...

Two – Yes. Aren't you?

One – I'm a police officer.

Two – Oh, I'm sorry...

One – We've had reports of pickpockets at the station. Do you have your papers?

Two – You think I'm a pickpocket?

One – Not at all... I just wanted to check that you haven't had your wallet stolen too.

The other checks his pocket and takes out a wallet.

Two (*holding up the wallet*) – You mind? I'll just check that your card hasn't been skimmed...

One – Be my guest.

The supposed police officer walks off with the wallet, leaving the other looking puzzled.

Blackout.

14. Of Course

Two characters, side by side.

One – Do you love me?

Two – Of course.

Pause.

One – Of course?

Two – What?

One – You said that like it was obvious.

Two – Well, it is to me.

One – No, I mean... you said it like it was a stupid question.

Two – Did I say it was a stupid question?

One – Of course... You'll admit it wasn't the most romantic answer. It's more logical, if you prefer. But the question... it wasn't really a question. It was more like... an invitation. If someone asks you, "Do you like apple pie?", then you say of course. But when someone asks you if you love them...

Two – Right... And do you love me?

One – See? Now it feels like an interrogation. "Do you love me, honestly?"

Two – That's what you asked me earlier, isn't it?

One – Yes but... I asked first... Oh, you're so annoying!

One exits, leaving the other bewildered.

Blackout.

15. Fire!

One character is already there. Another arrives and addresses them.

One – I heard the show's been cancelled.

Two – No? Are you sure? Who told you that?

One – The duty fireman.

Two – There are still duty firemen in theatres?

One – Apparently so.

Two – And why would the show be cancelled?

One – Supposedly there's a fire in the director's office.

Two – I can't smell anything... Are you sure he's a real fireman?

One – I don't know. He was dressed like one.

Two – In the theatre, you know... It might be a costume.

One – Still, don't you smell smoke?

Two – I just smoked one...

One – Even if he's a fake fireman, it could still be a real fire.

Two – If he were a real fireman, he'd be putting the fire out.

One – Or maybe he's a real fireman, but it's not a real fire.

Two – Why would a real fireman invent a fake fire?

One – Or maybe he's a fake fireman, but a real actor.

Two – So, the show's cancelled, but it's part of the play...?

One – Who knows. In the theatre...

Blackout.

16. Edge of the Stage

A character stands downstage, holding a fishing rod aimed towards the audience. Another character arrives, approaches, and looks at him.

One – Do you often fish at the edge of the stage?

Two – Mostly during the interval. It helps me relax.

One – Do you catch anything?

Two – Yesterday I caught a big one.

One – Are they edible?

Two – I'm not really sure. I wouldn't risk eating them.

One – With all the rubbish they must eat.

Two – No, the fishing is just for fun. When I catch one, I throw it back into the audience.

Pause.

One – Ah, I think you've got a bite.

Two – Yes...

He reels it in.

One – A fine catch, it seems... What is it? A shark?

Two – Or even a whale...

Blackout.

17. The Unwilling Actor

Two characters stand side by side.

One – Why did you choose to become an actor?

Two – I was diagnosed with multiple personality disorder at an early age. When I turned eighteen, I called a general assembly of all my personalities in a phone booth, and we unanimously decided to apply to drama school. Luckily, they gave us a group discount.

One – Oh, I see...

Two – And you? Why did you choose to become an actor?

One – Oh, I didn't choose. Both my parents were actors. I dreamt of becoming an accountant. But I didn't want to disappoint them, you see. And besides, they wouldn't have let me. Now they're both dead, and here I am...

Two – It's maybe not too late, you know.

One – Accounting is tough to get back into when you didn't start young and haven't practised for years.

Two – Another passion thwarted by social expectations.

One – It's true, it's very hard to make it big in accounting.

Two – Personally, I don't know any famous accountants. But when it's your passion...

One – And you can still make a decent living from accounting.

Two – Well, we'd better get back to it. The interval's over. You must be happy, you're playing the tax inspector in *The Dinner Game*.

One – Yeah... but it's not the same.

Blackout.

18. Full Moon

One character is already there. Another arrives.

One – Did you see? It's a full moon.

Two – Yes.

Pause.

One – How long does the full moon last?

Two – I don't know. It's not a precise length of time. It comes gradually. One day, the moon is full. Then it starts to wane bit by bit. Why?

One – It's been a full moon for three weeks now.

Two – Really?

One – Is it possible for the moon to stay full for three weeks?

Two – No.

One – That's what I thought.

Two – It mustn't be the moon then.

One – So, what is it?

Two – I don't know... I'd say... a spotlight.

One – You're right, it must be a spotlight.

Blackout.

19. Postal Delay

Two characters stand side by side, looking up at the sky.

One – Have you seen all those stars?

Two – Yes.

One – I wonder how many there are.

Two – Three thousand two hundred and twenty-seven.

One – What?

Two – I counted them. There are three thousand two hundred and twenty-seven.

One – You're joking.

Two – Yes.

One – Even if you could count them... between the ones we can still see but are already dead, and the ones that have just been born but we can't see yet...

Two – It's like asking how many people there are on Earth. Even if you got a birth announcement for each one, with postal delays, you'd never know the exact number.

One – Speaking of which, the neighbour's dead.

Two – The neighbour across the street?

One – The one next door.

Two – I didn't know. How long ago?

One – About two weeks. We missed the funeral. I've only just received the notice.

Two – He should've put it directly in our letterbox.

Blackout.

20. Goldfish

Two characters stand side by side.

One – Do you know your lines?

Two – I know half of them. And you?

One – I knew them all, but I've forgotten everything.

Two – When you've got a bad memory, you shouldn't do long plays... Or you should have a prompter.

One – A trumpet?

Two – A prompter!

One – Oh, yes, a prompter.

Two – And he's deaf.

One – When you've got a bad memory and you're deaf, you really shouldn't be in theatre.

Two – What's the name of this play again? I've already forgotten...

One – *The Goldfish.*

Two – The Codfish? Strange title...

One – Not The Codfish! The Goldfish!

Two – Ah, yes, The Goldfish...

Pause.

One – Do you know your lines?

Two – I know half of them. And you?

One – I knew them all, but I've forgotten everything.

Blackout.

21. Prompting Isn't Acting

One character is already there. Another arrives, searching for something.

One – What are you looking for?

Two – The prompter's box.

One – The prompter's box? That's been gone for ages.

Two – There used to be a box, right? I think it was here.

One – They covered it up.

Two – They covered up the prompter's box?

One – Well, I assume they let him out first.

Two – Another job that's disappeared.

One – Yep... But you know what they say: prompting isn't acting.

Two – And what if I forget my lines?

One – Forget your lines?

Two – If I have a memory lapse.

One – Your lines?

Two – Don't tell me the lines are gone too.

One – No lines, no prompter. It's contemporary theatre.

Two – So what are we supposed to say?

One – You can say anything.

Two – Now I don't know what to say.

Blackout.

22. Dressing Room Drama

A character enters, followed shortly by another, who calls out to them.

One – What do you think of this theatre?

Two – Yeah, it's not bad.

One – You think so?

Two – We've seen worse, haven't we?

One – Worse? I'm not sure... What's your dressing room like?

Two – Well... there's air conditioning, an espresso machine, a mini-bar, and a bathtub... And when I arrived, there was a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket and a bunch of canapés.

One – No way!

Two – Why? What's your dressing room like?

One – My dressing room? More like a big cupboard where they also store the sets.

Two – You know what? You should get a new agent.

One – I don't have an agent. Do you?

Two – No... Didn't you see my stuff piled up next to yours in that broom cupboard?

One – I thought so.

Two – Well, as long as we're getting paid.

One – You're getting paid?

Two – You don't have much of a sense of humour, do you? Believe me, you'll need it to survive in this business.

Blackout.

23. Matinee Performance

A character enters, followed shortly by another.

One – What time is it?

Two – It's 3:10. We go on in about fifty minutes.

One – I hate matinee shows... And by the way, why do we call it a matinee? No one performs in the morning, do they?

Two – Back in Molière's time, they did. Troupes performed in the morning, in daylight. It was easier than using candlelight. Naturally, they called it a matinee, meaning before the midday meal. But back then, what we now call breakfast, they called lunch, and what we call lunch, they called dinner. So, people went to the theatre in the morning, before having dinner around 1 p.m. Nowadays, we don't perform in the morning, we eat dinner after 8 p.m., but the term stuck. So when we perform before dinner, we call it a matinee.

One – I didn't understand a word of that. But anyway, I usually take a nap in the afternoon. Can you wake me up?

One exits, leaving the other perplexed.

Blackout.

24. Waiting for Nothing

A character enters and stands still. Another arrives.

One – Excuse me...

Two – Yes?

One – Are you waiting for someone?

Two – No.

One – Are you waiting for something?

Two – No.

One – So you're waiting for nothing.

Two – That's right.

One – Mind if I wait with you? I'm not waiting for anything either.

Two – Be my guest.

Pause.

One – Have you been waiting for nothing for long?

Two – Oh yes, quite a while... And you?

One – I used to wait for the bus a few years ago. Now I cycle.

Two – Do you come here every day?

One – Yes... well, often... (*Pause*) I think I'll be here tomorrow.

Two – So will I... (*Pause*) But you won't actually be waiting for me, right?

One – No, no, don't worry...

Blackout.

25. The Film's Title

A character enters, followed shortly by another of the opposite gender.

One – Are you the first one here?

Two – Looks like it. Why? Are we expecting more actors?

One – I'm not sure. Since the film's called *Sextet*.

Two – *Sextet*? Are you sure?

One – Isn't that the title?

Two – I thought it was *Sextape*.

One – Oh yeah, maybe. *Sextet*, *Sextape*, they sound a bit similar.

Two – Yes, but... they're probably not the same type of films.

One – No...

Two – Let's wait. We'll see if anyone else shows up.

One – Yeah.

Two – Yeah, because a *Sextet* with just the two of us...

One – Becomes a tête-à-tête.

Two – Which could quickly turn into a tailspin.

One – It's probably *Sextape*, then.

Blackout.

26. The Theatre Family

Two characters stand side by side, looking straight ahead. Silence.

One – Do you know the difference between public theatre and private theatre?

Two – No.

One – In private theatre, everyone in the audience knows the names of all the actors on stage.

Two – And in public theatre?

One – All the actors on stage know the names of everyone in the audience.

Pause.

Two – And amateur theatre?

One – Everyone in the audience is related to the actors on stage.

Two – So that's what they mean by the theatre family.

Blackout.

27. Drama Class

Two characters stand side by side, looking straight ahead.

One – Had you ever taken drama classes before?

Two – No. It's my first time.

One – What do you think of the teacher?

Two – He acts like he's God... doesn't he?

One – Yeah...

Pause.

Two – Do you really think we need to take classes?

One – There are loads of great actors who've never set foot in a drama school.

Two – Yes. Especially when their parents were actors too. And famous ones.

One – It must be hereditary, then.

Two – Are your parents actors?

One – No. They're teachers. And yours?

Two – They're butchers.

Pause.

One – We'd better head back in.

Two – Yeah.

One – Worst case, we'll end up drama teachers.

Two – Or butchers...

Blackout.

28. The End

Two characters enter.

One – Well, here we are. It's already the final scene.

Two – Yes. That was quick, wasn't it?

One – At least we didn't have time to get bored.

Two – Right. Now we need to make sure the audience understands it's over, and that it's time to leave.

One – What can we do to make them realise it's over?

Two – I don't know...

He exits and returns with a sign that reads, "It's over."

One – At least now, there's no ambiguity. You know, it's terrible, those plays where the stage manager has to start clapping so everyone knows it's finished.

Two – Yes.

They exit. The stage manager claps. With any luck, the audience applauds as well.

The End.

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theatre and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Comedies for 2

EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Preliminaries
Running on empty
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap
backward for Mankind

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Quarantine
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe the savage beasts
Neighbours'Day
Nicotine
Offside
Open Hearts
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

Enough is Enough
Him and Her
Lost time Chronicles
Open Hearts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stories to die for

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air

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