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James Beard was a big man. He stood six feet, six inches tall. His waist measured 52 inches around. His weight topped 300 pounds.

Rob Nagle, the actor who portrays Beard in the current production of *I Love to Eat*, wears a fat suit under double-plus-size striped silk pajamas and a billowy blue and red kimono. I couldn't imagine a man of Beard's true girth performing night after night in the one-man, 90-minute production. That and a few other seams in the production I found to be slightly distracting, but they didn't detract from Nagle's overall impressive performance.

True to the play's title, the famous *epicure* (he disdained the term "gourmet" – Lord knows what he'd have to say about "foodie") loved to eat, and even more, to *share* his love of well-prepared food (do not call it "cuisine").

One of the most riveting scenes had Beard whipping up mayonnaise *à la minute* on-stage while demoing an appetizer he popularized during his New York City catering days. As the scent of fresh-cut onion wafted over the performance hall, Beard served a tray of onion ring, chopped parsley, and mayonnaise finger sandwiches to audience members sitting in the front row. I can't remember ever seeing a play that made me salivate.

The production had aspects of *Pee-wee's Playhouse*: the set was dressed with props galore, and there were a couple of special guest appearances played to great comedic effect. These devices lightened the overall heavy mood of the occasion, which cast Beard at the end of his career and life, suffering from insomnia, on his deathbed, unhealthy from a lifetime of indulgences. His *un-sober* look back revealed feelings of being unloved and unaccomplished in his higher artistic missions as an actor and opera singer, leaving a bittersweet finish of bathos on the palate.

*I Love to Eat* will appeal to seasoned cooks, educated eaters, and especially to those who intuit the act of serving food, whether to oneself or to others, as putting their heart on the proverbial platter.